

Civil Society

BABA ADHAV COMES TO DELHI

PENSION SOUGHT FOR UNORGANISED SECTOR



'SMALL CIVIC BODIES GOOD FOR DELHI'

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COVER STORY

BABA ADHAV COMES TO DELHI

Baba Adhav and the Hamals, who carry loads in markets in Pune, set the tone for a five-day agitation to demand pension for workers in the unorganized sector.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

The rights of the unorganized

THE case for giving the unorganized sector a better deal was argued and won a long, long time ago. People turn up in cities from rural areas to do menial jobs. They carry loads, clean floors and take up just about any thing to survive. As they eke out a living, they provide a variety of important services on which cities run. It is also well established that the vendor, rickshaw-puller, foodstall owner and others like them have aspirations. When they borrow they are known to pay back. They are creative, innovative and entrepreneurial.

Unfortunately in the past 20 years of economic reforms very little has been done to unleash the potential of the unorganized sector. Instead of helping it to scale up, it has been left to fend for itself. Small entrepreneurs and workers in the unorganized sector find it difficult to open bank accounts, acquire housing, get an education or have access to health care. Added to the agony of being shut out like this are the growing disparities in the economy as some Indians seem to be doing so much better than others.

The result is the growing clamour for entitlements. People who haven't been given the fair chance to compete and improve their lot rightly believe that the government should take care of them. The demand for pension to workers in the unorganized sector, on which our cover story is based, should be seen in this light.

The liberalizers will say it is not a good idea to keep doling out money. Sure, it isn't. But then what is it that governments do to ensure equal opportunity and help the majority of Indians to prosper and get on with their lives?

Why should economic reforms be only for a select few?

The Hamals (pronounced Hamaal) led by the amazing Baba Adhav, a medical doctor, are an example of people who don't want charity but their rights. The Hamals carry heavy loads in Pune's wholesale markets. When they raise their voice in Delhi they want to be recognized for their contribution to the economy. What they are saying is that they want a better life. They don't want to be Hamals for generations to come.

The pension demand is important because of the millions of aged Indians who have nothing to fall back on. The country can't wish them away. It is rightly said that a society is judged on how it treats its aged.

The pension demand is relevant also for the exploited workers of today. They are going to get old and deserve a cushion. But a more important task is ensuring that the young in these families get into schools and colleges and move on. That is the challenge before all of us.

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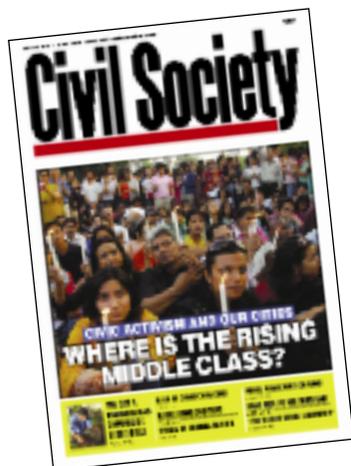


IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Social enterprises

The April cover story, 'Bottom up Businesses' is an eye opener. It is very difficult for young people with new ideas to get capital and advice. But now that the business environment is changing and venture capitalists realize that such ideas can succeed, there is hope. India, especially, is replete with young people, good ideas and an envious market. Lets hope our young people take advan-

tage of our strengths and create businesses that help villages develop.

Shankar Lal

Your cover story had very inspiring, innovative, original and worth taking the risks ideas. I especially liked the piece on d-light.

Pradeep Pratap

I thought Waste Ventures was a good idea for a start-up. All our cities, towns and large villages are overflowing with garbage. Municipalities don't offer any solutions except dubious waste-to-energy plants. So companies that can help cities clean up and also organize waste pickers into cooperatives should be in great demand. This is a social, economic and environment service. Waste is a revenue generator.

Ashim Ganguli

Jarawas

With reference to your story, 'Jarawas continue to mystify' I would like to ask why the Jarawa issue is being allowed to fester? First, their buffer zone should be protected and people moved out. If we can do that for our national parks and sanctuaries, for our tigers,

then why not for the Jarawas? After all their land has been illegally encroached on. Secondly, a dialogue should begin with them. We should ask them what they want and do it.

Amisha

Scotch eggs

With reference to the story, 'Scotch Eggs and Other Memories,' on the Rashtriya Indian Military College (RIMC) I would like to inform readers that RIMC has recently added another feather to its overflowing cap with the elevation of Old Boy, Vice Admiral Pradeep K Chatterjee, to the post of Deputy Chief of Naval Staff.

Chiranjit Banerjee

Great job. Proud of RIMC for producing your kind of officers. Well done.

Captain Arvind Kumar

Great article. A true reflection of the 'Rimcollian spirit'.

SR Swarup

The spirit of this great institution has been reflected in your article in a very wonderful manner.

Nitin Kanwar

ITI

Thanks for the story on the Indian Technical Institutes getting a much needed boost. This is an example of good corporate social responsibility. It benefits both the institute and the companies who need to hire people with specialized skills. There should be more such partnerships. My congratulations to Vidya Viswanathan and to Maruti Suzuki which initiated this work.

Hemant Biswas

Books

Your magazine has suddenly dropped the academic book reviews. The pages used to inform us about the kind of books which were available and what they were about.

Nagesh and Sarala

ERRATA

The cover of the book, *The Habit of Love*, by Namita Gokhale had incorrect details. The publisher is Penguin and the price is ₹250. The error is regretted.

Editor

INTERVIEW The MCD left a hole of ₹1,831 crores. 'Delhi will finally benefit from

Civil Society News
New Delhi

CIVIC services in the sprawling National Capital Territory will now come under three municipal corporations, three mayors and three commissioners. The gigantic Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) was found to be too big and cumbersome. Its trifurcation was long in the making and now services are expected to improve in the long run. But in the very near term there are problems of infrastructure, money, official records and jurisdiction.

It will be the job of R.K. Srivastava, Director of Local Bodies in the Delhi Government, to solve the problems of coordination and put a workable structure in place. He is a good choice for the role, being an earnest and hardworking officer who has been in his office most nights to help make the trifurcation happen. Sorting out the issues that are likely to come up won't be easy either and he can expect many more long hours at work in the months to come.

Srivastava is an officer of the 1984 batch of the IAS who has served in Arunachal Pradesh for five years and in Daman and Diu. He spoke candidly to *Civil Society* on the future of civic governance in Delhi. Excerpts from the interview.

What was the need to trifurcate the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) in the first place?

The MCD had become a very gigantic organization. It covered about 1,400 sq. km of Delhi's area, servicing 95 per cent of its population and 97 per cent of the city's total area. The Delhi Cantonment Board and the NDMC (New Delhi Municipal Council) handle around three per cent of the city. With just one corporation with one mayor and one commissioner it was impossible to provide effective services to citizens.

The structure was so mammoth, so huge. It had 142,000 employees. You can imagine the plight of the commissioner who was heading the corporation. If the service delivery mechanism is ineffective people are going to have any number of grievances against the administration.

But the impression is that trifurcation was done in a tearing hurry. Why?

The truth is that the division of the MCD has been in the pipeline for over a decade. Political and official committees have been appointed to find out what could be done to improve its functioning.

In 1991, under Article 239 of the Constitution Delhi got statehood and became a Union Territory. The National Capital Territory Act came into force. Earlier, the Balachandran committee had recommended the MCD be restructured.

When the elected government of Delhi got a Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers



R. K. Srivastava

more committees like the Vijay Malhotra committee were appointed. They, too, recommended restructuring. Some said MCD should be cut up into five municipalities, others wanted seven or as many as eleven.

Why was MCD divided into three and not seven or 11 municipalities?

I took over in the department of urban development in February 2011. At that time the Cabinet constituted a committee of three – Dr Walia, our urban development minister, headed it, there was also Arvind Singh Lovely and Raj Kumar Chauhan. The then Chief Secretary, Rakesh Mehta, served in the committee. I was its member-secretary.

We went through all records and details and recommended that the MCD be broken into five enti-

ties. This is because the Trans Yamuna area faces unique problems. It is a low-lying area contiguous to Uttar Pradesh, has a high population density and many unauthorized colonies. So it needs to be addressed separately. But the Cabinet pointed out such a division would lead to a multiplicity of agencies and settled for three corporations – one for Trans Yamuna and two for the rest of Delhi.

How was the division done?

Our job was to decide which areas would fall into the North Corporation and which into the South. We balanced it out like this: There are 70 Assembly segments in Delhi. The NDMC area has one and the cantonment area has one. You are left with 68. Trans Yamuna has 16. Your figure is now 52. That was divided into half or 26 segments. So

Financial discipline is vital. smaller civic bodies'

LAKSHMAN ANAND



and framing of rules, bylaws etc.

Short of two things the Union government has given us more powers. The power to appoint the commissioner is with them but in consultation with the local government. The power to supersede the corporations lies with the Union government. We never wanted those powers. We would never topple an elected body.

The Union government asked us how we were going to ensure coordination among the three corporations. Delhi is one city, it is the national capital and things should not become chaotic. Corporations should not pull in opposite directions to each other. Here I am talking of common facilities like roads, drains, sanitary landfills etc.

We introduced a provision in the law that the government would appoint a director of local bodies to oversee the corporations, coordinate and resolve intra or inter jurisdiction issues for the city as a whole. There are several cases pending in the Supreme Court and High Court. One corporation cannot take decisions that will impact the entire city. We realized there is a need to have an apex body to coordinate functioning and act as a bridge between local bodies and the government. That is how this department (the department of local bodies) came into being.

'If your area of jurisdiction is reduced, your attention gets focused and you concentrate on better delivery mechanisms.'

The corporations are complaining about finances. East Corporation is particularly in the red.

The biggest crisis that arose was that the old MCD revealed a deficit of ₹1,831 crores. We would never have come to know of this had the MCD not been trifurcated.

Take it with a bit of caution but they had been bluffing the people of Delhi. Their budget reflects a collection of ₹1,500 crore of property tax as a source of revenue. Expenditure limits for programmes are fixed accordingly.

But the actual realization of property tax is only ₹700 crore – a gap of ₹800 crores. They have not allowed property tax to be revised in the last five years because of political compulsions. Citizens like it but ultimately we are the sufferers. There are other sources of revenue but they are very small.

The government has stepped in to meet the

deficit by giving them a loan. Then there is an outcry. They say why have you given us a loan, we want a grant. My answer to that is that corporations can also borrow from somewhere. The government too has to earn from somewhere. How can the government pay for their inefficiencies?

They have been thoroughly inefficient in financial management. The less said about the delivery of civic services, the better, especially in East Delhi.

So will trifurcation improve financial management and service delivery?

Well, I view it from one point. If your area of jurisdiction is reduced, your attention gets focused and you concentrate on better delivery mechanisms. So service delivery will improve, efficiency will improve, and supervision by the commissioner will be better. With the reduction in the area and the size of the population you serve, services are bound to improve. Collection of revenue will improve with better supervision and a smaller area. All the departments have been vertically divided. Certain heads of departments have been retained. Today you have one chief engineer, a municipal health officer in each corporation.

A lot depends on the attitude of the people and the commissioner's dynamism.

In the process of trifurcation have you built mechanisms for accountability both on the political side and the administrative side?

The political side is responsible for policy decisions and passing the budget.

We have clearly told the corporations: you cannot bank on government support for funds for all time to come. Tighten your belt, pull up your socks and be ready to revise the service charges wherever feasible. Don't put the citizens under tremendous strain. Unless you earn you will not be able to get budgetary support. The granting of a loan was a clear message. Most of the payments made out of the corporation's budget will be done through electronic systems. We will try to ensure mechanisms have been put in place so that there is no leakage.

In the process of restructuring has there been any change in the departments. You have archaic laws and departments inherited by the British.

Currently, the same MCD Act continues except that it caters to three corporations. But the government has spontaneously appointed the Dharamarajan committee to draft a new municipal law. By August they are supposed to submit the first draft. It should be a reality by the end of this year. A lot of changes are being contemplated in the new legislation. So it will take some time for us to comprehend what is to be addressed afresh.

One question to be addressed is whether ward committees should be made more responsible. Presently the ward committee is very important but it has financial limits. A ward has a population of 50,000 to 60,000. For serving that ward size you should have a local area committee. Then that councillor in consultation with 20 different interest groups can decide what needs to be done in terms of services for that ward. The commit-

Continued on page 8

North Corporation has 26 and South also 26. Each Assembly segment has four wards.

The next question was whether we should bring in a new law or amend the existing Delhi Municipal Act of 1957. New legislation would have taken two years at least and as a Union Territory we would need the approval of the Union government. So we examined the Delhi Municipal Act in great detail.

Our mandate was that the Act should facilitate the setting up of more than one corporation and that the local government should have more powers. The Delhi Municipal Act is a Union law so powers are vested with the Government of India (GoI) through the Lieutenant-Governor. The Delhi government felt we should have more say over the corporations, in supervising their activities

Continued from page 7

tees may be given additional financial allocation if it is available for each ward.

Will the poor also be represented?

Yes, that's right.

In your position what are the big-ticket problems which you are first going to have to deal with?

The three corporations must discharge a few critical functions in the initial months. They will take time to establish themselves. Employees are settling in, records are being moved etc. The corporations need to ensure sanitation and cleanliness. This is the first priority. My second priority is drains. The city gets flooded. Submergence points on roads have been identified. Civic services should not be affected, cleanliness must be maintained and during the rains commuters should not face problems. The third problem, which is alarming, is massive encroachment and unauthorized construction.

The Najafgarh drain, which traverses the city, finally flows into the Yamuna. Seventeen drains meet in the Najafgarh drain. It starts from the South Corporation, goes to the North Corporation and finally ends in the East Corporation. If the drains are not desilted properly there will be flooding and the elected bodies will begin to blame the government for trifurcation. But flooding is not a new phenomenon. It happens nearly every year.

Second is financial discipline. There are at least 3.2 million properties in Delhi. Today, the city has been able to collect property tax from only 800,000 to 900,000 properties. So their efficiency is only around 30 per cent. And as I said earlier they show revenue collection (potential) of ₹1,500 crores. If they can tap these sources of revenue they will have more money.

They can improve the condition of municipal schools with additional revenue. In places like Narela and Najafgarh, their schools are in bad condition. They have hospitals and dispensaries. I would advocate that hospitals be transferred to the Delhi government. The corporations will save ₹1,000 crores and this will contribute to better fiscal management. The citizen is not bothered whether the corporation runs the hospitals or the Delhi government. What matters is the quality of services.

They should rationalize levies, fines. The Municipal Valuation Committee recommended five years ago rationalizing of the unit area rate for eight types of colonies. It is now seven years and we need to revise those rates. If they revise the rates even 10 per cent upwards, it would mean a lot more money.

Supposing one municipality wants to pursue a project which the other two don't want, then what happens?

The municipality has the authority to take decisions on local services. Supposing the East Corporation wants to raise the charge for a license fee, it can do so. The others may or may not. Anything which is locally administered, will be locally decided. If you have given out parking contracts, the rates for parking in Karol Bagh, a prime area, will be different from what you charge in Vishwas Nagar or Shahdara. There is no need for uniformity. ■

No tribal land for Gorkhaland

Communal conflagration looms over North Bengal

VIVEK S. GHATANI



The agitation at Oodlabari

Vivek S. Ghatani
Siliguri

THE sun blazes down as Susma Toppo, 36, an Adivasi woman trudges two kilometres from her home to a tea estate in the Dooars region to pluck tea leaves. Life is tough, she says. With her daily wage of ₹90 she supports a family of eight and a husband who is jobless.

"We have to survive," she shrugs. "No choice. We work in this sweltering heat for just ₹90. It's not enough to make ends meet."

Three of her children study in a ramshackle government school. Two children do not go to school anymore because there is no secondary school in her area. She can't afford to send them elsewhere to study. The two youngsters are now looking for jobs to support the family. But they haven't passed high school and even if they had, it would still be difficult for them to find work. Unemployment of rural youth is a big issue here.

Susma Toppo's plight is not uncommon.

Adivasis living in the Dooars region feel that 30 years of Left rule have left them on the margins. No development has ever taken place in their area, they point out.

Lying in the Himalayan foothills of North Bengal, the Dooars region is famous for its rich biodiversity and forests. The Gorumara National Park, the Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary and the Buxa Tiger Reserve are located here.

Stretching from the Teesta river on the west to the Sankosh river in the east, the Dooars forms a major part of Jalpaiguri district. It is the gateway to the Darjeeling-Sikkim region and the north-east. But the Adivasis here live a life of utter poverty and deprivation.

The ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) regime headed by Mamata Banerjee seems to have worsened their plight. New development plans have been announced but nothing has changed for the Adivasis who have been repeatedly asking for education, hospitals, tourism and more development in the region.

In fact they believe their hopes are about to be dashed by the demand for the separate state of Gorkhaland though the Adivasi shares everything including land with the Gorkha people.

The only organization of the Adivasis, the Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Bikash Parishad (ABAVP) is leading its own movement for the rights of the Adivasis. But due to deep differences of opinion amongst its own members, the organization has split into two factions.

The two factions disagree over the agreement signed by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) with the state government of West Bengal and the Government of India (GoI) for a Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA).

The GJM, led by Bimal Gurung, which has been demanding a separate state, has now settled for the GTA. But there is much confusion about this new region's territory and jurisdiction. Apart from the Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong sub-divisions, the GJM wants another 396 mouzas from the Dooars and the Terai region to be included in the GTA.

Senior ABAVP leaders have opposed this inclusion. "We have submitted a village-wise population document of the entire Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts showing the General, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) breakup. This document clearly shows that villages in both the Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling district have a predominantly ST population. It is an authentic government document. Therefore the question of the formation of the GTA does not arise let alone the inclusion of mouzas from the Jalpaiguri district," says Birsay Tirkey, the state president of the ABAVP.

Besides, he points out, 315 mouzas of the Jalpaiguri district have been categorised as Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) mouzas. "As per Article 338(9) of the Indian Constitution all policies in respect to the tribal mouzas will have to be decided in consultation with the Chairman, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes. Should we forgo our constitutional right? Where does the question of inclusion arise after this?" questions Tirkey.

But some ABAVP leaders have joined hands with the GJM. They support inclusion of not just the 396 mouzas but the entire Dooars region into the GTA. On 2 November 2011, John Barla, a prominent ABAVP leader, along with many others was expelled for teaming up with the GJM without the consent of the ABAVP's state leaders. The expelled leaders are now asking for a Gorkha-Adivasi Territorial Administration (GATA).

"GATA will ensure all-round development of the Dooars and the hill districts. The entire population of the Dooars wants to be included in the GATA. The ABAVP is not against it, only a few leaders oppose it," claims Barla.

The ABAVP leadership has informed the West Bengal government and the district administration that John Barla and two prominent leaders, Tez Kumar Toppo and Sukra Munda, no longer represent the organization. The faction led by Barla has formed a Pro-GTA Joint Action Committee (JAC) with the GJM headed by Bimal Gurung.

The two factions of the ABAVP have turned against each other. They fought and burnt 13 shops at Banarhat, a small town in the Dooars region of Jalpaiguri district. The two factions also



VIVEK S. GHATANI

'The GATA deal is illegal. The tribal people were never consulted. They were kept in the dark. This is our land and we will not give an inch of it.'

clashed at Odlabari, another hamlet town in the Darjeeling district. The tension between the two factions started after the Pro-GTA JAC announced an indefinite bandh in the region. The ABAVP faction led by Birsay Tirkey opposed it.

The bandh was called to protest the denial of permission by the administration for a public meeting to be addressed by Bimal Gurung. The administration had cited law and order problems.

"It is unfortunate that the state government which is a signatory to the GTA agreement did not allow the meeting. We just wanted to explain to the people the pros and cons of the GTA. We wanted to tell them that the region will develop if it is included in the GTA," explains Tez Kumar Toppo who was expelled from the ABAVP along with John Barla.

"When we met Mamata Banerjee to discuss the establishment of the Adivasi Territorial Administration under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, we did not receive any positive answer from her. Our people are poor and our resources are limited. How long can we carry on with this agitation? We decided to be part of the proposed GATA for the benefit of the tribal people in the Terai and the Dooars region and for the cause of communal harmony," he says.

But Birsay Tirkey counters this argument. "The GATA deal is illegal. The tribal people were never consulted. They were kept in the dark. John Barla and his colleagues did not have the authority to enter into an alliance. This is our land and our stand remains the same: we will not give an inch of it to the GTA."

According to Asok Bhattacharya, former Left Front Minister and a heavyweight in the CPI (M), the GTA will ultimately prove to be a damp squib. "From what we know of the general sentiments of the tribal people, they will never go along with the GJM. In fact, those leaders who initiated this arrangement are already beginning to lose popular support," he said.

What still remains unclear is why some tribal leaders decided to join hands with the GJM. According to political observers, the indifference of the state government to their cause and their failure to win substantial votes in the Assembly elections prompted this desperate move.

Much now depends on the Justice Shyamal Sen Committee that has been formed to look into the issue of including the Dooars in the proposed GTA. Ironically the committee has members from the GJM. Several political parties have objected to the committee's composition saying it should have had members from all the political parties. The committee is expected to submit its final report in the first week of July. Political observers have warned once the report becomes public, communal disharmony may break out in the region.

The ABAVP has already announced an agitation against the inclusion of the Dooars and Terai in the GTA. It has said it will launch a fresh campaign to counter the GJM's bid to get Adivasis to support the proposed GTA.

The ABAVP intends to hold indoor meetings and distribute leaflets among the people ahead of its rallies in Siliguri and the Dooars to oppose the GJM's demand to include more than 400 mouzas in the plains in the GTA.

"We do not want Adivasis to fall prey to the GJM's claims. Our leaders and members will go around to tea gardens and villages and tell people to oppose the GJM's demand to extend the territorial jurisdiction of the GTA beyond the Darjeeling hills," said Rajesh Lakra, secretary of the Dooars-Terai unit of the ABAVP.

Meetings are being held under the banner of the Dooars-Terai Joint Action Committee, an umbrella organisation of 26 outfits which are against the GJM's demand for the inclusion of the mouzas in the GTA. Lakra said the objective of ABAVP's campaign is to prevent the Adivasis from getting carried away by GJM's claims that they would be given a fair deal under the GTA.

"There are several state and central government schemes for the welfare of the tribal people. We will tell our people that we should concentrate on the proper implementation of these schemes," says Lakra.

Asked whether the GJM had gained ground in the Dooars through its strike, Lakra said: "Not at all. We had already shown our strength by enforcing strikes across the region on 10 April and 22 April. We received spontaneous response from all the people. They oppose the GJM's claim to the plains."

Not to be left behind the Pro-GTA Joint Action Committee has started a relay hunger strike in various places of the Dooars region to support inclusion.

But for Susma Toppo all this makes no sense. "Actually I do not know what is happening. There was a strike called by some people. Sometimes people hold a meeting at the tea garden and say that the GTA will bring more opportunities for our children. Then the other group comes and tells us not to get swayed by such talk, it will only make our future more bleak."

"We want our wages to go up. That would help me. If our children get jobs and lead a good life that would make me happy," she says as she trudges to the tea garden with a sickle in her hand and the relentless sun overhead. ■

Hill farms begin to blossom

HARC's efforts reverse male migration

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

IN the hills of Uttarakhand farming has for long been dismissed as a loss-making enterprise. Ask Prakash Dimri, a farmer from Chamoli, why and he will poetically answer: "*Kheti par kiski maar? Janwar, mausam aur sarkar.*" (Who has ruined farming? The animals, the climate and the government.)

Stringent wildlife rules prohibit people from killing animals when they ruin standing crops. The wayward climate makes it hard to decide cropping patterns. And the government doesn't have a helpful water or agricultural policy.

So for years men have migrated from the hills to the plains. They go to Dehradun, Delhi, Mumbai, Chandigarh and Lucknow to work as drivers, cooks, peons and do other menial jobs. Many villages have become 'ghost' villages. Homes and fields lie abandoned. According to the 2011 census, Uttarakhand has 326,000 vacant homes in the hills.

Two hill districts, Pauri and Almora, registered a negative growth in population. Supai village near Almora had a population of 500 people. Now only 100 villagers hang around here.

The population growth rate is less than five per cent in the remaining hill districts. The national average population growth rate is 17.64 per cent.

As a result, the plains now wield more political clout than the hills in Uttarakhand. The delimitation of Assembly seats for the recently concluded State Assembly elections resulted in the hill regions losing four seats to the plains. They now have 40 seats instead of 44. Hill representatives will have less bargaining power in the new State Assembly henceforth.

But in Rawain Valley things are changing. A reverse 'brain drain' of sorts is taking place. The men are returning to their villages. Umakant Dobhal, who left Rawain in 1997 to work in Delhi



Young men are returning to farming

as a driver, is now a flourishing farmer and member of a robust federation. He earns a livelihood he never dreamed was possible.

Rawain Valley comprises Naugaon, Purola and Barkot blocks in Uttarkashi district. You can see terraced fields here interjected by meadows and streams of fresh mountain water.

Mahendra Singh Kanwar, founder of the Himalayan Action and Resource Centre (HARC), a voluntary organization in Dehradun which piloted this turnaround in the Rawain Valley, explains the strategies his organization used.

"We realised that development has officially been reduced to distribution of grants. So we decided to terminate this dependency syndrome regardless of whether the donors were NGOs or government agencies. Instead, we worked to change the exploitation of villagers."

The first step that HARC took was to organize the farmers into federations so that they could work as a collective. HARC chose Naugaon, the biggest block in Uttarkashi district with 107 gram panchayats sprawled over some 27,237 hectares for its first experiment.

The geography of the hills makes things tough. Farms are small and scattered all over. People are ignorant of productive farming techniques. Pre and post harvesting technology is absent. So are roads and transport facilities. Agricultural produce used to be carried on mules. Not only was this costly, the

mules took a long time to inch their way to markets. By the time they reached some of the fruits and vegetables they were carrying would rot.

To deal with this dire situation, one of the farmers' federation, the Devrana Valley Fruit and Vegetables Producers Company, invented a gravity based ropeway at Dhari Kafnaul near Naugaon to transport fruits and vegetables from high altitude villages to the road beneath.

Now farmers just tie their produce in a basket at the upper end of the ropeway and it glides smoothly down without using any electricity in minutes. "We save on the cost of transportation. It takes us just one hour to send the goods down," says Raj Kumar, 43, of Sauli village.

It has also resulted in less spoilage and rejection of fruits and vegetables. "Earlier it used to take us five to six days to load a truck with fruits and vegetables and send it to the market. It took us a lot of time to load mules to carry the produce in batches to the truck. Now, during the peak potato and apple season we are loading one truck every day without losing the quality of our produce. This enables us to get a good price in the market," says Roop Singh, 53, of Rawain village.

The farmers' federations also developed market linkages. They tied up with the Delhi-based Mother Dairy Federation and with markets in Dehradun, Western Uttar Pradesh and the religious town of Haridwar. "A lot of young people work with us. Around 80 per cent of our members are below 30 and they are an enthusiastic bunch," says Jagmohan Singh, president, Rawain Valley Fruit and Vegetable Federation.

The income of villagers began to see a steep jump. Earlier, on an average, farmers would be paid just ₹9 for a kg of apples. Now they get ₹39 per kg. Previously, villagers could send 36 tonnes of vegetables to Delhi. In contrast, in July 2011, the Naugaon and Purola Federations sold as much as 156,000 kg tomatoes to Mother Dairy and 48,000 kg of tomatoes to the Vikasnagar market in Dehradun district.

The farmers' federations tied up with Mother Dairy and with markets in Dehradun, Western Uttar Pradesh and the religious town of Haridwar.

INDIA



Crates of fresh tomatoes



Green beans wait for the Mother Dairy truck



Most women are farmers. They are also involved in processing



A ropeway was built to slide farm produce to the main road

The office-bearers of the federations contact the wholesale market traders on their mobile phones and find out what the daily rate is. Then they decide whether the time is ripe to offload their produce. Each farmer is informed. "It helps me get the best price for my tomatoes, potatoes, French beans, capsicum, pears, malts, millets and soybeans," says Fakir Singh, 42, of Naini village. Singh earned nearly ₹45,000 by selling only tomatoes in one season. Naturally, the question of migrating doesn't arise. "Why should we leave home when we enjoy a good quality of life here?" he asks.

Reduced input costs have also increased earnings. Earlier farmers were not organized into federations. So each farmer would grow whatever he liked and sell at whatever price he thought was good enough.

This resulted in an expense of ₹36 for each 10 kg of produce for transportation. The Rawain Fruit and Vegetable Federation reduced expenses up to 70 per cent through collective action. It now costs ₹14 to transport 10 kg. The federations negotiate directly with transporters and marketing agencies on behalf of the farmers.

The farmers have also diversified by growing flowers like marigold and chrysanthemum. "Floriculture is a new venture for us. It is giving us good returns," beams Rajesh, 39, of Naini village. Last year, Dhari Kafnaul Federation produced 500 kg of chrysanthemum. The Naogaon

Federation produced 1,000 kg. The flowers were sold between ₹40 to ₹75 per kg.

The farmers also raise crops that can be turned into processed products like apricot oil, mango pickle, chilly-ginger pickle, apple jam and chutney. Some handicraft products like files and photo frames are also being made. The women handle these activities.

In Uttarakhand nearly 90 per cent of farm activity is actually carried out by women. But they don't have the status of farmers. Neither did they have any say in marketing farm produce. "It took us a lot of time to convince conservative elders to let women get involved in marketing. Now women have their own groups which market readymade products like pickles, candies and chutneys," says Amita Kala, who works for HARC.

The women's cooperative is called HARC Mountain Women Multipurpose Autonomous. It began in a small way in 2003. Now 1,000 women in 65 villages are its members. They are financially independent and some are realizing dreams they had abandoned a long time ago.

Roshni Rawat, 35, of Naugaon village, always wanted to give her three children a good education. After she joined one of the self-help groups (SHG) run by HARC she took two loans, one for her children's education and the other for herself. "I always yearned to study. The second loan helped me complete my intermediate studies," she says. Roshni is

now treasurer of her SHG. Out of 347 SHGs in Rawain Valley, 70.6 per cent are women's groups.

Women who have joined the SHGs now take part in local politics. They speak up during gram sabha and panchayat meetings. Some have contested and won panchayat elections.

Yashoda Nautiyal, 36, of Naugaon village is now gram pradhan. "If I had not joined the cooperative, I would never have had the confidence to stand for this election," she confesses.

"Women can be a powerful presence in the political process. I was determined to fight for women's rights and I filled all the forms myself."

To become a member of a HARC federation, a farmer pays around ₹50 per year as membership fees. The fees vary and are decided every year. The federations also charge ₹2 for every 10 kg of produce as marketing fees. This money is deposited into an emergency fund and used to compensate farmers in case any mishap occurs while transporting produce to the market. An additional fee of around ₹1 per kg of produce goes into a 'disaster' fund that helps farmers to tide over any emergency.

Village homes here now sport TV sets, solar lights and geysers. Homes have constructed toilets. Altogether HARC's efforts have improved the lives of 20,000 farmers. They have created 10 cooperatives, two farmers' companies, five farmers' federations, 307 SHGs, and 295 farmer's SHGs, 55 per cent of them being women. ■

Rising women sarpanchs



Women sarpanchs who attended the meeting

Bharat Dogra
New Delhi

WOMEN panchayat leaders are honoured every year by the Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) in Delhi. It has been doing so for 21 years. This year too nearly 500 women sarpanchs and panchayat leaders from 19 states turned up at the ISS to commemorate the 73rd Amendment which provides 33 percent reservation to women in panchayati raj institutions.

V. Kishore Chandra Deo, Union Minister for Panchayati Raj and Tribal Affairs, presented the awards for outstanding women panchayat leaders this year. His announcement that the Union Cabinet has approved 50 percent reservation for women in panchayati raj institutions was greeted with loud applause.

He said that his ministry seeks the cooperation of all sections including the voluntary sector for improving the performance of panchayats and boosting the empowerment of women panchayat leaders.

Some of the women who were honoured include Shashi Kiran, a member of the Zila Parishad of Lahaul and Spiti in Himachal Pradesh. Shashi found out about government schemes and ensured people took advantage of them. She has organized Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and helped artisans. Shashi campaigned for inclusion of snow-clearing work under MNREGA. She is now campaigning for extension of maternity leave to one year.

Puniben Chhanabai Rajpara is sarpanch of

Mokasar Gram Panchayat in Surendranagar district of Gujarat. Puniben belongs to a BPL family. She has sorted out the problems of water scarcity in her village and distributed homestead land to 40 needy families. She has encouraged women's participation in panchayat affairs and put her foot down if husbands tried to usurp their place.



Winners with V. Kishore Chandra Deo, Union Minister for Panchayati Raj

Shashi Kiran campaigned for inclusion of snow-clearing under MNREGA. She is now campaigning for extension of maternity leave.

Parbati Patra is pradhan of Jaynagar Gram Panchayat in West Bengal. Parbati comes from a Dalit family. She has tried to make her panchayat a model in which gram sabha meetings are regularly held, MNREGA is implemented properly and there is no discrimination. She has made a special effort to improve education and campaigned against female foeticide.

Manisha Gadve is sarpanch of Kodoli gram panchayat in Maharashtra. In her village, located near Kolhapur, she worked tirelessly to protect HIV-affected persons from discrimination and isolation. This subsequently led to a wider campaign to stop all such discrimination including a panchayat level pledge.

This year, the theme for Women's Empowerment Day, celebrated alongside the awards, was 'Panchayats and Health for All'. Ritu Priya of the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University, delivered the keynote address. She said that village committees on health, sanitation and nutrition have emerged as important units for convergence of health-related issues. She said all villagers, particularly elected panchayat leaders, should strengthen such committees.

Dr. Vandana Prasad, National Convener of Public Health Resource Network, said while the role of panchayat leaders particularly women in achieving 'health for all' is critical, capacity building work has to be taken up. Panchayat leaders should be able to distinguish between good and bad trends in the health sector. For example, they should be able to recognize the tendency to use poor patients as guinea pigs in clinical trials. They must warn people. She said that neglected health problems of women like domestic violence, mental health, post-menopause problems and occupational health issues must be addressed.

Dr. Madhulika Banerjee of the Department of Political Science, emphasised the need to integrate traditional systems of medicine so that their credibility and legitimacy are protected and there is greater chance of conserving traditional health knowledge. Women play a very important role in protecting and using this traditional knowledge.

Dr. K.B. Saxena, former Additional Secretary, Government of India, said women's health problems need to be better reflected in the country's health priorities. We face challenges like reducing child mortality. At the same time new diseases are emerging in rural India. Panchayats can play an important role in converging uncoordinated schemes of the government. The presence of village women in gram sabhas is still less. By improving their participation health programmes and initiatives like MNREGA can be linked more to women's needs. ■



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MEHRAJ BHAT



Damaged houseboats floating on the Jhelum

Srinagar's dying houseboats

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

KASHMIR's retro attraction for tourists used to be houseboats and shikaras floating on the placid Dal Lake. All that is changing. The business of houseboats is gradually dying. First, insurgency and the imposition of travel advisories led to a decline in foreign tourists. Domestic tourists do turn up but they prefer to patronize low budget hotels. Very few try out the quaint houseboat. The state government hasn't helped either.

The government was supposed to have decided the exact placement of houseboats and their distance from the banks of the Dal Lake. But successive governments haven't allocated dedicated parking slots to the houseboat owners.

"We are ready to collaborate with the state government about the exact location of houseboats. But officials are themselves unsure about the number of houseboats to be placed on the Dal Lake and other water-bodies. Let them first decide. Then subsequent steps can be taken," says Mohammad Azim Tuman, Chairman, Houseboat Owners Association (HBOA).

According to figures available with the tourism department more than 910 houseboats inhabit the water-bodies of the Kashmir Valley. The majority of houseboats are on the Dal Lake followed by the

Nigeen, Jhelum and Chunth Khul (a channel of the Dal Lake).

"Around 634 houseboats are placed on the Dal Lake and 171 on the Nigeen. The river Jhelum has 73 houseboats while 32 float on the waters of the Chunth Khul. There are 35 unregistered Donga boats. The number of unregistered houseboats on the Dal Lake is 41," said Tuman, who had all the numbers on his fingertips.

A windstorm on 20th and 21st March wreaked havoc in the Kashmir Valley and damaged several households. But compensation has yet to be paid to the houseboat owners. Tuman says as many as 226 houseboats were damaged. Some of the houseboat owners suffered losses of as much as Rs. 10 lakhs each. "But till now no compensation whatsoever has been paid. Houseboat owners have been silently suffering damages over the years. But the government has not provided any



Houseboats on the Dal Lake

relief," said Tuman.

The Department of Tourism had last month issued a notice placing a ceiling on the sanction of subsidized timber for houseboats that have suffered damages over the years. According to this notice, 100 cubic feet of timber can be sanctioned for the renovation of a deluxe houseboat while for an A & B class houseboat the ceiling is 75 cubic feet. Houseboats classified as C & D are permitted only 50 cubic feet.

This government notice has not amused Tuman. He says given the exorbitant market rates of timber it would cost around ₹2 crores to construct a new houseboat today. One houseboat needs around 6,000 cubic feet of timber.

"Providing a few feet of timber at subsidized rates to houseboat owners will not serve any purpose.

Houseboat owners don't know how to utilize this negligible supply. If market rates were less we could have arranged for the timber ourselves, but that is not the case," said Tuman.

The houseboat owners are also aghast over a recent government directive stating that classification of houseboats will be done this summer. They term the exercise as an infringement on their business interests. They point out that the process of classification should be carried out during the off-season.

"Different types of houseboats are present in the water bodies here. We have deluxe, super deluxe and low budget houseboats for tourists. The government's decision to carry out classification is a good one but it should be done at an appropriate time. Once the tourism season is over this exercise should be taken up," said Tuman.

The houseboat owners are quite disheartened over what they perceive as the apathetic attitude of the state. They say that they are not enthusiastic about carrying on with their ancestral profession and they are ready to accept the rehabilitation plan of the government, if any.

"We have always been blamed for polluting the Dal Lake. The fact is that the Dal Lake is clean wherever there are houseboats. If the government still sees us as the culprits then let them shift us to some other place and provide us alternate means of livelihood. We are ready to forego this ancestral trade even though we are emotionally attached to it," said Tuman.

MEHRAJ BHAT

The houseboat owners blame Srinagar's faulty sewerage system for polluting the Dal Lake. Tuman says the government has not taken up this issue and its plan for disposal of sewerage has been faulty all along.

The houseboat owners say that the recently introduced cruise service will damage their houseboats.

"The waves generated will damage our houseboats and the government will be held responsible. Let the government evaluate the cost of each houseboat and provide us another livelihood. We are ready to say goodbye," says Tuman. ■

Anti-dam struggle resurfaces

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

THE anti-mega dam movement in Uttarakhand is gathering steam once again. Activists fear that the newly elected chief minister, Vijay Bahuguna, is a proponent of big dams. They point out that he has been advising the Union government to resume hydro-electricity projects that had earlier been suspended following their prolonged agitation.

Vijay Bahuguna has support from a pro-dam lobby consisting of Avdesh Kaushal, who heads the Rural Entitlement and Litigation Kendra (RLEK), an NGO, and A.N. Purohit, the ex-Vice Chancellor of Garhwal University. The two have apparently threatened to return their Padma Shri awards if the three suspended dam projects – Loharinag Pala, Pala Maneri and Bhaitonghati – are not immediately re-started.

But the anti-mega dam agitators – mainly activists, scholars, scientists and project-affected villagers – are determined to stop them in their tracks.

To chalk out a strategy, the anti-mega dam group met in a hotel in Dehradun on 8 May. The pro-dam proponents arrived there to disrupt the peaceful meeting. No one stopped them. "Chalo, pahari, halla bol (Come on hill folk, raise your voices)," thundered Rajendra Todariya along with the Uttarakhand Jan Manch, a small group of pro-dam supporters. He shouted that if these projects were not re-started, the youth would turn violent since it would mean loss of employment opportunities for them.

Unperturbed, the anti-dam activists carried on with their meeting. When asked, they pointed out the contradictions in Todariya's statement. "Not only does his *pahari* call smack of ultra nationalism, his statement of the loss of employment to youth is a bundle of lies," said Jagdish Kukreti, a researcher from Dehradun.

The real loss to the people is from the construction of mega dams and not their cancellation. "People lose their land and natural resources. Farming and animal rearing are the two major livelihoods of the people. These will be destroyed. Just one member from each 'affected' household will get a menial job in these projects," said Ganga Dhar Nautiyal, convener of the Kedarghati Bachao Sangharsh Samiti. Nautiyal, a resident of Serasi village in Rudraprayag district, has led a long agitation against the Singodi-Bhatwadi project that

The activists opposed to mega dams met in Dehradun to work out a strategy for their agitation. The pro-dam proponents arrived there to disrupt their meeting. No one stopped them.

will affect 33 villages in the picturesque Kedar Valley.

The participants who came for the meeting spoke in one voice. Banwari Lal Sharma, national convener of the Allahabad-based Azadi Bachao Andolan said, "The real fight is not between small and big dams. The issue is: who will own these projects? Will it be the community or our conceited policymakers?"

"We never said dams and projects shouldn't exist. All that we are saying is that projects should be of a scale that the community can manage, benefit and own," explained Trepan Singh

Chauhan, convener, Chetana Andolan. The proposed 558 projects would channelize the state's rivers into 1,152 km long tunnels.

"When run-of-the-river projects mean no tunnels, no displacement, no loss of land, forests or livelihoods, why is land being lost and rivers being forced into tunnels?" he asked. "We are establishing two micro-hydel projects of one MW capacity each. One is on the Balganga river in Tehri district and another on the Panar-Sarayu river in Almora district. Both will be totally owned and managed by the community."

Another key activist, Kamala Pant, convener of the Uttarakhand Mahila Manch which was at the forefront of the previous anti-dam struggle said, "The question is: what kind of project, in whose ownership and for whose benefit? These mega-projects destroy nature and the lives and livelihoods of people. They will turn our state into a waterless desert."

People from both Garhwal and Kumaon regions came for the meeting. Rajiv Lochan Shah, editor, *Nainital Samachar*, a Hindi newsweekly, cautioned the government. "The fragile Himalayas must not be destroyed. Only non-tunnel projects which guarantee people won't be displaced and the eco-system remains intact can be granted permission," he said.

Shamsher Singh Bisht, president of the Uttarakhand Lok Vahini which is based in Almora suggested that a common resolution be passed to inform policymakers that mega dams will just not be allowed.

Sushila Bhandari of Rayadi village, Rudraprayag district, who was imprisoned for 65 days for opposing the Singodi-Bhatwadi Project said the Himalayas were a sensitive seismic zone and mega projects would wreak havoc were an earthquake to occur.

Since the days of the Tehri dam Uttarakhand has fiercely opposed mega dams. But its government does not listen to rivers or their people. ■

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



Kolkata's first seed festival

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

HERE were seeds galore at the Kolkata Seed Festival the first of its kind in the eastern region. Over 1,000 traditional varieties were on display for city dwellers.

Kolkataans also got the privilege of interacting with award-winning farmers who have discovered, invented and saved traditional seeds and thereby protected India's vast crop heritage.

The Seed Festival was organized jointly by the Development Research Communication and Services Centre (DRSCS), Earth Care Books and the Richharia Campaign.

About 18 seed conservation groups from seven states and seven districts of West Bengal took part. At Earth Care's stalls on Middleton Street, seeds of vegetables, legumes, paddy, wheat, and flowers were presented. There were little known traditional varieties of rice, palm jaggery, ash gourd, green mango and bottle gourd on sale.

Among the award winning farmers there was Jai Singh Raghuvanshi from Varanasi district in Uttar Pradesh (UP) who has received a national award from the Government of India for rediscovering wondrous varieties of wheat.

Raghuvanshi says it was lack of water in his village which started him on his quest to discover traditional seeds. "I found that indigenous varieties of wheat needed just one spell of watering in three months unlike hybrids which needed water three or four times. The hybrids would never give off branching shoots, unlike our traditional ones. The grains too were bigger and rounder in the traditional types."

Raghuvanshi discovered several indigenous seeds and got them tested at the Chaudhary Charan Singh Krishi Vidyalaya at Hissar in Haryana. The tests proved his seeds were far superior in protein, vitamins and mineral content than some hybrids and yielded more flour. He has rediscovered 120 wheat varieties, two mustard varieties and some in rice and pigeon pea varieties.

Two of his wheat varieties underwent trials by the UP state government and topped in yield, taste and nutrient quality. These have been released to farmers by the state. His Sugandhi basmati is also going to be distributed by the UP government. Farmers who have planted his JP 151 wheat variety have been awarded for breaking all records in agricultural yield with 79 quintals per hectare.

Raghuvanshi has now signed MoUs through



Kolkataans saw a variety of seeds which they could buy and plant



A display of traditional seeds

Krishi Vikas Kendras with the Haryana and Punjab governments to distribute his seeds to local farmers. He has also re-discovered a traditional variety of wood apple which produces the fruit in bunches. Agricultural scientists and farmers are frequent visitors to his farm.

Another noteworthy group present at the festival was the Sahaja Samruddha of Karnataka which consists of 10 farmers' groups. It has a membership of 250 farmers who specialize in minor and major millets, legumes, mangoes and 200 rice varieties including red, scented and medicinal strains. Four of their farmers have won the National Innovation Award.

Sahaja Samruddha was started by Krishna Prasad in 1994. He was previously working with Navdanya. Sahaja Samruddha has been organizing farmers into groups and training them to become crop experts. "With very little rain and little residual moisture in

the soil, nearly all rainfed paddy varieties have died out in Karnataka. We decided to save flood-tolerant and salinity-resistant paddy that can thrive in extreme conditions," says Krishna Prasad. Sahaja Samruddha has re-discovered and promoted 50 indigenous brinjal varieties, multi-coloured maize, jackfruit and step bananas.

As part of the Millet Network of India, Sahaja Samruddha has been sharing strains with farmers in Punjab, West Bengal, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. The cooperative has trained 50 farmers who have won state and national awards. It sells its organic products through its outlets at the WIPRO complex and Chamarajapet in Bangalore and through the Organic Sellers Network in southern India. Sahaja Samruddha has also undertaken seed mapping, and documented the nutritional value of millets.

The DRSCS in Kolkata, one of the organizers of the festival, specializes in creating awareness of tra-

ditional rice and vegetable varieties that can be grown in degraded, saline soils characteristic of coastal Bengal. Some of their varieties are being popularized in the Sunderbans where farming has been badly affected by rising sea levels, erratic rainfall and a shortage of fresh water.

Set up in 1982 as a technical resource centre manned by agricultural scientists, DRCS works all over West Bengal and has managed to promote and conserve seeds suited to dryland, wet, saline and water-stressed conditions. It has made use of the government's ICDS centres to create awareness on nutrition and promoted kitchen gardens. It also publishes and distributes low priced books on seed varieties and nutrition through krishi melas.

There was also Deepika Kundaji and Bernard Declerq who spoke about how they transformed a stony laterite wasteland into a lush forest and farm

There was Jai Singh Raghuvanshi from Varanasi in UP who has received a national award for rediscovering wondrous varieties of wheat.

they call Pebble Garden. Joined by Deepika in 1994, Declerq took seven acres of wasteland in Auroville and began rejuvenating this stretch with indigenous methods.

"India has 50 million hectares of wasteland lying fallow. If we brought soil from another place, we would have created the same problem elsewhere," says Deepika. They dug ponds to harvest rainwater, planted Acacia and Dodonea and created enough biomass to mulch the soil.

Once the land was prepared they planted indigenous trees including Ebony, Red Sanders, Arjun and Tendu. The trees were used to regenerate the forest. On half an acre, 19 varieties of seeds were planted. These included yams, cassava, leafy greens, herbs and vegetables. About quarter of an acre is reserved for fruit while the rest is for home garden varieties of vegetables. Pebble Garden has been thriving since the past 18 years and is a role model of regeneration.

A seminar on 'Agro-biodiversity and Ecological Agriculture' was also organized by DRCS. Prof RN Basu, former Vice Chancellor of Kolkata University, delivered the inaugural address. Dr Anupam Pal, associated with West Bengal's Biodiversity Conservation Farm in Fulia, spoke on the significance of India's indigenous rice varieties.

Said Bharat Mansata of Earthcare, a joint organizer of the Seed Festival, "The high input variety seeds being promoted by agri-business are sure to face plummeting yields with rising water shortages and mounting prices of inputs. Severe food scarcity looms ahead unless we adopt bio-diverse organic agriculture with our own traditional, locally adapted seeds. Particularly dangerous are genetically modified crops that threaten severe irreversible contamination of our numerous local crop varieties through uncontrollable cross-pollination." ■

Ravleen Kaur
Ladakh

TAKING advantage of Ladakh's icy climate the agricultural laboratory of the DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) is storing plant genes for eternity.

Located at Chang La, which is 5,000 km above sea level, the 'Permafrost Germplasm Storage Facility' is the world's second gene bank after the Svalbard International Seed Vault in Norway that took advantage of its cold climate to store seeds for the future.

"To conserve crop diversity, long-term storage of seeds at low temperatures is required. According to research, the ideal temperature for storage of most seeds is minus 18 to minus 20 degrees Celsius. To create low temperature artificially, especially in predominantly hot, humid, tropical and sub-tropical climates, a very high recurring expenditure on energy for thousands of years is required. Chang La however has naturally cold temperature for at least nine months. Besides the right temperature, 10 to 20 per cent of moisture can also be maintained inside this prefabricated structure," said Dr. R.B. Srivastava, director of the Defense Institute of High Altitude Research (DIHAR), that works under DRDO.

"According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) about 75 per cent of our genetic diversity has been lost in the last one year. If this continues our food, nutrition and health security will be under threat. Therefore in 1994 a World Trade Organisation (WTO) protocol said that every country should have one set of plant varieties duplicated and stored in an additional location either in their own country or in another country. One cannot discount the risk of natural or man-made disasters like a nuclear war either. This facility at Chang La is also ideal because the area has Army presence throughout the year," said Dr. Narendra Singh, a scientist at DIHAR.

The storage facility began as an experiment of the DRDO and the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) based in Delhi in 2001. Around 149 accessions (a new member to a plant or seed collection) of major food and horticultural crops were stored in an area 5,500 metres

Genes on ice

above sea level and their quality was examined every year. After four years it was found that the seeds were able to maintain a quality near to their original value.

Based on these results, DIHAR created a bigger energy efficient prototype facility that was inaugurated on 25 September, 2010. More than 100 varieties of vegetable and cereal seeds from the Himalayas are stored in this facility. "About 6,000 varieties of seeds can be stored here. In August last year, we entered into a Memorandum of

RAVLEEN KAUR



India's gene bank at Chang La

Located at Chang La, which is 5,000 km above sea level, the 'Permafrost Germplasm Storage Facility' is the world's second such gene bank.

Understanding (MoU) with the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) for storage of germplasm from all parts of the country. NBPGR, which also has its own germplasm repository, wants to keep 1.4 million accessions at the Chang La facility," said Dr. Srivastava.

Though the temperature remains below minus 15 degrees Celsius for about nine months at Chang La, gensets have to be used to operate air-conditioners in the three summer months. "We want to have an underground storage facility at Chang La where sub-zero temperatures can be maintained in summer also," he said. To avoid any disputes about intellectual property rights, seeds are stored in black boxes which can only be opened by the owner.

DIHAR wants to extend this facility to other countries. "Our neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka do not have such natural weather conditions. So once the permafrost facility becomes international, it will be a diplomatic tool in the hands of the Indian government to extend help to other countries," said Srivastava. ■

(Ravleen Kaur is a media fellow of the National Foundation of India working on agriculture in Ladakh)

Apne Aap's protective wristband

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

APNE Aap's cause to empower women and girls forced into prostitution has found a champion in US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. On her recent visit to Kolkata to meet Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Clinton's hectic schedule included a meeting with daughters of prostituted women, survivors of trafficking and activists involved in their rescue and rehabilitation.

The US Secretary of State met Apne Aap representatives including girls who grew up in redlight areas. Clinton proudly wore a 'Cool Men Don't Buy Sex' wristband presented to her by 19-year-old Uma Das from Kidderpore. "I requested her to campaign for punishment of those involved in the sex trade and child marriage," said Uma after she presented the US Secretary of State with the wristband.

Clinton asked her entire team to wear the wristbands.

Apne Aap's 'Cool Men Don't Buy Sex' campaign seeks to curb trafficking by drying up the demand for paid sex.

After seeing a karate performance by 16-year-old Poonam Khatoon, from Apne Aap's project in Bihar, Clinton remarked, "I agree with the approach of Apne Aap to invest in marginalised girls in small communities."

Concluding her visit, Clinton participated in a panel discussion with nine NGO leaders, moderated by Ruchira Gupta, founder of Apne Aap. She told them not to "feel weary".

"I am totally your cheerleader so continue what you are doing and I'll stand by you," she said.

What does Clinton's high profile visit mean to Apne Aap and their cause? Ruchira says, "My hope is that it inspires Mamata Banerjee to stand by exploited women and girls rather than blame them for being exploited. Closing down pubs at 10 pm does not address the issue of prostitution. But closing down the redlight district of Sonagachi will certainly prevent the rape and sexual exploitation of hundreds and thousands of girls and women."

And what does her visit mean to the prostituted women and girls in India? Ruchira says, "The fact that the most powerful woman came to talk to the least powerful girls in the world is a message to prostituted women in the US and India that there are women who are willing to listen to them and be their cheerleader in the struggle against exploitation."

Apart from fighting against trafficking, Apne Aap's projects help vulnerable girls stand on their



Poonam Khatoon demonstrates her karate skills

SHAMIK BANERJEE



Girls at Apne Aap's training centre in Dharampura

feet. The NGO works in Delhi, Kolkata and Forbesgunj in Bihar.

In Delhi they have been working closely with the marginalised Perna community whose members live in the Dharampura, Rauta Modh and Prem Nagar villages of Najafgarh district.

"Girls in our Perna community do not study because they cannot aspire to do anything later," explains Muskaan who was married off when she was just 12.

The girls are married young because they are in high demand as prostitutes. Usually, after the couple has one child, the husband forces the wife to join the sex trade. The Sapera and Singhi communities who also live here are similarly vulnerable to sex trafficking.

Apne Aap is trying to provide better choices to the girls. Their '3 L model' programme enables both women and girls to gain access to learning, livelihood and legal protection.

The NGO provides adult literacy classes, informal education, non-formal education, remedial classes, financial literacy and life skills training. It creates awareness on HIV/AIDS, hygiene and nutrition. There are self-defence classes and discussions on gender, sex and sexuality.

"The idea is to inform women about their legal rights and entitlements. We help them get Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards and the Aadhar card," says Shama Afroz, head of programmes.

Field staff at Apne Aap's new centre in Dharampura say it has been tough gaining the confidence of the women. "Most of them were reluctant to join us," say Shashi Bala and Mamta. They spent time interacting with the families, establishing a relationship and pointing to the benefits of joining up.

Shashi and Mamta admit it is going to take a long time to curb the sex trade here. Gains have been modest. "Many women and their daughters turned up at our Dharampura centre for a recent open-mike training session. They exchanged their personal stories with other members," says Manohar Rana, Delhi state coordinator of Apne Aap. He says it is a mix of intergenerational practices, lack of education about choices and poverty that drive communities into prostitution. Most of the girls are school dropouts and have to be encouraged to join Apne Aap's education programme.

Monica Rao, computer teacher at the centre, says she now has around 35 girls in her class. Bhangra classes conducted by Abraar Karan, a research fellow from Yale University, are a popular draw.

Mridula, a youth organiser from Action India who works in the Seemapuri area, conducts the gender training class. Fifteen to 20 girls sit in a circle. Mridula tells them they have equal rights with their brothers. Through songs and role playing the girls are told about their right to education, freedom of expression and the right to make choices.

Kalam is Apne Aap's project officer for legal advocacy and leadership. He is from Uttari Rampur, Bihar, and belongs to the backward Nat tribe where intergenerational prostitution has been the norm. Without Apne Aap's intervention he would probably have spent his life as a pimp or as another sleazy link in the sex trafficking chain. Instead, he helps his community break out of the curse of prostitution.

"It works with some people but not with those who are completely desensitised and groomed to become pimps," cautions Ruchira.

Apne Aap is campaigning for amendments to India's Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act (ITPA) which sends women and girls to jail for soliciting but lets off pimps and brothel owners with a light fine. Buyers of sex should be criminalised rather than hapless women and girls. ■

Computer definition:-

Computer is an Electronic data processing machine (E.D.P) It takes the user's data and gives the



Signalling a new era in teaching through Project Shiksha

Shweta was only 6 months old when she was left severely crippled by spinal polio. While growing up, her choices were never easy, but this didn't stop her from pursuing her dreams. She attended school, got herself a Diploma in Computer Applications and is now a computer teacher at a school for the hearing impaired. Even as she used sign language to teach, Shweta felt it was necessary to further simplify computer education.

Microsoft's Project Shiksha empowered her to make this happen. Under this initiative, teachers are trained to use computer programs like Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Moviemaker as tools for their teaching. Shweta used her learnings to create her own set of signs and gestures that incorporated computer commands, and helped the students understand computers better.

The result — skills that go beyond the classroom to create a better life for all.

SHWETA WALISHETTAR

B. D. Tatti Deaf & Dumb School | Lakshmeshwar, Karnataka

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Illustrating concepts with videos and presentations using **Microsoft Office PowerPoint** and **Windows Movie Maker**.

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BABA ADHAV COMES

Seeks pension for the unorganised

Civil Society News

New Delhi/Pune

FOR five days from 7 May, vendors, coolies, domestic workers, farm hands and several others in the informal sector gathered at Jantar Mantar in crushingly hot weather to demand their right to pension.

Giving this gritty protest special significance were Baba Adhav and the Hamals of Pune who have engaged with traders and the government in Maharashtra to get for themselves better wages, health benefits and provident fund. But they don't receive pension and believe it is their due.

The Hamals carry huge sacks on their backs in wholesale markets. Traditionally, they had no rights, but Baba Adhav, an allopathic medical practitioner with a clinic in a Pune slum, managed to change that. He united them into a workers' union and finally got the Maharashtra government to set up labour boards to supervise their benefits.

The Hamal story is that of the rest of the unorganized sector which represents the bulk of the workforce in India. These are workers who make a significant contribution to the economy but mostly get no recognition. They do hard labour and yet have inadequate access to health care. When they are too old to work they have nothing to fall back on.

Pension has been one of the Hamals' longstanding demands. By voicing it loudly enough in Delhi they hope to rally together other groups nationwide and make an impression on policymakers.

It has taken Baba Adhav nearabout four decades to show the Hamals how to assert themselves. He is now 82. For someone who fights so hard and has gone to jail many times, he is a surprisingly gentle and softspoken person. But, interestingly, his understated leadership has given Hamals a swagger. As part of the Delhi protest, 50 Hamals rode on motorcycles from Pune to Delhi. It was a statement of Hamal pride and the desire to get on with their lives.

In their youth, Hamals are burly with strong arms and bunched shoulder muscles. Their bodies tell the story of the work they do and it is with considerable pride that they carry the steel hook and rope by which they pull sacks on to their backs.

Having acquired a sense of identity thanks to Baba Adhav, they are now also



Baba Adhav in Delhi on a motorcycle with the Hamals



Annie Raja, Prabhat Patnaik and Aruna Roy

on a short fuse. The long ride on motorcycles from Pune in the blistering sun was an expression of their new aggressiveness. Everything about them sends out the message that they don't like being left behind in a liberalizing economy. The demand for pension is one way of setting the score right because old age begins early for a Hamal. But there are other aspirations as well such as education, health care and housing.

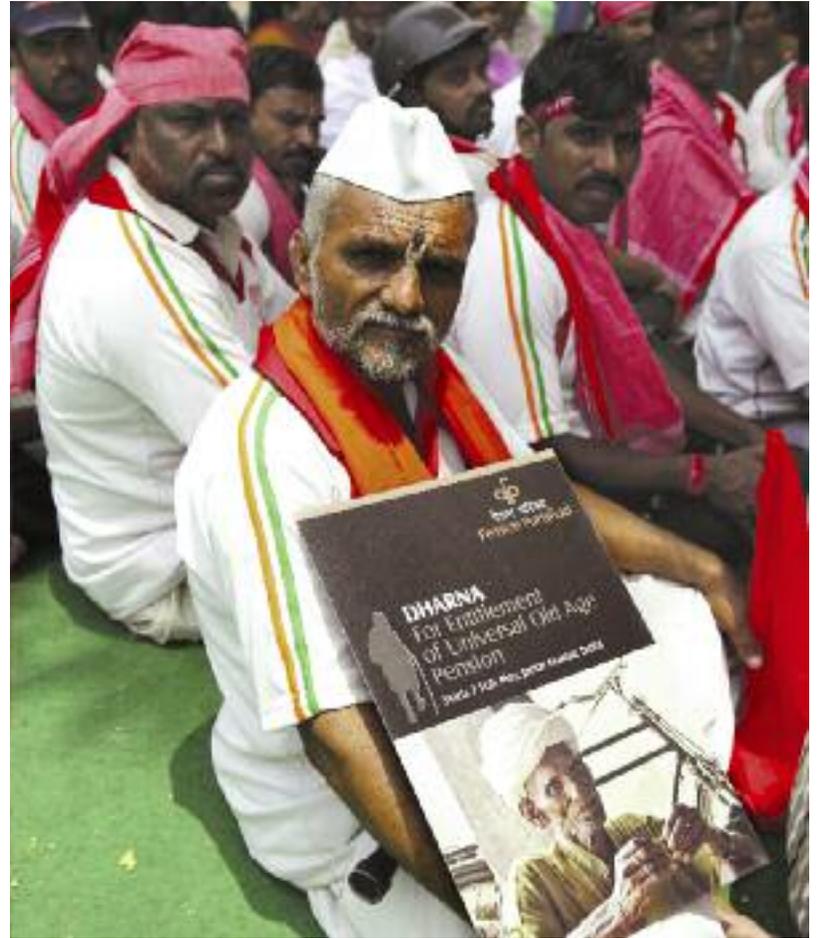
Elder Hamals didn't even have a place to sleep in the city let alone own motorcycles. Younger Hamals want no part of that kind of life either for themselves or their children.

BIGGER EFFORT: The protest in Delhi had wider support among senior activists and academicians. They pointed out that 8.2 per cent of the population or nearly 100 million Indians are above the age of 60. The majority of them are in the unorganized sector and after a lifetime of work, as their bodies break down, they have little to fall back on. Migration adds to their problems because young family members move on in search of work.

At a press conference on 4 May, Aruna Roy, Annie Raja, Nikhil Dey, Subhas Lomte, Ravi Srivastava and Prabhat Patnaik asserted that governments needed to find ways of giving a minimum pension to people who become old and

TO DELHI

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



Mohan Ramchandra Makare, a Hamal from Pune



Women ragpickers from Pune

aren't beneficiaries of social security measures that come with jobs in the organized sector.

Baba Adhav said unorganised workers had waited in vain for the implementation of the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act passed in 2008. "The Act provides for pensions to unorganised workers and since they constitute 93 per cent of the workforce, we are arguing for universalization of pension," he said.

In 10 years since 2000 the work force in the organized sector had grown by less than 0.3 per cent annually. But the economy had grown by 7.5 per cent. The workers in the unorganized sector have evidently contributed significantly to this growth.

Aruna Roy of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan said: "It is the obligation of the State to provide pensions to people who are no longer able to work. There are strong and progressive international precedents in lower and middle income countries in respect of pension."

PENSION PARISHAD: Beyond the slogans and speeches at Jantar Mantar is the Pension Parishad of which Roy and Baba Adhav are co-convenors. The Pension Parishad serves as a forum. It builds the case for universal pension

and also points out the inadequacies of the schemes that the government has tried to implement.

The Pension Parishad idea began in Pune on 24-25 February when 10,000 workers collected to reinforce the demand for universal pension. It was here that a nationwide initiative was planned.

The Pension Parishad's demands are:

- A universal and non-contributory old age pension system.
- Any Indian man above 55 or woman above 50 should be eligible. For vulnerable sections such as primitive tribal groups, sex workers and transgender people the age should be 45.
- The pension should be 50 per cent of the minimum wage or ₹2,000, whichever is higher.
- There should be a single-window system.
- The poverty line should not be used for exclusion.
- Pension should not be a reason to deny access to any other social welfare measure such as the public distribution system.

There are two criteria for exclusion: an income that is above the taxable threshold and pension from another source which is higher than the pension of ₹2,000 sought by this campaign.



Elderly women from Rajasthan

Prabhat Patnaik, a Left wing economist, says the pension scheme would cover about 80 million people and cost the exchequer around ₹360,000 crores per year or four per cent of the GDP.

If the Union government were to take 75 per cent of the burden it would come to ₹270,000 crores a year which is a smaller sum than the exemptions given in this year's Union budget.

"It should be a universal pension scheme and non-contributory. The demand is not linked to per capita incomes. The demand is for an absolute amount. With GDP growing at about eight per cent it is not a big demand. As long as prices don't rise, there won't be an increasing demand on the exchequer."

Ravi Srivastava, former member of the National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, says, "Two-thirds of the working force needs social protection and a directed social policy. Old people are the workers of today, they have contributed to the GDP. There is a consensus that pensions should be at a reasonable limit or half the minimum wage. Pensions should be transfers and non-contributory."

He favours a social security tax or a cess on those sectors which use the services of the informal sector.

EXISTING SCHEMES: Pension schemes in India largely cater to the well-off and workers in the organized sector. For the poor there is the Indira Gandhi National Old-Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) which provides persons above 60 years with ₹200 a month, and those over 80 years with ₹500 a month. But this is limited to persons below the poverty line (BPL). The result is that of the total elderly population, only a little over 19 million are beneficiaries of IGNOAPS. What this means is that just about one in five persons over 60 receives old-age pension. Under schemes run by state governments, amounts paid as pension vary from a maximum of ₹2,000 a month in Goa to a dismal ₹200 a month in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha.

GROUND LEVEL VOICES: The case for pensions is argued in many ways, but it is perhaps most powerfully presented by the ageing poor themselves.

At Jantar Mantar there were old people who had come with activists from all over the country. They held up walking sticks given to them by Helpage India and it became the symbol of their five days of protest.

The most pathetic stories tumbled out of elderly women. They were either widows, or they had sick husbands to support, or they had been abandoned by their children. There were also widows who had been supporting their daughters-in-law and grandchildren since the sons had passed away.

Women ragpickers in Pune earn around ₹2,000 a month. "My name is Kalpana Rode. I am 55 and I have worked as a ragpicker for 30 years. I am a widow. My daughter was abandoned by her husband. She has two small girls and lives with me. I am the sole breadwinner. I am 55. I won't be able to work much longer. What will we do?"

Leela Bai is 60 and has been a ragpicker since 31 years. She says ragpickers suffer from cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes and spondylitis. "We do dirty, high-risk work. Our survival is based on earning money daily. High food prices worsen our plight. I pay ₹50 per kg for *jowar* and ₹200 as rent for my hut. I need pension."

The women point out that Goa is paying ₹2,000 as pension to the elderly. So why can't the rest of India do the same? The money would help them pay



Women hold up walking sticks given to them by Helpage India

for food and health. Pensions might also prevent their children from throwing them out. It would give them respect in the family.

"The men migrate from the village. Their priority is to take the daughter-in-law and grandchildren. The elderly are left behind with absolutely nothing," says Sangar Bai, 75, from a village near Jaipur in Rajasthan.

Ram Kumar, who works with Bunker Roy's Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) in Tilonia, literally carried a group of aged women on his back to Jantar Mantar. They were so elderly it was difficult to hear their soft voices in the din. All of them sobbed out their stories.

Dhapu, 75, has cataract and spinal problems. She lives in a *kutchha* home all alone. Both her sons are dead. She is a widow. She still earns a paltry sum by selling firewood. Her grandson fetches water for her.

Rukma is 80. Her family beat her up and threw her out. She built a small mud house outside her former home. It collapsed in the rain. Now she lives in a tent-like structure made with sheets. She fetches water from a tray meant for cattle, sieves it and drinks it. The villagers give her some food. If they don't, she goes hungry.

All the elderly women suffered from chronic hunger. "I eat twice a day: two chappatis with chutney and onion," says Chotti Ma who is 75. Widowed 20 years ago, her family of five can barely survive. One son is dead, another works in Kishangarh and a third one, who used to be a construction worker, is sick.

With the economy slowing, universal pension is unlikely to be a priority for the government. There is already growing opposition to payouts. But the Pension Parishad has succeeded in highlighting the plight of getting their voices heard. ■

'Why tension not pension for us'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

BABA Adhav has spent a lifetime working for Pune's unorganized sector. He has fought particularly hard for the rights of Hamals, who are labourers in Pune's wholesale markets. At the age of 82, perched on a mobike with a jaunty red band around his head, Baba Adhav's manner is defiant and almost youthful.

Today, the children of Hamals go to school. They have identity cards, homes, provident fund, gratuity and health insurance. Most of all, the Hamal union in Pune has given them pride and dignity.

Baba Adhav has also organized unions for ragpickers, domestic workers and autorickshaw drivers and put them on the path to economic independence and self-esteem.

"A rickshaw-puller works 12 hours a day. An MP or an MLA can get pension, so why not us? Why pension for them and tension for us?" he asks.

Civil Society succeeded in getting Baba Adhav out of the Pension Parishad's proceedings at Jantar Mantar for an extensive interview. Here are the excerpts:

Tell us how you began working for the Hamals in Pune?

In 1953 I received my medical degree. I am a socialist. I started a dispensary in my *basti* which is in a trader's market. The Hamals were my patients. I came to know of their extremely difficult living and working conditions. They would carry sacks that weighed 100 kg. The work was inhuman.

There were accidents. But there was no insurance for them. The Hamals suffered from spinal, knee and joint problems. They were in a debilitated condition. They did not have regular hours, nor any guarantee of work. There was no surety they would be paid the right wages either. Their work was so casual. The traders would say they are not our employees. We will pay only for the loads they carry. We are doing them a favour by employing them.

They could not benefit from the Industrial Disputes Act, which is for organized labour, or the Shop Owners Act. There is no succour for them in labour laws. Today, there is a Social Security Act but it is not being implemented.

Now in the Mumbai dock there was a socialist leader who had started a scheme for headloaders – they called them Mathadis there – who loaded and unloaded grain from the ships. Officially, the Mathadis had no employer.

But the scheme was like this – The contractor paid the Mathadis for loading and unloading. On the payment decided for them, an additional levy was fixed. The dock management decided although the Mathadis were not employed by the board, they worked in the dock nevertheless.. So the dock would pay this levy.

If the payment per load was ₹1, the dock will pay say 20 paise. This money was used for implementing welfare schemes for the Mathadis and the scheme worked quite well.

The Hamal board was created on the basis of this scheme?

Yes, we placed this same demand before the government. We got some advantage from an ongoing agitation at that time for the Marathi language. Now the Hamals are rural, some are strapping, so when they raised their voices in this agitation they got noticed.

The government set up two committees. The second committee approved the dock scheme. It was decided the trader would pay a levy when he hires a Hamal. The traders objected. The committee said – fine, put the levy in the sales tax and pass it on to the consumer.

The law, called the Maharashtra Mathadi, Hamal and other Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Welfare) Act was passed in 1969. The traders fought against it right up to the Supreme Court, even though the money was not coming from their pockets.

What do they pay today?

The situation is like this – the rate for the Hamal is fixed with him according to the bags he lifts. But, in addition, there is a 34 per cent levy and we can take 50 per cent of this levy as per law. We decided how to divide this money for provident fund, bonus, gratuity, health, workmen's compensation and the expense of the Hamal board that was set up by the government for this purpose.

The Hamal board became operational in the 1980s. It consists of representatives from the Hamals, the traders and government officers. About ₹15 crores is collected. The trader has to deposit the cheque for the Hamal and for the levy with the board. And the board pays a salary to the Hamal. The Hamal also has a provident fund card. It acts like an identity card.

The board pays for everything including insurance. The Hamal can take an advance from his provident fund. There are government hospital facilities too and 10 per cent reservation in private hospitals.

Why did you feel the need to come to Delhi?

It is important so as to be able to influence policy, be heard by politi-

cians. See, the unorganized sector in India consists of around 450 million people. Around 200 million are agricultural workers, mostly women. Then there are fish workers, those who work in mines and construction workers.

Hamals comprise a considerable number. Due to the middle class and promotion of privatization the government has agreed to the Contract Labour Act. We are totally against this Act. It is a stab in the back for us.

Why should we become contract labour? Make us permanent labour. After so many years why can't the government do this? The board without taking any money from the government is giving benefits to the Hamals. Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee knows this. But they say, we are thinking, thinking...

What are the four or five things the government and society should do for the unorganized sector?

All workers should have an identity card. We too did not have identity cards. Now because of the Mathadi Board everybody has an identity card and a bank account. Give us social security cards. Why is it that you have to work in a mill to get this identity? Secondly, implement the Workmen's Compensation Act and provide provident fund and pensions.

What is your opinion on Aadhar?

What will the people get out of it? So far they have got nothing. People do want an identity. But I really don't know what are the advantages of having such a card. So far the Aadhar card has not demonstrated any gains at all for workers. ■



Baba Adhav

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

'See businesses as creating value'

Social enterprises need scale, competitiveness

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A scholar and an authority on marketing, Dr Jagdish N. Sheth has many valuable insights on the behaviour of institutions, be they hardnosed businesses, non-government organisations or social enterprises.

Dr Sheth has been adviser to governments and corporations alike. He knows to read global trends, often even as they begin, and understands where diverse interests can intersect.

Dr Sheth has lived in the US since the sixties and has held several prestigious academic positions. Currently he is Charles H. Kellstadt Professor of Marketing at the Goizueta Business School at Emory University.

He was in Delhi recently and spoke to *Civil Society* on what the social sector can learn from the world of business and how corporations can look for greater meaning in their search for profits.

What do you think social enterprises and NGOs need to learn from the corporate world?

The first thing a social enterprise can learn from business is how to scale. Social enterprises tend to be in a microcosm and find it difficult to get out of that local, local context. The idea is fantastic, their operations are honest, the benefits go to the stakeholders though they are not able to pay. But their scope is limited. Scaling requires access to capital, access to markets and often it requires recruiting the right kind of talent. Business learns how to grow, not plateau.

The second thing is to look upon businesses with trust and say I can learn something from them. When you do that you will see businesses as creating value – value for customers, stakeholders, employees, suppliers.



Dr Jagdish N. Sheth

'The best social enterprises are those whose members are actually livelihood creators: Sewa, Lijjat Papad.'

So, see businesses as creating value and not just making profits?

I would say, many NGOs and social enterprises are founder-driven – people who have a passion. And the passion stays till the founders survive. They stop giving value beyond what the founders can give.

But how do you constantly create value for your stakeholders whoever they are? It could be your donors. And marketing creates value. It is just not enough to have the product, but how do you finish the product, how do you package the product, how do you promote the product. Peter Drucker said the purpose of business is to create and retain customers and that there are only two functions that matter in business: innovation and marketing. I think that is a very insightful comment.

The third thing to learn from business is how to survive. Because it is all about competition. I think many social entrepreneurs don't have the survival instinct even though they are in a survival mode. Often they go from grant to grant instead of saying I will create enough of a reserve so that I don't have to take the next round of support. That is why the best social enterprises are those whose members are actually livelihood creators: Sewa, Lijjat Papad. When I visited Amul I was fascinated to see that the average number of cows owned by herders was three and a half. The farmers could never have done that on their own.

What is the difference between an NGO and a social enterprise?

A social enterprise tries to put the solution into an endeavour. An NGO is more of a purpose-driven exercise.

Entrepreneurship is fine. I believe in entrepreneurship and I have been an entrepreneur myself. But entrepreneurship in itself is not enough. What it needs is management skills and processes. Many social enterprises lack the management skills and

the backend. It is one of the reasons they are not able to scale.

Isn't the role of an NGO different from a social enterprise. Isn't an NGO meant to create awareness, solve that last-mile problem and then withdraw?

I see the NGO as being as perpetual as a social enterprise, business or any other institution. But an NGO can take up a cause, incubate it and then hand it to someone else to carry it further. It is the kind of thing that the foundations do. The Ford Foundation has done it for long and now there are Bill and Melinda Gates and Ted Turner. I think the foundations have to be more mission driven, process driven – create the process, manage the project for a while and then hand it over.

But an NGO which believes in self-perpetuation may in fact end up being a liability.

And I would agree on that one. That comment is surprisingly true of most institutions. The most insightful question I have ever been asked is why do companies fail? It was a question that took me by surprise and I did a lot of research on that. One of the biggest problems that NGOs face is complacency – they begin to remain in existence for their own sake and cease to be mission driven.

Our expectations from companies have changed. In response, companies try hard to appear to be socially driven. But CSR also has a bad name across the world. How do you see the relationship between companies and society playing out?

I think you are right. CSR has been used to ensure that a business continues to do what it does which may or may not be good for society. The concept of CSR is that it is in the best interests of a business as an institution.

CSR also comes from a guilt feeling – that you have made money the bad way. The Nobel prize comes from that tradition. I have always felt that a business without meaning is meaningless. CSR comes out of a sense of emptiness. That the business is not enough and there is a need to latch on to a cause. So, I do believe this issue of NGOs existing for their own sake and not being useful to society is a very serious problem.

That is true, but what about private equity which drives companies from quarter to quarter and then managements throw in a little bit of CSR...



Microsoft's computer training learning centre in a village in Gujarat

In our book, *Firms of Endearment*, we have delivered a blunt message that CSR as a standalone activity and afterthought is not sustainable. Unless it is embedded in the business itself – and hence the old concept of doing well by doing good – it will be another fad, another fashion.

In an economy like India's there are huge deficits in healthcare, education, infrastructure, water shortages. Now these aren't deficits which companies can ever be expected to bridge. Surely this is the work of government.

I think the best model for this is public-private partnership. I don't think the government can do it by itself because it is bound by so many rules and regulations. But I have seen the two (government and private sector) together can do it and I have seen them work well. I was on the board of the Manipal Group. There was an issue in Malaysia about Indian doctors – that by 2020 there would be 90 per cent Indian doctors. From a social value point of view that wasn't acceptable. There needed to be Chinese Malays, Bhumiputras etc. So they actually motivated the Manipal Group to start a hospital in Malacca. For me the combination works very well. It could be between a founda-

tion and the government or a foundation and a business.

So, what is achieved through the partnership is the spark and energy and flexibility to move forward. But would you agree that in PPP the Public is very important?

I agree. The public part is important and within the public part what is more important is the policy. I advise governments and I find that good governments have great policy leaders and policy thinkers. And governments listen to them. Singapore is an example. Surprisingly China is moving in that direction.

China...

China will be the largest NGO market in the world created with a purpose by the government both in the size and number of NGOs. Now we can have all kinds of speculation as to why the Chinese government is doing it. It could be that it wants to bring what is underground overground. With NGOs having to get licensed it is possible to monitor them. Well that is the dark side. But the numbers are staggering and government money is invested in creating them. ■

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Himalayan Himjoli

SHAMIK BANERJEE

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

A tiny shop in Delhi's Aurobindo market called Himjoli sells products made by a cluster of NGOs in Uttarakhand. There are spices, soaps, jams, jellies, honey and herbs as pure as mountain breeze. You can buy woollens too. For NGOs scattered across the state, the shop is a real saviour. Otherwise they would have to wait for tourists to come to Uttarakhand or for Delhi's occasional *haats* to sell their products.

Himjoli is a social enterprise set up by Pankaj Wadhwa in 2009. "Himjoli consists of 8,000 beekeepers, weavers and farmers," says Wadhwa, 50, sitting at Café Qahwa in Delhi's Safdarjung Development area. Profits generated are re-invested in the company, he claims.

Wadhwa spends 15 days with his family in Delhi and another 15 days travelling in Uttarakhand where he has built a home in Buzgaon in Kumaon district. "I'm either on a train or in the car driving to meet our partners. It often takes me five to six hours to get to one partner," he quips.

Wadhwa is not new to enterprise. After graduating with a business degree, he worked for the New York Stock Exchange and then returned to join his family's electronics business. He started Tinker Toys, a toy company which he ran for several years till cheap Chinese products flooded the market and wiped out his company. Tinker Toys was eventually sold to Mattel. Pankaj Wadhwa then started a kids event management company called Kidstuff and subsequently sold that to Mudra. Wadhwa has invested some of this money into Himjoli and kept the rest for his living expenses.

After he sold Kidstuff he decided to settle down in Kumaon. His heart was on trekking in the mountains. But he also wanted to do something for the state, he says. So he spent a year travelling all over Uttarakhand meeting producers, farmers, NGOs, government outfits and created goodwill for himself. "He travelled around at his own expense and came to talk to us. We partner in several areas," says V.K. Madhavan, the executive director of Chiraag, a large NGO which works in 200 villages in Nainital, Bageshwar and Almora districts.

Himjoli markets the incremental products of Kumaon Grameen Udyog (KGU), a Section 25 company under the Chiraag umbrella. These products are sold under the Kilmora brand name. They include silk woollen stoles, knitted toys, apricot scrub and oil. KGU has its own marketing system. It is also a Fab India supplier. Himjoli provides them an assured market for their incremental produce. Chiraag, in turn, helps Himjoli.

"We also want to create employment for youth. So when Himjoli needs staff for their retail outlets in Kumaon or the new one now in Delhi we try to hire youth," explains Madhavan. The relationship is symbiotic for Himjoli is going to help raise funds for Chiraag.

Many of Himjoli's relationships are similar. It helps market products for another NGO called Aarohi which is primarily involved in healthcare.



A variety of teas



Women weavers

Himjoli will also help Aarohi raise funds, says Wadhwa.

It has assisted Aarohi in setting up medical camps in remote areas of Kumaon where there are no medical facilities at all.

"Himjoli has been very helpful in keeping alive what my mother, Jaya Gupta, started. Pankaj seems to have struck a chord with her for she would mention him in all her conversations," says Shubha Mudgal, the famous Hindustani classical singer.

After retiring, Mudgal's mother settled in Naukuchital in Kumaon where she revived Aepan, a traditional pattern that women painted on floors and walls during festive occasions. Jaya Gupta helped the women do this art on contemporary products. This also gave the women additional income.

Himjoli now helps market the Aepan products. It also sent Claudia, a German designer, to help the women create new products. The white Aepan patterns now adorn unique lampshades and vibrant silk stoles. An Aepan laptop bag is in the pipeline.

This is Wadhwa's third company. He runs Himjoli like an efficient business. Their target is to cover

15,000 people at the end of five years and increase the average earnings of a producer from ₹1,100 to ₹4,500. In two years, Himjoli has successfully increased earnings to ₹2,700 and now sells about ₹2.5 crores worth of products every year.

Things have been moving slowly but steadily. Himjoli now has eight shops in Uttarakhand and one shop in Delhi. In the coming months they hope to open shops in Jaipur, Goa, Bangalore and Gurgaon. The staff that will manage these shops will be employed from Uttarakhand. Himjoli also plans to exit the business in five years. Ownership of a shop run in Uttarakhand by a group of women will be transferred to them.

Wadhwa also uses his social network to sell to companies. He gets permission to put up stalls during company events. Ernst and Young, Trilegal, Naukri.com, Accenture and *Business Standard* are some companies who buy Himjoli products for gifting.

Wadhwa has also got companies involved in volunteering. So employees from Ernst and Young are going to plant 50,000 oak trees in Uttarakhand. With Trilegal, a legal firm that employs 170 lawyers, the engagement is even deeper. Trilegal's lawyers plan to build toilets in village schools by helping local barefoot engineers. "It is fun for us to work with our hands. There is also more engagement with the people, instead of just doing cheque book charity," says Akshay Jaitley, a partner at Trilegal.

What is exciting for Wadhwa is the social change that Himjoli can bring about. In a village in Naukuchital a group of 16 women has earned Rs 16 lakhs thanks to Himjoli. He found out that they had moved their children to private English medium schools, bought medical insurance and that wife-beating had stopped. "For me this is rewarding. Earlier I counted bottle caps sold for Pepsi," he says. ■

Insights

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Ganga on a dry run

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

ONE of the most striking descriptions of this phenomenon called the Ganga came from Jawaharlal Nehru: "The Ganga, especially, is the river of India beloved of her people, round which are intertwined her memories, her hopes and her fears, her songs of triumph, her victories and her defeats. She has been a symbol of India's age long culture and civilization, ever-changing, ever-flowing and yet ever the same Ganga."

The dimensions are huge: at 2,526 km the Ganga is India's longest river. It is the world's most populated with over 529 million people – and this is a conservative 2011 estimate – staying in the Indian part which consists of 79.3 per cent of the river's basin area. Eleven states in India and four countries are part of this basin area.

In the Hindu religion, the Ganga is an incarnation of the Goddess herself. It figures in

the Vedas, the Puranas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Throughout the basin the river is considered holy. The website of the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) says, "The Ganga has been the cradle of human civilization since time immemorial. Millions depend on this great river for physical and spiritual sustenance. People have immense faith in the powers of healing and regeneration of the Ganga. It is arguably the most sacred river in the world and is deeply revered by the people of this country. The river plays a vital role in religious ceremonies and rituals."

However, the river is in very bad shape. It is one of the most polluted rivers of the world. Besides the main Ganga river, most of its tributaries,

including the Yamuna, Chambal, Damodar, Gomti, Kali, Khan, Kshipra, Hindon, Sone, Kosi, Betwa, Ramganga, Mahananda to name a few, are all described as grossly polluted by various agencies like the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), its National River Conservation Directorate and NGRBA.

If one were to travel down the river from the famous Char dham, namely Gangotri (the birth place of the Bhagirathi), Yamunotri (the birth place of the Yamuna), Kedarnath (the source of the Mandakini River) or Badrinath (the source of the Alaknanda River) one should be ready to face some rather nasty surprises, including the com-

plete disappearance of the river for several km. Further down, there are barrages on the river at Haridwar (water diverted to the Upper Ganga Canal), Bijnor (Madhya Ganga Canal) and Narora (Lower Ganga Canal), at Kanpur and also the dam at Farakka. In addition, every one of the river's 17 major tributaries has been dammed several times.

However, in NGRBA's description of the problem, there is no mention of these projects. Its sole focus is on pollution: "In the Ganga basin approximately 12,000 million litres per day (mld) of sewage is generated, for which presently there is a treatment capacity of only around 4,000 mld.

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Approximately 3,000 mld of sewage is discharged into the main stem of the river Ganga from Class I & II towns located along the banks, against which treatment capacity of about 1,000 mld has been created till date. The contribution of industrial pollution, volume-wise, is about 20 per cent but due to its toxic and non-biodegradable nature, this has much greater significance."

The polluted state of the river is not a recent development. This has been known for pretty long. It is not for lack of attempts or lack of financial, technical or infrastructure resource allocation or lack of understanding as to what are the responsible reasons that the river is in this state.

The first phase of tackling pollution in the river started with the enactment of the Water Pollution Act 1974, through which elaborate institutional arrangements from the Central and State Pollution Control Boards were set up, armed with significant legal powers. However, till date we do not have a single case of a river or tributary that has been cleaned up due to the efforts of pollution control boards.

Having seen this failure, the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi launched the Ganga Action Plan (GAP) in 1985. Rajiv Gandhi, in his speech announcing GAP on 14 June, 1986 in Varanasi was quite optimistic: "Today we are beginning the programme of cleaning the Ganga here and it is our hope that through this there will be a sewage plant built where all the sewage will be diverted and won't come into the Ganga. We will get power from that and fertilizer.. and the power that will be required to make it." He was also hopeful that the Environment Protection Act, enacted the same year would be useful in this endeavour. The Act is good, but the agency implementing it, the MoEF, has not shown the independence, the will or the intention of tackling this problem with any seriousness.

Moreover, the scheme did not attempt to learn any lessons from the failure of the earlier pollution control apparatus then in existence for over a decade. The GAP continued with its emphasis on more sewage treatment plants, pumps, pipes and such infrastructure. Decades later, the then Union Minister for Environment and Forests, Jairam Ramesh, declared on the floor of Parliament in 2009 that the GAP has failed to achieve its basic objectives.

In 1993 the GAP Phase II was launched, including tributaries of the Ganga like the Damodar, Yamuna, Mahananda and Gomati and in December 1996 it was merged with the National River Action Plan. The National River Conservation Authority is chaired by the Prime Minister and includes, besides several Union Ministers, Chief Ministers of all the basin states. While it was apparent that the GAP and the RAP (River Action Plans) are failures, no credible attempt has been made to understand the reasons for failure when supervision was supposed to be from the highest quarters. The CAG has shown through several reports how the scheme has been a failure, the latest report coming only in 2011. In the report, echoing what SANDRP had said several years ago, the CAG said that ever since the UPA came to power in 2004, there have been no meetings of either the authority headed by the PM or the Steering Committee headed by the secretary of the MoEF. This is just an indication of the low

priority the government has for our rivers.

In February 2009, just months before the Parliamentary elections, sensing that the issue of dams on the Ganga and pollution of this sacred river was becoming a hot issue, the UPA government came out with a notification on a National Ganga River Basin Authority, headed by the Prime Minister and including some non-government members. It was clear at the outset that this was a symbolic gesture and within the government there was absolutely no serious intent of tackling these issues. Most importantly, like in the case of earlier fresh starts in 1974, 1985, 1993 or 1996, this time too there was no credible attempt to understand the reasons for failure in the past and address the issues related to the governance of the river.

The non-government members had no role in the crucial decisions being taken by the government regarding the Ganga river, including the decision regarding the \$1 billion funding from the World Bank (which is also funding the Vishnugad Pipalkoti hydro project on the Alaknanda river in Uttarakhand, destroying a long stretch of the river) or specific plans, programmes or schemes. In over three years since the authority was

The Ganga Campaign advocates say the river should not be connected to the sewer, but the reality today is that the river is the sewer.

formed, there have been just two meetings (even the agenda and minutes of these meetings are not in the public domain!). Frustrated by this and supporting the fresh fast by Prof G. D. Agarwal (his earlier series of fasts led to ultimately declaring a 135 km stretch of the Bhagirathi as an eco-sensitive zone, though the notification for this is yet to be gazetted), three non-government members announced their resignation from the authority.

So what is the problem? Most importantly, throughout nearly four decades of attempts at river pollution control, the key decision makers and managers have been the Union and the state governments through their constituents like the Ministries of Environment and Forests, Water Resources, Urban Development, the Pollution Control Boards, the Water Quality Assessment Authority, Urban Municipalities, etc. But none of these agencies have shown any culture of democratic, transparent, accountable, participatory functioning. Their salaries, livelihoods or life sustaining elements are not dependent on whether the rivers are clean, whether they have any freshwater flow or not.

And the people whose livelihoods, life sustaining elements are dependent on these rivers have no, absolutely no role at any level, in ensuring that these rivers are clean, flowing all round the year with clear water, which is the basic slogan of 'Nirmal, aviral Ganga,' that the Ganga campaign has been raising.

In other words, the emphasis has been solely on infrastructure (new plants, pumps, pipes) and (pocketable) finances, but none at all in addressing the governance-related component of the river management regime. It is assumed that there is no need to address governance to ensure that the infrastructure actually works as intended, that decisions taken are appropriate and that finances are used optimally and for the right options.

A simple indicator of the failure of governance is that most of the existing sewage treatment plants do not function anywhere close to promised levels of quality or quantity of output. Yet, no one is responsible for this, no one has ever been punished.

The Ganga Campaign advocates say the river should not be connected to the sewer, but the reality today is that the river is the sewer. There has been no credible assessment of the amount of freshwater the river should have all round the year downstream from a dam, hydro project or a barrage, and none is getting released at diversion points. The rivers are allowed to be killed multiple times and this is actually being passed off as environmentally benign treatment by the Union Environment Minister Jayanthi Natarajan on the floor of Parliament while answering a question during the debate on 19 December, 2011.

Even where minimum flows, decided in an ad hoc manner are stipulated, the MoEF has no credible compliance mechanism in place. They have refused to involve the local people in ensuring compliance. Leave aside the question of stopping work on ongoing projects on the Alaknanda and Mandakini as the Ganga Campaign has demanded, Jayanthi Natarajan cleared the 300 MW Alaknanda hydro project of the GMR group even after the statutory Forest Advisory Committee twice rejected clearance to the project and the Ministry appointed consultant, the Wildlife Institute of India, recommended that the project should not be allowed. This project is close to the Badrinath and Kedarnath sites and also important protected areas like the Nandadevi Biosphere and the Valley of Flowers. It will dry up the river enroute to the shrines. In fact the Alaknanda basin plans will destroy all the five holy prayags if the planned schemes go ahead. One of them, the Vishnuprayag, already stands destroyed due the 400 MW Vishnuprayag project.

The gap between the state of the river and what the people of India dream of is only increasing. More troubling is the fact that there is no road map in sight to bridge this distance. One has to remember that in the context of climate change, with glaciers melting, sea levels rising and monsoon patterns becoming unpredictable, the state of the river will only get worse.

It is not that India's citizens and society are beyond blame. In a sense, the religious, cultural connection of the Ganga River has been a bane since it has led to an increase in the pollution load of the river rather than reducing it. Why did people allow the river they revere, to come to this pass? What have they done to reverse it? And can we even hope the river will have a better fate or state without making citizens a part of the process? Ultimately, the river is a mirror, or better still, a report card of what you do it in its catchment. ■

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India's costly dreams

KANCHI KOHLI

THIS time I am not reporting an illegality or highlighting a court judgment or even a new policy matter which needs a critique. There is news on all these fronts I am sure, but somehow words have decided to flow in another direction this time. Sitting in the small town of Waidhan in central India I can see from the window of the room where I write a large thermal power plant and a mine. So this missive is perhaps more reflective than full of facts and events.

It is interesting to be in a place which is often referred to as the energy hub of India. Singrauli is where the town of Waidhan is located. Every few km there is either a proposed or functional coal mine with a thermal power station not very far away. Public and private companies and their conglomerates are together realising their dream of pulling out all they can from an area which they refer to as being sparsely populated with vast stretches of land available for extracting coal and transporting it cheaply through conveyor belts or by road.

And in contrast there are the stories of people whose homes are currently under threat or have already been acquired. They had to leave behind their forest dependent lives and seek survival in four concrete walls with no basic facilities like electricity or water. Ask them about their forests or the mahua flowers that they might have been collecting right now and they smile in despair.

Over the last one year I have tried to follow the interface between industrialisation, ecological futures, people's lives and livelihoods. In a way there are three ecological stretches in the country where the growth dream of the government can be located.

All along the coast there are a flurry of thermal power plants and captive private ports being set up. It is in the forest belt stretching from west to east via the central Indian states that large deposits of coal, iron, bauxite and many other minerals exist. Linked with these raw materials are a spate of power plants and industries.

Move up further north and the northeast where both the western and eastern Himalayas have a future charted out by India's hydropower fantasy. On some river basins (including the main river and its tributaries) there are proposals for upto 17 hydropower projects. It is only a matter of time

before these strong and vibrant Himalayan rivers flow largely into tunnels. The hydro generation technology which is being used diverts rivers into tunnels and drops the river's waters into a power house where energy is produced.

In June last year when I stood in front of the mighty Kashang nallah in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh, I felt humbled. The sound of

its forceful flow still melodiously haunts my sensibilities. When in doubt I think of Kashang and it reinforces my conviction that rivers need to flow freely. The people in Kinnaur with their active supporters in the state have been trying their best to counter the hydro-electric projects that are proposed on the Kashang and similar water streams. These are at various stages of approval and con-

testation. Every time I hear an update, I think of Kashang and what it would take to pull down a massive, fast flowing water body in such a way that it becomes someone's pipe dream. Will the Kashang succumb to this or will it react to the violation of its being?

As I write this there are over 200 women who have gathered on the Randh Bandher in Bhadreswar, Mundra Taluka, in Kutch district of Gujarat. An inspection committee is visiting their home to determine whether water intake pipelines and a desalination plant can be set up on the inter-tidal mudflats and sand dunes they call home.

Far away I can visualise the scene having enjoyed many conversations in this traditional fishing harbour where fisherfolk do unique inter-tidal fishing including walking several kilometres into the sea for their daily fish catch. Not too far away are the salt pans from where many large and small companies source this critical ingredient for our food. I am sure many of the salt pan owners and grazing community representatives will be standing in unity with the fishing communities today as they have done in the past. But I wonder if the painted stork, the grey heron, lapwings and other resident animals and migratory birds will look into the eyes of the government committee and have any bearing on what they present to the court.

I look out of the window again. The sun is setting on the mine and the lights have begun to come on at the thermal power plant. The smoke from the stacks is getting darker and will merge with the darkness of the night. A splash of Kashang water blurs what I see outside the window filling my mind with hope. I await an update from Randh Bandher whose future is being negotiated in the corridors of power. ■

Kanchi Kohli works and writes on environment, forest, and biodiversity governance issues. In her writing, she seeks to explore the interface between industrialisation and its impacts on both local communities and ecosystems.



The Kashang stream in Himachal

Singrauli is where the town of Waidhan is located. Every few km there is either a proposed or functional coal mine with a thermal power station not very far away.

Rural Assam goes to Delhi

SUNIL KAUL



Assam's loss making paddy fields

PEOPLE are running away to cities because it does not make any sense for them to stay on in their villages. Rural livelihoods are in a crisis today. In fact, this may be an understatement. Paddy prices in Assam, where I work and live, haven't changed for the past 10 years or so. Between ₹650 a quintal at the time of harvest to ₹850 per quintal post-harvest, rice cultivation does not allow the farmer to break even after factoring in the cost of inputs and labour.

In Dahalapara, my neighbouring village, only five out of 65 households continue to farm. The rest opt for wage labour in the nearby refinery. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) procures rice from Punjab and Chhattisgarh at the Minimum Support Price (MSP) but refuses to do the same for the Assam farmer. And later when the rice in the Public Distribution System (PDS) leaks into the market, it keeps prices depressed.

No wonder I find labourers from Assam building houses in Trivandrum, parking cars in Bangalore's Electronic City and working as waiters in Delhi. As the exodus continues, labour gets more expensive in Assam, pushing farmers into penury.

For the same reason, MNREGA is going abegging. At ₹130 per day for MNREGA work, only the most desperate go for it. With Kerala offering ₹300 as daily wages, the resultant deficiency of labour in Assam's farms has hiked farm wages up to ₹200 or ₹250 a day.

Prices of most food items have gone up so much that the rural poor cannot afford to eat the two large meals they were used to. A well-functioning PDS could have averted hunger but the less we talk about that, the better. Government policies are holding people by the scruff of their

neck and hauling them into towns and cities. Around ₹50,000 crores is to be spent on 63 towns and cities under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, (JNNURM) and ₹12,000 crores has been budgeted for modernizing just 35 airports in the country. Cities are propelling the rural poor to migrate.

The poverty line at ₹26 in rural areas and ₹32 in cities has been correctly reviled, but there is another fundamental flaw. The poverty line should be higher for rural areas and lower for the city. Try living in rural Assam like I do and you will find that it is far more expensive to live in the village than in the city. Whether it is onions, tomatoes or potatoes, rates are higher in the village *haat* than in the town.

Transportation in towns is cheaper and easily available, so are clothes and other goods. The Maximum Retail Price (MRP) is often not followed in village stores too, so how could anyone conclude that villages need a lower poverty line than towns? The saving grace is that there are no market goods that one can be enticed to spend more on. But if one was to factor in health

Try living in rural Assam like I do and you will find that it is far more expensive to live in the village than in the city.

expenses, fish from Andhra, vegetables from Bengal – for nine months of the year – or even labour for construction, everything except my house rent is more expensive in the village than in my neighbouring town of Bongaigaon.

None of the rural livelihoods we saw just a few years ago will survive. Take weaving, for instance. Mahatma Gandhi once commented that Assam's women weave gold. Today, almost every person I know in the handloom sector says that he cannot get people to weave any longer. Eight years ago, when aagor, a weavers' collective started, their average weaver would get almost double the market wage.

Till just three years ago, the collective would take orders of any size as every woman in Bodoland knows how to weave. Today, just 50 out of 400 weavers continue to practice their traditional craft. The collective's Domestic Worker Rehab centre used to have a waiting list for months. Today it has to plead with weavers to continue weaving for a few months more to help them complete the paltry orders that come their way. For many years, aagor supplied to the best names in the handloom trade in India, but now what they get from their big customers is not enough to meet their necessary rural expenses. Their average weaver may still get higher wages than MNREGA but that too is far below the informal market wage now! A large handloom retail chain that used to buy 300,000 to 400,000 pieces of their garments every year, now prefers to switch to powerlooms to keep prices at a range that customers would be willing to pay.

The irony is that when aagor started, it decided to make garments and sell them to urban customers at a price that could give a fair wage to the weaver. Today, the situation seems to have reversed probably because women in the tribal area still feel pressurized to wear their traditional dress. The lack of weavers in rural areas and inelastic demand has pushed the cost of traditional garments to an all time high. The few weavers left hence get better prices from local markets than from customers in the shopping malls of Delhi and Bangalore!

As a shift in strategy, the collective has decided to manufacture mainly local garments to make good its losses for the past three years! The fear is that powerlooms in neighbouring Bengal have already started producing these traditional garments, and the next few years will be crucial for this weaving enterprise.

What has gone unnoticed is that the government's strategy, apart from freeing precious land, will also reduce social sector spending – its eternal bugbear. With the rural population decimated, the government will have to spend far less on MNREGA, the National Rural Health Mission and if it ever comes through, the Food Security Act as villages will be left with no rural people to serve! ■

(Sunil Kaul lives in rural Assam and works with a voluntary organisation)

Living

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A running marriage

Krishna and Uma go to the North Pole

T S Sudhir
Hyderabad

ON a recent trip to New Zealand, Krishna Prasad Chigurupati noticed a gentleman staring at him. "We have met before haven't we," asked the gentleman walking up to him. Prasad said frankly he couldn't recall such a meeting.

The gentleman then perked up and exclaimed, "Yes, of course, we ran together in the Antarctica."

Running? In the Antarctica? Sounds impossible. But Krishna Prasad, 57, founder-chairman of Granules India, a 28-year-old pharmaceutical company with a 15 per cent share of the world market, runs in the toughest and most exotic locations in the world.

His wife Uma runs with him. This plucky couple has run on the North Pole, the highest point in the world and in the Antarctica, at the bottom of the globe.

Their trip to the Antarctica took place on 15 December 2010.

"It is a frozen desert where even bacteria does not survive," says Uma. "We flew in from Chile. The weather was a major factor because there is daylight all 24 hours in the Antarctica. Winds howled and the temperature was minus 17 degrees. We wore four layers of clothing."

Krishna says it is very important to run at the right speed in such conditions. "If you run fast, you sweat and that turns into icicles that hurt you. If you slow down too much, your body temperature may fall. So the challenge is to maintain a steady pace throughout. And you have to be careful about every step you take. One wrong move and you could find your foot in a crevice."

The bright sun and ultraviolet radiation meant that runners had to keep their goggles on throughout. But the physical discomfort was forgotten when at 8:30 pm, Antarctica time, Uma and Krishna completed the marathon on the planet's harshest continent.

"The Indian flag we waved looked so beautiful against the white snow," recalls Uma. What made it special was that they were the first Indians to complete the Grand Slam having run in seven continents. An Australian citizen played A R Rahman's song 'Jai Ho' when Uma and Krishna completed the marathon.



Uma and Krishna



In extreme conditions it is important to run at the right speeds

The couple's passion for running started in 2003. The idea back then was to inculcate fitness and health among their employees. So one Sunday, 125 employees and their children accompanied Uma and Krishna to Hyderabad's Necklace Road on the Hyderabad 10 km run.

But things got serious in 2005 when Krishna's brother-in-law Sampath, invited them to join him and his family for a half marathon in Reykjavik in Iceland.

"We always thought that Sampath and other marathon runners were crazy. The idea of joining this group was not very appealing," says Krishna. "What was inviting was the thought of visiting Iceland, a rare destination. So I accepted. After that I began training and I cursed myself for this foolish decision." Uma could not join him on this trip.

Training involved doing yoga and running some eight to 15 km to be able to do the half marathon of 21 km in Reykjavik.

Once Krishna started running on the streets of Reykjavik, he did not feel silly at all. Actually, with the crowds cheering him and the other runners from both sides of the road, he felt wonderful.

Krishna got hooked. Since then, the couple has not looked back. Their next stop was Prague. People cheered as the couple ran. It felt good. Pretty soon their passports began to read like a diary of their exploits. They ran the marathon in 10 more cities including Washington DC, Los Angeles and Buenos Aires.

But soon the couple started getting bored of city marathons.

"I do not like the city marathon any more although it is quite the in thing," says Krishna. "They say if you have not run the New York marathon, then you can't be considered a marathon runner. But the adventure marathons are more challenging. In city marathons a huge mass of people run together but adventure marathons are with smaller groups. You need a lot more determination to complete them."

The urge to explore the unknown inspired Uma and Krishna to undertake the Seven Continents Club Marathon in 2010. In March that year, they ran the Los Angeles marathon. Then, they ran in the Lewa National Park in Kenya. Next came the red sands run in front of Ayers Rock in the Australian Outback. This was followed by a run in the blazing Gobi desert in Mongolia, one in Buenos Aires in Argentina, another in Porto in Portugal and finally the Union glacier in the Antarctica.

"The Gobi desert was extremely tough," recalls Krishna. "All you could see were camels and carcasses. And the sand dunes meant you could never quite see the finishing line, only a mirage."

And what did the two of them think or talk about while they were running?

"There is nothing to think. The geography around you is the same," says Uma. "There were just 11 runners in the Gobi desert marathon. So we could not see anyone around us. Our only companion was the eerie sound of the wind. For much of the 42 km stretch, I was meditating while running. It helps to have your spouse with

you. It is hugely reassuring."

Describing each of the marathons gets the couple excited. They talk of running alongside animals in Kenya, among the vineyards and the beaches of Portugal or the icy glaciers of the Antarctica.

It was during their Seven Continents Club journey that they heard of the Grand Slam, an exclusive club for marathoners who had run on the seven continents and the North Pole. The couple decided to head to the North Pole.

Even for the final frontier Uma and Prasad did nothing different.



At North Pole the ice is really thin



The giraffes look on

They walked, jogged and did some yoga in Hyderabad. Then they flew from Hyderabad's warm 34 degrees temperature to the North Pole's freezing minus 34 degrees.

Landing at the camp in Oslo in Norway, they realised that out of 26 runners from 12 countries they were the only ones who had come virtually unprepared. A runner from Paris had put his treadmill inside a commercial freezer to prepare for the North Pole cold. Another runner had run in the UK winter everyday without his T-shirt. A Norwegian runner had slept outside his home at night in the freezing winter to prepare himself.

"We looked like jokers," grins Krishna.

Unlike the South Pole, the North Pole is on the sea. The place where they landed was a big Ice Floe just six feet thick that often drifted at speeds of 2m to 8m per second in different directions. Also, there is no post to mark the exact pole due to this

constant drift. Runners have to use a GPS to locate the spot all the time. So if a runner were to stand still for an hour at the pole, he would find himself about a km away from it! The camp is set up and operated by the Russians in April every year.

Adverse weather conditions compounded their anxiety. The advance party was not able to set up the course because the Ice Floe had cracked and the aircraft was not able to land. The runway had to be shut down.

The runners found themselves stranded on a remote island in the Arctic Ocean. They had to vacate the hotel and take shelter in the barracks of a coal mine. To keep their spirits high, the group hung around doing dog-sledging and cave exploration and keeping their fingers crossed.

Finally, the runway became operational. The group landed in a chopper at Barneo close to the North Pole and started their run at 10 pm. It turned out to be a test of character. They ran through the daylight of the night, their ankles sinking deep into the soft snow. The exhaustion was staggering. After nine hours and 11 minutes of what Krishna calls 'torture', Uma and he crossed the finishing line holding high the Indian flag.

Their three children were apprehensive when Krishna and Uma embarked on the Antarctica run but once that feat was accomplished they did not worry too much about their parents' next venture – the North Pole marathon.

"Actually they should have been more anxious about the North Pole because it is a more dangerous expedition. The ice is really thin there because of global warming. Harsha, our son, gave us a satphone to keep in touch," says Uma.

Uma, who turned 50 last September, is now the Chairperson of the Hyderabad 10K Foundation, in a sense retracing her footsteps. Apart from the November event, where at least 14,000 runners took part, she has organised a 5 km run for women and India's first heritage marathon in Hyderabad in the last one year.

Uma looks after her vineyards business also. She says they do not run for records. Krishna reels out their timings. "We completed the North Pole run in nine hours while the runner who breasted the tape first finished it in five hours. Similarly, we took 4:15 hours in Porto, while the person who came first finished it in two and a half hours."

The couple wanted to run the highest marathon in the world, which is at the Everest Base Camp in Nepal, and the lowest marathon at the Dead Sea on the Israel-Jordan border. A bout of mountain sickness prevented Uma from going to Nepal but the couple is just back after running 42 km at the Dead Sea in April.

"You can't really gauge that you are at the lowest point in the world except for the slight pressure on your eardrums," says Krishna.

Someone once asked Uma what is the total length of a full marathon? She replied immediately: "42.195 km."

"Did you Google it?" he asked.

"No, we ran it," replied Uma. ■

SUSHEELA NAIR



The white sandy beaches of Tangalooma

Paradise of an island

Snorkel, dive, watch whales

Susheela Nair
Tangalooma (Australia)

AS the catamaran express sped on the sea, we glimpsed dolphins flipping fleetingly out of the water and vanishing into the waves. On the 90-metre ferry ride across the bay we also spotted a long hammerhead shark cruising on the surface.

We were heading to Tangalooma, the largest and best-known island resort in the Brisbane area. Once the site of the Southern Hemisphere's largest shore-based whaling station, Tangalooma has evolved into a major island vacation hotspot because of its distinctive flora and fauna, fabulous views and white beaches. The bay between the island and the Brisbane foreshore is home for sea turtles, sharks and dugongs. If you are lucky, you can sight whales on their migration path between the warmer northern waters where female whales give birth and Antarctica, their southern summer resort.

As I entered the resort I was struck by its verdant ambience, sprawling garden, colourful flower beds, carefully nurtured trees, shrubs, indigenous plants and winding pathways which lead to suites, villas and cottages sprinkled across the vast resort. What catches your eye is a harpoon, a relic from the Tangalooma Whaling Station. It operated between 1957 and 1962 when it harvested and processed 6,277 Humpback Whales. Subsequent to the ban on hunting of whales in Australian waters in 1963 and closure of the station, it was sold for resort development.

Set on Moreton Island, one of the sand islands that shelters Brisbane from the open sea, the Tangalooma Island Resort offers an array of activ-

ities that include snorkeling, diving, quad bike tours, stand-up paddles, tennis, kayaking and catamarans.

Taking part in most nature-related events is free. You can feed kookaburras and pelicans, spot birds and participate in bush tucker walks on Moreton Island Nature Park. Most other activities are in addition to the day ticket. On offer are parasailing, jet-skiing, cruises over offshore wrecks, desert safaris along trails and tobogganing down a terrifyingly steep sand dune.

The most popular activity at Tangalooma is the dolphin feeding session, which takes place every day at sunset. Tourists are briefed not to touch the dolphin and not to indulge in flash photography. Then they assemble in five lines stretching back from the waterline, one line for each bottlenose dolphin in thigh-deep water. A white bucket with a chlorine solution is placed at the head of each queue for tourists to rinse their hands to avoid infecting the dolphins. Closer to the water is a silver bucket filled with small fish. We saw tourists grasp slippery fish by the tail, wade into the sea towards the dolphin, immerse their arms in the water and wait for a dolphin to swim in and pluck the fish.

GREEN HEADSTART: The resort's environmental management mantra is simple – responsible reduction, recycling, rejuvenation and re-vegetation. It has taken the lead in protecting the marine environment of Moreton Island. Almost completely self-sustaining, the resort generates its own power source provided by diesel generators. Nothing goes waste. The generator produces heat which is harnessed and used for most of the

resort's hot water supply. Using the bi-product of heat in this way makes diesel generators very efficient by doing two jobs at once. To prevent noise pollution, the power-house has been made fully soundproof.

The resort has a state-of-the-art Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) where all wastewater is treated. No chemicals are used throughout the processing procedure. A small amount of chlorine, about the same quantity as used in a swimming pool, is added in the final stage to kill any residual bacteria after the water has been treated. The recycled water is used for irrigating gardens and for maintenance. Tangalooma recycles 98 per cent of its waste. If required, excess waste is shipped to Brisbane for further recycling and treatment.

Moreton Island is a unique island paradise with its own enormous underground fresh water supply. It is amazing how a fresh water basin can exist in the middle of an ocean. As the island is sandy, surface water is quickly absorbed into the water table with very little chance of evaporation. This ensures rain, run-off and recycled water is easily filtered back into the aquifer, replenishing this valuable water source.

In 1998, the resort worked with the University to develop an environmentally friendly method of beach raking to control the sand fly population at Tangalooma. The resort has an exemplary revegetation programme in place and has planted more than 17,000 native seedlings and saplings in the past five years and eradicated some noxious weed species.

The Tangalooma Marine Education and Conservation Centre (TMECC) informs and trains local people and tourists about conserving marine life. The centre employs marine biologists to provide information and do programmes that are included in the nature tour package for holiday-makers.

These include educational activities, presentations and tours, the dolphin feeding programme and assistance with animal care and rescue. Tangalooma assists wildlife rescues by providing facilities, equipment and the expert aid of marine biologists to ensure everything possible is done to help sick or injured wildlife. Tangalooma also works closely with the authorities and other wildlife organizations such as Sea World and the Australian Zoo.

It supports environmental groups like the Sea Shepherd Society, Queensland Conservation Council, Moreton Island Protection Committee, Australian Marine Conservation Society and the University of Queensland's research projects.

Currently, the resort is working in conjunction with the Department of Fisheries, University of Queensland and the Department of Environment, Resources and Mining to conduct research on protection of dugongs in Moreton Bay.

Another commendable eco-initiative is that Tangalooma now works with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to ensure managing a cane-toad-free environment. Moreton Island is officially the only place in South East Queensland that is cane-toad free. Raw materials shipped to the island are checked for the presence of cane toads. In addition, tourists are now prohibited from bringing plant materials to Moreton Island and Tangalooma as cane toads reached the island from introduced barks. ■

Secret stories on film

PSBT wins awards once again

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

THE Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) struck it rich at the 59th National Film Awards this year. Nobody was surprised one bit. For over 10 years PSBT has been actively backing alternative and independent filmmaking from around the country. PSBT's haul of the coveted annual prizes is now well past 30.

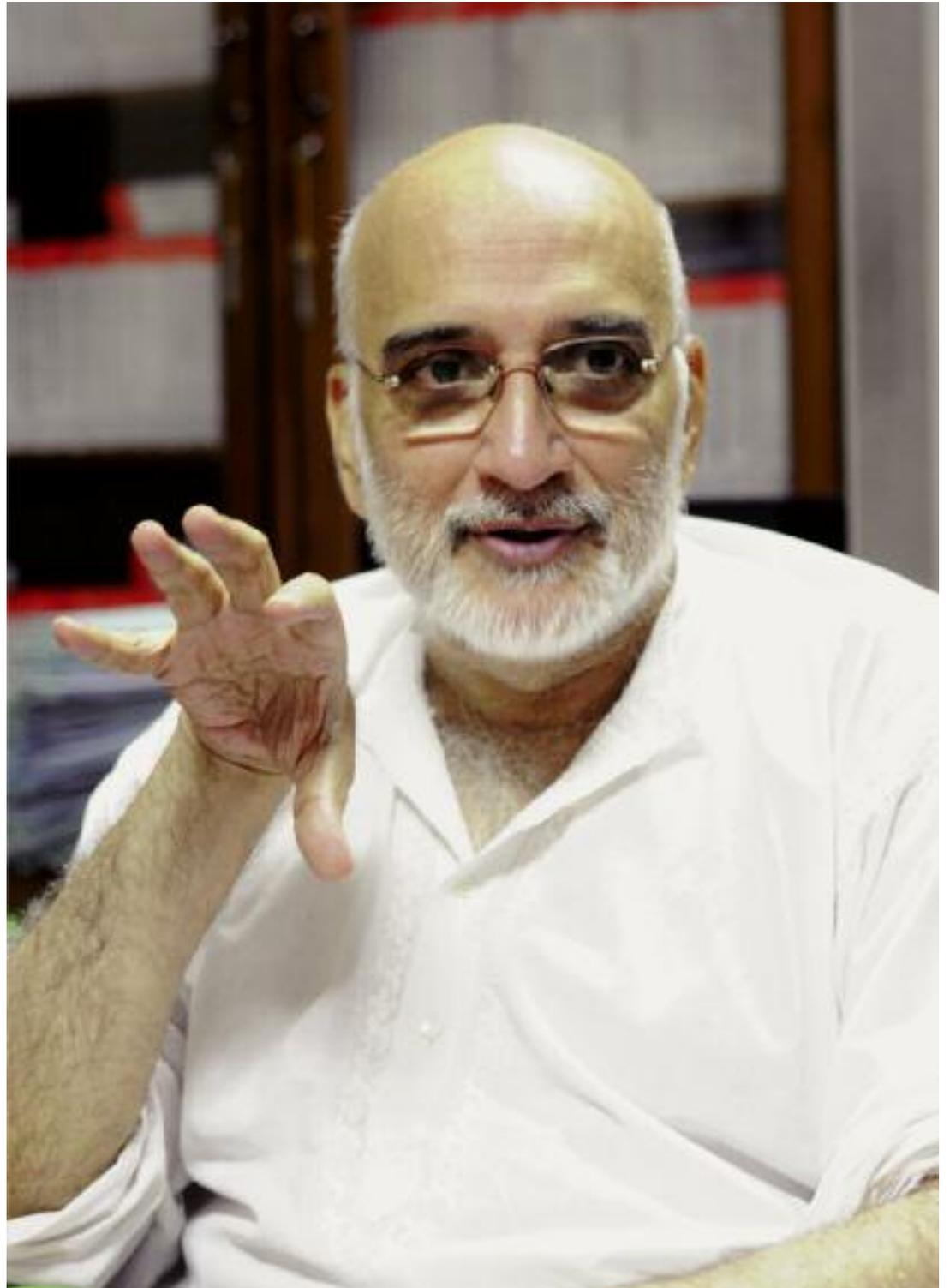
When Vice-President Hamid Ansari gave away the trophies at a ceremony in Vigyan Bhavan on 3 May, as many as three non-feature films funded by PSBT picked up four prizes, including a Swarna Kamal for Best Direction for first-timer Iram Ghufuran.

Ghufuran, a 35-year-old alumna of Jamia Millia Islamia's Mass Communications Research Centre, also won a Rajat Kamal for Best Editing for her debut documentary, the delectably crafted and profoundly evocative, *There is Something in the Air*.

This film deals with a theme that, at first glance, is disturbing: stories of women who are believed to be possessed by djinns, an "affliction of the air" that imposes on them the need to periodically petition for deliverance at a Sufi shrine in Badayun, Uttar Pradesh – the dargah of Bade Sarkar.

It is a state of "madness" that is difficult to grasp and explain, but Ghufuran tides over the barrier by adopting a non-linear approach to the narratives of the women featured in the film. She creates a visual and aural design that provides a perfect co-relative for the words of the afflicted pilgrims.

"When you ask people whether they have actually seen a ghost or a djinn, nobody answers in the affirmative, but everybody claims to know somebody who has," says Ghufuran, who views the condition from a spiritual standpoint rather than a medical one.



Rajiv Mehrotra

Acutely mindful that such afflictions of the air and the complex, barely comprehensible processes of healing are an intrinsic part of the Indian cultural and religious landscape, she presents the stories not as structured capsules of information but as piecemeal narratives put forth in the voices of those possessed.

"These women slip in and out of the state," she

It is a state of "madness" that is difficult to grasp and explain, but Ghufuran tides over the barrier by adopting a non-linear approach.

explains. "They are absolutely lucid when they are normal, but then something takes over and they go into a trance."

Ghufuran focuses her camera primarily on the feet of the women that are grappling with unseen inner torment. We see the women with multiple padlocks on their feet as they sway from one end of the dargah to the other oblivious of the world around them. When we do see a face – which is quite rare, actually – anguish is writ large and there is a faraway look in the eyes.

Following a screening of the three award-winning PSBT films in Delhi in early May, Rajiv Mehrotra, Managing Trustee, praised these unique documentaries "for bringing out rarely articulated issues with empathy and deep understanding".

He was obviously referring to the other two PSBT documentaries on the National Awards list this year as well. Arun Chadha's *Mindscapes... Of*

Love and Longing, winner of the award for the Best Film on Social Issues, probes the issue of the sexual needs of the differently abled.

Aparna Sanyal's *A Drop of Sunshine*, the Best Educational Film, is about a spirited Pune woman who paints as a means of countering schizophrenia. "The film presents a contrarian view of the psychiatric approach to the mental condition," says the Delhi-based filmmaker.

In *Mindscales...*, Chadha personally interacts with people with varying kinds and degrees of disabilities, from the soon-to-be-21 Trisha, who suffers from Down's syndrome, to the Solan-based Vipul Goyal, a middle-aged victim of muscular dystrophy who leads a normal life with his wife, son and a pet dog.

The five case studies that Chadha presents cover a lot of ground in terms of the different ways in which physically challenged people resolve issues relating to love, marriage and sex. The 61-year-old director says: "It is common for films to address the rights of people with disabilities. But their sexuality is never touched upon, let alone dealt with at length."

The adolescent Trisha is like any girl growing up in urban India and has her desires and dreams. In the second segment of *Mindscales...*, the physically challenged but fiercely independent Alok Sikka, who writes movie reviews for a website, talks about his crushes but is firm in his decision to remain unmarried.

At the other end of the spectrum is Sujata Goenka, who has broken away from a conservative Marwari family of Kolkata, to lead a free life in her own space. "I do not deny that I have a disability," the woman says on camera. "I have a walking problem. I have a speech problem. But I have a mind that works. I can party, I can drink and I've had sex," declares Sujata, who has chosen spinsterhood.

The film also introduces us to Sam and Meenu, both physically challenged, who fell in love in college and married each other despite belonging to different reli-

'It is common for films to address the rights of people with disabilities. But their sexuality is never touched upon at length.'



Still from *There is Something in the Air*



Still from *Mindscales of Love and Longing*

gions. They are not sure they can have a child, but love has a far wider meaning for them than just physical togetherness and procreation.

A Drop of Sunshine has a completely different tone and texture, obviously influenced by the theme and the individual that it homes in on. It goes where no Indian documentary has probably gone before – into the mind of a 30-year-old schizophrenic woman who has not only tamed the demons in her mind but also "befriended" and used them to propel her art.

Reshma Valiappan is a remarkable woman indeed, gloriously articulate, unshakably opinionated, and blessed with a lively sense of humour. She is the heart and soul of Sanyal's film: *A Drop of Sunshine* is what it is solely because of the presence of Reshma.

"Before I met her, I had a completely different film in mind," says Sanyal. "When I began speaking to her in person, I could see in the light of the research that I had done, the books I had read, and the people I had met that she was just the person I was looking for."

In her fight against schizophrenia, Reshma has gone through a series of psychiatric procedures, counseling sessions and art therapy. But she found her own way out largely on the strength of her own means.

Her story provides Sanyal the narrative spine around which to spin her pointed questions against the mainstream approach to the treatment of schizophrenia, what Reshma's doctor describes as "the vending machine kind of psychiatry".

A Drop of Sunshine is just that – a shaft of bright light that illuminates a terrain that is usually engulfed in darkness in this country. Thanks to Reshma Valliappan, painter and mental health advocate, and Sanyal's well-structured tribute to her spirit, we know that there are more effective solutions available than the ones that established medical science enjoins upon us. ■

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Curing cold

Dr G. G. GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



If you treat a cold, it will be cured within a week. If you leave it alone, it will disappear in seven days. This is a popular belief on cold.

Sometimes cold can be severe and chronic. It can lead to sinusitis and upper respiratory infection. Colds are a sign of low immunity and weakness of the body to react to external

intrusion by any microorganism. Cold is rampant in the first phase of the monsoon. It is common where there is dampness and mist.

Cold is the result of the body's reaction to keep its internal environment in balance. Cold has to be prevented rather than cured, because cold can interfere with your work and productivity.

FOOD: Take very light food. Make a rasam (soup) of horse gram with pepper and eat it as a curry with cooked rice. Observe 'upavasa' (fasting) for a day. Drink plenty of lemon juice with honey and water. In winter, to prevent cold, consume urad dal products like idlis, urad rice with coconut etc. Drink milk boiled with a pinch of turmeric powder. Drink coffee made with tulsi leaves many times a day. Mix the juice of two lemons in a glass of boiling water and drink it warm before going to bed at night. If children catch cold, burn fresh leaves of 'Karpooravalli' (Coleus Aromaticus) into ash and apply it on the head of the child.

LIFESTYLE: If there is headache with cold, then make a paste of turmeric with water, heat it slightly and apply it on your forehead. At night, if the cold is severe and nasal pathways are blocked, then take a small onion and split it into two with your own hands (do not use a knife) and place it on both sides of your nose and sleep.

If the nasal block is very severe and you are able to breath only through the mouth, then take a piece of dry turmeric, apply some ghee on its tip, burn it and extinguish the flame. Then inhale the smoke emitted by the turmeric through both nostrils one by one. Do it a few times till the nasal pathways are clear.

Take wine made from gooseberry every day to prevent cold. This can be made at home.

MEDICINE: Take 10 ml. of juice from tulsi leaves (sprinkle some water and just crush the leaves in a mixer for few seconds and squeeze through a clean cloth). Add 10 ml. of honey and take it five or six times a day, so that you consume 50 ml. of tulsi juice per day.

Take 15 gm. of ginger, 5 gm. of pepper. Boil together in 300 ml. of water till it reduces to 150 ml. Add some jaggery for taste and sip at intervals through the day till evening. If you take 30 ml. at a time, that will make it 5 doses per day. ■

vaidya.ganga@frlht.org

LOOK GOOD

Be slim and trim

WHY do we gain weight? The reasons are many. It is important to know why before understanding what we need to do. Ageing, hormonal variation and changes in lifestyle are some reasons for gaining weight. As we grow older, our metabolic rate decreases. This process begins after the age of 35. Women tend to put on weight after menopause. Sometimes, weight gain is due hypothyroidism. Consuming junk food and adopting a sedentary lifestyle also results in fatness.

Here are a few tips for shedding weight:

- Regular exercise is the best way to maintain your metabolism. Exercise burns extra fat and keeps you fit. Exercise can be any simple workout. It can be yoga, jogging, brisk walking, gym, aerobics, swimming, etc. Exercising regularly is most important.
- Include lots of fresh vegetables and fruits in your diet. Fibrous foods are important.
- Drink plenty of water. But don't drink water immediate-

ly after a meal. This will decrease your metabolic rate and food will not get digested properly leading to an increase in weight.

- Avoid eating heavy meals at night. Dinner should be eaten at least two hours before going to bed. This will help in proper digestion.
- Avoid curd at night. Instead, take buttermilk which is much more digestible.
- Don't eat junk food.
- Don't lead a sedentary life. Stay active.
- For those who have thyroid problems, kindly get your hormone levels checked regularly and consult your doctor. Ayurveda helps you to get rid of thyroid problems with minimal or no side effects.
- There are detoxification (Panchakarma)

treatments which will help to cleanse your body from inside.

- Sometimes psychological factors lead to weight gain. Due to tension and emotional stress one tends to crave for food.



Dr. Ashwini V Konnur BAMS, CFN, YIC



ORGANIC CHEF

Cake & curry

Benefits: This cake is easy to digest and beneficial for diabetes. It is also good for the eyes.

SPICED BUTTERMILK

Ingredients:

Fat free buttermilk: About 500 ml
Asafoetida powder: A pinch
Cumin seeds: ¼ teaspoon
Pepper powder: To taste
Dried ginger powder: To taste
Saindhava (a kind of rock salt): To taste

Method: Add all the above ingredients to the buttermilk and boil over a moderate flame. Allow it to boil for about five to ten minutes. This is used as a curry with cooked rice.

You can garnish the buttermilk curry with chopped fresh coriander leaves. These would enhance taste.

Benefits: This is a very tasty dish that enhances digestion. It is a very good diet for people suffering from diarrhoea (with mucus), flatulence, cough etc. It is beneficial for diabetics. ■

(Dr. Jayanthi S, Research Associate, I-AIM)

WONDER PLANT

Cool cucumber

CUCUMBER forms an integral part of salad in India. Cultivated here for nearly 3000 years, cucumber is believed to be native to our country. Today it is recognized globally as an essential ingredient of fresh vegetable salad. A member of the gourd family, cucumber is available around the year and usually eaten raw.

The dietary value of cucumber is negligible. About 96 percent of its composition is water. Its low fat and zero cholesterol content make it suitable for diabetic patients. Also, it has dietary fibre, calcium, iron and Vitamin A and C. Nutritionally, cucumber has relatively high mineral content. Cucumber skin has cell salts and vitamins. It should always be eaten raw as cooking leads to loss of potassium and phosphorous. It is also a valuable source of sodium, magnesium, sulphur, silicon, chlorine and fluorine.

Cucumber seeds possess similar properties to pumpkin seeds which are distinctly diuretic. Cucumber seeds are much smaller than pumpkin seeds, relatively narrower and thicker with little marginal groove. The emulsion made by bruising cucumber seeds with water is useful for alleviating diseases of the bowels and urinary passage.

Cucumber is also an excellent cosmetic aid. Cucumber juice is in great demand as a cooling and beautifying agent for the skin. You can scrub a piece of cucumber all over your skin to keep it soft and fair. It is cooling, healing and soothing for an irritated skin scorched by the sun or a skin rash. Cucumber lotion is easy to make and very beneficial for skin burnt by the sun.

Cucumber juice is used commercially to produce cucumber creams. An emollient ointment prepared from cucumber juice was considerably used to soothe skin irritation before the advent of non-fatty cosmetics. Currently, the most popular cosmetic preparation of

cucumber is cucumber jelly. The jelly has a wonderful effect on rough skin. The peculiarly refreshing fragrance of cucumber is used to make perfumes too.

MEDICINAL PROPERTIES:

Dhanvantri Nighantu says: 'Cucumber allays pitta and has a smoothing effect.'

Cucumber juice possesses many medicinal properties. It cures diseases related to urine. It also eases burning and checks fainting. A glass of cucumber juice taken on an empty stomach is good for health. As cucumber is very low in calories it is used for reducing obesity. Cucumber



juice with seeds is more effective than cucumber juice without seeds.

Cucumber is significantly useful in maintaining the alkalinity of the blood. It also operates as an excellent natural diuretic, secreting and promoting the flow of urine. Cucumber seeds are rich in potassium and are found to be beneficial in the treatment of burning sensations in urinary calculi or stone. A mixture of seeds mixed with curd is useful in dissolving the gravel in the urinary tract and in reducing hyperacidity of the urine.

It is used in constipation as it serves as a laxative and supplies roughage to aid bowel action. Cucumber juice is useful in the treat-

ment of hyperacidity, gastric and duodenal ulcers. It gives immediate relief when there is a burning sensation in the stomach. The juice of cucumber, carrot, beetroot and celery has a beneficial effect on conditions of uric acid accumulation such as arthritis, gout and rheumatism.

Fresh cucumber juice with coconut water is a good medicine for quenching excessive thirst among those suffering from cholera. The mineral content of the mixture acts excellently by restoring the electrolyte liquid balance in dehydration.

SELF-HELP

Cucumber face scrub: Make a fine powder of cucumber peel. Mix it with rose water or plain cold water to make a fine paste. Apply it evenly on the face. Rub your face gently.

Wash with cold water. Pat dry. This will remove blackheads, retain moisture on your face and give it a glow.

Cucumber lotion for sunburn: Peel the cucumber and squeeze the juice with a lemon-squeezer. Mix this with glycerin and rose water in equal parts. The lotion is now ready for applying on the skin.

Cucumber mask for oily skin: Cucumber: half. Egg white: one. Lemon juice: one tablespoon. Mint: one teaspoon. Mash all the ingredients and refrigerate for 10 minutes. Apply the mixture on your face and leave it on for 15 minutes. Rinse first with warm water and then with cool water.

Cucumber hair conditioner: Make a paste of finely powdered cucumber peel, green gram powder, orange/lemon peel and hibiscus flower powder in equal quantities. Apply this paste after shampooing. Leave on for 15 minutes and wash your hair with cold water. This acts as a good hair conditioner and gives life to your hair. ■

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PRODUCTS

SHAMIK BANERJEE

SEED POWER

THE Malnad Forest Garden and Seed Keepers' Collective initiated by Vanastree helps women raise forest home gardens. These tiny patches of land consist of trees and a variety of organic vegetables – amaranth, spinach, cucumber, gourds and pumpkins, tubers, beans and others. 'A few small seeds have the power to feed a family. A fistful of seeds can feed the whole community. Our future depends on saving the traditional diversity of seeds around us,' believes Vanastree.

The collective which started in 2001 now has a seed bank in Sirsi and produces a range of food and craft products. Vanastree welcomes interns to come and work with its collective.

"One of our hot sellers is kokum nectar, rind, ice cream and balm," says Alisa who came from the US to intern here.

The forest home gardens provide food security and money to the women. Vanastree markets over 80 products including banana, fig, ginger bite, pure honey, jackfruit papad, pickles and beauty products. The women are also growing cocoa. A new product in the pipeline is chocolate spread.

Contact: Sunita Rao, 80/1 'Asare', Vishal Nagar, Marathi Koppa, Sirsi-581402, Karnataka.
Phone: 08384-233293
Email: vanastree@gmail.com



PRASANTA BISWAS



WONDER WEED

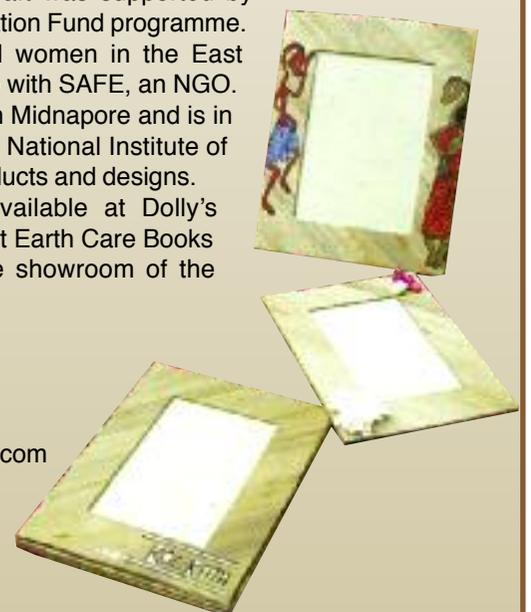
WATER hyacinth routinely chokes ponds and lakes. The weed, which spreads prolifically in water, is seen as a nuisance. Earth Craft, a social enterprise, puts it to good use. Working in Kolsur, a village in the North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, Earth Craft has trained local women to make paper from water hyacinth. This paper is then made into attractively painted folders, writing pads, photo frames, boxes, pen stands, coasters, pulley pads, waste paper boxes, note books and more.

For this enterprise, Earth Craft was supported by NABARD under its Rural Innovation Fund programme.

Earth Craft has also trained women in the East Kolkata Wetlands in partnership with SAFE, an NGO. Earth Craft works with patuas in Midnapore and is in the process of tying up with the National Institute of Design (NID) to create new products and designs.

Earth Craft products are available at Dolly's Collection at 18J, Park Street, at Earth Care Books in Middleton Street and at the showroom of the Crafts Council of West Bengal.

For orders contact:
Bikram Mitra at 09231640805
Email: earth_craft2001@yahoo.com



Changing Lives



General health care in rural villages by SST

Mrs. Nagama, 70 yrs, a poor widow from Padavedu, has been suffering from headache for months together. Whenever she suffered an episode of headache she was almost blinded, accompanied with vomiting, she used to isolate herself for hours together not able to do any other activities.

Left to fend for herself, she could not find a guardian to take her to any Government hospital, since she had to travel for more than 20 kms, let alone meet the expense of the traveling, She was anguished and helpless. She came to know from some SHG members of the village about the TVS-SST's sub centre in the close vicinity

A routine check up at the hospital revealed that she was

suffering from Hypertension. All other parameters were normal. She was first given a brief account of the nature of her illness and advised about DASH (DiETING Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet, and prescribed anti hypertensive.

On following a strict dietary regime (cutting down of salt, intake of fatty foods and increasing the intake of fresh vegetables), and medication, Mrs. Nagama has been relieved of her headache. Now she is full of life. She is continually getting antihypertensive drugs from TVS SST hospital every fortnight. In case she hasn't turn up for her routine check up, SHG members in her local area are alerted by SST. They help her to come for treatment regularly.

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WHY DID WE ENCOURAGE THIS TRIBAL WOMAN TO REPLACE HER SARI?

Because, unskilled women employees like Asha Hansda are trained to operate heavy vehicles and machinery under Tata Steel's Tejaswini programme.

Because we believe gender should never be a reason not to be.

Because, for us, it doesn't matter where she comes from, but where she can reach.

Because she is one of our own.

Because we can't fly if she crawls.

Because we started thinking of ways to better her life over a hundred years ago.

Because it's not just a company policy, it's an unwavering belief.

Because, each time she confidently smiles, our belief finds strength.

Because however strong our steel may be, our values remain stronger.

TATA STEEL
Values stronger than steel

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Asha Hansda
Beneficiary, Tejaswini Project