

Civil Society

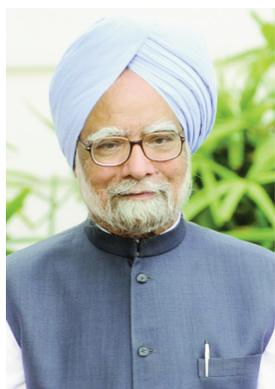


HINDI CINEMA'S RADICAL MAINSTREAM

**YOUNG DIRECTORS
REDEFINE SUCCESS**

Anurag Kashyap
of Dev D and
Gulaal fame

THE INDIA WE WANT



**ARUNA ROY, ANUPAM
MISHRA, DUNU ROY, ASHOK
CHAUDHURY, HIMANSHU
THAKKAR, ARUN GUPTA,
APOORVA OZA,
AV BALASUBRAMANIAM...**

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RURAL TOURISM AT ANEGUNDI

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SUSTAINABILITY STARTS AT HOME

AFTER ALL, THE EARTH IS OUR COMMON ADDRESS.

Sustainability is integral to our business. Our approach to sustainable development focuses on the triple bottom line of Social, Environment and Economics.

Our activities aim at optimum resource utilization with minimal environmental footprint. Our social initiatives are targeted at improving the life of the communities around our plants focusing on their basic healthcare, primary education and income generation needs.

We believe that profitability and sustainability are complementary. Our efforts in this direction have been recognized by international agencies.

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HINDI CINEMA'S RADICAL MAINSTREAM

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

The Congress victory

In recent months we have often been asked why we in *Civil Society* haven't been doing "election stories".

Our response has been that our coverage of these elections began all of five years ago --- when the UPA government came to power.

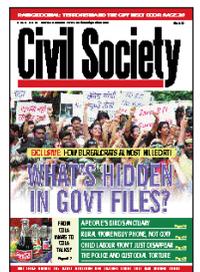
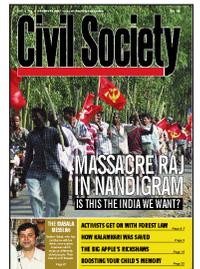
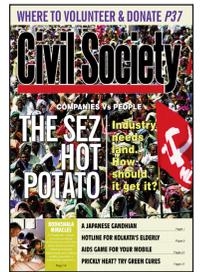
Reporting politics becomes interesting when you go beyond the politician. For journalists interested in issues, the UPA's first term in office was an exciting one. We tracked the deliberations of the National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by Sonia Gandhi. We reported extensively on RTI and rural employment guarantee, going from one public hearing to another and witnessing a rising tide of support for both ideas.

As we observed the troubled birth of new legislation, we realised how difficult it is to take causes into the mainstream of government. Without the NAC, which listened to voices from the grassroots, the UPA may not have gone in for RTI, rural employment and other social initiatives that have brought it to power for a second time.

Civil Society also reported on forest rights and the turmoil over land acquisition. We were the first to do a cover story on SEZs and the real estate scam that they were going to be. You had only to meet those farmers facing displacement to realise how flawed the SEZ policy was. Harivansh did a cover story for us on Naxalites. We were similarly at Nandigram and Singur and in touch with the agitation by fishermen. It was easy to see that the CPI(M) was out of sync with the times.

Even as the election results come out, we've chosen to do a cover story on Hindi cinema. Think about it, when politics change, the radical easily becomes mainstream in more than one sphere.

The directors we have profiled are using exceptional skills and talent to inject larger Indian realities into cinema and yet be commercially viable. Many of these directors come from small towns and diverse backgrounds. They portray Indian women differently. They show a churning in politics. Their films are about an India which increasingly goes beyond caste and gender. This is an India that policymakers and politicians need to wake up to.



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Smiles that tell a thousand tales!

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

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

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



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

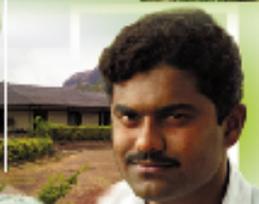


Mr. Jawahar Ram Paswan of Banamath Mahalla of Chaibasa district in Jharkhand. Today, he is an employee of Nav Jagat Manav Samaj. It became possible when the Nav Jagat Manav Samaj, supported by Tata Motors, intervened to manage his leprosy and found him a job with a permanent income. Today, Mr. Paswan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

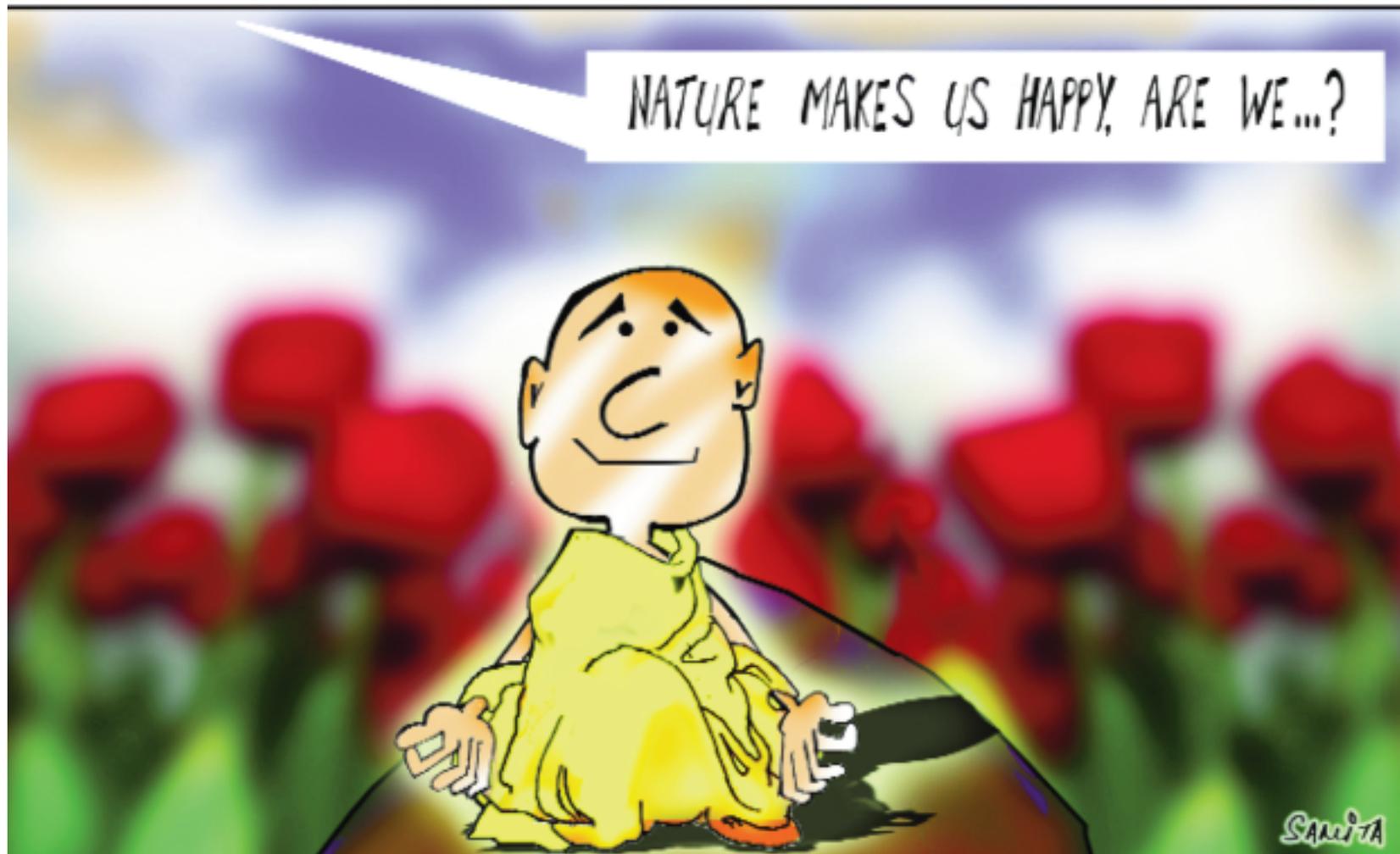


Mr. Man Singh Murre of Bajmathali village in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. With mostly infertile land holdings, Mr. Murre and other residents found making both ends difficult. Tata Motors helped him lead change by beginning a tree plantation drive. Today, Bajmathali has a forest of income-generating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

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



Tata Motors' Sustainability Programme. Striving for Sustainable Change.



LETTERS



NGOs & recession

The NGO sector as a whole is grappling with the impact of the global downturn. As donations and funding get tighter, the sector is being forced to rethink its regular programmes. Organizations like CRY, which has a unique programme for revenue generation can sustain in this period.

David_1900@yahoo.co.in

I know lots of NGOs are working for the right cause but there are an

equally large number of fake NGOs which have been created just for tax evasion. Such fake NGO have spoiled the image of the sector.

richasax@yahoo.com

NGOs will have to learn to be less dependant on grant support and give serious consideration to mobilizing resources through other income generating activities. However, due to amendment of section 2(15) vide Finance Act 2008, certain types of NGOs are likely to lose their tax exemption if they are involved in income generating activities which the income tax authorities may consider to be of commercial nature.

tripathy12@yahoo.co.in

NREGA

The NREGA scheme, if administered well, could be the exact antidote to the jobless growth problem. Growth is not percolating to the poor, tax revenues are booming, and the best use of available public resources would be to provide jobs to the poor. NREGA helps to do that.

sstrivedi@in.com

If NREGA can create durable and

useful assets in rural areas which create jobs, improve farming and forestry, it will indeed change the poverty stricken state of our villages.

Amit56@zepakmail.com

JNNURM

The future of India - its possibilities of growth, character of politics, nature of social conflict - will be centrally governed by the pattern of it's urbanization. Despite promises made under JNNURM, there is still no plan for invigorating urban local bodies

pb_mehta@penn.com

The city will soon be seeing a different image. The JNNURM will leave the poor and the lower middle class families looking for new place of settlement. They will only be left with sweet memories.

dinesh_m@yahoo.com

Elections

We don't need Independents. Our democracy is a parliamentary form of governance where the party has a role rather than individual leaders. Even if an Independent like Mallika Sarabhai got elected by some miracle, she can hardly do anything.

ritu@yahoo.co.in

I think the biggest disaster that can happen to our country is to have Independents elected as our MPs.

viad_iyer@rediffmail.com

If there are many Independents they can get together and form an Independent Party.

ashish2112@gmail.com

Independents will grow if regional political parties don't deliver. The Indian voter has reached a level of confidence and maturity. Voters are more willing to experiment otherwise they would not go for regional parties.

Amita Sandhu

Gujarat bonds

With respect to Himanshu Thakkar's article, could he please let me know the fate of people like me who are still holding on to the bonds?

vaidyanath2002@gmail.com

RTI

The problem with the RTI Act is that very few citizens know how to use the law and file an application

Rajesh123@yahoo.co.in

AGENDA FOR THE GOVERNMENT

It's a clear verdict and here is what people are saying

Rita and Umesh Anand
New Delhi

THE Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) has come back to power with a handsome verdict in its favour. The victory can be seen in many ways. It is a vote for stability, peace, balance, pluralism, secularism, genuine economic reforms. It is also a vote for a new generation of leaders who the Congress has been projecting.

But above all, this is a vote for development. It is a victory for people's movements and recognition of the issues that they have been raising with regard to land and water.

The old order has been thrown out in Chengara, Jagatsinghpur, Nandigram, Singur, Saharanpur and several flashpoints.

The Congress' willingness to listen, reach out to the grassroots and address issues of poverty has created a groundswell of expectations reflected in the votes it has got.

People clearly want the UPA government to complete what it set out to do in its first term. Reforms are needed but they can't be only designed to benefit the corporate sector.

The script for this victory began being written five years ago when the National Advisory Council (NAC) with Sonia Gandhi as its head tuned into the voices of activists and campaigners.

The result was the laws on the right to information, rural employment and the rights of forest dwellers. These have made a contribution to the Congress' election victory.

For the first time laws that were shaped through long consultation among activists and people's organisations actually reached government and got passed in Parliament. It wasn't easy. For Aruna Roy and Jean Dreze and a whole lot of others it was an engagement that took place at several levels.

It is significant that through all this give and take the key Congress leadership stood firm in

allowing dialogue to take place. The result was that finally good laws were passed.

Voters have also seen in the Congress a willingness to own up to its mistakes. In *Civil Society*, functioning as journalists, we closely tracked the disputes over land acquisition and SEZs. This was a major issue. It did not go unnoticed that the UPA government moved to amend an outdated colonial law on land acquisition with inputs from activist groups.

So, if the Congress has been brought back to power with a large number of seats, it is because the voter places great hope in the party. But finally what the voter wants is governance. The UPA's time to perform begins now.

Much remains to be done for implementing Right to Information Act, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act.

There are also issues of urban poverty and non-rural employment to be addressed. In health and education, the government has to show that its own infrastructure delivers because privatisation has had many ill-effects and hasn't solved the problems of millions of poor Indians. You could add affordable housing, power shortages and public transport to this ever growing list.

It will be equally important to help industry to be competitive. Private sector investment will be the key to growth and employment. How this investment can be inclusive and match national goals is the question.

If all this sounds terribly daunting, be assured the voter doesn't expect miracles. But there is at least the hope that the spirit of governance will change – in much the same way as the Congress organisation is being given new life.

In the past five years, probably for the first time, there was a serious attempt to take Union legislation to the grassroots and inform people about their rights. The response was positive. For NREGA, some 50 million job cards have been issued.



Implementing legislation is not an easy task. It is a complex minefield of corruption and indifference.

However, expectations are high. So are aspirations. People want a government that is capable of greater accountability. A government that ensures liberalisation's benefits are for everyone and not a chosen few.

Wherever you go in India people want to get on with their lives and find real time solutions to their problems. They have little time for the bluff of caste and religion. Similarly they have no time for ideologues who don't practise what they preach and do little to improve the lives of ordinary people. It should not be forgotten that West Bengal's Left Front does little to implement RTI and relies on an outdated colonial land acquisition law.

The Congress' big asset has been its ability to listen and make course corrections. As we did when the Manmohan Singh government first came into office, we once again offer a selection of voices from across India.

Obviously, this isn't a perfect exercise. It can't possibly be. But it is this magazine's small contribution to the process of consultation that must continue.

Extend NREGA, simplify RTI

Aruna Roy, *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan*

We would like National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) extended to 100 days of work per person per year. A great deal has to be done by the government to make this possible. Various kinds of work have to be looked at. We would like public education and political commit-



ment to the concept of social audit since transparency is very important for the scheme. The scheme also should be extended to urban areas. The UPA has promised this. It is necessary to address the issue of unemployment among the youth who may not seek work under NREGA.

In Rajasthan rural voters voted for the UPA because of NREGA. Urban voters were for RTI, for transparency and accountability. But implementation of RTI has been poor. We have to take RTI further and rethink strategy. The campaign by activists has focussed too much on the commission and not enough on the government. The government must spend on publicity and train staff - it has not done so - and make applications for RTI simpler.

Right to food is a promise by the UPA. It must be implemented along with midday meals. This right must be worked out with people's movements.

Older people need social security and pension. People are living longer but are unable to cope with work. When we hold our meetings in rural areas people tell us they are too old to take work under NREGA. Such people need social security.

Finally, education and health are two very problematic areas. Private healthcare is too expensive and private schools have no standards. The government's healthcare systems have broken down and treatment is no longer available at its hospitals.

In government schools teachers are highly paid but have no accountability.

Just govern

Anupam Mishra, Gandhi Peace Foundation

The voter has risen above bickering Indian politi-

cians and given a clear mandate to govern. This is a vote which goes beyond caste and religion. It is a vote for stability and development. The voter has looked at the national interest and not been swayed by local considerations and petty demands.

A huge responsibility therefore rests with the Congress and UPA government to honour the faith placed in them. The challenges of governance are one thing. But a more intricate task is in building dialogue and consensus. In creating space within which dissent is possible and even encouraged.

Voters have clearly seen the instability in the rest of the subcontinent and therefore given such a large mandate that the incoming government does not have to spend five years looking over its shoulder negotiating deals for its survival.

There is a clear message in the way in which parties have been set aside by voters. Lalu Yadav, Paswan and Mayawati have been ignored. Voters have also shown that it is possible to speak for the common man as the Congress has done without belonging to the Left.

Protect urban employment

Dunu Roy, Hazards Centre

Three key concerns appear to emerge from our work with community groups across the country. First, an urban right to work Act that provides for the livelihood concerns of the urban working poor. This has to be different from the NREGA because of the nature of the urban economy. More than asking the State to provide employment, the demand is for policies that protect employment opportunities.

Second, universalisation of access to services, including rations, health, education, water, housing. The targeted policies are leading to conflicts within the same communities and widespread misuse of resources, which were beginning to be controlled under universal schemes through greater transparency and accountability.

Third, public audit of the functioning of Private-Public-Partnerships, particularly for utilities and services such as water, energy and transportation. Such a review is urgently required for formulating policies based on the facts of optimum provisions rather than on the fiction of efficient markets.

Build rural infrastructure

Apoorva Oza, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme

The real crisis in infrastructure is in rural India - poor roads, no energy, no drainage. It is important to get specific.

First, roads with culverts so that children in rural areas can attend school across rivulets during the monsoon months. Culverts cost little, but are critical.

Second, is energy - light for children to read, power for irrigation. There are villages next to rivers which have no irrigation because they cannot pump the water from the river. Power can help milk to chill, so dairying can spread to all parts of the country. Energy is so much a key to increasing rural incomes, that all other investments like watershed and water harvesting don't add up till energy converts water to irrigation, and cattle to milk income.

Third, water and sanitation. They are key for the health of rural communities. Most diseases, whether in coastal, drought or flood-prone areas are water-borne, and bacteriological contamination is caused by poor sanitation and drainage.

Implement forest law

Ashok Chaudhury, National Forum for Forest People and Forest Workers

The Forest Rights Act should be implemented in its true letter and spirit throughout the country and it should find a place in the CMP. The core functions of forest management should be with the people and not with the Forest Department so that community forest governance can be realised. Basic amenities must be made available to forest dependent people. The Taungiya people still don't have voting rights.

A law like the new Forest Rights Act must be drawn up for fish workers.

Save babies

Arun Gupta, Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India

The Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR) has stayed at 37 since 2003. The Infant Mortality Rate reduced by 1.8 per year from 65 to 57. Some may call this minor change 'progress' but I question it.

Infants are human beings below 12 months. They form about two per cent of our population, that is about 25 to 26 million. About five per cent or more than one million are wiped out before they reach their first birthday. About 0.7 million of these babies are below the age of one month. They are wiped out by preventable diseases like newborn infections, diarrhoea, pneumonia and under nutrition.



Use of ORS for treatment of diarrhoea is just about 32 per cent. Poor governance and poor understanding of the direction to take is responsible.

There are three interventions which our Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, outlined in his speech on Independence Day, 2007:

"...Infants need to be breastfed, have access to safe drinking water and health care. We need the active involvement of the community and panchayats to see that what we spend reaches our children. I appeal to the nation to resolve and work hard to eradicate malnutrition within five years." All this should be implemented.

Educate children

Meenakshi Kohli, CRY

The government must ensure children a life of dignity and justice. Primary among these are education, health and protection. We would like the government to:

Increase expenditure on education to 10 per cent and health to seven per cent of GDP. Redraft the Right to Education Bill reflecting the true spirit of children's right to education, discouraging privatization and commercialization of education.

Ensure all children six to 18 years, without discrimination, are in government formal, full-time schools providing quality education, in their own neighbourhood. Children below six years should be in anganwadis

There should be nutritious mid-day meals in all primary schools. This scheme should include all children, even those out-of-school, through the year.

Implement integrated child development

services for all children under six years, as per the Supreme Court order of November 2001.

Restore groundwater

Himanshu Thakkar, South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People

The issue of access to water is becoming more and more relevant and intense. Some of the key issues the new government must address as top priority include the following:

Groundwater is the real water lifeline of India and will remain so for a long time. That lifeline is in very poor health, due to four reasons: destruction of existing groundwater recharge systems, unsustainable extraction with no serious attempt at regulating the use for unjustifiable purposes, pollution and deterioration of quality, and finally, practically no attention, allocation of resources or priority to groundwater recharge systems.

Only decentralized, local water systems can help recharge groundwater. And the only way to regulate this essentially local resource is through a bottom up mechanism starting at the lowest rung of government.

Secondly, India has one of the world's largest irrigation infrastructures including over 4,500 big dams. The performance of this infrastructure is very poor, due to lack of attention, allocation of resources and priority to ensuring repair and maintenance of this infrastructure so that we can get optimum benefit from this sunk cost.

Instead of spending more on creating more infrastructure particularly big projects, the new government must give top priority to achieving optimum utilisation of this infrastructure.

Revive traditional farming

AV Balasubramaniam, Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems

Indian agriculture cries out for urgent attention. There has been a continuous erosion of soil fertility and the extrapolation of the green revolution model has meant today that government effectively subsidizes every acre of land that is chemically farmed to the tune of Rs 6,000 every year.

The emphasis should shift to enriching soil fertility with natural products and at least a part of this subsidy should go to organic farming based on indigenous knowledge and inputs.

Land under agriculture is shrinking rapidly and the State needs to step in to protect agriculture and diversion of this land to non-agriculture use must be minimized and undertaken with careful weighing of the options.

India is a mega centre for biodiversity, housing two of the 12 global hotspots of biodiversity and we boast of a tremendous diversity of seeds. Farming needs to be diversified offering farmers a wider choice to cultivate their own traditional varieties.

The rich and diverse knowledge base of agriculture with our farmers has repeatedly been documented and validated even by the ICAR (Indian Council of Agricultural Research) but it needs to be integrated with the extension system of the government. Infrastructure and basic amenities in farming areas are vastly inadequate.

Improve governance

Rajesh Tandon, Participatory Research in Asia

I suggest the new government rationalize, modernize and simplify the entire system of govern-

mental functioning to make existing available funds be used in a more transparent, accountable and effective manner.

India must be ranking first on the Index of Gross Domestic Wastage of Public Resources. We mobilize annually nearly \$100 billion dollars (Rs 5 lakh crores) of public funds through various forms of taxations, levies and cess. Yet, we are unable to provide basic services for fulfillment of fundamental human needs of all our people - food, shelter, education, health, water, sanitation, employment, etc.

The main reason for this is a colonial, archaic, inefficient, corrupt, unaccountable and opaque system of conducting business in the entire gamut of public functions of governments at the local, state and national levels. We have old colonial laws on our statutes that are no longer relevant and contradict new laws. Our system of book-keeping and financial management in governments is pre-historic and wasteful.

Our entire system of personnel management (it's too chaotic to call it human resource management) is outmoded, feudal, chaotic, dysfunctional and illogical; recruitment, induction, deployment, review, promotion, compensation, discipline and termination systems and procedures (and mind-sets) in the entire range of government institutions breeds non-performance.

Efficient services

Ajay Mehta, *National Foundation for India*

Ordinary people have adjusted to being poorly served, be it by private sector facilities or government. This government needs to have a strategy that changes the mind-set of ordinary people and service providers.

It also needs to facilitate a new kind of politics that goes beyond the pursuit of power, patronage and control considerations. To serve their full potential, NREGA and the Forest Rights Act need radical changes in social and property relations and everyday politics. This government should look into how this might be done. The frame of the National Policy for the Voluntary Sector, passed in 2007 allows for such a discourse.

Tackle urban poverty

Amita Joseph, *Business and Community Foundation*

The government would need most of all to keep sight of the deepening crisis of poverty and hunger. Reports on urban poverty reveal unacceptable levels of deprivation even in Delhi. The capital is home to over 100,000 homeless people, 95 per cent of whom are productive workers. They subsidise our cities as head-load workers, rag-pickers, vegetable vendors, rickshaw-pullers, cart-pullers, etc. Yet they struggle for an identity - for a voter's card, ration cards and a decent night shelter.

Pension for elderly

Mathew Cherian, *Helpage India*

The elderly were just eight per cent of the population in 2002, but they will be 21 per cent by 2050. Ninety-four per cent of the elderly vote in any election. The elderly in India hope that universal pension and universal health care for all the elderly will be a reality. Ten years after the National Policy of Elderly in 1999, we hope that the new government will implement the unimplemented promises made in that policy.

Binayak Sen gets bail finally

Sejal Mahendru
New Delhi

AFTER two years of languishing in jail in Chhattisgarh, Dr Binayak Sen was finally granted bail by the Supreme Court on 25 May.

Dr Sen is a pediatrician who has spent more than three decades working for the marginalized people of Chhattisgarh. He was picked up by the police on charges of abetting Maoist activities and accused of sedition and waging war against the State.

The state government has been unable to produce any incriminating proof to substantiate its charges against Dr Sen.

Bail finally came from a Supreme Court bench comprising Justices Markandey Katju and Deepak Verma who took up the matter after senior advocate Shanti Bhushan mentioned Sen's petition in which a notice was issued to the Chhattisgarh government.

When the notice was issued, the apex court had asked the state government to provide medical aid to Sen, who has been suffering from a serious heart ailment. Dr Sen wants to go to Vellore for treatment at the medical college there.

Despite national and international protests, the state government of Chhattisgarh has refused to withdraw its case against a doctor well known for serving the poor and for upholding the human rights of poor people.

Dr Sen was jailed under provisions of the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act, 2006 (CSPSA), and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967, which allow for arbitrary detention without any right of appeal.

The only piece of 'evidence' the state government showed was that Dr Sen was giving medical treatment to Narayan Sanyal, an old, ailing Maoist leader in jail. But these were perfectly legal visits, allowed under the jail manual, and done openly. Sanyal was suffering from many

diseases and required medical attention.

Dr Sen's arrest is a disturbing example of how anti-terrorism laws can lead to excessive action by the State.

A series of public appeals and protests have been held in Dr Sen's support. The most recent was in Delhi on 14 May where Artists for Human Rights and the Release Binayak Campaign held a cultural protest on the lawns of Rabindra Bhawan in Delhi.

Even as music and poetry flowed, speakers

had expressed anger and anguish at Dr Sen's continued incarceration. Retired Justice Rajendra Sachar had said he was ashamed to call himself a member of the judiciary.

Irina Sen, Dr Sen's brave wife, pointed out the injustice of a law where a person can be jailed for mere association. "It is time we stopped worshipping the law blindly and spoke up against tyrannical laws which violate civil rights," she said. She called her husband's case an index case against injustice, and a symbol for the fight for human rights.



Irina Sen

"Is it possible for a doctor to ask a sick patient's political affiliations before treating him?" she asked.

Writer and activist Arundhati Roy slammed the state's misuse of power. She also lashed out against the policy of Salwa Judum.

The evening began with a performance by three upcoming musicians Ritwik, Tushar and Anand, who sang a song they had composed. Poet-activist Manglesh Dabral, recited his poems.

A round of bhajans was sung by feminist activists Dipta Bhog and Yagna followed by Gauhar Raza's poetry. Jigri K Sachitanandan recited poems in honour of Dr Sen and sang a Malayali folk song.

Celebrated singer Rabbi Shergill sang four songs, including the popular *Bulla ki jaana* and *Tere bin*. Rabbi's performance was followed by a heartfelt instrumental piece by Paaver, a 13-year-old boy.

Orissa's women continue to die

Biswajit Padhi
Khariar (Orissa)

SEVEREN women die every day in Orissa due to pregnancy-related causes. The Union government's Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) is a scheme which seeks to prevent maternal mortality, but it is feeble. Despite an incentive of Rs 1,400 in rural areas and Rs1,000 in urban areas for an institutional delivery, more than 50 per cent of women in Orissa still deliver in their homes – a pointer to serious flaws in the programme. The state government has hired the services of an additional workforce of 35,000 ASHAs (Accredited Social Health Activists) to facilitate JSY. An ASHA is supposed to link the government health centres with her village. Yet, the allegation here is that the JSY has only succeeded in raising the "fees" of doctors and nurses in government hospitals.

While the maternal mortality ratio, on the whole, has come down from 401 per 100,000 live births to 301 per 100,000, Orissa continues to lag behind at 358 per 100,000. Maternal mortality ratios are indicators that no country can overlook as they indicate the well-being of its citizens.

The recent Maternal and Perinatal Death Inquiry in eight districts of Orissa validates the claims of local NGOs that the poor are facing lack of access to services. About 10.46 per cent of deaths of women between 15 to 49 years are maternal deaths. Nuapada tops the list with 17.17 per cent and Rayagada has an unbelievably low figure of 6.62 per cent.

The problem is many deaths are not being recorded. The system of recording maternal deaths is done by lower-rung health service providers whose primary job is to provide services. Since health data is a barometer of service delivery, health service providers tend to suppress figures to avoid reprimand by their superiors.

Around 57.13 per cent of maternal deaths occurred within six weeks of childbirth. About 44.2 per cent of women died within 24 hours of giving birth. Although the JSY package includes a three-day stay in the hospital, post delivery, the insufficient number of beds and inadequacies in the referral transport system doesn't encourage the women to stay on. The increase in the percentage of post delivery

deaths in hospital institutions proves this. The JSY obsession with numbers has blinded them to the fact that infrastructure and personnel have to match enhanced demand for services.

Most deaths occur between July and September. Apart from medical reasons, geographical barriers during the rainy season and the preoccupation of patients and their families in agricultural operations limit their access to services. The efforts of the government to train all health workers in Skilled Attendance at Birth (SAB), is welcome. But it has to walk a mile further. It has to equip smaller sub-centres with these trained health workers, so that women can overcome geographical barriers. Such initiatives need to be matched with a strong referral system to avoid mortality.

One-fourth of maternal deaths are due to haemorrhage, before and after delivery. Sixty-nine per cent of pregnant women are anaemic in Orissa. Though there are 84 First Referral Units (FRUs) in the state, most don't have blood transfusion facilities. Voluntary blood donation is not a reality here. Since time

is of essence, every block hospital must provide blood transfusion facilities to avoid needless deaths.

A profile of 800 families where a female member had died due to childbirth underlines the need for a much more proactive role of the community. Around 46 per cent of women who died had been married before they were 18, despite a law against child marriages. It is also clear that socio-economic conditions are responsible for delays in seeking healthcare. About 67 per cent of women who died in childbirth were either Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe and 65 per cent were below the poverty line (BPL). Around 53.8 per cent of the women and 40 per cent of their spouses were illiterate.

Awareness levels too are low. About 66.2 per cent of spouses didn't think the women were so unwell as to be in need of medical help. Another 39 per cent couldn't get transport to hospitals. While governments need to put in place adequate infrastructure, the community too needs to address social barriers.

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The JSY obsession with numbers has blinded them to the fact that infrastructure and personnel have to match enhanced demand for services.

Green Dream

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

WILL Srinagar follow in Delhi's footsteps and ban the evil plastic bag? Green Dream, a group of students and young professionals in Srinagar, is rooting for such a ban. The group has held a rally in Srinagar against the use of polythene. Traders, schools and the municipality are backing the ban and the government is making friendly overtures. Green Dream has also got film director Vidhu Vinod Chopra to endorse their anti-plastic campaign.

"We just want to make a difference," said Khurram Wani, member, Green Dream. "We want to work for society so we started with a campaign to weed out the polythene menace."

On 21 March the founding members of Green Dream took out a small march from Mughal Darbar Bakers, Polo View, to Lal Chowk asking people to avoid use of polythene. "Close on the heels of our mini-rally, Farooq Ahmad Renzu, Municipal Commissioner, said on record that he would ensure that polythene is banned in Srinagar city," said Wani.

The municipality ordered traders to get rid of all the polythene lying with them within a month. The deadline expired April-end. The municipality has now threatened stern action against traders found guilty of hoarding polythene within their premises.

"As the Srinagar Municipal Corporation has asked us to desist from receiving fresh supplies of

NGOs, health

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

HEALTH officials and NGOs are at loggerheads over implementation of programmes to strengthen the basic health infrastructure across the Kashmir Valley. While health officials say that NGOs are doing nothing to improve the health standards of people, the NGOs complain about lack of support from the government, specifically the health department.

Dr Saleem-ur-Rehman, Assistant Director, Health and Family Welfare, says that NGOs should move beyond the district headquarters and function in far-flung villages. He says people living in remote areas face a lot of health problems and it is here that the NGOs should concentrate.

"Usually the NGOs set up their office at the district headquarters and function from there. People living here have access to health facilities provided by the government. The services offered by the NGOs are just an add-on. The objective of setting up an NGO is lost. If the government cannot reach remote areas, it is the responsibility of an NGO to do so," explained Dr Saleem.

"Healthcare facilities are needed for people in

says polythene a nightmare in Srinagar

polythene we have kept a stock of carry bags in our shop," said Farooq Ahmad Dar, one of the proprietors of Dar Provision Store, Sanat Nagar. "We give all our customers a carrybag each and ask them to bring this bag along next time they come."

On 22 March Green Dream members roped in Vidhu Vinod Chopra and arranged a press conference. The film director was in Srinagar for a shoot and he agreed gladly to support the campaign. "Vidhu Vinod Chopra has achieved a lot and we wanted to involve him in our campaign as he too is a Kashmiri and would love to work for his motherland. He readily agreed to our request and briefed media persons about the importance of making Kashmir polythene-free," said Khurram.

Most members of Green Dream come from well-off families and contrary to perceptions are very concerned about Kashmir's environment. Said Musavir Yousuf, a journalist and member of Green Dream. "If you are committed to your work then the Almighty also pitches in. This has happened with us. In no time people realized there is a need to root out polythene from society."

Musavir said that it goes to the credit of Green Dream members like Khurram, Kaunsar, Shahid Khan, Hashim Hussain and Mehboob Jeelani, (also a journalist) that awareness has been generated among people.

While Musavir and Mehboob work as correspondents in two local dailies, Khurram has completed his Bachelor's in Business Administration from Canterbury College, Kent. Kaunsar has a



Green Dream's rally in Srinagar

Green Dream members roped in Vidhu Vinod Chopra who is a Kashmiri and he gladly supported them.



Vidhu Vinod

degree in Commerce from Pune University, Hashim is an advocate and Shahid is pursuing his Masters in Business Administration in Pune.

"We owe something to the place which has given us birth. Everybody is talking about peace and prosperity but that is impossible without improving the environment. Polythene found hither and thither despoils the famed beauty of Kashmir," said Green Dream members.

To create awareness among the youth, Green Dream has carried out programmes in some of Srinagar's well-known schools. They plan to extend their campaign to colleges as well.

"Students are our future and we want to sensitize them on the polythene issue. We have held a programme at Tyndale Biscoe and Mallinson School, the leading missionary schools in Kashmir. Parvez Samuel Kaul, principal, was very cooperative and has promised us help in our future endeavours also," said Kaunsar and Khurram.

Green Dream is promoting alternatives like paper and jute bags. They point out there is no need to import such bags from other states or from abroad. They have checked things out and found that biodegradable bags can be bought from traders in the Maharaja Gunj area. "Only when people realize the harmful effects of polythene and the government bans it, we can say we have done something," said Mehboob.

After polythene, Green Dream intends to focus on preservation of the Dal Lake and protecting Kashmir's dwindling forest cover.

dept at odds in Kashmir

Teetwal, Tangdhar, Keran, Karnah, Gurez and others. The NGOs should visit these places and provide relief to the people in these areas," he said.

But, on the other hand, Ali Mohammad Mir, Executive Director, Voluntary Health Development Association (VHDA) blamed the health department. He said the NGOs were stuck since the department was not disbursing funds to them.

"It is very easy to criticize the NGOs but before doing so analyze the situation in a practical manner. A simple Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Chief Medical Officer of a district is all it takes to release a meagre amount of Rs 100,000 for basic steps to improve the health system. But that is not to be. The health officials don't cooperate on this basic issue. How can you expect NGOs to move ahead," said Mir.

He said a lot of funds have been allocated for the health sector under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) but the money is not trickling down to the grassroots via the Kashmir Valley.

"We at VHDA provided training to health workers at Lalded hospital and to those performing their duties in health centres in Budgam and Chadoora. In addition, all the ayahs and dais were provided six months training on the practical aspects of their

job. We also gave them kits. We paid them out of our own pocket and the money is yet to be reimbursed to us," said Mir.

Professor Abdul Hamid Zargar, Director, Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), Soura, believes that if basic health facilities are provided to people at their doorstep, there would be less pressure on the Institute.

"Ours is a tertiary care health centre. We are expected to handle specialized cases. But the reality is different. People with minor ailments come to the Institute. We cannot deny them treatment. We need to improve the existing basic health infrastructure," he said.

Professor Zargar pointed out that SKIMS cannot become a tertiary health centre unless and until the NRHM is successful. Basic health infrastructure has to be improved and widened.

Dr Saleem was of the view that NGOs in the Valley have not done any appreciable work in improving the health infrastructure and providing services.

"It is good that today everybody knows about NRHM," he said. "But that is not the end of the road. How many people especially the NGOs know about the National Programme for Control of

Blindness (NPCB)? Tremendous work has been done under this programme by NGOs in the Jammu division. But their counterparts in Kashmir are lagging behind."

Under the NPCB scheme a registered NGO can apply for funds of upto Rs 1 crore and that too without the involvement of the health department. Exclusive eye wards have come up in different hospitals of Jammu division by using this scheme, but unfortunately nothing of that sort has happened in Kashmir, said Dr Saleem. He was also dismayed that Mother NGOs (MNGOs) are yet to come up in the Kashmir Valley.

But VHDA, executive director Ali Mohammad Mir, disputed this and said Mother NGOs have been created in Budgam and Srinagar districts. The Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) was entrusted with issuing guidelines to Ashas of a district. "After this we at VHDA created some Mother NGOs and followed guidelines as prescribed by VHAI. But the Mother NGOs are facing huge financial difficulties. Funds are not being allocated to them by the state government and so their performance is not up to the expected level," said Mir.

Professor Zargar said strengthening infrastructure in Sub-District Hospitals (SDHs), Primary Health Centres (PHCs), Allopathic Dispensaries and units of the Indian System of Medicine (ISM), is critical since 90 per cent of ailments can be taken care off at these centres.

Indian forests combat climate change

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

SCIENTISTS from 34 developing countries gathered at the Forest Research Institute (FRI), Dehradun, to discuss the price that rich developed countries should pay to people of developing countries for conserving and protecting forests and thereby arresting the demon of global warming created by the West.

Scientists decided to make foolproof preparations to submit their claims before Copenhagen 2009, an international meeting on global warming, due end of this year. They emphasised the need to find techniques that would make accurate estimates of carbon being fixed by forests in the developing world. The Kyoto Protocol is lopsided as it talks only about compensation for new forests being planted to arrest global warming. The truth is that old forests also fix carbon.

"Most forests in the developing world are decades old, so we must get compensation for old forests also," said Dr Jagadish Kishwan, Director General, Indian Forestry Research & Environment Institute (ICFRE). "The developing world has done a commendable job of controlling carbon emissions by conserving, saving and protecting their forests. In doing so, they often face many problems. We want developed countries to compensate us monetarily."

Professor SP Singh, a renowned botanist and the ex-vice chancellor of Garhwal University, accused the USA which emits the largest amount of carbon gases, of disregarding international conventions. This has to be opposed, he asserted. Dr VRS Rawat of ICFRE emphasised the need for



developing countries to help one another in this endeavour. "Countries like India and Brazil have techniques of measuring forests through satellite imagery. They must help other developing countries to calculate the amount of green treasure they have," he said.

Scientists then brainstormed on the possible carbon absorption capacities of millions of hectares of forests. They were assisted by estimation plans prepared by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Scientist Masihero Otsuka said so far FAO publishes reports only on the world's forests. Soon, it will also need to estimate the amount of carbon

stored by these forests.

Another scientist, Daniello Mailicon, enlightened the august gathering about projects being run in Latin America and Asia. Countries like Brazil have immense rainforests and their trees absorb tonnes of carbon. So, Brazil must get value for the forests it has planted, conserved and protected, said Mailicon. His description about quantitative carbon fixation was supported by a scientist from Nicaragua, Wing Livon. He said Nicaragua has estimated correctly the size of its forests through remote sensing and soon a survey will be launched to estimate the amount of carbon being absorbed.

Indians were not lagging behind. A scientist from Forest Survey of India, Dr Devendra Pande, said an estimate of total carbon absorbed by Indian forests will be available by June 2009 and then a detailed report will be sent to the UN. Dr VK Dadwal of Indian Remote Sensing Agency, Dehradun, confirmed that an estimate of the carbon storing capacities of Indian forests is on.

On the concluding day, scientists worked to convert theory into practice and draw up a strategy. They concluded that the destruction of forests globally has increased the amount of carbon dioxide by 20 per cent in the atmosphere. If these forests had not been destroyed, there would have been more oxygen in the earth's atmosphere, concluded a scientist from China.

Several proposals were passed in the workshop. The most important was to prepare a carbon inventory of developing countries. India, Brazil and China would help in this. A panel to prepare the working plan was also formed. All countries must be fully prepared before the Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Degradation Plan of the UN is launched.

Sandro Fadriki of Coalition of Rainforest Nations informed the gathering that a green house inventory will also be prepared so that claims of carbon credits can be reinforced.

The UN representative, Doenelo Molicon, reinforced their hopes. She said it was almost certain that developing countries would get carbon credits against standing forests, so estimates must be made to value the greenery of forests in developing countries.



AMAZING ANIMAL TALES

Bollu the dog labourer



Bollu (left) with his master Mahalinga Naik

Shree Padre
Amal (Karnataka)

HOW does a dog serve its master? That's easy. A dog warns its master against thieves and alerts him about strangers entering the house. But two-year-old Bollu helps his ailing master, Mahalinga Naik, by working as a farm labourer. The dog collects arecanuts and coconuts and piles them up neatly in a spot.

Mahalinga and his wife Lalitha live in Amal, Karnataka. Bollu has turned out to be a true friend in need. "He understands most of our instructions so nicely," says Mahalinga proudly.

Because of an accidental fall from a coconut tree, Mahalinga can't bend to pick up nuts. Bollu does the job for him. During the arecanut fruiting season, Mahalinga and Bollu go to their garden early morning. Mahalinga holds the dog's chain in one hand and a bucket in the other.

Both search for fallen arecanuts. Bollu spots the nut, picks it up with his mouth and drops it into a bucket. This way, in about an hour or so, dog and master finish the task together.

During the peak season, they manage to collect a couple of buckets of arecanut. It is Bollu who picks up all the naturally fallen arecanuts.

"If left free Bollu doesn't per-

form the work properly. He has to be taken on a chain," says Mahalinga. "At times, I have to admonish him. After all, he is still a child, no? He has his playful moods, once in a while."

By the time the two return home, Lalitha has breakfast ready for both. Bollu is not fussy about food. He eats whatever is served.

Mahalinga started searching in his village for a good dog around two years ago. Finally, he found a puppy in a nearby household. Since the puppy was white, he christened it Bollu. In his Tulu language boldu means white.

Bollu is not a pedigree dog. It is not locally known who his parents are. He is a nondescript local breed. But Bollu has something special about him which makes you think that he is exceptional.

One day while playing with Bollu, Mahalinga

wondered whether Bollu could pick arecanuts.

"I have heard of dogs bringing newspapers and guiding the blind. So, why not this work? In fact this was just a passing thought at that time. I was not serious," he recalls.

Still, he took Bollu to his garden, showed him a few arecanuts and asked him in his mother tongue, Tulu, to pick them up. In a few days Bollu figured out what was expected of him. No professional training was required, nor were there long hours of practice!

But Bollu has tantrums too. If Vidyalakshmi, Mahalinga's grand daughter takes him to the garden, he pretends to pick up a couple of nuts and then pulls her back home.

Bollu is nevertheless serious about his work when his master is around. All the attention he has been getting has also made a difference. From picking up arecanuts, Bollu has learnt to collect coconuts. This is much tougher because they are larger.

"This is an act difficult to believe unless you see it," says Mahalinga. He gives us a demo. He throws a few coconuts haphazardly in his yard. Though it's very hard to clutch the big coconut in between his small jaws, Bollu not only picked up each one, he neatly put it near a basket outside the house. As part of his regular duties, says Mahalinga, Bollu collects the coconuts and heaps them in a particular spot.

Mahalinga, a coconut climber, was assigned this land on a hilltop in the 70s. It was impossible to farm. There was no water in the well. But being an optimist and a hard worker, Naik dug four surangas, one after the other. The suranga is a traditional water body in Kasaragod district of Kerala. It is a horizontal cave, excavated for water. Everyday, till midnight, he slaved away. It took him more than three to four months to dig a suranga. All the surangas failed him.

Luckily he struck water in the fifth suranga. Thereafter, carrying a stone on his head from the foothill on his way back home, he constructed half a dozen revetments, dug out the soil and built terraces, all the while supporting the soil-filled basket on his knees.

It was in 1998, after he raised the areca garden, built a house, a road, got a power connection, private tap water and all the amenities he needed, that disaster struck. While climbing a coconut tree, he fell down. The damaged disc made him stay in hospital for months. Though he is now able to do all other chores, climbing a tree, squatting and bending down are very painful.

Much to Mahalinga's disappointment his two sons are not interested in farming. One works as a labourer and the other is a helping hand at a doctor's clinic. "If only they had pursued this profession," says Mahalinga. "It won't be as hard as I have experienced. They could have led a contented life."

But Bollu has happily stepped into the picture. He is helping his master cope with his physical disability, maybe out of a sixth sense.

Dog and master search for fallen arecanuts. Bollu spots the nut, picks it up with his mouth and drops it into a bucket. This way, in about an hour or so, dog and master finish the task together.



HINDI CINEMA'S RADICAL

Young directors redefine success in

Saibal Chatterjee
Mumbai

A new breed of spirited filmmakers have been chipping away of late at the shibboleths of mainstream Bollywood and using the medium to articulate social and political concerns of contemporary relevance.

In their hands, Hindi cinema has acquired a new edge, a fresh vitality and a degree of relevance that it hasn't had for years.

"This had to happen," says Anurag Kashyap, maker of the quirky *Dev D*. "The 'new wave' has gone mainstream with a vengeance thanks to the advent of a crop of writers and directors whose creative impulses stem from the diverse 'real India' environs that they have come from."

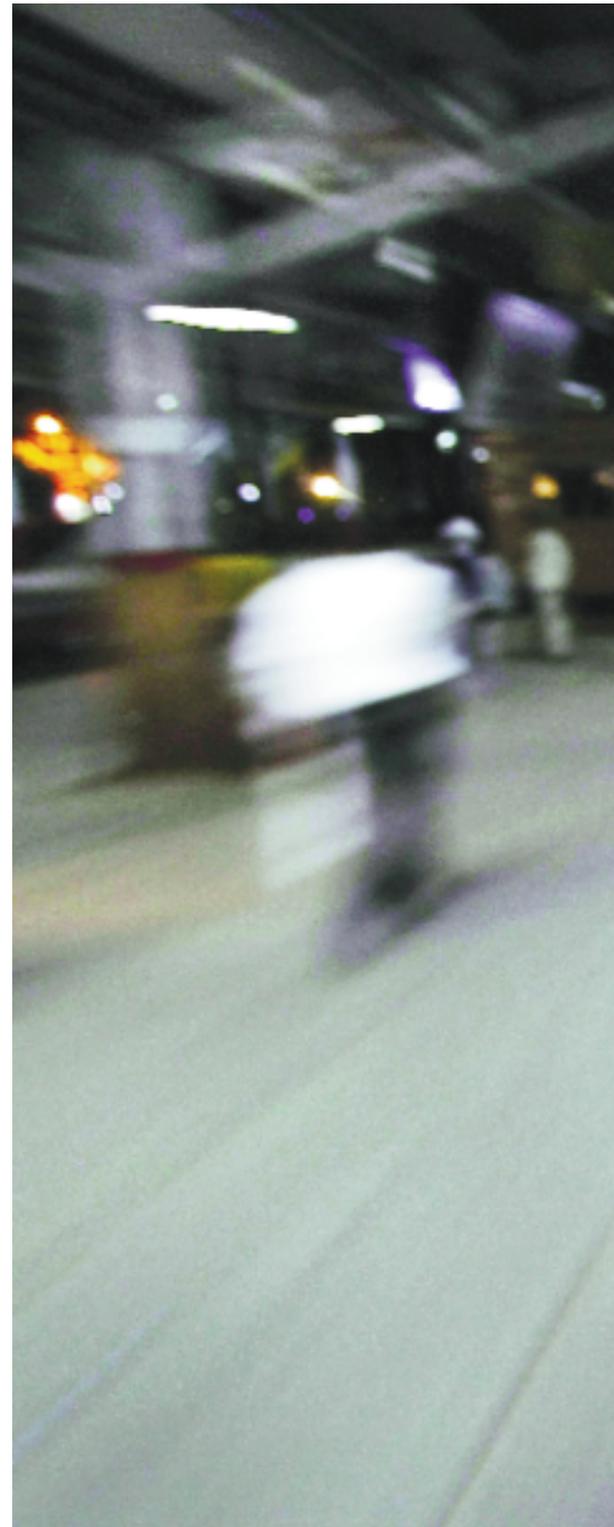
Kashyap has mellowed with time but has lost none of the inner frisson that triggered films like *Paanch*, *Black Friday* and *No Smoking*.

When he asserts that his latest release, *Gulaal*, a simmering love story with strong political undercurrents that plays out in a benighted feudal setting, is "an expression of my anger at the system" Kashyap, in his thirties, speaks not just for himself but also for all young Mumbai filmmakers.

The spirit of adventure and non-conformism that this brand of reality-oriented cinema represents was once largely confined to the fringes of the Hindi film industry. It has moved centrestage today.

"Outsiders bring with them stories that are unusual, surprising, and firmly rooted in the actual world," says Kashyap, a middle class Varanasi boy who was educated in Gwalior's Scindia School and Delhi's Hansraj College.

So even as the Mumbai film industry finds itself smack in the middle of an acrimonious tug-of-war between film producers and multiplex owners over the spoils of the business – the long-running



◀ Piyush Jha

'We must keep in mind the fate of the parallel cinema of the 1970s – it fizzled out because many of the leading lights of the movement delivered dry, drab and didactic films without thinking about the audience.'

MAINSTREAM



impasse has resulted in no major Hindi film being released since April 4 – film aficionados have reason to be happy with the way things are turning out. The kind of cinema they love – intelligent and meaningful yet engaging and energetic – has grown in strength. Their flow into the multiplexes has palpably increased.

In the weeks immediately before the forced dry spell kicked in, discerning audiences in India had a remarkably wide cinematic palette to choose from – apart from Kashyap's *Dev D*, and *Gulaal*, films like *Delhi 6*, *Little Zizou*, *Firaaq*, *Barah Aana* and *Luck By Chance* were lighting up screens across the country all at once. None of these was an average Bollywood film peddling the usual crowd-pleasing narrative ingredients. Yet each, in its own specific ways, gave the audience something to cheer and celebrate.

For Raja Menon, director of *Barah Aana*, *Dev D* has shown the way forward. "*Dev D* takes mainstream

▲ Irfan Kamal

'For me cinema isn't just entertainment. It is life. In *Thanks Maa* the research that I did on the subject of street children and statistics regarding babies that are abandoned in Mumbai helped...I took pains to ensure a stamp of authenticity.'



cinema elements and uses them in a way that is completely out of the box," he says. "Even the manner in which Anurag Kashyap has used music in the film is strikingly unconventional. Yes, music is an integral part of our films, but the director of *Dev D* seems to say that it can be used differently." Many young filmmakers like Menon are being similarly inspired.

"There is definitely a growing market for films that don't follow the norms of mainstream movie making," feels Menon. The response to *Barah Aana*, a black comedy peopled by characters that we see around us every day – drivers, waiters, watchmen – but choose to ignore, is proof enough, he adds. "These down and out characters represent the flipside of the economic boom," he says. "They are very much a part of the Indian landscape no matter how hard we try to pretend that they are not." The inference is clear. Says Menon, "It is possible today to make a film about a driver, a waiter and a watchman and get it released."

Barah Aana is the story of three very, very ordinary men – one of them (Naseeruddin Shah) is 'dead' in the official records, another is a migrant watchman (Vijay Raaz) who is pushed around in the big city like a heap of garbage – who stumble upon what they believe is an easy way to make money. But as they hurtle down the path of petty crime, their troubles multiply and they quickly sink into a quagmire beyond their control. *Barah Aana* eschews songs, dances and cheap thrills; it is just a spirited little film with a whole lot of spine, firmly ensconced in the realities that impact our world. In an earlier era, it wouldn't have made it past the scripting stage.

When he started out as a storyteller about seven years ago, Menon – he grew up in Bangalore and began his professional life in Mumbai making ad films and Bollywood trailers – wanted to craft "my kind of movie". But he was compelled to compromise at every step of the production process. He ended up with *Bus Yun Hi* (2003), which fell between two stools. "I had to put in commercial elements simply to ensure that the film got made," he says.

▲ Anurag Kashyap

'The new wave has gone mainstream with a vengeance thanks to the advent of a crop of writers and directors whose creative impulses stem from the diverse real India environs that they have come from.'

But the *Barah Aana* experience has added up to something infinitely more rewarding. "I did not have to dilute the essential spirit of the film. The response from the audience and the industry has been extremely heartening," he says. It is pretty obvious that the times have changed and the industry, propelled by the fast changing economic dynamics of showbiz, is more willing than ever before to let the mavericks play their own game.

As a case in point, take the Studio 18-promoted Indian Film Company's hands-off approach to celebrated screenwriter and photographer Sooni Taraporevala's directorial debut, *Little Zizou*. "The producers gave me unconditional creative freedom," she says. The result was a gem of a bittersweet ode to Mumbai's Parsis, a community that Taraporevala understands better than anybody else in the business.

Little Zizou, a contemporary English-language comedy that features some of Mumbai's top Parsi actors (John Abraham, Boman Irani, Shernaz Patel, Kurush Deboo, Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal), touches upon intra-community politics, the issues of freedom of expression and religious bigotry and the pains and challenges of growing up in a world where harsh reality constantly impinges upon youthful flights of fancy. In Taraporevala's words, the film taps into the real world but leavens it with gentle flourishes of the imagination.

"This is the first time that I have done a film inspired by my own cultural background," says Taraporevala, a true-blue Mumbaikar.

This engagement with the time and space that they live in also characterises the work of filmmakers younger than the 52-year-old Taraporevala. By addressing contemporary socio-political issues while adopting innovative ways to deliver entertaining fare, directors like Sudhir Mishra (*Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi*, 2003), Rahul Dholakia (*Parzania*, 2005), Rajkumar Gupta (*Aamir*, 2008), Neeraj Pandey (*A Wednesday*, 2008) and Manish Jha (*Mathrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women*, 2003 and *Anwar*,



2007), among others, have been pushing the boundaries of what is viable and acceptable within the mainstream moviemaking space.

One of the more interesting stories in this new emerging filmmaking scenario in Mumbai is that of Irfan Kamal. His father, Kamal Master, was a super-successful choreographer who made megastar Amitabh Bachchan dance to his dictates in films by Manmohan Desai and Prakash Mehra. Irfan grew up steeped in the ethos of masala movies, but when he decided to branch out as an independent filmmaker, he moved as far away as he could from where he had started.

The yet-to-be-released *Thanks Maa*, Irfan's maiden film, is a gritty, starkly realistic drama about a Mumbai street urchin who finds an abandoned baby and sets out in an impossible search of the infant's mother. "For me," says Irfan, "cinema isn't just entertainment. It is life. So it has to be rooted in reality no matter what."

He has turned a little idea about rag-pickers and abandoned children into a searing drama of survival on the mean streets of a big city. "My story does have a pronounced element of fantasy embedded in it – the central premise of the *Thanks Maa* narrative might not be possible in real life – but I took pains to ensure a stamp of authenticity on the way the film plays out. The research that I did on the subject of street children and statistics regarding babies that are abandoned in Mumbai helped," he says.

Irfan Kamal firmly believes that for filmmaking to be relevant as a profession one has to possess the ability and inclination to tell one's own stories. "Look inwards, do not ape anybody, and make the film that you want to make it" – that is the credo that drives him. On the evidence of *Thanks Maa*, he has set strikingly high standards for himself.

With the exception of the young boy who plays the central character, Municipality, all the *Thanks Maa* actors are street children that Irfan groomed for the camera much before *Slumdog Millionaire* catapulted the plight of

▲ Raja Menon

'Dev D takes movie elements and uses them in a way that is completely out of the box. Even the manner in which Anurag Kashyap has used music in the film is strikingly unconventional.'

others of their ilk on to the global media radar. "None of these children had a fixed address, so keeping track of them was a challenge," he recalls.

Challenges are an intrinsic part of the careers of those who work within the parameters of the Mumbai movie industry but dare to flout the ground rules of its profit-first strategy. Sudhir Mishra, who is in the process of developing a modern-day cinematic rendition of William Shakespeare's classic tragedy,

Hamlet, with Farhan Akhtar and Kareena Kapoor in the lead roles, knows a thing or two about surviving against odds in an industry that has for long frowned upon risk takers. But the story is quite different today.

Mishra is currently shooting a feature film "on a tight budget" inspired by the plight of civil liberties activist Dr Binayak Sen, who has been languishing in a Chattisgarh jail for over two years. "There are many Dr Binayak Sens in this country who pursue their cause away from the media glare," says Mishra. "This film is not about him – I don't have the right to make a film on him because I cannot claim personal knowledge of his life and beliefs. It's my view of a man like him. It's a tribute to his spirit."

Mishra continues: "The protagonist of my narrative is a man like Binayak Sen. Many people want to save him, but he is so committed to his cause that he does not want to be saved. Men like him are an anomaly in our cynical times, which do not want value heroes." The maker of films like *Iss Raat Ki Subah Nahin* and *Dharavi* believes that the time has come for Indian cinema to find its own voice. "Much of our cinema, even its so-called modern, alternative strand, is too referential. It thrives on imitation. It is not really our own cinema. We have to learn to break free and do our own thing," he argues.

Rahul Dholakia would probably be in agreement. He is on a 10-day schedule away from completing *Lamhaa*, which probes the pain and suffering of strife-torn Kashmir through a tale set against the separatist movement. But it isn't a small film - the cast of *Lamhaa* includes Sanjay Dutt,

◀ **Sudhir Mishra**

'Much of our cinema, even its so-called modern, alternative strand, is too referential. It thrives on imitation. It is not really our own cinema. We have to learn to break free and do our own thing.'

different from those in other parts of the country. They, too, want to join the mainstream and taste the fruits of economic prosperity. My protagonist plays football. How common is that? Contrary to popular perception, he does not go around with an AK-47."

Jha cites the success of Rajkumar Hirani's *Lage Raho Munnabhai* (2006) to buttress his argument that a story must be told well in order to get a point across. "The film dealt with a serious issue – Mahatma Gandhi's relevance in contemporary India – but it did not adopt a sombre tone. It worked because it had tremendous popular appeal," he says. "We must keep in mind the fate of the parallel cinema of the 1970s – it fizzled out because many of the leading lights of the movement delivered dry, drab and didactic films without thinking about the audience."

Dholakia's predicament is of a totally different nature: it lies in the endeavour to strike a balance between narrative substance and mode of delivery. "I cannot make *Lamhaa* with the same spirit that I made *Parzania*, which was a small, independent film. *Lamhaa* is more mainstream fare. So I cannot tell the story that I want to tell – I am under pressure to commercialise the film," says the director. "I made a choice not knowing the price I would have to pay in the process of seeing this film through to its logical conclusion."

Dholakia grants that new avenues have opened up and young filmmakers have more opportunities today to experiment with unconventional ideas and themes. "But in order to do justice to politically sensitive subjects, you have to stay within the small, independent filmmaking space. As soon as you enter the domain of big budget cinema, you

have to tone down your approach. Compromises become inevitable – you cannot go all out to lay bare the truth on the ground," adds Dholakia.

That probably explains why films like *Aamir* and *A Wednesday* had a smoother ride. They were small ventures devoid of many big stars and, more importantly, their politics was probably more in line with established notions of what is right and what isn't. As Govind Nihalani, veteran cinematographer-director who pioneered the cause of socially meaningful yet commercially sustainable cinema with seminal films like *Aakrosh* (1980) and *Ardh Satya* (1983) says, "Today, movie plots are built around terrorism as the new demon... The war on terrorism is given a markedly nationalistic spin. I don't see too many films being made with any degree of depth and sensitivity."

One might indeed quibble about the subliminal message in *A Wednesday* – this story about a common man who is so frustrated with the state of affairs that he takes upon himself the onus of eliminating a bunch of terrorists seems to suggest that the only way one can fight violence is with more violence – but the film does deliver a blow in favour of the kind of cinema that pulls no punches in capturing the warts, distortions and contradictions of our nation and society.

Cinema with a conscience – cinema that goes beyond the confines of mere entertainment in a quest for truth – is still evolving in this part of the world, but it is here to stay despite all the obstacles that dot its path.



Bipasha Basu and Anupam Kher. And as Dholakia has discovered to his chagrin, blending the mechanics of big-budget moviemaking with the rhythms of politically pointed cinema is anything but a cakewalk.

Piyush Jha, on the other hand, has just wrapped up *Sikandar*, a less star-studded film about a young Kashmiri orphan boy who wants to be a footballer but discovers that peace is an elusive commodity in the Valley. With the likes of Madhavan, Sanjay Suri, Parzan Dastur (who played the main protagonist in Dholakia's *Parzania*) and Ayesha Kapoor (who essayed the role of the deaf-mute and blind girl in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Black*) in the cast, *Sikandar* was shot in a single 35-day schedule in the heart of Kashmir.

"*Sikandar* explores the plight of the orphans of Kashmir, but the film is cast in the mould of a fast-paced thriller," says Jha. "It is important to tell a story in a way that grips the audience. Only then can you slip in the elements that create awareness about the issues in question – in this case, the conflict in the Valley and its repercussions on children."

Jha asserts that *Sikandar* "does not shout from the rooftops" because that would defeat the very purpose of making the film. "My film isn't targeted at the already converted. It has been taken to a popular level so that the message reaches a wider audience," he explains.

What is the message inherent in *Sikandar*? Says Jha: "Kashmir isn't really like what the mass media makes it out to be. Yes, there is strife and militancy out there, but they are on the wane and young people in the Valley are no

'Freedom of expression is under a severe threat'

Govind Nihalani, 68, is a veteran cinematographer and director who, from *Aakrosh* (1980) and *Ardh Satya* (1983) to *Drohkaal* (1994) and *Dev* (2004), has repeatedly dealt with politically sensitive themes. In an exclusive interview, he talks about the pros and cons of the recent spurt in films that seek to explore the complexities of the contemporary Indian reality

Is it easier to make political films today than it was when you began making films?

It was much easier in my time. We had NFDC backing and the Script Committee had enlightened people. Once a screenplay was approved, there would be no interference. You could go ahead and make the film you wanted to.

What would you say has changed today?

After *Tamas*, which I made in 1988, levels of intolerance have gone up both in the public space and in official circles. How many political films are made today? Very few and those that are made are of a rather superficial nature.

Isn't it important to make these films acceptable to a wider audience?

Why should it be so difficult to strike a balance between the need to entertain and the effort to highlight relevant social and political issues? A film can be entertaining and stimulating at the same time without having to make undue compromises. You can hold an audience spell-bound from the first frame to the last and yet throw up the issues that you feel strongly about.

But isn't that primarily a question of ability?

Well, that's a given. A filmmaker cannot hope to survive if she or he doesn't have the ability to hold the attention of the audience with her/his storytelling skills. That is an absolute must irrespective of what kind of film you make.

An increasing number of filmmakers are today addressing contemporary issues. Isn't that a good sign?

After *Drohkaal*, people discovered terrorists as the new villains. In my film, I put forward the views of the terrorists too because they have a political agenda. They are doing what they are doing because they are driven by a cause. It is important to understand their motivation. Terrorists cannot be equated with ordinary criminals. There is a

difference between a terrorist and a mafia don, but that is being increasingly lost sight of.

Why?

The war on terrorists is now being given an overtly nationalistic spin. Films about terror are today's war films. Terrorists are projected as the new demons, the new enemies. These films lack depth and sensitivity.



'The audience has changed. Its concerns, aspirations and idea of entertainment have changed. What they feel angry about is very different from what audiences in the 1970s and 1980s felt angry about. So filmmakers respond to issues in contemporary terms.'

So you are not one of those who are impressed with these films.

Well, I have some reservations. I feel the politically loaded films of yore had greater impact. None of my films lost money – the audiences responded to them with enthusiasm.

Several of today's reality-inspired films are also doing well at the box office.

Yes. The audience has changed. Its concerns, aspirations and idea of entertainment have changed. What they feel angry about is very different from what audiences in the 1970s and 1980s felt angry about. So filmmakers respond to issues in contemporary terms. If they don't, their films won't work. Today, you cannot expect a smooth ride if you decide to rattle skeletons in the cupboard.

Are you talking about the pressures that are put on filmmakers who set out to tackle sensitive socio-political issues?

Yes, precisely. I worry about the unofficial censorship

mechanism that is gaining ground in India. The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) shows *Angels and Demons* to a group of Christian leaders for their approval. That sets a dangerous precedent. No religion, least of all Christianity, can be so feeble that it needs protection against a film. Today, it's this group. Tomorrow it will be another. Where will we stop?

What should the filmmaking community do to prevent this form of censorship?

Not just filmmakers but also artists, writers and musicians should close ranks and take a stand. Otherwise the situation will only get worse. People resort to violence and are allowed to get away with it. The government seems to have abdicated its responsibility. If you have a problem with a film, you can take recourse to legal action. If the government keeps on giving in to these demands, freedom of expression will soon be a thing of the past.

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
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Everybody taps into Project Jyoti

Microsoft's learning centres trigger empowerment

Civil Society News
New Delhi

PROJECT Jyoti was launched under Microsoft's Unlimited Potential initiative in 2004 to promote computer literacy. Under this project, a Community Technology Learning Centre (CTLC) is set up at any convenient location in a semi-urban or rural area. It could be inside a school, a panchayat office or a community building.

You will see young boys and girls at these centres. They learn how to use computers and the Internet and explore career options. Many of them are dropouts. The CTLC helps them clamber back on board. It gives them skills, helps them learn English and generally positions them for entry level jobs.

CTLCs also have a much wider role. They speed up the availability of information, be it on crops, market prices or the weather. They empower communities by teaching them to use information technology to secure their rights. They also link people with government schemes.

By giving women access to computers, CTLCs bring about a change in their social status. They help them earn and run small enterprises with greater efficiency. In April, buoyed by the programme's success, Microsoft released additional funds to NGOs they work with.

Civil Society spoke to Vikas Goswami, head of CSR at Microsoft India.

It is five years since Project Jyoti began. What have you achieved in terms of scale?

Recently we inaugurated the thousandth Community Technology Learning Centre (CTLC) in India. We are spread across 20 Union territories and states. We have trained more than 160,000 people out of which 35 to 40 per cent are from government.

At the inauguration, the CAP Foundation, which had set up this particular CTLC, said on a grant of Rs 1 crore from us, it had in two years educated and trained people who had earned and



Vikas Goswami, third from left in dark kurta, at a community learning centre in Gujarat

brought back home close to Rs 14 crores.

I am talking of one NGO, one grant. That's the return on investment. I don't think I need to do another dipstick to find out. The NGO trained 20,000 people out of whom 18,000 are employed. These are people who had no chance of formal employment. The money they bring back home not only impacts their lives economically, but encourages them to study further. They now want to go back into the same education system from which they dropped out. After finding employment, and seeing the opportunity a graduate gets in moving up the ladder, they want to go back to college and do more.

The return is also on their siblings who want to study further. Young people, after being trained by a CTLC, can support them. Then, terrorism and criminalisation is on the rise. So creating role models in slums, peri-urban and rural areas is

very important. It also creates a ripple effect. When one youngster sees his neighbour being employed and earning respect, he wants to do the same. They become an asset to society and you can't measure that in mere economic terms.

What are the kind of jobs young people in rural and urban areas get after they acquire basic computer skills?

A variety of jobs. Computers, life skills and English are required as a combination for almost any job today – be it in a security agency, BPO, coffee shop, retail chain, hotel, restaurant or hospital. Because we are reaching out to the first generation of people in formal employment, they do not know how to dress for an interview, how to face an irate customer and so on. So learning life skills prepares them for these challenges.

(Continued on page 23)

Wonder Grass takes root in GK

Abhinandita Mathur
New Delhi

THE Bamboo Store is located in a quiet lane in Greater Kailash's N Block market. Beautifully displayed inside are handcrafted traditional and contemporary bamboo products such as lamps, baskets, artifacts, planters, candle-stands, bathroom accessories, garden umbrellas, etc. The store also stocks off the shelf and made to order screens and blinds for windows. The more significant products on offer are bamboo based building and construction materials, a much needed green alternative to the ugly concrete stuff used to construct homes and offices.

A brainchild of Shahriyar M Choudhury and Mehnaaz Majumdar of Earth and Grass Workshop, the store was set up in January 2008 with support from the National Mission on Bamboo Applications to promote bamboo as a viable, eco-friendly alternative to wood and plastic. Structured as a Technology Mission, the National Mission on Bamboo Applications is one of the key initiatives of the Department of Science and Technology which is hoping to enlarge the bamboo sector.

The idea behind the store is to create awareness among urban consumers about the numerous uses of bamboo. The store serves as a retail outlet for bamboo craftsmen across the country and helps them sell in the city. Its diverse collection highlights the strong and supple character of bamboo that lends itself to both traditional and modern products.

"What we are really doing at the moment may be termed brand building for bamboo," explains Choudhury. "People know little about bamboo. There are several myths about the material that come in the way of bamboo getting its due." Choudhury and Majumdar have been promoting crafts from the northeast for over a decade. Their relationship with bamboo and the craftsmen who work with this wonder grass goes back a long way.

Unfortunately, bamboo is one of the most under utilized resources available today though it grows naturally in every State and in every region, except the extremely hot and cold deserts of Western Rajasthan and Ladakh. So far, 1500 uses of bamboo have been documented and 16 Indian bamboo species identified as being commercially viable through extensive testing.

The use of bamboo in construction is poor considering it is one of the oldest materials traditionally used in India for building homes and structures like bridges. Quality, costs and some myths about the material discourage builders from using



Shahriyar M Choudhury

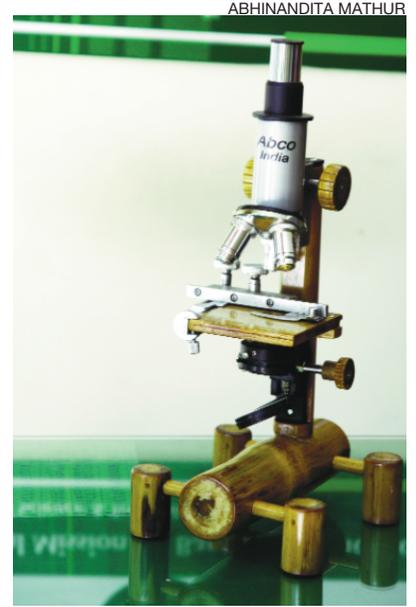
this eco-friendly alternative.

At the Bamboo Store, products are available for a fair price. For instance, corrugated bamboo roofing sheets cost between Rs 60 to Rs 90 per square foot. Woven bamboo mat board for walls is priced between Rs 30 to Rs 80 per square foot, depending on thickness. Bamboo flooring costs Rs 175 per square foot and laying charges are between Rs 30 to Rs 50 per square foot.

A common concern that has emerged among bamboo promoters is the lack of awareness about the innumerable benefits of the wonder grass amongst consumers in big cities. Thus was born the idea of The Bamboo Store.

But running this store is no easy task. Choudhury, who with his partner Majumdar personally source all products directly from craftsmen, explain the challenges they face. "The problems are at various levels. The bamboo sector is not an organized one. We source these products from individual craftsmen in faraway places. Though things are much better now, initially it would be quite a task to just reach out to them."

Bridging the gap between modern day demands and traditional products is another aspect. Often,



products created by craftsmen fail to attract modern urban markets.

Says Choudhury: "I remember meeting an artist from a pottery community in Delhi in the early years of my work. The artist asked me how I could help them. I told him I would get them designs that would increase their business. I asked him to make a soap dish. The potters laughed at me. After much ado, they did take my suggestion and those soap dishes sold faster than anything in their collection had in a long time. I began to be known as the *sabun case wale bhaiyya* in the community. The point I'm trying to make is that people are bored of just buying handcrafted decoration pieces. We have to

integrate these crafts in our way of life to be fully able to utilize the material".

Another problem, Choudhury points out, is logistics. He explains how bamboo charcoal, an environmentally beneficial and cheaper substitute to wood charcoal, is no longer stocked by their store. "Even though we managed to source bamboo charcoal at almost half the price of wood charcoal the cost of transporting it from Nagaland to Delhi doubled the price, eventually resulting in no sales. We then had to clear the stock by making a loss. Such problems can only be tackled through policy changes in collaboration with the government. Unfortunately, sometimes it is cheaper to transport materials from Thailand and China than from Nagaland."

Dedicated lovers of bamboo are hopeful of changing things around. New bamboo plants are being invented to increase production and make it more easily available. Amongst other inventions, a bamboo microscope will soon be available for professional use.

The attention given to detail and sensible pricing are additional reasons why this little mission will continue to grow.

How BYST creates employment

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

NEETA Jain, 43, can barely see. Not even enough to spoon sugar cubes into her tea. But her less than perfect vision has never blurred her dreams. Jain's company, Aarkay Graphics in New Delhi, specialises in designing stickers and has an annual turnover of Rs 33 lakhs. Jain has blue-chip multinationals like Gillette and Pepsi as clients. It's been tough, though, and Neeta says she couldn't have got here without help from the Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust (BYST).

BYST is a non-profit that assists disadvantaged youth develop their business ideas into viable enterprises. It provides access to capital and business advice. For budding entrepreneurs, BYST gives supplementary capital up to Rs 5 lakhs along with dedicated mentoring and guidance.

Neeta says she needed both. "BYST and my mentor have given me all I have. Yes, I had a business idea and I had the spirit to take risk, work hard and innovate. But I needed a platform, a sounding board. Of course, the loan was the starting point. BYST has given my company much more value than that. They have transformed my life, my personality," explains Neeta who approached the non-profit more than ten years ago on the advice of a counsellor from the Institute of the Physically Handicapped, Delhi.

Neeta has been suffering from retinitis pigmentation since 1987, a rare condition with no cure and rapid vision impairment. Her guilt at seeing the family income wither away due to her medical bills spurred Neeta to make herself count. Although she graduated in physics from Delhi University, Neeta hadn't worked after marriage. She enrolled in a special computer course for the blind, dabbled in desktop publishing work and set her sights on starting her own venture. BYST gave her a loan of Rs 46,250 to establish her printing unit, and she pitched in with personal savings of Rs 30,000. Neeta now employs eight people, among them her husband, and through BYST's recent Credit Guarantee Scheme with banks, she has access to a Rs 15 lakh term loan from the Bank of Baroda for expansion.

Neeta is one of 1,782 entrepreneurs supported by BYST since it was founded in 1992 in New



Lakshmi Venkatesan



Kusum Tanwar

Delhi. Through them, nearly 18,000 people have gained employment.

"That is really the core of our mission, to turn job seekers into job creators," says Lakshmi V Venkatesan, founder-trustee and executive vice-president, BYST. "The micro-finance model is suited only to some target groups. The younger demographic population is not often the right fit. They have limited community obligations, more aspirations and more drive. And this is what makes them better entrepreneurs. We focus on this group. Studies show 75 to 80 per cent of the young are either underemployed or unemployed. We need to de-trap them from this situation by facilitating access to credit and after care to ensure their enterprises mature and stabilize."

Inspired by the Prince of Wales Trust, BYST is the first organization to replicate the youth business model successfully outside the United Kingdom. Lakshmi Venkatesan says tweaking it to conditions in a developing country was a challenge at first, but the model now works equally well in urban and

rural India. The loan recovery rate is an impressive 95 per cent. Each entrepreneur has employed on an average ten people. For the Rs 99 million loaned out, Rs. 990 million has been generated in turnover. BYST now has six regional chapters – Delhi, rural Haryana, Chennai, Pune, Hyderabad and rural Maharashtra.

It is the mentoring programme which attracts young entrepreneurs. "Of course, our panel of mentor-selectors look for that unmistakable drive when youngsters come to us with business ideas. We are friends, philosophers and guides. We listen and give advice on managerial aspects, brand building, financial prudence, even life skills. It's tough at times. Our entrepreneurs have many expectations and often it is difficult to fulfill all of them. One also gets mentally attached. Their successes and failures impact us too," says Ashok Dayal, managing director, Bellmandata India Pvt. Ltd., who has been Neeta Jain's mentor for over a decade.

BYST has a database of around 3,000 business mentors. None of them takes even a penny as compensation. BYST has encapsulated their wisdom in its new Mentor Online learning programme. It fuses the best practices of individual mentors with the latest research. The mentoring programme, online courses and

practicals are accredited by City & Guilds, UK's largest vocational awarding body. Over 1,000 mentors completed the accreditation in one and a half years.

Eventually, the validation that counts is the one which comes from entrepreneurs. "My mentor, Dr Kusum Chopra, is instrumental for my success. She taught me how to position my brand, how to read the customer and how to design keeping clients in mind. More than becoming financially self-sufficient, I feel proud that I now mentor a BYST entrepreneur and do technical evaluations. Only when you have been mentored can you really understand the value it brings," says 38-year-old Kusum Tanwar, who defied family opposition to run a boutique in Delhi's conservative Nangal Raya area with a BYST loan.

Kusum, who has travelled all over the world to participate in micro-entrepreneurship seminars, also received CITI Groups Micro Entrepreneurship Award 2007. Her journey of inculcating and then imparting entrepreneurial zeal is an example of

Everybody taps into Project Jyoti

We fund and support the computer part of it, but we encourage and support our NGO partners who can do the rest. These are all entry level jobs. I am not claiming these are high-end. CTLCs are like the primary school of computer education. I am not making them computer programmers. I have to see how to spend the money. Should I spend Rs 100 on 10 people or two? I'd rather impact 10 people and get them into formal employment.

Are the CTLCs helping communities to boost their incomes, improve their livelihood prospects?

The programme is very generic in nature. You can make it as specific as you want in a locality. Fishermen in Tamil Nadu use CTLCs to find out where the school of fish is camping and go fish in that area and where the best markets for fish are.

Groups of women in SEWA use their computer skills to find out how to improve productivity. I have seen women sitting over an Excel sheet talking in Gujarati.

This particular group was manufacturing detergent. On the sheet they had input costs like marketing, raw materials and packaging. They were having a very vibrant conversation on what needed to be tweaked to bring down costs. Such use of technology has an economic return because of the ripple effect on other women in the area –

women who would not be allowed to sit on the same charpoy as the men in a panchayat meeting. Earlier, it was never thought that women could use technology. Now they are winning respect in their families and communities. In the E-gram project, which the Gujarat government is running, the women E-sevaks are called for meetings, their opinion is sought.

If you look at NGO vocational programmes run earlier we had pickles, papads and petticoats. Nobody challenged it and said why can't women be technology oriented? Boys were given those trainings but women were not. This programme helps to challenge the idea that only men can do it and women cannot.

How have rural communities reacted to the idea of having a CTLC around?

Each rural community has reacted in a different manner. Farmers have used CTLCs to find information on pests, good seeds and so on.

One example I like is from the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP). They borrowed an entire presentation from a local agricultural college and showed it on a laptop to various villages. When the next animal fair happened and somebody was parading a cow as a Jersey cow, a village woman got up and said it was not a Jersey cow. A Jersey cow has two bumps, she said, because she

had seen it in the presentation. So you cannot short-change the villager any more.

At a meeting of sarpanches who had CTLCs in their villages, a sarpanch said Internet was an issue in his village. Now you expect sarpanches to talk about primary education, health or livelihood. You don't expect Internet to be a priority.

The reason it has become a priority is that AKRSP has a rights based approach to computer education and technology. They use the CTLC as an RTI centre. How do we get you BPL (below the poverty line) benefits? Let's figure out the criteria. Your village should have had water and electricity by this year you have not got it, let's figure out why.

When you have RTI and you have the Internet you are suddenly very powerful. The government has to respond to you. The NGO plays a very crucial role here because they understand both spaces and help people walk the path.

How have local demands and needs changed the character of the CTLC?

The CTLCs adjust to local conditions. Can I go to Jharkhand and teach computers, English, life skills and talk about employment? I can't. These things work in urban and peri-urban areas.

So I have to look at the role CTLCs can play in their lives. Can they be used for disaster awareness, information on agriculture, RTI or getting you the news earlier? Can this be a centre where people can get their birth and death records?

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Govt presides over plant loot

KANCHI KOHLI



INDIA'S Parliament approved the Biological Diversity Act in 2002. Drawing its objectives from the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Act lays out provisions for conservation, sustainable use of biological resources and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of that use.

The Biological Diversity Act was meant to be a response to the increasing and alarming instances of biopiracy and bio-based trade which needed serious checks. It was felt that a law was needed which would see conservation of biodiversity holistically and not only through sector-specific laws on forests, wildlife, water and pollution laws. The illegal access to natural resources and the 'theft' of associated traditional knowledge required legislation that would check misuse. A framework was looked into for comprehensive legislation based on the principles of sovereignty and decentralisation for a more people-based conservation policy.

It has been over six and a half years since the law has been in place. One of the main purposes of the

law has been to bring in a clear institutional framework for approvals for access to biological resources to foreign and Indian nationals.

There is a three-tier structure with the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) based in Chennai at top, then State Biodiversity Boards (SBB) at every state level and finally village level Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs).

If any foreign entity (defined in the Act) wants to access India's biodiversity and/or associated traditional knowledge for research, commercial utilization or Intellectual Property Right (IPR) or third party transfer, they need to apply before the NBA. The NBA then would need to review the application. It is bound to 'consult' local BMCs before granting an approval. In case of an Indian entity, it needs to only intimate the SBB unless an IPR is involved, in which case the application is made before the NBA.

On 5 May, in a letter and press release, the Campaign for Conservation and Community Control Over Biodiversity brought a few facts to

the attention of the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA).

It pointed out serious lacunae, bias and conflict of interest in the manner in which 335 approvals have been granted by the NBA. To begin with, and shockingly, none of these approvals have actually followed the mandatory procedure of 'consultation' with the BMCs, as stipulated by Section 41 (2) of the Act.

There is evidence of the minutes of the NBA meetings where the approvals are listed. Moreover, the process of forming BMCs is still at a nascent stage. At present there are only 1,402 BMCs that have been formed in the states, with 1,354 being only in Karnataka. Other than this all 48 panchayats of the state of Madhya Pradesh have set up BMCs. For a country as vast as India, this is minimal.

While this issue remains unresolved at various levels, including whether it is wise for villages to set up BMCs in the first place, the other glaring issue that the approval scenario highlights is truly shocking.

The NBA has appointed an Expert Committee for Evaluation of Applications for Access, Seeking Patent, Transfer of Research Results and Third Party Transfer of Bioresources which screens applications and recommends/rejects approvals. This committee has been set up for different tenure at different points of time since October 2005, the last one being February 2008. The present head of the committee is Dr RS Rana, the former head of the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR).

A first look at the composition of this Expert Committee will give anyone the evidence that the committee is filled with only Government of India officials or those from affiliated departments/institutions.

This includes the Department of Science and Technology, NBPGR, National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR), National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), NRC on Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, CSIR, Centre for Plant Protection Studies and so on. There is not a single person from local communities, farmers' groups, conservation

(Continued on page 27)

Now Delhi wants Himachal water

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

THIS is a true story of a real city. The city gets a lot of rain every year, more than sufficient for its needs, but it does not use that rainwater.

It had hundreds of water bodies, but it has destroyed most of them and continues to destroy the remaining ones.

There is a massive river flowing through the city, but the city has used up all its water and made the river a dirty drain, releasing untreated effluents.

Proper treatment of those effluents can actually make this water fit for reuse for most purposes, but the city does not bother to treat the wastewater properly. It has wastewater treatment plants, but they are functioning at less than half their capacity and even then are not treating the water sufficiently to make it reusable.

Groundwater levels once were very high in the city, but urban residents used it at such an unsustainable pace that levels are plunging at most places.

The city is also using up the flood plains, further endangering the groundwater recharge system.

The city gets a huge quantity of water from long distances, equal to one of the highest quantities of water in India, when compared on a per capita basis. It is getting water from big dams and rivers from far off places. However, official reports say that at least 40 per cent of the water that the city gets is lost in leakages. But the city does practically nothing to fix those leakages. In fact, the city's water supply body does not have functioning meters at most bulk water lines, so it does not know where the water is lost.

The city now says that it needs more water.

The logical step would be to assess what is the least cost option for the city among the available options, including options like fixing leaks, rainwater harvesting, protecting local water bodies, groundwater recharge, treating wastewater, demand side management, ensuring that those using beyond the minimum threshold level are charged at more than the cost price of water and so on. But the city does not bother to do any such exercise (as it officially accepts), and looks for the easy option of proposing a massive dam in a far off area. The city is powerful enough to make the government cough up Rs 4,000 crores required for the new reservoir.

So what is wrong?

Well, there are some small hitches: the project is going to take up at least 2200 ha of land, will displace thousands of people from 32 villages, will destroy dense forests over at least 1300 ha including part of a wildlife sanctuary, affect a wetland that is declared a Ramsar site and also has religious significance for the people, create a 35 km long reservoir, destroy the river and all the benefits that a river provides, will destroy the carbon sink (forests) and create a new source of glob-

al warming. In fact the Environment Impact Assessment of the project (p 149) accepts, "It was found that about 95.62 per cent of Project Affected Families are not in favour of this project".

Sounds incredible?

Well, as it was said at the outset, this is a true story. The city described above is our National Capital, Delhi. The dam in question is the proposed Renuka dam over the Giri River (a tributary of the Yamuna river) in Sirmour district of Himachal Pradesh.

around 950 million gallons per day and 40 per cent of that amounts to almost the same quantity as that proposed to be supplied from the proposed Renuka dam. So the Renuka dam is proposed, basically, to compensate for the avoidable leakage from Delhi's water system.

The Environment Impact Assessment of the project is fundamentally flawed in many respects, including some aspects described above, like not doing the options assessment or evaluating the value of the river flowing with freshwater or assessing the impact of the project on climate



Dirty Yamuna

However, the project will not have a smooth run. It has yet to obtain the environment, forest, techno economic, planning commission and other clearances. In fact, the very legal foundation of the project is non-existent. The proponents claim that the project is the result of the May and Nov 1994 agreements between the upper Yamuna basin states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh (now Uttarakhand too), Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi. However, according to the Union Ministry of Law and Justice, since Rajasthan, one of the party states, did not sign those agreements, the agreements are no longer legally valid. Haryana is already opposing the validity of those agreements and also the Renuka dam. In Himachal Pradesh itself, the Renuka Bandh Sangarsh Samiti and the Himalay Niti Abhiyana are opposing the project.

According to the Performance Audit report of the Delhi Jal Board for 2008, "Delhi has distribution losses of 40 per cent of total water supply which is abnormal and significantly higher than the acceptable norms of 15 per cent prescribed by the Ministry of Urban Development." Delhi gets

change and impact of climate change on the project. The public hearing itself has seen violations with the local people not knowing about the public hearing, not getting the EIA documents in their local language, among others. Now the Himachal Pradesh government is applying the emergency clause to acquire land for the project, in complete violation of legal norms and Supreme Court orders.

Recently, a detailed memorandum, signed by broad based groups including the affected people, has been sent to the authorities including the Prime Minister, saying why this project does not make any rational sense and should not be allowed to go ahead.

Incidentally, the municipal corporation officials call those who steal water from their pipes to sell it to others as water mafia. What would you call those who are pushing this project? One only hopes that better sense will prevail and the citizens and authorities in Delhi, Himachal Pradesh and elsewhere will not allow this project to go ahead.

*Himanshu Thakkar (ht.sandrp@gmail.com)
South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers & People (www.sandrp.in)*

Climate change fuels Naxalism

Dr DK GIRI

IN 2007, the world heard a watershed announcement. The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon told the globe it was witnessing its first climate change conflict. Ban Ki-moon said the ethnic bloodshed in the Darfur region of Sudan was triggered, at least in part, by man-made climate change.

UN statistics revealed rainfall in Darfur had declined 40 per cent in two decades, as monsoons were affected by a rise in Indian Ocean temperatures. Ethnic Arabs and Africans, who had co-existed peacefully for generations, fell into catastrophic war over diminishing water supplies and farm land. Darfur remains in chaos and the UN has warned one million people face food and water shortages in the coming weeks.

India also faces the prospect of paying the price of climate change in bloody conflict. The vast increases in crop failure and forest degradation predicted for rural India offers the Naxalite insurgency the prospect of long-term growth. The movement has always drawn support from those who find their agricultural livelihoods are simply not putting enough food on the table. The insurgency could be widened, deepened and prolonged if climate change is allowed to ravage our nation's rural areas.

The Delhi Sustainable Development Summit in February saw US Senator John Kerry address delegates by video-link from Washington. Describing India's future in a world of climate breakdown, he said: "Scientists are now warning that the Himalayan glaciers, which supply water to almost a billion people, could disappear completely by 2035. This would reduce the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra rivers to cracked earth."

Kerry warned that "rising sea levels are forcing salt water into the Ganges, with the potential to destroy millions of acres of fertile Indian soil." He added that farming output in India is projected to fall as much as 30 to 40 per cent by 2080. If this grim prediction is realised, millions of rural livelihoods would become extinct. But the rural dwellers will, of course, continue to exist after their jobs vanish. Despite the drift to the cities, India's rural population continues to grow in size. Wishful thinking would lead us to hope the death of the Indian peasant means the growth of the urban middle class. It does not. It means the growth of the city slum dweller - and the Naxalite.

It was, after all, the degradation of India's rural environments that helped to fuel the current level of Naxalite rebellion. Successive governments have overseen swathes of agricultural and forest land being converted



to industrial use. It has been estimated that 30 million rural Indians, more than the entire population of Canada, have been displaced since independence in 1947. This process is nothing less than internal colonialism. Naxalism, in its current form, can be viewed as the fight-back.

To stem the red threat, the green banner must be raised. Environmentally conscious lifestyles must be adopted for the sake of peace and state security. The tools of the battle to disarm Naxalites are not only police rifles. They are energy saving light bulbs and the ignition keys to our cars. It is bizarre, indeed almost incomprehensible that such an epic issue relates directly to the most mundane aspects of modern life. But that's the way it is.

Despite the high profile recent killings, there has been some good progress with regard to Naxalism. Thousands of villages have accepted cash rewards for agreeing to refuse them support. Surrender policies, which allow insurgents to be rehabilitated and protected, have attracted hundreds. The Forest Rights Act can be interpreted as a smart government move to combat

the spread of Naxalism, protecting as it does the rights of millions of rural dwellers to land and livelihoods among the trees.

But climate change is the one factor that could tragically undo all these other human efforts - that is the nature of the beast.

The Congress election manifesto released on March 24 is a 9,000 word list of seductive promises. But the document contains only 205 words related to climate change. That's just 205 words on the single greatest threat to our nation's future. Congress claims it will implement "in letter and spirit" the National Action Plan for Climate Change unveiled by the Prime Minister last summer. This Plan refused to establish targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

The BJP's own election manifesto is 16,000 words long. Less than 500 words of the document are focused directly on climate change and the environment, but it does at least concede that "containing global warming is essential to protecting life and security."

Two leading UK environmental campaigners have suggested that we replace the term 'climate change' with different tags. Johann Hari prefers 'climate chaos,' while George Monbiot suggests 'climate breakdown.' Chaos and breakdown will indeed be the results of climate change in our rural lands.

Dr DK Giri is director of Schumacher Centre, a Delhi-based NGO. He can be contacted at dr.dkgiri@gmail.com

The tools of the battle to disarm Naxalites are not only police rifles. They are energy saving light bulbs and the ignition keys to our cars.

Weavers face new threats

BHARAT DOGRA

SINCE several years stories of extreme distress have been pouring in from many famous centres of handloom weaving in India. I recently travelled to Varanasi and to villages in some nearby districts. I heard innumerable sad stories of how in some villages over 50 to 75 per cent of handloom weavers have been forced to give up their traditional skills and seek casual daily wage work as construction workers and rickshaw-pullers or as petty vendors. "Our looms are silent and our youth are selling *gutka*," an elderly weaver said more with anguish than anger.

From Varanasi and its neighbourhood I went to Lucknow and villages in nearby districts. Here I learnt that the work of zardozi and chikan artisans has also fallen on bad days. All the skilled artisans to whom I talked to in Lucknow and villages in Sitapur district said that work availability has reduced significantly.

Several factors are responsible for this decline. Exploitative, unjust conditions, domination of a few big players within these artisan trades cause a lot of problems. One factor which is common to almost all these situations of distress and reduced work availability is the increasing threat of indiscriminate mechanisation, including imported machines.

If we look at the entire debate on the protection of handlooms and related skills such as hand-printing, then loss of livelihoods in the artisan sector caused by indiscriminate mechanisation is due to violation of existing rules and schemes.

An expert on handlooms, LC Jain has estimated that during the last decade 5.5 million handloom workers were rendered unemployed or their employment had reduced due to the displacement of 13,86,000 handlooms (each handloom providing part or full employment to four per-

sons) by 2,31,000 powerlooms (each powerloom displaced six handlooms).

Similar massive loss of employment was seen in other areas of the textile industry such as the hand-printing industry. According to LC Jain, because machines were employed for 942 million meters of clothes over and above the 500 million meters at which their output would have been frozen as recommended by the Research Advisory Panel (textile printing industry), an estimated 2,50,000 jobs opportunities have been lost in the economy.

In recent times this threat has taken new forms. Imported machine-made cloth and imported machines are further reducing employment. Dr. Rajnikant, Director of Human Welfare Association in Varanasi, said his organisation had initiated a project called *Taana-Baana* for protecting the rights of handloom weavers in villages of Benaras district. However, in recent years under the liberalised import regime of WTO, problems for handloom weavers have started increasing due to the bulk import of cheap silk, or imitation silk cloth from China as well as import of embroidery machines.

These have been used by some manufacturers to produce cheap imitation products which are making the market extremely difficult for genuine products such as the Benarasi sari. On the

one hand, several weavers and other artisans have become unemployed, and on the other hand their wages and margins have been reduced to such an extent that they can't meet basic needs. Similarly, machines imported from China are a threat to zardozi artisans. Computer copying of designs is snatching the livelihoods of weavers while imitation products flood the market.

Keeping in view these fast growing problems a large number of weavers and artisans took part in a Bunkar Sandesh Abhiyan (Campaign on the Voice of Weavers). This was initiated by Banaras Bunkar Samiti with the support of an organisation called 'Find Your Feet'. This effort was able to focus attention on several new threats to artisans and prepare a charter of demands.

It is important to go back to the original legislation which was enacted for the protection of the handloom sector and the rules that were formed (but later diluted) to protect handlooms and related work like hand-printing. Even the diluted

version of the laws were not properly implemented. Today we need to strengthen these laws keeping in mind the new global order and recent changes. Also, organisations of weavers need to be strengthened to ensure better implementation of law. Only then will it be possible to save millions of threatened livelihoods from the disruptive impact of indiscriminate mechanisation.

Problems for handloom weavers started increasing due to the bulk import of cheap silk or imitation silk cloth from China and import of embroidery machines.

Govt presides over plant loot

organisations, political parties or NGOs working on related issues. The only 'outsider' is a consultant from the multinational seed giant, Syngenta.

Digging deeper reveals several more astounding facts. As the letter to NBA points out, "Almost all the institutions or departments who are part of the said Committee have also sent in applications for consideration of access, transfer or IPR." In the four times the committee has sat and decided on the applications, there have been nine applications by NBPGR, six by DARE, two by the Centre for Tuber Crop Research Institute, two from NIO, two by NRC on Medicinal and Aromatic Plants. Applications from the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and DBT were also considered and recommended for approval.

And the reality blows to full steam with the

decisions of the Expert Committee whose tenure was from August 2007 to February 2008. There was only one meeting of this Committee in August 2007. It was in this meeting that 126 approvals were recommended for Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) applications of CSIR. The Emeritus Scientist of CSIR was on the Committee.

Earlier, during a meeting on 20 June, 2006, when the application for third party transfer of biological resources by Syngenta was approved, the consultant of the company was sitting on the Committee.

The minutes of these meetings, or subsequent discussions within the NBA available in the public domain, does not reveal that the concerned members stepped out or abstained from the decision making role of applications where there was a direct conflict of interest.

Given the facts in hand, over 50 groups consist-

ing of farmers groups, environmental organisations, researchers, activists, and NGOs in their letter to the NBA and the Ministry of Environment and Forests (which is the nodal ministry for this Act) demanded:

- Dissolution of the Expert Committee on Access and its immediate reconstitution. The committee should have members who represent conservation and local community interests, and not the bias that reflects presently.
- Withdrawal and or cancellation of the approvals granted till date on the grounds that they are in violation of Section 41(2) of the Act and also on grounds of conflict of interest of the committee members.
- Recovery of any fees or allowances paid to private consultants or companies who are Committee members.
- And finally, put a freeze any further approvals till the issues are dealt with.

Kanchi Kohli is member, Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group and is based in New Delhi. E-mail: kanchikohli@gmail.com

Living

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

Anegundi is first in rural tourism

Susheela Nair
Anegundi (Karnataka)

THE picturesque hamlet of Anegundi, perched on the banks of the Tungabhadra, has many claims to fame. It is steeped in mythology and history. Anegundi is the legendary kingdom or Kishkinda of the monkey prince Sugriva. It is also the cradle of the Krishnadevaraya dynasty of the glorious Vijaynagar Empire and falls in the core zone of the World Heritage Site of Hampi.

What's more, Anegundi is a pioneer in the Endogenous Tourism Projects programme. Started 2004 in 36 destinations across India, the programme is being carried out by the United Nations Development Programme in partnership with the Union Ministry of Tourism.

Recently, Anegundi added one more feather to its cap. With the help of The Kishkinda Trust (TKT), the implementing agency of Endogenous Tourism in Anegundi, the village has become a role model in heritage conservation and sustainable rural tourism.

Under the Rural Tourism Project, programmes are designed to ensure that local people benefit economically and culturally by conserving their heritage. The project promotes and preserves the physical and cultural characteristics of Anegundi village. Local people work for the programme as employees and stakeholders through self-employment schemes.

"Preserving vernacular heritage is of paramount importance to us," says Shama Pawar, founder trustee of TKT. "The Rural Tourism hardware scheme provided us with a wonderful opportunity to integrate conservation and empowerment."

Old houses lying unused have been renovated and are now earning people an income.

"Since Anegundi had several ruined houses waiting to be renovated, we thought of many options to restore and utilise them in a way that would help the tourism initiative become a reality for the village community and an exposure for the visitor," says Shama. "Old unused houses have been restored and converted into business incubators without marring their original beauty. These are maintained and managed by local people on a profit-sharing basis. This has brought joy and pride to the community and an engaging exposure to the visitor."



SUSHEELA NAIR

Drifting down the Tungabhadra River in a coracle



UNESCO Guest House with a reading room

These traditional houses have been transformed into guest houses and rented to tourists, thereby opening up employment opportunities for locals. In keeping with the tenets of vernacular architecture, only local materials were used. The UNESCO Guest House which houses a reading room, was the first historic vernacular building to be rehabilitated. This was carried out by TKT in collaboration with TEMA of Sweden and UNESCO. The building will be handed over to the owner, an artisan, once the lease period expires

in 2009. Subsequently, other dilapidated houses have been restored and renovated into guest houses like Peshkar, Champa, Naidila and Ooramma.

The interiors of these guest houses are spartan. The flooring is made of mud smeared with cow dung. Some have built in beds placed on raised platforms. Rooms have carved wooden pillars and handprints on doorways. Furnishing is done with locally made textiles and crafts. To accommodate the needs of the visitors, an Internet cafe has been set up and a restaurant called Howa, which serves traditional cuisine.

The crafts shop has a wide range of handicrafts and rural art products like bags made of banana stem and river grass. The vibrant banana-fibre cottage industry here took off after the Women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) participated in several exhibitions across the country. "To enhance the capacity of local artisans we conducted different workshops and seminars to provide value addition to their existing skills. Some of the women were trained in the preparation of traditional cuisine

(Continued on next page)

Sumant Batra's real India

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WALK down a busy Indian street and what do you see? A feast of activity, a sea of faces. There are people selling things, drinking chai, plying rickshaws and carts. You will find children, barbers, a street astrologer, a cow ambling past. Superimpose these images on paper and you get a book that is quintessentially Indian.

That's what Sumant Batra, has done. He saw the extraordinary in the life that ordinary Indians live. He tells this story through a tapestry of pictures in his book, appropriately titled, *The Indians: Interesting Aspects, Extraordinary Facets*. It was released this month by Dr Karan Singh.

Batra is a corporate lawyer and much sought after. He is consultant to the IMF, the World Bank and the OECD. He sits on the board of prestigious global and national bodies. Why would he spend precious time doing a book like this one?

Well, Batra is emotional and deeply patriotic. He grew up in Hisar, a small town in Haryana. He studied law in Punjab University and slogged his way up, starting his own law firm, Kesar Das B & Associates from a basement in cramped Lajpat Nagar. Batra now has 40 lawyers working under him. He says he has a long way to go, but you can see he's arrived.

You would think a globe-trotting lawyer would lose his soul to jetlag and the good life. But not Batra. It disturbed him that India was typified by just a few symbols: companies that had gone global, cricket, Bollywood and, very recently, the Oscars. Nothing wrong with this, but there was so much more to India.

"I never wanted my human side to get lost," he says about his climb from oblivion. "I hung on to my sensitivity, kept my feet firmly on the ground



Sumant Batra

and tried to be a responsible citizen, working for donor agencies at low costs. I wanted to do something for society," he explains.

"People don't realise that behind every successful Indian face there is a sea of ordinary people working backstage day and night to make it happen, contributing to India's GDP," he says.

He made it his mission to bring missing India into the limelight. Batra got a young team together. He travelled with his photographer, 26-year-old Sonhal Nachani, explaining his vision of the

tion of books to schools. Storytelling sessions, regular film shows and Panchatantra videos are also organized. TKT's Rashmi Manthan programme was initiated to impart education in the performing arts.

The improvement of village infrastructure through a Solid Waste Management (SWM) programme has been initiated with the aim of promoting clean and hygienic conditions. TKT has evolved a strong, scientific approach to SWM practice and given it a new perspective. A place has been demarcated to dump the total waste generated. The villagers have been trained in appropriate waste segregation, disposal of plastics, reuse and recycling of plastic and vermi-composting. To provide clean and safe drinking water to the community, existing water tanks were redesigned to

book as they went along.

He even rejected two publishers. One wanted to flirt with his idea, the other wanted the book to be released only in September. "I didn't care," says Batra. Finally, it was his sister-in-law's publishing firm which was given the responsibility of bringing out the book.

Indians is not loaded with copy. It tells you what you need to know. The book has attractive and meaningful pictures and takes you on a virtual journey into India's busy towns and redolent countryside. There are 21 chapters, thoughtfully chosen, on topics like rituals and ceremonies, gurukul, madarsa and pathshala, garam chai, coolies, shaves and haircuts on streets, headgear, desi khana, the ironing man and dhobi ghat, bazaars and pherwalas, childhood games, paan mania, Bollywood and so on.

The book is a tribute to India's unity and diversity. There are aspects of Indian character which Batra has sought to highlight: the tolerance of the average Indian despite deprivation, the optimism of a better tomorrow, the deep faith in self-respect and dignity which spurs people to work hard.

"I wanted to show all this as part of normal life, not ornamental life," says Batra.

He also felt now is the right time to capture India's amazing landscapes, before they disappear. Towns and cities are

changing rapidly. What we see today may not be visible tomorrow. So a book like this would have heritage value.

Indians has a foreword by Cherie Blair, wife of former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

Sumant is associated with the Loomba Trust. Cherie Blair is its president and she agreed to write the foreword.

There is more to Batra than his successful law firm. He is a socially conscious individual and has pledged the money the book will bring in to the

cater to a larger number of people at any given time. Additional taps have been installed and hygienic surroundings created with proper drainage facilities.

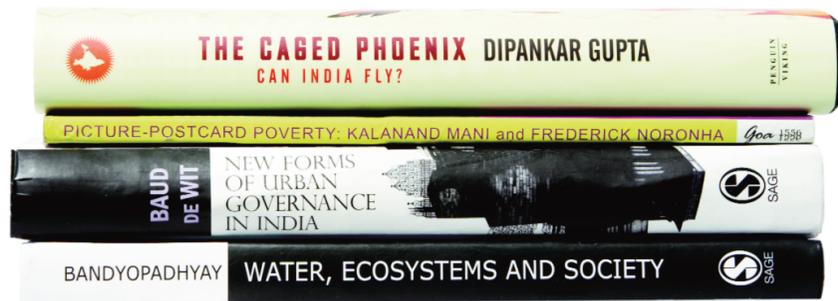
Some of the stakeholders of the sustainable rural tourism development project have been trained in organic farming. Realising the immense potential of adventure tourism in Anegundi, equipment for adventure sports has been given to villagers so that they can promote water sports, camping, rock climbing and bouldering. Special customised packages like bird watching trails, swimming in a natural lake have been devised for the less energetic. Bicycles can be hired for travel. Coracle rides across the Tungabhadra River are organized. The project has provided numerous employment opportunities to the local people, enhancing their lives and

(Continued from previous page)

and housekeeping," says Shama.

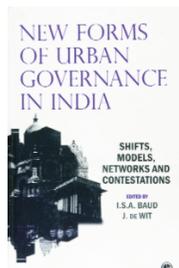
The driving force behind most of these unique programmes for the economic empowerment of villagers is Shama Pawar. The main activities and achievements of TKT are riverside landscaping, beautification of four streets and the village centre, a sculptural garden, development of parks and fencing and improvement of roads within panchayat limits. Streets have solar lights and signages installed in prominent spots indicate the facilities available in the village.

Another highlight is an inscription in the village centre in front of Gagan Mahal, a 16th century structure which details the history and mythology of Anegundi. An interesting aspect of the rural tourism project is the display and distribu-



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

Random shelf help



NEW FORMS OF URBAN GOVERNANCE IN INDIA
SHIFTS, MODELS, NETWORKS, CONTESTATIONS
Edited: ISA Baud and J De Wit
Sage
Rs 850

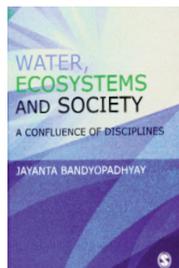
Indian cities have been trying to decentralise governance in fits and starts since the 1990s. This book examines whether such efforts have improved local governance and got citizens to participate. The authors evaluate if partnerships of the state with the private sector, development agencies, NGOs and communities have improved service delivery and included the poor. Unlike the global experience, Indian cities have tried mostly local partners.

Part One has research papers on how decentralisation has taken place. M Pinto focuses on Mumbai. J De Wit, N Nainan and S Palnitkar look at the performance of Ward Committees. A Ghosh and M Mitra examine West Bengal's Ward Committees. N Nainan and ISA Baud write on the role of NGOs in Mumbai's decentralisation.

Part Two looks at multi-stakeholder arrangements in public services. ISA Baud and R Dhanalakshmi examine the performance of such arrangements in south India. Interestingly, these seem to have worked better for resident welfare associations than for the poor. Political leadership at a higher state level is needed for things to work for the poor. I Milbert writes on law, urban policies and the role of intermediaries in Delhi-where the voice of traders and the middle class overrides that of the slum dweller. Mumbai's solid waste management is analysed by S Redkar. There is a paper on Hyderabad's urban reforms.

Part Three is on contestations and urban governance. Only Kerala has functioning ward committees but the danger of being too local is that the wider perspective of the city is lost. Small ward committees work better. The mill lands of Mumbai and how industrial workers lost out completely is analysed and there is a paper on judicial activism and its links with the middle class in Delhi.

It seems the partnerships of the future will be



WATER, ECOSYSTEMS AND SOCIETY
A CONFLUENCE OF DISCIPLINES
Jayanta Bandopadhyaya
Sage
Rs 550

A must read for water activists, *sarkari* engineers and politicians. The author tackles crucial issues which have become contested terrain between peoples' movements, the state and industry – economics and water management, floods in Bihar, the controversial river-link project, and more. The author takes us through these mine-field issues and presents a rational, well researched argument in favour of an ecological, integrated approach to water. The book finds a middle ground.

The first chapter dwells on inter disciplinary research and identifies specific areas which we need to know more about like groundwater, surface water, holistic assessments of water related projects etc. The chapter analyses water management by the government and why we appear stuck in a grove.

Chapter 2 talks about the need to take an eco-hydrological as opposed to an engineering approach to floods and drought. The author analyses services provided by floods and the necessity of taking up the 'living with floods' approach. After all, there isn't any such thing as a foolproof flood management system.

Chapter 3 is on the role of economics in water management. Valuation and pricing, economic efficient use and allocation among competing demand are analysed. Of interest is ecological economics of water which assesses the role of water in economic development.

Chapter 4 discusses the river-link project. After looking into the issue from all sides the author concludes that the project will not fulfil its objectives of controlling floods, providing domestic water security and food security. Alternative options for doing all this already exist. Neither do we have comprehensive knowledge for the Himalayan component of the project.

'There can be



THE CAGED PHOENIX
CAN INDIA FLY?
Dipankar Gupta
Rs 550
Penguin Viking

THE euphoria over India's high growth rate over the past decade has slowly died down. Apart from the global recession, it is our poverty figures and human development indicators which have led to a sense of disquiet. High growth has not pulled people out of poverty and we continue to languish in backwardness.

Dipankar Gupta, professor at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in his book, *The Caged Phoenix*, explains why the India growth story has not translated into development for all. Combining fieldwork with academic rigour, he takes apart various reasons trotted out for India's inability to provide opportunity and development to the grassroots.

Your book says culture is not a reason for India's backwardness. Surely culture has some influence?

By explaining away India's poverty and economic backwardness on a cultural basis we ignore the vital shortcomings of our state in addressing the delivery of public goods - education, health, housing, energy and so on. All too often the poor are blamed for their misery. It is said they either produce too many children, or are caste ridden, or are superstitious, or cannot look beyond the village.

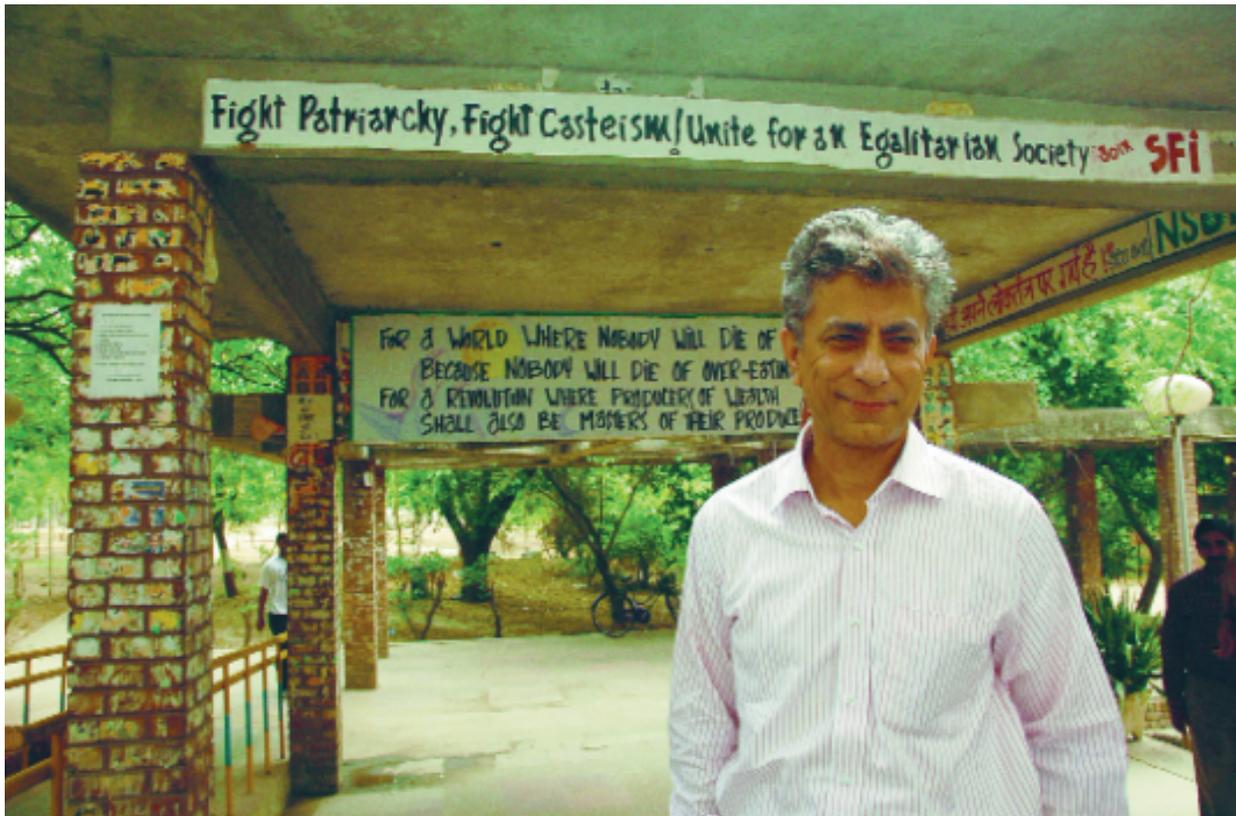
None of these features can stand the test of rigorous analysis. The poor in India travel long distances looking for jobs, any job; they live and work with people of different castes; they may be superstitious but they know how to keep these beliefs in their place so as not to interfere with their economic activity; their family size is directly related to their lifestyle and not to their mindset and they are not besotted by the village. Five billion railway tickets are sold every year. This could not be possible if the Indian villager was resolutely bound to the countryside.

Your book points out how the Indian village is imploding. Is the village facing extinction?

The rural economy is increasingly becoming non-agricultural. Today nearly half of rural net domestic income comes from activities other than agriculture. In a way one might say that apart from density of population, Indian villages may not qualify as rural any more. But they are still there as empirical realities though their

no substitute for governance, activist State'

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Dipankar Gupta, Professor, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, JNU

rural essence, which is agriculture, is being rapidly hollowed out. Indian villagers, consequently, want to run away to cities faster than the cities are ready for them.

Should the focus of development be on reviving the Indian village?

Poverty in rural India can be overcome largely by addressing issues of urban poverty. The percentage of people below the poverty line is much lower in urban India and the average urban income is double that of the villager. Further, in terms of electricity and water, the urban poor fare much better. But the issue goes much deeper. Agriculture can develop only if it functions as an industry. This cannot happen as long as small plots of land are cultivated by small farmers. Only when there is large-scale agriculture can productivity go up. For this the number of people dependent on farming must decrease. They should have the confidence to lease out their lands to large operators and move to the cities. They must have the necessary connections outside the village so that the vicissitudes of urban life do not become unbearable or intimidating for them.

Only when there is large-scale agriculture can productivity go up. For this the number of people dependent on farming must decrease.

Do we need a much more activist state?

This is why we need an activist state and not a rolled back state. An activist state will provide social insurance so that the poor villager no longer has to depend on kin and clan. It is this dependence that does not allow the villager to sever ties with the village and head for the cities without looking back. This is because it is the kin-clan network that provides the villager with the necessary

social insurance that is needed when times are hard. When the state actively provides public goods at quality levels to the public the villager can leave the village and agricultural productivity can go up. Agriculture will then function like an industry.

Your book appears to be ambivalent on the role of NGOs and multilateral agencies involved in development. What do you think NGO priorities should be?

Good NGOs are usually driven by a sense of desperation at the utter helplessness of the people around them. Where the state is a functioning one, there are few NGOs. This explains the lack of NGOs in the West and the over abundance of

them in developing countries. Bangladesh is practically NGO country. Such a situation of state inactivity also spurs the wrong kind of NGOs as well. For a durable public-private partnership the best option is for NGOs to help the government in monitoring and auditing its delivery programmes. But for this the government must take the first step. Otherwise, NGOs will continue to work and create little islands of hope but not enough to change the country. No NGO can run hospitals even at the district level for the public.

Elections now reveal that ministers who perform on development do get re-elected. But public discourse continues to focus on caste, religion. How do we change public discourse?

Public discourses on caste, religion, etc. continue

because their worth still exists among those who want to make their stay in office as lucrative as possible. We can change the current discourse by calling the bluff on such arguments. Instead of asking the question: why caste matters, we should point out how caste does not matter at the level of the voter.

In any constituency above the gram sabha or even at zilla level, electoral calculations on caste grounds fail for there are too many castes that jostle against each other. In such conditions, even if one is a diehard casteist, very rarely will such a person find a person to vote for who satisfies the caste criterion. There are too many castes and not enough viable candidates. So empirically, at the voter level, caste cannot be the determining factor.

Even in places that are considered Yadav strongholds, this caste is hardly ever more than 20 per cent. Usually the percentage is between 12 to 15 per cent. West UP is considered to be a Jat stronghold, but Jats only make up about 6 per cent in most of this region. Yadavs top their presence in Muzaffarnagar by making for about 8 per cent of the population.

If one looks carefully at the places Mayawati won in 2007, it will be easily apparent that caste is not the explanatory variable. But intellectuals are equally to blame for setting up the caste bogey. Politicians like this line of thinking and encourage it for then delivery will be of little consequence and they can choose to give tickets to their favourites which are drawn on caste lines.



SUDHARAK OLWE

An old man from the slums pulls up his chair on the railway tracks for a breath of fresh air in Mumbai. These tracks are rarely used by trains.



SUDHARAK OLWE

Cesspools and slush in a Mumbai slum. This is the world of poor children.

Big Bang for fair trade

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

ON 9 May, World Fair Trade Day, Kolkata witnessed a Big Bang cultural mela which went on for a week. Big Bang's focus was on rural producers and artisans pushed to the margins by global markets. Inaugurated by the city's Mayor, Bikash Bhattacharya, the mela started with the rhythmic rolling of drums. 'Beat Poverty, Beat Climate Change, Beat the Economic Crisis' was the slogan. There was an exhibition of handcrafted products at the Sasha and Silence outlets, a photography exhibition, a film festival at the ICCR complex and finally a panel discussion on fair trade.

Most of all the focus was on the significance of trading fairly with millions of marginalised producers in developing countries. The economies of the rich have grown on the backs of developing countries, by accessing cheap labour, cheap raw materials and commodities from under nourished nations.

Take organic produce. At a time when shopping malls and health food marts ride the organic wave in the West, farmers in developing countries are deprived of the opportunity of accessing such markets. Stringent organic certification is demanded from them. This is an expensive, time consuming affair, out of the reach of small and marginal farmers who make up 80 per cent of agricultural producers in India. So, you can be an organic farmer, but you may not be able to sell your produce in global markets.

Similarly other products from developing countries face trade barriers set up in the guise of stringent environmental, health or social standards. Terms of trade need to be fair.

"We no longer have the option of keeping our eyes closed to issues of poverty, trade inequity, unmitigated greed, all of which have contributed to global recession and global warming. The Big Bang of protest is meant to take viewers beyond the suffering of farmers compelled to commit suicide," said Suwendu Chatterjee of Drik India, co-sponsors of the event and curators of the photography exhibition.

The photography exhibition displayed pictures of closed factories that have destroyed the lives of once self-respecting textile workers, a burgeoning tourism industry that threatens to uproot subsistence farmers in Ladakh, an industrialization that is forcing the poor to abandon their farms. Some pictures showed overcrowded slums and displacement caused by rising sea levels in the Sunderbans. The cultural mela sent a strong message that climate change and unfair trade were closely linked.



KUSHAL RAY

Subsistence farmers marketing their vegetables in Ladakh. Their land will soon be



PRASHANT PANJIAR

Children playing on land overlooking tanneries in industrial Kanpur. Respiratory ailments are the bane of this industrial town.



ZISHAAN AKBAR LATIF

Construction worker on a site. Workers toil for hours at a stretch in cities for a pittance

Hot summer, cool food

Dr G G GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



SUMMER season is called Grishma ritu in Ayurveda. Poetically speaking, in this season, the sun's rays are like the flowers of Atasi (Linseed), that is, light blue and very hot. The earth seems to burn with heat. Still, the breeze from the south west is a bit comfortable. Now that summer is in full swing, it is so hot and exhausting. Energy levels are drained out. Not only humans but animals and plants suffer from the effects of the scorching sun. Trees have no shade under them as the ripened leaves wither off. The leaves, bark and entwining creepers are all dry.

Water in the rivers, lakes, ponds etc reduce and many reservoirs dry out due to the strong heat. The sun's rays being very hot withdraws the strength of the earth during this season.

So choose the right kind of foods, according to the climate. Mother Nature provides us with ample foods that are specific to a season and are healthy. In this way, you can adapt your body to seasonal changes.

Eating light is the mantra for summer. This helps the heart and digestive system to remain healthy and function well. The heat of the summer seeps into our system and saps our strength leaving us dehydrated. Ayurveda provides us with a diet and regimen which helps to avoid dehydration and maintains liveliness. During this season one should avoid exercise, basking in the sun, food with pungent, sour and salt taste, food which is hot and those things which produce heat. Alcohol should be avoided. If taken it should be in a very minimal quantity that too with a large amount of water, otherwise it will produce edema, laxity of the joints, burning sensation and delusion.

Water is the best option to quench thirst and keep the body cool. High humidity levels will not allow sweat to evaporate quickly. This prevents the body from releasing heat in an efficient manner. Water helps hydrate the body. So drink water even if you are not thirsty.

Do not drink very chilled liquids as they don't really help to cool you down in summer. Chilled liquids make you cool for some time but drinking cold liquids actually leads to a slight constriction of blood vessels in the skin and thus decreases heat loss and hence is not advisable for cooling down.

Syrups, thin gruels prepared with corn flour and sugar which are very sweet in taste and smell, kept in fresh mud pots, are the ideal drinks. The food that we consume should be sweet, cold and liquid. Meat of animals and birds living in desert-like regions are alright. Rice, milk, ghee, grapes, tender coconut, can be eaten. One can use fresh fruit juices, lemon juice and thin buttermilk to replenish the fluids that are lost due to sweat.



Include a lot of fruits and vegetables in the form of salads and juices preferably without sugar in your diet. Use tulsi seeds in your drinks as this has a cooling effect.

Eat light, nutritious and non-fatty meals. Reduce intake of heavy vegetables and fruits like spinach, radish, hot peppers, onions, garlic, beetroot and pineapple. Minimise the intake of dried fruits. Cut down intake of fried foods like vadas, samosas, chips, bhajies, etc. Fat has a thermal effect.

Avoid caffeinated or carbonated beverages and those high in sugar. All these drinks contain preservatives, colours and sugars. Avoid sugary foods especially honey and molasses and stick to natural sugars available from fruits and veggies. They are acidic in nature and act as diuretics. Such foods cause loss of fluids through urine. Excessive intake of soft drinks increase phosphorous levels in the blood and in turn displace calcium from bones making them porous and brittle. It also causes plaque on teeth, kidney stones, arthritis and problems related to bones.

A floral head dress of garlands prepared from the petals of lotus and lily are good. Wear light coloured cotton clothes and cover the exposed areas. Use fragrances like sandal, lavender and rose that are cooling.

Try to stay in cooler places like beautiful lakes, wells, rivers and forests which are cool and spread pleasant fragrances.

Ideally, sleep in places equipped with water coolers during the day and at night in an open area with sweet smelling flowers all around.

Pitta pacifying lifestyle and diet is recommended in summer as Pitta will be aggravated in this season. One can go for Pitta pacifying treatment like Ksheeradhara, takradhara (buttermilk), Jaladhara and mud bath during summer.

PATHYA - FOOD TO EAT

● **Grains:** New rice, red rice, shashti rice

● **Vegetables:** Bottle gourd, bhindi, snake gourd

● **Legumes:** Tur dal, moong dal, masur dal

● **Meat:** Goat, duck, deer, rabbit

● **Tubers:** Potato, tapioca, suran, kamalkanda

● **Fruits:** Orange, sweet lime, mango, banana, cucumber, sugarcane, custard apple, grape

● **Milk Products:** Cream, milk, butter, thin buttermilk, piyusha

● **Water:** Rose water, matka water (water from earthen pot)

APATHYA - FOOD TO AVOID

● **Grains:** White millet, ragi, and barley

● **Vegetables:** Brinjal, drumstick, bitter gourd, fenugreek, red pumpkin

● **Legumes:** Hyacinth bean, pea, and sweet pea.

● **Meat:** Dry meat, roasted meat, and fish

● **Tuber:** Turnip, garlic, onion

● **Fruits:** Black plum, jack fruit, hog plum, wood apple

● **Milk Products:** Thick buttermilk, kadhi, lassi (salty)

● **Other things:** Mustard, asafoetida, lavang, mint, sesame, chilies

● **Water:** Hot water

Yoga heals the alcoholic

SAMITA RATHOR

"The only thing I have ever found that will cut through the fog and get an alcoholic's attention is pain. Deep, pervasive and unrelenting spiritual pain. Over time it only gets worse, it never gets better on its own. Never deny an alcoholic the opportunity to suffer; it may be their only hope. There is always hope."

--An anonymous alcoholic

MILLIONS of people around the world suffer the aftermath of alcohol. There are many ways of overcoming this disease. The first and foremost is the desire to stop. This feeling can come only with a determination from within. As the saying goes, "You can take a horse to the water, but you can't make him drink." Once this hurdle is crossed, the next step will automatically lead to an inner self enquiry. Ask yourself why you consume alcohol and then see what the root cause is. You will realise that drinking is merely the symptom, not the problem.

Alcohol gives you a transitory high. A yogic way of life is essentially about a sense of balance between the body, mind and soul, and discovering a place within yourself where you can attain this. This inner focus aids in creating an awareness of where you stand with yourself and your levels of determination. Such awareness can be carried through your entire existence by analyzing situations in your life that need attention. This pattern is not solely related to drinking but to other aspects of being as well. More emotional equilib-

SOUL VALUE

rium along with less time for drinking by virtue of yoga practice can help to steadily repair nearly any addiction. It's a matter of discipline, compliance and commitment. These ideas are very much part of the philosophy of yoga.

A genuine yoga practitioner does not consume alcohol. A significant reason is that alcohol is considered to lower the vibrations of the subtle body. The aim of a yogic lifestyle is to increase the vibrational level to unfold the higher self and alcohol consumption does exactly the opposite by taking a person away from his real self, by retarding and slowing down these vibrational levels. Yoga also considers alcohol to have an adverse effect on the central nervous system, and in particular, the brain. The integrity of the central nervous system is considered very important by a yoga practitioner, since one of the goals of yoga is to improve the health of this system. Much of the growth of yoga is achieved through this fundamental communication system.

As we mentioned earlier, the first and foremost step is stopping alcohol consumption followed by detoxification. Stopping is the easy part. It is the after effects that need a lot of grit, spirit and muscle. Yoga can definitely be a catalyst here. A balanced diet with adequate exercise like walking, asanas, deep breathing, relaxation and quality sleep play an important part in restoring the

body's balance. There are certain asanas that can strengthen weak organs but such asanas can be prescribed only after checking the person thoroughly. The person leaving alcohol should be physically in a position to practice the asanas which will happen over a period of time as strength is regained. Physical over stimulation during this period should be avoided. The person needs to be essentially bundled with love, empathy and understanding from the surrounding family.

Alcohol produces a feeling of lightness in the beginning. Later it can impair vision and lead to coordination problems. Human cell membranes have a high absorption capacity in relation to alcohol. As a result, once alcohol enters the blood stream, it has a tendency to get into each and every biological cell, tissue and organ of the body system.

Alcohol is known to first stimulate and then shortly afterwards depress the central nervous system, with a range of side effects. This is capable of damaging every organ and system in the body. Regularly consuming alcohol is correlated with an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease, liver damage, depression, anxiety and several other illnesses.

It's worth having an open mind and giving it some serious consideration. What is the real reason for consuming alcohol? Maybe there is an answer, maybe there isn't. You're not going to know for sure till you give it a shot!

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PRODUCTS

VOTE KHADI

Delhi-based designer Sunaina Suneja is an ardent advocate of khadi. She realized that the recent parliamentary elections were a great opportunity to promote the fabric and remind people of its symbolism. Aptly titled 'The Election Collection', Suneja's summer line was inspired by the slogan, 'show you care, cast your ballot, make your mark and what better way to do so than by wearing khadi.'

"I think designers like me need to display a commitment to responsible fashion. It's important we use our skills to make a statement and inspire people. I wanted to do something for elections as soon as the dates were announced. We need to keep up campaigns that urge people to participate," said 52-year-old Sunaina who has been trying to get the government to declare one day a year as National Khadi Day.

'The Election Collection', still on shelves at her small, festively decorated boutique, Raj Creations, in Hauz Khas Village is divided in two parts - Politician Khadi vs Aam Aadmi ka Khadi. The focus is on white muslin



khadi. Sourced from weavers in Orissa, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal, this white muslin, Sunaina says, is stylish, lends itself to great cuts and is perfect for the summer. There are churidars, small kurtis, long kurtas, skirts and dresses to choose from. But, the aam politician might not find a cut that suits his style. "All they really need to wear is their heart on their sleeves," says Sunaina.

--by Shreyasi Singh

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**Jayavidhya, Kalasamudram Village,
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Earning through Income Generation	800 to 1500	1000 to 2100	1500 to 2500

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