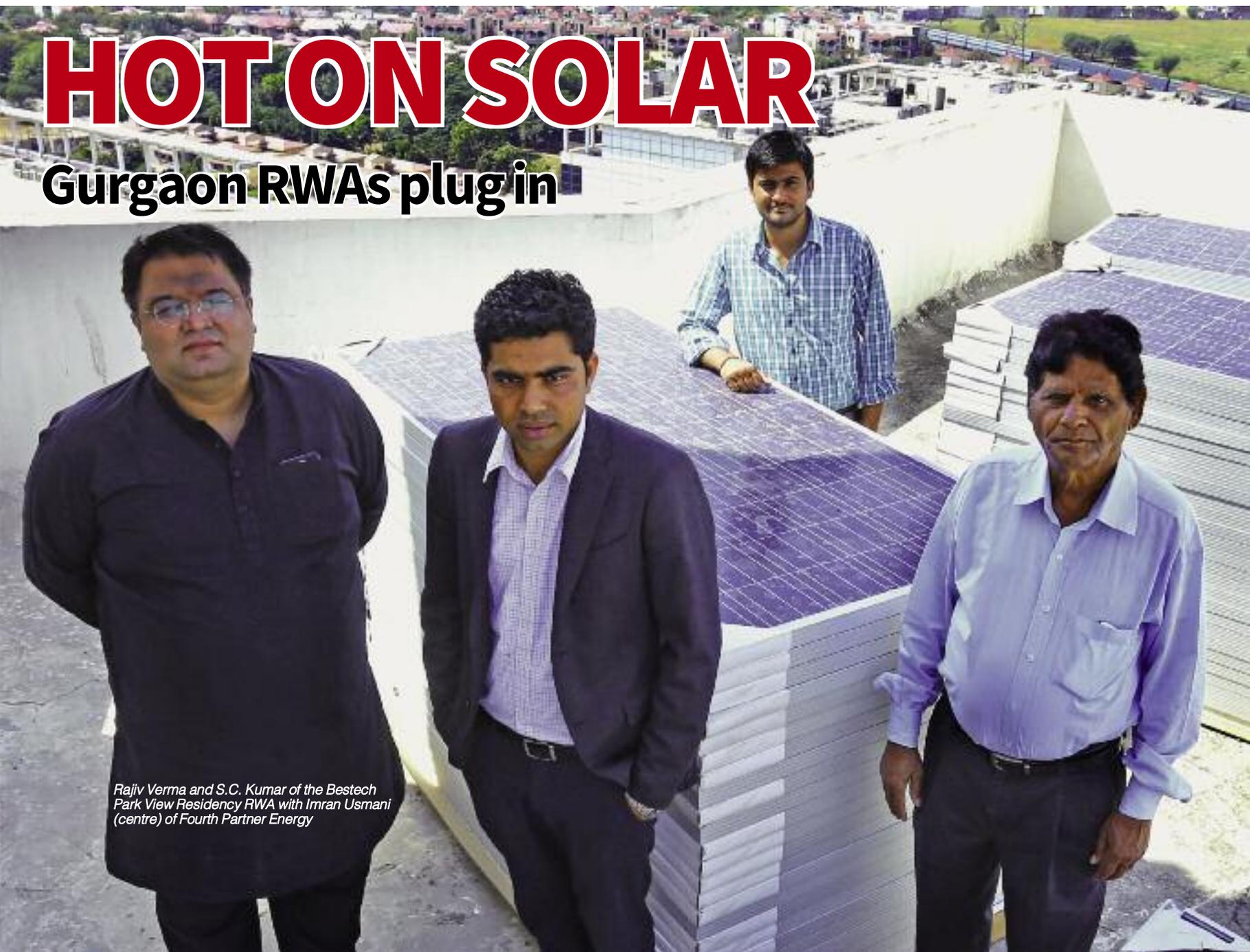


Civil Society

HOT ON SOLAR

Gurgaon RWAs plug in



Rajiv Verma and S.C. Kumar of the Bestech Park View Residency RWA with Imran Usmani (centre) of Fourth Partner Energy

JNU AND CAMPUS KARMA

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AAP TO FIGHT CIVIC POLLS

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J&K CHARM WANING

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INTERVIEW

'ABOLISH CONTROL OVER POLICE FOR REFORMS TO WORK'

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MODERNISING AYURVEDA

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RETURN TO NIYAMGIRI

Page 27

2 FILMS ON A JOURNALIST

Pages 29-30



Skill training provides employment for rural youth.

After I graduated from college, I wanted to work and support my parents who get a meagre income as daily wage agriculture labourers. The only opportunity for employment in my village was working as a farm hand that was poorly paid seasonal work. Without any job prospects and income , I was depressed to be financially burden on my family.

SST team help me in finding a suitable job for my qualifications. They enrolled me in a 10 days youth development training program in soft skills. Once I completed the training, I got a job in a KFC restaurant in Mysore. Now I have a regular income of ₹ 7000 per month. This helps me to meet my need and also contribute to family income.

Mr. Chaluva Nayaka
Kembal village, Mysore district, Karnataka.

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HOT ON SOLAR

Government policy is encouraging Gurgaon's consumers to switch to solar power. Two gated communities have opted for captive generation to meet a significant part of their consumption.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Solar shines bright

SOLAR power's time has come in India. It is so because of many disaggregated pieces of the bigger picture falling into place. But much credit must also go to the power minister, Piyush Goyal, and the bureaucrats of his ministry who have worked hard to create an enabling environment. The states have found it easier to follow through and real work has been done.

Scaling up alternatives is always a tough number. Governments have a key role. It is not enough to set targets. Finding ways of achieving them is important. Nothing short of a mission mode will work because procedures have to be cleaned up, citizens encouraged and, as in the case of solar, entrepreneurs brought in.

Our cover story this month tells the stories of two resident welfare associations in Gurgaon which have decided to adopt solar power in a big way. Now Gurgaon, as everyone knows, is in a huge mess. Builders have run wild. Politicians have colluded. There is no real infrastructure to speak of. Citizens have little confidence in the local administration or the state government. The municipality, with an elected mayor and councillors, hasn't found its feet and will most likely keep stumbling along for some time to come.

But solar is happening in Gurgaon and is likely to change the way people generate and access power in an age defined by disaggregation. It is no minor achievement. If solar can find takers, perhaps so can local sewage treatment plants and segregation of garbage by households.

So with this cover story, like so many others we have done in the past, we hold out hope. But let us not be fooled. Citizen action is no substitute for robust governance.

If you were watching lawyers affiliated to the BJP running amok in the Patiala House courts in New Delhi recently chances are that you would have wondered what the Delhi Police was doing. How could journalists, teachers of JNU and the main litigant, Kanhaiya Kumar, be attacked so brazenly is perhaps a question you asked. The answer lies in police reforms. We have for you an interview with Prakash Singh, a veteran of the IPS, who moved the Supreme Court all of 10 years ago and got a directive on making the police more professional by freeing it up from excessive political control.

In 10 years, some things have happened, Prakash Singh tells us, but they have mostly been by way of state-level legislation to circumvent the directive of the Supreme Court. Politicians simply don't want to let go control over the police. It is a weakness that cuts across political parties and the nation pays a heavy price for it. So weakened is the force that many things which could be done to improve working conditions and morale also don't get done though they don't come under the purview of politicians.

The developments at JNU have brought campus life into sharp focus. We are of the view that campuses should be free places where students are allowed to push boundaries in ways that they may not be later in life. It is so elsewhere in the free world. Beginning this issue we will be bringing you stories on campus life, which we believe, deserves to be given space and respect.

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Himalaya touches more lives in rural India through a **Community Health Initiative**.

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Through a health program disbursed through a partnership with ten local government schools we have overseen the basic health of over **1,500 school children**.

With this active initiative, Himalaya is making concerted efforts to bring wellness into more homes, healing more lives and spreading the **gift of good health** far and wide.



IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



state government's decision to sell off prime agricultural land to Jindal Industries for an international school in Nanisar village in Almora district.

But the people's resolve will force the state to budge as it did when Raturi fought against stone-crushers in Maletha village in Tehri district, a story covered by your magazine.

Suresh Thapaliyal

P-PAS wins

Congratulations to Madhu Sudan Padhi and his team for winning the national e-governance award for citizen-centric services. P-PAS is a model for other states. Not only does it give relief to farmers, it also makes procurement efficient and free of corruption. The agricultural department must take advantage of this ready-made delivery system for farmers.

Saikat Panigrahi

Dalit rights

Bharat Dogra's article, 'Land rights elude Dalits', was an impressive and informative write-up. Since I don't have his address, please inform him of my deep appreciation.

D.K. Oza

Northeast films

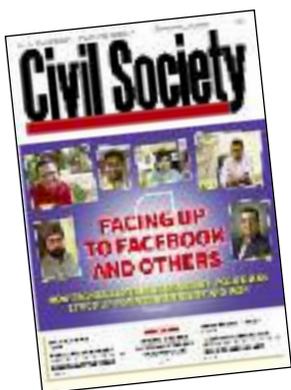
It is very difficult for films that tackle real issues in our country to catch public attention. Saibal Chatterjee is doing a great social service. There is no other place I can get such information.

But he should also tell us from where we can buy the film to see it.

Zara Sachdeva

Letters should be sent to
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LETTERS



simply, got public support and focused their attention on the regulator. Campaigners for public causes can learn a lot from them.

Ramakant

Triple talaq

Zakia Soman and her group, the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan, have taken up a critical cause – making Muslim Personal Law more progressive. Let's hope this time political parties think of national interest and support them. The Supreme Court will rule wisely and in an enlightened manner. Reform will be meaningful if Muslim society embraces it.

Shakila Nag

Oh, Kanhaiya!

A picture speaks a thousand words and your photo essay on the JNU row captures the entire episode perfectly. So much so that it tells the entire story, capturing the onslaught of the mighty State on a citadel of higher learning and scholarship. I am a proud JNU scholar.

However, the situation was made worse by inward-looking politicians who went to its campus for their narrow ends, especially the Congress, forgetting the similar onslaught taking place on people fighting for their rights in Uttarakhand. This is my state, ruled by the very same party, where they have arrested Sameer Raturi, who is fighting against the

Net neutrality

Thanks for the cover story, 'Facing up to Facebook'. The article was very lucidly written and explained everything one needed to know. The Save the Internet campaign has effectively stopped commercial interests from exploiting the Internet. But vigilance is the price we pay for freedom.

Ranjan Lal

Today, thanks to technology, the world is finally creating spaces like the Internet which are meant for everyone. This is true democracy at work. We should never, ever, let anyone control our access to this space.

Asha Das

I would like to congratulate Kiran Jonnalagadda, Apar Gupta, Rohin Dharmakumar and Raman Chima of Save The Internet for the manner in which they led this campaign. They kept a cool head, explained things

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‘Police reforms need another abolition like zamindaris’

Prakash Singh on the need for an independent force

Civil Society News
New Delhi

IT is 10 years since the Supreme Court ruled in favour of police reforms, but recent events in New Delhi, Haryana and elsewhere show that little has changed. The archaic Police Act of 1861, which was introduced by the British, is still in use. The police are hampered by lack of manpower, basic infrastructure and authority. Politicians continue to exercise influence on the police.

On the other hand, the need for a modern force that can deal with contemporary problems has only grown. From terrorism to cyber crime, the challenges are many. The police also need to cope with present-day trends in society.

The Supreme Court, in September 2006, issued a series of directives to governments to improve the efficiency and accountability of the police and ensure political parties did not unduly interfere with police functioning.

These guidelines included fixed tenure for police officers, transparent selection of state police chiefs, separation of investigation from law and order, the establishment of a Police Complaints Authority and a new Police Act.

Prakash Singh, a veteran police officer of the 1959 batch, had moved the Supreme Court. We spoke to him on what his petition has achieved and how the police can be modernised to be more effective.

It is nearly 10 years since the Supreme Court ordered states to implement police reforms. What has changed?

I think people now generally understand that this country needs police reforms. Maybe they are not articulating their support or coming out on the streets for it, maybe it's not an election issue as yet, but the fact that India desperately needs police reforms is sinking in. The intelligentsia is quite conscious of the need for it.

Ordinary people have started understanding that there is something called police reforms. My batch-

mate, K.V. Rama Rao, joined politics and was a minister in Chandrababu Naidu's government in undivided Andhra Pradesh. He told me, 'You may not be aware of this, but even during election campaigns your name is sometimes mentioned in remote public meetings in some remote corners of Andhra.' At one meeting, where he was present, the speaker said that this government had not introduced police reforms which were advocated by Prakash Singh, our party will support it. The speaker has never met me. But he talked of Prakash Singh and police reforms.

There are some NGOs in different corners of the country who are now raising their voice for implementation of the Supreme Court's directives on police reforms in their respective states. There is Common Cause, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Public Centre for Governance in Mumbai, a small NGO in Lucknow and NGOs in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The issue is not as yet vocal enough to catch public attention at national level. In the Supreme Court any number of lawyers are supporting this cause. I could mention Fali Nariman and Soli Sorabjee.

I don't think lawyers in the Patiala Court who beat up journalists and Kanhaiya Kumar support police reforms?

No, that was a different breed of lawyers. I am talking about socially conscious lawyers.

‘If you go into the details you will find that the states have subverted and diluted the directives of the Supreme Court.’



Prakash Singh: 'Living conditions and working conditions of the

But in terms of reforms sought by the Supreme Court there has been no progress at all?

You see, state governments had to implement six of the reforms and the Centre only one. Now, in all the states I have been to, while they may not be supportive of police reforms or of implementing the court's directives in letter and spirit, they are very conscious of the need to keep their papers in order so that they are not caught by the Supreme Court for violating the directives and then hauled up for contempt.

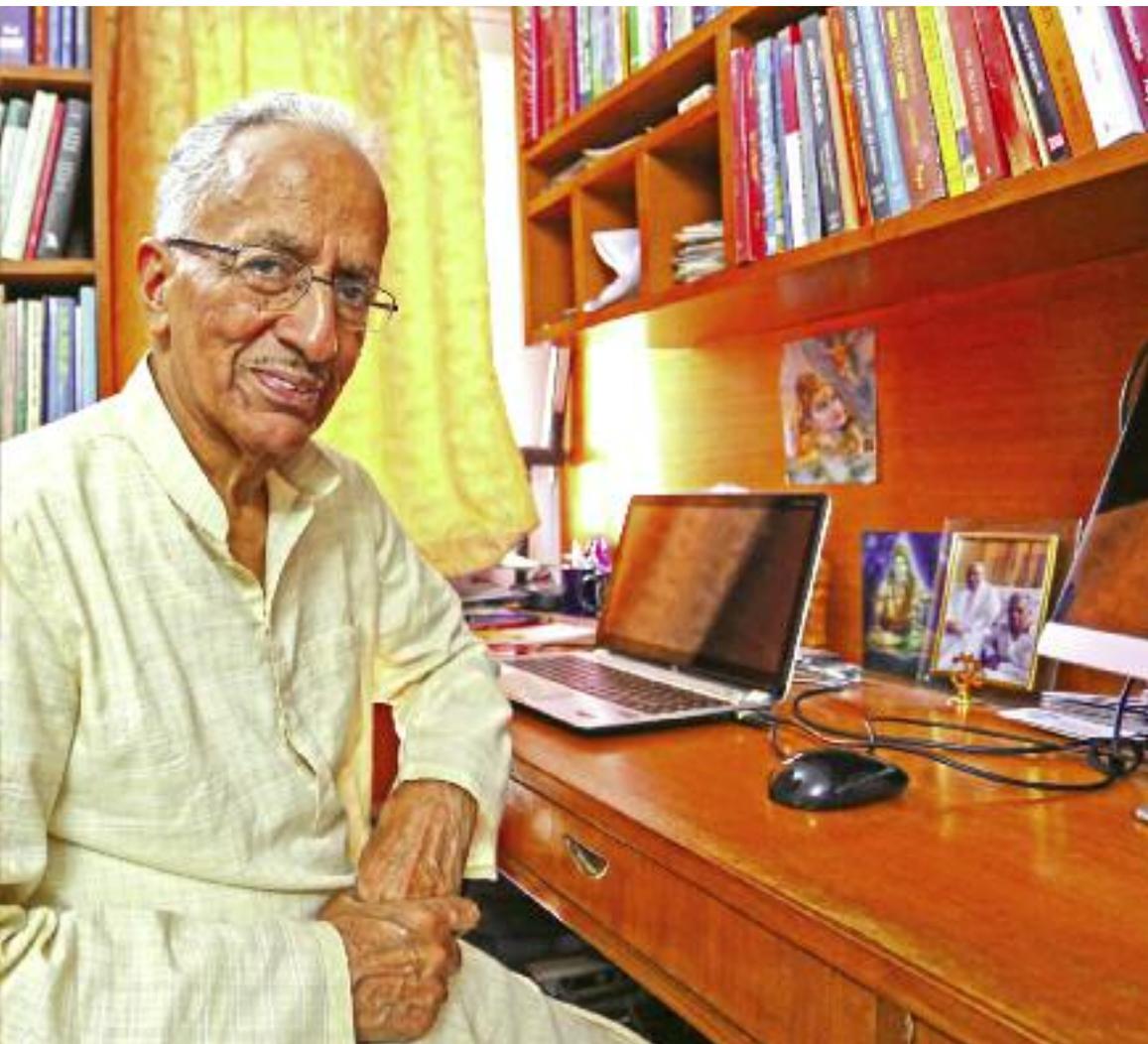
For example, one of the court's directives says that every state should set up a Police Establishment Board to decide the postings of officers up to the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP). For higher ranks the state government can decide but the board can make recommendations and those should be given due weightage.

Now, whenever they have to post a DSP, they do the posting on their own. Then they send the list to the board and ask its members to put their signatures on it. So they are simply trying to keep their papers in order, just in case somebody goes to the court and says the board was not consulted therefore this is ultra vires.

Seventeen states have passed laws purportedly in compliance with the Supreme Court's directives, but their real intention has been to legitimise the status quo. These states are the most difficult to deal with.

The judiciary has the power to step in when there is a legislative vacuum. But they cannot legislate. They can give a set of directives. This is what the Supreme Court did. While giving such directives the Supreme Court added a caveat that these directives will hold good till the Centre and state governments pass laws on the subject. So this proviso is

AJIT KRISHNA



'police are terrible'

there in the Supreme Court order of 2006.

The states that were extra smart — and Bihar was in the forefront — found this sentence the most relevant. They said, to hell with police reforms. We will legislate and give legal cover to the status quo. So you legislate and tell the Supreme Court that now we have legislated as per your directives at least on paper. If the directive included setting up of a Police Establishment Board the state tells the court, yes, we have set it up, here are its functions.

But if you go into the details you will find that they have completely subverted and diluted the directives of the Supreme Court.

Could you give us a specific example of that?

For example, there should be a State Security Commission, according to the Supreme Court's directives. This commission is supposed to act as a buffer between the state government and the police. They are expected to ensure that the state government does not interfere in the day-to-day functioning of the police and the police, on the other hand, functions within the limits of law. The commission is also supposed to lay down the broad policies which the department will follow in its day-to-day performance.

Now, for such a body to be really effective it needs to have members who are non-partisan, have integrity and high principles. The Supreme Court has laid down what the composition of the board should be. There were three choices before them: one composition was recommended by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), another by the Ribiero Committee and the third by the Sorabjee Committee.

'There are things we can do on our own and politicians will not interfere. But it is not happening. You can blame the police for it.'

If you analyse the composition under all three heads, you find broadly that it followed the principle of letting the executive retain leadership of the commission. The chief minister or home minister will be the chairman of the body and it will include the chief secretary, home secretary and the DGP. It will also have some members from civil society, including retired judges of the Supreme Court or High Court or a member of the NHRC or a person recommended by the Lokayukta and other distinguished persons. The Supreme Court said the composition should be evenly balanced between members of the government and members of civil society.

Now what did the states do? They said, alright, we have to take some members from civil society. So they chose their stooges. If they had to take somebody from the judiciary, they took judges who would not go against them. So they have completely diluted the composition of the State Security Commission.

The Supreme Court said that any recommenda-

tion by the commission should be binding on the state government. But the states said it would be just recommendatory. That is as good as not having the State Security Commission.

So you have a State Security Commission but it is a pliant one?

It's a farce. It's a toothless tiger. It is just compliance on paper.

Would you say the impediment to adequate change is lack of political will?

Not only lack of political will. I would prefer to use the phrase 'political executive'. By that I mean the political establishment and the bureaucracy. Police reforms in India require another *zamindari* abolition. The *zamindars* would never let go of their lands on their own. The government had to forcibly deprive them of it. The political establishment and the bureaucracy don't want to lose their hold on the police. I am not saying they should not be directing or guiding the police. But my objection is to not giving the police even functional autonomy.

What do you suggest should be done?

Police reforms have two dimensions. One is the external dimension which is very important and covers 65 per cent of the functioning of the police. The second is the internal dimension which covers around 30-35 per cent of their work. The latter is within our power. Police officers, if they decide, can start working on it.

What is that?

For example, there are severe constraints on the registration of reports. But a beginning has to be made. The Delhi Police chief, B.S. Bassi, faced a lot of criticism but he has shown the way. If you study Delhi's crime graph, it has taken a sharp upward trajectory. The problem with registering cases is that the public isn't prepared for a sharp escalation in crime records. The press jumps at rising crime figures. The opposition jumps at the chance to attack the government in the Assembly. So the ruling establishment doesn't want crime figures to go up. But crime should be registered and Delhi Police has shown the way.

Then there is behaviour in the police station. Whether you register a case in five minutes or five hours, you can be courteous with the complainant. You can make him or her feel comfortable. A person should not feel, I am going to the police station, God knows what will happen to me. It is for us to remove that feeling.

This is an in-house effort.

Then there is corruption. Some is done under compulsion. There is also corruption that you do because your intentions are not transparent. But compulsion in corruption can be taken care of, and to that extent, corruption can be minimised.

Are you saying some reforms can be done internally?

Yes. Soon after police reforms were announced, I issued an open letter to police chiefs of different states. I requested them to see that it was disseminated down to the *thana* level. There are things we can do on our own without requiring any legislative sanction or a financial allotment and politicians will not interfere. But that is also not happening. You can blame the police for it.

Continued on page 8

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What about the working and living conditions of the police?

Living conditions and working conditions are terrible. I have been saying, at least start with a 12-hour shift. In the existing shift system you may be putting in 14 hours or 16 hours. I think officers who are in the field or in the police station and have to look after certain jurisdictions should not be working more than 12 hours. In the course of time, as manpower increases, it could be brought down to an eight-hour shift.

Apart from the Supreme Court guidelines there are a whole lot of things the political establishment can do while retaining power over the police. They can increase manpower. The UN yardstick is 222 per 100,000 people. We stand at around 180. At least we should have 200 police personnel for every 100,000 people.

Then there is shortage of vehicles and lack of communication. Even today there are police stations in this country which have no wireless or even a telephone. Can you imagine? There is also an acute shortage of forensic labs. The only state that has done commendable work in this is Gujarat. We need small forensic labs at district level and larger ones at state level. Bigger states like Uttar Pradesh need at least two big forensic labs.

There is an acute shortage of housing for the police. The government is committed to providing 100 per cent accommodation to all staff but the level of satisfaction with the housing provided is very low.

And you would say in the absence of these structures we are creating a greater environment for corruption?

It creates a sense of frustration. Corruption is a later byproduct. To start with, you don't feel happy in the circumstances you are placed in. Police stations sometimes don't even have a reception room, tables, chairs, stationery or even petrol in the vehicle.

Government departments need the police. If the income tax department goes to raid somebody's house, they ask for the police. So does the excise department and the transport department. Without police protection, no department wants to move. These are all things governments can work on but nothing is moving forward.

What can break this logjam?

NGOs have to come forward in larger numbers in every state. The voice of the people has to be heard by our elected leaders. There are half-a-dozen NGOs working on this but, considering the dimensions of India and the complexities involved, at least 100 NGOs should come forward. Secondly, the media has to support the cause of police reforms. It plays an important role in deciding what the policies of the government should be. But the media is happier bashing the police for its faults, real or perceived.

The Supreme Court should also do some soul-searching. What is the point of issuing directives if you are not going to ensure their implementation? They ought to realise that they are exposing the judiciary to ridicule. These directives were issued 10 years ago. Why is the judiciary a silent spectator? Police officers too must implement internal reforms without waiting for orders. At least the police can be provided with infrastructure, manpower and better living and working conditions. ■

Dissent, politics and



Kanhaiya Kumar addressing a press conference after his release

Abida Khan
New Delhi

STUDENT politics has always been a seasonal story about who has won which union election and stuff like that. But in recent times campus life has been in the spotlight like never before. With the arrests at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) names like Kanhaiya, Anirban and Umar have made it to prime time. What may have passed as random oratory in years gone by, has now come to transfix the nation.

In this turbocharged atmosphere, questions have been raised over the significance of student politics, its scope, its impact on the academic life of a student and the funding of institutions like JNU with public money.

So, what is the real political atmosphere within JNU? Going beyond the headlines what are students saying? To start with, there are six significant student organisations that are both popular and big in terms of membership. They owe their allegiance to political parties like the CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML), the Congress and BJP. Leftist unions dominate the campus.

Kanhaiya Kumar is a member of the All India Students Federation (AISF) which is aligned with the CPI. Anirban Bhattacharya and Umar Khalid were members of the now defunct Democratic Students Union (DSU), ardently left in orientation.

There are also fringe groups and committees based on various issues and ideologies, for example, The New Materialists' group and the Gender Sensitisation Committee Against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH).

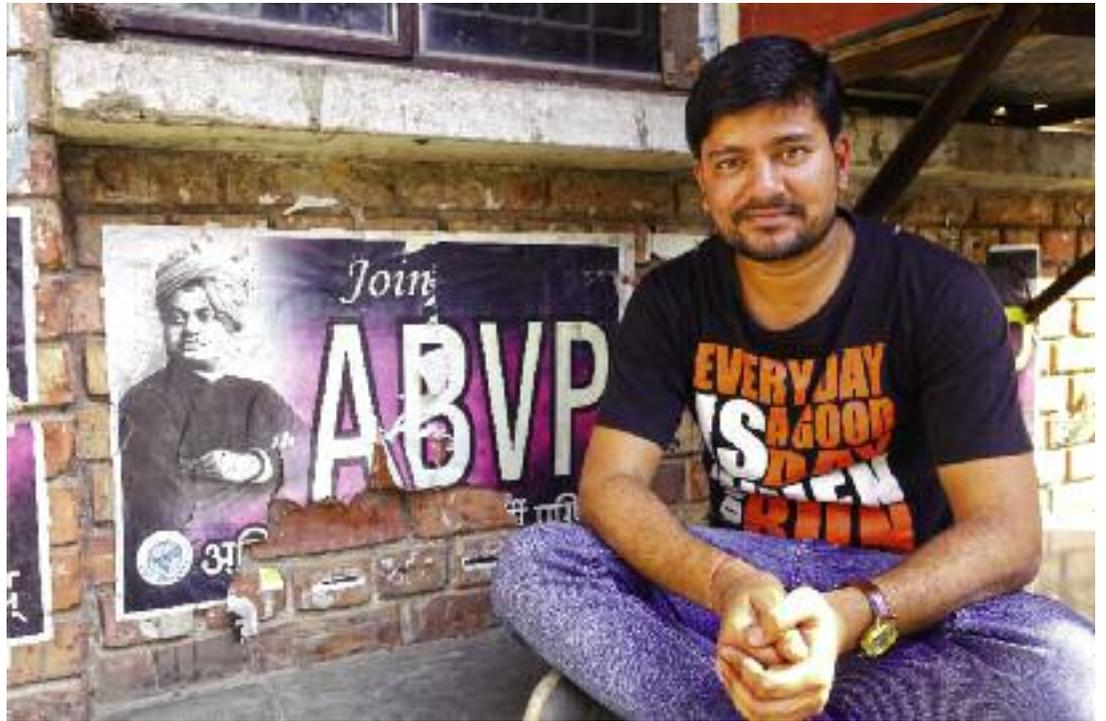
There are four members in the JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) — president, vice-president, general secretary and joint secretary. Apart from these main posts, councillors hailing from different student organisations are elected to represent each of the academic centres and schools of JNU.

Let's begin with the All India Students' Association (AISA). According to its website, it is a revolutionary students' movement with a firm presence on campuses throughout the country and has a vision of 'a new India and a new world'.

AISA national president and ex-JNUSU president Sucheta De explains, "AISA is a left student organisation, formed in 1991 when right-wing forces in the name of the Ram Mandir were dividing society.

campus karma at JNU

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA



Vijay Kumar of the ABVP: 'We are the ones actually being witch-hunted'



Sucheta De of AISA: 'We draw our ideals from peasant movements'



Aparajitha Raja of AISF

We organise students to democratise Indian campuses as well as Indian society."

De, 32, belongs to a middle-class family from West Bengal. She joined AISA in 2005. "I chose AISA over all other left groups because they believe that the structural exploitation of people needs to be challenged through organised forms of resistance by the Indian working class, poor and marginalised communities," says De. "We draw our ideals from peasant movements across India."

In terms of strength in numbers, AISA is the biggest union in JNU. However, in terms of popularity among left-leaning students, the Students Federation of India (SFI), Democratic Students Federation of India (DSF) and All-India Students

Federation (AISF) are strong contenders.

V. Lenin Kumar, organising committee convener of DSF and president of the Jawaharlal Nehru Students' Union (JNUSU), reveals he has been involved in student politics for over 15 years.

"DSF is a student organisation that we started in July 2012. We broke off from the SFI because of their intense ties with a national political party. I firmly believe that students movements should involve solely students. In the recent past, student movements stagnated for multiple reasons. Students were being pressured and directed by the big political parties over what to do and what not, what is good for students and what is not," says the 28-year-

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

old Lenin, who comes from a lower-middle class family in Chennai.

A student movement should be about the students and not the party, Lenin asserts. As the JNUSU president, Lenin organised the JNU protest against the Nirbhaya rape. He reiterates that although student organisations have often become puppets in the hands of national parties, not all hope is lost.



V. Lenin Kumar of the DSF

“Now, starting with the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), the movement is finally becoming one coalition, one student body. All universities are uniting in their fight, not led by any political party, and that is how student movements are supposed to be,” he says.

Young and vibrant, Aparajitha Raja, daughter of CPI leaders D. Raja and Annie Raja, says growing up amid leftist literature and discussions she chose left politics by default. She is active in the AISEF.

“Our organisation has also picked up issues like a common education system, fund cuts in education, saffronisation of education and how it’s related to communalism. So this is not just about politics out there, it very much affects our everyday life and how you perceive and read things,” says Aparajitha, who firmly believes that political activism sharpens one’s academic life instead of deadening it.

Aparajitha’s view is echoed by students on the JNU campus who see political awareness adding to their academic learning.

“In JNU we gain knowledge not just by attending classes. We read pamphlets, attend public meetings and debates. Our activism enriches and shapes our academic opinion on issues. Getting involved in political activism always enriches your world view and academic knowledge,” points out Lenin.

The Students Federation of India (SFI) was

founded in 1970 and is affiliated to the CPI(M). Last year it claimed it had 4.3 million members among school and university students throughout India.

Shatarupa Chakravarti, SFI leader and JNUSU councillor from the Social Studies School (SSS), explains, “In JNU, political activism helps students realise their role in society in a much larger sense. Students from JNU don’t just graduate, find a job and settle down. They actively take part in the struggles of the marginalised and discriminated-



Shatarupa Chakravarti of the SFI



Arnab Chakravarti, ex-ABVP

‘In JNU we read pamphlets, attend public meetings and debates. Our activism enriches and shapes our academic opinion.’

against communities. Our leader, Vijoo Krishnan, ex-JNUSU president, is now leading the All-India Kisan Sabha, which is majorly struggling for the rights of farmers in our country.”

Questions have also been raised on whether JNU has become a left hegemonic space, where students are burdened with left diktats and pressured into activism.

Vijay Kumar, councillor from the School of International Studies (SIS), belongs to the Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). He says ABVP supporters are discriminated against in an atmosphere where leftist groups prevail.

“This year two out of five ABVP candidates from the School of Languages were flunked. We are the ones actually being witch-hunted within this campus. In the shadow of fear and aggression we study here. In fear we carry out our activism on this campus,” says Kumar.

The ABVP is affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Balraj Madhok took the initiative to found the ABVP in 1948 to counter communist influences on university campuses. It has been working on the JNU campus since 1989-90.

“Last year we received around 1,000 votes and even won a seat in JNUSU. Throughout India, about 10,000 people have left their parties and joined us in the last year. Nobody is talking about

that,” says the 27-year-old Kumar who comes from a lower middle-class family in Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

Another councillor from SIS, Arnab Chakravarti, 26, says he “may disagree in principle with ABVP on many issues, but I am shocked that if anything happens on this campus they blame the ABVP. The moment I say that I don’t support anti-national slogans they label me as being from the ABVP and keep forcing the label on all my discourses. Even if we sneeze it is painted as a communal thing.”

Interestingly, Arnab quit ABVP some years ago due to differences of opinion. But he is concerned about Leftist dominance.

“I would definitely say that witch-hunting happens within this campus and it happens with the nationalists and the right-wing people, not the left-wing ones,” says Arnab. “Unfortunately, this campus has become their bastion and they are treating it like their personal propaganda space.”

The National Students Union of India (NSUI), formed in 1971 as the student wing of the Indian National Congress, has become almost non-existent in JNU.

Vipin Yadav, NSUI national coordinator and former general secretary of the JNU unit, says, “The basic ideology of the NSUI is to mould future leaders for the nation and to organise students to realise the objectives of the Indian National Congress.”

All these student groups state that they raise their funds on campus. They hold

a membership drive every year, through which they propagate their agenda and raise funds for their activities.

“NSUI has a membership drive every year in which an individual applies for new membership by paying ₹10. It is renewable each year for ₹10. The membership fee is our main source of funds,” says Yadav, who belongs to a Dalit community in south Rajasthan.

Shatarupa adds that students are usually interested in donating funds because most of the issues picked up are student-related. For example, if there is a seminar on the hostel crisis, students readily donate funds. “Similarly, we hold public meetings, gatherings, discussions where we debate various issues and consolidate support over injustices,” she says.

JNU is known to have a long list of alumni who now occupy important political and bureaucratic positions. And though it is a much debated aspect, most students in JNU feel that student politics shapes the political backbone of a country.

The question is how much distance should there be between student unions and political parties. Lenin believes it is essential and hopes that the trend of students uniting on issues that concern the student community primarily will continue to grow. ■

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AAP dips toe in municipal waters

AJIT KRISHNA

Abida Khan
New Delhi

THE Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is preparing itself to contest municipal elections. For a start, it is putting up candidates to contest by-elections to 13 wards which fell vacant in Delhi's three municipal corporations.

In January the Delhi High Court had ordered the State Election Commission to conduct by-elections for the 13 vacant wards within three months. AAP had been hoping to dissolve the corporations and conduct fresh elections instead.

Last year, the newly formed party had swept the Delhi Assembly polls with a lively street-level campaign. So there is interest in its election strategy and its roadmap for Delhi's beleaguered municipalities.

The Congress government led by Sheila Dikshit had divided the cumbersome Municipal Corporation of Delhi into three, ostensibly to manage civic issues more efficiently. Instead, trifurcation worsened its problems. The north and east municipal corporations are now on the verge of bankruptcy. Nearly 150,000 *safai karamcharis* (sanitation workers) went on an indefinite strike in February because they weren't paid salaries. Mounds of garbage piled up in the city. Some areas of the city have fallen off the map and Delhi now has three mayors.

AAP recently announced its list of candidates. Ashutosh, spokesperson for the party and a former journalist, explained their plans for the upcoming by-elections and the three municipalities.

What is your party's strategy for elections to Delhi's municipalities?

The AAP-led Delhi government has been working for the people and their concerns. On that basis, we have kept education and health as our priority while addressing civic concerns. We have saved money over the years through low-cost construction and honest work.

We completed the Azadpur flyover project in just ₹150 crore, saving about ₹100 crore. We want to inform the people that when there is governance without corruption there is no dearth of money.

Second, the MCD has become the most corrupt civic body in the world. The High Court too has referred very strongly to this corruption. This issue needs to be highlighted. The wards are dysfunctional. There isn't a dearth of workers. But there is a dense network of corrupt officials. The inefficiency and corruption within civic bodies needs to go.

The Delhi government's work in the recent past and the rampant corruption within the MCDs are the two broad issues we want people to be aware of before going to the polls. AAP is a revolution meant to rid the city of corruption and provide a platform for transparent governance and participatory democracy. I invite everyone to join this movement to make Delhi a world-class city.

How do you propose to address the financial crisis facing two of the three municipalities?

There is no financial crisis. The money that the government owed to the municipalities has been dis-



Ashutosh: 'MCD is the most corrupt civic body in the world'

persed. The problem of workers not receiving their salaries is mainly because of the officials appointed by the BJP government. They are either inefficient or extremely corrupt. The Centre led by the BJP is not allocating funds and neither is it letting the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) disburse funds meant for the civic bodies. So, the only way to address this issue is by appointing and electing non-corrupt, efficient and hardworking candidates.

On what basis has the party chosen its candidates?

We have selected only those candidates who are very well acquainted with their particular ward and who are aligned with the party's principles. All our candidates are first-timers. Most of them have been long-time volunteers with our party.

Our principle, while selecting candidates, was to focus on the 3Cs: corruption, criminal records and character. Candidates should not have any history of corruption, they should not have a criminal past, and they should have good character. If, despite our scrutiny, a candidate is found guilty of violating these criteria, he or she will be disqualified even on the last day of the poll.

What is the party's stand on trifurcation?

That is a very, very tricky issue. The municipal corporation was trifurcated for various reasons. We are still considering the pros and cons of this system. However, if trifurcation is not working and adding to the woes of civic bodies then it is an issue we need to consider very seriously. We are still very much in the process of making a decision on this particular issue.

Are you in favour of a system with three mayors?

That is one of the major problems and the core issue of our discussions. One of the major causes of rampant corruption and inefficiency is the non-functional representatives in the municipal bodies.

These are very structural issues and we need to think them over before coming to a decision.

AAP has talked about creating mohalla sabhas in every ward. How do you plan to map these?

The plan to map mohallas is still in its initial phase. The idea is to include all areas and categorise them under mohallas, including slums and rehabilitation colonies. We have asked our teams to demarcate boundaries of the mohallas, which will then be recorded.

We think governance cannot be limited to bureaucracy. People of a locality should be able to raise their concerns. In a mohalla people can get together and discuss amongst themselves the problems that exist in their area, and through mutual discussion and voting they can prioritise their requirements. The work is then allocated to a contractor.

The local councillor, who is present at the meetings along with other representatives of government agencies, then facilitates the sanction of funds allocated for the area. Once the work is completed, the residents decide if it has been done to their satisfaction and then sign a work completion certificate. Only then are funds allocated. This, in other words, is true working of participatory democracy.

The idea is to have transparent governance and involve people directly so that work can be delivered to their satisfaction. Also, involving people directly means less scope for corruption.

What are your plans for waste management?

We have discussed this issue with the Delhi Development Commission (DDC). The commission is currently studying different models of waste management used globally. We are very aware of the impact of poor waste management on health and environment in the city. So we have speeded up the process and we will come out with a plan shortly. ■

Kathputli colony wants to be tourist attraction

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

It's easy to romanticise Kathputli Colony, a slum that has been around for more than 50 years in West Delhi's teeming Shadipur area. Home to traditional artistes like puppeteers, dancers, acrobats, jugglers, musicians, magicians and storytellers, the colony has been exoticised in Salman Rushdie's novel, *Midnight's Children*. It attracts droves of journalists and filmmakers in search of a story, especially since the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) drew up a blueprint to raze the colony and put up new apartments for its residents.

The redevelopment plan got mired in controversy. Residents got suspicious and opposed it saying they needed more space and NGOs trashed it.

"That's a totally one-sided perspective of Kathputli Colony," says Sterre Sharma, a Dutch artist and main trustee of Kalakar Trust that works to improve the lives of the community. "What about the squalor, degradation and simmering political dynamics at work," she questions.

"The performers are extremely difficult to work with. They are a very politicised group and you have no idea of the trouble they can create. They have better connections than most so they call the press, start whisper campaigns and protests. For me it is such a big problem because they don't want upgradation of the colony despite appalling living conditions," says Sharma.

Before Kalakar Trust was founded in 1992 by Sharma and her sister, Dr Mei Zegers, nine well-meaning NGOs had given up, unable to work with Kathputli's rebellious residents. The last to venture into the slum was the Rotary Club of Delhi Midwest that had ample funds to make a radical difference to the lives of the artistes and their families.

"A whisper campaign was started against them by the same people who are making trouble now. They said Rotary had an ulterior motive: to grab their land. So Rotary never spent their funds and pulled



Performers and artistes say what they want is respectability

out from the colony," says Sharma.

Why did Sterre Sharma, a foreigner, persist in working with the residents of Kathputli? Married to controversial Congress politician Satish Sharma, she could have buried herself in her art. But Sharma, who came to India in 1971, proved to be a woman of mettle. Daily irritants like the lack of running water in her first home in Gautam Nagar and the bewildering dynamics of life in a joint family inured her to the hurdles she faced when she set up the Trust.

Kalakar Trust's intentions were suspected from the beginning. "They said that, as a *mantri ki biwi*, I was not sincere and hurled all kinds of accusations against me. They said we had ulterior motives. But I am stubborn and decided to stay on," says Sharma.

The Trust is now loved and makes a radical difference to the lives of 1,200 families, largely puppeteers, dancers, musicians, acrobats and magicians. They come from Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Bihar, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu.

Through health, education, income generation and social initiatives, the Trust has garnered tremendous goodwill among the

communities it works with.

The Trust's Kalakar Vikas School currently tutors 180 children below 12 years in two groups with a focus on English, writing Hindi, computer education and general knowledge. The flexible classes are a great draw for the young ones, who also get trained in visual arts, playing the *dholak* and harmonium as well as puppetry, acrobatics and dance.

Parents are encouraged to send their children to government and local private schools. It's not easy. Teachers in formal schools constantly complain about irregular attendance and the difficulty of keeping the children in class. Also, when the children become adolescents, they are pulled out of school and inducted into their parents' professions.

To keep the children interested in its coaching sessions, the Trust uses projectors and screens for specially designed lessons. Children also watch educa-

tional TV channels that will advance their learning.

The health of the community is a major concern — and success story — for Kalakar Trust's dedicated team. "Earlier, people used to go to quacks for treatment. It took us a long time to create awareness but now they come to our health camps where illness is diagnosed. They then go to major hospitals for treatment. When needed, our health workers accompany them to hospital. We also have a dispensary where they can get over-the-counter medicines and simple first aid," says Anju Chaubey, a trustee of Kalakar Trust.

The Trust's clinic has a tuberculosis eradication centre that has adopted the World Health Organisation's well-known Directly Observed Treatment (DOT) TB control strategy. "I feel satisfaction because we have saved a lot of lives through our clinic," says Sharma. "Sometimes I have to give people food because the patients are so weak they can't earn anything. But the ultimate aim is to make people independent."

Enthused by the success of its annual talent show, 'Bal Kala Utsav,' at Saidulajab in Mehrauli, Delhi, where over 2,000 people turned up to see the performances, the young artistes look forward to more such events, exchange programmes and workshops that will skill them further.

"I am whatever I am because of Kalakar Trust," says Mahesh Bhat, 33, who has metamorphosed from being a small-time puppeteer and drummer into a flourishing freelance event manager with performances in Holland, France, Germany, Singapore and Mauritius behind him. "Bhat, who was the least educated, got the most mileage out of the training though I had to talk him into wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase whenever he went to look for work," laughs Sharma.

The need for respectability is particularly important for these performers. Most of them belong to denotified tribes historically stigmatised because they belong to nomadic communities. "We give India a good name abroad but the government doesn't bother about us in our country. Yes, I am reconciled to plans to upgrade our colony but we want it to be developed as a tourist attraction," says the agile Maya Pawar, who teaches acrobatics at the centre twice a week. ■



Sterre Sharma

J & K Sikhs for minority status

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

THE Sikh community, which enjoys the benefit of minority status in other parts of India, has not been granted this status in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The All Parties Sikh Coordination Committee (APSCC), an umbrella organisation of various Sikh groups in the state, has been meeting people in government to demand minority status through extension of the National Commission for Minorities Act to Sikhs in J&K.

“For years we have been carrying on a struggle for getting minority status. We fail to understand why we are being denied minority status although it has been recommended under the National Commission for Minorities Act across the country,” says Jagmohan Singh Raina, Chairman, APSCC.

The APSCC met Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh and apprised him of the problems being faced by Sikhs in the state due to the government’s failure to accord them minority status. Raina says the response consisted of mere assurance with no practical changes on the ground.

“Earlier we met former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh twice and the then Home Minister, P. Chidambaram, but then too we were left dejected since our demand was not met during the rule of the United Progressive Alliance government at the centre. Our meeting with President Pranab Mukherjee also failed to yield any result and we have been at the receiving end all the time,” says Raina.

Twenty-five years of militancy in the Kashmir Valley have led to an exodus of Sikhs from rural areas to Srinagar and other district headquarters. A majority of Sikhs have settled in Srinagar.

According to Raina, “Out of a population of 80,000 in the Kashmir Valley, 70 per cent of Sikhs have migrated from rural areas and are living in Srinagar city. The exodus has been from Central and North Kashmir districts. People have migrated from Budgam, Baramulla and Kupwara districts, abandoning their assets. Sikhs in the south Kashmir districts of Pulwama and Anantnag have stayed put.”



Jagmohan Singh Raina, Chairman of the APSCC

The APSCC Chairman says Sikh migrants are bearing huge economic losses as they left behind their agricultural and horticultural fields. Half of them have asked neighbours to look after and cultivate their fields for the past few years.

“We have been demanding compensation for their losses for the migrants. But successive governments have been indifferent to our demands. Rough estimates put each family’s loss at ₹25 lakh over the past 25 years or so,” points out Raina.

The state has a Sikh population of 270,000. Like

other communities, some Sikh families also left J&K when militancy began.

In Jammu, 1,749 Sikh families are registered with the office of the Relief Commissioner, but there are many yet to be registered. There are thousands of Sikh families that shuttle between Srinagar and Jammu during the course of the year.

The APSCC has been seeking filling up of posts of Punjabi-teaching teachers and lecturers lying vacant in schools and colleges.

“Over the past few months we have been carrying out silent protest programmes in support of our demands. The process started from Srinagar and subsequently reached Baramulla and Tral. We will not hesitate in going for extreme measures in support of our demands and for that the political leadership would be responsible,” declares Raina.

He also says the State Subject Certificate is being denied to the youth of Sikh migrant families. As a result, they are being denied admission in educational institutions and entry into jobs.

“Our problems have multiplied due to the negligence of the people in government. A specific employment package should be announced for the Sikh community so that our youth get absorbed in the government. Also,

there must be an inquiry into the killing of 35 Sikhs at Chattisinghpura in Anantnag district in March 2000,” says Raina.

The APSCC Chairman points out that the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) had, in its election manifesto for the 2014 Assembly polls, promised that minority status would be given to Sikhs. But this promise was forgotten when the party came to power, despite the fact that many of its candidates won due to the Sikh vote in various constituencies of both Kashmir and Jammu divisions. ■

SAMITA’S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



BILAL BAHADUR



Boatmen on the Dal Lake wait patiently for elusive tourists

Kashmir tourism needs a facelift

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

FABLED as a tourist destination, Kashmir might be in danger of losing its exalted status on the world tourism map. People in the tourism sector in the state are sceptical and feel that tourism is stagnating in the Valley. In fact, they say tourism, especially in the Valley, is at such low ebb, that drastic steps are needed to save the situation.

According to Peerzada Faiyaz Ahmad, member of the Eco-Tourism Society of India (ESOI) and a major tour operator, Kashmir tourism is plagued by many ills. "First, travel to Kashmir has to be made manageable and within everyone's budget. The airfare has to be controlled and capped. During the peak tourist season, an air ticket to Srinagar from New Delhi costs between ₹18,000 and ₹22,000. Not everyone can afford that," says Ahmad, who was also formerly president of the Travel Agents Association of Kashmir (TAAK).

Next, he says, hotels should be categorised on the basis of stars and not on A, B and C ratings. Discipline needs to be inculcated among the transporters who, he points out, have caused huge damage overall to the tourism industry.

"The transporters accompany the tourists to various shops and so the shopkeepers keep a commission for them. The price of an object gets inflated and the tourists feel they have been cheated. This needs to be looked into by the authorities," says Ahmad.

Rauf Tramboo, a reputed adventurer and president of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of Kashmir (ATOAK), points out that Kashmir is the only state in India to have a Tourist Trade Act. Despite this, the enforcement agency has failed to take action against people who cheat tourists.

"It is imperative that the Tourist Trade Act be implemented in letter and spirit in the state, and particularly in the Kashmir Valley. It is nobility that brings visitors here even though we are not able to provide them the services they deserve. There is no nightlife and the evenings and nights are dull," says Tramboo.

The ATOAK president says the tourism department should take immediate steps to ensure tourists are provided services in the form of theme parks, cultural programmes, theatres and other recreational facilities.

"It is important that we move forward with

'We have to go beyond Gulmarg, Pahalgam and Sonmarg. We had included Bangus-Drangyari in our itinerary, but our plans could not materialise due to security risks.'

respect to the tourism itinerary in Kashmir. We have to move beyond Gulmarg, Pahalgam and Sonmarg and explore other places of tourism importance. We at TAAK had included Bangus-Drangyari in our itinerary, but our plans could not materialise due to the security risks involved in visiting this place even though it is so beautiful," says Ahmad regretfully.

According to the ESOI member, tourist places like Yusmarg and Doodhpathri in Budgam district can be developed as day destinations for visitors to Kashmir. He pointed out that hotels are not up to the mark in Yusmarg and the huts are also in pitiable condition. Despite repeated requests to the telecom companies, no mobile tower has been erected here.

Ahmad says that although some guest houses have come up in Doodhpathri, they are substandard. Road connectivity needs to be improved and club type entertainment, whether indoor or outdoor, should be available for tourists.

"When it comes to sightseeing and nature, Jammu and Kashmir has fierce competition from Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Darjeeling.

When it comes to facilities for tourists, we are at the bottom and that too at a time when tourists across the world have become demanding and choosy," says Tramboo.

The ATOAK president says officials manning the tourism department are painting a rosy picture but the reality is totally different. The tourism scenario in Kashmir is dismal and the trend is downward, not upward as projected by some. The development authorities in Kashmir have done nothing for promotion of tourism in their respective areas.

"It is important that ecology and environment are taken care of when we talk of tourism promotion. It is quite unfortunate that forests are being cut with construction going on at Gulmarg and Pahalgam despite a ban by the High Court. These things need to be looked into so that we don't cause any damage to Mother Nature," he says.

The Kashmir Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KCC&I) has sought government intervention in the escalation of airfare to Kashmir. The KCC&I president, Mushtaq Ahmad Wani, feels intervention is necessary in view of reports that a particular section of high-end tour operators and agents pool resources and block tickets en masse.

"During the season, these tickets are sold at exorbitant prices. This practice, apart from adversely affecting the tourism sector, also makes travelling by air prohibitively expensive for the general public. The government should block a particular number of seats so that they can be released during the season," says Wani.

The Tosa Maidan area in Budgam district can be popularised as a tourist destination. After being vacated by the Army, this huge meadow has the potential to attract tourists from across the globe. The Tosa Maidan Bachao Front, along with the Jammu & Kashmir Right to Information Movement, has organised many programmes in this regard but the state government is yet to take any practical steps. ■

Empower the poor

Alex Tuscano, Ganesh Iyer and Narinder Bedi respond to an interview Nikhil Dey of the MKSS gave to *Civil Society* in its February issue

ARE advocacy, *yatras*, social audit and online services sufficient to enable the rural poor to receive rights given through legislation?

This is a question which all serious NGOs must ask themselves. The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) is a committed pro-poor NGO and we respect them, therefore we are responding to your interview with Nikhil Dey of the MKSS titled, "Online Service Delivery is a Complete Nightmare."

We open the debate by saying it is easier to legislate a pro-poor right for rural working families than it is to enable them to demand and receive those rights. Unfortunately, the position of most politicians and parties is, "We have helped the rural poor to get rights, now it is up to them to access those rights, our responsibility is over." Another position is, "We struggled to get this pro-poor Act legislated, now it is up to the state governments to implement it."

We disagree with both positions because they don't take the history of the rural poor peasantry into account. The poor peasantry comprises women, Dalits, Scheduled Tribes (ST), Backward Classes (BCs) and minorities. In the past, they have never been trained nor organised to demand their rights. For convenience, the Left parties organised urban corporate-based labour but left 30 per cent of the rural population, the poor landless and landed peasantry unorganised. Then come political parties who give them land reform Acts, women's rights to property, bonded labour rights, the justice against atrocities Act, child rights, the Panchayat Raj Act, right to education, and finally right to work, and right to food security. They then say to the rural poor, now it is up to you. Is it that simple?

The rural poor have been oppressed and exploited for centuries. They are mostly undereducated and divided by caste. They have been made to believe they are inferior. They have been dependent on the landed classes to mediate with the government for what they want the government to do for them, and no political party has really stood by them. As a matter of fact, neither have the NGOs. Parties have legislated pro-poor rights but they have not shown any interest in whether those rights were being accessed. NGOs have supported the imple-

mentation of programmes, but have not gone into the gram panchayat to organise poor peasantry to demand and receive rights given by pro-poor Acts.

In 1983, when we first took up land struggles in the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh, we discovered that though *Inam* and *Shotriam* lands had been abolished in 1948, landless cultivators were



MNREGA workers need to be organised into unions

NGOs have supported the implementation of programmes, but have not gone to the gram panchayat to organise poor peasantry to demand and receive rights given by pro-poor Acts.

still paying a share of their crops to the *Inamdars* and the *Shotriamdars*. When we sat with them and explained the rights given to them under land reform Acts, their answer was, "Sir, we do not know anything about laws, and even if we did we cannot take on the landed classes."

"What if we help you? Would you be willing to fight for the rights given to you under land reforms Acts?" They were willing to struggle provided we joined them because they neither had the courage nor the confidence to do it alone.

This partnership started in 1983 and is still active. As years went by we took on every pro-poor right, using the same unions formed for land reforms Acts. From 1986, our unions started to campaign for right to work. When the Act was passed in April 2006 they were ready to take on important responsibilities.

They convinced the government to pass Government Order 80, creating APNA — a GO-NGO partnership which made the NGOs responsible for informing job card holders, organising them into Gram Panchayat Samakhya (GPS), and conducting monthly meetings of each GPS to ensure

that rights demanded by the GPSs were being honoured by the government. Within five years of informing and organising the job card holders into Sram Sakhi Sangha (SSS) work groups and SSS groups into GPSs, the state has become foremost in implementing the MGNREGS and is the only state which has created GPSs to demand workers' rights.

After each monthly meeting, the GPSs present their rights-related problems to the Additional Programme Officer (APO), who is head of MGNREGS in the mandal, and demand action. The credit for creating this system goes to the government of Andhra Pradesh.

If we are serious about enabling the rural poor to demand their own rights then there is no alternative to the creation of GPSs in every gram panchayat where we are working. We find that Nikhil Dey makes no mention of this in the interview. Neither MKSS nor YIP is a people's organisation. We are basically pro-poor activists.

In 2013-2014 Thomas Piketty published a book titled, *Capital in the 21st Century*. In it he studied the growth of Free Market Capitalism (FMC) in America and Europe and in other parts of the world over 250 years. His major conclusion was that FMC leads to further and further accumulation of capital in the hands of fewer and fewer people, so the rich get richer and the poor poorer. Therefore FMC cannot remove poverty. But

because FMC operates within democracy in which parties are elected to power for political survival the ruling party is forced to legislate pro-poor Acts to redistribute social wealth by taxing the rich and the super rich. These social funds are then used to support pro-poor legislation such as right to work, pensions, right to education, right to political participation through the Panchayati Raj Act, child rights, right to food security, and many others.

We have lost faith in FMC bringing our rural poor out of poverty through capital-intensive programmes. The only future for the poor is in pro-poor legislation. Our commitment should be to enable the rural poor to access every right legislated for them. This work has to start with the poor living in the gram panchayats. Advocacy, *yatras*, social audits, and online services are very necessary, but not sufficient to enable the rural working poor to receive every benefit guaranteed them by the pro-poor Acts.

Their future lies in their ability to become strong enough to make the system honour their rights. For that they need our total support, external and integral. ■



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Gurgaon residents to produce, use, sell solar power

Bestech Park View Residency and Nirvana Country are first with plans to switch

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

BESTECH Park View Residency is basking in solar power glory. It is all set to be the first gated community in Gurgaon to go partially off-grid with 270 KW coming from panels of photovoltaic cells atop its nine buildings. The solar power won't meet all the needs of residents, but it will be cheaper per unit than conventional power. They will also no longer have to run costly and polluting diesel generators to deal with grid vagaries like breakdowns and poor supply.

The residents of Bestech Park View Residency haven't had to sink any money into making this transition. They have an agreement with Fourth Partner Energy, a renewable energy service company or RESCO, which has made the investments. Under the agreement, for the next 25 years the residents will get solar power at a rate of ₹6.95 per unit with an increase of 3.5 per cent a year, which is less than the ₹7.8 charged by the Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam (DHBVN). In winter, about 25 per cent of the demand will be met through solar power and in summer about 15 per cent.

The condominium will be consuming all the solar power it will produce. However, technically, surplus solar power can be sold by feeding it into the grid. So, Bestech Park View Residency will now have a 'two-way net meter' which can measure solar energy that is put into the grid and conventional energy used by its residents. At present, there are no plans to sell the solar power but, going forward, this is an option. A second meter will measure the solar power consumed.

"We want to save energy, be green and implement government policy," explains S.C. Kumar, president of the Residents' Welfare Association (RWA) and a former government official who retired from the Cabinet Secretariat some years ago. "We held a general meeting and there was absolutely no objection from any resident."

In Haryana, it is mandatory for every building over 500 square yards to have solar power. In the past year, the administration has been working to smoothen processes, create awareness and make it easier for citizens to opt for solar power.

The new policy has got people thinking. The cost of solar energy has been declining; on the other hand, conventional power keeps getting costlier. There are also power cuts when supply falls short. Gurgaon could be India's foremost solar city since it receives sunshine for nearly 300 days in the year.

The problem so far has been the initial capital cost of installing solar panels and putting a functioning, dependable system in place. It involves spending a few crores of

rupees depending on the size of the plant. But with a RESCO putting in the capital and technical expertise, and with a business model in place, suddenly solar energy makes good economic sense.

The panels have also become cheaper and entrepreneurs have been allowed to come in and build viable businesses for captive users. Added to all this is a rebate of 25 paise per unit of conventional power provided by the government as an incentive for generating solar power.

"In peak summer we consume around 2.5 MW and in winter this drops to 1.2 MW," says Rajiv Verma, treasurer of the RWA who works at IBM. "With solar we expect to meet 25 per cent of our demand in winter and 15 per cent in summer. On an average, the colony's electricity bill works out to ₹25 lakh per month. With solar we hope to reduce this by ₹48,000 during the winter months and ₹1 lakh during the summer months."

Verma explains that the cost of solar power is also offset by the savings from not using diesel generators. "In summer, we have four to five hours of power cuts. The cost of generating a unit of power from diesel works out to ₹14.5 per unit."

Imran Usmani, manager of Fourth Partner Energy, says the cost of running a solar power plant makes it possible to offer an unchanged rate of ₹6.95 per unit for 25 years to the colony. "We have done commercial buildings. This is our first residential project," he says.

Things have been looking up for Bestech Park View Residency ever since its ambitious RWA took over from the builder 18 months ago. It is located in the midst of crumbling civic services. The road that runs by its gates is full of potholes. But the condominium's compound is clean and green. Cycle tracks and pedestrian pathways are being made, a sewage treatment plant (STP) provides usable water, 600 trees have been planted and new roots and shoots sprout from a freshly laid botanical garden. The entire colony is under CCTV surveillance.

"The STP processes 180,000 litres of waste water every day. We reuse it for horticulture and for flushing toilets. Our water bill has been reduced from ₹1 lakh to ₹50,000 per month. We will be applying for green building certification and go in for carbon trading," says Verma.

NIRVANA GETS READY

Bestech Park View Residency has been quick to cash in on the solar opportunity. But Nirvana Country has also been hard at work. It is a housing colony on 300 acres with 3,500-4,000 residents, in mostly low-rise houses. Negotiations are underway to wrest a good deal from a RESCO.

Sanu Kapila, president of the RWA there, says



A home solar products shop



Solar panels being fitted on one of the rooftops at Bestech Park View Residency

tenders have been floated and they hope to get their 'grid interactive rooftop solar system with net metering' started very soon.

"We will not invest anything," explains Kapila. "The RESCO will invest, generate the power and sell it to us at a fixed rate for 15 years. This rate will be lower than the grid rate."

Nirvana is simply offering the RESCO the space needed to set up the solar plant. The RESCO will set it up, look after operations and maintenance, and sell the solar power generated at a rate lower than the grid rate for 15 years after which the solar plant will become the property of the colony.

Here, too, it wasn't difficult to convince residents. The RWA had encouraged residents to get involved and live as a community. "We are also the first to set up a retail store where farmers can sell vegetables directly so that they earn more. We resolved the problem of stray dogs by getting an NGO to train them as guards. So when we floated this idea of solar power residents voted unanimously for it," says Kapila.

The Nirvana RWA is implementing solar power installation in phases. In the first phase 17-18 arrays of solar panels will be installed in common areas. They will generate 200 KW initially which will over time rise to around 700 KW.

"Lights, fans, water pumps, computers, everything in our common facilities that consume power will be run on solar energy," explains Kapila. "The total power we need for our common facilities is about 1,500 KW. We hope to meet 30 per cent of our power needs from solar energy. This is also the limit set by regulators because of grid stabilisation issues." Seven or eight two-way net meters will replace conventional meters.

The solar power produced by Nirvana Country will be fed directly into the grid via the net meters during the day. Since the common facilities have to be run after dark, the housing colony will draw back the equivalent power from the grid.

"We won't be storing the power in batteries because this makes the model more expensive. Batteries are also not environmentally friendly," says Kapila.

The Haryana administration has been working to smoothen processes. The new policy has got people thinking. The cost of solar energy has been declining while conventional power keeps getting costlier.

In the second phase, around 100 households will install solar panels on their rooftops. "They are offering their rooftops voluntarily because their power bills will come down and, in the long term, savings on power will be very significant," says Kapila. These homes will have individual net meters.

For the next 15 years Nirvana will pay a fixed rate of ₹6.40 to the RESCO while DHBVN, which charges ₹8 plus per unit, is expected to increase its rate by at least 8-10 per cent every year. So by the end of 15 years, Kapila says, the residents will be paying roughly 40-50 per cent of the electricity bill that they would have paid to DHBVN had they not had solar power.

Once the RESCO hands over the infrastructure, Nirvana will not have to pay anybody a single paisa for the solar power. The life of a solar plant is around 25 years.

So if Nirvana generates 30 per cent of its total power needs from solar, it will

save close to 60 per cent of its total electricity bill because of the fixed rate for solar for 15 years and then the free power for 10 years. Meanwhile, the price of conventional power from the grid will keep rising.

18 MONTHS IN THE MAKING

“Haryana is the first state in the country to make it mandatory for all large buildings of more than 500 sq yards to install solar rooftop power plants,” emphasises Vinay Pratap Singh, Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) of Gurgaon.

A graduate from the Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS), Pilani, Singh and his team have worked persistently over the last 18 months to make sure installing solar systems becomes economically viable and easy to implement. The government can then enforce compliance with its mandatory order. The ADCs of each district have been made the implementation officers of the solar energy programme.

“The total solar energy capacity installed in Gurgaon over the last five-six years is about 5 MW. I expect that figure to jump to 50 MW by June-July this year,” says Singh, upbeat about Gurgaon’s sunny future.

The government, on its part, offers a 30 per cent subsidy on installation costs on a first-come-first-served basis. That means, if funds are available. The Haryana Electricity Regulatory Commission (HERC) gives a 25 paise rebate on every unit of electricity generated through rooftop solar power plants.

The minimum solar power capacity to be installed is 1 KW or around 3-5 per cent of a building’s connected load. A 1 KW plant can generate up to 4.5 units of electricity a day, enough to power three fans, seven tubelights and a cooler for four to five hours. It costs about ₹1.2 lakh per KW.

“We have closed the loop. Now all the elements and the necessary ecosystem are in place for rapid implementation of decentralised grid interactive solar power generation,” says Singh.

The administration has had to nudge several agencies and stakeholders into framing regulations and processes. Many issues had to be resolved.

Citizens needed to be aware of the policy. Agencies that sanctioned building plans such as the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) still had to frame regulation and ensure that all new buildings, industries and social institutions included solar power in their plans. Banks had to be nudged into providing housing loans that included the cost of rooftop solar power plants.

Agencies like the Haryana Electricity Regulatory Commission (HERC) too had to frame regulations to enable implementation. The responsibility of providing subsidies and incentives was given to the Haryana Renewable Energy Development Agency (HAREDA). They needed to sort out the quantum of subsidies, ease processes and ensure payments could be made on time. The power distribution companies had to be ready to install net metering.

“Now all that is in place,” says Singh. A Solar Facilitation Centre has been inaugurated at the Rajiv Gandhi Renewable Energy Park to provide a single-window system for providing all sanctions and clearances.

“Nobody will have to run from pillar to post to install rooftop solar systems. All you have to do is to go to this one office and you will get all the information you want as well as all clearances and sanctions,” says Singh. The Centre will also tell citizens whom they can approach to get rooftop solar systems and net meters installed.

There were complaints that DHBVN was deliberately going slow on installing net meters since some 60 per cent of their revenue comes from Gurgaon. Singh says that under a renewable energy purchase obligation discoms like DHBVN have to ensure that a minimum percentage of their electricity is sourced from solar power. “Rooftop systems are included. If they take solar power their total cost of meeting their renewal energy purchase obligation actually comes down. Moreover, the power needs of Haryana are growing, so additional power coming from such systems only adds to the total power they can supply to consumers. They earn from such supplies while getting power at almost no cost,” explains Singh.

DHBVN has now announced the certified manufacturers for two-way net metering — L&T, Genus and Secure Meters. “These meters have been tested and certified and can be installed for net metering,” assures Singh.

“Net metering has started in Gurgaon,” confirmed Shubhra Puri, founder of Gurgaon First, a non-profit that works on urban issues. “With this there will be a surge in solar power. People are going for it to reduce their electricity bills and to lessen their dependence on the grid.”

Puri, who works closely with the administration, has been holding workshops bringing the administration, citizens and vendors of solar equipment together. She is now putting up a website with complete information on solar energy for citizens.

Another issue that confronted the administration was whether the grid was



Dr O.S. Sastry, director-general of NISE



Vinay Pratap Singh, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Gurgaon

primed up to absorb renewable energy.

“Renewable energy systems are by their very nature unstable power generators. The power they generate depends on various environmental factors that cannot be controlled by us,” explains Dr O.S. Sastry, director-general of the National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE), based in Gurgaon.

“The amount of solar power generated at any given time depends primarily on the intensity of the sun’s radiation falling on PV cells – when the sun is blazing, more power will be generated, when radiation is somewhat less due to cloud cover or lower position of the sun in the sky, the power generated will be less and so on. So the amount of power they supply to the grid fluctuates widely,” says Sastry.

“The biggest problem of all grid interactive renewable energy systems is maintaining grid stability. We can certainly produce 100 GW of solar energy by 2022, as Prime Minister Modi wants. But unless we work out how to ensure grid stability in a situation where hundreds or even thousands of MWs of power can suddenly get injected into the system and then abruptly drop off, can only cause a disaster. The grid will collapse,” he explains.

But this problem too has been resolved. “To ensure grid stability we have got the discoms to allow net metering only for 30 per cent of the total power drawn from any specific transformer,” says Singh.

This means that if a household or any other consumer has a total sanctioned load of, say, 1,000 units a month, the consumer will be allowed to set up a grid interactive rooftop solar system with net metering for a total capacity of only 300 units per month. “This is actually a large amount since the mandatory requirement is only three to five per cent of total sanctioned load,” Singh explains.

In practice, this 30 per cent cap on grid interactive rooftop solar capacity is



Bestech Park View Residency RWA members: Nitin Tyagi, Rajiv Verma, Vikas Dhull and S.C. Kumar



Shubhra Puri of Gurgaon First



Sanu Kapila, president of the Nirvana Country RWA, with one of the strays trained to be guard dogs

‘The total solar energy capacity installed over the last five-six years is about 5 MW in Gurgaon. I expect that figure to jump to 50 MW by June-July this year,’ says Vinay Pratap Singh, Additional DC.

expected to translate into no more than 10-15 per cent of the total load of any grid. Besides, many consumers will be opting for models that are off the grid.

NISE, on its part, is planning to train people to become solar energy entrepreneurs. “We will launch an SPV soon to train people in providing services to consumers for setting up rooftop systems for a fee,” says Singh. “This will create employment and manpower to ensure rapid adoption of rooftop systems.”

A few RESCOs have started operations in Gurgaon but they feel government policy favours the consumer and not the entrepreneur.

“Right now, some of the subsidies and incentives available for grid interactive rooftop solar power generation that are given to consumers if they set up their own plants are not available to RESCOs. But we are talking to the government and we expect this to be resolved soon,” says Sanjiv Agarwal, head of Amplus Solar, one of the channel partners of the Haryana government for installation of rooftop systems under the RESCO model.

Another option for consumers is the capital expenditure model. Here the consumer owns the asset and can claim accelerated depreciation and save taxes. He can enjoy capital investment subsidies offered by the government for setting up solar energy plants.

Most households so far have opted for off-grid solar rooftop solutions. “The future is bright in solar,” says Sanjay Verma, of Verma Trading Company, one of the first-movers in rooftop solar plants for households.

“In the last six months I have installed more than 50 KW,” he says. One of the first households he sold solar equipment to was that of Dr Krishan Kumar Chopra, a retired professor of physics. Verma sold him a 400-watt rooftop solar power plant in February 2015 for ₹48,000.

“I am saving roughly ₹10,000 a year on my electricity bill and the system is working perfectly with no maintenance costs,” says Dr Chopra. But this off-grid system without any way to store the power generated allows only for limited capacity. “The government should help bring down the initial cost. Then I will increase my capacity,” he says.

Singh is confident that 50 MW of grid interactive rooftop solar capacity will get installed in Gurgaon by July-end. It will be less than the government’s target of 10 per cent of renewable energy for smart cities. But it is a beginning.

“Yes, definitely Gurgaon can emerge as India’s first city in terms of solar energy use,” says Sastri. “Gurgaon has lots of sunshine.” ■

Reported by Arjun Sen

BUSINESS

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‘Big potential for Ayurveda as lifestyle illnesses rise’

But ruling deters allopaths from prescribing herbals



Civil Society News
Bengaluru

As integrative healthcare grows in popularity, Himalaya enjoys many advantages that come from being an early mover in this space. The company has invested in building bridges between traditional knowledge and modern science. It has taken plant-based remedies found in Ayurveda and validated them in terms understood by western medicine. Then, through packaging and marketing it has created new-age identities for formulations that were otherwise fading away.

Himalaya's products enjoy uncommon loyalty. An example is Liv.52 and there are many other formulations that sell in India and overseas. The challenge for the company has been to go from the personalised approach of traditional medicine to a mass-market approach without losing out on efficacy. It is a difficult number to do because it means straddling two different worlds.

Himalaya's CEO, Philippe Haydon, spoke to *Civil Society* on the company's journey, the opportunities that beckon and the problems that arise from policymaking.

How successful is India in seizing the global opportunity in herbal medicine?

Everyone is talking about contemporisation and taking traditional Indian herbal medicine to the world. Himalaya has been doing this for the past 80 years. Since our inception in 1930, we've been promoting 'integrative medicine' and today we reach out to more than 450,000 doctors across the country.

Our research and development (R&D) is one of the most advanced herbal research facilities in India and we have over 280 multidisciplinary scientists engaged in R&D. We are present in more than 90 countries and our flagship brand, Liv.52, a hepato-protective, is

prescribed by doctors around the world.

However, in India traditional medicine is up against a big roadblock. In the mid-1990s, there was a Supreme Court ruling that disallowed crosspathy in the case of prescription drugs. Technically, this judgement should not extend to OTC (over the counter) products, since anybody can purchase them without a doctor's prescription. However, the ruling created confusion amongst the medical fraternity with doctors fearing punitive action and therefore shying away from cross-prescribing even OTC products! This has slowed down the growth of Ayurvedic medicines in India which is unfortunate for patients who are being denied holistic treatment and care.

Doctors who were building the story of 'made in India' and the success of traditional Indian science by using herbal medicines have suddenly taken a step back.

Because they are not qualified to be called Ayurveda doctors?

Yes. But the flaw is that all herbal medicines are OTC and you don't need a prescription for them. In other words, a layperson can get these medicines from the chemist but when a doctor with years of experience in allopathy prescribes them, he or she could face legal consequences. Similarly, anyone can go and buy paracetamol but a doctor of Ayurveda can't prescribe it.

We want the government to clarify the Supreme Court ruling and remove this contradiction. We are

not asking for a change in the law but for a simple clarification so that Ayurvedic and allopathic doctors are free to prescribe or recommend OTC medicines.

Where does it get stuck?

Presently, doctors from different streams of medicine are looking to the government for a clarification of the Supreme Court ruling.

As a company what have you done to address this?

We are engaging with the Union Ministry of Health, the Department of AYUSH, and the wider medical fraternity. We are also

rallying leading voices in the public space and raising awareness for integrative medicine through media. Our regulatory team has written to senior members of the AYUSH and we are awaiting a reply from them.

And for how long have you been writing?

These things move gradually. However, with the impetus given to traditional medicine by the new government, we are hopeful this will pick up pace and we should have clarity soon.

Before that you thought nothing could happen?

As I said earlier, change takes time. We are the only company fighting for clarification of the Supreme Court judgement. However, we do have tremendous support from progressive voices in the medical communi-

ty, academia and health officials. In the interest of contemporary herbal medicine and for the benefit of patients, we will continue to tap all the channels available to us to resolve this issue conclusively.

You said you work with 450,000 doctors. So how do they prescribe your products?

There are doctors who understand that the ruling should not be applicable to OTC medicines and hence continue to recommend them to their patients. But lack of clarity, has deterred a great many doctors. This rule comes in the way of promoting integrative medicine which is the mantra of this century. It is a huge opportunity for India with its rich traditional knowledge in healthcare.



Philippe Haydon

So after this rule became effective, has anyone ever been prosecuted?

It's been 20 years now and not a single doctor has been prosecuted. To the best of our knowledge, it is legally impossible to prosecute someone for recommending an OTC product.

Which of Himalaya's medicines get prescribed more? What is the learning from this?

We are present in several segments and we dominate in the liver segment. Himalaya's Liv. 52 has been in the list of top 15 medicines in India for quite a few years now. It is the only herbal drug to make it to the top 15. Liv. 52 is part of the Russian government's anti-TB regimen and we are engaging with AIIMS and other organisations for it to have a similar status in India.

Renal stones is another big area for us where we have a product called Cystone which is the only product of its kind. It is a combination of certain herbs and diuretics.

As a brand, we have taken a conscious decision to promote our products ethically, through the doctor prescription route. We could advertise our products, as many other companies are doing, bypassing the doctor. But we believe in the science backing our medicines and feel that doctors are most qualified when it comes to recommending them.

How many different medicines do you produce?

We have a total of 60 brands in the pharmaceutical space including specialised dental care, oral care, dermatology etc.

How have sales volumes have been increasing?

Himalaya's pharmaceuticals portfolio has been registering a healthy growth over the last 10 years. We've diversified our product lines and this has given us focus and reach. Our sales force has grown from 400 to over 2,500 in a short span.

What is the potential of the market you see for yourself as well as the industry as a whole?

The Indian herbal market is pegged anywhere between ₹8,000 to ₹10,000 crore, but there is no authoritative number on the size of the segment.

Himalaya's products are positioned mainly in lifestyle and chronic disorders, although we do have products for more serious therapeutic concerns like Hepatitis B.

As average life expectancy increases, lifestyle disorders are on the rise. Besides, as a result of our hectic and stressful lives, the onset of these disorders is also much earlier. We have varied products for osteoporosis, menopause, osteoarthritis and so on. In the next five years, you are going to see a wall of health supplements in India as you see in Singapore and other countries. We recently launched a new 'Wellness' division with over 50 'softer therapeutic' products for consumers who are proactive health seekers, or those who are looking for preventive care or the management of chronic ailments.

So this potential is difficult to judge?

All we can say is that the potential is huge. One way of understanding it would be understanding what current sales and the rate at which they are growing. Himalaya is growing at a CAGR of 23 per cent for the last five years.

How much is the global market for you?

We are approximately ₹2,000 crore in India. Our global business is handled by other CEOs.

Can we talk about the huge amount of work that you have done as a company in trying to make a bridge between traditional medicine and western measurement. This is a tricky thing. Can you give an idea about it?

This was part of the founder Chairman's dream. He believed that if you want your science to be taken seriously, it has got to be validated by modern research and empirical evidence.

After we had our initial products in place, the first person to pick up our products for clinical trials was Dr Rustam Jalwakil in Mumbai, an eminent cardiologist back then; that was where the journey began.

'At Himalaya we don't launch a product before eight to 10 years of research and it has to go through stringent safety and efficacy protocols.'

It was a very simple concept — if I want to be taken seriously by allopathic doctors, then I need to speak the language of medicine familiar to them. Hence, we engaged with allopathic doctors and conducted our clinical trials in leading institutes and hospitals.

Thereafter it has become a practice at Himalaya. We don't launch a product before eight to 10 years of research and it has to go through stringent safety and efficacy protocols, similar to an allopathic drug, including phase I to phase IV clinical trials.

We have about 280 scientists of varying qualifications at our R&D centre — from Ayurvedic specialists, phytochemists to biochemists and botanists. It's a diverse team. The Ayurvedic doctors identify how traditional medicines can address current lifestyle disorders by referring to traditional texts and literature. Post this, the phytochemistry division takes over and develops formulations in convenient formats and dosages.

So, what you are doing is laboratory research into the active principles of those plants?

Yes. We make combinations and undertake clinical trials following protocols similar to the development of allopathic drugs.

How long does it take you develop a drug?

On average, it takes us eight to 10 years to develop our drugs.

How many drugs are you developing now?

Currently we have 40 under research.

And how many have you produced?

So far, we have 60 pharmaceutical brands which are already in the market.

The brand is equivalent to the drug?

Yes. They have different doses from syrup base to tablets.

All Ayurvedic medicine is as good as the plant material you source. What happens in the case of

a company like Himalaya? How do you ensure quality and efficacy when you mass produce Ayurvedic medicines?

We solve this problem by defining active principle markers for the input materials. This is done by our phytochemists who set markers for the products and any product that goes below that level of marker gets rejected.

We also have a quality department that monitors quality from farm to the finished products and ensures we maintain batch-to-batch consistency.

You know that there is large scale degradation of our natural resources and over-harvesting is also done today.

Sustainable sourcing is very important to us. Majority of our high volume herbs are procured through cultivation. A lot of it is also sourced through our farming initiatives. We have a long standing contract farming agreement with the NGO, Gram Mooligai Corporation Limited (GMCL), based in Madurai, that focuses on farmer livelihood development. We are also working with about 3,000 farmers across India. Our Agrotech team has a package of practices in place to ensure compliance with good agricultural and cultivation practices.

Being an Ayurveda company, what are the investments that you make in Ayurveda?

We have tied up with close to 190 Ayurvedic colleges in India and instituted awards and programmes for meritorious students. The Ayurvedic college outreach programme runs all year long, managed by a dedicated team of Ayurvedic doctors at Himalaya. We publish a magazine named 'Infoline' designed for students in these colleges.

To expand the sphere of Ayurvedic knowledge, we actively reach out to doctors from different fields through our doctor-meet programme and share advances made by Himalaya.

Today, Himalaya is the modern face of Ayurveda. The question we ask ourselves is - how are we modernising the essence of Ayurveda and pushing the boundaries of herbal research and science. In fact, we are doing some serious research in immunomodulation for cancer therapy and the results are very encouraging.

There are challenges in modernising Ayurveda.

Modernising Ayurveda requires heavy investments in research, quality, safety and efficacy. We need empirical data that validates the safety and efficacy of herbal drugs.

Presently, at Himalaya, we validate all our products using modern scientific tools and protocols that have been designed for allopathic drugs. Every system that we put for testing efficacy is based on the allopathic guidelines. Even our clinical trials are done in leading allopathic institutes.

How much do you invest in the research really?

Every rupee earned is ploughed back into three areas: R&D, infrastructure and human resources. So there are no set budgets. For the last four years, we have upped our investments in R&D. Since we are a privately owned company, we have the freedom to take decisions based on our internal priorities and goals, and we are not beholden to short-term shareholder interests. We want to develop the best herbal medicines in the world and that means making significant investments in R&D, which is what we will do. ■

AJIT KRISHNA



Siddhi Karnani and Anurag Agarwal 's enterprise will market organic food from the northeast and Sikkim

How Sikkim ginger came to Delhi

Subir Roy
New Delhi

PARVATA Foods has marketed 100 tonnes of 'Himalayan Ginger' in the National Capital Region (NCR) through Mother Dairy's 350 plus Safal outlets which offer fresh food and vegetables. The farmers who grew this organic ginger in Sikkim, now a totally 'organic' state, secured a high 65 per cent of the price which Safal paid to Parvata Foods. Farmers traditionally get no more than 30 per cent of what consumers pay.

The start-up will next target the markets of Mumbai and Bengaluru for processed spices and thereafter explore the prospects of exporting.

Parvata Foods Pvt Ltd was set up in late 2013 by two co-founders, Siddhi Karnani and Anurag Agarwal, who both graduated from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad that year. This is the first venture for both.

The idea for it came to them when they were touring Sikkim as part of a course run by Prof. Anil Gupta. Named Shodh Yatra, it seeks to energise potential young entrepreneurs into uncharted territories where there is scope for new ventures but the business model for them is yet to be developed.

Karnani explains, "Our aim is to build value chains in fruits, vegetables and spices from Sikkim and other states in northeastern and eastern India, thus elevating the living standards of farmers in difficult hill areas by integrating them with main value chains. The start-up processes the products to add value and then markets them globally."

Agarwal adds that the start-up has just set up a spice processing plant in Sikkim as a joint venture

with the Sikkim government. In April it will launch its own brand which will market an assortment of spices and produce such as ginger, turmeric, chilli, buckwheat and black cardamom. Then the venture will come up with squashes. Right now the effort is to set up the backend of the business.

Ahmedabad-based Last Mile Accelerator, set up by IIM Ahmedabad's tech incubation Centre for Innovation Incubation and Enterprise (CIIE) and US-based investor Village Capital, has invested \$50,000 in Parvata Foods which is now working on a second round of funding.

In the current year, Parvata Foods will likely have a turnover of ₹75 lakh and expects to break even by 2017-18. By then it will have invested \$2.5-3 million (around Rs 20 crore at current rates of conversion). Right now it has ₹6 crore invested in its capital assets and operations, says Agarwal.

The venture bases its future on two legs. As Indian incomes, health consciousness and knowledge about safe and nutritious foods grow there will

Trade sources seem to agree that the future demand for organic foods in India is not being served by the high premium being charged for produce that is labelled organic.

be increasing demand for organic foods which are grown in clean environments without using chemicals. But the supply of genuine organic food will remain far behind this growing demand. Therein lies an opportunity for socially conscious entrepreneurs.

The problem with growing organic foods and labelling them is that you may not be using pesticides in your cultivation but their use may be widespread in the area and some of this will have seeped into the same aquifer from which both draw groundwater for cultivation. It takes several years for a grower to secure certification that his produce is organic.

This is why the whole state of Sikkim being declared organic straightens the path of those who wish to market such produce nationally and globally. It will then be correct and straightforward to label a produce "Organic from Sikkim". This will be new in a country which lacks GI (geographical indication) based marketing when the organic foods demand in advanced countries has a strong preference for it. The world market pays a premium for 'traceability' — being able to say from which farm the produce came.

Right now organic foods are available in India only in upmarket stores at a premium over general produce of around 50-80 per cent, according to trade sources. This too for some produce whose 'organicness' can be dubious. Once the practice of growing organic produce stabilises in India, it will command a premium of no more than 25-30 per cent, which is the global norm.

Trade sources seem to agree that the future demand for organic foods in India is not being served by the high premium being charged for produce that is labelled organic in a somewhat slapdash manner. There are several established organic produce companies in India today but the commitment to organic produce on the part of large retailers is limited. It is still very much a niche business.

Parvata Foods faced the challenge of seasonality when it delivered organic ginger to the NCR. In season — from October to March — it supplied 1.5 tonnes a day. This is also when the cool weather encouraged the consumption of ginger. Supply was low at one tonne per day in the April-May lean season. There is also the issue of farmers following poor growing practices by seeking to get some mileage out of 'mother ginger' in the following months. During September-October the ginger has high moisture content which does not make for transportation across the country.

To overcome seasonality, keep being good to farmers and have a cash flow for as much of the year as possible, Parvata Foods is laying store by processing spices according to organic norms and then marketing them everywhere with accurate and honest labelling.

The ultimate hope is that people will realise the value of going organic. Not only does traditional knowledge list numerous benefits of natural produce, their efficacy is enhanced by organic growing. The curcumin content in turmeric, which is its principal compound, is 4 per cent in the case of organic turmeric from Sikkim but only 2 to 2.5 per cent on average in the conventional produce. So, on the face of it, organic turmeric may cost more but you get more out of it, making it good value for money. And try listing all the good uses that traditional knowledge tells us turmeric has! ■

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

School blooms in desert sand



DILEEP RANJEKAR

BACK TO SCHOOL

ON several occasions, when I tell my former classmates and relatives that I am travelling in Barmer, many of them ask, “Where is Barmer?” One even asked, “What is Barmer?”

Very few know that this district of Rajasthan, with around 6,000 schools and 21,000 teachers, is the second largest educational district in the country. The importance and sensitivity of this district lie in that, like Jaisalmer in Rajasthan and Kutch in Gujarat, it shares a border with Pakistan. A large part of the district is desert and the only change that the residents have seen during the past two years is a lot of greenery — thanks to the rain gods!

On our itinerary was a wonderful school — commended as the best government school in Barmer

district, based on some criteria adopted by the state. My colleague in Barmer chose this school for a visit for several reasons and one of them was our association with it for the past 18 months. The key feature was the head teacher of the school who had almost single-handedly developed it to its current status.

The most striking feature of the school was its ambience — a well-manicured entrance flanked with green shrubs, a clean environment, three lovely leafy trees on the premises and an eye for detail that was visible everywhere such as positioning the dustbins at the right places to well-painted toilets and cleanliness around the place where the midday meal is prepared, and so on.

The large ground was full of desert sand but levelled in a manner so that children could easily use the ground for sports and other activities. The children were full of energy, with nicely tailored, clean uniforms and something that you don't see in many government schools — a properly worn tie on each child. One could observe a good balance of freedom (noise and free speech) with discipline in the way the children responded to the instructions of the head teacher. The teaching-learning material developed by the children along with their teachers was displayed on the walls of each classroom. Also displayed was a board indicating the grade of the class

in a unique manner. The school had about 20 nail cutters that were used to ensure that children cut their nails each week.

The school has around 160 children in eight grades. Due to its reputation, all the children in a 10-km radius have withdrawn from private schools and enrolled in it. The head teacher presented some cultural performances and requested me to interact with the children, especially the members of the Baal Sansad (Children's Parliament — consisting of a Prime Minister and his Cabinet of Ministers).

A Class 5 boy presented a traditional Rajasthani folk dance with several acrobatics (such as holding a moving wheel in his teeth while dancing). He wore make-up and was dressed as a girl in a bright red sari. I was told that the reason for this was that the boy excelled in dance and the school was keen to break the stereotype that such dances can be performed only by girls.

The interaction with the members of the Baal Sansad was reflective of the deeper involvement of the students in the day-to-day management and affairs of the school.

The moving spirit behind the school is the head teacher of the school along with his team of six other teachers. Despite taking a lead role and being fairly assertive during the proceedings, the head teacher was humility personified. He did not speak too much of what he has contributed over the past six years to the school. Nor did he volunteer to share how he was instrumental in the transformation of the school since taking over. The only statement he made, quite spontaneously, was, “Every night, before I sleep, I plan what I will do in the school the next day.”

At the Azim Premji Foundation we have, for long, held a view that the leader of the school has the potential to make or break the school. This has been a fully researched position that I experienced once again during the three hours that I spent in this school.

Having resolved its basic infrastructure and ambience issues, was everything right about the school?

We found that it was an ideal candidate for improving its academic processes and becoming a school that conforms to the standards of



Children walking to a government school in Rajasthan

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Not a poor man's Budget

BHARAT DOGRA

THE Union Budget has been publicised as a budget for the poor and vulnerable sections with special concern for farmers. But this is not really borne out by an analysis of the actual allocations. To be sure, there are a few increases here and there for schemes and programmes relating to the poor. But these increases are not at all adequate, keeping in view the cuts made in the previous two financial years and the special needs of nearly 300 drought-affected districts.

The allocation for the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmer Welfare was ₹15,809 crore in the revised estimates of the previous year while this year's Budget mentions an allocation of ₹35,984 crore. The increase has been used to publicise this as a pro-farmer Budget but this is a huge exaggeration.

Until the previous year, the allocation for the interest subvention for short-term credit to farmers was reported under the Department of Financial Services within the Ministry of Finance. But in this Budget the allocation of ₹15,000 crore has been mentioned under the allocation for the Department of Agriculture. This change in accounting procedure has led to showing a

big increase in allocation for agriculture and farmers. While comparing the Revised Estimate of the previous year with the Budget Estimate of this financial year, an increase from ₹15,809 crore to ₹35,984 crore has been shown while the actual increase is only from ₹15,809 crore to ₹20,984 crore.

Also, it should be noted that when the Revised Estimates of the previous year are compared with the Budget Estimates of the previous year it is revealed that in the case of several important schemes and programmes the Revised Estimates were actually less than the Budget Estimates.

In the case of the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, for example, the Budget Estimate was ₹4,500 crore while the revised estimate was reduced to ₹3,900

crore. The Budget Estimate for the National Food Security Mission was ₹1,300 crore but this was reduced to ₹1,137 crore in the Revised Estimate. The Parampragat Krishi Vikas Yojana had received an original allocation of ₹300 crore but it was reduced to ₹250 crore in the Revised Estimate. What this implies is that there were important cuts in the last months of the previous financial year which had to be made up by the Union Budget for 2016-17.

The Revised Estimate for food subsidy in 2015-16

increased only marginally and, keeping in view the backlog of wage payments and the impact of inflation, even this marginal increase may not be a real one.

The Budget Estimate for the most important nutrition programme, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), for 2016-17 is ₹14,862 crore compared to the Revised Estimate for 2015-16 of ₹15,584 crore. Keeping in view the fact that even last year there were severe fund shortages for ICDS, it is difficult to see how the programme

can be implemented on a lower budget at a time when the need for nutrition will be much higher given the widespread drought conditions.

This is not to say that there are no encouraging signs for the poor and vulnerable sections in this year's Budget but only to point out the inadequacy relative to real needs. The CBGA, after analysing the allocations for the entire social sector, has concluded, "The allocations for Budget 2016-17 for most of the social sector schemes, which are either slightly higher or a little less than the 2015-16 (Revised Estimates) figures, fall short of expectations."

No significant effort has been made to increase direct taxes with the result that the share of indirect taxes in total taxes has been rising which is more burdensome for the poorer sections.

Also, due to this, adequate resources

could not become available for pro-poor and pro-farmer schemes and programmes in line with the declared intentions and aims of the Budget. Hence, despite the recognition of the urgency of the needs of severely drought-affected areas in the Budget speech, no announcement was made of special drought relief works which can be more effective in making prompt wage payments.

The National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights has pointed out in a review of allocations under the Scheduled Caste Sub Plan that, instead of earmarking 16.6 per cent of funds, only 7 per cent has been earmarked. Similarly, in the case of the Tribal Sub Plan, only 4.36 per cent has been earmarked in place of the requirement of 8.6 per cent. ■



Arun Jaitley before presenting the Union Budget in Parliament

was ₹1,39,419 crore while the Budget Estimate for 2016-17 has been put at ₹1,34,835 crore. Clearly, keeping in view the drought conditions in 300 districts, the food subsidy should have been increased in not just nominal terms but also in real terms after making up for the impact of inflation.

In an overall analysis of all aspects of the allocations for agriculture in the Budget for 2016-17, the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) says, "Given the stress that the rural economy is facing today, the budget proposed for the farming community seems inadequate." Hence, all the recent hype about a highly pro-agriculture Budget is not really justified.

The allocation under the MGNREGA has

Continued from page 25

quality enunciated by the national education policy and curricular framework. We shared this with the head teacher and he readily agreed that the school needed help in developing appropriate competence among teachers to move towards teaching-learning practices that would enable the school to have child-focussed education. While the teachers were sincere, their teaching was rather traditional – leading to a focus on rote memory-based learning.

The positive and sincere attitude of the teachers showed their potential for being developed as resource persons for the entire block. One of the most critical factors in enabling teacher professional

development in our country is the non-availability of Teacher Educators competent to work with teachers in a meaningful way. Such Teacher Educators need to have important attributes such as alignment to the overall education perspective envisaged by the national curriculum framework, subject matter expertise, ability to work with people and very good facilitation skills. If teachers and head teachers from schools that have demonstrated how to run a good school serve this purpose, it will be ideal since they would carry immense credibility with the teachers.

Given our scale of schools and teachers, current institutions like SCERT, DIETs, and Block / Cluster Level Resource Persons are grossly inadequate to

contribute effectively to teacher professional development. We need a much larger number of competent resource people. Among the seven million teachers that we have across the country, at least 10 per cent are well motivated and highly competent to be quickly developed as Teacher Educators. This translates into almost 700,000 teachers with potential to be developed as resource people.

We need different approaches to address the huge challenge of lack of Teacher Educators who could contribute to teacher capacity building and the kind of school that we visited in Barmer can be a good source for such teachers. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation.

Return to Niyamgiri



KANCHI KOHLI

FINE PRINT

NIYAMGIRI is back in the news. That tired question, whether or not the bauxite deposits that lie underneath its forest should be mined, is being reiterated — once again. The Odisha government has gone back to court, saying the gram sabhas (village assemblies) in the area should be reconvened to consider whether mining can be carried out by the state-run Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC).

This hill range that spreads across the Rayagada and Kalahandi districts of Odisha became contested terrain since more than a decade. Once hidden from the public eye, Niyamgiri ironically became an international phenomenon when local perceptions of home, culture and nature clashed with state aspirations for growth and corporate interests in profit.

That was in 2004. Much water has flowed through the Niyamgiri hills since then. The impressions of Niyamgiri have been shaped by international campaigns, expert committee reports, street protests, media narratives and the directives of the higher courts. Some actors might have changed, but many remain the same. Till such time as there is ore beneath Niyamgiri's hills, the narrative might remain the same.

The first phase of action against the Niyamgiri hills had two stages. First was the fact that three cases before the Central Empowered Committee (CEC), set up as part of the Godavarman Bench hearing, related to forest violations. The allegations were that the company in question, Sterlite Industries, a subsidiary of the UK-registered Vedanta plc, had initiated the construction of a refinery downhill in Lanjigarh even though the permission for forest diversion for the mining component of the project had not been delivered. The raw material had to be dug out and transported via a conveyor belt from the hills down to the refinery.

Second was the subsequent and masterful delinking of the refinery from the mining process, so as to evade the illegality attached with its construction. The company managed to convince the CEC and the apex court that the refinery could be run without being dependent on Niyamgiri's bauxite and hence the two projects were separate. It is a differ-

ent matter that the project document and the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) stated otherwise.

Lanjigarh's refinery continued to be constructed while Niyamgiri's future went on to be debated in the Supreme Court on both legal and ecological grounds. At the same time, the importance of this place had only begun to be revealed. Starting from it being the home of Niyam Raja, the creator of the Dongria Kondhs, the livelihoods and food cultures of several tribal communities, the presence of wildlife, the origins of water streams et al were repeatedly documented and presented through audio, video and written formats.

In 2007, following the debate over the CEC's report, the Supreme Court said that Vedanta could not be allowed to carry out mining. This was primarily because some of its funders, including the

favour of mining in the Niyamgiri hills.

This decision was challenged before the Supreme Court by OMC and Vedanta, who claimed that the orders of the environment ministry were not "in accordance with law", as directed by the SC in 2008. It is in this case that the 2013 judgment was passed by the SC, the outcome of which is now back in court. In the April 2013 judgment the SC had, in a very detailed set of observations, broadly concluded that cultural and religious rights form part of the forest rights of the people of the Niyamgiri hills.

Further, the judgment said: "Gram sabha has a role to play in safeguarding the customary and religious rights of the STs and other TFDs (Tribal Forest Dwellers) under the Forest Rights Act..." Following this, the court directed the government to place the issue of forest rights and related religious and cultural rights before the gram sabhas.

Once this was done, the MoEF would take a final decision on whether or not to grant its final approval for mining. Mind you, this is the same approval that has already been rejected once. Twelve gram sabhas unanimously said no to mining when the matter was placed before them for consideration. Based on this, the MoEF said no to mining.

Zoom to 2016. The OMC is back before the Supreme Court. News reports indicate that the state-owned corporation has argued that, as per the FRA and other legislation like the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, the gram sabhas had no powers to decide whether mining can be carried out in Niyamgiri. Other

reports indicate that OMC wants gram sabhas to be reconvened because they believe that the verdict is likely to be different this time, especially because a government company would be carrying out the mining activity, and not Vedanta. The decision of the gram sabhas, they say, cannot be in perpetual force, and requires review.

The court's verdict on this is awaited. But it is important to note that the MoEF denied permission for mining under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA). The Supreme Court had also directed the MoEF to take the final call. If OMC seeks to mine Niyamgiri again, it would need to fulfil the requirements for all environmental approvals again. It would be back to 2004 when the first set of legal challenges had raised several questions around ecological fragility, livelihood importance and the cultural significance of the Niyamgiri hills. The discourse was about all these issues, as well as about what is or should be legally acceptable.

Not everyone is likely to sit back and enjoy the 'fight' until a court verdict is announced. Niyamgiri is once again back on the streets, in the courts and in writings such as this! ■

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A Dongria Kondh village: twelve gram sabhas had said no to mining when asked

Norwegian Council of Ethics, had withdrawn support on the grounds of its poor reputation regarding environment and human rights compliance. The court order, however, presented a solution: mining operations could be possible if Vedanta's subsidiary, Sterlite, entered into a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) with the OMC.

A few months and a handful of expert committee meetings later, the SC reverted the decision to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) to take a call on the matter "in accordance with law". By now, what was in place is popularly known as the Forest Rights Act, 2006. The discourse that followed questioned the possibility of displacing the Dongria and Kutia Kondhs from the proposed mining area, even as their rights were yet to be recognised by the government. Executive orders in the form of circulars and guidelines, both from the MoEF as well as the tribal affairs ministry, emphatically stated that no legal diversion of forest land, as in the case of Niyamgiri, was to take place until the recognition of rights was completed. In 2010, based on the recommendations of its Forest Advisory Committee (FAC), the tribal affairs minister himself directed that forest diversion could not be approved in

Break free from cars



V. RAVICHANDAR

CITY LIFE

ONE Sunday in February, a miserly 250 metres on MG Road in Bengaluru was closed to traffic and thrown open to the public as an Open Streets initiative. There were

shops, food outlets, street art, entertainers, music et al. And the public response was overwhelming. Over 100,000 people visited the stretch and, post-5 pm, the place resembled Churchgate Station in peak hour. It was an unqualified success, barring challenges in finding parking space and some grouses about the littering. It just went to show that citizens are starved of vibrant public spaces and flock in droves when there is an opportunity. Bengaluru's Open Streets initiative follows a string of similar initiatives in other cities — Raahgiri in Gurgaon, Delhi, Bhopal and Equal Streets in Mumbai.

Getting to one big Open Streets day event, albeit on a small stretch, has not been easy. Since early 2000, civic enthusiasts have been interested in having pedestrian areas in select places. Commercial Street, a major shopping area, has been the street of choice for a very long time. The local traders' association resisted it, fearing a drop in shoppers and demanded huge parking arrangements to allow it. Finally, about two months ago, they relented and allowed a Happy Streets Sunday which had a decent response.

The reason shop-owners are open to it now is due to the competition the street shops are facing from the malls — it made eminent sense to use the natural attributes of the great Bengaluru weather and a car-free safe environment to attract shoppers! This author recalls shop-owners in Marienplatz in Munich, Germany, a fully pedestrian area, mentioning that they had protested against pedestrianisation but in reality their sales had increased three-fold since the area became car-free. One lives in hope that some of the major shopping districts of Bengaluru become vehicle-free every day of the year.

Bengaluru has had a few 'car-free' initiatives in the past two years. A 'cycle day' programme has been running under the aegis of the Department of Land Transport (DULT), supported by civil society groups like Praja. The 'cycle day' is held twice a month in different parts of the city. A very small part of the road infrastructure (200-300 metres) is made vehicle-free and families can use the place for leisure activities and cycling. The focus was to promote non-motorised transport and build awareness about sustainable mobility. Six months ago, the Horticulture Department and the traffic police collaborated to make Cubbon Park a car-free area on Sundays. Slowly, Bangaloreans derived a welcome taste of an alternative vehicle-free life on Sundays.

One of the best examples worldwide of vehicle-

free Sundays is Cyclovía in Bogota. In a city of seven million, close to a million come out to large tracts of the city which are vehicle-free. In many areas, one set of lanes is closed to vehicular traffic while the opposite lanes are made two-way. In this manner, with alternative route planning, hundreds of kilometres can be made vehicle-free. In HSR Layout, a residential locality in Bengaluru, they tried a car-free Sunday by banning vehicular traffic on the main roads. This led to a lot of inconvenience for

informal conversations have maintained that while it could be great for the public, it's just another task enjoining more effort for the traffic cops. Here too, the cops are missing out on an important benefit of such car-free, community outing days — it brings the local police representatives in closer contact with the community and builds trust and respect.

The plan to do such events twice a year is woefully inadequate. It needs to be a weekly event and some streets need to become pedestrian areas every



Bengaluru is getting a taste of a vehicle free life

The cops are missing out on an important benefit of such car-free, community outing days — it brings the local police representatives in closer contact with the community and builds trust and respect.

folks who needed to head out or come in during the day. So it is important to plan vehicle movements while making parts of an area car-free.

The Open Streets initiative on MG Road showcased what government agencies are capable of when they work in tandem. The MG Road event was run by DULT (Directorate of Urban Land Transport) with assistance from the Traffic Police, Bangalore Metro, Bangalore City Corporation, the Tourism Department and the bus transport folks. There is, however, a challenge when it comes to the government trying to do these events on its own with limited external assistance. It has reservations about doing it too frequently and prefers it as a token activity — it has said it will do Open Streets once in six months.

Further, it is worried about scaling it up on a regular basis across the city. Senior police officials in

day of the year. Our cities have challenges with hard infrastructure of roads, traffic woes, and problems of garbage, water, sanitation and so on. We can at least mitigate some of these woes by providing soft infrastructure, and community-friendly alternatives like making our public spaces come alive through car-free days. The Open Streets event can easily attract sponsors and be run in a sustainable manner using event managers where the role of the government is to provide the necessary permissions, and plan or regulate the vehicular traffic on alternative routes. Government agencies need to let go of their turf rights and allow the scaling up (at least one km per ward for the 198 wards) to happen through private efforts and local community involvement. ■

V. Ravichandar, civic evangelist, hopes that citizens can be in touch with their inner Bengaluru in car-free areas!

LIVING

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Ideas that shaped India

2 films on a seminal journalist

Saibal Chatterjee
Kolkata

RAMANANDA Chattopadhyay, regarded as the father of Indian journalism, is filmmaker Ashoke Viswanathan's maternal great-grandfather. To mark the 150th year of the pioneering editor, the Kolkata-based director has made a pair of films in tribute to a life and career whose influence went beyond the two journals he founded.

One is a period film adapted from a novel by Chattopadhyay's younger daughter Sita Devi. The other is a feature-length documentary focused on the interactions between three of the most influential minds of the early 20th century — Rabindranath Tagore, Romain Rolland and historian Kalidas Nag, Chattopadhyay's son-in-law.

Between them, the two films highlight themes that have assumed renewed urgency today: the concept of nationalism, the nature of journalism and the status of women in a feudal society.

Chattopadhyay, born in 1965, was the founder and editor of two monthly journals — *Prabasi*, published in Bengali from Allahabad, and the *Modern Review*, in English, which came out from Calcutta.

The former was launched in 1901 and the latter in 1907. Both served as platforms for the nationalist intelligentsia of the early 20th century. The list of contributors to the two journals was a veritable who's who of the greatest thought leaders of the era.

Viswanathan's 70-minute documentary, *The Lighthouse, the Ocean and the Sea*, which has dramatised recreations by actors, provides a glimpse of the far-reaching influence that Chattopadhyay had on the crucial ideas that shaped the future of a colonised nation.

"Chattopadhyay's role in popularising Tagore's major literary works in homes in Bengal and the rest of the country was immense although it has not always been acknowledged," says Viswanathan. "He wrote in three languages — English, Bengali and Hindi — which allowed him to reach a very wide readership."

From the very first decade of the 20th century until his death in 1941, Tagore published his writings in *Prabasi*. Besides reviews and essays, *Prabasi*



Bhrasta Tara is based on a novel written by Sita Devi, one of the first Indian women to graduate from college

carried book extracts, poetry and one-act plays. It serialised one of Tagore's greatest novels, *Gora*, between 1907 and 1909.

The Modern Review, launched a few years after *Prabasi*, was a response to the latter journal's dwindling sales. Targeted at Indians who knew English, it was an instant nationwide success, helping Chattopadhyay stabilise his publishing business. *Prabasi* continued to be in circulation for over six decades.

The Modern Review covered politics, economics and sociology, besides publishing literary works, travel pieces and reviews. Readers of the journal were, among other things, exposed to social scientist Radhakamal Mukherjee's path-breaking essays on environmental degradation in India and anthropologist Verrier Elwin's seminal reportage on the Gonds of central India.

In the director's note on the documentary, Viswanathan writes: "There are certain periods in human history that are characterised by conflict and irreparable loss. The First Great War and its aftermath left an indelible impression on the minds of sensitive souls like Rabindranath Tagore and Romain Rolland..."

"...In this experimental docu-feature, the reactions of thinkers of the likes of Ramananda Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, Romain Rolland and Kalidas Nag to a turbulent period in modern history has been juxtaposed with recreation of incidents that shaped the course of so-called human progress."

The Lighthouse, the Ocean and the Sea, funded by the Union Ministry of Culture, outlines a history of the Brahmo Samaj of which Ramananda Chattopadhyay was a part.

It goes on to focus on the epistolary exchanges between Kalidas Nag and French Nobel Prize-winning writer Romain Rolland, articulating their shared admiration for Tagore.

"Rolland never set foot in India but wrote the biographies of Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda thanks to his constant interactions with Nag," says Viswanathan.

Nag went to Sorbonne for a doctorate and that is where he came into contact with Rolland and forged a lifelong friendship with the writer. "It was Nag who introduced Rolland and Tagore to each other," says Viswanathan.

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Ashoke Viswanathan, left, with his actors

Tagore's strong views on nationalism and fascism form an important component of *The Lighthouse*, *the Ocean and the Sea*. "Tagore, Rolland and Nag were internationalists who did not believe in a world divided by narrow cultural borders," says Viswanathan, pointing to Adolf Hitler's assertion of the supremacy of the German race as a directly opposed philosophy.

In his fierce opposition to fascism, Tagore found ready support from the likes of Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell and Hermann Hesse.

For the filming of *The Lighthouse*, *The Ocean and the Sea*, Viswanathan travelled to England, France, Switzerland and other parts of Europe.

Viswanathan's fiction film, the privately-produced *Bhrasta Tara* (The Broken Lily), is based on a novel written towards the end of the 1910s by Sita Devi, one of the first Indian women to graduate from college.

She was also perhaps India's first published feminist writer, "well before Ashapura Devi and Mahasweta Devi," says Viswanathan.

Bhrasta Tara brings alive a fictional world where the plight of a woman hinges on patriarchal whims. It tells the story of Amar (played by Bhashwar Chatterjee), a diligent young student from a family of modest means whose wedding to a beautiful village girl, Surama, (Sophie Moulik) is thwarted by his father and uncle's unreasonable demand for dowry.

Years later, a guilt-ridden Amar discovers that Surama is now the unhappily married wife of a wealthy landlord who is old enough to be her father. "The story," says Viswanathan, "referred to depression at a time when little was known or understood of the psychological ailment."

In a case of history repeating itself, Amar and his younger brother Prabodh find themselves at another wedding in which the bride's family is humiliated for not offering enough dowry. This time around, the younger sibling has the courage



A still from *The Lighthouse, The Ocean and the Sea*

to step up and accept the rejected girl as his wife without seeking his family's permission.

"The period film is faithful to at least 90 per cent of the story," says Viswanathan. "Most of the detailing in the book is also in the film. The two families at the centre of the tale are from a place on the Bankura-Purulia border, but passages of the story play out in a North Calcutta milieu."

"The only change that I have introduced is by employing the funeral procession (Sita Devi only touches upon it) as a kind of Greek chorus, a cinematic device that allows the male protagonist to see his life flash before his eyes," explains the director.

These two cinematic recreations to a bygone era contain messages relevant for our times. In renaissance 19th century Bengal, Tagore, the great poet with a disdain for aggressive nationalism, was a towering figure who overshadowed everything and everyone else.

But it was also a time when men like Ramananda Chattopadhyay and Kalidas Nag contributed in no mean measure — one as an editor and the other as a historian — to defining Bengal's and India's cultural scenario.

Viswanathan's two films are, if only indirectly, a timely reminder of what this nation and its journalism once were — and could still be. ■



Flamingoes taking off in spectacular unison

A barren land teeming with wildlife

Susheela Nair
Ahmedabad

IT was twilight when we checked into Rann Riders, an ideal base to explore the Little Rann of Kutch, a wildlife sanctuary in Gujarat. Located amid agricultural fields and wetlands, near the hamlet of Dasada, Rann Riders is an ethnic eco-resort built in Kutchi village style, using locally sourced materials and crafts of the region.

Sprawled over 4,953 sq km in the five districts of Surendranagar, Banaskantha, Patan, Kutch and Rajkot, the Little Rann of Kutch is the largest sanctuary in India and has the added advantage of being recognised as a Ramsar Site.

We were ushered into our cottages resembling the *bhungas* of the Rabaris of Kutch. Each cottage is circular in design, made of mud paste, dung and twigs, and has a dome-shaped bamboo-and-thatch roof. A traditional carved wooden door marks the entrance to the hut. The use of intricate arts and crafts is very obvious as soon as one steps into the room. The walls are decorated with inlaid mirror work and paintings. The interiors are a medley of traditional décor and modern comfort. As Aditya Roy, managing director of Rann Resort, shepherded us around, he showed us the cottage where Hindi film actor Amitabh Bachchan stayed during the filming of a commercial promoting tourism in Gujarat.



SUSHEELA NAIR



A herd of wild ass

SUSHEELA NAIR



The bedroom at Rann Riders. Cottages resemble the ethnic bhunga

Shivering with cold, we set out at the crack of dawn the next day for a jeep ride into the Little Rann of Kutch, famous as the world's last refuge of the endangered Indian wild ass. The territory of the wild ass once extended from western India through Sindh, Baluchistan and Afghanistan to southeastern Iran. Currently, the animal's last refuge is in and around the Little Rann of Kutch.

Locally known as *khur*, the wild ass looks elegant and majestic with its dark mane running from the back of its head to the neck. It has dark brown stripes stretching from its back to the tip of its tail. The chestnut brown wild ass is powerful, capable of running at an average speed of 50 kmph for long distances. The Little Rann of Kutch was declared a Wild Ass Sanctuary for the conservation of these magnificent creatures. The animal survives off the flat, grass-covered expanses or islands known as *bets*, which rise up to around three metres. The Little Rann was established in 1973, at a time when the wild ass was in danger. Thanks to conservation efforts, its number has increased from 362 in 1963 to more than 3,000 now.

As we drove through the flat, cracked and absolutely barren land, salt mounds greeted the eye in every direction. For miles there was nothing but a huge expanse of saline desert, a wilderness interspersed with a little grass, scrubland and marshes. It is mostly silent except where animals or birds congregate, or where the pickaxe pierces through hardened hills of industrial salt.

This bleak landscape is surprisingly rich in biodiversity and is an ecologically important area for wildlife. Apart from the wild ass, we spotted a nilgai which sprinted away on seeing us. If you are lucky, you will also see other mammals which reside here. They include desert foxes, jackals, wild boar, jungle cats, desert cats, blackbuck, Indian wolves, Indian gazelle, and striped hyenas. While the wild ass is easily seen, the other 32 mammals are rarely spotted.

During the monsoon, water envelopes the area. It dries up in winter, converting the land into salt-encrusted parched earth with shallow lakes and small islands, the *bets* which

attract a myriad of birdlife. The Little Rann of Kutch supports a profusion of local and migratory waterbirds like cranes, ducks, pelicans, flamingoes and land birds like sandgrouse, francolins and the Indian bustard.

After an arduous drive we reached Bajana Creek where we were treated to the fascinating sight of thousands of flamingoes in the distance. They remained unperturbed but, as we ventured closer to the water, our feet sank in the mud and they took off in spectacular unison.

Demoiselle and common cranes, greater and lesser flamingoes, several species of duck, pelicans and storks also flock to this creek and adjacent areas. During winter, migratory birds from as far as Siberia congregate at watering holes like the Bajana Creek and over 380 species of birds have been recorded in and around the Little Rann of Kutch. The common and demoiselle cranes arrive from Siberia and the blue-tailed bee-eater visits from Europe. Also present are 10 species of lark, Indian coursers, three types of ibis, stone plovers, shrikes and moorhens.

We came across some *agariyas* (salt pan workers) living in the arid and harsh land of the Little Rann. We spotted them in the middle of the Rann, surrounded by mounds of white salt crystals. The area is punctuated by desolate salt farms, scattered encampments where people make a living by pumping up ground water and extracting the salt for a paltry sum. The sanctuary faces the threat of illegal salt mining, the emergence of chemical factories, and noise and air pollution caused by transportation of salt. But salt production is the only livelihood option for *agariyas* despite the health hazards they face. ■

FACT FILE

When to go: The sanctuary is open round the year but the best time to visit is from October to March. The best sightings are from November to February when it is cooler and migratory birds arrive in thousands.

Contact: Wildlife/Forest Department

Phone: 02757- 280257

Distance: 129 km from Ahmedabad

Where to stay: Rann Riders

Phone: 02757-280257, 09925236014

LAKSHMAN ANAND



and misconceptions of gender and sexuality. I know that the media occasionally raises concerns about discrimination by medical professionals particularly around how transgender individuals are treated within medical spaces and, rarely, when 'treatment' is offered to LGBT individuals in lieu of support and empowerment.

I believe that there has been an abdication of responsibility by these professionals who are not only healthcare experts but, whether they like it or not, social change agents. I feel that they cannot ignore concerns around human rights, dignity, personal freedoms or choices, and cater to a moral majority that treats a large chunk of the population as devoid of any of these concerns.

What sparked the idea of a book?

We were both working together on a brief study looking at responses from medical professionals providing treatment to those of a different sexual orientation. The paper that emerged from this study (supported by SARAI, Delhi) went through a couple of iterations like strengthening the literature section and looking for academic data on conversion therapy, etc — especially after presentations before the Karnataka Association of Clinical Psychologists, and at other meetings and conferences.

While the original idea of the study was to examine the intersection of medicine, law and society, the

medical community. The authors also suggest ways and means of changing mindsets.

Both Vinay Chandran and Arvind Narrain have years of experience and the right sensitivity in handling such issues. Chandran is a counsellor and executive director of Swabhava Trust in Bengaluru, an NGO working on issues related to the LGBT community. He has set up a helpline called Sahaya, organised support services for the LGBT community and provided training to those keen to work with the community. He has also worked with state AIDS prevention organisations.

Narrain is an advocate and founder-member of Alternative Law Forum in Bengaluru. He has written several books on alternative sexuality such as *Queer: Despised Sexuality, Law and Social Change*. He was one of the team of lawyers representing those who challenged Section 377 in the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court.

Civil Society spoke to Vinay Chandran on their important book.

Why has there been such a long silence about how the medical community treats the LGBT community? This is known but rarely talked about publicly or in the media.

I wouldn't say that there's been a long silence. If anything, the voices against discrimination in the medical sector have been increasing over the last two decades. The louder silence is within the medical sector itself which doesn't debate attitudes around gender and sexuality as much as they ought to. But these silences have deep roots in the sexist and heterosexist attitudes within society.

We have seen, through our research, that medical practice doesn't exist in a vacuum. It is heavily influenced by social perceptions, personal belief systems

SAGAR DAVE



Vinay Chandran

powerful nature of the engagement between medicine and the LGBT community, particularly where conversion therapy was concerned, was important to acknowledge. Added to that, we collected narratives from gay people on their experiences of being 'treated' in order to 'convert' them from being gay to straight, and our efforts focused automatically to enrich the study and seek more work around it. Thus the idea of the book was born.

You have brought together experts in medicine, law and human rights to present a comprehensive picture. How were the experts and the issues they would analyse identified for the book?

We were fortunate that, over the years from when we first started putting this collection of papers together, several mental health professionals and activists or peer counsellors from within the LGBT community had begun to identify or had started writing about the issues that we raised. We invited several of them to submit their papers and also got a couple of them to actively conduct studies, specifically for our book. Almost all the authors in the collection have had a significant amount of experience working with the LGBT community, in the context of medicine or law.

Would you recommend a ban on treatments and cures offered to people who are homosexual or lesbian?

The practice of aversion and conversion therapy as a

form of 'treatment' or 'cure' for LGBT people is unfortunately still an option provided to clients in India. While the International Classification of Diseases, put together by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and used by a majority of health practitioners in India, is already on its way to removing differing sexual orientations as a criterion for treatment, and more and more medical curricula

in colleges address the changes that have occurred around the world on LGBT rights, there is still a significant gap between those who teach these values and those who practise them.

Simply banning these treatments cannot be the only goal. There has to be active engagement with medical professionals around the country to help them understand the long-term disastrous impact that such treatments have on LGBT people. Teaching ethical practice is as important as teaching medicine.

Does the LGBT community have specific medical needs?

The danger of medicalising or pathologising an entire community is that specific needs are overlooked. Every aspect of their health becomes identified with their gender identity or sexual orientation and treatments ignore underlying causes like social ostracisation or oppression, discrimination from within family or workplace and so on.

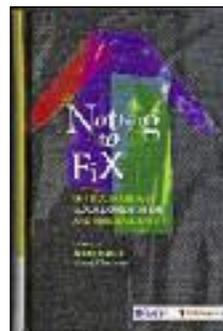
Depression owing to external oppression, fear and guilt of leading double lives, risk-taking behaviour, and self-harm are each a direct result of the stress of being LGBT in a homophobic/transphobic world. These have to be addressed specifically as well as awareness on LGBT issues increased in society.

Why have formal medical protocols not been developed for the LGBT community?

Conversations around gender and sexuality within the medical profession only appeared when HIV and AIDS became associated with high-risk sexual behaviour. Protocols developed in this sector addressed certain areas of mental health and general health. NGOs helped gain even more empathetic responses through their work. But a generic understanding of LGBT issues and addressing the lacunae of ethical and practice protocols in medical curricula still has a long way to go.

If a person from the LGBT community is wrongly treated by a doctor or humiliated, is it possible to get justice? Or does one have to wait for Section 377 to be removed?

Medical professionals whose personal practice is influenced by the moral majority are unlikely to change the way they work with LGBT clients, regardless of whether the law changes or not. The only way to ensure justice in these instances is to empower the client through creating support systems or support groups that help improve confidence levels and make the client comfortable and actively seek legal redressal where discrimination is experienced. But even a change in Section 377 is not automatically going to remove prejudice, either in society or in the medical profession. Until the journeys of gender and sexuality are seen as being separate from those of marriage and heterosexist conformity, the road ahead is long and winding. ■



Nothing to Fix
Edited: Arvind Narrain & Vinay Chandran
Sage/Yoda Press
₹ 995

Jack machine

FOR the first time a tender jackfruit peeling machine has been invented by Ralak Control Systems, a company in Bangalore. "Our new machine is designed to peel fruits of up to 500 mm in length and 125 to 250 mm in diameter," says Vasudeva Murthy, proprietor of Ralak.

It took Murthy six months to develop this machine. It has a one-horse power motor and requires a floor area of 1,100 mm height, 1,200 mm length and 650 mm width.

The machine removes 70-80 per cent of the peel. To take off the peel from both ends manual effort is required.

"It works three times faster than a man," says B.V. Bhaskar Reddy, senior research fellow at the University of Agriculture Sciences in Bengaluru.

The machine will be useful for industries that have to process thousands of tender jackfruits a day. With interest in jackfruit picking up in South India and more entrepreneurs keen to invest in jackfruit products, this machine, if improved would be really handy for minimal processing of tender jackfruit.

The jackfruit peeling machine costs ₹90,000. "To get maximum edible portion of the fruit, the dancing tool holder has to be redesigned. If we introduce variable speed drive with one more motor for the dancing tool and redesign the safety guards, we can make it compact," explains Vasudeva Murthy.



Can the same machine be used for peeling pineapple? "We haven't tried or thought of it so far. But it should be possible, maybe with some modifications," says Murthy.

Contact: Ralak Control Systems - 90360 25300 (WhatsApp too).
Email: ralakv@yahoo.co.in

by Shree Padre

PICTURES BY BILAL BAHADUR

Fab paper

KASHMIR's paper mache products are famous. Delicately painted in floral designs, the Valley's paper mache is liked by one and all. Both local people and tourists, buy paper mache products for their homes and offices. Not only are these products useful, they lend an aesthetic touch to your drawing room, study desk or lobby.

The city of Srinagar is crowded with shops selling paper mache products. Among them is Mohammed Abdullah's shop which is ranked high by locals. His products, they say, are authentic and durable. Sitting in his shop located in a tiny lane of the Koker Bazar area, Abdullah can be seen selling his products. His shop is also very popular because he has products to suit every person's pocket.

You can see beautifully designed wall hangings, penholders, shikaras, samovars, flower vases, boxes of all shapes and sizes, candle stands and Christmas décor items. Sifting through his shop is a relaxing and unhurried experience. You can also buy wood carving items.

Contact: Mohammad Abdullah, Koker Bazar,
Lal Chowk, Srinagar. Phone: 09796131147.

by Jehangir Rashid



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Founded in 1946, Jamshedpur School of Art today boasts of a library comprising 13,000 books on art