

Civil Society

MISS LOVELY MAKES A MARK

Indian new wave films
find global money



'PANCHAYATS WILL ALL BE CONNECTED'

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Money and the new wave



COVER STORY

MISS LOVELY MAKES A MARK

Filmmakers in India who want to cut a different path find there are takers elsewhere in the world for a good script. In Europe their films are positioned as arthouse offerings.

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TO be successful, cinema must enthrall. So, when money is to be made from films, the preference is for tried and tested ways of capturing audiences. But it is from initiatives in the fringes that we get intimations of tomorrow's tastes and it is here that new thresholds of creative excellence are explored. The question is how to give such efforts a chance with money and reach.

Bollywood is often sneered at for being too crass and commercial, too formula-driven to be original. But it is also true that several small budget films with innovative themes have in recent times been runaway successes at the box office. They have defied known odds and raised the bar for popular cinema. The financiers of these films have walked away with a healthy return on their investments. So, everyone has been happy – the discerning filmgoer, the director and the producer. Most importantly, these films have dealt with current concerns and done so in ways that face up to the commercial challenge of inviting everyone to watch.

But it is also true that boundaries haven't been stretched enough. More needs to be done so that cinematic talent can experiment and enrich the Indian movie business and society as a whole.

This is our second cover story on talented filmmakers who struggle with a system that seems to be loaded against them. In desperation, many filmmakers have used the advantages of a networked, viral world, to go directly to audiences to raise money. There are others who have found investment in Europe and other parts of the world where their offerings are regarded as being good for niche audiences.

In a globalised world money can come from anywhere for a good idea – or in this case script. But the solution is not in efforts funded by European trusts and foundations – charity money. What is needed is fair access to screens and finance in India itself so that the new wave is forced to compete in the marketplace of ideas and sharpen what it does. A successful film doesn't have to make money. It would be enough if it doesn't lose money and yet makes its presence felt. And if it fails, it perhaps deserves to. Subsidising creativity is not such a great idea because it leaves scope for bluff. The true test should be a paying audience – be it for a film, play, book, or magazine. Distant patronage provides interim relief, but it is not the real measure of success. However, for the filmmakers we feature in this month's cover story we are nonetheless happy they found takers for their work and we hope they go on to have outstanding careers.

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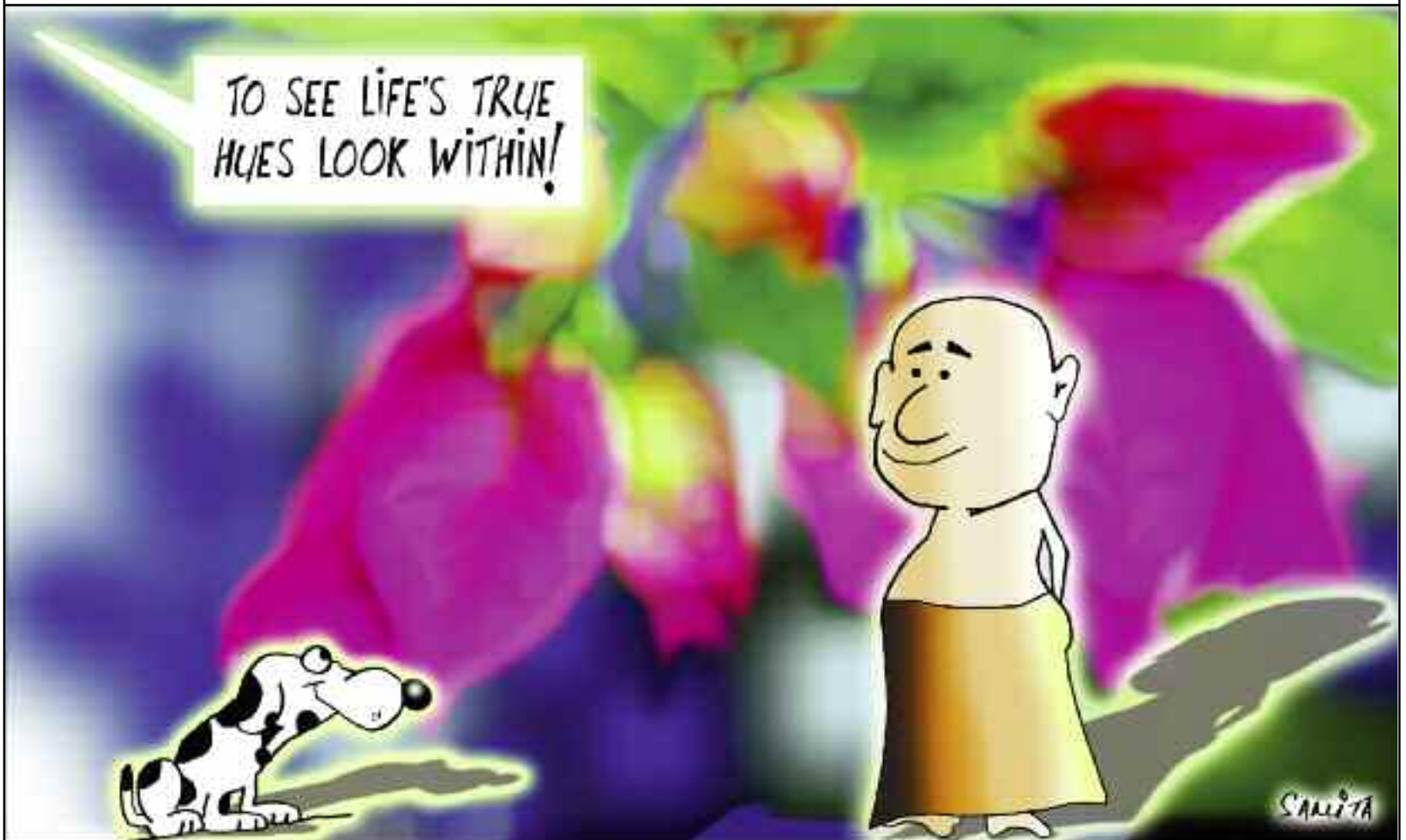
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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Childline

Your cover story on Childline in the November issue was very well written. This is a good service for children in distress. Every school in India must inform children about it. Child abuse happens at home and in schools also.

No child, rich or poor, should suffer in silence.

Asha Trivedi

Childline is an excellent idea but it needs to be backed by strong State institutions. Currently, children dread being put under the care of the State. Orphanages are horrible, bleak places, like jails. We need many more honest NGOs working for the benefit of children to partner the government in improving such facilities for children. Like the SOS Villages, every child needs a caring home and family.

Sangita Shah

It should also be added that the Government of India bears most of the cost of running the Childline network. In 2011-12, that worked out to about \$6 million and the huge expansion in coverage will increase that sum manifold in the next five years. Civil society too contributes, but that is a small fraction of the total sum needed.

Nawshir Mirza

Hall of Fame

With reference to your story, 'Ratnauli's wired hero', I know Sanjay Sahni well as he used to visit my house to attend to electrical repair work. I always found him

prompt and efficient in his work and very disciplined in his attitude. When I came to know about his passion for serving the workforce back at his village, I felt great admiration for this youngster who unmindful of his financial losses due to being absent from his work in Delhi, spent considerable time and effort to represent the cause of the NREGA workforce with the state government and seek relief for them.

I am proud of his achievements. I would quote him as an example to young people that you can succeed in anything in life provided you give your 100 per cent. My congratulations to you, Sanjay, and I wish you many more awards and acclaims in your life. I would only caution you not to get carried away by such rewards but continue the selfless spirit of your service at all times.

Viswanathan
(envynathan@gmail.com)

Congratulations to Dr Evita Fernandez for getting this award. I am truly delighted that such a wonderful human being has been recognised for her untiring efforts in building up the Fernandez

Hospital from what it was to what it is today. Her sincerity, her love and devotion to the profession and patients has been rewarded. Evita, I am really happy for you and I am sure you will continue to keep up the good work that you have always been doing with a cheerful smile.

Sucheta Gersappe

I have known Evita for about 50 years (she was my senior in school). She has always been helpful and service oriented. My family and I were very proud of her when she courageously and cheerfully took over the enormous responsibility of running the Fernandez Hospital. I am delighted to hear that she is being recognized with a prestigious award, which she more than deserves.

Lydia Flynn

Working children

Your story, 'In J&K children work to learn' was a very good one. The way the authorities are sleeping over child abuse, they are not just killing a dream but Generation Next.

Shahzad Hamdani

I am thankful to Charkha Development Communication Network for highlighting this issue. The story, 'In J&K children work to learn' was well researched. During my one-year research I found most children are doing hard work and not getting benefits from various government schemes.

From the story it appears the children are attending private schools instead of government schools. The reason for this is that government schools are understaffed. If there are staff members they are not trained to teach the children. Those who are posted under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) scheme have low qualifications (10+2). In most rural areas of Kashmir, schools, which were 'upgraded', still do not have basic needs like drinking water and toilets.

Maybe through this scheme India will reach 100 per cent literacy. But it is clear, according to my view, that we will be losing great thinkers and scientists due to poor schooling.

The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) is another government programme which has totally failed due to lack of buildings and rations.

An anganwadi worker informed me that they got rations for only six months. They don't have a separate building due to which children do not come to the anganwadi. A six-year-old child in rural Kashmir does not learn alphabets in Urdu, English or numbers. That is why child labour is rampant and some children are forced to earn to learn.

Pir Azhar

Thangadh

Tanushree Gangopadhyay's report, 'Dalit anger mounts in Gujarat', is indeed timely. It would be interesting to know how much the state government of Gujarat has really done for the Dalits. It also appears that the 2002 riots of Gujarat have not taught the police anything. They continue to be insensitive to the minorities.

Manu Patel

The famous argument is that reservations will lead to empowerment. The question is do our politicians really want to empower the downtrodden and marginalized?

Can anyone ever imagine Laloo Prasad Yadav or Ram Vilas Paswan taking an objective look at what really needs to be done to educate and empower Dalits except for resorting to cheap populist gimmicks?

I also do not agree with the use of the word affirmative action for reservations. Reservations are forced and not based on consensus whereas affirmative action does have some incentive linked to implementing empowerment.

Empowerment is a complex thing and deals with a psyche that comes from taking pride in what one is. Blacks achieved a degree of empowerment through taking pride in Black culture, religion, literature even Black capitalism and cultivation of popular Black idols and public figures.

Erandi

Jackfruit

I am a scientist working in the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, in the field of jackfruit processing. I request you to kindly send me information on RTC jackfruit technology.

Munishamanna

We feel empowered

More than 100 of us at Ratnauli village watched the video film of the recognition ceremony of the Civil Society Hall of Fame 2012 on civilsocietyonline.com.

It made us very happy to see that our voices had been heard and that all our efforts to fight for work and our dues under NREGA are being recognized.

The people of Ratnauli and other neighbouring villages of Muzaffarpur district say we are entering a new age. We feel empowered by this new technology and feel now that we can ask for better development be it water, sanitation, healthcare or education.

We feel accountability is possible and people like us raising our voice against corruption and poor governance can be heard.

About 5,000 people under seven panchayats have publicly supported the agitation we began at Ratnauli. They say they are proud of me for taking up the cause of poor people who seemed to have no hope.

We want to all thank *Civil Society* magazine for reporting us and

including us in the Civil Society Hall of Fame 2012.

Sanjay Sahni

Ratnauli Village, Muzaffarpur, Bihar

The truth about dams

I read with keen interest Himanshu Thakkar's detailed report on irrigation in Maharashtra, 'Dams aplenty, but where is the irrigation?'

It is a shame what has happened in Maharashtra. It is so clear now that politicians across political parties have been involved.

It is sad that this should happen in Maharashtra which is a leading state and should have set a benchmark for better governance and accountability.

The root of all corruption is lack of transparency in government. Information that should be in the public domain is tucked away in files and the result is that how public money is being misused does not come to light.

It is of little help to get annual reports because by then the corruption has already happened. What we need is constant monitoring and awareness.

I welcome 'Public Inquiry' as a series in *Civil Society* so that serious journalists like Thakkar can bring out the truth about governments and how they use our money.

Our salvation lies in quickly using information technology to prise open government and improve processes by which citizens can ask for answers.

S. Bakshi, Gurgaon

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INTERVIEW / SAM PITRODA It is all about Gandhiji's

'We are re-engineering the nation. Every panchayat will be connected'

Civil Society News,
New Delhi

INDIA is poised for a giant surge in Internet connectivity in the next few years. Every panchayat will be hooked to optical fibre pipelines, which will deliver video and not just data. It will transform the way in which people get an education, transfer money, share knowledge and access government information.

Sam Pitroda leads this initiative as the Prime Minister's advisor on public information infrastructure and innovations. Pitroda is an entrepreneur and policymaker. He is a visionary who triggered India's communication revolutions in the eighties.

Pitroda, who shuttles between India and the US, spoke to *Civil Society* at his New Delhi home on Safdarjung Road. Edited excerpts from the interview.

You have been advising the Prime Minister on public information infrastructure. What's on the table and how far have we got?

We have a grand design for public information systems to essentially democratize public information over a period of time. The right to information (RTI) law was the first seed that was planted for the democratization of information. But even with RTI in place we really don't have information organized and available in the format we need. There is a lack of good, credible and consistent information available to everybody. As a result, people say anything and get away with it. This is true of all kinds of information: number of schools, teachers, infant mortality, female literacy, number of courts, road signs....

Data is sometimes five years old, sometimes seven years old. Even our boundaries of districts and states differ because, you know, maps vary from the water department to the revenue department to the telecom department to the power department.

With the technology potential available today, it is time to really structure this properly. So, we decided to launch this visionary plan on public information infrastructure. It has many pieces.

Lots of people are working on it. What we are working on is really the technology. Other pieces are training, execution, process engineering.

But infrastructure is the basis for it all. Tell us about the technology that is being put in place.

Now that we are a nation of one billion connected people, we need to take this connectivity further. We need to go to video-based connectivity and bypass data connectivity. Video-based connectivity requires large amounts of bandwidth. It has the potential to reach out to people with icons and symbols and video and not worry about huge amounts of text. This is very important in our part of the world where there are multiple languages and interests and so on. So, the idea is to provide broadband connectivity and you need hundreds of megabytes for that.

To provide connectivity we have two main programmes. One is NKN (National Knowledge Network) to connect all our universities, all our R&D labs and, ultimately, libraries, clusters, courts and so on.

This network was approved three to four years ago and it is almost built with a thousand nodes working today. We hope to get all 1,500 nodes in the next six to seven months. The idea is really to improve collaboration and share valuable education, research and talent because it is limited. A professor in Chennai can give a lecture and small colleges all over the country can take advantage of it.

This network is costing us about \$2 to 3 billion. With it we are also connecting around 20,000 colleges.

Then we have a plan to connect 250,000 panchayats with optical fibre. A lot of this is feasible today because we have a million kilometres of optical fibre in place. This fibre was laid for telecom use when bandwidth carrying capacity of that fibre was really low. Now you can increase capacity by 1,000 times. If we had to lay this fibre today it would be a huge task. So, we are taking this fibre, mapping it and seeing what else we need to do to go from district to panchayat – that would be about 400,000 km extra. Since most of the reach in rural areas is between BSNL, Railtel or Powergrid we are

using these three companies to lay extra fibre.

This project is going to cost us ₹30,000 crores or more. We have been in the planning stages for two or two and a half years. We have 58 panchayats connected, trials are going on in Rajasthan, Tripura and Andhra Pradesh. We are going to be trying some software. The idea is to get pretty much all the panchayats connected in the next 18 months – apart from those where there may be issues of terrain.

When this happens you will have huge bandwidth available. At the panchayat level there will be a tower, which would be accessible to everybody. Government applications at panchayats for payments, service fees and so on would be essentially through one operator, maybe BSNL. But the fibre access would be available for everybody. It would be open access on the tower for the last mile. Private operators can go and offer services to schools etc. Then we will be truly connected.

The issue after that is applications. What kind of applications are we going to design?

The second piece relates to all of the platforms. One is the UID platform where we are already offering I believe close to 300 million UID numbers to residents. By next year it will be 600 million to 700 million residents, which is massive. And this will be plugged hopefully into telephone numbers and bank accounts.

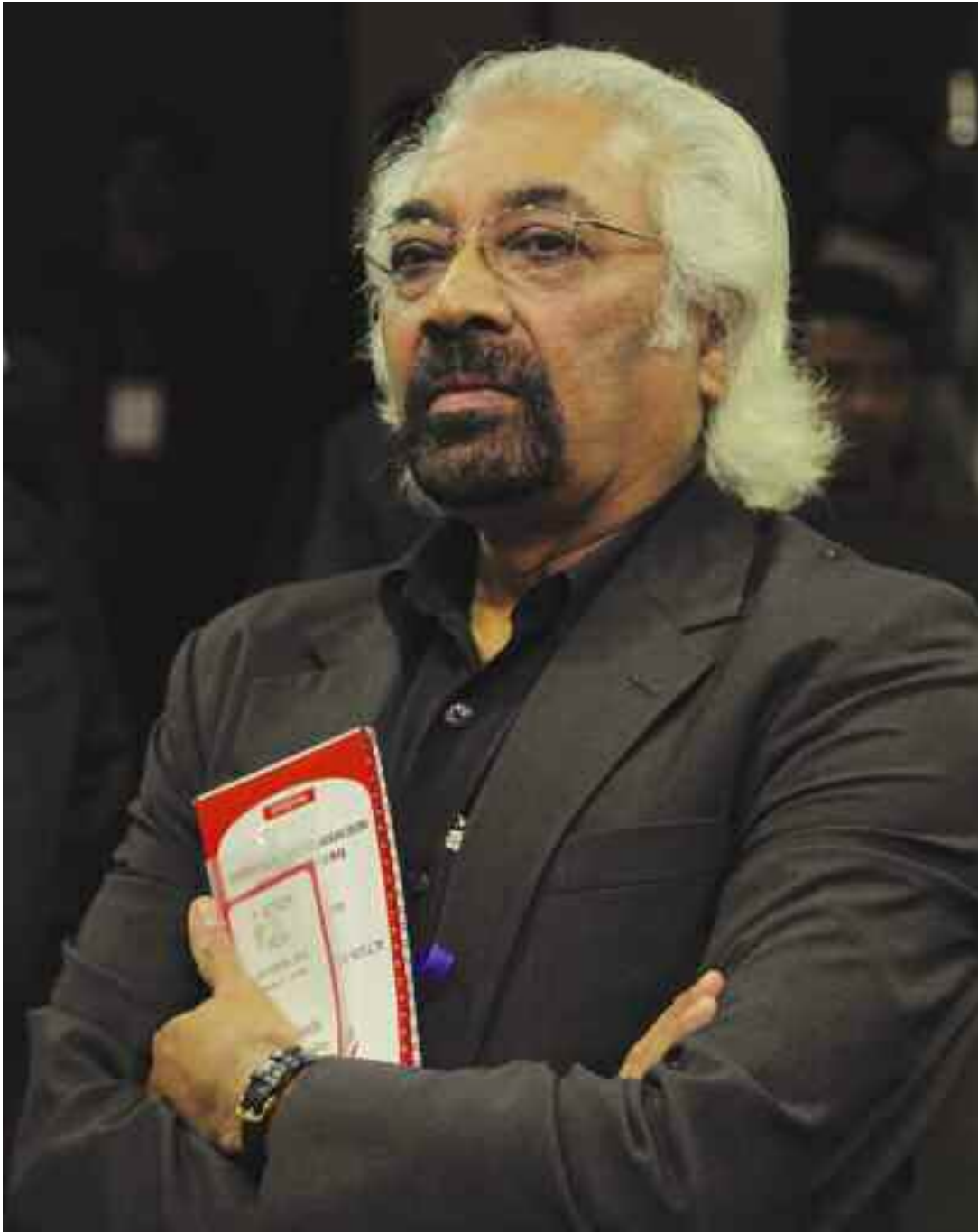
In terms of the rollout how does this compare to other countries?

Nothing like this has been attempted anywhere else in the world. But you see that is because partly we are doing this in 2012 and not in 1995. So its not just that we are very smart but that the tools are very different. Cloud computing, open source software, high speed fibre, smart phones, tablets...these were not there earlier.

All this coming together represents a huge opportunity for this country.

We are re-engineering the nation. I don't think people get it. It will have far reaching implications. It will create a new India with the young

dream: transparency, accountability, access



Sam Pitroda: With better processes, corruption will be eliminated over time

participating. A lot of old people won't get it. Even I won't understand how the applications will unfold. But I understand the infrastructure, it is here, take it, use it.

What does this mean for the nation in terms of governance, accountability, transparency, delivery of services, payments, new-age enterprises....

That's what I mean when I said we are re-engineering the nation. It is all about transparency, accountability, access, clarity, consistency.... all the things Gandhiji talked about. Gandhi's dream could not be realized because there was no Internet.

How easy is it to bring government files on to websites?

Complicated, so let's take one side of it. UID is one piece, which will happen. Nandan Nilekani is leading it. It's a very complicated task. We are fortunate to have Nandan lead it.

Similarly, another important task is the national GIS. Today 30 government departments use their own maps. So many resources go into creating maps. We met all these government departments to convince them to get one portal for GIS. Finally, we have a plan after two and a half years of working. We have started working on this with Dr Kasturirangan taking the lead.

The GIS programme will initially cost us ₹3,000 to ₹4,000 crores. But when that happens we will be able to tag every physical aspect: we will be able to tag who is building a hospital, a school, how many rooms. We will know where every railway compartment and wagon is and for how long it has been there. We will be able to pinpoint every detail because the resolution is so good now.

Four major data centres are being created in Delhi, Bhubaneswar, Pune and Hyderabad. These will be massive data centres. Each state will also have its own data centre, though you don't need

it. States (are accustomed) to doing their own thing in e-governance. They are given money to buy computers, develop software. We are saying that's a lot of waste. Now we will put everything on the cloud. It will be the same software for everybody. You can tweak it to change your user interface in the local language, but the basic software will be the same for prison records, death and birth certificates and so on.

We have a variety of applications for which software already exists or is being developed from passports to drivers licences, food distribution, NREGA. There are 30 major programmes for which there are 30 teams developing software.

Who is developing these? You must need an awful number of people?

Ten thousand software people.

Is that enough?

No, but I would say it's a good start. A lot of work has been done in the past. Now all of this work of 20 years is coming together because domain experts know what is useful, what is not. The NIC is the government arm for developing this and has various groups. On passports there is collaboration with TCS, on the police with Wipro. For the legal sphere there are two small companies. Of the 10,000 software developers, 3,000 may be from NIC and 7,000 from contractors.

You will need more platforms. How will this play out? What is the resistance to open systems?

Once the information infrastructure is ready, we will focus on some major programmes of the government like the electronic office. The e-file is a big thing. How do you convert *narawali* file (the typical government file tied with a string), into a digital file? There we are finding a lot of resistance. But it will happen. We have to set a date from when there will be no more manual files and work backwards. The way we have designed it a digital file looks like a *narawali* file, it moves like that too. When you open it, it's a green sheet. The design is intended to make the transition easier. We just need political will to set a cut-off date.

Similarly we have this open government platform that we have developed in collaboration with the US. When President Obama visited India we explained to him our public information infrastructure. We decided to launch a joint programme on an open government platform between our group and the White House. They had data.gov. But it did not have documents with it. Our teams developed the document piece jointly without really meeting each other.

This platform is now going to be used by Rwanda, we have requests from Canada, Russia, Trinidad. We have opened it but our people are afraid to put data in.

Are there states which have aggressively pursued this?

Some yes. There are some great people and initiatives. But this is India, you know, that's our diver-

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

sity. When you put all this data together – e-court, e-police, e-file – you have a whole new way of dealing with the system.

Then you have to redesign some of the processes. On top of this, when you bring in electronic payment, then you are bypassing the middleman completely. Corruption, confusion and inefficiency will be eliminated over a period of time. That is the new India we want to build.

How long do you see all this taking?

I would say infrastructure would be ready in two years. It will take a couple of years to understand applications, adjust. In anywhere from seven to 10 years it will be robust.

In terms of volumes and implications for the country it will be amazing. Take scholarships as an example. Who gets scholarships? It will all be there on the network so fake names will not be in the list. If cooking gas dealers are linked to UID you will find that millions of people don't even exist. This will open up the system.

If I am rich enough and I still take advantage of these benefits my name will be on a list. People will ask, why is he buying rice for ₹2? I will be exposed. Today nobody knows, so I can get away with it.

Now this infrastructure is all at State cost.

Nobody in the private sector would invest because there is no business model as yet. But over a period of time five years down the road there will be a business model and new opportunities will be created from this platform.

And over a period of time it would be sustainable? For instance one would pay for land records etc.

Yeah, that's what I am saying. Business models will emerge. It will drive new kinds of entrepreneurship.

How do you see innovation in the Indian context?

We have been able to develop consensus on many major issues in the National Innovation Council.

One, having just one National Innovation Council is not enough in a country of one billion people. We need to request the states to set up state-level councils, sectoral councils and we need a lot many more people involved in this movement. Seventeen people can't do much.

Two, we need an innovation fund to see innovations for the bottom of the pyramid. Our overall strategy is don't bother about innovations for the rich; they will figure it out. We need to focus on problems of the poor and that requires clarity on affordability, scalability and sustainability. We need to create an eco system: capital, understanding of patents, trademarks, links with universities, R&D labs and so on. We have created this fund of ₹5,000 crore which will be operational in the early part of next year. So we go in on a commercial basis and invest in these ventures. We can't provide the same returns that normal VCs provide, but we can provide reasonable returns. We need clusters where we go in and link them with universities, CSIR labs, banks and so on to improve productivity and efficiency.

We don't see the bottom of the pyramid as a market. I had differences with CK Prahalad. It is about using technology to improve the income of the bottom of the pyramid. It is then they will have the money to buy things. Today they don't have money to buy things. To me this is more important. ■

India's milk capital

Tanushree Gangopadhyay
Anand (Gujarat)

LAST year Papiya Patel, a bubbly 24-year surrogate mother, delivered twins for an Asian-Canadian couple and earned ₹4.50 lakhs. She paid off a large debt her husband had taken to buy his own auto-rickshaw.

"I could never have been paid this much. I would like to earn all that my family wants while I am young and robust. I am looking forward to being a surrogate mother again so that I can invest in our own home," she says with pride. Her husband Prakash, who has accompanied her to Dr Nayana Patel's clinic in Anand, nods in agreement.

Once famous as the milk capital of India, Anand has gradually become the 'international capital of surrogacy.' This mode of livelihood seems to have benefitted mostly poor and marginalized families. But it raises many contentious issues.

"Since India does not have laws regulating surrogacy, it has become the most favoured destination for childless couples from the US, the UK and several countries," rues Ameer Yagnik, an advocate. "There is no God involved in such pregnancies, merely technology. We now have to depend on the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) guidelines."

There are no official estimates but it is estimated that the surrogacy industry in India could be worth over ₹30,000 crores. It remains unregulated and has the character of a cottage industry, say feminists who have failed to bring about a ban on commercial pregnancies. They point out that surrogacy is a complete violation of the surrogate mothers' human rights.

"Surrogacy in the US costs upwards \$ 100,000 whereas in India it costs just \$ 25,000," says Dr Manish Banker, President of the Indian Association of Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART). The practice is banned in several European countries.

"Since the past eight years around 70 clinics are operating in India. More than 2,000 children have been born there. Surrogate mothers are paid anywhere between ₹3 lakhs and ₹4 lakhs per pregnancy," says Dr Banker. Surrogacy forms part of his association's agenda. Dr Banker is a member of the committee that drew up the ART Bill, 2008. The bill has not been tabled in Parliament as yet.

Contracts have to be signed by the parents, the

surrogate mother and her husband. "The birth certificate is made in the parents name and the surrogate has no lien," says Dr Banker.

Dr Nayana Patel's Kaival Clinic and the Akanksha Infertility Clinic on Station Road in Anand are the most popular destinations for childless couples from the US, the UK, European countries, Israel and Singapore when they come looking for surrogate mothers. Around 500 surrogate children have been born here since 2004. An Oprah Winfrey TV show featured Dr Patel and resulted in making her clinic even more popular.

Nayanaben, as she is fondly called, has around 70 surrogate mothers on her campus.

TANUSHREE GANGOPADHYAY



Dr Nayana Patel

Nayanaben, as she is fondly called, has around 70 surrogate mothers on her campus. 'This is to ensure good nutrition and a conducive environment for them,' she says.

"This is to ensure good nutrition and a conducive environment for them," she says. The surrogates are graded according to their stage of pregnancy and health. They are put up at three places in and around her hospital.

"I have 350 listed surrogates," she says. In her clinic, unlike other clinics, mothers breast-feed the babies for at least two weeks. This is included in the money charged to the parents.

Dr Nayana Patel is recognized as a reputed gynaecologist. She started practising in Anand in 1991. Later, she began offering the in vitro fertilization (IVF) procedure. "I started offering surrogacy assistance from January 2004 quite by chance. An Asian couple from the UK approached

is now surrogacy hub

TANUSHREE GANGOPADHYAY



Surrogate mothers live together

me for a surrogate mother but I couldn't find anyone. Finally, the childless woman's mother voluntarily became the surrogate. That's when I decided to get into this practice," explains Dr Patel.

"We insist that the surrogate mother has had at least one pregnancy to ensure that her uterus is healthy and she can bear this complicated pregnancy. We counsel surrogate mothers about the pros and cons of bearing a child for another couple. This helps them give up the baby soon after delivery."

The ICMR guidelines limit each surrogate's pregnancies to five including her own. The age limit is between 21 and 35. Not more than three embryos can be transferred to the surrogate after IVF. Small wonder, a majority of surrogates have given birth to twins. There is no provision in the guidelines for residential quarters for the surrogate mothers or for breastfeeding once the babies are delivered.

Dr Lata Shah, a gynaecologist and health activist, is horrified that three embryos can be transferred to the surrogate mother. "Handling just one normal pregnancy can be fairly risky. How do they expect surrogates to manage two or three embryos?" she says. Dr Shah has been opposing IVF. She points out that in reality it promotes preferences for a male child.

"Commercialization has ruined the fabric of Indian society where the sanctity of motherhood and breast feeding was strong," remarks Heena Gajjar, a sociologist from Anand.

Surrogates do face problems. In Dr Nayana Patel's

clinic surrogates live in hostels, away from their families. Nayanaben does allow the women to keep very small children with them for short periods. But the women miss their homes and their home food, particularly during festive occasions like Diwali. In turn Nayanaben offers the women training in computers, tailoring etc. "I want them to become economically self sufficient," she says.

Most of the women prefer to keep their surrogacy status a secret. "Not many families understand," confided one of the women. A majority don't like to disclose their identity. All the names of the surrogate mothers quoted in this story have been changed.

Neela, a surrogate mother from Vadodara, says her husband is an alcoholic and her two children are not very safe with him at home. The advantage of this 'job' she says is that she is given a salary of ₹3,000 per month which is more than what she earned as a nurse working in a hospital in Vadodara. "My father-in-law has been told that I have gone out of station for a job," says Neela.

Most surrogates are women from poor working class backgrounds living in and around Anand. Muslim women find surrogacy a good way of earning money since their work choices are limited by their families and society. Dalit women too find surrogacy attractive since they do not face discrimination from foreign couples.

Somi comes from a village near Anand. Widowed at 30, she would never have been

accepted by any Indian couple as she belongs to the sweeper community. She learnt of this lucrative means of earning a living when she worked in a chemist's shop.

"My first trimester was very stressful," she says. "I pleaded with madam to get rid of the foetus. But then I was told that the 'party' (the American parents) had invested lakhs of rupees for the surrogate baby. I won't do this ever again," says Somi.

Somi got her tubectomy reversed for this pregnancy. "I already have a daughter and two good for nothing sons who are alcoholics like their deceased father," she says.

The rooms the women live in are often cramped. The upside is the women make friends and a spirit of camaraderie binds them. "We talk, we share problems about our families, our health and our incomes," say the women.

Dr Shah was surprised to learn that the women sit on the floor to have their meals.

"Why can't Nayana make dining halls for the women as she makes a packet out of them," fumed the activist-doctor.

Also, maternal mortality is kept under wraps. Surrogates have died, it is believed, but such cases have never been discussed openly. Dr Banker, who does not keep surrogates under his care, trivializes the issue. "Maternal mortality is commonplace even in normal pregnancies," he retorts. The parents have to pay compensation to the surrogates.

Premila Vaghela, died in the eighth month of her pregnancy in Ahmedabad in May this year. Dr Banker says the post-mortem report is still pending. Dr Banker immediately conducted a Caesarian section and delivered the infants for the American parents. But, it is alleged that the delay in taking the surrogate mother to the hospital earlier led to her critical state.

The medical fraternity questions how the pregnant woman's life is not given precedence. Insurance companies do not cover surrogacy. And legal provisions do not exist.

Dr Amar Jesani, editor of the Indian Journal of Medical Ethics says: "Assisted reproduction has a strong patriarchal bias. It reduces parenthood to genetic parenthood. It disregards the parental rights of the biological and social parent – the mother. And this is complicated by the commercialisation of assisted reproduction. Surrogacy is only one part of a long range of methods used for assisted reproduction."

He points out that two actions are important. "First, prohibition or regulation of commercially assisted reproduction and surrogacy. Secondly, removal of all gender biases. The surrogate mother must have undisputed right over the child. She may give it away for adoption, but she must have the ultimate right to decide whether to keep or give the baby away irrespective of any contract signed." ■

Fragile peace in Darjeeling

Vivek S Ghatani
Siliguri

NOW that the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) is a reality in the Darjeeling region, people who supported the agitation for a separate state of Gorkhaland are looking forward to a better economy, more development, employment opportunities and improved civic amenities.

The GTA, achieved after 44 months of persistent protests led by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), now has its headquarters at 'Lal Khoti', ironically once the nerve centre of Subash Ghisingh, considered the king of the hills in the past. Bimal Gurung, the GJM chief, now occupies his throne. Gurung had at one time garnered support for Ghisingh and then rebelled against him.

After the first ever GTA elections, the GJM elected 45 members to its GTA Sabha and promised hill residents all round development in every sector.

However, the West Bengal government headed by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress has yet to transfer all the departments mentioned in the GTA agreement signed between the state government, the union government and the GJM.

"The hills need a complete revamp in all sectors, be it roads, infrastructure or education. The GTA has just been formed but all their members are looking forward to bringing in as much development as they can," says a senior leader of the GJM. Polytechnic Institutes, Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), colleges, schools, water parks, hospitals, tourism development and much more has been announced.

But the West Bengal government is yet to sanction the fund of ₹200 crores that the GTA is supposed to get per annum for three years. The earlier set up – the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) – used to receive ₹22 crores for the development of the region.

However, is the man on the street really satisfied? Not a single person wants to go on record but in private they feel that the Gorkhas have once again been fooled. "The separate state demand is not just about development. The demand for Gorkhaland is associated with the identity crisis that the Gorkhas living in the hills and anywhere in India are facing. The Indian Gorkhas are always labelled as foreigners and that really hurts. The GTA cannot be expected to satisfy this identity crisis," said a senior citizen on condition of anonymity.

In the midst of this debate, the issue of Constitutional guarantee has risen over the formation of the GTA. Responding to a case filed by Subash Ghisingh questioning the legality of the GTA without repealing the DGHC Act, the Kolkata High Court has said that the new body does not have any Constitutional guarantee. It has asked the state government to immediately seek a Constitutional guarantee failing which the GTA may be declared invalid.



The creation of the GTA supposedly brings to an end the agitation for Gorkhaland

In response, the GJM has put the ball in the state government's court to save face. "It is the state and the central government's headache to procure Constitutional guarantee status for the GTA. It is not our duty. The GJM never dropped the demand for Gorkhaland. If the GTA is declared invalid, then we will restart our agitation for a separate state," says Harka Bahadur Chettri, GJM spokesperson.

Down in the plains of the Dooars and Terai region the Adivasis, who opposed their inclusion into the GTA, are silent. Even the people of Gorkha origin living in the Dooars for years are not sure what their aim is now. Most GJM leaders in the Dooars blamed the central leadership of the GJM for the non-inclusion of the Dooars and Terai region in the GTA.

In private, a leader says, "This is the second time the Dooars people have been fooled. First it was by Subash Ghisingh and now, Bimal Gurung. During both the agitations for Gorkhaland (lead by Ghisingh in 1988 and by Gurung in 2007) it was the Dooars people who fought from the front. We are extremely hurt that after such dedication and sacrifice we are left out of the GTA."

Chettri says, however, that the demand for inclusion of the Dooars has not been dropped. "We are waiting for the report of the fact verification committee formed by the state government to look into the matter of inclusion. The people of the Dooars should have patience and faith in the GJM," he says.

In reality many believe that the inclusion issue is over now. "The GJM is trying to woo supporters in the Dooars since it is eyeing the panchayat polls. To say that the issue of territory is not over is just a face-saver for the party," says an observer.

The Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikas Parishad (ABAVP) continues to stick to its stand: it does not want to come under the purview of the GTA despite its rebel leader, John Barla, joining hands

with the GJM. The ABAVP rubbishes the GTA's claims that they have the support of Adivasis in the region. Likewise, the Bangla O Bangla Bhasa Bachao Committee has also been opposing inclusion in the GTA.

Back in the hills, the Gorkhaland Task Force (GTF) – a conglomerate of anti-GJM parties – has been seeking public support in the hills of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. But public response has been weak. The GTF also met opposition parties in neighbouring Sikkim. "The GTA will never resolve the identity crises each Gorkha living in India faces. That is what we Gorkhas are striving for. The formation of the GTA is a step towards silencing the voices for Gorkhaland but we will never allow this," says Dr Enos Das Pradhan, GTF chief.

Bimal Gurung, sitting in the GTA chief executive office, has held several meetings with his troupe of 45 members to bring in development which he claims will transform Darjeeling into Switzerland. Whether this metamorphosis will occur or not, time will tell but it is unlikely that voices for Gorkhaland can be stopped, especially when Telangana in Andhra Pradesh inches closer to its destiny.

Post November 2012, the GJM's central leadership will hold rallies in three hill sub-divisions, in Siliguri and the Dooars. An all-India level conference will also be held on 16 December to highlight the problems Gorkhas living in India face.

Observers believe that the GJM, after securing 100 per cent seats in the GTA, is now eyeing panchayat polls in the Dooars. It has joined hands with John Barla and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha.

"The GJM would love to win seats in the plains given the party's downfall after the formation of the GTA. The winning of more seats will ensure that the party keeps its support base intact and makes GJM supporters in the plains happy," said an observer. ■

Rocky Perla grows a forest

It took 15 years of dedicated effort by a school

Shree Padre
Kasargod (Kerala)

TWO decades ago nobody wasted their time planting trees in Perla, a small town near the Kerala-Karnataka border. Coaxing a new plant to grow here was impossible. This rocky land was so barren that if a stray dog strolled around you could see it at a distance from all four sides. The town sat on a hard bed of black top laterite soil, condemned as infertile.

Yet 15 years later a miracle has occurred. Sixteen acres of this same stubborn land are now covered with an impressive forest. A local high school has accomplished this feat with persistence and devotion. On about four acres a canopy of trees and plants protect the ground from the merciless sun, providing humidity for smaller grasses and plants to grow.

"We began in 1998 by starting a Nature Club. It was inaugurated by the late environmentalist Shampa Daitota," recalls Shivakumar, headmaster of Sathyanarayana High School (SNHS) in Perla. "Every monsoon we used to bring hundreds of saplings and plant them here. Without fail, they would all die." Faced with such a high failure rate the school began to wonder if their dream of growing a forest was really just a chimera.

They changed their strategy. The school began to plant bigger two-year-old plants from nurseries belonging to Karnataka's forest department. A few of these survived. At this time six teachers of



Every class was assigned a patch of land to raise vegetation

the school were all going to retire. Younger teachers requested them to sponsor a plant each for Rs 300. The money was used to build enclosures for the new plants so that goats wandering around wouldn't chew them up.

Local people laughed at the school's efforts. How can you expect plants to grow on hard laterite where no soil exists, they mocked.

"When school used to reopen after the weekend break, we would helplessly see that many of our new plants had been uprooted," recalls a teacher. Then, there was the goat menace. If some plants sprouted, neighbours would cut them for green manure when the school was closed. The school's pleas to residents to kindly let the plants grow fell on deaf ears.

'When school used to reopen after the weekend break, we would helplessly see that many of our new plants had been uprooted,' recalls a teacher.

The school's Nature Club managed to raise some money from a few sympathetic local people to buy new plants. This time they made cylindrical enclosures from chicken mesh to protect them. But these, too, would vanish when school closed for the weekend. Thieves would steal the mesh to sell as scrap.

The teachers put their heads together and came up with an idea. They decided to protect the plants with plastic bags coated with white cement. This worked. Nobody was interested in picking up used plastic bags. The plants were finally safe.

Every class was assigned a patch of land to raise vegetation. During the monsoon the students, who are mostly from farming families, brought a few plants from their own farms and planted it here.

None of the teachers is a forestry specialist. But they have gained a lot of wisdom on how to raise a forest on hard laterite land. "If you observe the ground closely, you will notice fissures on the surface. These fissures have soil in them that can support plants. So we planted mostly on these fissures," explains Govinda Joshi, a teacher.

They also noticed a few natural pits and depressions where planting could be done. "These have a very thin layer of soil. But plants can survive here," says Umesh, a teacher and former convener of the Nature Club. Umesh says he has forgotten the endless number of times he brought cuttings of *gliricidia* all the way from his homestead

SHREE PADRE



SHREE PADRE



Mango, cashew and other trees have been planted

by hiring an auto rickshaw. *Gliricidia*, locally called *eetina gida* (manure plant) is known to survive in such conditions.

Once one group of plants survives, they form an undercover of grass and small herbs beneath. When dry leaves begin to fall, the soil forming on the ground becomes rich in nutrients.

Teachers and students realized this was the turning point. They could now raise plants of

higher utility. They planted mango, cashew and trees in the natural shelter created by the smaller group of plants.

"The initial growth of these tree species was very, very slow," recalls one of the teachers. "But, after four to five years the trees began growing rapidly. May be the initial slowness was because the tree's taproot had to penetrate the hard soil to reach the softer sub-soil underneath."

Two jackfruit trees have grown big. Last year, one jackfruit tree yielded fruits for the first time. A few other tree species have also come up nicely.

Two years ago, the school invited Venkatrama Daitota, a well-known herbalist, to come and see their young forest. He identified about 150 plant species here. That number has probably increased to 500 species by now. "Even if we don't plant anything, this vegetation will remain and spread out," says Umesh, full of hope.

One bonus of so many years of hard work is a surfeit of water. Every year towards the end of summer, water in the school's open well would touch rock bottom. The school couldn't extract even a pail of water.

Last year they pumped out water from the well to construct a building. "Even in late summer despite continuous pumping, the well did not dry up," recalls Shivakumar.

No study has been done to find out how much groundwater levels have risen. At the top of the hillock there is a school building. In 1996, a rain-water harvesting awareness programme hosted by the school had attracted hundreds of villagers. Inspired, the teachers with very little effort, diverted water falling on the roof of the building to natural pits. "And now we find open wells newly dug near the school yield good quality water," says a local resident.

The new vegetation and the cool microclimate it has created has inspired the school to raise a vegetable garden. In the last two years students and teachers have grown a few vegetables during the monsoon. They earned ₹5,000 and used the money to fence some of the land. Dozens of amla plants have been planted. The school hopes to raise an 'amla van' or forest.

"I think over the years we must have planted at least 10,000 plants. Finally, around 10 per cent have survived. But looking back, it was all worth it," says Keshava Prakash, a teacher.

The school now plans to expand its teenage forest to surrounding vacant land. There are two old banyan trees on the fringes of the new forest. Teachers are dreaming of making this space into an open classroom but they don't have the funds to do it so far. ■

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SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



Anger simmers in Rajaji

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

SINCE 1 November an entire village of angry women, men and even children have been camping with their animals in tow in front of the forest range office in Gauhri. The villagers are insisting on their right to collect forest produce and demanding implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA).

"We will not budge till our claims are accepted by officials of the forest department," said Chandramohan Singh Negi, convener of this dharna called *dera dalo, ghera dalo* (camp and sit-in protest).

Janaki Devi, an elderly woman of 95 has emerged as an inspirational figure for the protestors. "We demand our right to collect biomass for our daily needs and forest land for our livelihood. This right is ours. The forest department usurped it, saying it was theirs. We will now force them to implement the FRA," she said in her creaky, courageous voice.

Janaki Devi knows how painful it is to collect forest produce and deal with forest guards who block their way, harass them and demand bribes. The women are the most agitated since collecting forest produce is considered part of their household responsibilities and they have to fend off the forest guards almost every day.

"We spend hours every day doing this. We have now decided to put an end to this sort of harassment," said Maya Devi, 48. Roshani Devi and Bhagirathi Devi, both prominent protesters, nodded in agreement.

Their village Kunau in Yamkeshwar block is situated inside the Rajaji National Park. The villagers accuse the park authorities and the Dehradun administration of not implementing the FRA although they have been living in Kunau for generations.

"The village is our home since decades. We have given them all the proof needed of residence as required under the FRA. But strangely the district administration is not interested in redressing our claims," says Mansingh Payal, another key protester.

This is the second protest by villagers. The first time they agitated was on 24 September. Led by Negi and Payal they went on an indefinite hunger strike to express their anguish against the park authorities for not implementing the FRA.

The agitating villages had rejected the pleas of the Pauri district administration officials and Yamkeshwar MLA Vijay Barathwal to end their stir. They called it off finally when the district administration assured them they would sort out all these issues in a month.

But the administration's assurance proved hollow. So this time the miffed

villagers arrived with bag and baggage and parked themselves in front of the premises of the forest department. "We are here in full force since they paid no attention to our peaceful demands and sat on our claim forms for over a month. We will now continue our agitation till we get our due rights under the Act," declared Vikram Singh Bhandari, another protester.

The forest officials feign indifference. "Officials from the Rajaji National Park came to open the gate of the park for visitors and tourists on 15 November, but they didn't visit us. This shows that they are not seriously interested in addressing the demands of us forest dwellers," said Negi.

Annoyed by the attitude of forest officials, Payal said, "The district administration has asked them to submit a report on this matter. Why have they failed to do so? And, where have all those 'activists' who come here and ask us to fight forest officials disappeared? Obviously they only make an appearance when they get project money, or are funded by foreign agencies," he said in disgust.

The villagers say they want to make a profound point. They are determined to put pressure on the forest and district administration to settle their claims under the FRA. Altogether they have filed



Villagers demand their rights

120 claims out of which only 48 have been approved. In reality, however, not a single claim has been granted. "The Pauri district authorities after holding enquires recommended acceptance of certain claims of the villagers of Kunau to the District Level Forest Rights Committee," explains Negi. "But even after two years, we the villagers, are yet to get our rights. There has been no response from the district committee towards our claims."

The villagers are bearing the brunt of official apathy. Unless their rights are accepted they will continue to be classified as encroachers and live without electricity, drinking water and schools. Even the road network is conspicuous by its absence in Kunau.

"Our village is a classic case of *chiragh tale and hera* (darkness under the lamp). There is a hydroelectricity project of 36.4 MW at the Chilla Range of the Rajaji National Park but there is no electricity in our village. The forest department's Range Office is located where our village begins and there is a housing colony for forest officials where our village ends. Both have electricity. We, who live in between, are deprived of light," says Chandra Mohan Negi.

The villagers of Kunau are not the only people waiting for the administration to implement the FRA. As many as 165 villages have been recognized by the state government as being inhabited by Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwellers.

"Uttarakhand is the only state where not even a single case of entitlement to forestland has been settled so far. But, this time, the authorities cannot keep sitting on our rights," says Chandra Prakash Lakhera, a Kunau resident.

The picture of FRA implementation in a state where at least 200,000 people live in forest areas and many more are dependent on forests is dismal. The state administration and the Rajaji National Park officials must provide justice to the people. Unfortunately both refused to comment.

Rajaji is a reserve forest to the east of Haridwar famous as an elephant habitat. It also harbours the mountain goat, goral. Spread in the three districts of Dehradun, Haridwar, Pauri in Uttarakhand and the Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh, the park is in the foothills of the Shivalik range. Ever since it was notified in 1984, the Rajaji National Park has turned into a battleground between forest dwellers and officials. ■



Women of Kunau want their claims to be settled

'We insist on our right to forest land for our livelihood and to collect biomass for our daily needs. We will force the administration to implement the FRA.'

BDA fails to enrich people

Civil Society News
New Delhi

It is now 10 years since India's Biological Diversity Act (BDA) came into being. How successful has this law been in conserving India's ecological wealth? Has it enhanced the incomes of people in possession of traditional knowledge of plants?

The BDA owes its origins to an international agreement called the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD). NGOs and activist groups lobbied for such a law because they pointed out that companies take plant species and traditional knowledge from people in forests in the third world



without paying compensation or doing conservation. Companies then develop drugs and reap rich returns. The indigenous people from whom such knowledge has been culled invariably get nothing.

The CBD sought to put a stop to this free-for-all. Each member country was given the right to protect its own biodiversity. The idea was to empower local people. They would first be asked if they wanted to share such knowledge (prior informed consent) and then adequately compensated. Conservation was a key component.

As a signatory to the CBD, India put its own law in place in 2002, notably the BDA. The goals of this law are: conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits.

India has a three-tier institutional structure to implement these objectives: a National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) based in Chennai, State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) in every state and Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) at panchayat or municipality level.

Kanchi Kohli, writer and researcher working on environment governance and biodiversity conservation issues and Shalini Bhutani, a lawyer and biodiversity researcher have published a study

titled, 'Common Concerns' which analyses the role and functioning of Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs).

The study is a collaborative effort between Kalpavriksh, the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) and the Campaign for Conservation and Community Control over Biodiversity which has been tracking implementation of India's biodiversity law since 2004.

Kohli and Bhutani have based their study on Madhya Pradesh (MP), Karnataka and Uttarakhand. MP was the first to set up a Biodiversity Board and notify Rules. It has the most Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) in India. Karnataka is regarded as a model state for

compiling People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs). It also has a growing number of BMCs. Both states have tried to energise panchayats, put in place joint forest management committees and local structures for biodiversity management. Uttarakhand, a hill state, has van panchayats for managing forests which precede panchayati raj institutions.

Key findings of the study state:

- The job of the BMCs has been reduced to drawing up People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs) to document local flora and fauna. The SSBs see the PBRs as essential baseline information which they can tap if there are claims on patents or Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).
- But the BMCs don't see much value in this exercise. They point out that PBRs don't have any legal protection, so they question how safe this knowledge is. If somebody accesses the PBR or there is biopiracy what will they do? Besides BMCs don't know how to seek IPRs on their own traditional knowledge and have to rely on the SSBs for all information.
- BMCs are being set up as replicas under the diktat of the MoEF or NBA or a funding agency.

"There has not been a single instance where a rural or urban community has initiated a BMC in any of the three states," write the researchers. How a BMC should be set up is not known. Should it be integrated with existing village level institutions or dovetailed with NGO activities? This would make it mandatory for the local institution to carry out all the functions of a BMC.

- Seed money is being offered to panchayats as incentives by SBBs to set up BMCs. Panchayats sometimes see BMCs as a threat to their own power and jurisdiction and are therefore reluctant to form them.

- Communities too question the need for BMCs. There ask what 'benefits' would accrue to them in terms of powers or finances. Already villages have a plethora of committees. Why have one more? The problem is discussions do not take place with villagers to create a consensus on whether a BMC will facilitate conservation and safeguard livelihoods.

- Even where BMCs exist their prior informed consent or opinion on benefit sharing is not sought. "In fact there was no instance in any of the three states studied where BMCs were 'consulted' before permission for access were granted by the NBA or in conditions laid out by the SBBs following prior intimation," write the authors.

The powers of the BMCs have been limited to levying fees and issuing challans. In some cases BMCs have attempted to regulate the collection of forest produce by forest departments and finally settled for fees in return. The BDA Act, State Rules or additional guidelines have not been able to empower BMCs to truly regulate access to their commons.

- There is lack of representation of women, pastoral communities and lower castes in the BMCs. The relationship of the local people to their resources, especially the commons, has neither improved nor been guaranteed by the BMCs.

- Discussions on reviewing the legal structure of BMCs or the implementation of their work invariably do not involve them.

- A positive fallout is that some SBBs are beginning to discuss the importance of biodiversity with villagers before setting up or strengthening BMCs.

The government continues to have more control over biodiversity than the people. Even conservation of plants is cherry picked to government agencies. The gram sabha has little say. In one or two rare examples where companies forged a relationship with local villages for extraction of biodiversity, both conservation and livelihoods appear to have been promoted to some extent.

"The point to note is that India does not have a stated national access policy for its genetic resources," write the authors. Not a single penny has gone to communities via the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA). ■

Common Concerns costs Rs 100. For a copy please email biodcampaign@gmail.com

MISS LOVELY



FINDS MONEY



Ship of Theseus is shot in Mumbai but has universal appeal

For a good film script there are global takers

Saibal Chatterjee,
New Delhi

THE world has shrunk and talented Indian filmmakers who go beyond the Hindi film industry's commercial concerns are finding finance and appreciation in other countries. Take Anup Singh. A Dar-Es-Salaam-born, Pune Film Institute-trained Indian filmmaker he decided to make a Punjabi fictional feature about a displaced villager fighting to rebuild his life after the trauma of Partition.

Shot entirely in Punjab, the production, featuring Irrfan Khan, Tisca Chopra and Tilottama Shome in the cast, has received funding from Germany, the Netherlands and France, besides India's National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). That is Anup Singh's *Qissa*.

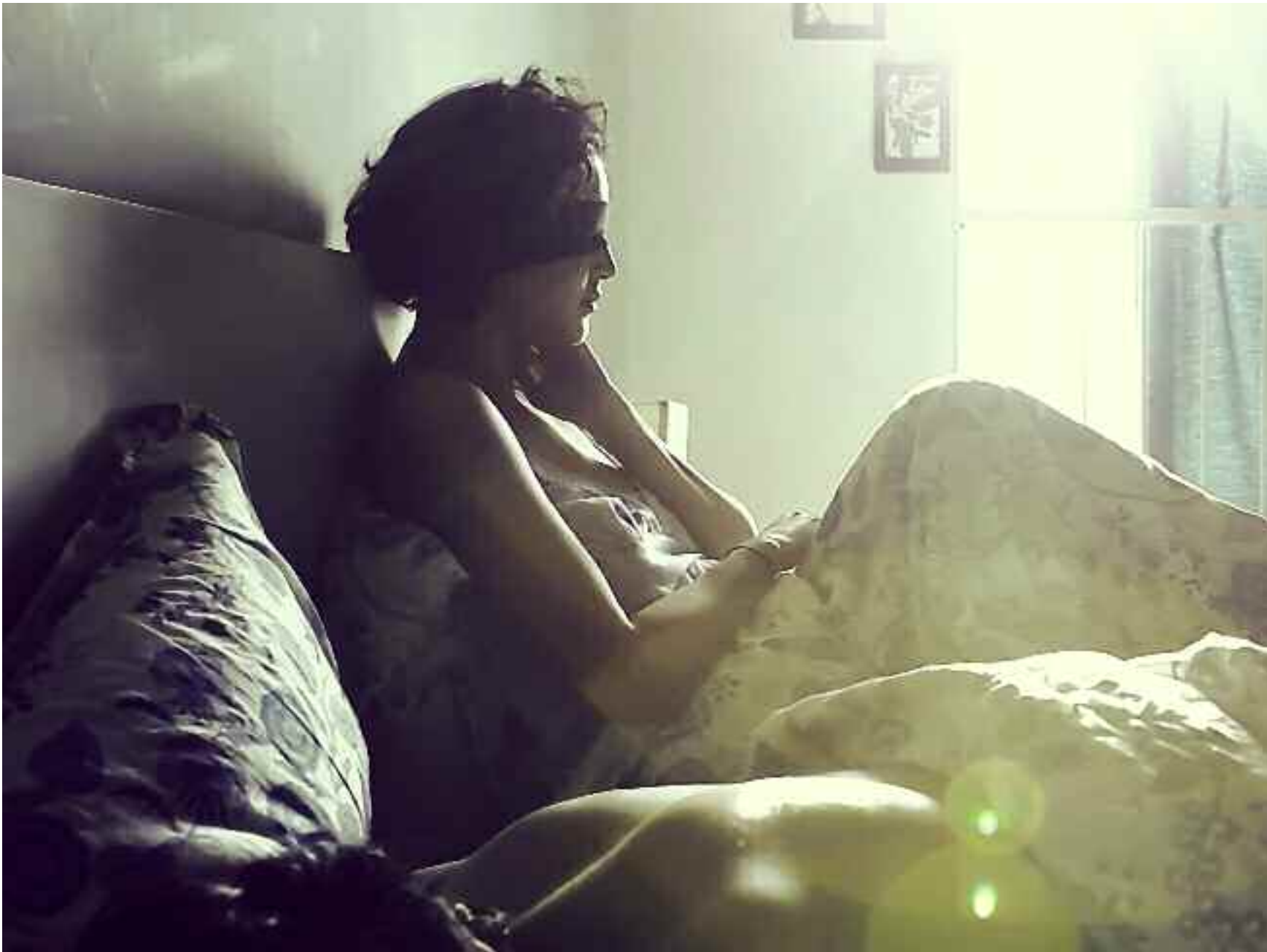
The international rights of *Qissa* have since been picked up by The Match Factory, a Cologne-based world sales company that specializes in the distribution of arthouse cinema. The unique provenance and subsequent journey of the first-ever film made under the new Indo-German co-production treaty are by no means a stray occurrence.

Anup Singh made an impressive feature debut about a decade ago with *Ekti Nadir Naam* (The Name of a River), a highly personal docu-fictional exploration of the themes and motifs of the cinema of Ritwik Ghatak through the love story of two refugees. *Ekti Nadir Naam* travelled to numerous festivals around the world and was heaped with awards and praise. The critical accolades did not make it any easier for the director to get his second film off the ground.

But now with *Qissa* in the cans, Anup Singh already has a third film in the works. It is *Lasya – The Gentle Dance*, one of 12 projects that were selected for the Locarno Film Festival's Open Door co-production lab last year. It is scheduled to go into production in 2013.

For Anup Singh and his endangered tribe of filmmakers, international co-productions have emerged as an alternative to the mainstream Mumbai movie industry paradigm. That is not to say that the woes of India's genuinely independent filmmakers who operate outside Bollywood is over. But there is no denying that the growing engagement of a segment of Indian cinema with producers, sales agents and film funds overseas is a welcome augury for those that despair at the overwhelming dominance of the mass-oriented idiom of commercial Hindi movies.

Veteran Mumbai filmmaker Sudhir Mishra says, "In the mainstream movie industry, the belief is that there is only one way of making and selling films. A fresh breed of young directors are revolting against that and going out on a limb to tell their own stories. Fuelled by new aspirations to make films outside the Bollywood system, they are breaking away from the established principles." Indeed, varied themes and unusual approaches to storytelling are increasingly finding favour among this lot of directors.



Ship of Theseus deals with individual identities

"There are few backers in India for films that do not play by the established commercial rules," says writer-director Onir, maker of films like *My Brother Nikhil* and the National Award-winning *I Am* series. "The international co-production route opens it up for us."

It has done just that for Shivajee Chandrabhushan, whose maiden film as director, *Frozen* (2007), a minimalist black-and-white drama is set in a serene Ladakh village where a family's existence is disrupted when the Army moves in and sets up camp near their house. Chandrabhushan had to take recourse to crowd-funding for his second feature, *One More* (2011), the story of a ragtag ice hockey team from Ladakh.

But now for his third film, *The Untold Tale*, Chandrabhushan has everything sewn up neatly well in advance, thanks to the involvement of a French co-producer (Cosmopolis Films, Paris) and the fact that the proposed project made it to the prestigious L'Atelier programme of the last Cannes Film Festival.

"I don't want to be labelled an arthouse filmmaker," he says, "but if that tag helps me get into co-productions, why not? The critical success of *Frozen* has definitely helped." *The Untold Tale* is incidentally the first cinematic venture to roll since the signing of the Indo-French co-production treaty.

The protagonist of *The Untold Tale*, which opens in Spain and moves to Rajasthan via France, is a French girl, daughter of a flamenco dancer and an Indian royal. The film spans six decades and traces the links between the



Gurvinder Singh

Gypsies of Spain and India through the dance forms of kathak and flamenco.

Chandrabhushan believes that the struggle for his kind of cinema is far from over. "It is not easy. What prevails globally is a preconceived notion about Indian films – that they are about song and dance, heightened melodrama, etc.," he says. So convincing the world that there might be another way of approaching Indian cinema continues to take some doing.

Ashim Ahluwalia, whose second feature, *Miss Lovely*, has been making waves across the globe since premiering at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year, agrees. He told an interviewer recently: "India's is a star dominated industry. It's not about films, it's about stars... the indie scene is overrated because we are still finding our voices. It's not a scene yet and everybody has varying relation-

ships with Bollywood."

It is this "relationship" that is increasingly being broken. So optimism is on the rise. "The movie industry eco-system has changed," says Sunil Doshi, producer of films like Santosh Sivan's critically acclaimed *The Terrorist* and Sagar Ballary's sleeper hit, *Bheja Fry*. "The script is now assuming greater importance than the stars."

"The way forward for us is a non-insular cinema that talks to the whole world," argues Doshi. "We might live off Bollywood, but we can break free



Anand Gandhi

‘The movie industry eco-system has changed. The script is now assuming greater importance than the stars.’

from its shadow and survive on our own terms.” Script labs and workshops, film funds and production grants from international festivals, among other means of engagement, are helping young filmmakers bypass the big, star-driven, commercially oriented movies that mainstream cinema thrives on.

Faith in the alternative is reinforced by the firm strides being made by a new breed of filmmakers who have no desire to live and grow by the methods employed by the mainstream Mumbai film industry. Gurvinder Singh, maker of the much lauded Punjabi film, *Anhey Ghorhey Da Daan*, which had its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival last year, says: “We are on the verge of the new Indian New Wave.”

For his next film, *Chauthi Koot* (The Fourth Direction), Gurvinder has a French co-producer, Catherine Dussart, on board. It won the Paris Project Award at the 10th Hong Kong-Asia Film Financing Forum, besides being selected for the Hubert Bals Fund of the International Film Festival of Rotterdam.

Chauthi Koot, adapted from two stories by well-known writer Waryam Singh Sandhu, is set in post-Operation Bluestar Punjab. “It looks at the plight of the common man caught between the security forces and the militants in 1984,” he reveals. “I want to cast a mix of pros and non-actors, as I did in *Anhey Ghorhey Da Daan*.” Gurvinder plans to begin filming in early 2013.

Another young Indian filmmaker who is all set to go places is Anand



Sidharth Srinivasan

Gandhi. His *Ship of Theseus*, one of the most remarkable debut features to come out of the country in recent times, has been acquired for international distribution by Amsterdam-headquartered Fortissimo Films, which also has the rights to *Miss Lovely*.

No two films can be as different from each other as *Miss Lovely* and *Ship of Theseus*, but both have come out of the same space. *Miss Lovely* is a dark tale that delves into the world of C-grade Bollywood films of the mid-1980s, where two brothers fall foul of each other over the lead actress of their film. Though set in a segment of the Mumbai movie industry, the film gives a wide berth to mainstream narrative conventions.

For *Miss Lovely*, Ahluwalia, a filmmaking graduate from Bard College, New York, received a production grant from the US-based Global Film Initiative, besides funding from France, Germany and Japan. His first film, the feature documentary *John & Jane* (2005), set in the call centres of India, fetched him global recognition and eased the path to a career that does not have to depend upon funding from mainstream sources of Indian cinema. *Miss Lovely* is a starless film. Its three principal actors are Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Delhi theatre pro Anil Joseph and first-timer Niharika Singh.

Gandhi’s *Ship of Theseus*, a visually striking film that weaves three stories into a remarkable philosophical exposition about individual identities and

value systems, also has a cast of unusual actors. Egyptian filmmaker Aida Ek Kashef is a blind photographer who struggles to view the world in a new light when her vision is restored; Neeraj Kavi plays an ascetic whose beliefs are tested when he falls ill; and Sohum Shah essays the role of a young materialistic stockbroker who stumbles upon an organ transplant racket. The three strands connect at the end.

Says Gandhi: "Strictly speaking, all of Hindi cinema has been independent since the death of the studio system. But what is genuinely independent today are films that are free from the pressures of mainstream storytelling." He does not see *Ship of Theseus* as a Mumbai film at all. "It may be set in the city, but the stories could take place anywhere and the questions the film raises are universal," he says.

He accepts that the challenges that confront a truly independent Indian filmmaker are many but creating cinema that has greater value than what can be reflected in box office collections is worth all the trouble. Two filmmakers from different ends of the spectrum – Hansal Mehta and Sidharth Srinivasan – exemplify both the difficulties and the highs of surviving outside the established system.

Mehta is a Bollywood veteran whose filmography includes titles like *Chhal* and *Dil Pe Mat Le Yaar*. He has returned to the thick of the action after a four-year break with *Shahid*, a film about the life, work and death of slain human rights lawyer Shahid Azmi. "I had enough of serving the commercial movie industry. I wasn't making the kind of films that I wanted to, so I bailed out of it all."

Shahid is a no-holds-barred but sensitive film. It does not adopt an accusatory tone even as it pays tribute to the spirit of a young man who suffered, went astray, faced the wrath of an insensitive system and finally emerged from his tribulations to become a symbol of hope for innocent Muslims accused of terror links. *Shahid* marks the reinvention of Hansal Mehta. The film had its world premiere at the 2012 Toronto International Film Festival in September.

Mehta does not subscribe to the view that it is impossible to make personal films while staying within the parameters of commercial Hindi cinema. "I had a completely free hand in the making of *Shahid*," he asserts. It is significant that the film has been produced by Anurag Kashyap and Sunil Bohra, two men known to back risk-prone projects.

Equally significantly, Mehta opted to cast little-known actors in *Shahid* and was none the worse for it. Raj Kumar Yadav, who plays Shahid Azmi, carries the entire film on his shoulders without getting ahead of his brief. "I needed an actor who



Anup Singh



Hansal Mehta



Shivajee Chandrabhushan

*Miss Lovely* is about the sleazy world of C-grade films produced in Bollywood in the eighties*Shahid* is the story of a human rights lawyer



Ashim Ahluwalia

Hansal Mehta and Sidharth Srinivasan exemplify both the difficulties and the highs of surviving outside the established system.

*Frozen* is a social drama set in Ladakh

would not overshadow the character," says Mehta.

That approach to casting is an entire world away from the norms of the mainstream industry. For Srinivasan, maker of *Pairon Talle*, an independently funded film that looks at the violent repercussions of rapid urban development on a tradition-bound fringe of the National Capital Region of Delhi, the Bollywood set-up has never been of much interest.

His next film, *Traas* (The Profane), will be a UK-Korea-India co-production. London-based Rook Films, which has co-produced British director Ben Wheatley's *Kill List* and *Sightseers*, will team up with Korea's Finecut to bankroll the new film, which Srinivasan describes as "an edgy chamber drama" that "challenges the notion of the family being a sacrosanct entity". He says: "*Traas* suggests that the family can do the most grievous harm to an individual."

Srinivasan makes no bones about the fact that *Traas* will be a genre film – "a truly Indian horror film rooted in eastern philosophy but universal in its appeal". He was always aware that the theme would be too hot to handle for a Mumbai producer. But that, as is obvious, is unlikely to stop Srinivasan from going all the way through with the film. For directors like him, the conventional distribution-exhibition system in India remains a difficult-to-crack conundrum. But now, in a borderless world, there exist a whole new slew of options. ■

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

ReMeDi reaches your heart

Neurosynaptic creates a PHC in cyberspace

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

If you thought Skype was cool, ReMeDi (Remote Medical Diagnostic) is even cooler. This medical device enables a doctor to feel the pulse of a patient sitting in a remote location and simultaneously use a stethoscope. All this in a connection of 32 kilo bits per second. ReMeDi also runs on just two watts of power.

ReMeDi is an innovation by Neurosynaptic Communications founded by two techies, Sameer Sawarkar and Rajeev Kumar. The duo were one of three finalists selected for the Social Entrepreneur of the Year India Award, jointly instituted by Schwab Foundation For Social Enterprise and the Jubilant Bhartia Foundation. They were in Delhi to attend the felicitation function and the World Economic Forum in Gurgaon. The Social Entrepreneur of the Year India Award went to Anshu Gupta of Goonj. Udyogini was also a finalist.

Neurosynaptic's business model is futuristic. After building ReMeDi, Sawarkar and Kumar found they had to create an entire primary healthcare eco-system around it. They are in the business of research and manufacture of medical equipment, call centres, franchising, primary healthcare infrastructure and healthcare finance all at the same time.

Neurosynaptic is associated with World Health Partners (WHP) and offers primary healthcare consultation in rural Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The model works like this: A patient visits a rural healthcare centre run by a fran-



Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit presenting a citation to Sameer Sawarkar and Rajeev Kumar of Neurosynaptic Communications for being finalists of the Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

chisee. He can undergo six keys tests including blood pressure, temperature, oxygen saturation and an ECG. A doctor in a centralized healthcare centre in Delhi or Patna can hear how his chest sounds – similar to using a stethoscope – even while talking to him. This city-based medical facility also has specialists whom the patient can fix an appointment with. The patient's records, including all diagnostics, are stored electronically in a central database.

It has been a long haul for the company, which is now cash flow positive. "If I had known it was going to be this difficult, I may not have got into it so easily," confesses Sawarkar, CEO of Neurosynaptic. The company was incorporated in 2002. Sawarkar and Kumar were classmates at the Indian Institute of Science and then colleagues at Motorola in Bangalore for nearly five years. They worked on digital signal processing technologies and parallel processing.

After being employed for several years, Sawarkar and Kumar decided to start a company specializing in high-tech healthcare. They were working with McGill University and with the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS). At McGill they worked on a prosthetic eye, a device that would connect with the visual cortex of the brain. With NCBS they tried to build a device for blind people that would enable them to see with their tongue. The device could project the visual profile of a space on the tongue.

But those were the heady days of the Internet. People believed that technology could bridge several divides. The TeNet group at IIT Chennai under the guidance of Professor Ashok Jhunjhunwala was building several technologies applicable to rural India. "That struck a chord. I am from Amravati and Rajeev is from Bulandshahr. These two towns are not exactly rural India but we had seen our relatives in villages and we were aware of the situation there. So this was a turning point for us. We decided to use connectivity and technology to provide basic services for a large mass of people," explains Sawarkar.

They visited IT kiosks set up by n-logue, the Internet company promoted by IIT, Chennai. Healthcare was completely missing. They realized that 70 per cent of people lived in rural areas and about 60 per cent went to quacks for their health needs. The government was the main health provider. But it serviced only 20 per cent of the people. An auxiliary nurse and midwife (ANM) was expected to cover 5,000 people in three to five villages. She was also responsible for recording, reporting and implementing all government programmes from sanitation to documenting births and deaths. That is a huge number of records.

A Primary Healthcare Centre (PHC) in rural India caters to around 35,000 people and is supposed to have a doctor, nurse, pharmacist, lab technician and a system for in-patients. But PHCs are dysfunctional, especially in north India. "The government tried attaching three PHCs to each teaching medical college. But we do not think it will evolve this way. You cannot take doctors to rural areas," says Sawarkar.

To solve these problems Sawarkar and Kumar figured they needed to develop a technology for remote diagnostics and operate them out of

Internet kiosks. So they got a group of doctors to come to IIT to define the parameters of this technology. "Several doctors want to contribute. They just don't know how. We called Dr Tulsiraj from Aravind Eye Hospital, Dr Basu Raj from Christian Medical College, Vellore, and several others," says Sawarkar. This consultation helped them create an initial definition of what was required in primary healthcare. They also realized their inventions would need to work in very harsh conditions.

With this definition in place, they got seed funding from Venture East, a fund that invests in companies that affect a large population in India.

Neurosynaptic in partnership with WHP set up five centres in Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor and Meerut. Now they have 128 centres in UP. In Bihar, they have 400 centres.

They also set up a Section 25 company. With the help of the technology team at IIT Chennai, Neurosynaptic had a breakthrough in two years. They developed a device which would work on two watts of power from the USB port of a computer, have real-time audio-video conferencing at 32 kbps and the doctor could hear the stethoscope sounds in real-time. They went through several design iterations and then came up with a device that was 600 grams, the size of a diary and had all probes. By 2005, they got the price right and the device could also work with high power fluctuation. Initially, people were afraid that they would get an electric shock but the mobile phone changed that perception.

They took the device to the IT kiosks and got feedback. Individual doctors volunteered for remote consultations. Once in the field, Sawarkar and Kumar encountered many more challenges. The band-width that the kiosks were supposed to work on did not exist. Not all operators were accepted as health centres. When medicine was prescribed, there were no pharmacies to buy them from. Sawarkar and Kumar then realized that the Internet kiosk business model itself faced several challenges. "We had thought of only technology at first. Now we were forced to think of an eco-system and a business model," explains Kumar.

From 2005 till 2008 Neurosynaptic experimented with several models. They tried a standalone healthcare kiosk. It was a 10 ft by 10 ft place, which had the blessings of the sarpanch. They charged for diagnostics and consultations were free. They also made money from referrals. Neurosynaptic tried delivering medicines through bus routes. The company tried to attract Piramal, a large healthcare player.

They also tried a hospital outreach model with the Acharya Vinobha Bhave rural hospital. Doctors in the hospital were available for consultation with patients in surrounding areas remote-

ly. In the north they tried the kiosk model with Drishtee. "It was really bad in some parts. A kiosk would be 40 km away from the district headquarters and it would take four hours to reach. We tried various models with various partners in UP, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu," says Sawarkar.

Meanwhile, they got another round of investment from Venture East in 2006. They also got funding from the Technology Development Board for commercializing their device. Six or seven hospitals including the prestigious All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) clinically validated their device. They got IEC 60601 certification, which applies to medical devices. Neurosynaptic also made product improvements. From a point-to-point device it was converted into a client server solution where multiple patients from multiple village locations could access multiple doctors.

In 2008, they got their first scalable model with World Health Partners (WHP). WHP had experience in implementing the Bihar government's Janani family planning programme. They had 40,000 retail outlets and 500 clinics with MBBS doctors who could do hysterectomy and sterilization. WHP had a small budget, but had made a significant contribution to the reproductive health indices of Bihar. They worked closely with WHP for process and technology. "It was a mutual exchange of expertise," says Sawarkar and ReMeDi evolved further.

In 2008, Neurosynaptic in partnership with WHP set up five centres in Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor and Meerut. Now they have 128 centres in UP. In Bihar, they have 400 centres. WHP is the implementation partner and Neurosynaptic is the technology partner. "We do not believe in verticals. We think primary healthcare is horizontal," says Sawarkar.

In Bihar, WHP is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to screen four conditions including TB, pneumonia, kala azhaar and diarrhoea. Patients visit a consultation centre run by a franchisee identified by WHP. Patients also get general purpose healthcare. The operator is usually a woman or a couple. She creates a unique ID for the patient and then connects him to a central medical facility in Patna or Delhi. The system also has a custom designed workflow. For example, TB patients do not complete their course and so providers are given an incentive to get them to complete it. The system generates SMS alerts for both doctors and patients. It keeps track of doses.

Neurosynaptic has had to work at making the system foolproof. For example, they have created a reference chart of 16 points in a sequence over 15 to 16 seconds for the operator to use the stethoscope. If a doctor wants to note a particular spot he points to that spot on the software and the operator can see what the doctor requires on his screen. They are trying to get the system to work on both a generator and solar power.

Finance is another critical issue. Sawarkar and Kumar have been working with the health ministry to get the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) to cover primary healthcare consultations. "We could run a technology-based OPD. The next goal is to be able to reach 25 per cent of the country's rural population in the next three years," they say. ■

OneBreath keeps it simple

Low-cost, portable ventilator can save lives

Jyoti Pande
New Delhi

WHAT do you think would happen to old Jamunabai in remote Maharashtra or ailing Sonalben in rural Gujarat if the bird flu pandemic were to strike?

Maharashtra and Gujarat are two of India's more developed states. But if you think remote, rural areas anywhere in India are prepared for an emergency, leave alone a pandemic, do yourself a favour and get a reality check.

Here's a hint. When the Titanic was sinking, there were only enough lifeboats for the first-class passengers. The others were expected to fend for themselves. Whether that story is apocryphal or real, the point is that any large, bulky, high-cost equipment is unlikely to be found in abundance in any situation, even if it can save lives.

It's the same with ventilators, those unwieldy, life-saving devices that can keep the human body breathing when its lungs have given up the job. The most complicated ventilator with multiple functions in their slick avatars can cost anywhere between \$10,000 and \$30,000.

But their key job remains, as Matthew Callaghan, a Stanford student and inventor figured in 2008, is to push air around. How complicated could that be? So the physician-mechanical engineer decided to do away with all the bells and whistles of the ventilator and devise a simple, low-cost, uncomplicated device that would just do its basic job of pushing air in and out of the lungs. And that's how OneBreath was born.

OneBreath is a portable, rechargeable ventilator, currently in its development phase. Dr Callaghan is now a general physician at Stanford, among other things. The company plans to apply for Food and Drug Administration approval by 2013 and will set up one manufacturing facility in India and a second in China, according to OneBreath CEO, A. Vijayasimha.

Ventilators keep critically ill patients breathing when their respiratory system is unable to function, and because OneBreath will be portable and battery-operated, the device can be used in rural areas which have limited or no access to electricity or big hospitals.

OneBreath is designed to address two distinct problems – emergency readiness in developed countries and the shortage of ventilators in developing countries, says Vijayasimha. OneBreath will cost a fraction of conventional ventilators: it will be priced at around \$3,000, compared to \$10,000 to \$12,000 for normal hospital models,



The OneBreath wonder



Dr Matthew Callaghan

Vijayasimha said.

To cut the price, "we've just removed the bells and whistles and made it simpler – which actually ends up making the product more reliable by reducing the risk of mechanical component failures," he said.

The company also keeps in mind the specific challenges of developing countries – dust, power surges and electricity failures that could make a ventilator stop its crucial job of pumping air into weak lungs.

"OneBreath can run on a 12 volt battery for six to 12 hours at a time and is smaller than a toolbox making it easy to deploy in remote areas," explained Vijayasimha. The batteries can be recharged using solar panels.

"Real innovation looks at simplicity. The laws of physics don't change. It's all about clever designing," said Vijayasimha in a phone interview from Bangalore where the OneBreath India office is located. "We intend to leverage the global expertise of the US, Europe and Japan and the manufacturing skills of China and India to make this product international."

Their business model of setting up manufacturing facilities in exactly those countries that need such low-cost technology makes perfect sense. By leveraging the cheaper manpower and manufacturing capability of countries like India and China, OneBreath will be able to keep its costs low.

From rural India and China to top-end hospitals, like the one Dr Callaghan works at, this ventilator's market already has a pent-up demand.

"Our manufacturing capacity by the end of three years will be 4,000 ventilators. After that, we will be in a position to produce around 3,000 ventilators per year," said Simha.

OneBreath is a short breath away from getting its first round of funding of around \$3 million from a consortium of investors led by Omidyar Network, eBay founder Pierre Omidyar's philanthropic investment firm What is more exciting than the funding is that the consortium includes medical doctors from the Bay Area, among other investors. When a product is co-created by users and those that deliver the service, what could be better?

Omidyar's Director of Investment, Jasjit Mangat, declined to comment on the actual deal, but was very enthusiastic about the product. "It's a smarter re-design of the whole thing. It has better features, better access – it is portable – and is almost four to five times cheaper. This combination of pricing, access and features is a killer," he said, his voice rising with excitement as he explained how crucial it is to get healthcare facilities closer to the rural poor.

"It is intimidating for Jamunabai sitting in a rural village to come to a city hospital if she needs a ventilator. We have to be able to get these devices closer to these people – we have to lower the floor," he said. Vijayasimha expects to go in for a second round of funding in 2015 to expand manufacturing facilities in both countries.

Hopefully, the bird flu pandemic will hold off until then. ■

Insights

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Saving Yamuna from Yama

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

In the 16th century Sanskrit hymn, Yamunashtakam, a verse by the philosopher Vallabhacharya describes the descent of Yamuna from her origins in Yamunotri to meet her beloved Krishna and to purify the world. The hymn praises Yamuna for being the source of all spiritual abilities. It is Yamuna who, being the holder of infinite love and compassion, can grant us freedom from even death, the realm of her elder brother Yama. The question is: Who is going to help Yamuna herself from certain death?



The Yamuna choked with filth in Delhi

THE first thing that strikes you about the mighty Yamuna flowing through Delhi is that it is a national shame. The river that is the largest tributary of the holy Ganges has been turned into a sewage drain. This has been the situation for decades. The city of Delhi has been unable to treat the sewage it generates and dumps mostly untreated and sometimes partially treated sewage into the river.

This action is completely illegal according to a number of laws including the Water Pollution Control Act of 1974. But Delhi has been brazenly indulging in this illegal act for decades, in full view of all the law enforcing and monitoring agencies at the state and central level. What else can one call this except a national shame?

That the Yamuna river flowing through the National Capital Region (NCR) has been turned into

a drain by Delhi is well known for decades. The Supreme Court was apprised of the matter on 9 November, 2012, by a committee appointed by the Apex Court itself. The state of the river signifies the failure of the pollution control regime at the Delhi state level and at the national level for decades. What is even more troubling is that the case is before the Apex Court since 1994 when the court took up the case suo moto, following a front page news report in *The Hindustan Times* then. So the court has been handling this matter for 18 long years. What has been achieved in the process?

The state of the river has worsened in terms of its levels of Biological Oxygen Demand, Chemical Oxygen Demand, Dissolved Oxygen or even the stretch of the Yamuna that is polluted downstream from Delhi. In every conceivable respect

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the river has deteriorated even as the highest court of India monitored it.

It is not the first time that the court has been told that downstream the Wazirabad barrage there is no water left in the river as Delhi takes it all away at least for eight or nine non-monsoon months. Downstream the Wazirabad barrage there is just Delhi's sewage, mostly untreated, left in the river. Upstream along the Yamuna river and downstream, the Hathnikund barrage diverts all the water from the river into the Western and Eastern Yamuna canal, leaving the river dry for eight or nine months of the year.

In fact, in January 1998, the Supreme Court in the ongoing Yamuna case appointed a High Powered Committee (HPC): "To assess the requirement of a minimum flow in the river Yamuna to

in the river." Nothing can be farther from truth.

In fact, making a mockery of the Supreme Court order for release of 10 cumecs of water all round the year for the Yamuna, the CWC has been repeatedly saying in affidavits before the court that Haryana is already releasing 160 cusecs (4.54 cumecs) of water downstream of Hathnikund and another 140 cusecs (3.9 cumecs) into the Najafgarh drain which confluences into the Yamuna river downstream of the Wazirabad barrage, thus making up for the 10 cumecs!

The Supreme Court should have taken the agency to task for completely misinterpreting and misrepresenting its order. First, these flows cannot be added as the CWC is doing. Out of the 160 cusecs released at Hathnikund almost nothing would reach Wazirabad. Incidentally, there is no credible monitoring agency to ensure that this

groundwater used within the city. The claim that unauthorised colonies are responsible for the sewage not reaching STPs is clearly unacceptable. These colonies did not spring up overnight. The Delhi government, the Delhi Jal Board and the MoEF should be made answerable for this situation. All concerned must be held accountable.

The HPC's long-term suggestions of building the Renuka Dam, the Kishau Dam, and linking rivers are not necessary for the Yamuna to get freshwater all round the year. In fact, these projects and other hydropower and dams planned in the Yamuna basin are more likely to destroy the river further. The MoU of the Upper Yamuna River Board suggesting that even the erroneously proposed 10 cumecs flow into the river would be possible only after these big dams on the Yamuna are built is trying to mislead the Supreme Court and everyone else and is only an instrument of non-action and an attempt to push unjustifiable projects.

What can the Supreme Court do? Well, there is a lot that can be done to spare water for the river and spare the river from untreated sewage and effluents. These include adoption of more appropriate cropping patterns in the Yamuna basin in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, adoption of water-saving techniques like the System of Rice Intensification and incentives for organic farming that can help build up soil capacity to hold moisture.

In urban areas like Delhi, time-bound rainwater harvesting plans, groundwater recharge, protection of local water bodies, flood plain, ridge and forests, demand side management measures including avoiding unnecessary and wasteful water using activities, ensuring that existing STPs work to their optimum capacity in quality and quantity of output through participatory and accountable governance, ensuring that new STP capacities are set up in a time-bound manner and are decentralised and use biological treatment methods that require less inputs of power, materials and land and make recycling of water easier at local level, to name just a few. All of these are known measures, but governments have shown no will to take any of these seriously. Only transparent and accountable mechanisms can ensure that such steps are taken up.

In an order on 12 January, 2011, the Allahabad High Court (in PIL no 4003 of 2006 in the matter of Ganga Pollution Vs State of UP and Others) has said that from any river, not more than 50 per cent of available water should be diverted and the rest should be allowed to remain in the river. This principle needs to be applied in the case of the Yamuna at every location, but particularly at the Hathnikund and Wazirabad barrage.

If all this is done and the dumping of untreated sewage and effluents into the river is stopped, along with other practices mentioned above, there is a possibility of rejuvenating the Yamuna almost immediately. The Supreme Court seems to be the only body to ensure these steps are taken with seriousness and implemented with participatory governance. It is estimated that ₹12,000 crores has been spent on cleaning the Yamuna over the last 18 years by all agencies put together.

The question is: Will the Supreme Court be able to save the Yamuna? ■

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South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers & People (www.sandrp.in)



The sad state of the Yamuna

facilitate restoration of the desired river water quality". The committee, headed by the chairman of the Central Water Commission (CWC), told the court, without any real study, that the river needs 10 cumecs of water. In the first place, the court should have asked the HPC/ CWC to study the needs of the river at various points along Yamuna.

However, the court based on the recommendation of the HPC, ordered later in 1998 that 10 cumecs of water should be released for the river all along its stretch all round the year. That order of the Apex Court remains unimplemented till date. The CWC, acting like a lobby for big dams, has been saying that the river cannot have water until mega dams have been built upstream!

This is another remedy to further kill the river. The CWC has never shown any interest in allowing freshwater flows in any river anywhere in India. Even in the case of the Yamuna, the CWC has been telling the court that a minimum flow in the river is being maintained!

For example, as recorded in the order of the Supreme Court in IA 17 in WP 537/1992 on 13 May, 1999, "A.D. Mohile, Chairman, Central Water Commission, stated that minimum flow in River Yamuna is still being maintained and there is no need to release any further quantity of freshwater

water has in reality been released so the veracity of the CWC's statement is doubtful.

At Wazirabad, Delhi is already taking away all freshwater. Therefore, no freshwater flows downstream of Wazirabad in the lean season. Secondly, as clearly stated in the Supreme Court order of May 1999, the four cumecs that Haryana transfers to the Najafgarh drain is for irrigation purposes in South Delhi. This is not for the ecological needs of the river. In any case to add up such small quantities released at various points to show that 10 cumecs is being released in the river is making a mockery of the Supreme Court order which was for the whole stretch of the river all round the year.

Moreover, Delhi had assured the Supreme Court in 1998 that by the end of 2000, the city will have adequate capacity to treat all its sewage and that after 31 December, 2000, no untreated effluents would flow into the river.

That is yet to happen. Delhi till today does not have sufficient capacity of Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) to treat the sewage it officially generates. Secondly, none of the STPs are functioning at even 50 per cent of their capacity. Thirdly, Delhi generates much more sewage than officially assumed due to the additional 200 to 300 MGD

Kaziranga becomes safer

KANCHI KOHLI

IN September this year the National Green Tribunal (NGT) issued a strong judgment which shut down several stone crushers, brick kilns, tea estates and other small-scale units operating in the No Development Zone (NDZ) around the famous Kaziranga National Park in Assam. This was in response to an application filed before the NGT pointing out that the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) had allowed these units to continue functioning in complete violation of its own orders declaring Kaziranga National Park an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) in 1996.

Here is a bit of background to the issue. In the early 1990s the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas proposed to set up a petroleum refinery at Numaligarh, in close proximity to the Kaziranga National Park in the eastern side of Assam. The ministry's officials had not disclosed this fact. But environmental groups like the Bombay Environmental Action Group and the then Union Environment Minister took note of this issue. Although their intervention and efforts could not stop the setting up of the refinery it ensured that 15 km around the refinery was declared a No Development Zone (NDZ). The expansion of industrial areas, townships, infrastructure facilities and other such activities which could lead to pollution and congestion are not permitted within the "No Development Zone."

Section 3 (2) v under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, which empowers the MoEF to restrict industries and industrial operations in certain areas on environmental grounds was the basis on which this order was issued. It is important to note that many Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESAs) across the country have been declared using these clauses and their corresponding Rules.

However, the implementation of this NDZ had not been very effective and this is what the application filed before the NGT was all about. Environmental activist Rohit Choudhary, a resident of village Bokakhat in Assam, invoked Section 14(1) of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010, and sought appropriate directions to safeguard Kaziranga and its ecology. According to the applicant, unregulated quarrying and mining activities permitted in and around the Kaziranga National Park area, were not only threatening the Eco-Sensitive Zone but also the survival and existence of rhinos, elephants and other wildlife species. This application had further drawn attention to the indiscriminate and illegal setting up of stone quarries within the NDZ and its immense adverse impact on the environment, wildlife and ecology. Unfortunately, no action had been taken by the relevant authorities to stop this.

During the course of the hearing, the NGT took strong notice of this violation. In an order dated 19 April, 2012, it directed the MoEF to conduct a



Kaziranga National Park

site visit to ascertain the total area of the NDZ and the number of industrial units functioning there. The preliminary response of the MoEF in May this year indicated that there were 64 units functioning within the NDZ, of which 26 were stone-crusher units, 14 were brick kilns, 12 were tea estates and 12 were miscellaneous units. The ministry also sought more time to carry out a

Acting on an application, the NGT has passed an order to remove illegal stone quarries and small units in the No Development Zone of the Kaziranga National Park.

detailed inspection and then file a report. This was also because the area covered under the NDZ within its notified co-ordinates was more than 600 sq. km. and officials of the Pollution Control Board had not been able to cover the entire area due to heavy monsoons and a short time-frame.

However, the government of Assam first denied the existence of these stone-crusher units in the NDZ. It mentioned that 12 stone crusher units were in operation till 31 December, 2011, within 10 km of the National Park. But, it said, an order regarding their suspension had been issued and a

number of cases were pending against the units in the Guwahati High Court. This point was corrected by their subsequent submissions before the NGT.

The owners of the stone-crushers had their own story to tell. They said the units were in operation prior to the 1996 notification and had due permissions granted to them by the Director, Kaziranga National Park, Director, Divisional Forest Officer, Eastern Assam Wildlife Division, Bokakhat and /or agreement executed by the Divisional Forest Officer, Eastern Assam Wildlife Division, Bokakhat. They also had the relevant permissions and consents from the Pollution Control Board.

At an interesting point of the hearing a petition was filed by M/s. Numaligarh Refinery Local Area Development and Safety Forum. They sought to intervene in the matter to safeguard the rights of small industrial units and workers engaged in the said units. The Forum invoked the fundamental right to life and extended its interpretation to the livelihood of the people that they represented. One of the critical pleas of this Forum was the quashing of the 1996 notification as it was impacting the lives and livelihoods of the people working in the small industries located in the area. It was also revealed during the hearing that many of the tea industries and estates which were under question had existed in the area prior to it being declared as a NDZ. However, several of them had also come up post the 1996 notification.

Following the placing of all facts and argumentation in court the NGT bench comprising Justice A.S.Naidu and Dr. G.K.Pandey issued their final

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The culture of agriculture

BABA MAYARAM

THE remote village of Pithauragarh in the Satna district of Madhya Pradesh holds the dubious distinction of being one among five states that showed an additional 50 farmer suicides in 2011 as compared to 2010, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Ironically, in this village lies a secret that can help arrest the suicide trend by boosting agriculture and its dying culture.

In Pithauragarh 65-year-old Babulal Dahiya, a farmer, is not only experimenting with indigenous seeds on his farm but is also inventing new methods of seed conservation and promotion. In the process he is becoming a role model for fellow farmers entangled in the web of hybrid seeds.

The sight of his impressive collection of conserved seeds in his home revives images of ancient India. Pasted on one wall, like a blackboard, are varieties of paddy seeds preserved carefully in polythene bags. Flakes from a recent harvest have been stored in his cow dung plastered yard. You can see a lot of hard work has gone into Babulal's farming practices. A knowledgeable man, Babulal explains the merits of indigenous seeds. The fragrance of fresh saplings and the rhythmic sound of a hand-driven mill crushing urad daal seem to match his words.

"The taste of paddy cultivated by using indigenous seeds is much better than what hybrid varieties yield. So you can get a better price for local paddy. Indigenous paddy crops can be grown using traditional cowdung as fertiliser while hybrid or dwarf crops require chemical fertilisers. Besides increasing production cost, hybrids damage the fertility of the soil," says Babulal, flaunting his collection of 70 varieties of paddy seeds that he has collected by wandering from village to village and growing them with the most traditional and natural methods.

"Harmful insects are naturally controlled by flies, honeybees, ants and other insects. Earthworms work 24 hours a day, eating into the infertile elements of the soil and aerating it, facilitating a healthy crop. As compared to hybrid varieties which need more irrigation, indigenous varieties take less time to blossom and that too through a natural process."

Each variety of paddy has its own unique characteristics. Some like Sarya, Sikiya, Shyamjeer,

'Our indigenous seeds are becoming extinct and we are losing our agriculture-related vocabulary. The culture around our farming is being hampered.'

Dihula and Sarekhni are ready for harvest within 70 to 75 days. Others like Newari, Jhalore, Kargi, Mungar and Sekurgar take 100 to 120 days. Badal phool, Korakhamha, Vishnubhog and Dilbakhsh require 120 to 130 days to harvest after sowing.

The gradual extinction of traditional songs and folklore celebrating the beauty and colour of indigenous seeds attracted Babulal's attention. This concern drove him to conserve and promote not only traditional ways of farming but "farming in culture" as well.

When there were no mobiles, radios or television to relay weather forecasts, farmers in days of yore predicted the weather appropriate for each

stage of the farming process. They could gauge the weather by assessing the colour of the clouds, the flow of the wind and the pattern of rainfall. An old local legend says: "Purva jo purvai pabay, sookhi nadiyan nav chalavein," which means: "When wind starts blowing in the direction of the Orient Star, it rains so heavily that even dry rivers can offer you a boat ride."

Based on such traditional wisdom, farmers created proverbs and folk songs which played an important role in passing on such ingrained wisdom to the next generations. Alas, the link has been broken, much to the dismay of the older generation.

"Our indigenous seeds are becoming extinct and we are losing our agriculture-related vocabulary. The entire culture around our farming activities is being hampered. We manage with words like rice, wheat and dal. Earlier, we had several varieties of pulses and grains: Sama, Kodo, Kutki, Mung, Udad, Jowar and Tilli, to name a few. People would be involved at every step, every procedure of farming," says Babulal. His collection of season-related songs and proverbs have been published in a book named *Sayanan ke Thathi* published by the Madhya Pradesh Biodiversity Board.

In the past, villages were self-reliant. They grew their own food and stored what they needed for themselves. Except for salt, people could procure all their daily necessities within the village. They would grow multiple grains and followed mixed farming methods. Wheat, rice and dal were assured. Similarly, the village blacksmith would prepare all the tools necessary for farming. He would barter these for grain during the harvesting season. We need to learn from the past and make our villages self-reliant producers and manufacturers once again. ■

Charkha Features

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judgment based on primarily three questions. First, was an NDZ declared under law; secondly were there industrial units operating within the NDZ and, thirdly, what steps should be taken to eradicate the hazards created by the expansion of industries or units in the NDZ.

The first two issues were upheld legally. The NDZ did exist and so did most of the units within it which were not meant to be there as per the 1996 notification. The impact of all the existing units on air and water was also acknowledged, be it the tea estates, stone-crushers or brick kilns. So the third point was also established. The NGT held the MoEF and the Government of Assam responsible for this and strongly criticized their inaction post the issuance of the notification. Both the MoEF and the Assam Government have been directed to pay ₹1 lakh to the Director, Kaziranga National Park, for conservation activities within the park. In this regard, the observation made by

the judgement on 7 September says interestingly: "Continuous infringement of law and tolerance of violations of law, for reasons good, bad or indifferent, not only renders legal provisions nugatory but also such tolerance by the Enforcement Authorities encourages lawlessness which cannot be tolerated by any civilised society."

The NGT also referred to recent orders in the Supreme Court's ongoing T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad Vs. Union of India (2012 (3) SCC 277) case, and asserted that environmental justice can only be achieved if we drift away from the principle of anthropocentric to the principle of eco-centric. The NGT thereby indicated the need to assert a more eco-centrist or nature-centred approach where humans are part of nature and non-human existence has intrinsic value. Therefore, here human interests don't automatically take precedence over nature or non-human existence.

In its final judgment the NGT asked the state government to remove 11 non-functional stone-

crushers in the NDZ and relocate one functional one which was established prior to the 1996 notification. The other 23 stone-crushers which were functional in the vicinity and outside the NDZ should not be allowed to work till necessary pollution control equipment was put in place, said the judgment. All the 33 brick kilns were asked to be shut down with immediate effect. One brick kiln, operational prior to 1996, would need to be relocated. When it came to the 11 miscellaneous units, except for four petrol pumps and one restaurant, all others have been asked to shut down. Finally, for the tea estates, the NGT judgment observed that for 25 tea estates (of which three were outside the NDZ but within 500 metres), the State Pollution Control Board and other authorities are to ensure that none of the units which have boilers using fossil fuels should be allowed to function within the NDZ.

The follow up to this order and its impact are yet to be fully ascertained. ■ kanchikohli@gmail.com

Living

□ Books

□ Eco-tourism

□ Film

□ Theatre

□ Ayurveda

Homeless life on stage

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

JHABBAR, the aging watchman, walks the streets of Delhi night after night. "Jagte Raho" (keep awake) he calls out from time to time. His callous employer shouts at him to keep him on his toes. Jhabbar gradually slides into insomnia, his nerves ravaged by sleepless nights until one day he drops dead on the streets of the heartless city of Delhi.

Jhabbar is a character from *Humein Naaz Hai*, a hard-hitting play which was staged recently in Delhi. Lokesh Jain, director and scriptwriter of the play, says many of his characters are taken from real people, migrants whom he has befriended around Jama Masjid's Meena Bazar and Shahjahanabad in Old Delhi, where the play is set.

There are other heartrending characters in his play. Like a woman who becomes mentally deranged after losing her two young daughters. And Jamal Chacha who runs a tea stall which teems with the impoverished homeless, most of whom can't afford to pay. He reminisces about his life in the family haveli, lost during Partition. Then there is Kataari, a eunuch forced into the flesh trade and little Azad who suffers sexual abuse.

"I have so many memories of Meena Bazar," says Lokesh who grew up in Old Delhi's Daryaganj where he still lives. "There used to be a close and rich community culture. But all that changed after 1982 and the anti-Sikh riots when homeless migrants emerged in Delhi. After the introduction of the government's neo-liberal policies in 1990 you saw beggary as well."

Lokesh is one of the founders of Jamghat and the creative director of Mandala, (The Magic



Lokesh Jain in a scene from *Humein Naaz Hai*

Circle), a theatre group. Both groups joined hands to stage this play.

Humein Naaz Hai is the theatre of the oppressed. It has many grim moments. The actors launch into monologues about the circumstances that brought them to a life of squalor and misery. Jhabbar, the watchman, recounts how he left his family and land behind in his village to earn a living in Old Delhi. The city does not allow him to sleep. Yet he keeps going despite his flagging health. The disfigured Fauzia keeps body and soul together by selling the waste parts of animal corpses. She narrates how her maternal uncle whom she jilted retaliated by throwing acid on her face.

Lokesh believes that there is a certain dignity about people who toil to earn a humble living.

"While the common perception of the homeless in Old Delhi is that they are thieves, drug addicts, beggars and so on, such prejudices are completely misplaced. Ninety five percent of the homeless are working class people who are honest and live with dignity – be it as labourers, rickshaw pullers or as workers in shops and tenthouses," he says. "They are the real owners of places like Khari Baoli, Fatehpuri Masjid, Chawri Bazaar and Hauz Qazi. Homeless women and children truly live in pathetic conditions but they find security in places like Meena Bazaar."

They find fleeting moments of happiness too. The characters in the play sing, dance, banter and romance. Baba Batasha, played by Lokesh him-

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self, is an expansive Santa Claus to homeless children. Moony eyed Muniya and labourer Patru decide to settle down together. Old Bollywood music often plays in the background and Baba Batasha spouts poetry. "This is not a story of pain but of celebration, courage, humour, optimism and positivity which I saw in the culture of these homeless people," says Lokesh.

Many of the actors like Somya Mani Tripathi (who plays Muniya) and Nitin Kumar (Jamalu) are university students. Chavi Jain (who plays the deranged woman and is Lokesh's wife) is a

dren are from five to 16 years old.

At the Jamghat shelter the children are provided healthcare, counselling, education or vocational training, street and stage theatre training. "Over the last nine years 35 children from the shelters have returned home or are working," says Amit with pride.

One example is Irfaan who used to live and sleep on the pavement near Hanuman Mandir. Like many other street children he was hooked on drugs. Selected for the theatre performance of *Patri Par Bachpan* at the age of 14, he put up such a good show that Amit and Lokesh thought he had the potential to get on to better things. "We decided to send him to the day care centre at Kabootar Market in Jama Masjid where he now does vocational training such as screen printing and making jute bags to children. We strongly felt that taking someone from outside would not be the answer as that person would not be able to understand and relate to street children," says Amit.

LAKSHMAN ANAND



University students pitched in as actors

'The play celebrates the courage, humour, optimism and positivity which I saw in the culture of these homeless people.'

Bharatnatyam dance. Some are street children who have found a safe haven at the Jamghat shelter in Lado Sarai.

Four little children who act in the play are from Jamghat and so are Irfaan (the eccentric Baad Budiya), Rajan (the churan seller) and Sonu (the contractor), all of whom play commendable roles in *Humein Naaz Hai*.

Jamghat, which means 'lively gathering' has turned nine now. The play was staged to celebrate this important milestone. Theatre, in fact, has been the cornerstone of the NGO.

It all began in 2003 when Action Aid approached theatre professionals Amit Sinha and Lokesh Jain to stage a play on homelessness for Prince Charles when he was visiting Delhi. The duo got together a group of 14 street children to put up a play called *Patri Par Bachpan* (Childhood on the Footpath). The play was a big success and the troupe staged it all over India and abroad for three months. The 14 children who had been provided food, shelter and a small stipend of ₹50 refused to return to the streets.

To find ways to support the children, Amit and Lokesh set up Jamghat. "We faced an acute financial crunch in the beginning but with the support of people and several NGOs the organisation has taken wing," says Amit, founder-director of Jamghat. Today Jamghat has a full time shelter in Lado Sarai for 15 boys and another for 10 girls in Saidulajab near the Saket Metro station. The chil-

Sonu, who plays the contractor, drives the children back and forth from school.

Jamghat's day care centre is a haven for 35 children in Jama Masjid's Kabootar Market where volunteers take care of them. The children get health care, formal and non-formal education and participate in group activities such as life skills workshops and computer classes. Jamghat's awareness programme hinges on theatre and theatre workshops facilitated by Lokesh and Amit. These are an important means of raising funds for the organisation.

Jamghat also organises night walks for four hours through the streets of Old Delhi and shelters for the homeless to expose citizens to life on the streets.

Jamghat maintains close links with Mandala and Indu Prakash Singh, now head of the CityMakers Programme. Singh is president and a board member of Jamghat. He believes that Jamghat's greatest accomplishment is that it helps the children even when they become adults. Moreover, it teaches them skills that last a lifetime. "Jamghat can impart education and life skills in a way that the children can face the world with confidence," says Singh.

However, Jamghat's children have higher aspirations. Amit says, "We want to fulfil their dreams – be it of becoming computer engineers or army officers." He has also made it his mission to see that all 35 children from the day care centre go for formal schooling. ■

Folk music

Bharat Dogra
Bundelkhand (UP)

SANTRAM Basor is an accomplished musician who plays the *Ramtula*, a traditional instrument crucial for many folk art performances. When a team of folk artistes enters the stage or the performance reaches a crescendo, it is time for the *Ramtula* to be played. This is a customary practice. So Santram's services are much in demand at folk art festivals.

However Santram faces some harsh realities. He is an impoverished musician from a landless family in the Mohaba district of Uttar Pradesh (UP). And his caste group is the poorest. Traditionally, they did cleaning or scavenging to eke an income. Now he rears pigs. Life is tough indeed.

"If only I had some land to grow food for my family. That would have given me some security. I would have found more time to devote to my music," he says disconsolately.

In Bundelkhand region there are many folk artistes like Santram whose ongoing battle for survival prevents them from nurturing their skills as musicians and singers.

Fadla Dom's great skill with the *dafla* is the stuff of legends here. But he had to migrate to Surat to earn money. Young artist Anand attracted a lot of local attention with his *balma* dance recitals. But he was very poor and he too migrated. Last he was discovered working as a bonded labourer for several months on some miserable site near Meerut.

Such tragic stories touched the heart of Gopalji, a senior activist in Bundelkhand. He had been working for long on issues like bonded labour, land distribution and education of tribal children. He

Campaign

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

A five-day festival called 'Traffic Jam: Red Light Blues' was held at Dilli Haat to draw attention to the trafficking of women and children. An initiative of Commotion & Connect and Apne Aap Women Worldwide, the event attracted the participation of several NGOs who set up stalls to sensitise visitors.

On display at Apne Aap's stall were coconut shell jewellery, Madhubani greeting cards from Bihar, apparel, jute bags, terra cotta knick knacks and home accessories from Delhi and Kolkata. These attractive products had been made by victims, survivors and women vulnerable to prostitution.

Present at the stall were three young girls – Shilpa, 14, Hasina, 14 and Meenu, 12, who chatted gaily as they decorated henna on outstretched hands. "We wanted to send a message

finds a rhythm



Folk artistes perform at their annual Lok Laya festival

decided to turn his attention to the plight of folk art and artistes. He travelled the length and breadth of Bundelkhand and identified impoverished artistes. He began organizing every year a festival of folk art called Lok Laya. Its fifth edition was held recently.

"The government must increase the allocations made for folk artistes. It should ensure that this money reaches genuine folk artistes in remote rural areas. Although some provisions already exist like pension and travel concessions, there is so much red tape involved that the artistes just give up. In fact, they have to cough up money from their small earnings to process various application forms for the government. Even then there is no guarantee that they will get their entitlement. Some of them have just stopped trying."

There is growing apprehension that city-based

artists and organisations corner most government funds. Genuine artistes struggling in far-away villages are starved of help.

Not just the government, other donors should also be cautious and ensure that their funds reach deserving artistes.

Also, promoting folk arts strengthens the social fabric of our villages, says Gopalji. So the government must step forth and be generous. "Folk singers perform till late at night and people of various castes and communities gather to enjoy the music, song and dance. This helps to bind them like nothing else. When folk arts start declining, then social bonding weakens leading to an increase in strife and violence," he explains.

Dr. Prabhakar Lakshman Gohadkar is a famous classical singer of the Gwalior gharana who has also been deeply interested in folk music. "Folk music is really the mother of classical music, a fact that is accepted by several classical singers of repute," he says. Gopalji agrees. "In my ancestral

village, Bigahna, some farmers are accomplished *dhrupad* singers," he points out.

At the fifth Lok Laya festival, classical and folk singers spent two days singing and celebrating together. Another heartwarming aspect was that emerging Kol tribal panchayat leaders like Sanjo Kol and Booti Kol also performed. Their rendition of Kolhai and Rai art forms got roaring applause. Shashi Nigam, a social activist and researcher, has not only mobilised folk singers but has learnt folk dance herself so well that she could join accomplished folk-dancers in doing difficult steps which involve carrying an earthen pit with lamps lit on top.

Gopalji's efforts provide a blueprint for more festivals to keep alive India's traditional folk tradition. As the fifth Lok Laya celebrations came to an end, Gopalji announced that he would not be organizing more festivals because of his advancing years. However, Shashi and Vinod, both young artistes came on stage and assured the audience they would keep Lok Laya alive. And so this festival of hope ended on a note of hope. ■

says no to redlight



to our society that prostitution is not inevitable for poor, female and low caste people. By making these crafts and jewellery we wanted to show that we are also capable of producing beautiful objects. We also want to inform the government that we want choices other than prostitution. We want access to markets, job training, capital and other inputs," said Ruchira Gupta, founder-president of Apne Aap Women Worldwide.

Survivors of rape and prostitution joined hands with young musicians, artists, street theatre groups and crafts-persons to celebrate the festival that featured two evenings of live music, painting, choreography and street theatre performances.

However, while such events do focus attention on trafficking there is still a long way to go. Shilpa and Hasina are out of school though they are learning vocational skills at Apne Aap's centre at Dharmapura, on the outskirts of Delhi. They also happen to belong to the Perna community where intergenerational prostitution is widely prevalent.

"Our aim is to give vulnerable girls and women a foothold so that they can stand on their own feet and resist falling into the trap of prostitution," says S. Kalidas, communications adviser, Apne Aap. ■

Catch Periyar's one-day festival



SUSHEELA NAIR

Ruins of the Mangala Devi Kannaki temple overgrown with grass and creepers

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

EVERY year when the mercury soars in the months of April-May, hordes of pilgrims throng to the Mangala Devi Temple perched on the Mangala Devi hill to take part in the Chitra Pournami festival. The temple forms part of the Periyar Tiger Reserve in the districts of Idukki and Pathanamthitta in Kerala and runs along the Tamil Nadu border.

Mangala Devi has often been entangled in controversy because of an unsettled dispute on whether it is situated in Kerala or Tamil Nadu. For 364 days in a year, entry to the forest road to Mangala Devi is closed to the public. The temple and its surrounding region are fully under the control of the Kerala Forest Department. But on this one auspicious day when there is a full moon in the dark sky, people are allowed to move into the Periyar Tiger Reserve from 6 am to 6 pm.

We set off on a mountain track leading to the ancient, desolate Mangala Devi Kannaki temple with thousands of devotees from Kerala and Tamil Nadu to participate in this annual festival.

As our jeep trundled up a 13-km stretch, negotiating steep U-turns up a hillock, we saw pilgrims in yellow attire trudging up while the fainthearted took the easier option of travelling by jeeps and tractors. En route forest officials ensured tight security and imposed a total ban on plastic and alcohol. We passed through semi evergreen forests with towering trees interspersed with shrubs and a precipitous gorge with a stretch of



SUSHEELA NAIR

Priest performs the annual ritual

shola grasslands. As our jeep traversed different terrain, we looked on keenly hoping to catch a sight of the elusive tiger and some elephants. Though the Periyar National Park is a part of Project Tiger, tiger sightings have become very rare. Anyway, we were fortunate to sight an occasional sambar amidst the dense foliage. Nilgiri langurs peered at us from treetops.

After entering a semi evergreen stretch we emerged into the bright sunlight of the Mangala Devi hill. A watchtower loomed into view assuring us that we were in close proximity to the hill. Standing on the summit of the hill, among the scattered ruins of the temple, we marvelled at the stunning beauty of this place.

Mangala Devi is steeped in legend. It is said that Kannaki of Silappathikaram's deep anger reduced Madurai to ashes and she fled to this picturesque place to make a trip to heaven. According to local

people, the hill might have been part of some ancient trade route or it could have been a stopover. Perhaps it was the site of some sort of cult worship. Or there could have been settlements here which relocated for some reason.

To our right we could see, quite far below, the hill ranges of the Periyar Reserve along with grassy slopes and lush meadows. The hills wrapped in mist were a welcome relief from the humid plains of Kumily. As the morning mist lifted we sighted the Periyar Lake shimmering in the distance like a silvery patch and tree stumps sticking out from the lake.

As we stood there breathing in the bracing air, to the left in the distance we could see the Kambam valley, Gudalur and the surrounding countryside of Tamil Nadu, a stark contrast to the lush environs of Kerala. The steep drop to the flat valley seemed as though the Western Ghats on this side had been chipped off. The Kambam valley unravelled a vista of pastoral delights – a cluster of villages, harvested paddy fields, small patches of coconut plantations and vegetable farms.

Strolling around the scattered ruins of the temple, covered with wild grass, we found a huge slab of granite, part of the temple's compound wall, on which were inscribed several lines in Tamil Grandham, a script which was popular in the 12th and 13th century AD. The temple had four structures made of granite slabs, each housing an idol. With its battered rock idols and structures, the temple is a sad reminder of the damage wreaked on it some decades ago. The roof of one of the domes collapsed and was subsequently repaired with brick and mortar.

On Chitra Pournami day the peaceful atmosphere of the forest is replaced by the bustle of milling crowds who congregate here to pay obeisance to Kannaki and other deities. A sari was wound around the presiding deity. It is meant to be an offering for certain specific favours from Kannaki. The deity was also decked in ornaments and flowers. The day to dusk festivities began with special pujas and aradhanas, flower offerings and abhisheka with holy water from the temple.

But the annual temple festival is more than a religious event. A local mela takes place punctuated with colour, gaiety, lots of stalls, food counters, knick-knacks and thousands of attendant devotees.

What makes this festival unique is that it is conducted under the supervision of the Forest, Police and Revenue Departments from both Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The Idukki District administration officials work in close coordination with the officials of the Theni District administration of Tamil Nadu to make arrangements to provide pujaris, flowers and drinking water. An interesting feature is that the two states have been organising this religious festival with unfailing regularity for the past three decades. While trudging back to the plains, we thought if other states could emulate this laudable gesture, an easy solution could be found for all inter-state problems. ■

FACT FILE

Nearest airport: Madurai (140 km from Kumily). **From there a shared jeep can be hired to Mangala Devi Temple. Kochi (190 km from Kumily).**

Nearest railhead: Theni (60km)

Tourist information offices: District Tourist Information Office, Thekkady Junction

Phone: 04869-222 620

Gems in Dharavi's muck



POOR LITTLE RICH SLUM

Rashmi Bansal
Deepak Gandhi

Westland

₹ 250

Colin Fernandes
New Delhi

ASIA's largest slum, Dharavi, has been written about, photographed and filmed several times. One of the recurring themes of these many documentations has been the steady entrepreneurial success among its million inhabitants.

Poor Little Rich Slum by Rashmi Bansal and Deepak Gandhi is colourfully anecdotal and investigative in its portrayal of the characters that constitute the case studies. It is also fairly exhaustive in its research into slum development and social rehabilitation.

"Economies are not built on capital alone. They

are the products of human intent. Dharavi is what you get when a million people hold a common intention – to rise above their circumstances and make the best possible life for themselves," state the authors.

Bansal is the best selling author of *Stay Hungry, Stay Foolish, Connect the Dots* and *I Have a Dream*. She constructs the story while Gandhi's background with the National Dairy Development Board, Tata Steel and UNDP provide the insights. The slim book is populated with photographs by Dee Gandhi.

Several case studies by the authors all outline how hard work and sheer can take anyone anywhere. Mapping Dharavi, Bansal and Gandhi meet Mustaqeem Bhai who looks more like a benevolent maulvi than the most successful businessman in Dharavi with his export tailoring unit built from scratch.

There is Brazilian Aldo di Julho who has set up



Rashmi Bansal

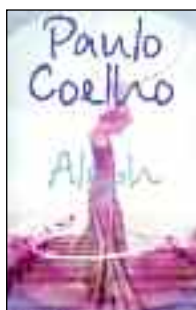
musical workshops for rag picker children in this sprawling slum. But it is Mustaqeem who provides us a succinct philosophy of success in Dharavi when he says, "I've never got ahead by hurting or defrauding someone because there must be tehzeeb in life as well as poetry."

The authors have also included chapters on innovative NGOs and schools that help Dharavi's burgeoning population keep pace with education, health and social matters.

Writing from the perspective of a Mumbai citizen who's

always turned up her nose at the slum, Bansal's narrative lends a revelatory experience to the reader. The writer discovers Dharavi is not only about success stories. Having met people who were born and thrive in Dharavi she realises the community is not just one of the more industrious neighbourhoods in Mumbai. "It's not just a physical location; it's also an emotional entity. A city within a city with the soul of a village." ■

Journey to nowhere



ALEPH

Paulo Coelho
Harper Collins Publishers

₹ 350

Swati Chopra
New Delhi

THE book under review is the latest offering from Paulo Coelho, writer of *The Alchemist*, a book that has been one of the biggest best-sellers in history. Ever since its publication in 1988, *The Alchemist* has sold more than 65 million copies in some 70 languages. The genre Coelho writes in could be termed 'mystical fiction' and Coelho himself populates it by publishing a book every two years.

Aleph deviates from most of Coelho's other books – it is autobiographical and therefore non-fictional. Of his 30 published works, only two

have been written in a similar vein – his very first book, *The Pilgrimage*, which predated *The Alchemist*, and *The Valkyries*. *Aleph* dissolves the boundary between author and subject. He takes the reader along on his journey of self-discovery.

Of course, an autobiography by its very definition necessitates this process of turning the spotlight on oneself. But what makes *Aleph* interesting is that it is written in Coelho's typical 'magical/mystical journey-making' style. Only this time, it is Coelho himself who is the 'hero' of the plot. He is the one making the journey, discovering or 'rediscovering his kingdom' as he puts it, a reference to reclaiming his personal connection with the divine and the cosmos.

Curiously, the effect this particular alchemy has on the reader is to convey an exaggerated sense of self, of an ego that seems to become bloated by the spiritual rather than become eroded and lessened, which is the goal of most spiritual traditions. It is easy to understand why Coelho might think highly of himself. However, to weave one's ego so blatantly into a book that is positioned as an account of a personal spiritual journey makes for a disappointing read.

The reason for *The Alchemist's* enduring popularity is, in my opinion, because it enables readers

to find something of their own self in the young protagonist and his journey towards finding a deeper meaning to his existence and to life. *Aleph*, on the other hand, does not easily bring the reader to that personal space. Rather, it reads very much like a humourless and self-absorbed journey towards... what?

The book begins on a promising note – Coelho feels he has not learned anything even though he has been on the path all these years. He does not feel connected to the magic and mystery of the universe. He feels restless and frustrated. His teacher suggests a journey, and the portents too point towards one. As soon as he opens his mind to the idea, his diary fills up with appointments with publishers of his books for events that eventually lead him to undertake a month-long journey aboard the Trans-Siberian Express from Moscow to its end at Vladivostok. A young Turkish woman joins the group, and much of the drama in the book unfolds through her interactions with the author.

By the time the book comes to an end, we have not only travelled 9,288 kilometres with the author, we have also visited a past life of his, sat in on prayers and shamanic rituals, witnessed coincidences that are never coincidental, and been party to emotional and psychic tumult. Does the author find the redemption he seeks? Is the cosmic connection re-established? Does the author regain his mystical mojo? All I can say is, 'Read and you shall find.' ■

www.swatichopra.com

Fever and its roots

Dr G. G. GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



MONSOON, post-monsoon and early winter are times for different kinds of fever. Dengue, chikungunya, rat fever and so on are the new sicknesses on the rise. Ayurveda observed, a long time ago, the importance of

fever and termed it the 'king of all diseases.' It is the first symptom of any imbalance in the body which affects the thermo dynamic balance of the system.

All fevers are not due to external organisms. There are fevers due to infections. There are fevers due to internal accumulation of toxins and blockage of micro channels and lack of digestive power. Ayurveda studies fever comprehensively and holistically. Mental aberrations such as continuous stress, mental agony, fear, anger and other afflictions can cause a rise in body temperature. Ayurveda calls this temperature increase as fever or Jwara only when it is expressed in the body with three concurrent symptoms:

Swedavarodha: Blockage of perspiration or sweating.

Santhapa: Psychosomatic fatigue and rise in body temperature

Sarvanga grahanam: Muscle catch or cramps.

The most modern biomedical analysis of fever does not go beyond these symptoms.

Ayurveda puts forward a systematic approach to manage, control, cure and rehabilitate patients with fever which includes medicine, diet and lifestyle change. The whole management of fever in Ayurveda has been divided into three.

LANGHANAM

Denying the body heavy foods and difficult to digest foods by giving

carminative, semi-liquid and liquid form foods. These foods should be given warm and fresh and in smaller quantities at short intervals. Such foods should be prescribed for three days. No medicines generally are prescribed unless the fever is very high.

PACHANAM

At this stage, medicines in the form of decoctions and hand-rolled, micropulverised and small dosage, high penetrating tablets which are meant to improve the digestive power and remove the blockage of micro channels so that the perspiration and metabolic process can be advanced are given. Different kinds of easily digestible medicines like GoroChanadi, Chukkum Thippalyadi, Mukkamukkuduvadi etc. are used. Amruthotharam kashayam, Amrutharishtam, Pippalyasavam are apt in this condition.

SHODHANA

When indigested foods in the form of bio-toxins (ama) accumulate, the micro channels get blocked which can be observed by lack of perspiration. At this stage purificatory measures like light virechana and basti (or elimination enema) are given. In general, the Jwara should be allowed to go through the process of accumulation, digestion and elimination in the body within a week's time. These seven days should be spent with maximum rest and light food. Head bath and exertion are to be avoided.

If fever is treated in this way, the body will not lose its vitality after every episode of fever. In fact, on the other hand, the body will become stronger so that the next time minor reasons will not cause fever and the body will become immune to such small attacks.

These days, especially in urban life, we see youngsters and middle aged people contact fever at the slightest aberrations in their daily schedules and change in climatic conditions or geographic relocation. The Ayurvedic approach helps people get out of these kind of weaknesses and helps them to lead a better quality of life.

This is what Ayurveda is expected to do. ■

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WONDER PLANT

The charming Screw Tree

HELICTERES isora, which belongs to the botanical family Sterculiaceae, is an unassuming, hardy shrub with delightful flowers and dense foliage. The fruits of this shrub are popularly known as 'Screw fruit' since the fruits look twisted. The plant is commonly known as the 'East Indian Screw Tree'. It is also a well-known medicinal plant used by several ethnic communities in India. Almost all Indian traditional systems of medicine prescribe this curious shrub for various health problems since it possesses incredible medicinal properties!

Location: The Screw Tree is widely recognised as an indicator of teak forests because it generally grows near teak. However, the plant's affinity to teak is not clearly known. Otherwise, this hardy species grows in natural habitats like foothills, scrub jungles, dry and moist deciduous forests and semi-evergreen forests. It can be found in central, western and southern India.

Properties: The fruits of the Screw Tree, commonly called murudsheng in India, are prescribed, especially in Ayurveda, for a variety of intestinal complaints. A decoction of the roots stimulates the uterus. The fruits are reportedly useful for hemorrhage, epistaxis, ophthalmitis, colic, flatulence, verminosis, wounds, ulcers and intestinal complaints. The fruit stimulates appetite. The juice of the roots is useful in the treatment of diabetes. The root bark is reportedly used for scabies, gastropathy, diarrhoea and dysentery. The fruits are also useful in acute and chronic bronchitis. The stem bark is used for diarrhoea, dysentery, scabies, biliousness and cramps. Fried pods of the shrub are given to children to kill intestinal worms.

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Gardening: The Screw Tree is very versatile. It adapts easily to different soils but it has a preference for red loamy soil. It can be planted in the full blaze of the sun or in shadier spots between buildings. The Screw Tree is generally a pest and disease free species. It tolerates drier and hotter conditions and can be grown in large gardens where there is less proximity to water.

The Screw Tree has plenty of beautiful, scarlet coloured, erect flowers that imitate tiny birds resting on slender branches. It flowers profusely throughout the year and keeps the garden graceful! Even a single shrub specimen can be planted in lawns where there is clear visibility and no dearth of space. It enhances the look of your lawn.





The Screw Tree species cannot be maintained as clipped hedges. Rather, it can be planted intermittently in regular or irregular rows. Planting the shrub near a path or patio will provide a delightful look. Or you can plant it near a water body, allow it to bloom and enjoy its reflection in the water!

This adaptable species is also easy to grow. It can be propagated by seeds and by cuttings. Sandy soil is especially good for propagation. Generally seeds are sown in sand beds from July to September. Germination starts after a month. Around 6 to 8 cm tall seedlings are transplanted in polybags or containers. One-year-old seedlings can be planted in the field. Semi-hard woodcuttings of pencil thickness measuring 35 to 40 cm are selected for vegetative propagation. Stem cuttings are planted in raised, pure sand beds without mixing any fertiliser in mist chambers from February to March. Rooting is initiated within 25 to 30 days and can be transplanted after three months.

SELF-HELP

For diarrhoea: The fruit of the shrub is made into a paste and is used to control the frequency of motions during dysentery and diarrhoea. Take a few dried pods, grind them in a mixer and consume half teaspoon of this powder mixed with ghee to control diarrhoea.

For ear ulcers: A handful of seeds are mixed with pure castor oil and boiled for 10 minutes. Cool and filter the oil. Use two or three drops of this medicated oil if you have ulcers in the ear.

For stomach cramps: A decoction of the shrub's roots helps to relieve stomach cramps, flatulence and diarrhoea in children. Take a handful of roots, clean and boil in a glass of water till the quantity of liquid is reduced to half a cup. Cool and filter the decoction and consume it twice a day for relief from stomach cramps.

For diabetes: The root bark in decoction form or root juice is given to lessen blood sugar levels.

For fever: The fruits are slightly roasted and powdered. A teaspoon of this powder is given along with ghee and sugar. ■

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LOOK GOOD

Sleep soundly

PEOPLE of all age groups suffer from loss of sleep now and again. This may be due to shift jobs, a faulty lifestyle, stress and advancing age.

Sleep nourishes our body and mind. It restores good health and gives us peace of mind. Sleep helps in refreshing us from the day's exhaustion. Good and sound sleep balances our mind and body.

Ayurveda considers sleep to be an essential element of life apart from food.

Here are some tips for better sleep:

- A clean room will give you peace of mind thereby leading to good sleep.
- A light meal at night helps you digest food easily and therefore induces proper sleep.
- Avoid watching TV or using a computer for long durations. This is not good for your eyes and it disturbs sleep.
- Wash your feet with warm water and pat them dry. Apply slightly warmed coconut oil on your soles and massage lightly. This will help you sleep soundly.
- Drink plenty of water according to your needs. Water will flush out toxins and make you to sleep better.



- Practicing light yoga and exercise will also induce quality sleep.
- Drink a glass of warm milk before going to bed.
- Stick to particular sleep timings. This helps in balancing the body doshas.
- Chanting of "Om" also helps in sleeping better.
- Meditation and music relax the mind. Music therapy is adopted for inducing sound sleep.
- Avoid drinking too much tea or coffee. Avoid hot drinks as these intoxicate the body and spoil sleep. ■

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ORGANIC CHEF

Dosa & idli

SWEET CUCUMBER DOSA

Ingredients:

Cucumber: Half or medium size fruit (Cucumis sativus – large with yellow skin)
Rice: 250 gms
Molasses: 3 to 4 lbs
Salt: To taste.

Method: Wash the rice thoroughly with water. Peel the cucumber. Don't throw away the skin. It can be used to prepare chutney. Grate the cucumber. Make a batter of rice and grated cucumber in the grinder. No need to add water to grind because cucumber contains lots of moisture. Add a little salt to taste. Leave overnight. Next morning, mix the batter with molasses. Now the batter is ready for your sweet dosa.

CUCUMBER PEEL CHUTNEY

Ingredients:

Cucumber peel: 1 fistful
Fresh coconut: Half
Green chilli : 2 medium
Tamarind: 1 small piece
Salt: To taste.

For seasoning:

Cooking oil: 1 tsp
Mustard seeds: Half teaspoon
Green gram: 1/4 teaspoon

Method: Grate the coconut and grind it with cucumber peel, green chilli, ripened tamarind and salt. Season it with mustard and green gram.

WHOLESOME IDLIS

Ingredients:

Black gram: 1 part
Green gram: 1 part
Rice: 4 parts
Water: Enough to soak black gram, green gram and rice
Salt: To taste

Method: Wash black gram, green gram and rice separately. Now soak them in separate bowls for about eight hours. You can put them to soak in the morning. In the evening, wash again and grind each separately to a fine batter. Mix all the three batters properly and leave overnight. Next day, add salt and mix well. Put the batter into small vessels made of Artocarpus integra leaves and steam cook over a medium flame. To test whether the idlis have cooked appropriately, pierce into the batter. If the idli paste does not stick to the knife then it is cooked properly. Remove and enjoy with coconut chutney.

Note: You can also add finely chopped vegetables like cabbage, carrot etc. to the batter just before steam cooking the idlis. ■

Dr Rekha R, RMO, IAIM Health Care Centre, Bangalore

PRODUCTS

LAKSHMAN ANAND

BOBBING TOYS

MAHESH Kumar Murtikar's clay toys with bobbing heads take you back to an era when Indians dressed so differently. In the 1930s men mostly wore dhotis, shervanis and lungis. The women wore saris wrapped in different styles with long sleeved blouses.

"This is all history," says Murtikar. "People, especially foreigners, want to see how Indians dressed a century ago. They get a good idea from my clay statues."

Nestled among his clay toys is the icon of Air India – the famed maharaja with his walrus moustache. So is that also history? Murtikar laughs. "Maybe," he shrugs. He hasn't added Kingfisher Airlines as yet, he says!

Murtikar's stall also displays delicately made miniature clay statues of freedom fighters, Hindu gods and goddesses, historical personalities and so on. A 10- piece set costs just ₹450. He can also make statues on request. Murtikar has received an award from the Uttar Pradesh government for his clay models. This is his traditional profession.



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LAKSHMAN ANAND



WARM RUGS

ARIFA Jan's small business is poised at a take off stage. This young entrepreneur from Kashmir first worked with the Craft Development Institute (CDI) in Srinagar to redesign and revive namdahs – those woolly mats which were passing into oblivion because of their fusty designs and poor remuneration for weavers.

After a successful stint with CDI where Arifa helped revive modern designs for namdahs, she left to start her own business called Incredible Kashmir Crafts. She now has a logo with a tagline: Revolution in Craftmanship.

Arifa's business in namdahs now employs 25 artisans. She has added embroidered bags to her product range. These are made with suede, velvet and organza and each piece is exclusive. "We are also planning to teach women, mostly widows, the art of making namdahs and bags so that they can earn an income," says Arifa.

She said the response to her products was very good at Dastkar's Nature Bazaar held in Delhi this month. Just a few namdahs were left, she said, pointing to a modest pile.

Arifa continues to be an idealistic entrepreneur. She will always sell directly to buyers, she emphasizes, so that money earned flows back to the artisan.

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