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Civil Society

FILMS FROM THE VALLEY

Divergent views emerge on Kashmir

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COVER STORY

FILMS FROM THE VALLEY

Diverse realities in the Kashmir Valley come alive in a travelling festival of contemporary films made by Kashmiris. It isn't a complete picture but helps in understanding a conflict zone. 20

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Civil Society
READ US. WE READ YOU.

The other films

DID you know that films are being made in Kashmir – other than the Bollywood ones, that is? A travelling festival recently sought to introduce the rest of India to the work of Kashmiri directors and the stories they have to tell on life in the troubled state.

We chose to do a cover on these directors and their offerings because cinema provides an opportunity to explore the concerns and aspirations of people. We need to know more about Kashmir by going beyond the stress of news headlines.

These films don't provide a complete picture. We wish there would be more films, for instance, on the uprooting of Kashmiri Pandits and the ways in which they have rebuilt their lives. Ladakh, too, deserves to be heard.

But, all in all, films from the Kashmir Valley are welcome because the angst of people in a conflict zone needs to be understood and addressed in multiple ways.

Films tell us a great deal about ourselves. Sadly, our choices are mostly limited to what distributors expect will be successful at the box office. The result is a lot of cinema, perhaps not all of it fantastic stuff, runs the risk of going unnoticed. A travelling festival featuring the Kashmir films is an example of the guerrilla efforts that are needed to compete with the established channels.

In *Civil Society* we are proud to have reported on films irrespective of their commercial success. It is another matter that many of these films and their directors went on to be widely celebrated. But for us the important thing was the trends in cinema they represented and the realities they were portraying.

We have had several cover stories on the new wave of films being made in India and featured directors like Anurag Kashyap, Raja Menon, Paresh Mokashi and Rahul Dholakia. In the backgrounds of these filmmakers and the stories they tell we see the shape that India is taking.

This issue also covers the smart cities coming up on the Delhi-Mumbai freight corridor. Urbanization is a reality and whether we use it as an opportunity or succumb to its enormous pressures is a choice we now have to make. It has been the position of this magazine that Indians need to learn from the best in the world if we are to take the road to being a modern economy defined by sustainable ideas and practices. It is in the urban space that we can bring in cutting-edge technologies. It is also important for cities to be inclusive so that there is equal access to resources and opportunities. In the smart cities which are being planned, it will be the government's responsibility to put trunk infrastructure in place. This is the way it should be. But it is not enough: the government has also to ensure that these cities don't become enclaves and that their infrastructure will be available to all.

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR

LETTERS

Mentor Moms

With reference to your cover story, 'Mentor Moms,' I would like to say that the Udayan Care model differs from the SOS Children's Village model but it is equally beneficial. The advantage is that children grow up with other children in the neighbourhood in a joint family atmosphere. I think this idea is worthy of emulation.

Sharda Joshi

I really admire the ladies who volunteered to become mentor moms. They clearly have the experience, the commitment and the passion to undertake such a delicate task. I guess the work is very fulfilling and their adopted children love them as much as their own children do.

Shreya Ghosh

Bringing up children is a tough task. It requires a lot of love. Kiran Modi and all the mentor moms deserve to be honoured by society.

Ritu Singh

Muslim women & love

Your interview with Nighat Gandhi was very interesting. I found her book rather moving. I think she put in an enormous amount of dedicated work.

Shikha Sharma

Nighat Gandhi and I share something in common: Born in Bangladesh, brought up in Pakistan (and India) and married to an Indian.

Riaz Quadir

Agraharam

With reference to Susheela Nair's story, 'Pallakad's historic villages,' I lived in a similar village when I was a child, and later spent holidays with my grandparents.

Today I am a senior citizen who just wants to retire to a quiet Agraharam. But where is there one? My ancestral villages have been gobbled by ugly, cancerous cities.

Others have this 'closed-to-outsiders' face that is as good as a keep out warning. Modern cities have come up with their own version of ghetto villages. They are called gated communities. But they are laid out like American suburbs with names like 'The Acropolis' and 'Napa Valley,' addresses I would squirm to call mine. Senior citizens colonies are sterile, devoid of the purpose to live other than synthetically whipped up enthusiasms. But even if there is a perfect Agraharam, is it possible for a person used to the non-interfering facelessness of urban living, to adjust to the critical norms of village society?

It is an opportune time for planners, architects and builders to think about the old in a new manner.

Mithun Sinha

Wonder story

Shree Padre's story, 'Wonder farm in Kerala' was very interesting. I would really like to see this Agricultural Research Station. In our education system, after children finish school they should be encouraged to study agriculture.

Chandran

Radical scientists

Your film review, 'Evoking India's radical scientists,' was thought-provoking. It is sad to see that we are no longer producing such world-class scientists. Meghnad Saha, S.N. Bose and C.V. Raman lived and breathed science. They were true 'Bharat Ratnas.'

Ashish Rohilla

It was great to read this article. C.V. Raman is a well-known name for all of us, but I didn't know about S.N. Bose and Meghnad Saha. Thanks for giving us this knowledge. Their lives inspire us not only to excel in science, but to excel in whatever we do.

Vivaksha

Jackfruit tart

Shree Padre's story, 'Jackfruit turns into a dainty tart' was a delightful piece. Great to know jackfruit is finally getting recognition. What can be better for its reputation than five-star chefs endorsing this humble fruit.

Vinod Yadav

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'7 DMIC cities will be smart

INTERVIEW

Amitabh Kant

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FROM 2018, a dedicated freight corridor will make it possible to ship industrial goods by rail from Delhi to Mumbai in just 14 hours. Right now it takes 14 days to cover the same distance and trucks carrying the goods have a costly carbon footprint.

Seven manufacturing hubs, designed as smart cities, are planned along this efficient and ecologically friendly corridor. They are meant to generate jobs and promote investment. But more importantly, as smart cities, they are expected to raise the bar for urbanization in India. They will be of high density and vertical and promote mixed use. They will recycle water and waste, rely on public transport and be seamlessly integrated with information communication technology (ICT).

The cities will come up in six states – Dadri-Noida-Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, Manesar-Bawal in Haryana, Khushkhera-Bhiwadi-Neemrana in Rajasthan, Ahmedabad-Dholera in Gujarat, Pithampur-Dhar-Mhow in Madhya Pradesh and Nashik-Sinnar-Igatpuri in Maharashtra where a modern port is planned.

The Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation Ltd. (DMICDC) has been involved in some very detailed planning since 2011, when the Union Cabinet gave its approval to the project.

The DMICDC has scouted around the globe for the best consultants so that the cities leapfrog in terms of technology and design.

For instance, Jurong of Singapore has been signed up for the Manesar-Bawal Investment Region (IR). For the Khushkhera-Bhiwadi-Neemrana IR there is Kuiper Compagnons from the Netherlands. Halcrow from the UK is the consultant for the Ahmedabad-Dholera IR.

Amitabh Kant leads the mega project as the managing director of DMICDC. *Civil Society* spoke to him at his office on the third floor of the sprawling Ashoka Hotel in south Delhi.

At what stage is the project?
This project was actually approved by the Union Cabinet in November 2011. Since then we have been completing the perspective plan, designing the cities, identifying spaces, getting plans notified, getting necessary approvals from state governments and getting them to move forward. We are working in partnership with the states.

What is this project about?
The Dedicated Railway Freight Corridor will run from Delhi to Mumbai. The train will carry only containers. All the goods produced in the northern part of India will be put into containers and shifted via train. At present almost 75 per cent of goods from northern India travel by road to ports. It takes 14 days to reach. Once the corridor comes up in early 2018, goods will reach the ports in 14 hours.

The corridor will go through a completely new route through six states. So it is possible for us to look at new areas for manufacturing and, as a logical consequence of that, urbanization. We are planning seven new cities in the first phase to drive India's manufacturing, which in due course will drive India's urbanization. These cities are what we are taking forward in partnership with state governments.

So the project is still at drawing board stage. Will the cities come up first or the manufacturing?
See, when cities happened across America and Europe land, gas and water were cheaply available. Americans made sprawling cities. You could live in, say, New Jersey and drive down to Manhattan and your car would guzzle gas. They made cities for cars and not for people. The American car companies bought over the railway companies and destroyed them.

India should have made new cities after Chandigarh but this was not done. Today, it is not an easy project. It's tough, difficult and complex. It can make a paradigm shift in India's urbanization and manufacturing. Why we need a long time to plan is because cities don't happen in two years. The best of cities happen over four to five decades. Spending time at the drawing board stage is very important because cities require proper planning, detailed engineering and a backbone. You don't need cities like Gurgaon where you allow the private sector to come in, get into real estate, then after four decades start doing sewage and drainage and trunk infrastructure.

By proper planning I mean cities have to evolve on the back of public transportation. You need recycling of water, recycling of waste. If you do not plan this out in a systematic scientific way with proper engineering your cities will be a disaster.

So is this the concept of the smart city?
India is starting this process of urbanization very late in the day. The only way you can catch up with the rest of the world and leapfrog is by use of technology. So we have tried to integrate the process of planning with ICT. When we talk of smart cities we are really talking about how you use technology to make a big jump.

A smart city is one in which you are using real-time information for public transportation, for information about your community, education, health… minute by minute. That enables you to take informed decisions on a real-time basis. This is feasible if your backbone has an ICT broadband. For the first time in the world we have tried to integrate the process of ICT planning with geographical planning – dovetail them. We have got companies like Cisco and IBM to plan for ICT. Some cities have done this in part – Rio de Janeiro and Amsterdam but nowhere in the world has this been done in an integrated manner.

Amitabh Kant: 'Cities require proper planning, detailed engineering

What is it exactly that technology is going to do?
A central command room will pass on information to people. If you want access to your land records it will be available on a minute-to-minute basis. If you want to know where's a water leakage you can find out. If you want to pay ₹1,000 for electricity you can break it up into parcels of, say, ₹200 for the fridge and ₹300 for Tata Sky or whatever. You cannot do this through retrofitting in an existing city. But you can manage green field cities with technology.

So these are industrial cities in a new context?
Exactly. We can't create industrial cities like Detroit any more. We can create, instead, smart cities by embedding technology in the process of planning.

Will these cities be green?
I am talking about a sustainable city where 70 to 75 per cent of people travel by public transport. CO2 emissions all come from cars. That's why we need to do detailed plans and engineering plans of the trunk infrastructure. Don't bring in the private sector at this stage. Delay the process of development. First create the drainage, the sewage, the transport network, the roads… once you have done that you have enhanced the value of that city. Then your land prices go up and you can capture that value in a

and sustainable'

LAKSHMAN ANAND

and a backbone.'

'By proper planning I mean cities have to evolve on the back of public transportation. You need recycling of water, recycling of waste. If you do not plan this out in a systematic scientific way with proper engineering your cities will be a disaster.'

Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV). Then bring in the private sector.

When I joined here this project had just ₹10 crore of equity. I went back to the Union Cabinet and said no one in the private sector will create your trunk infrastructure. They are not here for charity. Delay the process of real estate and build the trunk infrastructure first. The government should do it. When Chandigarh was created, its backbone was built and financed by the Government of India. So in each of these cities we are not just taking land, we are creating the backbone of this infrastructure.

You can't de-plan a city. Two cities made at the same time, Atlanta and Barcelona, each cater to a population of 2.8 million. The ecological footprint of Atlanta is 12 times more than Barcelona because in Atlanta 98.2 per cent of people travel by car. In Barcelona, 65 per cent of people travel by public transport. Another 18 per cent either cycle or walk. You would have to break Atlanta apart to reduce its ecological footprint down to Barcelona's. India must learn this. Planning and detailing is the key to the new city. Delay bringing in the private sector. Make your choices clear. And that is why we have brought in some of the best planners in the world to create sustainable and smart cities.

Who is helping with planning?

When you do this kind of project it's very important first to break a large project into small, doable components. Then you break it into those that can be done with private sector participation and those that can't. Trunk infrastructure cannot be done by the private sector. No organization can have all that expertise in-house.

We have had the best planners for the planning of the cities and for execution we have brought in programme managers. The London Olympics were driven by a company that worked through 65 departments and delivered the Olympics eight months ahead of schedule. It was responsible for execution and delivery. You have to bring in companies that are professional programme managers in the field of urban development.

What would be the average population size in a city like this?

We have planned seven cities with a population of 1.5 to 2 million by 2040. Every city has a different demand pattern, depending on its industries. The working population is estimated at 0.8 million.

How will you acquire the land?

Land is a complex subject. Whatever you do you have to take the people along. In a democracy you can't uproot a large number of people. To my mind it is also wrong to have one unified approach in this country. The land acquisition process (for smart cities) has been left to the state. The Government of India is bringing in the money for the trunk infrastructure. All these cities are an SPV with 50 per cent equity each (between the Centre and the state).

Land, to our mind, is a state subject. The states have adopted different policies. For instance, Gujarat has been through a process of town planning which is a very good scheme where the landowners participate. The landowners give 50 per cent of their land for creation of trunk infrastructure and they keep the balance. The value shoots up. This policy has been very successful. They have done town planning of 920 sq km – bigger than Singapore.

In Maharashtra, its State Development Corporation has a well-designed policy. They negotiate with the landowners and fix land values. That's how they have acquired about 25-30 sq km in Aurangabad. They plan to acquire about 100 sq km.

In Rajasthan, the state negotiated with the people. They give the landowners houses. You can use the lower portion for commercial purposes and stay on the upper floor. Everywhere not only is the land value being given, but 15 per cent of the land area is being given back to the owners. It's a process of how far the states take forward land acquisition. UP has been slow.

There is a swing back to the old-style cities.

I am a believer in cities that are dense, compact, vertical with public transport, including buses and light rail. The city must recycle water waste and be mixed-use. We look at all sources of water supply, existing water, wastewater, rainwater. Our view is that, for industrial purposes, all the water needs to be recycled. Water is going to be a very big challenge. Innovative solutions will be needed.

Who will manage these cities?

Good mayors manage cities best. But first, you have to create good quality trunk infrastructure and do detailed engineering for green field cities. We should not allow too much interference at this stage. You need administrators. But once the infrastructure is created you need a strong mayor driving it and making it a vibrant city with an elected system. Every day Indians are moving from rural to urban areas. People are coming to cities for job opportunities. We need to create new cities and more jobs. ■

Activists join hands across the border to fight mining

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A delegation of 10 activists from Bangladesh toured the coal belt of eastern India to see firsthand the devastation caused by open-pit coal mining and coal-fired thermal plants. They travelled to Singrauli, Jharia and Dhanbad and spoke to local people affected by coal mining and activists fighting on their behalf.

Their visit was arranged by the Delhi Solidarity Group and People's SAARC.

The activists from Bangladesh wanted to explore the possibility of working with Indian activists.

"We wanted to learn from India and share their experience of people's initiatives and struggles to oppose mining and thermal power plants," explained Prof. Anu Muhammad, an economist who teaches at the Jahangir Nagar University in Dhaka, at a press conference in Delhi.

Since 2006, the activists from Bangladesh have been leading a movement against an open-pit coal mining project in Phulbari in northwest Bangladesh. Prof. Muhammed explained that a multinational company was keen to mine in the area.

He said Phulbari is densely populated and agriculturally rich. If the project does go through it will displace millions of people and destroy their homes, lands and livelihoods.

The multinational's draft resettlement plan claims just under 50,000 people will be displaced. But, according to a committee set up by the government of Bangladesh, the project will affect 130,000 people and displace around 220,000 since mining drains away water for farming.

According to the National Indigenous Union (Jatiya Adivasi Parishad) in Phulbari, mining would evict 50,000 indigenous people belonging to 23 tribal groups.

The multinational is not offering land for land compensation. Eighty per cent of land in Phulbari is agricultural land, said Prof Muhammad.

The delegation appeared alarmed and moved by what it saw in eastern India. Prof. Muhammad said they spoke to people who had been displaced many times: first because of a dam, then due to open-cast mining and then a power plant.

They noted the pathetic state of the displaced who lived without healthcare, livelihood or even a roof over their heads. They saw people travelling 30 km to sell coal and earn just ₹300.

"The trip educated us on the kind of life the people of Phulbari will have if mining takes place. We have seen the reality. We are not keen even for a public sector company to mine. We just need to find an alternative to mining," said Prof. Muhammad.

He also noted important differences between north Bangladesh and India's coal mining region. In eastern India open-pit mining was being carried out on barren, hilly terrain whereas in Phulbari, he said, land was flat and fertile. Population density wasn't that high in India's mining regions. But in Phulbari it was more than 2,000 per sq. km. Water was scarce here but north Bangladesh is rich in water and you can tap groundwater at just 15 feet.

Then, mining in India, explained Prof. Muhammad, was carried out mostly by the public sector and subsidized by the state up to the 1990s. But Bangladesh has no mining industry at all.

In India, coal is used domestically for power generation but in Bangladesh 80 per cent of the coal mined will be exported. The multinational will not pay export duties. It will get a nine-year tax holiday and pay a measly royalty of just 6 per cent, he said.

The trip to eastern India has strengthened the resolve of the activists from Bangladesh to fight on. "No foreign company will be allowed to mine in Bangladesh," said Saiful Islam Juwel, convener of the national committee in Phulbari.

"We will drive them away," said Mohammad Rafiqul Islam Sarkar from Birampur in Bangladesh which will lose 28 per cent of its land if mining takes place.

"We grow three crops a year. We were shocked to see that in eastern India people who owned 30 acres now have menial jobs in hotels. In Birampur, a man with just two acres can lead a dignified life. Women in India's coal belt go to the jungle to deliver babies. This is shocking for us. We will not allow mining to take place," said Sarkar.

Avadesh Kumar, president of the Srijan Lokhit Samiti, said that people lived in such hopeless conditions in Singrauli that a dreaded disease like cancer has become so common it is talked about as if it were malaria.

The delegation from Bangladesh also sought the support of Indian activists against a proposed coal-fired power plant coming up in Rampal. The project is a joint venture between India's National Thermal Power Corporation and Bangladesh's Power Development Board.

Prof. Anu Muhammad said the power plant would have an adverse impact on the environment of the Sunderbans, the world's largest mangrove forest and a UNESCO protected World Heritage Site. He said the mangroves protected people in coastal areas from devastating cyclones and storms. If this disappeared, millions would suffer every time a typhoon or cyclone struck.

Pradip Chatterjee of the National Fishworkers Forum promptly offered support. He said the Sunderbans were the biggest nursery of fish in India and very important for fisher people.

Prof Muhammad stated that the thermal power plant would have political ramifications and result in anti-India sentiments. He said Bangladeshis were angry with India because of fencing at the border, border killings, the Tipaimukh dam and the Farakka barrage. ■

Stinky

Dirty drain in south Delhi being cemented over

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

STORM water drains in Indian cities have mostly become open sewers, but covering them up in the hope that the stink will go away may not be the best thing to do.

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) recently ordered a temporary stop to plans for putting concrete slabs on the Kushak and Shahdara Link canals in south and east Delhi, saying it needed to be convinced that this was an environmentally sound way to go.

Delhi has traditionally had channels linked to the Yamuna to take rainwater to the river and carry away overflow from the river. Rampant urbanization has led to sewage and garbage being put into these channels.

There are plans for setting up a Dilli Haat, an open-air market popular in south Delhi, on the covered Shahdara Link canal. The Kushak is to be used for parking lots.

But the petition filed before the NGT said both canals needed to be used for runoff during the monsoon and for promoting greenery and creating walkways. It was also pointed out that

drain? Don't cover it up!

LAKSHMAN ANAND

cleaning a covered canal is almost impossible. A cover would put the pollution and filth out of sight, but it would not go away.

The petitioners are Madhu Bhaduri, a former diplomat, and Manoj Misra, who retired from the Indian Forest Service.

They have also argued that there is a need to educate citizens about the real purpose of the canals and dissuade them from dumping waste in them.

Covering of open-air storm water channels leads to an increased risk of floods during the rainy season. Since water cannot find its way into the drains, it stagnates on the streets. Waterlogged streets in Defence Colony and Green Park are a case in point.

In fact, a key government body has already disallowed covering of storm water channels. The Unified Traffic and Transportation Infrastructure (Planning & Engineering) Centre, or UTTIPEC, when it was headed by the former Lieutenant Governor, Tejendra Khanna, issued an order to this effect in February 2010.

Misra says, "Not only does covering up of these drains directly violate UTTIPEC's ban, the projects also lacked clearance from the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA)."

These areas can be redesigned to create non-motorized transport (NMT) corridors, providing a safe space for Delhi's cycling enthusiasts and runners.

It also makes scientific sense not to cover the channels, now that they are being misused for sewage. A cement cover will only trap the toxic fumes and bad odour. But sunlight, on the contrary, will naturally clean the sewage.

Dr Dipankar Chakraborti, Director (Research), School Of Environmental Studies, Jadavpur University, says: "In an open-air drain purification happens because of exposure to sunlight. The sewage is cleaned through natural processes."

Subir Ghosh, member of the IUCN's Commission for Ecosystem Management, concurs. He says direct sunshine plays a vital role in degradation of organic compounds in domestic sewage.

Ghosh says aquatic plants, which are both in the water and above it, can be used to reduce the pollution.

"In addition to ample sunshine there will be scope for macrophytic intervention in the system. Aquatic macrophytes, especially those which are floating and emergent (i.e. roots and reeds) can serve as biofilters for organic waste. They can reduce BOD (Biological Oxygen Demand), COD (Biochemical Oxygen Demand) and dissolve organic loads like organic phosphorus, nitrate and nitrite-nitrogen etc."

Ghosh has been closely involved in one such project in West Bengal. In Mirik Lake, the Siliguri Jalpaiguri Development Authority (SJDA), in collaboration with the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA), had developed a macrophyte-based wastewater treatment system for treatment of sewage from the town of Mirik in Darjeeling district.

In the US, UK and Germany it is increasingly preferred to treat city wastes through natural processes. There is a growing trend of 'daylighting' streams getting buried under waste.

Taking a cue from these examples, the open-air canals of Delhi can also be redesigned to turn them into repositories of greenery and natural biodiversity. These areas can be redesigned to create non-motorized transport (NMT) corridors, providing a safe space for Delhi's cycling enthusiasts and runners, away from the risky main road traffic.

Says Bhaduri: "It was a civil society intervention. When we learnt that the DDA plans to cover the Shahdara drains to bring up a Dilli Haat on top of it, we had to put a stop to it."

"Communities must understand that open-air canals are not waste drains. A proper intervention must be staged to put a stop to dumping sewage and wastewater in the drains meant to carry storm water," explains Bhaduri. She calls for mapping of drains.

IIT Delhi is currently mapping existing drainage systems including streams, nullahs, natural drainage courses, besides evaluating the water carrying capacities of culverts and other cross drainage structures and related aspects in Delhi and the National Capital Territory (NCT).

Termed as the Master Drainage Plan for NCT of Delhi for the year 2021 it also involves planning and designing storm water drains for present and future requirements.

AK Gosain, Professor of Civil Engineering department, IIT Delhi, says, "There is a need to overhaul the entire sewer system. Through this plan we would be able to propose new storm water drains and suggest improvements to existing drainage sections." ■

Doon School mates speak up

The class of '63 at their 50th reunion in Doon School

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE class of '63 met at Doon School recently to mark its 50th anniversary with much to celebrate, but one big regret: Kobad Ghandy could not be there among them.

Ghandy has been lodged in Tihar Jail for the past four years, accused of being a Maoist supporter. He is 66 and extremely unwell. No charges have been established against him but he continues to languish in difficult conditions behind bars.

His former classmates, who traversed continents to attend the Doon School celebration, have now issued an appeal that Ghandy should at least get the special status accorded to political prisoners.

"The concern strongly voiced was that Kobad should be provided basic facilities that will enable him to survive the rigours of cell life. He is a senior citizen and should be treated as such. In West Bengal as well as Andhra Pradesh, political prisoners enjoy special status," said the Doon School old boys in an emotionally worded statement.

"Kobad was discussed in small groups at the dinner hosted by the headmaster in his beautiful home. Why was Kobad being kept behind bars? Why had we not obtained special permission to enable him to

Rural lives are being put at risk with ban

Bharat Dogra
New Delhi

OVER the years doctors deeply committed to rural health have saved millions of lives using a technique called UDBT (Unbanked Directed Blood Transfusion). This is a technical name for taking blood from a donor and, after doing all the relevant tests, transfusing it directly to a specific patient without 'banking' or storing it. UDBT plays an important role in villages and in areas where blood banks do not exist.

According to existing rules, a blood bank should have seven rooms of which four should be air-conditioned with an uninterrupted supply of electricity, specially designed refrigeration and sophisticated equipment managed by a well-paid medical officer and other technical staff. The chances of creating such blood-banks (or even slightly modified versions) in remote villages are next to nil. Therefore, doctors have found UDBT essential for treating many emergency cases where blood is immediately needed. This is particularly the case in saving accident victims and mothers experiencing excessive post-delivery bleeding. UDBT plays an important role in achieving national goals like reducing maternal mortality.

In many emergency cases in rural areas, the only alternative to UDBT is for the patient's family to rush to blood banks in cities. Apart from higher cost, this can delay the treatment till it is too late.

In rural India UDBT has saved millions of lives in the past 60 years. However, this life-saving work was rudely and tragically interrupted some time ago by an amendment in The Drugs and Cosmetic Rules which in effect made UDBT illegal. As the realization of the new rules spread, many rural doctors and para-medical staff started becoming increasingly reluctant to provide life-saving treatment which needed UDBT.

But many rural doctors continued to use UDBT for life-saving treatment as they just could not see patients dying before their eyes. However, this life-saving work of doctors has become illegal in the eyes of the law that has been arbitrarily changed.

When legal action was actually initiated for using

for jailed Kobad

Kobad Ghandy

attend the celebrations? After all, ministers in the government had been made aware of Kobad's situation – some even knew him in school. There were many questions and few answers," the statement said.

The class book contains the profiles of 36 of the 44 former classmates who sent in write-ups of themselves. Kobad had sent in his from Tihar Jail and the most thumbed pages of the class book were the ones with his profile.

At dinner the next day, the 12 classmates who had passed away were mourned, but special reference was made to Kobad who could not be there.

Later, at Kikar Lodge, near Ropar, a full-fledged discussion took place as the old boys sat around a bonfire in the evening. Different views were expressed. Some felt he was by his own declaration a Naxalite theorist and his party had declared war against the State. There was little choice for the government but to put him in jail.

The dominant view was that since for four years, the authorities had not been able to substantiate a single charge against him, surely he was entitled to bail in much the same way as Dr Binayak Sen was allowed out.

An appeal to the authorities on Ghandy's behalf was issued by Gobinder Singh Chopra, Delhi; Harsh Vardhan, West Lafayette, Indiana, US; Vishvjit P. Singh, Delhi; Deepak Dhawan, Epsom, Surrey, UK; Ramji Narayanan, Delhi; Lalit Pande, Almora; Ajay Tankha, Delhi; Ashok Chakravarti, Harare, Zimbabwe; Sumanjit Chaudhry, Delhi;

Balkishan Devidayal, Mumbai; Alok Chandola, Delhi; Amitav Bose, Kolkata; Anu Kohli, Delhi; Vijay Singal, Houstan, Texas, US;

Sheel Sharma, Delhi; Daman Raj Singh, Birmingham, U.K; Raman Kapoor, Delhi; Kanak Singh, Delhi and Gautam Vohra, Delhi.

In the meantime, Ghandy has been appealing himself to the Director-General of Prisons.

He recently found that he was being transferred from Jail 3 to Jail 1 though he had earlier been spared such rigours.

Ghandy's letter, circulated by his former classmates, says that though he had been suffering from skin and kidney ailments, it had taken a full month for the medical officer to see him. Then it was decided to send him to AIIMS.

The letter goes on to say: "Also, since one year I have been requesting for senior citizen status. In Jail 3 I asked to be shifted to Ward 4; here in Jail 1, I could be shifted to Ward 9 (I have copy of BSc degree and IT returns till arrest). On 19 October the Sessions Court had instructed that I be provided facilities made available to senior citizens.

"In Jail 1, they have been kind enough to give me a western toilet, medical diet, and hot water. But I also need a bed. Getting up is very difficult due to arthritis, light to be lowered for reading, as in Jail 3 (SMO permission) due to damage to the eye, a sevadar to help lift weights and cleaning.

"There has not been any complaint against me in the four years I have been in jail. Madam I request an interview with you at your convenience." ■

on blood transfusion

UDBT, then even these doctors started shying away from this technique, although this was needed for life-saving treatment.

The final blow came when blood bags for collecting blood were simply denied to rural doctors. Now even if they wanted to, they could not use UDBT since they did not have the essential equipment.

As the possibility of UDBT has greatly reduced, chances are that every day hundreds of human lives in rural areas are being endangered due to this.

The Association of Rural Surgeons of India (ARSI), along with other highly respected and dedicated doctors and surgeons has been carrying out a campaign for making UDBT legal again.

These doctors have always followed the essential safety procedures of UDBT such as screening for various diseases. UDBT, with essential safety provisions, is also accepted by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The demand for restoring the legality of UDBT is therefore justified. Just the correction of an arbitrarily made legal change can help to save hundreds of human lives daily.

It has been learnt that some senior health officials of the Government of India are very sympathetic to the demand for restoring the legal status of UDBT. Then why the long delay in making the legal correction? Is it because of some powerful lobby resisting this correction? ■

Children set agenda for govt

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

YOUTH Alliance released a children's manifesto for political parties at an event titled 'Udghosh: Making Children Heard,' held at Ramakrishna Ashram on Children's Day. Around 41 per cent of India's population is below 18. They are, therefore, not voters but their opinion is very important.

The manifesto captured the voices of nearly 10,000 schoolchildren. Youth Alliance went to 50 schools across Delhi, from well-known ones like Blue Bells International to lesser know schools like Nigam Pratibha Vidyalaya.

It asked schoolchildren a straightforward question: "What is the Delhi of your dreams?"

Youth Alliance comprises a group of committed citizens who work with the young. It encourages youth to do social work or start social enterprises.

Youth Alliance collated all the opinions of children and came up with India's First Children's Manifesto. It used two programmes, Compassionate Delhi and Delhi Doodles, to tap into children's voices. Compassionate Delhi sought to help teachers from participating schools create a conducive classroom environment that would motivate children to think creatively. Subsequently, teachers from private schools and fellows from Teach For India conducted sessions in classrooms and collected opinions from 8,000 children.

Delhi Doodles was launched to reach out to senior students. Here, art was used as a medium. The subject they doodled on was 'Delhi of Children's Dreams.' Around 2,000 students took part.

Some common themes emerged. These were: Crime, School, Environment, Women's Safety, Culture and Infrastructure. All were included in the manifesto.

Children doodled many ideas like hiding dirt with brightly coloured sheets and filling potholes with tasty sweets or a grading system where no one gets less than an A.

"It was interesting to see that the children were thoroughly moved by the issue of women's safety. We got an entry from eight-year-old Ashira who said that Delhi, like Chandigarh, must also run pink autos meant only for female passengers and operated by female drivers," said Shashank, coordinator at Youth Alliance.

When Pari, a student from Kat-katha school, on Delhi's infamous GB road was asked about the Delhi of her dreams she said: "In the Delhi of my dreams, I wish that nobody uses abusive language and urinates on the walls."

Brother Steve, who unveiled the manifesto at the event, said, "Every little dream of the children in the manifesto is a pearl of wisdom. We adults should pay heed and listen to them." ■

Muturkham's tree soldiers

Rakesh Agrawal
Ranchi

RAKESH AGRAWAL

Jamuna Tuddu with her forest protection group

AFTER bumping along a pot-holed road and staring at a lunar-like landscape, we arrived at Muturkham village in Jharkhand's East Singhbum district and were taken aback by its greenery. A magnificent 50-hectare forest of sal, tendu, acacia, teak and eucalyptus stood on the red soil. Beyond lay earthen, red-tiled huts painted with yellow, black and red stripes.

Thirteen years ago, Muturkham's forest, like other forests in Jharkhand, was lorded over by the timber mafia. The state has lost 50 per cent of its forest cover to illegal logging in the past decade. But, in 1999, the timber mafia's unchallenged rule ended. Jamuna Tuddu, 33, a short, stout Santhal woman, arrived in the village with her new groom. Aghast at the state of the forest, she heard from the villagers how the timber mafia had destroyed it.

"Not a single tree was more than two feet tall," she recalls. "All the greenery had vanished and the entire area looked brownish red. We had no firewood, no fodder and the village well was nearly dry."

Jamuna, who had completed school and trained as a beautician, sought help from the forest department. She formed a Van Suraksha Samity (VSS) of 25 Adivasi women and registered it with the department. The VSS now has 70 women. The youngest, Bahamayee Tuddu, is 13 and the oldest, Malati Tuddu, 70. Some of them are grandmothers.

This group of women armed themselves with sickles, axes and sticks, and patrolled the forest in three groups of 10-12 members each. They caught illegal loggers – usually hired hands from nearby villages – and handed them over to the forest department. The women also raided railway stations where the timber mafia surreptitiously stashed wood for transportation. On the night of August 18 this year, they raided Kokpara railway station near Muturkham village and confiscated a huge pile of smuggled wood.

The timber mafia began to back off. Word spread that Muturkham's trees were not to be trifled with. Twenty villages in the vicinity noted Muturkham's success and began to form VSS committees of their own.

The Muturkham VSS also plants trees and nurtures them and, without any government or NGO support, has revived the dying forest. "Earlier, you could even build a hut between two trees as the gap used to be more than 24 feet," said Kalawati Tuddu, VSS member. "Our village now has several species of reptiles, birds, wild boar, hares and elephants," added Man Singh Tuddu, Jamuna's husband and unflinching supporter.

With sickles, axes and sticks, the women patrolled the forest in three groups, caught illegal loggers and handed them over to the forest department.

Other village men have seen the merit of her work. "In summer, it is less hot now and we get more rain too," pointed out Charu Charan Tuddu, 51, senior sarpanch.

In addition, women and children now earn a living from sal trees. "We make plates from sal leaves and earn up to ₹4,000 per month, selling them in nearby markets," said seven-year-old Manisha Singh.

The VSS also uses religious traditions to instil reverence for trees. "We tie *rakhis* on trees during Raksha Bandhan. We place a *tilak* on the trunk of the tree and perform an *aarti*," said Duli Mandi, member of the Adharia village VSS. Whenever a girl is born, the VSS gifts 10-18 saplings to her parents under a popular scheme called Paudha Ladali Yojana.

Only fallen twigs can be collected for firewood. However, animals are allowed to graze in the forest. "Anyone caught felling trees is fined ₹501 and handed over to the forest department," said Jamuna. In December 2012, they caught two men from Machadia village, who were sent to jail. The money collected in fines is deposited in the Samity's fund. It has been spent so far on community welfare and to buy mobile phones for members of the VSS so that they can be in touch with each other while on patrol.

Now, the VSS is trying to improve education facilities in the village. "We have a government primary school but the children learn nothing," said Biplav Mohanti, a schoolteacher. The VSS started a lower primary school called Birsa Vidya Mandir. About 70 children from four villages have enrolled in it. "I can recite the entire English alphabet and multiplication tables from 2 to 10," said a proud Sonamukhi Kisku, a four-year-old Adivasi girl from Kanthalia village.

The forest department has staunchly stood by Jamuna and her team. It built a road connecting Muturkham to the Chakulia-Tata Main Road. It has also built an overhead water tank, ensuring 24-hour supply to every household in the village. "The Ranger, A.K. Singh of Chakulia Forest Range, is a noble soul. Two of our children had diarrhoea in August. He ensured they reached the district hospital. He is also building a check dam on a hill stream," said Jamuna.

In August this year, Jamuna received the Bravery Award from Kapil Sibal, Union Minister for Law. Earlier, in January 2012, former Union Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh had honoured her for forest protection. ■

CONFLICT ZONE

No state, no rights

Gulzar Bhat
Jammu

Every day scores of people approach a small room, 12 ft by 12 ft, in the vicinity of Vijaypur in Jammu. The room is sparse with a wooden table laden with files, a few plastic chairs, a couple of cabinets and a squeaky fan spinning slowly overhead. This is the office of Labha Ram Gandhi, President of the West Pakistani Refugee Action Committee. The elderly Gandhi has been fighting a long, lonely, invisible battle for the rights of refugees living in wretched conditions since 1947, when India was partitioned.

After retiring from the Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry as a Havildar, the septuagenarian Labha Ram Gandhi devoted himself to the cause of West Pakistani refugees who migrated to Jammu during the bloody carnage of 1947.

"Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches. Since I am myself a refugee I can best understand their agony and misfortune. Although I am no power-wielding man, I am working to get at least their small issues resolved by making frequent pleas to the authorities," says Labha Ram.

About 21,000 families, 90 per cent Hindus and 10 per cent Sikhs, mostly belonging to a category ubiquitously called 'disadvantaged', migrated en masse from West Pakistan in the wake of the 1947 violence and have been living in deplorable conditions across the Jammu region since.

Sixty-five years have passed. Yet they are still bereft of civil and political rights, exacerbating their living conditions. They cannot stand for election to the State Assembly or even the village panchayats. They are disqualified for jobs in government. They cannot acquire immovable property – all because of the special Constitutional status granted to Jammu & Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Section 6 of this Article recognizes only those people as permanent citizens of J&K whose ancestors lived in the state for a minimum period of 10 years, up to the cutoff date of 14 May 1954.

"Because we are not recognized as state subjects of J&K, the Permanent Residence Certificate (PRC), an important document making a person eligible for getting a government job or owning immovable property and availing other benefits in the state, is not issued to us," says Labha Ram.

Since West Pakistani Refugees cannot acquire immovable property, they are deprived of 'absolute rights' to the land allotted to them by the government in 1954 in the wake of their migration and thus they cannot sell or mortgage it to get a loan.

> **Daya Ram, 85, another West Pakistani refugee, says before he dies he would like to see his forefinger stained with indelible election ink.**

For them, seeking admission to government technical colleges or just getting a ration card is an uphill task since, in both cases, the PRC is a 'must produce' document.

"Every day scores of people from different refugee localities visit my office with issues like denial of admission to their children in technical colleges, reluctance of the authorities in issuing a ration card and so on," says Labha Ram.

Although the Ministry of Human Resource Development issued directions to the state government on 27 August 2008 to grant certain concessions to the refugees, including waiver of domicile requirements for admission to schools and colleges, the concerned authorities, says Labha Ram, are rather contemptuous of such directions.

Eighty-year-old Dev Raj is dewy eyed as he recalls Bhishan Singh, the protagonist of Saadat Hasan Manto's famous story, 'Toba Tek Singh,' when asked about his national identity. "I was just 15 when we fled our native town Shakarpur, (now in Pakistan), in 1947. Sixty-five years have passed but I am still searching for the identity I had in Shakarpur. We are the lost and rightless citizens of the world's largest democracy," says Dev Raj.

Daya Ram, 85, another West Pakistani refugee, says before he dies he would like to see his forefinger stained with indelible election ink at least once during the elections to the Assembly.

The West Pakistani refugees have approximately 50,000 votes divided among 15 Assembly Constituencies which are not being polled since they are not allowed to vote.

Most of the youth is unemployed. They while away their time at home. This has a deleterious effect on their psychological well-being and triggers a feeling of alienation amongst them.

Dr Sapna K. Sangra, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Jammu University, says, "Unemployment among the displaced is affecting their psychological health. Alcoholism is common and, since they know they can't get jobs in government, they have lost interest in education."

A few refugee families, after offering kickbacks to revenue officials, have managed to get PRCs but they are dogged by constant fear as a mere complaint could land them in trouble.

A West Pakistani refugee woman who managed to go to college and graduate, concedes that she got a PRC after going through a cumbersome process. She wanted a job in government, she said.

In 2007, Ghulam Nabi Azad, then Chief Minister of J&K, set up a committee under GD Wadhwa to look into the problems concerning refugees. The committee made several recommendations that were barely implemented. A writ petition was filed in 1982 by Bachan Lal Kalgotra, a lawyer, in the Supreme Court on behalf of the West Pakistani refugees seeking redressal of the grievances they face. The court in its verdict on 20 February 1987 expressed helplessness in providing any relief.

However, it observed that it was up to the State Assembly to act and amend certain laws like the Jammu and Kashmir Representation of People's Act, the Land Alienation Act and the Village Panchayat Act, among others. ■

(The writer is a Sanjoy Ghose Media Fellow) Charkha Features

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR

Yuva's solar mission

Shree Padre
Kasargod (Karnataka)

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE

K. Akhil (second from left) with Shaukath Ali, Pavan Naidu and Shashwath Naik in a hut they have lit up

FOR the first time, Bhaskar Rai's home glowed when the sun went down. He was thrilled. A group of students had come to Kenya in Sullia taluk of Karnataka and installed a solar light in one of his rooms.

"The grid power line is far away. Thanks to the students, we now have lighting in one room. The solar light is functioning very well. It was totally unexpected and a great gift for my family, " he said. The students also lit up the one-room huts of other poorer villagers.

Yuva or 'Youths United for a Vision to Achieve,' is a group of students who are providing light to the poorest families in rural Karnataka. They have, so far, installed solar lighting in 52 village houses in Mysore and Dakshina Kannada districts.

And on 26 January, Republic Day, Yuva plans to light up 1,000 poor homes in a single day.

Raghunatha Rai, a social worker in Sullia, says, "I accompanied these students for their project last year. It was a boon for all those houses. The villagers really appreciated their gesture. Many families are now asking for a second bulb for which they are even prepared to pay."

The bright spark behind Yuva is K. Akhil. Five years ago when he was in Class 10 at Kendriya Vidyalaya, Mysore, he was participating in a science exhibition with projects on power generation. A panelist judging the competition told him: "You have good ideas. Why don't you make use of them for the benefit of the community?"

That struck a chord. Akhil decided to implement his ideas. He roped in a few friends and Yuva was born. "We students can do a lot. If we really want to we can change many things in society," says Dharmveer Singh who recently joined the Yuva team.

When Akhil was in Class 10 he built a solar power system for two houses in Puttur with his school friends. His uncle, Girish, and some of his father's friends contributed cash and kind. It was a simple installation – a solar panel mounted on a post near the house with a battery connected to it and one LED bulb for lighting. "This project received good response from the media, including television. Our teachers appreciated our efforts and that inspired us to continue," recalls Akhil.

Yuva members fix their equipment

Yuva has installed solar lights in 52 village houses in Mysore and Dakshina Kannada.

After a pre-degree education at Moodabidri, Akhil is now studying engineering at Vidya Vikas Institute of Engineering and Technology in Mysore. Since the students changed colleges, the team got disbanded but Akhil simply rebuilt it and kept up Yuva's social work.

Yuva first singles out poor families without power supply. It visits villages and collects the Below Poverty Line (BPL) list from the panchayat. But the group does not stick to the list blindly. The team visits and interacts with families and then selects the beneficiaries. After that the students pool some pocket money, raise the rest from friends and buy spare parts for the installations.

Yuva's second project was a centralized one at Kumbra near Puttur. A project for an independent house costs ₹3,000 to ₹4,000, but a centralized one is far cheaper. Fifteen houses at HD Kote near Mysore were provided solar lighting in 2011. In a centralized system, one set of panels and battery is set up. Each house is then connected to it and provided bulbs. As Akhil explains, "The per unit cost goes down because from a common point only wires need to be linked to the houses."

Yuva's student volunteers come not only from colleges, but from different cities as well. "We keep connected through mobile phones, Internet and Facebook," says Akhil.

Yuva members are divided into three teams: the Survey team, the Fund-raising team and the Installation team. Dharmveer Singh heads the Fund-raising team and was instrumental in pooling resources for the HD Kote project. About 10-15 members are involved 'on-scene' while another 30-40 help indirectly. Some of Yuva's core members are Chethan, Abhishek, Manish Kumar Yadav, Pavan Naidu, Nalini, Sai Ganesh, Shaukath Ali, Vishal and Chinmay Kini.

Shashwath Naik, a student, recounts the moving moments after they finished installation in one house. "All the family members thanked our team with folded hands. I can't ever forget that touching moment," he says.

To light up 1,000 homes on Republic Day Yuva has begun work in earnest. "We have nominated event coordinators among the students. The survey to identify beneficiaries has been completed in the districts of Bagalkot, Mysore, Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada, Hassan and Bellary. Six hundred to 700 houses have been identified," says Akhil.

This project will require ₹15 lakh and fund-raising has started. "We request well-wishers, companies and voluntary organizations to come forward. Students and social workers are also welcome to join in," says Akhil. By end-December Yuva will complete its resource mobilization so that the next three weeks can be used for an implementation action plan.

"While other college students are enjoying life, it is touching to see this team doing something for the needy," says Dr N.S. Sriram, Dean, Vidya Vikas Institute of Engineering and Technology. "Our management is also considering ways of supporting this good work."

The huts of the poorest of the poor that the government could not light up are now being provided a glow by India's thoughtful young citizens. ■

Contact Yuva: 88929 38686 (6 pm – 8 pm), info24x7.yuva@gmail.com

Tobacco tears you apart

Campaign to combat *gutka*, *khaini* with video

Lakshman Anand
Gurgaon

THE Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched a mass media campaign in July to curb the use of smokeless tobacco products such as *gutka, khaini, zarda* and betel quid. A video, *Tears you Apart*, was aired for five weeks on TV and radio to warn people against the deadly effects of smokeless tobacco.

Filmed at the B. Barooah Cancer Institute in Guwahati and the Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai, *Tears you Apart*, features cancer patients suffering disfigurement caused by use of smokeless tobacco. Since these are real stories of real people, it makes you think.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Nandita Murukutla, Country Director (India), World Lung Foundation

The video was released in 16 languages across India. The health ministry created the campaign and the video with technical help from the World Lung Foundation (WLF) and Bloomberg Philanthropies. India has one of the highest rates of smokeless tobacco use in the world. It is poor women in rural India who are the biggest victims of smokeless tobacco. They begin at the age of 15. Smokeless tobacco is associated with stillbirths. It also depletes the family's income.

Around 275 million Indians are tobacco addicts. Seventy-five per cent of them use smokeless tobacco products and 91 per cent of users are women.

In an interview to *Civil Society*, Nandita Murukutla, Country Director (India), World Lung Foundation, said that graphic imagery does have an impact in persuading addicts to quit.

How and why did you launch a campaign against smokeless tobacco?

Tobacco is a major burden especially in lower-income and middle-income countries. The tobacco industry has increased its focus here. In India we know that an estimated one million people will die annually due to cancer and respiratory diseases caused by tobacco use.

Internationally there is the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO-FCTC), to which India is a signatory. India has committed itself to implementing a number of tobacco control policies.

Does this convention include a reduction in the use of smokeless tobacco?

When policy workers were working on this convention, there was a strong push to include smokeless tobacco. While cigarettes are a problem in the rest of the world, in South Asia we have cigarettes, *bidis* and smokeless tobacco products.

Nationally, we have the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COTPA) as well as the National Tobacco Control programme to reduce the use of tobacco.

How far does health messaging work?

Health communications is a key intervention because when you educate people you reduce the demand for tobacco and thereby you reduce the burden of tobacco use.

There is a lot of literature on the kind of messaging that works best. Tobacco is an aspirational product the way the industry wants you to see it. It is glamourized. To counter it, research shows you need to show the truth – the real victims and the real users. It is the poor that typically use tobacco and end up in a poverty trap. They spend money on obtaining tobacco, on ill health, all of which results in loss of productivity and creates a poverty spiral. So, showing the true face of tobacco is important.

The World Lung Foundation is part of the Bloomberg initiative to reduce tobacco. We started in 2008 in India with message testing to see what are the kind of spots and messages that would work best. In India we found that hard-hitting messages, which focused on the graphic side of cancer caused by tobacco, were the most effective.

> **'We have taken the raw and real approach where we worked with an oncologist and actually met patients. They are the real victims of tobacco. We captured their stories.'**

The first message testing study we did was with the Cancer Council Victoria in Melbourne. Australia has been in the forefront of tobacco control, whether it is plain packaging or mass media campaigns. We tested concepts that aired successfully in other countries to see if those would work here and we found that many do. So we adapted them for local use and then the health ministry aired them as part of their National Tobacco Control Programme. There have been 10 campaigns since 2008.

In *Tears you Apart* cancer victims speak of their pain. What was their reaction when you approached them?

We have taken the raw and real approach where we worked with an oncologist and actually met patients. They are the real victims of tobacco. We captured their stories in a cinematic form.

These are typical stories of people who start using tobacco early, not knowing what it would mean. Often, they use tobacco products as medicinal properties, thinking that these are good as digestive aids or for oral cleansing. Actually, smokeless tobacco causes cancer most quickly in the mouth since it is a very sensitive area. We focused on showing the impact of smokeless tobacco not just on the victim but also the victim's family. The last case is of a

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Street vendors study hygiene

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

DELHI's street food vendors are dishing out cleaner fare, with help from the National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI).

NASVI works with food vendors all over India, training them in hygiene, management and scaling up their small businesses. It has a network of 12,000 street food vendors in Delhi and around 130,000 across India.

In December, NASVI plans to organize a three-day Street Food Festival at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, with 200 vendors from all over the country.

Arbind Singh, Director, NASVI, points out, "Most vendors are not in this profession by choice. They take to it to earn a livelihood. So they lack proper training in food handling and hygiene."

He also cites the general lack of hygiene in India. "Be it our homes or hotels, we are unable to follow proper hygiene standards. The food vendors can't be blamed for not maintaining hygiene. But we try to make them realize its importance, not only for themselves and their families but also as a means to attract more customers," he says.

At NASVI training sessions, the vendors are taught everything, from the necessity of using aprons, gloves and clean clothes to their rights as entrepreneurs.

The training programme has five modules. The unit hygiene module deals with keeping the food cart clean. The personal hygiene module focuses on personal hygiene and sanitation. The environmental hygiene module teaches vendors how to keep the surrounding environment clean by managing and disposing waste. The health hazard module helps them follow safety precautions while cooking.

The follow-up module enables the vendors to connect with NASVI, reporting progress and any complaints. Shashank Pandey, NASVI street food coordinator, says the training programme is specifically designed to make it "practical, affordable and sustainable". He says, "We ensure that the vendors can understand it and follow it. We don't ask them to use overpriced hand sanitizers when a simple cake of Dettol soap would do."

Radha, a tea vendor, after training

Radha, before training

The vendors are divided into zones across the city. From each zone, NASVI identifies peer leaders, based on their cleanliness and sale. These leaders set an example for others to follow and in turn train the vendors in their zones.

Peer leader Radha, who owns a tea stall in Sarojini Nagar market, says, "I showed how keeping a clean stall and engaging the customer in casual conversation increases sales and customer base. Now sales of the other vendors have grown too."

According to Singh, Indian street food is not yet in the league of its Singapore and Thailand counterparts because Indian municipal bodies and the police do not cooperate with the vendors. "The municipal bodies don't supply proper water or a working sewage disposal system to the vendors in many areas. Often, the police harass the vendors by seizing their carts."

NASVI also issues identity cards to vendors, which assures consumers of cleanliness and also protects vendors from harassment by the authorities.

Ranjit, a paratha stall-owner in Sarai Kale Khan, says that NASVI's training has boosted his business. "It's amazing how, by using simple methods of cooking and serving clean food, I get more customers now. Also, due to the NASVI ID card, the MCD and PWD have stopped harassing us as much as before."

Singh says, "Other states have started registration processes for vendors. Maharashtra has come up with online registration. Delhi must register its food vendors to protect them and also to maintain proper standards."

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) set up a Food Safety committee in 2011. "The committee comprises food security officers from 15 states," says Singh, who is also on it. "We began a gradual transformation, by dividing the city's vendors into zones and identifying eight zones as 'Food Streets'." Nizamuddin, Chandni Chowk, Sarojini Nagar, Karol Bagh, Paharganj, New Delhi Railway Station, Tilak Nagar and Krishna Nagar Jheel are the eight zones.

NASVI also plans to collaborate with Amity University and other institutes for food testing and specially designed food carts. ■

Continued from page 15

Tobacco tears you apart

woman afflicted by cancer where her son talks about selling her bangles to get enough money for her treatment. The lack of awareness leads to these horrific diseases. It burdens the individual and the family.

Was the hospital supportive?
It is very, very difficult work. We worked closely through doctors. They know their patients best. We went through ethical clearances first and explained everything to the patients. We tried not to burden them. After all, they were there for treatment. But many of them were motivated by the desire to do something because they didn't want others to fall into the same trap.

So they were very active advocates themselves and the doctors too. It requires a lot of sensitivity. I know my colleagues have cried in the midst of their stories.

Whenever there was hesitation we did not go through with it. We make sure patients understand that the video is a public service announcement and that nobody is benefitting from it in monetary terms or in any other way. It's only after we get their reassurance we proceed. These are real stories and real lives.

How effective has the *Tears you Apart* campaign been?
The campaign is educating people but knowledge alone is not enough. We need to increase risk perception. For behaviour change, people need to feel it is essential for them to change. We also try to increase the goal in perception leading to a change in social norms, which is, changing social practices around smoking or tobacco use and eventually cessation and reduction in prevalence.

Another goal of the campaign is to support policy. For policies to be passed you need public support and that will come only when people understand why. So campaigns serve a very important function.

Are you asking for a complete ban on smokeless tobacco products?
Gutka has been banned and currently there is a move to ban all smokeless products. Since there is a law, why shouldn't we comply with it?

What about 'tobacco-free' *gutka* products?
That is surrogate advertising and it is illegal. Such companies are trying to confuse consumers with similar brand names.

Is there a problem with implementation?
Smokeless tobacco products are a profitable industry. The ban on *gutka* has been difficult. There are ministers who represent the tobacco industry and therefore will not approve of the ban in their state. Raising taxes on smokeless tobacco products is another difficult issue. ■

Aranya's quest for an education

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

WHEN Aranya Gupta, an autistic child, was three years old, he used to love to skate in the rink at Greater Kailash II in New Delhi. A gentle skating instructor guided him

But three years later another instructor took over. Every day he would complain to Aranya's mother, Manjir Gupta, about how her son jostled other children.

"I told the instructor that Aranya could not hurt a fly," says Manjir. She agreed to pay the instructor more but he said that he couldn't take chances with the safety of other children.Things became worse. Manjir found herself pleading with the instructor every day to let her son skate, offering to take him home after just 15 minutes in the rink.

One day the instructor told her outright to take her son away in front of 10 children with their mothers. When she refused to budge he made the other children sit down and told Aranya to skate alone.That was when something snapped in Manjir.

"For a second I thought how cruel human beings can be. I could see that Aranya's face fell. The instructor went from parent to parent telling them that if Aranya skated with their children it would be very dangerous. I explained to the mothers that he would be very careful since I had explained the rules to him. The mothers kept silent. Finally, one of them suggested that I take him to a skating rink for special children. I just sat down and cried in front of everybody for 10 minutes. I took Aranya home. For two nights I couldn't sleep because of the humiliation," recalls Manjir.

Manjir's driver suggested that instead of a 'hi-fi' place, Manjir should take him to a skating rink in Govindpuri frequented by people from the nearby slum. It worked.

Today, an 18-year-old boy from Govindpuri teaches him skating. "The underprivileged are far more accepting of the differently abled," says Manjir, a banker by profession who quit her job as zonal head of ICICI Bank to look after her son. There wouldn't be any middle-class children at Aranya's birthdays so Manjir now invited children from the slum to celebrate the child's big day.

But an anguished Manjir could not erase her son's public humiliation at the skating rink from her mind. Moreover, her dream of social inclusion for her son in a regular school was dashed time and again. Her search seemed to end when she sent Aranya to Step By Step School in Panchsheel, one of the few academic institutions that advocated inclusion. He was there till the age of eight. One day, along with similar parents, she was informed by the school authorities that they didn't have the requisite infrastructure or teachers for special children, so they would have to withdraw their children.

A special school seemed the next best bet. And so Aranya spent four years in an environment that Manjir realized only fostered seclusion.

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Manjir Gupta at her school, Parivartan

'We keep talking about the Right to Education. But it has made very little difference to the integration of differently abled children. Most schools do not recruit psychological counsellors or special educators.'

The idea of setting up an NGO that would give Aranya and others like him a happy education took shape.PORDAC (Protection of the Rights of Differently Abled Children) started off as a parents' focus group in November 2009 with four or five parents as members.

"We keep talking about the Right to Education (RTE). But RTE has made very little difference to the integration of differently abled children. Most schools do not recruit psychological counsellors or special educators. They don't hold sensitization workshops for regular children," says a despondent Manjir.

And it isn't just Manjir who has a grouse against the RTE. "RTE has to be for every child no matter what their mental or physical capability," points out Jyotsna Dharwar, a schoolteacher and the single parent of 17-year-old Shaurya, an autistic child who used to study in the special wing of the prestigious Air Force Golden Jubilee School in Delhi. Jyotsna, who lost her IAF fighter pilot husband in a plane crash when she was eight months pregnant, was at her wits end when she realized that her son had little interaction with other children in the school, except when they boarded the bus. She tried many options like NGO schools, special schools, home-based programmes but none seem to have worked for her son. Finally, after hearing glowing reports about PORDAC and Manjir, she decided to send her son to the NGO.

At that time PORDAC had a learning centre housed in J.D. Tytler School, Munirka, with 20 children. They were helped by a well-qualified physiotherapist, a special educator, speech and occupational therapists, a computer trainer and a dance and drama therapist. But due to space constraints the PORDAC learning centre could not run any longer in the J.D.Tytler School. So PORDAC is now running its school and a vocational centre for young adults called Parivartan in Chittaranjan Park.

Manjir's main problem is finding a suitable place for her school. Rounds of meetings with senior government officials and the Director of Education, Amit Singla, to house special children in at least five out of their 2,500 schools in and around Delhi and the NCR have been disappointing. "I was told by Singla that the children should apply under the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) provision of RTE which would ensure them good mainstream education free of cost. But this applies only to nursery-going children. What will eight or 10-year-old children do? If they do apply under EWS what support or infrastructure will the school have? Where are the special educators, psychologists or occupational therapists. Is RTE a joke?"

There is a silver lining, though. Aranya, now 14, has emerged a swimming champion. He won a gold medal at a state-level championship organized by Special Olympics, a worldwide body that arranges sports for 100 special schools in Delhi and the NCR. ■

LOCAL SOLUTIONS BOOST

With PRADAN's advice paddy fields, mango orchards, vegetables....

Rakesh Agrawal
Ranchi

AFTER trudging over red earth in pouring rain amid the rolling hills of the Chhota Nagpur plateau in Ranchi district of Jharkhand, we finally sit down under a panoply of sal trees. Green fields, bordered by verdant trees, are visible in the distance, covering the red soil sparkling with flakes of mica.

The rain stops, giving way to a grey sky. People, including women, emerge from mud huts near their homesteads where cauliflower, cabbage, tomatoes and spinach grow in plenty.

Armed with maps, they eagerly explain the plan that transformed their village from a parched, barren region to a veritable bower of vegetables and fruits. "We made this map to identify the different types of land in our village so that an appropriate developmental strategy could be formed," explains Gangi Purti, 42, executive member, Gram Vikas Samiti (GVS), a 20-member group responsible for the integrated natural resource management of the village.

The village has undulating landscape so a development strategy to suit its varying altitude was designed. "After a detailed participatory research study, we decided to plant sal, sheesham and acacia on the *tanr* (upland) and mango and guava plants on the *badi* (midland)," says Rani Purti, also an executive member of GVS. Under the same strategy, vegetables were grown on homestead land and paddy through Sri Vidhi or the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) method, was planted on the *don* (lowland).

The Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), a Delhi-based NGO, is boosting agriculture in these villages under its Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM) programme. PRADAN works in villages of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh with Self-Help Groups (SHGs), gram sabhas and groups of farmers.

"The idea is to organize people into collectives, engage with them and help their collective become self-reliant. After imparting basic skills like training SHG members to maintain accounts, we are not involved with their day-to-day functioning," says Satyabrata Acharya of PRADAN.

"The village was under the Vishesh Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana and we just acted as a facilitator," says Manik Biswas of PRADAN, modestly. But the results of their efforts are impressive.

There is a thick grove of timber trees on the upland while the reddish, 13-hectare midland has a mango orchard with Ambrapali mango trees, four feet high. This has ensured adequate biomass and a livelihood option for villagers.

"Currently, Ambrapali is sold between ₹40-60 a kg in Ranchi, which is about 50 km away. So we'll surely earn a substantial amount when the orchard yields fruits after three or four years," said Moti Kandulana, 45, a farmer. His hopes are not misplaced. The orchard, planted in 2009, has 76 mango trees per acre and all 42 households of the village have an equal share in it. They can get up to 50 kg fruit from every tree.

Each household is already earning by growing vegetables on their homestead land. "I just sold tomatoes for ₹3,000 from my tiny homestead," said an enthusiastic Soma Purti, a woman farmer. And Noga Purti added, "I grew green vegetables and sold them for ₹5,000."

Land and forest management have been integrated with water management. "We have repaired, modified and built *dobhas* (the traditional water harvesting system of this region) and we also created new water sources to take advantage of the rainwater in the medium upland, medium lowland and lowland," said Biswas.

For this, PRADAN took recourse to a mathematical formula called the 5 per cent formula in the medium upland. A field of 30 feet by 40 feet on a slope is chosen and 5 per cent of it is used for rainwater harvesting. "This way, every field has its own

A woman explains the topography and agricultural development in her village

BARREN FARMS IN RANCHI

PICTURES BY RAKESH AGRAWAL

There is a thick grove of timber trees on the upland while the reddish, 13-hectare midland has a mango orchard with Ambrapali mango trees, four feet high. This has ensured adequate biomass and livelihood.

water body that is able to hold rainwater. Otherwise the water would flow out of the plot as run-off. The water, held in pits, will irrigate the fields during periods of water scarcity. Seven such pits, called ₹Rs 5,800 each," explained Biswas.

The lowlands have luxuriant paddy fields, with farmers more than happy to grow paddy by Sri Vidhi. Here, too, the paddy crop is saved during a dry spell by *aahars*. Existing *dobhas* have been modified and new ones constructed. "*Dobhas* are small structures of 1,000 to 1,500 sq ft with an average depth of six to 10 feet, cut in the corner of an individual field on medium lowland and lowland. They capture and recycle the sub-surface flow to irrigate crops," said Biswas. This has ensured a good paddy crop and now the farmers, after fulfilling their own requirement, are able to sell rice in the market.

"Earlier, it was impossible to grow paddy here as our lands were barren and dry. Last year, I grew 12 quintals of paddy," said Polina Dodrai, 60, a farmer with 0.25 ha. Another farmer, Chamara Purti, with 0.20 ha, said, "I grew 11 quintals on my land."

The picture is much the same in other villages. Wading through knee-deep water in a seasonal rivulet, we climbed to the uplands of Konkua, a 63-household village in the neighbouring district of West Singhbhum. A 32-acre mango orchard welcomed us as we passed through their midland. INRM is being implemented here too, as it is across the region, though with different programmes financed by different institutions. "The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) financed INRM in our village and gave Rs 10 for digging a pit," said Shivnath Diggi, president of the Programme Executive Committee, the 48-member group carrying out INRM in this village.

Half-moon trenches on slopes above six degrees and polythene-lined tanks on lower slopes harvest enough rainwater for this mango orchard and the fields below. NABARD provides money only for the polythene-lined tanks and all the villagers have to undertake manual work.

The people are already reaping the benefits of the programme since its inception in 2009. "I earned ₹15,000 from growing green vegetables on my 1.5-acre field," said farmer Mangal Chaki.

The success of the programme has brought back people who had migrated. "I came back to my village in March 2011 to raise a mango orchard on my land," said Harish Diggi, 23, who was working as casual labour in a park in Mumbai.

In neighbouring Raghoi, with 125 households, the villagers are using the direct seeding technique with paddy seeds sown directly in the pits made by a double-wheeled weeder. "This is a very convenient technique as no nursery is raised and the weeder requires very little labour. Even a child can operate it. And it doesn't bend into the sludge and ruin the grass," said Salkhan Hasda, a farmer. Women like Thupi Murmu, 34, are happy. "The yield is now double and we don't have to put in much labour to practise Sri Vidhi," she said.

"We also have a forest in the upland, a mango orchard in the midland, vegetable farming in homesteads and paddy through Sri Vidhi in the lowland," said Meeru Sore, president of the 60-member Adivasi Krishi Vikas Samiti (AKVS). A water tank in the midland completes the picture. Shiv Shankar Singh of PRADAN explained that the project in Raghoi is the convergence of the MESSO project of NABARD and the Tribal Welfare Fund of the Information Technology Development Agency (ITDA). "We are the facilitator," he says.

Significantly, INRM is countering the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), whose implementation is marred by corruption and middlemen in Jharkhand. PRADAN has mobilized panchayati raj institutions and created a Project Execution Committee (PEC) in Kuira village, West Singhbhum district, that is responsible for planning, fund-raising and execution.

"We used funds raised by the village's 14 SHGs for 42 water harvesting tanks, 181 water harvesting pits, 61 seepage tanks, 11 homestead wells and 10 acres of land treatment and plantations," said Surja Purti, member, PEC. He is also the first physically challenged person to get a job under MGNREGA, providing water to the workers and running an on-site crèche.

The project cost was ₹83 lakh and the gram sabha approved the plan. It then went to the district administration through the block and was subsequently approved. The money was deposited into the PEC account.

This integrated development approach is also working as a counter to Maoist propaganda. PRADAN workers have often come face to face with Maoists. "Once they surrounded us in a village and raised guns at us. They suspected us of being police informers since our vehicle had entered the village without honking. After thorough interrogation, they laughed and released us, saying, 'You guys are carrying out similar work as us though *alag tarike se*,'" recalls Tapan Pal of PRADAN.

It is the different methodology, it appears, that is making all the difference in Jharkhand. ■

Where Have You Hidden My New Crescent Moon is on disappearance of loved ones

The psychological impact of the conflict on Kashmiris is examined in

FILMS FROM THE

Divergent views emerge on Kashmir

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

KASHMIR is no longer the place that Aamir Bashir, actor and filmmaker in Mumbai, grew up in. A witness to more than two decades of political turmoil, Bashir finds that the friends of his boyhood have drifted away from him.

The protracted conflict has taken a heavy psychological toll on his friends. Most of them have aged much faster than him. Bashir's directorial debut, *Harud* (Autumn), made in 2010, brought the simmering disquiet in their hearts to the big screen with acuity and empathy.

Harud was a much-needed foot in the door. Several other personal stories set against the Kashmir unrest are now on the way. "There are thousands of narratives out there. What we have seen or heard thus far is not even the tip of the iceberg," says Bashir.

Efforts are on to expose a larger chunk of the iceberg. Novelist, poet and now filmmaker Siddhartha Gigoo feels, "Films on Kashmir by Kashmiris will certainly help not just to inform, influence and educate, but also to shatter views that are based on prejudices."

"We have to hear each other's stories," says documentary filmmaker Ajay Raina. "That can be the only way forward in the Valley." If the expected funding comes through in time, Raina's first feature film project, *Aharbal Falls*, should get off the ground in March next year.

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"It is about Kashmir and Kashmiris and it is related to the themes of exile and alienation," says the FTII-trained director who spent his formative years in the Valley.

Ashvin Kumar, maker of the widely talked about feature-length documentaries, *Inshallah Football* and *Inshallah Kashmir*, is firming up plans for a third film in the series, Noor, a fictional drama about a 10-year-old girl whose father goes missing after being arrested by the army.

New Delhi-based Gigoo, who recently made a 13-minute short film, *The Last Day*, about the plight of a Kashmiri Pandit family in a Jammu refugee camp, believes that "somewhere there is a feature length film lurking within" that talks of displacement, anguished nostalgia and the thwarted longing for home.

Bashir, too, is hoping to begin filming *Winter*, the second in a planned trilogy of Kashmir films, this year. "In my new film, there will be further exploration of violence and state oppression, this time from a woman's perspective," he says.

There are indeed as many standpoints on the Kashmir issue as there are voices, and filmmakers like Raina, Ashvin, Bashir and others are articulating them with greater intent than ever before – in the face of heavy odds. They are up against many commercial and logistical challenges, but films set in or about Kashmir are witnessing a palpable surge.

Says Raina: "There are many Kashmir films being made at the same time. The overall impact of these disparate attempts could in the long run contribute a lot in changing the prevalent discourse."

> **'These films are important documents of resistance and a valuable account of personal narratives and images that get torn apart by violence.'** **Iffat Fatima**

Tariq Tapa's Zero Bridge

Broken Memory Shining Dust tells us what women go through in a conflict zone

VALLEY

"I think films about the Kashmir issue," says Bashir, "have a unique opportunity to counter the mainstream discourse because all the other sources such as the so-called independent news media follow the monochromatic, nationalistic, even colonialist line."

Raina, who lives in Philadelphia but is currently travelling in India, is the maker of acclaimed documentaries like *Tell Them the Tree They Had Planted Has Now Grown* (2002), *Waapsi* (2005), *Between the Fence and the Border and On the Edge of a Map* (2011).

It is true that Kashmir rarely, if ever, goes off the media radar. The Valley, which abounds in stories for newshounds who thrive on bad tidings, has been repeatedly rocked by political strife, militant violence, state repression and mass resistance.

Yet Kashmir has had no indigenous cinema worth the name. Besides *Harud*, only three films in the Kashmiri language have so far been produced in India.

That is not to say that the Kashmir narrative has not found expression through cinema. It certainly has, especially in many remarkable long documentaries and short films. But it is only of late that fiction films on the vexed situation in the Valley are also beginning to nudge their way into the wider discourse.

Ask Bashir what he thought of the general response to his first fiction film and he says: "I suppose *Harud* got what it deserved. I never expected it to gain mass acceptance. It does not fit into the categories of film that would readily be recognized by distributors or even audiences."

But he believes that it has been a "fulfilling experience". He says: "I got an opportunity to gauge the response of whoever saw it and I would say a majority of them were moved by it. If nothing else, *Harud* started a conversation about Kashmir."

DIALOGUE GAINS GROUND: That very conversation was at the heart of a package of narrative, documentary and short films on Kashmir curated by filmmakers Raina and Pankaj Rishi Kumar. Titled *Kashmir before Our Eyes*, it was originally meant to be a one-off screening event. The overwhelming public response spurred the curators to turn it into a travelling film festival.

First screened in Films Division, Mumbai, over three days starting 31 May, the package was subsequently taken to different cities of the country – Chennai, Thrissur, Puducherry, Hyderabad, Pune and Delhi – between 23 August and 29 September.

"We will now take a break for a while," says Raina, "and hope it continues with its journey to other parts of the country and finds its eventual home audience in Kashmir where it naturally belongs."

He adds: "The travelling festival has demonstrated that there is interest, curiosity and capacity for audiences in the rest of the country to find space for all kinds of perspectives on Kashmir … "

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> **'We have to hear each other's stories. That can be the only way forward in the Valley.'**
> **Ajay Raina**

The expressed purpose of the travelling festival of films on Kashmir was obvious: to open up the debate and push it in directions that have normally been avoided. "It is an inclusive package in which films made from diverse and often confrontational perspectives have been brought together primarily to tell the story of the Kashmir conflict in its myriad dimensions," says Raina.

"The idea is to chronicle the story of Kashmir through its cinema and to have the films in dialogue with each other in a situation where most of the discourse is often destructive and tinged with fatigue."

MULTIPLE REALITIES: The Kashmir story certainly has multiple realities and getting to the heart of the truth is the big challenge, feels Gigoo, who was forced by political turmoil to leave Kashmir as a teenager in 1990. He laments that the mainstream coverage of the conflict has assumed

A scene from Iffat Fatima's film, Where Have You Hidden My New Crescent Moon

The Dal Lake in a scene from Valley of Saints

the form of a sort of entertainment – a relentless scramble for sound bytes.

"The media is driven by biases and prejudices. They are mandated to report only on violence. The human stories that lie beneath the violence go unreported," says Gigoo, whose *The Last Day* was part of the *Kashmir before Our Eyes* package.

It is the complex nature of the truth that these filmmakers, irrespective of what their individual perspectives are, are seeking to drive at. Raina is of the opinion that nobody speaks the truth about Kashmir. "There is only posturing," he adds.

"I have not been able to screen my films in the Kashmir Valley because the subject of exodus is almost hidden from the separatist discourse and also because there is no infrastructure and willing partners to show my films there," adds Raina.

Says filmmaker Iffat Fatima: "In Kashmir, the truth stares you in the face. (It is) a political problem outstanding for the last 60 years screaming for a just resolution. It is the obfuscations and denial that create complexities."

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The Valley has been out of bounds for most filmmakers ever since militant violence erupted there, sparking a massive Kashmiri Pandit exodus. But while both the security forces and extremists continue to perpetrate violence in Kashmir, several independent screenwriters and directors are turning the cinematic spotlight on the plight of the people of the Valley on both sides of the conflict.

Films, both narrative and documentary, are emerging from the region. It is at best only a trickle at the moment, but it has the potential of turning into a movement of sorts.

"These films," says Fatima, "are important documents of resistance and a valuable account of personal narratives and images that get torn apart by violence, undermined by erasure and substituted by official versions."

> **'Films on Kashmir by Kashmiris will certainly help to shatter views that are based on prejudices.'** Siddhartha Gigoo

She quotes Milan Kundera to emphasize the important role that storytelling can play in keeping the dialogue within and between communities: "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against oblivion."

Fatima, who, in 2009, made *Where Have You Hidden My New Crescent Moon*, a documentary about an ageing Kashmiri woman whose son goes missing, admits that it is never easy filming in the Valley.

"There is a lot of media attention in Kashmir, which has resulted in a certain performative media practice. The challenge is to break through that. Of course, there is also the risk of confrontation and conflict with power in different forms. My crew and I have been detained several times (while filming in the Valley)," she says.

BREAKTHROUGH EFFORTS: But the effort to effect a breakthrough continues. Since Tariq Tapa's *Zero Bridge* had its world premiere at the 2008 Venice Film Festival, one more major Kashmir-themed film has been lauded by critics around the world – Musa Syeed's *Valley of Saints* (2012).

Tapa was born in New York to a Jewish-American mother and a Kashmiri travel agent father. Until he was 10 years old, he visited Srinagar every summer with his parents and took in the sights and sounds of the place in the company of his cousins.

When trouble broke out in the Valley in the late 1980s, the visits stopped, but the stories stayed etched in Tapa's mind. *Zero Bridge*, a naturalistic, slice-of-life film named after an actual bridge in Srinagar, was the result. It probes the psychological impact that the continuing unrest has on common people.

Zero Bridge tells the story of a 17-year-old pickpocket whose plans to escape his lot in the Valley are thrown into disarray when he develops a soft corner for one of his victims, a 28-year-old woman who has been compelled to abandon her studies in the US and lives with her cousins in Srinagar.

Musa Syeed, like Tapa, was born in the US. His father migrated to America in the 1960s after being jailed as a political prisoner in India.

Valley of Saints, shot in Kashmir during a spell of military curfew in the autumn of 2010, was premiered at the Sundance Film Festival a couple of years later.

Its plot revolves around a young boatman who wants to escape his poverty-stricken existence but his plans to get on the bus out of Srinagar are jeopardized by the imposition of curfew.

Like the spirited pickpocket in *Zero Bridge*, the boatman of *Valley of Saints* is drawn towards an attractive Kashmiri-American girl. Their nascent relationship cannot escape the shadow of the conflict around them.

Syeed's father never told him stories about his life in Kashmir, and the aspiring filmmaker wasn't raised speaking Kashmiri nor was he taken to the Valley on annual visits.

He told an interviewer: "Kashmir became an almost mythical place for me… But like many children of immigrants, I was curious to know what day-to-day life was like in Kashmir." *Valley of Saints* was made in response to that need.

QUEST FOR TRUTH: Some remarkable documentaries on different aspects of the Kashmir situation have also been made in recent years, including Sanjay Kak's *Jashn-e-Azadi: How We*

Valley of Saints is about love and longing

Celebrate Freedom (2007), a two-and-a-half-hour-long exploration of Kashmir's continuing struggle for independence.

That apart, the perspective of women has been powerfully put forth by films such as Sonia Jabbar's *Autumn's Last Country*, Iffat Fatima's *Where Have You Hidden My New Crescent Moon* and Nilosree Biswas's *Broken Memory, Shining Dust*, among others.

The last two deal with a predominant theme in the Kashmir narrative – women coping with the enforced disappearance of husbands and sons and fighting a bitter, mostly losing, battle against the state for the return of the missing men.

Musa Syeed

In Fatima's film, which zeroes in on an ageing Mughal Mase whose schoolteacher son disappeared in 1990, the final cry of the aggrieved woman is underlined by a fervent yearning for peace and succour in her final days: "I crave to see him once."

In order to make *Where Have You Hidden My New Crescent Moon*, Fatima spent a day with Mughal Mase in March 2009. In October that very year, the woman passed away and her hope of seeing her son went to the grave with her.

There is of course no dearth of such heart-rending stories in Kashmir. In fact, Aamir Bashir's *Harud*, too, touches upon the subject of unexplained disappearances.

Harud is a disturbing tale about a Srinagar youngster struggling to come to terms with the disappearance of his elder brother and the impact of the event on his aged parents.

The young man makes an abortive bid to cross into Pakistan along with a few friends. He returns to his distraught family and sinks into complete numbness. A friend calls him a zombie. Yes, he is one.

The only time a flicker of hope flashes across his visage is when he discovers his brother's old camera with a roll of undeveloped film. The roll yields a bunch of photographs of a pretty girl.

Rafiq espies the girl at a meeting of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) and follows her in the hope of exorcising the past and getting a hold on his present. But like all his dreams and hopes, this too is fated to vanish soon enough.

NO REACH: There, however, is a problem, as Raina points out. "Two of the three films you mention have been made by expatriate Kashmiris based in the US. The only independent film to emerge from a Kashmiri with a ringside view of the Valley's troubles of the past 23 years is Aamir Bashir's *Harud*," he says.

Bashir agrees: "For these films to counter the dominant narrative, they have to be rooted in Kashmir, to bring out the voice of the people who, even when they scream themselves hoarse, find their points of view drowned by the two nation states of India and Pakistan."

Be that as it may, more and more independent fiction films on Kashmir are, as we have already seen, in the pipeline, including Raina's *Aharbal Falls* and Kumar's *Noor* and they are all inspired by real-life situations.

Aharbal Falls is mostly set in Delhi and, in Raina's words, "climaxes as a road movie". He explains: "On the surface, this is a story about two lovers whose anarchism is the reflection of the violence they have internalized through 20 years of turmoil in Kashmir. It is also a metaphor for a freedom fighter's existential justification for killing."

In *Noor*, written by Kumar himself, when the little girl goes looking for her missing father, she stumbles upon mass graves. As her story hits the headlines, she herself is arrested and made to 'disappear'.

Not surprisingly, even when a Kashmiri filmmaker plans a narrative film that isn't set in the land of his birth, like in the case of Rajesh S. Jala, whose upcoming feature debut, *Chingari*, tells a story that plays out in Varanasi, the themes stem from his psyche.

"The film," says Jala, "will most certainly reflect my personality and my concerns." *Chingari*, about a Muslim man on the run from the post-Godhra Gujarat riots of 2002, will essentially address themes that a film set in Kashmir would have – displacement, distrust, alienation and violence.

Aamir Bashir

In 2007, Jala completed *Floating Lamp of the Shadow Valley*, an hour-long documentary about a nine-year-old Kashmiri boatman's struggle to keep a family of six, including an ailing mother, afloat.

Jala says he is keen to make a narrative film about the Pandit exodus from Kashmir. "That aspect of the recent history of the Valley has not been given the play that it merits," he adds.

But it is easier said than done, he admits. "Making an independent film in India is difficult; it is even more so if the film is about a reality that everybody – the government, the army, civil society and the militants – is out to suppress," he argues.

Interestingly, two recent indigenously-made fiction films set in Kashmir have moved away from the conflict and narrated stories about human relationships.

The more recent of the two, Dilnawaz Muntazir's *Partav* (Influence), a 35mm digital film, is a competently crafted drama that centres on a celebrated writer and thinker with a well hidden secret – he abandoned his illiterate and pregnant wife 29 years ago, leaving her and her about-to-be-born son to their own devices.

In 2006, theatre professional Arshad Mushtaq, who did a short stint at the National School of Drama, made *Akh Daleel Loolech* (*A Kashmiri Story of Love*). It was a period film set in the late 19th century, a feudal period during which the *jagirdari* system was in place and *begar* (forced labour) was prevalent.

A poor boy and a rich girl fall in love and the film's drama revolves around their struggle to bridge the class differences as they seek to pursue their dreams. The film premiered in Srinagar's Tagore Hall, before an enthusiastic 1,200-strong audience. It was Kashmir's first film in 40 years.

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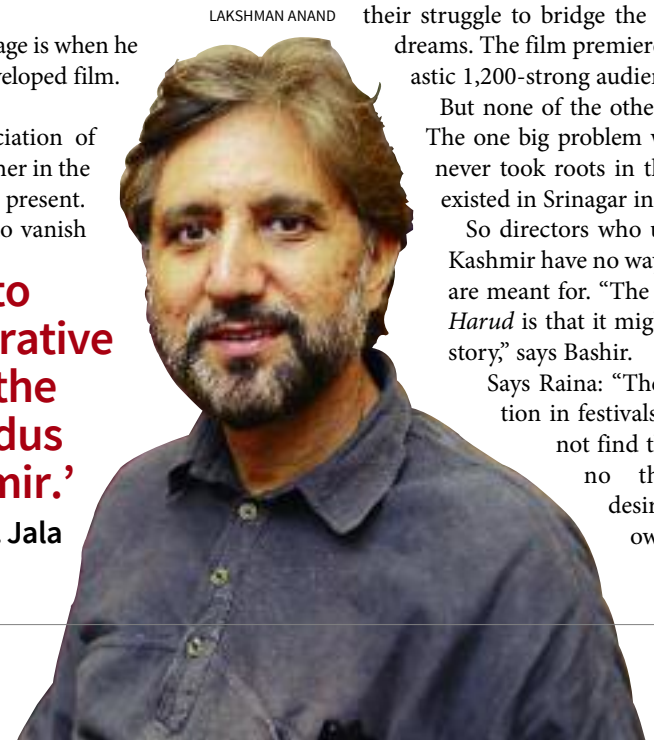


'I am keen to make a narrative film about the Pandit exodus from Kashmir.'

Rajesh S. Jala

But none of the other films on Kashmir have been screened there. The one big problem with cinema in the region is that the medium never took roots in the Valley and the handful of movie halls that existed in Srinagar in the pre-militancy days have all closed down.

So directors who use the medium to tell personal stories about Kashmir have no way of showing these films to the people that they are meant for. "The reason it is important for Kashmiris to watch *Harud* is that it might encourage more people to tell the Kashmir story," says Bashir.

Says Raina: "These films have earned their name and reputation in festivals abroad and in the rest of India but they will not find theatrical release in Kashmir because there are no theatres. Moreover, there is no overt desire/demand/curiosity from people to view their own stories on the big screen." ■

Digital literacy meter ticks

Intel and partners learn as they go along

Adult villagers learn how to use a computer

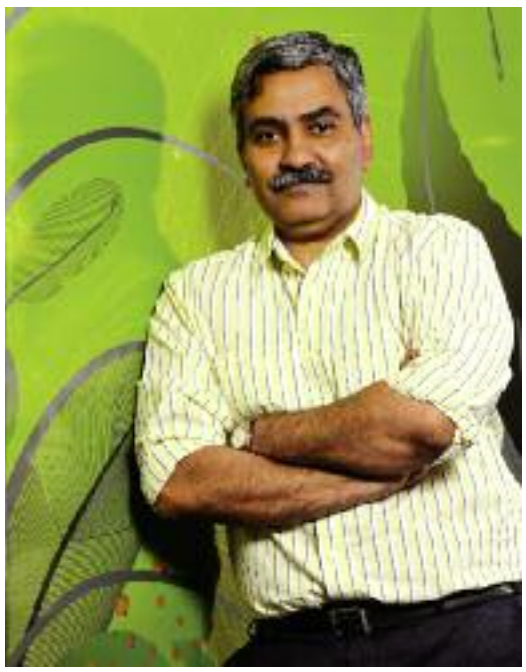
Civil Society News
New Delhi

COMPUTERS, like phones, empower people and speed up an economy. But spreading digital literacy quickly is a challenge that goes much beyond what a government can hope to do on its own.

Intel, primarily a chipmaker, has been closely involved with the India story – both as a hardnosed business and as an agent of empowerment and change. At some point the two roles intersect, but Intel's founders always wanted to give back to society and the company has some serious stories to tell about staying engaged with the wider goals of an emerging economy.

Collaborating with the government and reaching out through non-government organizations, Intel has been helping to get more people at the grassroots to understand what computers can do to transform their lives.

Ashutosh Chadha, Director, Corporate Affairs, spoke to *Civil Society*.



Ashutosh Chadha

The National Digital Literacy Mission launched by Intel seeks to empower all citizens to access quality education, healthcare and services. Would you say that is too grand a statement?
Let me step back and start with some facts. This is actually our newest programme, which was launched in August 2012, to be very precise. We were doing some comparisons of economic development, broadband and PC penetration in history. If you look at the four BRIC nations – Brazil, Russia, India and China– some 15 years ago they had the same level of technology and PC penetration. Our GDP was also almost at the same level. The World Bank has clear statistics that the more the penetration of technology, the more the impact on GDP growth. When you come down to the current years, you will find that the other three countries have actually moved ahead where technology penetration is concerned. India has remained at less than 10 per cent in this thing. Our GDP too is significantly lower.

We figured out that there were three things which we could look at – the applicability of technology, the availability of technology and the appreciation of technology.

Applicability is what technology can be used for – whether you have the relevant content, whether you have the relevant services and so on. Availability deals with the availability of connectivity in the villages, whether you have devices available and at price points at which people can afford them.

But we found that if I don't know what technology can do to improve your life, you are still not going to buy it. So we thought that the first thing we would do was to start driving this appreciation. Ultimately, we feel, if people start appreciating technology, they will be using more technology. It would help them in their daily lives.

So you are introducing people to computers.
Not exactly. We are introducing people to technology and how it can benefit them. The owner of a *kirana* shop in a village couldn't care less about Microsoft Excel or PowerPoint. But, what he cares about is how can the technology help him? Help him create his own posters, which he can put up during Diwali or anytime and say that he has a sale on in his shop, without having to go to a design firm. Or he could use technology to figure out how much of stock he has or doesn't have. Similarly, if you look at a self-employed graduate, or a seamstress, how can he or she use technology like the Internet to market a product?

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Smart phone for the blind

Users can play games and access GPS

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

THE world's first smart phone for the blind is being tested on users and is likely to be launched in India some time next year.

Braille phones exist, but they have simple keypads. A smart phone is much more complex because its functions require multiple use of the screen.

Sumit Dagar, who has a degree in Interaction Design from the National Institute of Design, came up with the idea. Dagar is 29 and has plunged into entrepreneurship, setting up Kriyate Designs.

An ordinary Braille keyboard allows a visually challenged person to make calls and use SMS. There are also many audio interface apps like Siri, SayText and TalkBack.

The kind of phone that Dagar is working on is the next generation.

Dagar has turned to shape memory alloy technology for his device. A shape memory alloy remembers its original shape. This technology is also used in the medicine and aerospace industries.

What Dagar has done is to design moving pinheads that rise on the phone body as Braille text and numbers and shapes that the user can recognize by touch.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Sumit Dagar and the Braille smart phone (right)

What Dagar has done is to design moving pinheads that rise on the phone body as Braille text and numbers and shapes that the user can recognize by touch.

"The phone uses an innovative touch screen based on moving needle heads that elevate and depress the contents received by transforming them into touchable Braille patterns," explains Dagar.

If the phone receives an SMS or an email, the pins would move to replicate the Braille version of the text onscreen. Similarly, the same pins would change the surface into Braille numerals when the user wants to dial a number.

Dagar says, "The phone has all the features you would generally spot on a smart phone, except the camera." The smart phone forms icons, shapes, figures and diagrams, which help the user to access images, play games and even consult a GPS map.

It is designed to help a blind person get a better understanding of the environment he or she is in, which includes everything from the location to the colour of the object in front of him.

Dagar has been working on the smart phone for the past three years. He developed this idea when he was studying for his master's degree. He came up with a prototype nine months ago, which loosely resembles an open circuit with buttons and a speaker.

Developing a path breaking technology is no mean feat. "When you design a normal smart phone, you develop on a platform that is already created and worked upon over years. But our main challenge was to design an entirely new platform on which to base our technology," says Dagar.

Dagar and his team have been testing the new technology on blind users in the L.V. Prasad Eye Institute of Hyderabad. Though tightlipped about the developments based on the test results, Dagar says that the early users have been ecstatic.

"When we met our test subjects, we interviewed them thoroughly," says Dagar. "We asked them about their aspirations, what they want in their lives. We simply tried to incorporate their aspirations into our designs."

According to the World Health Organization, 285 million people worldwide are blind or visually impaired. Almost a quarter of that population dwells in India. Therefore, the potential market for the Braille smart phone in India is quite sizeable.

But Dagar seems to be somewhat embarrassed by the idea of making money out of the blind. "Our primary intention is not to make profits. We hope that the technology is as helpful as we are designing it to be."

The price of each smart phone will be anywhere between ₹20,000 and ₹30,000. "Initially, we wanted to keep our price at ₹10,000 per phone. But, based on our test results, we had to make improvements in the design," says Dagar. "We are looking forward to launching it as a global product."

Dagar has already received accolades from all over the world, including the prestigious Rolex Award for Enterprise. The prizes have come with money which funds Dagar's work. In 2011, Dagar was also selected as a TED fellow to showcase his design at the TED conference in the United States.

Dagar says that he wishes to deliver a unique and complete product, which doesn't lack in technology or quality. To him, the past three years have been an "awesome experience". He hopes that his product will be "a true companion for the blind." ■

Children at an Intel event in Arain village in Rajasthan

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There is a difference in teaching technology vis-à-vis how the technology can add value and help me make that one dollar more or spare that extra one hour in which I can do something else useful.

So you're creating digital literates.
Yes, we are creating digital literates who can use technology to help themselves and contribute if possible.

These digital literates can also be illiterate?
They can also be illiterate. It is a part which we want to look at and tackle. We designed a programme that would drive a little literacy, so to say. That was around two years ago. We realized that this is something that we cannot do on our own. It has to become a national mission. It has to have more people involved. It has to have the government getting involved, because it would have an overall impact on where the economy can go. So that's when we got partners together – IT, civil society and we also brought the government in.

In August 2012, we launched the National Digital Literacy Mission with the thought that we want to create a digitally literate nation by 2020. The then minister of state, Sachin Pilot, said that we should look at making at least one citizen in each house digitally literate by 2020.

Making the 'entire nation' digitally literate by 2020 seems like a huge target. Do you have a strategy for doing that?
When the National IT policy came out in September 2012, they actually had that as a goal in the policy. Then we decided that, to help show the path, the entire consortium would come together and we would do a few things. The national optical fibre network was being laid. We said we would take three villages where the network was going to reach and actually go out and do this – showcase it to the government. The second thing we said we would do is hold a digital literacy week during which employees from various organizations would go out into their neighbourhoods, or into places which have been defined, and impart digital literacy using a certain curriculum. The third thing we would do was that we would create a portal that would aggregate content available from various people.

'One of the people we trained in Arain was actually a labourer under MGNREGA. After training she is now a data operator working for MGNREGA over there.'

We had 11 organizations participating in the digital literacy week go out across some 16 or 17 cities and they trained around 10,000 people in one week. We were doing our own work and all that was happening on its own.

As late as two or three months ago, the ministry decided that it must have a clear strategy on how it would go after the one citizen per household plan. So now they are working along with us to adopt the National Digital Literacy Mission and they are looking to the Planning Commission to help fund it so that they can scale it higher.

We have trained nearly 1.7 million people on how to use technology on our own for various things.

How did you do that?
Through partners. For example, in the village of Arain in Rajasthan, we've had the Digital Empowerment Foundation go out and do stuff. We have various partners. We have worked with state governments to reach out.

There are various ways through which we reach out. We have done it face to face, we have created Facebook apps, Google apps. We have used broadcast as a medium and so on.

So, it is like you are empowering a person who has access to a computer, be it a community computer. But have you been able to provide access to a computer for the total number of people?
Ultimately, if you look at 250,000 villages getting access points –hubs are being created – you will be able to scale. Till then, there are lots of opportunities that you have.

What you offer has to be relevant to the end customer – what he or she wants.

For example, during digital literacy week, a few employees went to a small village outside Gurgaon. There, we had taken our own laptops and connectivity to a school. The school also had its own laptop and computer. So, we were using theirs and ours at the same time. We started giving them information on computers and what they could do with it. And then, one of them said, "Madamji, can you please show us how we can look for designs for our stitching?"

So, these people immediately shifted the entire thing. Now, for them that was what was important. So we put a little bit of the structured and a little bit of the unstructured and we made sure it happened.

One of the people we trained in Arain was actually a labourer under MGNREGA. After training she is now a data operator working for MGNREGA over there.

We have found that some of the people we have mentored and made trainers have entrepreneurial skills. So we decided to give them the computers and ask them to go do what they want.

At the end of the day, human ingenuity is the strongest when you provide an opportunity. We are ready to do that. To achieve our huge target by 2020, we must have the government, civil society groups, everyone working together with a lot of spirit.

We could either say that it's too big and let's not take on a bold, audacious goal or we could say, let's at least start.

How many NGOs work with you?
At least 20-30 NGOs are working with us in this particular mission and then there are governments.

What are the ways of judging impact?
There are various ways. I will give you an example. I think it was in the state of Gujarat. There we reached out through the video conferencing facility. In these schools you had these people coming in. We taught and asked them to go to a website and do something, which was recorded.

The interesting part is that the Gujarat government set this loopback mechanism on their own and the person sitting over there says, "*Iss school mein is din 4 log hi aye hain? Phone karo uss principal ko kyun sirf 4 log hi aye hain*?"– which is exciting. It's real!

Because we are using different modes of outreach, whether it is the VSAT mechanism, or the face-to-face mechanism, there are various ways by which we can crosscheck the impact. ■

Why girls are anguished

NIGHAT GANDHI

Adolescent girls are increasingly suffering from low self-esteem

Campaigns like the one launched by WOW of Chennai are trying to address teenage body-image problems, but girls are getting far more toxic messages about their looks from the media and their families.

AS a counselling psychologist, I often listen to harrowing stories. Three young girls aged 16 to 18 have confessed in the past month about their desire to commit suicide for different reasons. But underneath the surface difference in reasons is a depressing sameness. And these were just three who found the space and courage to seek help. There are many others who at this moment are either contemplating, trying, or have 'successfully' ended their lives. And many others are regularly engaging in self-injury by cutting or starving themselves. These girls come from middle-class homes. They are not deprived of education or nutrition. They are not unplanned, unwelcome daughters.

So what's going on? What is so depressing about our middle-class culture that so many girls are ready to bid farewell to life in their teenage years? Why aren't they looking forward to becoming young women, getting married, and having careers and families of their own?

What does society dish out to girls to plummet their budding self-esteem? In a fairness, thinness and breasts-obsessed culture, how does a non-fair, non-thin girl or one not endowed with big breasts feel? One 17-year-old told me how her father insisted she join a gym so she could attain the ideal weight to please a prospective husband. Her father also subjected her to laser treatment to permanently remove excessive facial hair. He was concerned about her future: *Tum ko koi larka nahin milega* (You won't find a groom). She loves to paint. But that doesn't count as much as thinness and hairless skin.

Well-meaning public information campaigns like the one launched by WOW of Chennai are trying to address teenage body-image problems, but girls are getting far more toxic messages about their looks from the media and their families than they were in an earlier era. Looks count. Everything else is secondary. Future success for a middle-class girl still means marriage to the right candidate. Preparations to ensnare the right groom begin in adolescence or even earlier. Higher education or employment isn't ruled out for her, but all that's like icing on the cake called marriage.

Another beautiful 16-year-old tells me with suppressed sobs she knows she's ugly. She's not like the other girls. She's too dark-skinned for boys to notice her. Too dark. Too short. Too fat. Too hairy. When will girls be just right? Too many girls are reaching adulthood saddled with an extremely poor self-image and an unrealistic and negative cognitive coping style, marked by low self-esteem, helplessness, suppressed rage and a passive-aggressive approach to life's conflicts. But just think: before the age of 11, most girls exhibit no such cognitive and emotional helplessness.

DEPRESSED GIRLS, DEPRESSED WOMEN: Depression in women can manifest as consistently dejected mood, irritability, low self-esteem and negative expectations of the future, low motivation, loss of appetite or overeating, eating disorders, sleep disorders, loss of interest in sex, poor concentration and chronic fatigue.

According to one study conducted in the United States in the 1990s, in the 15 to 24 age group, women have a 21 per cent lifetime incidence of major depressive disorder compared with only 11 per cent for males. One out of five women is likely to become seriously, clinically depressed but many more suffer from what can be described as low-grade depression or prevalent sadness.

It's not that women are naturally prone to sadness, hopelessness and helplessness. Women and girls' higher prevalence of chronic sadness across cultures must be understood in the socio-cultural context in which their lives are lived. I'm talking about most women, not the exceptions. A small percentage of women manifest clinical depression or other serious psychiatric illnesses. I'm talking about ordinary, reasonably well-adjusted girls and women. Other factors have to be taken into account to explain their sadness. Factors such as violence and abuse, poor body image, inequality and gender-based discrimination and limited opportunities for self-expression. Limited regard for their creativity, limited opportunities for pursuing higher education or a career of their choice, and almost no cultural acceptance for a life of economic and emotional independence.

One of the girls who told me she had thought of killing herself mostly kept her emotions under tight control but felt guilty about times when her anger overflowed and got expressed verbally. Since she was a child, she had been emotionally and physically abused by her father. Recently, sexual abuse had also been added to the repertoire of abuse. Sexual harassment and sexual abuse for girls peaks in adoles-

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cence. A girl who is sexually abused by her father in her own home has nobody to turn to. Who can she talk to about this shameful, unnameable thing? How does she express what she doesn't have words for? If she's lucky, her mother or a teacher will listen. But if the mother herself is a powerless person, trapped in an abusive marriage and is dependent upon the father, what might such a mother tell her daughter? "It's your fault. You must have done something." You must not have dressed properly, behaved properly, walked/talked/laughed properly. In short, you are responsible for what happened to you.

What is the proper way to dress, behave, walk and talk for a girl? Can you hold a daughter responsible

Respectful listening is the first healing step. Girls are willing to talk if there's somebody willing to listen without judging, labelling and moralizing.

if her father wishes to abuse her? How should she dress or talk or behave with her father, uncle or cousin who is much older, whom she respects and trusts, who perhaps takes her to the movies and helps her with homework? But one day, out of the blue, starts fondling her? He says: Don't tell anybody about it. He whispers: This is our little secret, ok? He threatens: Shut up, you slut! You have a boyfriend, don't you? So what's your problem if I do it?

What can we do to heal girls? Respectful listening is the first healing step. Girls are willing to talk if there's somebody willing to listen without judging, labelling and moralizing. I asked the girl who has been sexually abused by her father: "What are your strengths?" She couldn't think of any. I assigned homework: "Make a list of your strengths. Make a list of what you like about yourself. Ask friends, teachers to tell you what they like about you." She said as she was leaving: "I will find nothing to put on this list." She came back next week with a blank sheet of paper.

"Didn't you tell me you like helping your friends with their homework? Didn't you tell me you enjoy painting? Didn't you tell me you like basketball? Didn't you...." As we talked, we discovered her strengths, passions and personality traits that showed her to be a sensitive, caring, honest, creative and strong person. And soon we had a list of at least 10 things she enjoyed doing or was good at but had never thought of as personal strengths. She was more surprised to see the list than I was. "I want you to keep adding to the list. And whenever you feel you don't like yourself, look at the list."

I'm not sure that unconditional positive regard is a strong enough palliative, an effective enough antidote to counter the emotional venom delivered over a lifetime in slow, regular doses to girls and women. It's a start. Until patriarchal cultural values change radically for girls and women to feel truly good about themselves, we'll have to light many such candles in the dark. ■

RESCUING THE CHILD SLAVE

KAJOL MENON

RECENTLY, a 13-year-old child domestic worker was rescued from the home of a flight attendant in Delhi. Beaten and taunted, she was contained like a prisoner – locked in the house every time her employer travelled. She was rescued by the police with the help of NGOs and placed in a residential care facility. The Child Welfare Committee (CWC) member in charge reported that the girl is safe, her family had been contacted, and for all purposes is likely to have a bright future.

Unfortunately, 'and she lived happily after' is far too simplistic a view.

India's official statistics report 12.6 million children are engaged in child labour. Other reports indicate that India has 60 million child labourers while some NGOs estimate this number to be far higher at 100 million. The International Labour Organisation reports that 20 per cent of children under 14 working outside the home are engaged in domestic child labour. Regardless of whether one believes the government's conservative numbers, or other reports placing the numbers much higher, the issue is far from a fairytale ending. The number of child domestic workers is of grave proportion and calls for serious consideration across stakeholders – be it government or society. Some concerns are highlighted below.

ENSURE FAMILY SECURITY: Sitadevi is from Madhubani district in Bihar. She is from a Dalit community and lives below the poverty line (BPL). Her husband has no work most of the year and the agricultural land they own is too small to yield much. They have five children. Two are engaged in domestic work in a faraway city. The money she receives from the agent who took her children helps her stay afloat.

There are a number of government welfare facilities applicable to her village that Sitadevi should be able to avail of. These include minimum days of employment for her or her husband, free electricity, money to build a pucca house, a monthly supply of rice and wheat, a midday meal in school for her children, pre-school care, education and nutrition for her toddler, an adolescent girls support group for her teenage daughter, healthcare services, money for her daughter's marriage and a small pension for her widowed mother-in-law. Such benefits would certainly provide her the much-needed buffer to keep her family together and her children away from child labour.

However, Sitadevi has to run from pillar to post to avail of her entitlements and even after that, she does not receive what she deserves. In a system fraught with dilution, inefficiency and corruption she has to spend far more than she has in hand to avail of any welfare and has finally concluded that it is unworthy of her time. Who could blame her?

Sitadevi and many similar families should be on a list of most vulnerable families – special targeted services should reach them with rigorous tracking and follow-up systems to ensure that all her children receive education and that her family achieves economic independence over a finite period of time.

Part of the answer lies in overhauling the social protection framework to include efficient and qualitative delivery of essential services (healthcare, education, nutrition and child care), access and availability of public amenities (drinking water, sanitation, roads, electricity), monitoring and tracking

systems, coupled with measures of empowerment tackling social exclusion and discrimination – the root causes of poverty.

REACH CHILDREN ON TIME: Shiv, a grocery store owner, called the child helpline to report that a 12-year-old domestic worker in the neighbourhood had severe bruises and burn marks on his arms. The local helpline took seven days to garner the support it required from the labour department, the police, and the CWC. They went to rescue the child only to find that he had disappeared.

The Prohibition of Child Labour Act, 1986, and the notifications of 2006 ban the employment of children under the age of 14 in hazardous settings that include work in hotels, eateries, workshops, households and the like. The enactment of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, ensures every child free and compulsory education up to the age of 14. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2000, provides for District Child Protection Units (DCPU), CWC, and Special Juvenile Police Units (SJPU). The Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) provides for child protection committees to coordinate and monitor the

protection and rehabilitation of children at the village level. Each police station has a designated Juvenile Welfare Officer (JWO). There are National Child Labour Project (NCLP) special schools in districts with high incidence of child labour and Anti Human Trafficking Units (AHTU) at the district level across the country. Each state has a plan of action to eliminate child labour, and a child labour task force is constituted in each district to ensure the convergence between services required for the rescue and rehabilitation of child labour.

Despite all of these provisions, systems do not come together in a coordinated manner, wasting time and effort with the child ending up in more vulnerable conditions. When they do come together, it is most often due to the efforts of an NGO working behind the scenes to bring responsible individuals/systems together. As a result, rescues are shoddily planned and conducted, children do not receive the psycho-social support they require, the procedure for obtaining compensation is too complicated, families do not receive any assistance or support, prosecutions are low, convictions are lower and rehabilitation is not planned or monitored. Consequently, children end up going back into the workforce into worse conditions of employment.

Rescue and rehabilitation of child labour requires proactive, swift, synchronized action by multiple stakeholders. Despite repeated attempts by the government to come together to identify protocols for coordination of rescue and rehabilitation of victims of child labour, its silo style of working prevents quick action. Human resources across all departments need to be trained to work in teams, manage rescues, conduct inquiries, record evidence, and interact with children, among other things.

LIGHT THE LAMP OF LEARNING: "What does he learn in school? There is no school building, just a single teacher for 200 children. At least he is learning work in the city. What will he do here?" say parents in a focus group discussion.

Despite the right to education becoming a fundamental right in India, schools lack the infrastructure, materials and trained human resources to provide quality education to children. For children, this means low learning levels, low retention levels, and even lower numbers of children getting higher education. Most youngsters exit the school system unskilled. They enter the unorganized labour force, choosing to join their families in agriculture or migrate to urban areas, unable to participate in manufacturing or services industries due to lack of required skills.

Taking the other issue of lack of opportunity for rural employable youth into account, the state's current plans and systems are not up to the mark. While it does have outlines for upgrading the skills of youth, it needs to create employment opportunities to absorb them. Currently, government initiatives at skill development tilt towards self-employment, pushing young people into the unorganized sector. Self-employment brings the risk and insecurity of failure.

Predictably, with a future that looks bleak for their children, parents for whom daily survival is a challenge fail to be convinced that the long-term benefits of educating children outweigh the short-term economic gain that child labour provides.

People need to be made aware that domestic child labour is nothing less than slavery. The daily reports of abuse and violence against minors engaged in domestic work must be taken as a wake-up call. There is a need to break out of traditional and feudal ways of thinking that 'my child's needs and entitlements are higher than a poor child's'.

ENSURE CHILD SAFETY: "A woman from Delhi known to my brother-in-law took my daughter. Three children from our village were taken in all. They said they would train them and give us ₹2,000 every month. They paid us once and have now disappeared. We have not heard from our children for six months. We are terribly worried," a parent from Jharkhand complained to a visiting researcher.

There is a huge demand for domestic child labour in cities. Human traffickers run large networks of agents who round up children from poor village families, bring them to cities in large groups, keep them in inhuman conditions in illegal and unregulated placement agencies, from where they are then placed in households for domestic work. The agencies take an annual fee for the placement in addition to collecting their monthly wages from employers. The child receives nothing. Bachpan Bacchao Andolan, an NGO, estimates that there are over 2,000 such agencies in Delhi alone.

In fact, it has been reported that agents prefer placing children in domestic labour instead of prostitution because it is easier to escape the authorities. Having mastered the art of obtaining fake certificates for age, education and so on, agencies manage to evade the law under which employment of children under the age of 14 in domestic work is a punishable offence. Employers, on the other hand, prefer to employ children because they work for less wages, are powerless, pliable and complain less. Ironically, they are perceived to be less likely to abuse or mistreat the employer's own children.

Police and labour functionaries need to crack down on the nexus of human traffickers and illegal placement agencies in big cities and shut them down. The chain of traffickers supplying children from rural areas needs to be broken. Neither can be allowed to operate. The procedure for all stakeholders in the system must ensure that those found to be employing children under 14 years of age are prosecuted.

CHANGE ATTITUDES: "You all are from Nepal, right? Find me a small boy or girl for my house. There is not much work. Just to play with my children and give them company. He can even study in the evenings after his work. My family has always helped such poor people"- a woman overheard talking to staff in a beauty parlour.

Domestic child labour is a common sight in cities. The public is desensitized to it. There is a tendency to rationalize it, believing it is better than starvation. Some employers even believe that they are doing a service to the child labourers they employ.

People need to be made aware that domestic child labour is nothing less than slavery. The daily reports of cases of abuse and violence against minors engaged in domestic work must be taken as a wake-up call. There is a need to break out of traditional and feudal ways of thinking that "my child's needs and entitlements are higher than a poor person's child's". This is long overdue.

Citizens can no longer be silent spectators of domestic child labour in friends' homes, at restaurants, at parties or in the neighbourhood. It needs to be reported to the police, CHILDLINE 1098, or to a local NGO. Resident's Welfare Associations (RWA) and housing societies need to have clear rules that disallow employment of minors in people's homes and they should enforce these rules.

On the other hand, vulnerable parents in villages need to be made aware of the risk they bring to the safety of their children, once they hand them over to traffickers. They need to be pushed to finding solutions and resources from within the community itself to keep their children away from child labour.

The government needs to realize that the country is steadily garnering a poor reputation for the manner in which it treats its children, who form a third of the population. Domestic child labour is a cruel manifestation of the lack of state commitment to the development and protection of children. To eliminate child labour the state would need to increase its financial and human resources in social protection programmes to support families to retain their children and prevent them from becoming child labour. Education must be of quality and lead to opportunity for gainful employment. Systems for rescue, rehabilitation, and prosecution need to be prepared to act in time, in coordination and in the best interests of the child.

Society must break out of traditional ways of thinking to ensure that children live happily ever after. ■

What Shah Commission said

KANCHI KOHLI

THE news of the submission of the M.B. Shah Commission's final report in mid-October came with clear signs that its tenure is unlikely to be extended. The Shah Commission was set up three years ago. Its interim report of January 2011 and its report specifically on Goa had not just flagged a variety of reasons for illegal iron ore mining in the country but had strongly recommended a ban on iron ore exports as one measure to curb illegal mining.

The foremost reason cited in media reports for the tenure of the commission not being extended - despite its members seeking it – is that its modus and findings are not going down well with the 'mining lobby' of the country. Besides, decisions such as a ban on mining exports are not aiding the exchequer and are a hindrance to economic growth.

The non-extension of the commission's tenure has not gone down well with several civil society groups and social movements who have gone public and approached the Supreme Court, saying that the commission's report cannot be considered complete as its members have yet to go into the irregularities in grant of mining leases in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra. The commission has not visited the states. Interestingly the *Times of India* on 16 October 2012 quoted U.V. Singh, one of the members of the Shah Commission, as saying: "The commission was not able to complete the final report as there was hardly any time left to complete the detailed report."

The Shah Commission was set up by the Ministry of Mines on 22 November 2010 to inquire into illegal mining of iron ore and manganese in India. Its terms of reference laid out four areas of work, starting with an inquiry into the nature and extent of illegal mining in the iron ore and manganese sector of the country. The states to be covered included Goa, Karnataka, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand. Names of specific firms, companies and individuals were sought to be identified following this inquiry.

The commission was also expected to find out the extent to which the management, regulatory and monitoring systems related to mining, storage, transportation and trade have worked. In case they have failed to detect and punish offences, then why and who are the persons responsible. This inquiry would then look into how far tampering with official land records and boundaries had gone on and determine responsibility for the same.

Finally, the Shah Commission was asked to look at the impact of all of the above on the environment, forests, livelihood and rights of tribals, other forest dwellers and those living in the mined areas. Financial losses caused to the central and state governments were also part of the mandate.

The commission's Interim Report of January 2011 delved into detail. This report, apart from the four aspects mentioned, elaborated fairly extensively on remedial measures to prevent illegal mining, trade, transportation and export. One can attempt to analyse the contents of the final report submitted by the Shah Commission based on emphasis in its Interim Report.

Mining has ruined the landscape in Jharia

The Interim Report drew substantially from a few other reports, apart from its own investigations. These were the 19th Report submitted by the Standing Committee on Coal & Steel (2005–2006) for deemed extension (of mining leases) and the Lokayukta for investigation and report under Section 7(2A) of the Karnataka Lokayukta Act, 1984. The two reports of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) (set up through the T.N. Godavarman case in the Supreme Court) related to illegal mining in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Odisha were also relied upon and quoted extensively in the Interim Report. The Andhra Pradesh CEC report was on the illegal mining controversy related to the Bellary iron ore mines. This issue had rocked politics in Karnataka and Parliament around the same time that the Shah Commission was set up.

CURBING ILLEGAL MINING: One can attempt to understand the focus of the Shah Commission's findings and recommendations through three aspects. Most of its recommendations are directed at corrective and remedial measures to be taken by the Ministry of Mines, Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM) and by various state governments where iron ore and manganese mining is taking place.

The first relates to the streamlining of procedures linked to renewal of mining leases, including amendments to the Mineral Concession Rules, 1960. The specific recommendation of the commission is that while applying for an extension of a mining lease 12 months before it expires, mine owners should simultaneously apply for approvals for use of forest land (from the Ministry of Environment and Forests) as well as any other permissions needed from the Pollution Control Boards.

The second aspect the Interim Report dealt with extensively were the measures to be taken for controlling mining without lease or licence and mining outside the leased area. The report, while putting a huge responsibility on the IBM and state governments for verifying boundary markers and pillars, questioned their past record of being ineffective. The commission's report says that no check in the demarcation of the mining area is a very important reason why illegal mining continues to take place.

To quote the report: "As pointed out by the Lokayukta of Karnataka, the forest areas of Bellary - Hospet, Karnataka, especially those sharing boundaries with Andhra Pradesh, have seen some worst cases of illegal mining." The Interim Report lays out a range of mechanisms through which this can be strengthened: amendments to the Mineral Concession Rules and bringing into force the IBM circular of 6 April 2010, mandating geo-referencing of the mining lease area.

The third aspect relates to collection of royalties through checkposts, weigh-bridges, toll tax and so on to curb illegal mining and transportation. By using the clauses of the Mines and Mineral (Development & Regulation) Act, 1957, the Shah Commission puts forth several mechanisms for modernizing checkposts and curbing corruption through online monitoring of weigh-bridges and so on.

One of the foremost recommendations of the Shah Commission was to encourage domestic consumption of iron ore rather than mining for export. The report stated emphatically that the mining of iron ore is primarily for export. It said: "Blanket ban on import may cause drop in prices and this would immediately reduce illegal mining." While there might be initial problems, ban on exports may result in development of technology to use this ore within the country by industry. ■

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DDA chokes the Yamuna

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

THE most interesting and possibly the most charitable way of looking at what Delhi is doing to the Yamuna river is to recall the story of that foolish shepherd who was cutting the branch of the tree he was sitting on. The Yamuna is in a terrible mess. The major culprits are the state and central governments sitting in Delhi and the upstream states. What the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) now intends to do is to strangulate the river further.

Through a public notice on 28 September, the DDA stated that it plans to acquire about 40 per cent of the river's flood plain and has declared its intention of taking more in future. The DDA claims this is required as the dwellers of Meethapur and Jaitpur villages and unauthorized colonies are not getting necessary permissions and infrastructure facilities. However, if we look closely at the actual diversion areas and their locations this justification seems to be valid only for a minuscule part of the proposed diversion. So it seems DDA is using this as an alibi to justify huge diversions for entirely different reasons.

The Yamuna needs its flood plain for its survival, for the safety of the people, for society, for nature. Any ad hoc removal of such a large chunk of area will have huge impacts in terms of flood risks to those occupying the flood plain and beyond, on groundwater recharge, on biodiversity potential, on people's livelihoods and many other aspects.

Such large-scale post facto regularization of illegal encroachments in an ecologically sensitive area will send a clear invitation for more such encroachments.

Considering the huge impacts and risks involved, DDA needs to justify every hectare of diversion with convincing reasons which it has clearly not done. Looking at the proposed diversion areas we find that these can be divided into three. First, essential and relatively lower impact proposals (roads, bridges, railways, Metro lines). Second, high impact but difficult to reverse encroachments where large populations of relatively low income people are involved. And third, high impact, non-essential and should be possible to remove plans.

Most of the area proposed for diversion seems to fall in the third category.

The DDA notice says: "Earmarking of 300 metres wide belt from river, based on orders of Hon'ble High Court of Delhi on 29.03.2006 vide WP(C) No. 2112/2002 and W.P.(C). No. 689/2004. No construction to take place within 300 metres on either side of Yamuna River." This is clearly a misleading use of the High Court (HC) order, since the court had mentioned 300 metres only in the first stage of protection. There was no convincing technical basis for the use of 300 metres, in any case.

In fact, subsequent to the HC order, thousands of poor people were removed from the Yamuna flood plain. The same yardstick needs to be applied for the dwellings of the rich who are now owners of flats in the Commonwealth Games Village on the Yamuna flood plain. The same is the case for DMRC colonies, the DTC depot, among other powerful and influential bodies. The Akshardham Temple too is indulging in further construction even without legal permission. If a clear signal is not given, the interpretation that there are different yardsticks for the rich and powerful and the poor is inescapable.

Another significant point mentioned in the DDA public notice says: "DTC, DMRC have constructed embankments/raised the level of land for locating depots so that they are not affected by floods though located within 300 metres from River Yamuna. In view of this, the similar areas/locations, based on ground realities could be examined for excluding from 'no construction zone'."

The Yamuna flood plain is being nibbled away

So it is clear that DTC and DMRC structures are within 300 metres of the Yamuna and yet, there is no proposal to remove any of them. Moreover, it is clear from this point that DDA has plans to remove more areas from the 'no construction zone' even within 300 metres from the river. This shocking admission only shows that DDA has absolutely no concern for the impact of such exclusions.

The fact that so much construction activity on such a large scale has happened within Zone O (the river and the flood plain area is called Zone O in the Delhi Master Plan) over the years shows that currently Zone O does not have any reliable legal protection. If we want to save Zone O from further diversions, we need to urgently provide legal protection to the remaining Yamuna and its flood plain. One possible option for this is to declare the remaining part of Zone O as an Eco Sensitive Zone (ESZ) under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

Even for category A and B diversions, as described above, an Environmental Impact Assessment and Social Impact Assessments need to be done as absolutely essential and bare minimum requirements, to be followed by public hearings, appraisals, clearances and monitoring. Clearly, nothing has been done.

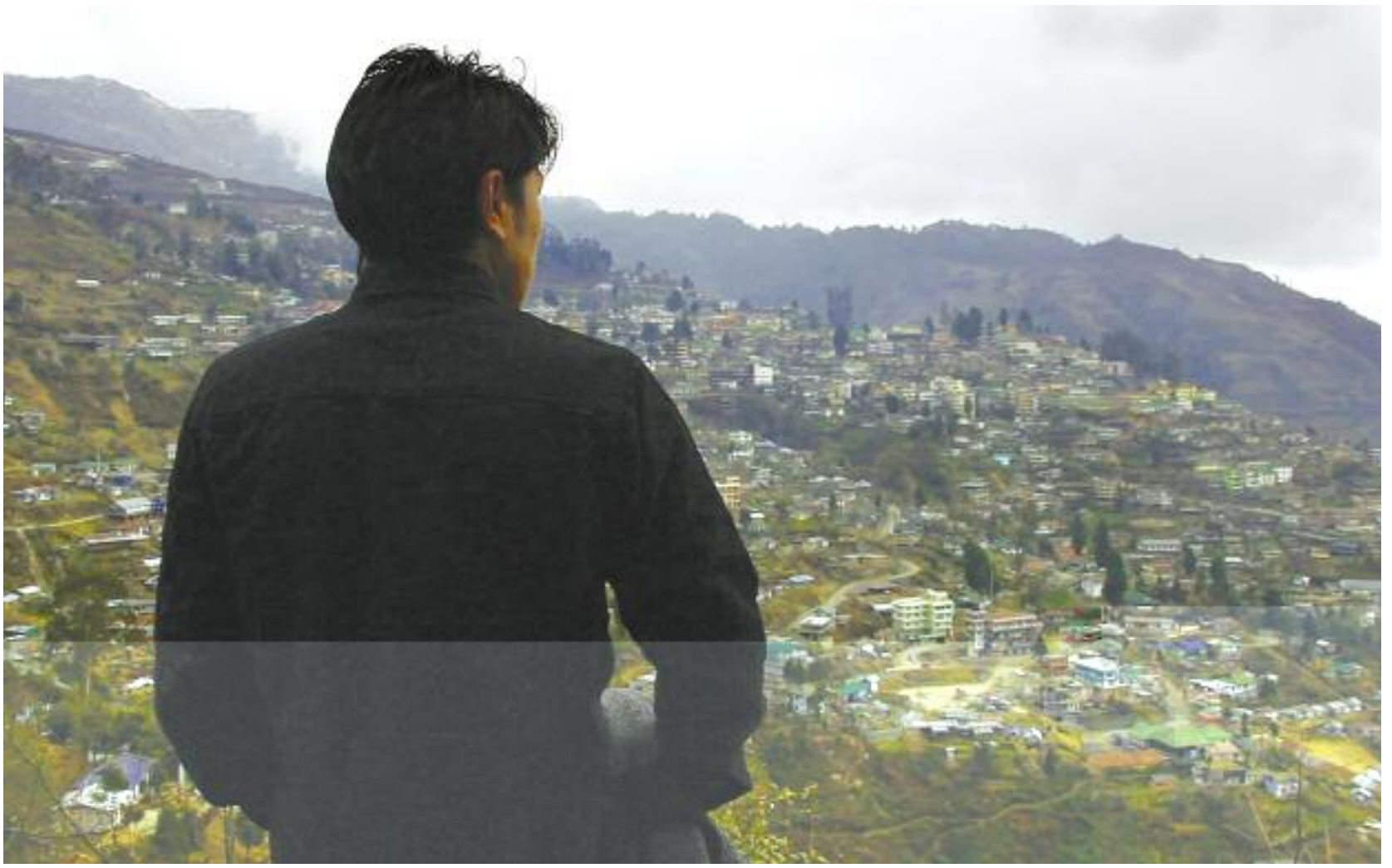
The world over, the trend is to provide more room for the river. This has become even more pertinent in view of climate change impacts since more unpredictable flash floods of high intensity and frequency are inevitable, and the rivers will need more space to accommodate such floods. The DDA proposal is clearly moving in the opposite direction.

The principal justification that DDA has used for declaring such areas out of the river zone is that embankments have been built that will protect such areas from flooding. This is clearly wrong as no embankment is flood-proof and can provide at best limited protection for a limited time span. Strangulating the river with embankments will invite disasters like the Uttarakhand flood where, too, encroachments on the river were one of the main reasons for the huge scale of the disaster. Delhi could be inviting a similar disaster with such diversions.

In the story of the foolish shepherd by the great poet Kalidas, life was rosy for him after he was found by some pundits cutting the branch he was sitting on. Delhi will surely not be that lucky.

One hopes Najeeb Jung, Delhi's new Lt Governor, will take strong and credible action in this regard. I did get that feeling after a brief meeting with him one afternoon recently. ■

Himanshu Thakkar: http://sandrp.in, http://sandrp.wordpress.com



Crossing Bridges was filmed in and around Shergaon village

When the village beckons

Crossing Bridges is Arunachal's first indigenous film

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

A primary school teacher in remote Arunachal Pradesh reads out a passage about Holi from a Hindi textbook. He tells the class that their state, too, has a similar festival and it is called Kro-Chekor. On cue, one girl asks why the book has no mention of the local festival. The teacher replies: "Because the outside world does not know us."

The above scene from Sange Dorjee Thongdok's *Crossing Bridges*, a film made in a dialect spoken in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, sums up the principal reason why a young man from northeast India decided to go behind the camera to tell stories about his people.

Sange asks: "If we do not tell our own stories, who will?" And there is, he adds, no dearth of stories in his neck of the woods.

Crossing Bridges, the story of a retrenched web designer who returns to his village after being away for eight years, is a remarkable effort in many ways.

"All that I had to begin with was a screenplay and a Canon 5D Mark 3 camera," says Sange, a Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute (SRFTI) alumnus.

The challenges before the first-time director were daunting, but none was more so than the task of finding the right actors. "There are no professional actors who speak the Sherdukpen dialect, so I had to fall back on my own pool of friends for the various onscreen roles," says Sange.

Crossing Bridges is none the worse for it. The amateur actors lend the film a feel of spontaneity that professionals could not have achieved. "Before the shoot, I did a three-month workshop with members of the cast to familiarize them with the demands of filmmaking," the director reveals.

The male lead in *Crossing Bridges* is played by Phuntsu Khrime, while the pivotal character of a lady teacher who arrives in the village from Shillong is fleshed out by mountaineer Anshu Jamsenpa, the first Indian to climb Mount Everest twice in 10 days.

Crossing Bridges was filmed in and around Shergaon, the picturesque village that Sange left some years ago in order to pursue his dreams. "The film is inspired by my own experiences," he says. "The return to my village after many years was quite a journey of rediscovery. I wrote down what I saw and felt."

Crossing Bridges is the second film to be made in Arunachal Pradesh but is the first-ever directed by a native of the state. In 2006, a film in the Monpa

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dialect, *Sonam*, was made by Assamese director Ahsan Muzid.

For his first feature, Sange roped in his batch mates at SRFTI who worked with him on his final year diploma film, *Pratyabartan* – cinematographer Pooja S. Gupte and editor Sanglap Bhowmik, among others. "They were an integral part of the project from the very outset," he says.

Sange Dorjee Thongdok

Sange is, however, keen to make a film with technicians from Arunachal Pradesh. "It would be great if youngsters in the state could be trained in various aspects of filmmaking," he says. Sange is a role model: he is the first person from Arunachal Pradesh to pass out of film school.

Crossing Bridges is currently doing the rounds of film festivals and garnering critical appreciation. It premiered at the 15th Mumbai Film Festival in mid-October and then travelled to the Dharamsala International Film Festival in the last week of the month. The film is due to travel next to the 18th International Film Festival of Kerala in December.

The story of a young man struggling to reconnect with his roots has universal resonance. Made in a simple but visually and emotionally engaging style, the film revolves around Tashi, who is back in his village for a break after losing his job in Mumbai.

As he waits for news of reemployment, he struggles to fit back into the environment that he left behind and moved away from.

His own village has now become an alien land, while he himself has lost touch with the little things that he did as a teenager, like drinking butter-tea and crossing log bridges across mountain streams.

Tashi gets a temporary job as a replacement teacher in the local school, where he meets Anila and his relationship with his own roots begins to change.

Sange weaves legends and fables about forest spirits and shamans, a story of unrequited love and the experiences of Tashi's boyhood friends, among other strands, into the film's narrative tapestry.

The views of his boyhood friends are in sharp contrast to Tashi's restless spirit. Even as he is desperate to get back to Mumbai, one of his pals tells him: "I have a home, livestock, a field, a wife and a child – what more can a man want?" The question that the film asks is: Tashi certainly wants more, but does he need more?

Tashi begins to see his own village in a different light as he interacts with fellow schoolteacher Anila. "She shows Tashi how beautiful his village is. Sometimes it takes an outsider to reveal what is obvious," says Sange.

The onscreen performances in *Crossing Bridges*, says Sange, evolved through a process of trial and error. When the non-actors spoke the lines written in the script, they sounded too rehearsed.

So the director allowed them to improvise and use words that they would in real life to convey the emotions and ideas being articulated onscreen. "That imparted an air of naturalness to the dialogue delivery," adds Sange.

He believes that "making a film is actually pretty easy, especially if you dare to do it without the bells and whistles". What is difficult, he adds, is getting the film out into the market. "I would want as wide an audience as possible to see my film," he says.

He wants the film to be a window on Arunachal Pradesh for the "outside world". He points out that in the last couple of decades, major changes have been sweeping through the state. As a result, the cultures of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are under threat.

Sange points out that his state has 25 major dialects but only two have written scripts. "Any audiovisual form of communication is therefore useful in documenting, spreading and preserving our culture," he says.

Crossing Bridges is already building bridges. The film has been acquired by Montpelier-based Insomnia World Sales for international distribution.

Says Sange: "I am hopeful that as the film travels and reaches out, more people will develop an interest in Arunachal Pradesh and we will see more production collaborations falling into place in the state."

Crossing Bridges is only one small step in that direction, but the film clearly has the makings of a success story of far-reaching proportions. ■

A still from Crossing Bridges

A music and dance show

Ten days across amazing China

Murad Ali Baig
New Delhi

CHINA is a wonderful experience for any traveller. It is one of the world's oldest and most sophisticated civilizations. Since China is rapidly becoming one of the most powerful nations in the world, it is important for everyone to understand its culture.

My wife, Tannie, and I joined 15 other travellers on a very well-organized 10-day package tour of China. We began in Beijing where our spirits were rather dampened by a depressing drizzle. Our first stop was the Forbidden City, the largest palace complex in the world. High walls also make it a huge gated colony or, rather, a series of gated colonies, one inside another. The visitor walks from the outer courtyards to smaller and more exclusive inner courts where the audience halls and private chambers of successive emperors were located.

China's emperors not only had politically important empresses but hundreds of concubines who

PICTURES BY: MURAD ALI BAIG

China Town in Shanghai

were usually introduced to them when they were between 13 to 15 years old. Unless she bore him a son, she seldom saw him again. The most trusted court officials were eunuchs who could not only be trusted to enter the inner palace but were incapable of having dynastic ambitions.

The inner courts have beautiful gardens with a profusion of bonzai trees and tortured rocks. We then had a sumptuous Chinese lunch at a famous restaurant from where we staggered to the ancient Temple of Heaven and later saw a dramatic kung fu show before crashing out for the night.

On the second day, we went to see the Great Wall that is clearly one of the greatest wonders of the world. It is not, as most people imagine, a continuous 6,000 km barrier that can be seen from space. There are many long sections of the seven-metre high wall near Beijing and several gaps till it roughly links up with other walls around many smaller towns. The wide wall, with crenellations, snakes between big watch-towers and follows the contours of the hills. We later went to a jade factory and then visited the Sacred Way and the Ming tombs.

On the third day, we went to the Summer Palace and a pearl factory and enjoyed another sumptuous banquet. We then travelled by cycle rickshaw through the colourful old Hutong parts of the city. The river flowing nearby made it very attractive and there was no garbage or plastic bags strewn anywhere.

We then took a two-hour flight to the ancient Chinese capital of Xian from where many Chinese dynasties ruled. Emperor Qin Shi Huang (259-210 BC) unified several warring tribes and became China's first emperor. He was also a megalomaniac and began building his own tomb as soon as he ascended the throne at the age of 13. Farmers digging a well in 1974 discovered a huge terracotta army here, covered by a roof of mats and mud. Only 1,100 out of about 7,500 soldiers and their horses have so far been excavated. Archaeologists are still to unearth the emperor's palace buried further below.

We began the fourth day by visiting a museum of the terracotta warriors to understand China's earliest history and a large pottery factory to learn how the seven-foot tall warriors and the oversized horses were made. We spent several hours admiring the terracotta army created to serve the emperor in heaven. Every soldier had been given individual features and weapons. We had lunch in a typical middle-class Chinese flat where the hostess taught us how to make dumplings. Later, we went to the small Wild Goose Pagoda and were treated to a delicious banquet where we also saw a Tang dynasty music and dance show.

I TRAVEL

On the fifth day, we leisurely visited the battlements of the Xian city wall and the history museum and had another excellent lunch. We visited a Chinese mosque with pretty gardens and carvings that may not quite fit the Islamic concept of banning graven images.

Another two-hour flight took us to the beautiful Guilin area where we saw the huge Reed Flute caves with amazing stalactites. We then visited the elephant trunk hill on the beautiful jade green river that is surrounded by the most amazingly beautiful steep limestone hills. The next day we went on a most enjoyable three-hour cruise down the Li river to Yangshou. Next, we visited the house of a local farmer to get a glimpse of their lives. Tannie and I then left the group and went by a local bus back to Guilin. Interestingly, the bus stopped every 30 km so that passengers could use public toilets conveniently built on the side of the road.

On the eighth day, we flew another two hours to Shanghai and had the evening to ourselves in this bustling city. The pedestrians-only Nanjing Street was a hive of activity. We spent time the next day visiting the big Shanghai museum followed by another sumptuous 22 course farewell lunch.

We then walked on the bund along the busy river and visited the French Concession where hundreds of shops, bars and eateries attract thousands of young customers. Over 80 per cent of the tourists were Chinese, clearly having a good time.

Later in the afternoon we went to Tianzifang or China Town. It was a colourful collection of typical Chinese houses, shops and eateries built around attractive gardens and decorative lakes. We found time to visit a local Taoist temple near the market. We noticed that though most Chinese are atheists, many burn joss sticks before their chosen deities and then put them into large flaming cauldrons so that the smoke can take their prayers to heaven. I had visited Shanghai in 2006 and observed that worship in Buddhist temples was almost exactly similar.

Shopping in China is no longer cheap. A half-litre bottle of mineral water from a dispenser costs 10 yuan, the equivalent of about $1.70 or ₹100. Beautiful Chinese clothes, bags, jewelry, silk, jade, pearls and other items may be cheap when exported but are quite expensive locally. Except for the rich elite, that includes senior bureaucrats, most Chinese earn small salaries. The cost of food and shelter is expensive for them even if they have easy access to low-cost healthcare. Following the tradition of Confucius, great emphasis continues to be laid on education. Though education is free at nursery and primary school level, it is entirely based on merit at secondary school level and beyond.

Chinese food in China was very different to Chinese food found in foreign countries. It had little chilli, salt or sugar and there were no sauces on the table. Ordering our meals in street restaurants was also difficult even if the menus had helpful pictures since communication was difficult. Although most young Chinese are taught English, they are either shy or not very proficient in the language. It is quite difficult to get anyone to understand what you are trying to communicate.

Our package tour, organized by TravelChinaGuide, that we had found on the Internet, provided us 10 days of accommodation in good four-star hotels, all internal airfares and transport, five banquets and two shows, visits to pearl, jade and silk factories and entry tickets to all the major tourist spots. At a cost of about $1,800 a head, it was very good value for money. ■

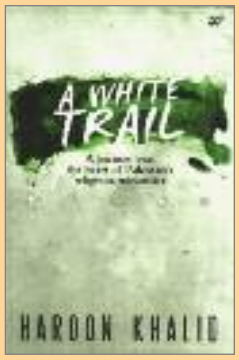
BOOKS & AUTHORS

Tracing Pakistan's

Civil Society News
New Delhi

AS a writer on history and archaeology for *The Friday Times*, Haroon Khalid scoured Lahore for monuments of the past. His eye spotted temples obscured in the city and gurdwaras on the outskirts of villages. Intrigued by Pakistan's pre-partition history, Khalid began exploring its minuscule religious minority communities, starting with Hindus and Sikhs, both stereotyped by years of state propaganda.

After writing for some time, Khalid realized he wanted to delve deeper. In September 2010, supported by the Citizens Archive of Pakistan, he began researching five religious minority communities – Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Baha'is and Zoroastrians, collecting a wealth of detail and writing a book, *A White Trail.*



Khalid has chosen to trace the lives of Pakistan's religious minorities from the pre-partition era onwards through the festivals they celebrate. From this angle, he probes the touchy subject of religion and emerges with a realistic image of minority communities. He bucks the tendency in Pakistan's media of clubbing minorities and portraying them as victims.

A White Trail is descriptive, thoughtful and nostalgic. Each chapter is about one festival – Holi celebrations in Multan, church prayers at Sacred Heart Cathedral, the Navroz festival of the Parsis, Hazrat Bab's birthday celebrations by the Baha'is, Sikh festivals and more.

This is good reportage, well- written and full of surprises. It is also courageous. For Khalid it's been tough to delicately persuade religious minorities to talk. Sometimes he has had to read between the lines to locate the truth.

Civil Society interviewed Khalid on email.

How has your book been received in Pakistan?
The book reached Pakistan about two months after it hit bookstores in India. Even right now it is not available in all the bookstores in the major cities, which is why it is still too soon to talk about the response in Pakistan. But I have heard from a few people who have read the book and interacted with people at my book readings. For most of them there is a fascination that all these events are happening in Pakistan. The image that Pakistan has of itself is shaped by the international image of the country. So for them such cultural diversity comes as a surprise, much as it would for any foreigner, if not more.

Has it led to a debate on minorities?
I think that the Pakistani media today has started talking about religious minorities in the country much more than it has ever done. When I started working on this book, which was about three years ago, there were only a handful of people writing about minorities, and that coverage was specific to the aspect of persecution. For the most part, the minorities in the Pakistani media are still discussed as a homogenous group who are being persecuted. Only recently more writers and journalists have started writing about other aspects of the minority experience, which has been my focus in the book. I believe that my book is a product of that debate that started in the past few years and has gained impetus recently.

Is there now an interest in the culture of syncretism in Pakistan?
There has always been an interest in the culture of syncretism in Pakistan, in fact a sort of obsession, but there is no appreciation. Syncretism is not seen as a good thing as it might be in India. Here it is looked down upon, as an impure element that soils the purity of the 'Pakistani' culture. There is a historical context to that. Pakistan was created on the basis of separation of cultures, therefore acceptance of religious and cultural syncretism would dilute the raison d'etre of Pakistan's existence.

Why did you choose religious festivals to write about minority communities? The tendency is to use the social-economic angle first.
The answer lies in the question. Because there is a general tendency to use the social-economic angle, I wanted to look at the subject from another angle. Besides it is also about what fascinates you as a researcher. Yes, the political aspect is important but for me cultural and religious traditions appeal more.

Out of all the communities you met, which were more open to talking with you?
There was some sort of resistance from all communities in a way. The methods, though, were different. Some would sugarcoat their answers, while others would simply refuse. Some would agree to talk off the record. It all came down to

Hand-holding education

INDIA is currently in the throes of a big debate on how to improve the quality of education. The rich and the poor believe private schooling is better. Whether such perceptions are true is very debatable.

Private-Public-Partnerships (PPPs) in education have been mooted as a panacea but is this the best strategy? Pritha Gopalan analyses a range of such partnerships in her book, *PPP Paradox*. She weighs the pros and cons of each partnership and zeroes in on what works and what doesn't.

Gopalan is not an enthusiastic proponent of privatization in education. At the outset she points out that education is an essential public service. Privatization, she says, is essentially decentralization of a public service to make it more efficient. But a for-profit model will not work for the poor who live in remote areas.

Gopalan also questions whether privatization is really all that efficient. The public school system carries onerous burdens. Apart from size it faces red tape, less money and frequent policy changes. Government schools also do census duties, election duties and collect taxes. If private schools had to do all this they would collapse.

So the best alternative is to revitalize the ailing public education systems with robust partnerships. For Gopalan, the 'private' entity can be parents, the community, an NGO or a foundation. She seems to prefer what she calls the Public-Social-Partnership (PSP).

To improve the quality of learning, a school needs to have good teaching and engaged learning. At micro level, this requires strengthening teachers and teaching and at the macro level it means funnelling innovations and models through a huge public education system.

Three examples that Gopalan cites hold promise. One is Thailand's Rural Ecology and Agricultural Livelihoods (REAL) project which began from one school and expanded to 48 schools in six provinces with state support.

A teacher, Manas Burapa, understood that his students needed field experience to figure out the side effects of pesticides. That would help them to seamlessly understand rural ecology. He involved the government's agriculture extension department, and the World Education, an NGO. They adapted a curriculum that had been designed for adult farmers. Parents got involved. Courses to help teachers were held. Learning in rural areas improved hugely. But the project couldn't go further because of lack of financial and human resources. The REAL method has been introduced in Bangladesh, Cambodia and the Philippines.

plural heritage

Haroon Khalid

> ‘I think that the Pakistani media today has started talking about religious minorities in the country much more than it has ever done.’

the individuals. There were individuals in all communities who were frank about their observations and others in every community who were hostile. For example, at one of the festivals, a member of the community snatched my intern’s camera and threatened to break it. I was furious and decided to leave but then there were other members of the same community who came to us, apologized, and asked us to stay.

Have you received any reaction from them to your book?
No. To tell you the truth, I am afraid of their reaction. The book is, after all, my interpretation of their situation and I am not sure how people I have mentioned in the book would respond to what I perceived. There would be differences, of course.

Has this rather courageous exploration changed you too?
Change, especially when we talk about individuals, is something that happens gradually, subtly. It is a process, which is why it is difficult to identify. Looking back now I can say that I have become much more comfortable interacting with people. I can go to a new place and talk to people easily. I have also become more curious about societies and stories and lives hidden within their folds. I have started looking for aspects that one can’t really identify initially. ■

Westland, ₹395

The second example is the Middle Start Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) programme in Michigan sponsored by the WK Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) in partnership with the Academy for Educational Development (AED), a non-profit, and the state department of education among others.

The focus was on changing learning for children 11 to 14 years old, a critical period. It included using best practices, training teachers, designing curriculum, improving assessments and so on. The initiative relied a lot on teaming, with teachers and students deciding on learning projects.

The third example is the Chennai Corporation Schools that have introduced Montessori learning in the kindergarten sections of their primary schools. This successful initiative is a partnership between the Sri Ramacharan Charitable Trust (SRCT), the Centre for Montessori Training-Chennai (CMT-C), a non-profit and the Corporation.

Funds for classroom material were raised by the SRCT and trained teachers were embedded into classrooms. Resistance by government teachers broke down slowly. Those who opted to get trained became enthusiastic proponents of the Montessori method. The result in learning outcomes has been dramatic. Children from very poor homes love going to school, they are learning Tamil, English and math and parents are thrilled. But scaling up will need much more resources. This is certainly an experiment that municipal schools should try.

A lot of zeal and passion goes into designing and implementing successful reforms in education. Non-profits working with government have designed some of the best models. Companies keen to enter education could offer to build schools or help with logistics but school education should be left to the idealist. ■

Sage Publications, ₹495

Talking about policy

EVERY year the India Policy Forum (IPF) holds a conference on India’s economic transition and the policies needed to tackle difficult bumps. The line-up of scholars involved in these discussions is very impressive.

IPF is a partnership between the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in New Delhi and the Brookings Institution in Washington.

India Policy Forum: 2012/2013, edited by Shekhar Shah, Barry Bosworth and Arvind Panagariya, consists of research papers and responses from the IPF conference held in July 2012. The book is an important read for policy- makers.

Five critical sectors in India have been analyzed: primary education, the Total Sanitation Campaign, depleting groundwater, the demographic dividend and boosting the manufacturing sector by using information technology.

The paper on primary education by Karthik Muralidharan is an eye-opener. Muralidharan points out that the government has spent a lot of money on improving school infrastructure, hiking teacher salaries and on midday meals and textbooks. But learning outcomes have not improved at all. So children sail through school without even acquiring functional literacy.

He recommends revolutionary improvements in pedagogy and school governance. This requires intense work at the grassroots. So states must be given more autonomy and access to best practices. Muralidharan emphasizes that the goal of primary education should be to improve learning outcomes. There is a lot of detail here.

The subject of Dean Spear’s paper is the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) from 2001 to 2011. It reportedly built one latrine for every 10 rural people. The campaign’s strategy has been relatively successful. It gave an incentive to local political leaders and thereby motivated them to encourage villagers to build toilets and use them. TCS is now being merged with the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan and an older strategy is being revived – to give rural families a subsidy to make toilets. The problem is they may not use them.

Spears underlines the importance of investing in sanitation – it would lower infant mortality too – by investing in data, monitoring and giving ex-post incentives. He supports the construction of pit latrines, incentives to local leaders and village- level action, as under the TSC.

India’s demographic dividend has been much talked about. The paper by Shekhar Aiyar and Ashoka Mody analyzes data from India’s more developed ‘leader’ states in south and west India and its ‘laggard’ states in the Hindi heartland to calculate the demographic dividend that has accrued thus far.

The leader states have certainly benefitted. The right mix of economic policies will help the laggards to catch up.

Sheetal Shekri assesses how far policy changes, like encouraging rainwater harvesting or changing the paddy season (as in Punjab) have helped conserve groundwater levels. She finds that only decentralized rainwater harvesting subsidies, as in Gujarat, have worked.

The last paper, on IT investments and productivity in manufacturing, by Shruti Sharma and Nirvikar Singh argues that employment and growth can be boosted in the manufacturing sector by use of IT. ■

Sage Publications, price on request

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND

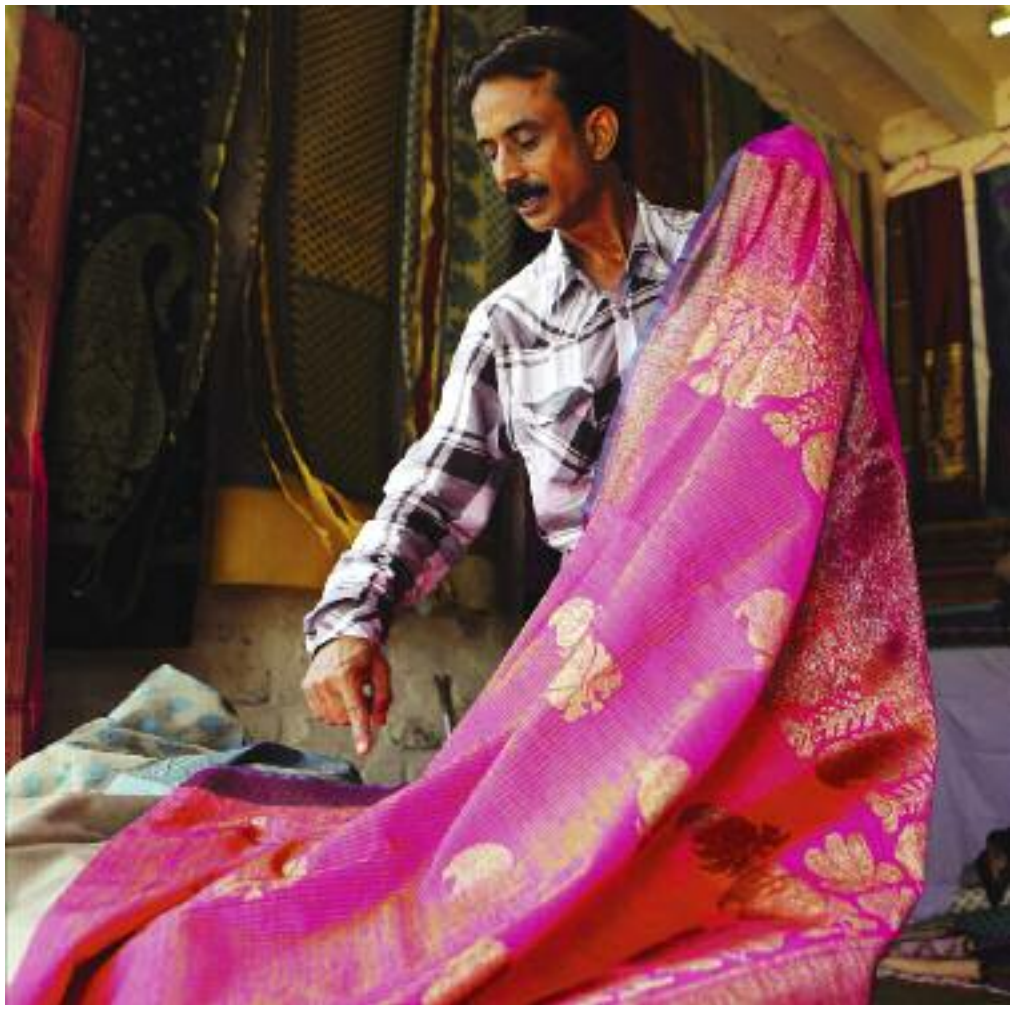
Healthy honey

BRBEE's Honeylite products are creating a buzz. Its hardworking bees produce natural honey that isn't laden with antibiotics, heavy metals and preservatives. You can buy honey in many flavours: acacia, thyme, blackberry, lychee, orange, wildflower and fresh herbs. BrBee produces monofloral honey.
That means the bees travel in their bee boxes to different fields of flowers in the high mountain ranges of the Himalaya. They go to Lahaul in Himachal Pradesh, to Jammu in Kashmir, to Dehradun in Uttarakhand and to Haryana when the mustard is in full bloom. Bee travels depend on the season.

They also flit around in dense forests and come back with nectar that has a subtle taste of clove, eucalyptus and basil. This honey is called Wild Forest. Try it.

Each honey has a distinct taste and colour. Acacia is light and subtle. Blackberry is darker and intense. While acacia is good for coughs, thyme is a blood purifier and a digestive. Blackberry lowers blood pressure and diabetes. Honey is, after all, the elixir of good health.

Contact: BrBee Products Pvt Ltd, VPO Bandrol District, Kullu Tehsil, Himachal Pradesh Phone-1902-08510070085, 011-43001861/62 Abhishek Saha: 09711181446 Email: asaha@brbee.co.in



Benares weaves

BADRUODUJA Ansari is an expert at weaving the elegant Baluchari sari. A traditional weaver from Benares, he says his Baluchari saris are distinct since he weaves Bengali patterns delicately, infusing them with the Benaresi touch. In 2008, he received a national award from the Government of India for his version of the Baluchari sari.

Ansari is an innovator. He has been experimenting with fabrics from all over India. He shows us a red sari with gold motifs. The fabric is muga silk from Assam, he explains, and the motifs are distinctly Benaresi.

Ansari, like other weavers, is using all kinds of fabrics to make several products at cheaper prices. You can buy a woven silk scarf for just ₹650. There are saris and salwar suits in cotton-silk, and fabric. But there is no compromise on the quality of his weaves.

His partner, Ashfaq, says that the Union government's economic package for weavers has greatly helped them. 'We are grateful to the government. We would like it to keep helping us, like getting us this space in Dilli Haat to sell our products," he says.

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