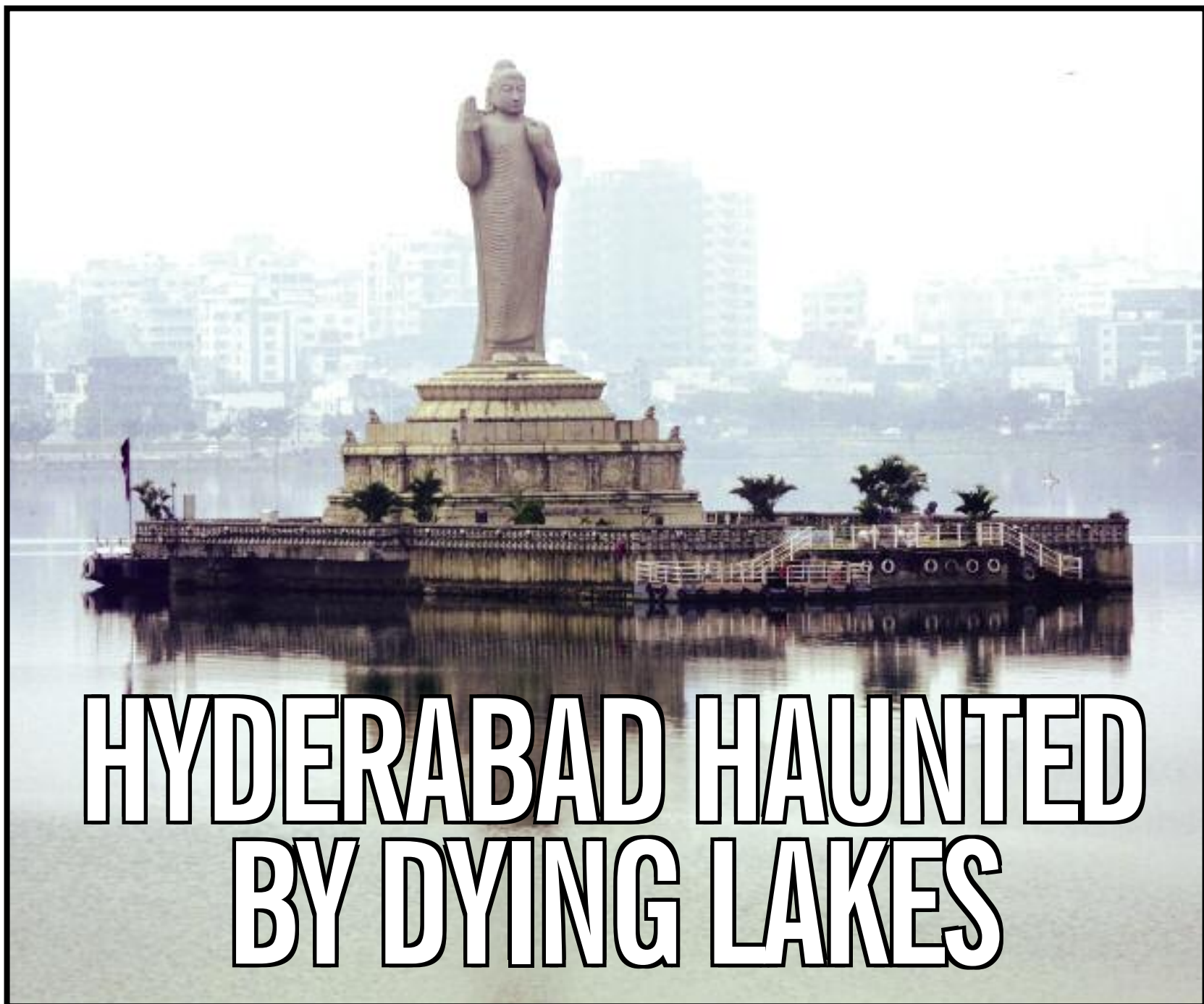


Civil Society



HYDERABAD HAUNTED BY DYING LAKES



'MFIs READY FOR A NEW BEGINNING'

Alok Prasad on life after the Andhra mess

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MAMATA IN SINGUR BIND

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Inviting Applications for the Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award 2012 - India



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HYDERABAD HAUNTED BY DYING LAKES

Lakes and water bodies have either been filled up or used to dump sewage, causing pollution and robbing the city of traditional systems which gave it an ecological balance

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

It's time to figure out our cities

THE dying lakes of Hyderabad are a messy reminder of how poorly our cities are managed. The lakes, together with the city's rivers, should have been a thriving example of ecological balance and urban growth. The reverse has happened. An innovative traditional system has been destroyed without substituting it with anything better.

The lakes, and how they connect with the rivers, should have set Hyderabad apart. A system so simple and rooted in nature, but also intricate as this deserved to be better understood, protected and showcased. It would then have been a reason to visit the city and live in it. Now the ugliness of its destruction turns you off.

National economies look to their cities to drive growth. Cities attract investment and talent. They spur the search for new technologies. A city's character, as much as its systems, often defines its appeal. History, environment and unspoken messaging all add up to provide that sublime hook. Great cities, both big and small, have people seeking them out.

Politicians in many parts of the world strive to own the success of the cities they represent. They find it good for their record to figure out what to do with garbage and sewage and how to house the poor in ways that give them wholesome access.

In India politicians haven't spotted the opportunity that cities offer. Despite a zooming urban population, they remain ignorant of the significance of urbanization. Perhaps historically this has something to do with the lack of powers that urban bodies have. But even as that stands corrected, there is a perception problem. A mayor is a lowly entity. A councillor is even more so. Those who get into politics at that level are mostly biding their time to clamber their way up.

But it is in its cities that India's future will be shaped. Cities are huge gobblers of energy and water and producers of waste. The result is that they have an ecological footprint several times their geographical size. Making cities sustainable is now a serious challenge. With each passing day the task becomes more intricate.

Indian cities also drive aspirations. People flock to them for a better life. But it is also here that they live face to face with hurtful disparities. Making our cities inclusive both in terms of infrastructure and opportunities is a challenge that will have to be met.

Future solutions will have to come from being innovative and flexible. They will require a new kind of leadership, which knows to preserve an ancient lake system like the one in Hyderabad while building facilities for software companies.

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Choco-break

We got a chance to read *Civil Society* magazine when it was given to us by our Indian suppliers of cocoa, IOFP-CL. First of all, we would like to thank Shree Padre on behalf of Monica Müller and Markus Lutz for the interesting article about our company, our Fair Trade initiatives in India, and for the highlight given to the new chocolate product 'India' made with cocoa and vanilla from India.

Last week, at the Biofach fair in Nürenberg, I showed this product to P.J. Joseph, Kerala's minister of water resources and Asit Tripathy, Joint Secretary, Department of Commerce, and they were very impressed about the concept of launching an India chocolate made in Switzerland.

I gave one chocolate bar also to Dr. Vandana Shiva. She too was very impressed to see such a world class product and we would like to acknowledge Shree Padre's journalistic intuition in understanding the importance of this unique product.

Antony Panakal
Export Key Account Manager
Chocolat Stella

If the Swiss can come to India and help farmers scale up why can't we do it? The "Swiss Choco Break" cover story of your February issue by Shree Padre was outstanding and it should make Indian policy makers and Indian companies think about the potential of the farm sector.

If we want Indian farmers to scale up and become globally competitive and wired to international demand it is necessary to work with them in a focused way.

We should urgently bring to Indian agriculture a sense of mission. The Indian farmer needs to be empowered with better techniques and linked to markets. For a deeper and stronger economy, a prosperous farm sector is essential. The farmer after all is not just a producer but a consumer too.

Rohit Upadhyay,
Guwahati

Grievances Bill

Your interview with Nikhil Dey on the proposed grievances law was an eye-opener. It makes sense to have a broad-based mechanism to deal with grievances which may have nothing to do with corruption. Indeed by creating transparent and efficient ways of dealing with grievances we could actually limit the possibilities of corruption.

Not everyone wants to file criminal cases which are difficult to pursue. On the other hand a mechanism that allows one to register one's complaint and ensures feedback may well be the stimulus that is needed for government departments to perform.

Jyoti Desai,
Kolkata

Dehat award

Dehat family is happy to inform you that Sony Entertainment Channel has selected our founder, Jitendra Chaturvedi, for the 'Social Bravery Award' in recognition of our struggle for the basic rights of traditional forest dwellers. This award is given to only two people from the entire country. The award will be given to our founder on 11 March in Mumbai. Such an honour would not have been possible without your support and blessings.

Dehat family,
Bhraich

BPNI

I attended the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India's anniversary and I listened to Dr RK Anand's speech. It was most invigorating for people like me. Thank you.

A Muthuswami

Jarawas

The Jarawas should tell us what they want done and we should carry out their orders.

Pushpa Sinha,
Jharkhand

INTERVIEW Alok Prasad says with single regulator, 'MFIs have looked within and are

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Microfinance Institutions' Network (MFIN) has spent the past year in helping restore sanity in the microfinance business.

The industry as a whole has seen rapid decline after an ordinance in Andhra Pradesh in October 2010 in one stroke made a large number of microfinance institutions (MFIs) unviable because of the conditions that it stipulated for their operations.

Beginning with the large sums that poured into SKS through its initial public offering (IPO), big-ticket compensation packages and the super-sized valuations for MFIs, the industry began to be seen as profiteering out of poverty.

But two years later microfinance remains the only option for urgently reaching around 500 million Indians who are outside the formal banking system.

The challenge is in having regulation, accountability and standards in place. A new law, as yet a draft, is poised to go through Parliament to create a framework in which MFIs can do business.

MFIN, whose member-MFIs are across the country, has worked at self-regulation and sought to raise the bar for the industry through consensus from within.

Alok Prasad, a veteran banker and CEO of MFIN, has been in the forefront of these initiatives involving the government and the MFIs. He spoke to *Civil Society*.

There is a sense that microfinance has collapsed in a heap. How accurate is this?

First, we must be very clear as to what is meant by microfinance. Microfinance is not just micro-credit delivered through the microfinance institutions or MFIs.

It is micro-savings, micro-pensions, micro-insurance and, of course, micro-credit too.

For micro-credit, the delivery channels are the MFIs and the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) which are enjoying various forms of government subsidies. You also have the banks directly providing micro-credit, albeit very limited. But what you are referring to are only the MFIs.

Yes, there is a sense that the MFIs have collapsed with a sigh and gone out of business.

The MFI industry, as of 31 March 2011, actually did grow by about 10 per cent. That was largely driven by the fact that in the first six months of the year there was extremely rapid growth – growth at historic levels. So, despite the industry coming to a standstill from October 2010, the previous six months saw you through to the annual results.

In the current fiscal 2011-12, I think, overall, the microfinance industry will be looking at nega-



Alok Prasad

tive growth of 25 to 35 per cent. That is going to be very likely.

But it is important to segment MFIs based on their exposures and the geographies they are operating in. There are institutions which are (A) large but with a minimal or zero exposure in Andhra Pradesh, (B) large but with a significant Andhra Pradesh exposure and (C) medium or small MFIs across the country – with or without an exposure in Andhra.

After the ordinance (issued by the Andhra Pradesh state government in October 2010) everybody was frozen in the headlights. The funders had walked away. The regulator was looking at you with a microscope and pretty much the whole world was against you.

But as the dust settled down, institutions in the first category – large MFIs with minimal or nil exposure to Andhra Pradesh – were able to demonstrate that they deserved to be looked upon differently.

In 2011-12, institutions in this first category are

likely to see good growth – from 15 to even 50 per cent.

The second category consists of MFIs which have mostly gone through corporate debt restructuring and have, therefore, got a new lease of life. They have 18 months to figure out how things have to be done. I would say we should wait and watch how things pan out for them.

The third category of MFIs are the ones really in trouble. I think there would be consolidation in this category.

So what would have the industry shrunk to in terms of its outstandings?

This year, let us say, from its historic high of ₹30,000 crores as of 31 March 2011 it will probably slip to around ₹20,000 crores.

MFIs have come to be typified by excessive greed. Greed is a part of life. None of us can say we are above it. Was there greed or excessive greed at a point of time? Some did walk that path. But

single policy, Andhra-type mess will be history ready for a new beginning'

LAKSHMAN ANAND



nationalization or RRBs haven't worked.

Today just about 54 per cent of the population has bank accounts and nine per cent have loan accounts.

The estimated unmet demand for microfinance is between \$100 billion and \$150 billion. Going by the current capital adequacy norms prescribed by the RBI, microfinance companies would require capital of at least \$ 20 billion to be able to meet this demand.

Can you imagine money of that order coming from the goodness of people's hearts? It can only come from commercial capital.

Therefore, going forward, there might well be a time when IPOs become necessary for raising capital. Why should IPO be a derogatory term?

But it is not as clear-cut as you make it out to be. The IPOs took place in conditions which made many people uncomfortable.

Yes there are things that did happen. I am not trying to justify them.

You don't see them happening again?

No, I don't, because the regulators have got their act together and are monitoring closely what is going on. I very clearly do not see a repeat of some of the developments that had taken place around 2009-10. MFIs with proven viability and efficient systems in place are already attracting investment. Bandhan and Ujjivan are examples.

The draft of a new law to govern microfinance is ready. What are the expectations?

It provides for an overarching regulator irrespective of legal form so that the risks of both regulatory arbitrage and regulatory duality are dealt with. What you will have is one uniform policy applicable to a certain activity. Microfinance is one kind of activity and it should not matter what kind of legal form you have, the regulation should be the same.

With this, the regulatory risk and the concomitant political risk get addressed. By a central law, the regulatory duality that we have seen till now is also dealt with. And, you have the country's most mature and seasoned regulator, the Reserve Bank of India, being put in complete charge.

There are lots of constructive, enabling provisions in the draft Bill and a good balance between the industry point of view and the point of view of the state governments.

There is client protection. For instance, the law provides for a national advisory council. It also provides for state level advisory councils. So, as a framework it holds a lot of promise.

So, if this Bill becomes a law you will never have an Andhra-type situation again? Is that what you are saying?

Absolutely. There would be no possibility of a

state government promulgating a different kind of law. A repeat of the Andhra-type intervention would be completely ruled out.

How will this law protect the consumer, the user or beneficiary of microfinance?

The very fact of having state-level advisory councils where there would be very strong representation from the government and other stakeholders provides almost real time monitoring and feedback mechanism for keeping a watch and taking action, as required. Secondly, it also provides for an ombudsman.

A single ombudsman?

It is like an enabling provision. A structure will have to be put in place. We are dealing with a large clientele. Hence, any structure for grievance redressal has to take that into account.

Third, it is also likely to provide some role for the industry association as a self-regulatory body. As you are aware, we at MFIN have been working pretty intensely at being a credible self-regulatory body. We have provided client helplines independent of the MFIs. We have a very, very tight code of conduct. The entire orientation of the code of conduct is towards client protection and responsible lending.

An MFI's shareholder could be the seasoned investor sitting perhaps in New York or Mumbai or wherever. Or he/she could be a member of the original SHG. What is being done to empower such shareholders so that they understand the implications of what they have got into?

In my view you are going to see far more domestic capital coming into the industry. You may recall that in the last budget the finance minister announced the creation of the microfinance equity fund – a small amount, but a good start. You are likely to see much more money coming from domestic sources into the industry. And with that happening, the observation with regard to overseas investors I think gets, in fair measure, addressed.

And what about people in self-help groups who become shareholders in these entities which become companies? Does the new legal framework look at their rights?

I think what you are referring to is empowerment arising out of education and awareness of rights. That again is a process. My belief is both the microfinance industry and the government together have to work on this. Still early days, but, directionally, we are moving towards that. Even as we speak, the process of consultation with some government agencies and development finance institutions for funding of a national level financial literacy programme which is embedded in the lending process of MFIs is underway. ■

should that be used to paint the whole industry black? The answer can only be a categorical no. The misdeeds of a few can't be seen as being representative of the industry as a whole.

But doesn't it go deeper? After all microfinance is primarily an attempt to reduce poverty.

The point you are making is that this is a social business. There are two parts to it: social and business. Both together are foundational principles of the industry. Reasonable returns on investment are intrinsic to a business. Keeping in mind the social and the business aspects and the interplay between the two there is the need to define a model, which can deliver benefits to the poor in a fair and transparent way.

Do you see more IPOs of the SKS kind happening?

The demand is huge and funds will have to finally come from the market. For over 60 years we have been talking of financial inclusion without significant results. Major initiatives such as bank

Mamata caught in Singur bind

Arup Chanda
Kolkata

ANGER is simmering in Singur, in West Bengal's Hooghly district, once again. Farmers are waiting impatiently for the Trinamool Congress (TMC) to live up to its promise of giving them back land that was acquired by the Left Front government for the Nano factory of Tata Motors.

The Trinamool Congress swept to power on the back of the Singur agitation. But the outdated Land Acquisition Act of 1894 does not allow for land to be returned. It can only be redistributed among the landless.

A new Bill titled, The Land Acquisition and Resettlement and Rehabilitation Bill, 2011, has been drafted by the Union government and is currently biding its time with a parliamentary standing committee. But the Trinamool Congress has opposed it on several counts. So, a more modern law under which acquired land can be returned is not yet in place.

To keep its word to the farmers of Singur, the Trinamool Congress government under Mamata Banerjee issued an Ordinance and put in place a state law: The Singur Land and Rehabilitation Act, 2011, to return 337 acres to those farmers who had opposed acquisition and refused compensation.

But this law has been the subject of a court battle with the Tatas questioning its validity. The matter is now before the Supreme Court.

The first paragraph of the Singur Land and Rehabilitation Act states that Tata Motors had not started production of its car and had abandoned the project.

"The Act is based on an untruth," says Arunabho Ghosh, noted Calcutta High Court lawyer and Congress leader. "The Tatas were about to roll out the Nano but were actually forced to stop production due to the unruly agitation during which their executives were threatened. They were forced to shift the plant site and till date they have not given up possession."

Ghosh explains that though the validity of the Singur Land and Rehabilitation Act has been upheld by the High Court, "it is to be seen what the Supreme Court says."

Besides, a state government cannot decide to return land only to 'unwilling farmers' as it cannot decide who was then 'willing' and 'unwilling' on the basis of who accepted monetary compensation. In addition, a petition has also been moved by the so-called 'willing' farmers.

Ghosh described the Singur issue as a 'legal imbroglio'. For the state government to resolve this legal tangle and return land to farmers is going to be an uphill task.

"Right now there is neither agriculture nor industry in Singur and it is the farmers and the poor landless labourers who are suffering," remarked Ghosh.

Most farmers who lost their land belong to the villages of Bajemelia, Joymollah, Khasherberi and



Tata Nano factory



Kamal Santra has been reduced to gardening

Debadi, adjacent to the defunct Tata Motors plant site.

"Our fight is not only for the farmers of Singur but for the entire country. Why should the government enforce a law enacted by the British for their own interest to forcibly acquire the land of farmers?" says Manik Das of Beraberi village who

lost six bighas.

But neither heroic nor soothing words from TMC party workers are mollifying farmers. Manik Das, who is also a local TMC functionary, admitted that people were getting restless. "They will have to wait patiently. Many are getting impatient as for six years we agitated and organised demonstrations

but now there is no activity," he says.

Irate farmers are questioning Mamata's political integrity and saying she used them for mere electoral gains. "We are facing questions from the farmers but we are trying to explain to them that Didi's intentions are good and that they have to patiently wait instead of taking the law into their own hands

PICTURES BY TUMPA MONDAL



When we visited their house, Kamal Santra was spending his time gardening. "We have only around one and a half bighas left. We used to farm for all 12 months. But now we have a very meager income. Suddenly, we have become poor," says Kamal Santra.

They admit that even if around 400 acres are



Abdul Mannan



Sukumar Pakhira

and grabbing land," says Sukumar Pakhira, TMC local leader and elected gram panchayat member in Singur.

"But we are in a tough situation now," admits Pakhira, as he takes us around the various villages where people whose lands have been acquired continue to live. "It is a difficult call for us now as the issue is in the courts. Since our government is in power, we cannot forcibly regain the land. Our Singur legislator, Rabindranath Bhattacharya, who is also state agricultural minister has called a meeting of all party functionaries to discuss this issue and chalk out a strategy as farmers are getting restless," he says.

Though Rabindranath Bhattacharya is the Singur MLA, most of the land acquired now falls within the Haripal assembly constituency that is represented by TMC legislator, Becharam Manna.

Manna has had to face the wrath of the peasants whom he had promised the moon. Now he is in such a difficult state he bides most of his time in Kolkata.

Meanwhile farmers who used to be well-off are sinking into penury. Anil Santra and Kamal Santra are two brothers who used to own nearly 15 bighas. "By cultivating that land we married our four daughters and built pucca houses. Thirteen bighas were taken forcibly from us. We harvested and grew vegetables throughout the year. We have no option but to wait and suffer," say the two brothers.

returned to farmers it might not be possible for them to cultivate the land as fly ash has been dumped on their former fields. Even if Tata Motors reach an out of court settlement with the state government and pull out of the factory, Mamata might try to set up a railway project, they fear.

For the small farmer the situation remains the same whether they were willing or unwilling to give their land. Said an old lady, Tarkbala Manna, "My nephew made me sign on some papers and later I came to know that he gave away the land for ₹1.5 lakhs. Now I hear he says he was an unwilling farmer and wants the land back. Who will help a helpless widow like me?"

The farmers have realized that they will be able to extract a better price if they can get back their land. But they are in no mood to wait for long.

While around 2,000 farmers lost their land more than 4,000 agricultural labourers and around 1,000 share croppers became unemployed overnight. The farmers who lost their land at least see a ray of hope due to Mamata's attempts to return 337 acres to those who were unwilling to sell, but for the landless labourers and sharecroppers there is no chance of any compensation.

The CPI(M) local leaders are in no position to openly campaign in Singur and its affected villages. But they have started a whisper campaign among the small peasants who had given up their land and, other than compensation, were given jobs at the Tata Motors factory.

These small peasants feel that as the plant was shifted overnight because of Mamata's violent agitation those who had jobs could not afford to shift to Gujarat and were therefore deprived of an opportunity to get trained and be employed with Tata Motors.

On the Union government's new land and rehab bill, the TMC's position is clear – land cannot be acquired by the state for industry. And industry cannot buy agricultural land indiscriminately.

"The Trinamool Congress was the first party to articulate a policy on land acquisition. We did this as far back as 2006, because we saw a huge problem coming in the absence of a well-defined, modern land acquisition mechanism. The issue here is not just about who should buy land – whether the state or industry. There is a larger context to it, including concerns of food security," says Derek O'Brien, TMC Raja Sabha MP.

"The Trinamool policy is based on a fair and just reading of the doctrine of eminent domain," explains O'Brien. "When the state recognises private property, the private owner is the absolute titleholder. However, the state is the paramount titleholder. Should it need a piece of land for a clear and apparent public purpose - building a highway, for instance – it can resort to land acquisition. Of course, this should be done with generous compensation and not just a textual interpretation of 'market rate'."

He says that the doctrine of eminent domain cannot be misused to acquire land for favoured industrialists or real estate companies. "That would be a gross misuse. As we saw in West Bengal in the Left Front years, it would lead to crony capitalism and sweetheart deals. If private players want to build factories or condominiums, they must buy from the farmer directly."

O'Brien also says that a thorough digitized map of India's land area must be set up. "This map must establish exactly which tracts of land are fertile and suitable for multi-crop cultivation. Such land is a national asset. It is critical for growing food for our 1.2 billion people and serves as a bulwark for food security. Therefore, it must be a 'no go' area for industry."

O'Brien suggests a facilitative authority be set up to oversee, educate and help farmers negotiate directly with corporate buyers since there are concerns that farmers may not have the skills to deal directly with companies. "Overall, however, we need to trust the sagacity of the Indian farmer. He knows what's best for him, and for his country," O'Brien felt.

Such pro-farmer sentiments are no doubt well intentioned but how far the farmers of Singur are willing to wait or agitate for such a law is an open question.

The TMC's main ally, the Congress, has had no option but to support the Singur Land and Rehabilitation Act. Off record, Congress leaders doubt whether it would be able to resolve the issue and benefit the farmers.

Says Abdul Mannan, a senior West Bengal Congress leader who is chief of the party's media cell: "Singur has now become a thorn in the throat for the state government. Neither can the land be returned to farmers immediately as Mamata had promised and the peasants want, nor can any factory be established there because of the court cases. I hope violence does not erupt here again." ■



Anita Rana (right) with Kathleen Rogers

Awards for Janhit

Civil Society News
Meerut

ON 2 February, Anita Rana, director of the Janhit Foundation based in Meerut, was conferred two awards, one by the UNDP and the second by Earth Day Network (EDN) in partnership with TERI.

The UNDP award, 'Leadership in Community Initiatives for a Green Economy,' was presented to Anita by Caitlin Wiesen, UNDP's Country Director.

EDN-TERI recognized Anita's contribution to 'Women and the Green Economy'. Kathleen Rogers, President of EDN, handed over the certificate of appreciation to Anita.

"I am deeply honoured. I shall continue to do my utmost for the people of Western Uttar Pradesh," said Anita.

The past four years have been a testing time for Anita. Her dynamic husband, Anil Rana, who founded Janhit Foundation passed away suddenly. Anita took over as director of the foundation.

"Till then I was a housewife, bringing up my two sons," she says. "I had not worked in a professional capacity. Taking on the task of running the Janhit Foundation, with its impeccable track record and experience, was a daunting task for me. It was a baptism by fire."

Anil had devoted himself to reversing environmental degradation in Western Uttar Pradesh. With its filthy rivers, polluted groundwater and infertile topsoil, it seemed like an impossible task. Undaunted, Anil began a series of initiatives to help farmers switch to organic farming and get better prices. He began rainwater harvesting, tried to stop industries from polluting and worked for a groundwater policy.

Anita has shown grit and determination in taking the foundation forward. She has continued Janhit's work. In 2009, the Janhit Foundation received the Green Apple Award for its work in eliminating use of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) among farmers in Western UP.

"UP is an agriculturally strong state. We promote organic farming, biodiversity and we have started the first retail outlet in Meerut to supply organic food," explains Anita. "As a public interest organization we focus on strengthening local communities and involving them in decision-making. They must have control over resources."

Janhit also runs a 24/7 Childline in Meerut which has been rescuing and helping troubled children. ■

'Much more cleaning

TS Sudhir
Hyderabad

SIXTEEN years ago, Dr Jayaprakash Narayan quit the IAS to start Loksatta, a people's movement to campaign for free and fair elections and probity in public life. As a 1980 batch IAS officer, JP as he is called, was personally chosen by NT Rama Rao to be Principal Secretary when he became Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh in 1994.

Today, Loksatta is a political party with JP as its sole MLA in the Andhra Pradesh State Legislative Assembly. But despite his party's numerical insignificance, JP is a voice which is heard with respect. JP was also one voice the Centre turned to during the debate on the Lokpal bill. With elections to five states just over, JP spoke to *Civil Society* rather candidly about the performance of the Election Commission (EC) and the use of money and muscle during the elections.

How would you rate the recently concluded State Legislative Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand and Manipur?

It obviously varies from state to state. What has happened in the last 15 to 20 years is that the Election Commission has put the fear of God into politicians. Even for legitimate campaigning you cannot do this or that. It holds the whip, ordering staggered elections and saying you cannot put up banners etc. The middle-class kind of loves it because we do not want our walls to be defaced, we don't like campaigning, loudspeakers, public meetings...

But the actual rot, the EC cannot address. They address only the symbolic stuff and get kudos for it. Money power has increased. North Indian states are now catching up with the South, where Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu

and Karnataka are absolutely the worst in the country. Bad practices spread fast and in these elections, we have seen that. The number of criminal candidates has increased, both in actual numbers and in percentage terms.

Whose failure is it then?

The movement against corruption and fielding criminal candidates has clearly not moved political parties because they do not think there is any retribution or electoral consequences. While making a song and dance about it, enough is not being done. The EC's response is far too technical. It is not looking at the situation in a larger sense. If you look at violence during the election process, it is not so bad. But the way caste is being mobilised as the central unit of political action is distressing.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati sacked many ministers before the elections, most of them on charges of nepotism. Would you say that was just window-dressing?

Yes and no. Even if it was just window-dressing, the fact that you are willing to sack so many people is significant. Don't forget they are all influential people. Once you sack several ministers who have money power, influence and a caste base, it is a good sign. If we keep criticising such an action, then there is no incentive to even do this much.

Akali Dal's Sukhbir Singh Badal has argued in favour of an increase in expenditure limits for candidates. Do you think it is time to take a serious relook at the issue, given the fact that all of us know that a candidate for an Assembly election spends between ₹5 to ₹7 crores?

In 1996, ₹1.5 lakhs was the limit set for election expenditure in an Assembly constituency in a big state like Andhra Pradesh. It was subse-

Is PES the answer?

Sanjay Kaw
New Delhi

THE Chief Election Commissioner, S.Y. Quraishi, released a policy document on electoral reforms on 9 February at the Constitutional Club in New Delhi. The document, prepared by the Campaign for Electoral Reforms in India (CERI), advocates a Proportional Electoral System (PES) to make Indian democracy more inclusive of marginalized and minority groups.

Quraishi said the Election Commission would set up a technical committee to examine CERI's

proposal. Alongside, a two-day national conference on electoral reforms was organized by CERI.

The PES is a two-vote system in which a voter can cast one vote to any candidate and a second vote to the party of his choice. CERI has suggested that 30 per cent of members should be elected through direct voting and 70 per cent nominated by political parties.

"All political parties will then have to submit a list of their respective candidates to the Election Commission before the elections. After the polls, each party will be allotted seats in proportion to the percentage of votes it gets," CERI Founder M C Raj said.

of elections needed'

quently increased to ₹4.5 lakhs, then to ₹10 lakhs and now it is ₹16 lakhs.

But I must point out that I contested in one of the largest Assembly constituencies in Andhra Pradesh in 2009 with volunteer support. My expenditure was ₹4.5 lakhs, with no concealment. This in the face of very formidable candidates who spent close to ₹50 crores against me. But I could still win the election.

Maybe there is a case to increase the expenditure limit to say ₹25 lakhs, but in most states, as you say, the expenditure now is ₹5 crore to ₹7 crore. Most of it is illegitimate expense, mainly to buy votes and distribute liquor. A lot of it is also to pay money to your own people to mobilise votes. That means there is no party in operation. The party is there only for its brand name and symbol. There is no collective desire to do something worthwhile. It is all about feathering your nest.

Once you reduce campaigning to that level, even legitimate campaigning will cost crores. The answer then does not lie in enhancing the limits and making everyone a mercenary but in politics becoming more legitimate and attracting the best people. Illegitimate expenditure should be curbed. Vote buying is a disaster for the country.

During the Tamil Nadu elections, Jayalalithaa openly told voters to take money distributed by the DMK saying the money actually belongs to the people, but vote for the AIADMK on election day. Isn't that an admission that buying of votes happens during all elections? That is what clever parties are saying now. If you are in the blame game, we will not get anywhere. People are not taking money because they are crooks, but because they have lost hope



Dr Jayaprakash Narayan

in the democratic process giving them tangible results. So, as far as they are concerned, whoever wins, they have already lost the game. They are in fact, maximising short-term gains. In an election, the voter thinks since there is no real outcome for me, I might as well get some money and liquor today.

If everyone is making money, then the voter looks at the freebies on offer. In Tamil Nadu and

than 25 per cent of votes win most of the seats and form governments. "Further, the percentage of votes gained by a party do not match with the percentage of seats it gets. Thus there is a huge wastage of votes resulting in declining voter interest in elections."

Quraishi criticized political parties for not coming forward to bring in effective electoral reforms. He said India should be proud of its vibrant democracy. He cited the example of Union minister C P Joshi who lost by just one vote during the Rajasthan Assembly elections but he did not file a single petition against the election results. "That's the credibility of our system," said Quraishi.

Expressing serious concern over money and muscle power during elections, Quraishi said candidates end up spending anything between ₹5 crore and ₹10 crore. "That's why from day one

Andhra Pradesh, free TVs, mixer-grinders and so on are popular. If nothing works, promote hatred between communities. In a society like India, divided by caste and religion, it is so easy. And once that happens, corruption, mal-administration and everything else gets ignored.

Loksatta has been in existence for 16 years now. Despite your campaign we find the electoral process in India dominated by money and muscle power.

In terms of outcome, we have not yet achieved our purpose. We have mobilised the consciousness of the people but there has been no tangible outcome. If political parties don't buy votes, it will work. My rivals paid ₹5,000 for a vote, yet I won. Earlier during NTR, Indira Gandhi, V P Singh's time, they did not pay money. At least there is no evidence to that effect.

Two, there is the fear of losing among candidates. In our First Past the Post system, the last 1,000 votes make all the difference. In a generic sense, the bigger spender has the advantage though he does not always win. Money matters. Let us not hoodwink ourselves. Each candidate is in the rat race and there is competitive pressure to get that extra vote. Even in the US, the big spender goes on to become the Presidential candidate.

This election will also be remembered by the decision to cover hundreds of statues of Mayawati and her election symbol. Do you think the EC went over the top?

It was unnecessary. Given the way it was in the news, not covering it in fact would have created a level-playing field. That is the problem. It is a very bureaucratic approach. The desire to prolong, have staggered elections, put armed police in each booth is not a very happy tendency. I say this with all responsibility. No decisions are taken through the period of the election. Governance has become secondary, elections are primary. ■

they get involved in corrupt practices."

The CEC, however, said all politicians were not corrupt. "It's because of good leadership that India has progressed. It is for Parliament to decide who should contest. If charges have been framed against a person in a heinous crime by any sessions court, such cases should be handled with all seriousness."

But Quraishi said he was completely opposed to the "Right to Recall" of non-performing candidates idea. "This is not the right solution. I am also against compulsory voting. Instead, we should focus on better participation in elections." He also said both Election Commissioners too should be removed only by impeachment.

"Our secretariat should be allowed to function as an independent body. It should function like the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, Supreme Court and High Courts," he said. ■

The document said the First Past The Post (FPTP) being followed was inappropriate to address the problems, hopes and aspirations of marginalized groups like Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, Minorities and Women. PES would provide more even-handed representation. It was more appropriate for a multi-party democracy like India in which coalition politics has become entrenched.

Elections in India show that candidates with even less than 10 per cent of votes in a constituency can win. In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, 145 out of 543 elected members won with less than 20 per cent votes. Only a handful of MPs from Nagaland, Sikkim, West Bengal and Tripura got more than 50 per cent of votes. The average MP got only one-fourth of the vote share.

Raj said the present electoral system was not representative of minorities as parties with less

Budgam district is smoke-free

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

BUDGAM in central Kashmir has become the first district in Jammu & Kashmir to be declared 'smoke free' in public places. Credit for this achievement should be given to the Jammu & Kashmir Voluntary Health Association (JKVHA) and the district administration. Both worked closely together.

Across Budgam district 321 public places were identified for the erection of 'No Smoking Area' signboards clearly stating that smoking in public places is an offence. "Out of 352 sample public places in Budgam district we placed 'No Smoking' signboards in 321 places. That means we covered 91 percent of the sample area. Only nine percent remained untouched," says Ali Mohammad Mir, Executive Director, JKVHA.

Mir said that at 307 places it was observed that smoking had stopped after the signboards were put up. However, in 45 public places people were still lighting up. He said that at 323 places no smoking aids were found. But in 29 public places smoking aids were discovered.

Mir said that Budgam's smoke free atmosphere would help to prevent schoolchildren and minors from falling into the tobacco trap.

As part of the survey a compliance monitoring study was conducted by volunteers from the Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK) under the technical guidance of the District Statistical & Evaluation Officer, Budgam.

"A compliance level above 80 to 90 per cent can be set as the standard for declaring a particular area or district as smoke free," says Mir.

Mohammad Rafi, District Development Commissioner, Budgam, lauded the untiring efforts of JKVHA. "I am glad that the residents of Budgam extended their full support to us. This is a good sign. Hopefully smokers will give up smoking in their homes as well," said Rafi.

Aga Syed Ruhullah, state minister for information and science technology, who represents the Budgam constituency in the Legislative Assembly, said smokers should have the will to quit smoking. He said that he too would try his best to quit smoking himself. He said he fell into this dragnet due to some personal problems.

Ruhullah said that 20 per cent of Value Added Tax (VAT) on cigarettes and other tobacco products in the state have generated revenue for the government. He said that the state government cannot introduce any legislation seeking a blanket ban on cigarette smoking. He asked non-smokers to motivate smokers not to smoke in public places. Ruhullah said that smokers should be fed with the information that the consumption of tobacco and other similar products leads to fatal casualties. Only then would they quit smoking.

Following in the footsteps of Budgam, the officials of Srinagar and Kupwara districts have started taking steps to make public spaces smoke free. Action has been taken against those found puffing in public places and fines have been imposed on such violators. ■

How Arvind Waghela

PICTURES BY GAUTAM SINGH



Arvind Waghela sitting outside his home

Gautam Singh
Mumbai

THERE'S an unmistakable twinkle in his eye as Arvind Waghela sits on the cement slab covering the gutter outside his hut. He's posing for a picture and holding up the national flag. A bit dramatic, but then Waghela's just emphasizing his Constitutional right to life in the narrow, crowded lanes of Dharavi, Mumbai's giant slum. Though he was taking on the formidable bureaucracy of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), Waghela won thanks to the persistence with which he kept filing his complaints.

It's a small but hard won victory and the eyes of the illiterate 65-year-old tailor glint like shiny medals. Just a few feet from Waghela's front door, the open sewer would often get blocked and overflow in the monsoons with dead rats and noxious substances sweeping into his living room. This had to stop and thus began his bout with the BMC.

Waghela believes most strongly that the system is meant for people's welfare but one needs to make it work. "From my childhood days in my village in Gujarat, I have seen officials and judges dispense justice. You finally get your due but you have to fight for it," he says.

So, Waghela was ready for a long fight. He has

got his drain covered in Mumbai



Sneha volunteers at a community meeting



Women listed their priorities

not been to school and so his petitions were drafted with the help of a lawyer. In addition, for more than a year, Waghela has been attending weekly meetings organized by the Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action (Sneha) which has spent a decade or so working with women in urban slums to reduce maternal and infant mortality, malnutrition and domestic violence.

To create agents of change, Sneha recently partnered with 'We, the People' (WTP), a small group of volunteers devoted to raising an active, engaged and informed citizenry.

WTP works with a range of social groups – Sneha and Magic Bus in Mumbai, Pragati Abhiyan in Nashik, Bhumi in Hyderabad and Literacy India in Gurgaon – to educate the community on the role responsible citizens can play. "The effort is to link up the reality around us, that is a part of our daily lives and connect it to our Constitutional framework," explains Vinita Singh, one of the founders and trustees of WTP.

The campaign began on Republic Day and continued till the municipal elections. It was an appro-

those five years that follow," says Vinita. But once a citizen has cast his vote he lapses into amnesia till the next elections. "How do you hold the corporators accountable or interact with them or make them understand the issues you face?" she asks.

'Anchors' plays a crucial role in this process of learning. They are usually volunteers who are mentored by the trustees and other anchors. Most of them are professionals from diverse fields. Sourav Banerjee, 30, who is in human resources at Microsoft, joined the team to design programmes for anchors a few months ago. "The individual has to be empowered, but you have to understand his social ecosystem. What are we doing about his family, his neighbour? It is important to involve the family. We teach the anchors to facilitate, not preach," he says.

Sourav's explains his reasons for volunteering. "How can I use my human resource skills to help organisations that are trying to make a change but have a resource constraint," he says. "My passion at work is how to create impact and that is not easy.

appropriate time to make this connection between the citizen, self-governance, corporators and the all-important vote.

In a community centre in Dharavi, around 200 people, divided into three groups, huddle together to discuss their roles as citizens in ensuring corporators and municipal staff perform their duties effectively.

"During elections our basic responsibility as citizens is to vote for the corporator and be a part of what happens in

How do you know that behavior is getting impacted? Can we create something around action?" These were some of the challenges that drove him to bring his skills from the relatively stable environs of the corporate sector to the imperfect world of Dharavi. "There is a strong belief that the individual is powerless. And it's very difficult to change this belief," Sourav observes.

In Dharavi, the women told Dr Nayreen Daruwalla, a mental health professional, that they needed help in matters of day-to-day survival – kerosene, food rations and sanitation were crucial priorities for them. "We informed them that there is a connection between you and the ration office. Why is the Public Distribution System (PDS) there in the first place? What is the law behind it? And then we make that connect between their Constitutional rights and the existing structure. The understanding emerges that there are written rules and that every time there is a price change, there has to be a corresponding written order. And the correct place to find this information is in the ration office," says Vinita.

People began to understand that the system existed for them, that they had rights.

In the beginning, many women who questioned the ration shop owner were rebuffed, but then they went in groups and equations began to change. "It requires tenacity because if the storekeeper refuses to comply, one has to approach a higher official and so on, till they get the information," says Dr Daruwalla. "One of our strongest members is a 55-year old housewife called Nirmala who has doggedly confronted the ration shop owner in her locality. Now she has involved women from other areas and is often asked to accompany them to the ration shops."

The Right to Information (RTI) law has been very effective where an initial request for information has failed. "In the citizenship programme, available in modules, we train the anchors to take this understanding of the RTI forward," says Vinita.

One of these anchors helped Arvind Waghela file an RTI application demanding information from the Nagar Sewak of his area about the use of funds allocated to her and how many sewers needed repairs. Waghela also wrote that his Constitutional right to life was being infringed upon.

Those may have been the magic words. The BMC machinery promptly descended upon Dharavi to repair the sewer in front of Waghela's house. "Their top officials, along with the Nagar Sewak's PA, started visiting me daily, promising that the sewer would be repaired and requesting me not to pursue the matter any further. They even offered to repair anything else that I knew of that needed mending," he says laughing.

"If you try hard enough, you can change your locality. This experience has made me know a lot of powerful people and I'm only an ordinary man," he says simply. But then the rotund tailor with a jolly smile sitting on a slab of concrete over an offensive sewer is no ordinary man. He's one of India's most powerful – an enlightened citizen. ■

Govt hospital's gentle Gubbara

Health centre for special children blossoms under NRHM

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

ANIKET ran after the sparkling, duck shaped cart sliding smoothly on the spotlessly clean floor. The cart rolled down a few feet before he could catch and sit on it. As he started 'driving,' Kushi, an older girl, stood in front of him, holding a toy in her left hand. Suddenly, Tsering, a much older girl, came and snatched the toy from Kushi's hand as she was annoyed at her obstructing Aniket's march. Kushi got the message and said sorry, clearing the obstacle. Tsering returned the toy and all three dashed out to the play area in the enclosed verandah – where swings and climbing equipment were available.

Sadly, the time was limited for them: it was late on Friday afternoon and these children – all with special needs – were just winding up their five-day assessment programme at Gubbara, a new state-of-the-art diagnostic centre for children with multiple disabilities in Dehradun.

Early Intervention and Assessment Centres, though far and few, do exist in different cities around the country. Gubbara is unique in being situated in a government hospital and run as a Public Private Partnership (PPP) between the Latika Roy Foundation, a voluntary organization devoted to children with special needs, and the Government of Uttarakhand.

Gubbara is just one of the many projects the Latika Roy Foundation runs for children with special needs in the city. Early intervention is a cornerstone of its philosophy; the sooner children with disability are identified and receive therapy and education, the better they will do.

Although the Foundation's centres throughout Dehradun are open to all regardless of ability to pay, its staff were frustrated by their inability to reach out to the poorest children, those most in need of services. Opening Gubbara right in the heart of a government hospital changed all that.

The Foundation already had a long history in the Doon Hospital. Jo Chopra, the Foundation's director, tells the story of how she went to the Doon Hospital in 2001 with her daughter Moy Moy to get her Disability Certificate.

"Without a certificate, nothing is possible," she explains. "You need one to get train and bus concessions, to apply for special job quotas, for tax purposes – for everything. But getting one was a nightmare. It was confusing, time-consuming and humil-



Gubbara, the Early Intervention and Assessment Centre at the Doon Hospital

'We thought of painting balloons on the walls and telling people to just 'follow the balloons' to reach us. It worked!'

iating. It took us three separate visits to get it – Moy Moy was exhausted and I was angry. I thought if it was this difficult for me – living in Dehradun, with my own car and people to help me, what must it be like for a poor family coming from a distant village? That's when we decided to start a Help Desk at the Doon Hospital, to help people navigate the system and to make it work for them."

The Help Desk started functioning in 2002 and to date it has assisted thousands of people in obtaining what is their legal right. During their time at the hospital, Foundation personnel developed strong working relationships with hospital staff, especially with one Dr Rawat, a sympathetic and committed pediatrician there.

And as so often happens, one thing led seamlessly to the next. Connections were made. The right people appeared at the right time. When the Foundation proposed starting an assessment and diagnosis centre at the Doon Hospital, the Health Secretary at the time, Keshav Desiraju, took hold of the idea and refused to let it go. At his suggestion, the proposal was submitted to the National Rural Health Mission, (NRHM) whose director, Dr Piyush Singh, was open and receptive. Between the two of them, and the very cooperative team at the Doon Hospital itself, remarkable progress was made.

In April, 2011, just three months after the signing of the MoU between the Latika Roy Foundation and the Doon Hospital, Gubbara opened its doors. It is spacious, beautifully designed and full of state-of-the-art equipment and brightly coloured toys. Even its name is evidence of the care and thought that has gone into its planning.

"Originally, it was called the Doon Early Intervention Centre," Dr Sebastian Gruschke, the centre's director, explained. "But for illiterate parents, that meant nothing. Often, they would wander the halls looking for us, not knowing how to even pronounce the long, foreign words. Then we thought of painting balloons on the walls throughout the hospital and telling people to just 'follow

the balloons' to reach us. That worked! And then we thought, why not just call it Gubbara or balloon in Hindi? It fits in perfectly with our philosophy – we want to set children free, to help them learn to fly!"

The centre has had a remarkable response. Already, in only 10 months it has on its staff a physician, two therapists, a special educator, a psychologist, a social worker, office coordinator and two assistants. They have done comprehensive, in-depth assessments for over 200 children and rapid appraisals for over 500.

The in-depth assessment is a week-long process. Parents come with the child every morning at nine and remain in the centre till four in the afternoon. Each day is highly structured, with different specialists working with each family both individually and as a group. The goal is to get a complete picture of the child from every possible perspective – medical, social and developmental – to help the parents understand the nature of the disability and the importance of following a prescribed programme to help her/him develop optimally and to help them access the many resources that already exist in their communities.

All required tests, including blood work, X-rays, hearing and vision tests are arranged through the Doon Hospital and splints and braces are made available when needed. Families are assisted to get their disability certificates and counselling is provided on a regular basis.

"Parents generally refuse to believe that so much help is possible as all they have to spend is ₹11 – the normal registration fee at the Doon Hospital," says Rizwan Ali, Gubbara's social worker.

"While the CT scan was done at the Doon Hospital free of cost, the Gubbara psychologist assessed my daughter and the special educator analysed her educational needs," Dhiraj, a street vendor at Moti Bazaar in Dehradun said.

"Sometimes," Dr Sebastian explains, "the



The in-depth analysis is a week-long process

advice is as simple as getting parents to see the importance of good nutrition. We saw a boy recently who was grossly underweight, inactive and lethargic. It was even thought that he was deaf and perhaps blind. But with a simple diet of nutritious, cheap homemade food, he gained weight and began to improve in many other domains as well."

At present, most of the children seen have been from Dehradun, but some have come from the hills, neighbouring districts of Himachal, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and even Rajasthan. "They are referred to us by the OPD downstairs. Others know of us through NGOs, other hospitals, or just by word of mouth," says Dr Gruschke. "As our outreach continues throughout the state, we expect to see many more referrals from the remote areas."

Gubbara has also reached out to other organisations working in special needs to make its services available to them. Last week, a contingent from Arjita Home and Ngoenga School for Tibetan Children were enrolled in the assessment programme.

Communication skills are a vital part of life and Pooja Negi, special educator at Gubbara, works

hard at helping parents to learn new ways of communicating with their children. "Call him by name before you start any activity with him," she advised Satyam's mother. "Give him time to respond before you go forward. Help him make his own choices. That way he'll feel a part of the activity and will enjoy it more."

Satyam's mother, Poonam, a single mother and an anganwadi worker, was thrilled. "He has been in this condition since birth and for the first time I can see a way to work with him."

Gubbara has a fund to assist parents from out of the city – both with transport costs and staying arrangements at a local

dharamshala. "This place should be better publicised in the remote, rural areas so that people from the hills, where no such facility exists, can also benefit," says Pushpa, mother of Anoop Chauhan, a three-year old boy who was being assessed at the centre.

That may take some more time. Right now rapid assessment exists for children who walk-in (usually referred from the OPD) but are not able to come for the full week. While there is no substitute for the five-day assessment, even a brief check-up by the highly skilled team can make a difference. So far, over 500 children have been seen this way.

What is clear is that when sympathetic, sensitive and honest public officials join with a dedicated and skilled voluntary organization, when all parties are determined and passionate and completely above corrupt practices, a programme like the NRHM can work.

Uttar Pradesh has its mega, ₹5,754-crore NRHM scam with murders and a suicide. Uttarakhand has Gubbara and hundreds of children with special needs are learning to walk, talk and – perhaps – even fly as a result. ■

(Names of children have been changed)

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



Forest villages take to RTI

Rakesh Agrawal
Babraich (UP)

DEPRIVED of connectivity for many years, villagers of Karikot village in Babraich district of Uttar Pradesh were delighted when a road was finally built linking their village to the main road. But they were deeply disappointed with the newly constructed road. It was very narrow. They had hoped for a wider one. Suspecting foul play, the women decided to investigate.

"Six of us filed a Right to Information (RTI) application, asking the district administration for the status of our village road. From the RTI reply we came to know that our road was far less wide than approved. We informed the District Magistrate. He ordered the contractor to re-build it. Ours is an Ambedkar village, you see. We oversaw the construction to make sure the contractor doesn't fob us off again with a narrow road," explains Marri Devi.

The women were asked to check out the dimensions of the road. "We went with a measuring tape. We briskly measured the width of the road and tallied it with the size specified by the government. Yes, the width was the same. Only then did we give our approval," recounts Marri Devi. The six women had filed the RTI application in November 2010. They got a reply within a month. In May the road was rebuilt.

The RTI law has become the new tool of empowerment for women in this most backward region of UP. They have been using it to get rid of corrupt contractors and builders, to access their entitlements and to stop alcoholism.

Karikot is located near the Kartaniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, an extension of the Dudhwa National Park. Altogether there are eight forest villages in and around the sanctuary and park.

Villages here have for long been deprived of government schemes such as paved paths, pucca homes, toilets, NREGA funds and the Kanya Vidyadhan Yojana, a scheme which entitles the girl child to scholarships and loans from the state government.

"We decided to use mass RTIs. According to this

PICTURES BY RAKESH AGARWAL



The women measured the size of the road before giving their approval

'The strategy was for 20 or more women from each village to file RTIs in govt departments asking for the specific orders that prohibit these forest villages from inclusion in govt schemes.'



strategy 20 or more women from each village filed RTI applications in various line departments asking for the specific government orders that prohibit the inclusion of these forest villages in government schemes," says Jitendra Chaturvedi of Developmental Association for Human Advancement, (DEHAT), an NGO based in Babraich which has been working for villages here for over a decade.

Altogether, 13 RTIs were filed by 52 women. Two were against the forest department which had accused these villages of poaching and encroachment. The women got their replies within the stipulated time.

"The RTI replies revealed that no specific government order existed barring these villages from access to government schemes. We also found out through RTI that 96 incidents of poaching had been reported between 2005 and 2010. Just three pertained to forest villages. And in all three cases

the accusation was that villagers had been caught fishing in ponds located in forestland. We also got a path connecting a forest village to the main road sanctioned," says Chaturvedi.

That set the ball rolling. Villagers began applying in droves for their entitlements. Subsequently, with the help of DEHAT, two public distribution shops were started. Around 436 households got ration cards. BPL cards were also issued. Schoolteachers were posted in two primary schools in Vishalnagar and Bhawanipur village. Four ICDS centres were opened. An Auxilliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) was appointed in the health centre.

One important upshot of this exercise was that people got proof of identity. So the forest department, which was trying to uproot these villages by listing them as encroachments, found their plans stuck. "Thanks to the entitlements, we villagers got proof of residence and development certificates for 2006-2007," says Sushila Devi of



Naibasti village.

The women also succeeded in breaking up the nexus between some employees of the forest department, contractors of *kanji* houses (animal shelters) and local moneylenders. These villages are located on the periphery of a wildlife sanctuary. If their animals wander into the forest, they are caught and sent to the *kanji* houses. The owner has to pay a fine to get the animal released.

Women filed an RTI to the Chairperson of Bahraich district's Zila Panchayat to find out how many *kanji* houses existed in the district and how much they were supposed to charge for each animal. "We learnt that there should only be two *kanji* houses in our area. That meant that one was fake. We were also paying a highly inflated amount of money to get our animals released," says Saroj of Girijapuri village.

The women came to know that the *kanji* house in Bichhia

Bazaar village was not even sanctioned. Officially, fines for stray animals were listed as ₹20 per buffalo, ₹10 per cow and ₹2 per goat. But the innocent villagers were being made to pay ₹500 per buffalo, ₹300 per cow and ₹200 per goat. "The agents would pick up these animals and the hapless villagers had to go to greedy moneylenders to borrow money and pay a hefty interest," says Chaturvedi.

The women formed the Van Gram Adhikar Manch. They took over these *kanji* houses. "The other two *kanji* houses have become practically dysfunctional as hardly any stray animals are caught now," says Saroj of Bichhia Bazaar village.

Alcoholism has also been wiped out from six villages through the use of RTI. "We decided to make people realise how much amount money they were wasting on alcohol," says Geeta Prasad of Kailashnagar village who started this crusade in 2008.

Prasad found out how much revenue the government earned from a shop selling alcohol in Bichhia Bazaar village. An RTI application was filed in June 2008 to the District Excise Officer of Bahraich district. It revealed that the total revenue earned was over Rs 40 lakhs. A meeting of the six villages was convened. A list of alcoholics was prepared. A total of 279 people, including 38 women and 19 teenagers were identified. They were asked to calculate the amount they spend on alcohol in a year. It turned out to be as much as Rs 21,78,000.

"We realised that this money can be used for our homes, for food and medicine," says Basanti Devi, an ex-alcoholic. We not only gave up alcohol, we destroyed eight illegal breweries operating in our area." Only two octogenarians, Bajinath and Guruprasad of Dhakia village, refused to give up their love for the bottle. Chaturvedi finally succeeded after counseling them intensively. ■

Call for second look at JNNURM results

Civil Society News

New Delhi

ACTIVISTS working with the poor in 22 cities have called for a social audit of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) before the second phase of the flagship programme is rolled out.

The JNNURM was launched in 2005 as a seven-year initiative to bridge the infrastructure deficit in urban areas. Among other things, it was meant to recognize the rights of the urban poor and give them access to better living standards.

Now that the first seven years are over, the process for implementing the second phase is under way. But activists say that the experience with JNNURM has not been satisfactory and there is need for a review.

There is concern that the Rajiv Awas Yojna (RAY), which seeks to do away with slums in urban areas by providing affordable housing, is no different to the initiatives for providing basic services for urban poor (BSUP) in phase one of JNNURM.

At a two-day national consultation in Delhi in February, activist groups demanded that a social audit be done of the BSUP component of the JNNURM to assess what had been achieved.

They insisted that RAY be put on hold till it was established that it was an improvement on the BSUP.

The JNNURM was launched across 65 cities with a total planned budget outlay of ₹1,25,000 crore. The scheme had two sub-missions administered by the Ministry of Urban Development for Urban Infrastructure and Governance (UIG) and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation for Basic Services to Urban Poor.

Of the total budget outlay, 65 per cent was reserved for infrastructure projects and the remaining was for the basic services to the poor.

Activists point to the siphoning off of funds and poor implementation. D. Leena said the problems vary from one city to another. She helped author a mid-term review of JNNURM in 20 cities in 2009. (See *Civil Society April 2009*.)

According to her, nine BSUP projects had been sanctioned for the poor in Patna. The houses were to be provided in 2009 but they were evicted from their homes in March 2009 and construction began only a month later.

The situation was very different in Ahmedabad where people had been evicted and houses were ready, but no allotments had been made. And in Hyderabad, people were provided accommodation in houses having no basic civic amenities.

"They were provided houses far away from their work places, as a result the income of 87 per cent people had drastically gone down," said Leena.

Ministry of Housing and Poverty Alleviation

joint secretary Aruna Sundararajan agreed that there were shortcomings. "No plan can be perfect. Now we are taking corrective steps," she said.

Sundararajan said the government's approach was to see if a person has been living in a particular area, he or she should have property rights and be provided with all basic services. As far as land acquisition for construction of houses was concerned, she said it was the duty of the states to bear the cost of the land. "Each state has to have its own legislation on property rights."

As some participants raised the issue of problems being faced by the poor to procure their identification documents, Ms Sundararajan said such things could be resolved by holding discussions with the community. "If 50 per cent residents say that a person has been living in the area, that is okay with us."

Ministry of Urban Development's Director, Prem Narayan, said the appraisal of the JNNURM showed that urban local bodies were short of funds. He said procurements were delayed and it was not always possible to find suitable contractors.

He said that regional review meetings had thrown up suggestions for stringent reforms in bigger cities. "There was a suggestion for having urban service regulators as well," he said.

Planning Commission director Rakesh Ranjan said the key issue was whether the Centre could direct the states and the states in turn could direct their respective municipalities in implementing such schemes. He said that under the JNNURM only 25 to 30 projects had been completed. "About 70 projects are yet to be completed."

Ranjan claimed that the states had failed to come up with definite plans under the RAY. "That's why the budget allocated to us is yet to be consumed." Of the sanctioned budget of about ₹60,000 crore, the government has so far spent ₹40,000 crore on the scheme. Many participants demanded that the money spent so far should be properly audited.

"Unless social audit of the money spent under various schemes is done, no new project should be launched," demanded Mr Dunu Roy of the Hazards Centre, which has conducted several studies on the rehabilitation process of the urban poor.

Roy was of the view that the urban poor should themselves be involved in getting the construction of their houses. "We can form cooperatives of carpenters, masons and labourers for setting up these houses. That will automatically reduce the cost of construction."

Former Union secretary Anil Bajjal sounded a word of caution for second phase of JNNURM. "Every city should have a vision for 20 years. As the second phase is on the way, we should have correct feedback from different groups. We have to be more conscious." ■

'A composite class is emerging in rural India'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FIVE years after the historic Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act was passed, there is soul searching and debate about its efficacy. Activists complain that there is no political will and that certain clauses make it tough to get forest people their land claims and community forest rights. A clear process of implementation hasn't fallen into place. Each state follows its own rule-book.

But some villages have managed to get their due. Such villages, located in and around forests, have historically been the poorest with the worst human development indicators. Most of them were regarded as encroachments and were vulnerable to eviction. Now for the first time a few of these villages are getting roads, health centres and primary schools thanks to recognition gained under this Act.

The National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW), played a key role in getting the forest rights law passed. We spoke to Ashok Chaudhury, Convener, NFFPFW, about his group's assessment of how the law has worked.

How much progress has been made in implementing the forest rights law?

We want to look at it in a positive way. For the first time people have got legal rights and we don't want to merely grumble. Being a mass organization we have to ensure our people relief and certain rights.

We have found that wherever people are organized and they strive to get their rights they are gaining tremendous political space. Indian democracy is at the crossroads. Since the past 10-15 years people have become democratically conscious, especially women at the bottom rungs of society. For the Act to be successfully implemented, the landlordism of the forest department has to be finished.

Can you cite three positives?

First, from our experience in implementing



Ashok Chaudhury

this law, a strong sense of collectiveness has been created and community rights have become a crucial issue. Fortunately, forests cannot be owned by a single individual. The problem is people's relationship with land is individualistic.

We have been working on this issue since May 2002, when the Uttar Pradesh (UP) government issued an order that SC/ST cannot be arbitrarily evicted. Wherever they are they should get permanent rights. We started reclaiming land on the basis of this order. As a result in Sonbhadra today, around 20,000 acres are being collectively farmed by women. Land collectivism is an achievement for our movement. The credit goes to the women.

The second is the emergence of women's leadership. This will impact growing children from 14 to 16 years of age. They are getting seriously involved, especially the girls. The perceptions of rural youth are different. They question their seniors and are unafraid. We can see this emergent leadership in Nandigram and the Posco movement also.

There is also the emergence of a collective, composite class in the rural sector especially in the forest-agriculture sector which does not have this concept of caste or clan. Adivasis, Dalits and OBCs are coming together. They have a common enemy now.

Similarly the other side is also getting organized. The forest department has direct access to

powerful people in the village who control public land – the Yadavs, Jats and Gujjars. They are working in political institutions, they are mobilizing forces and they have money with them.

But people are getting conscious of their rights. The word 'adhikar' has become strong and is facilitating a composite class culture.

What would you identify as the drawbacks?

There are so many drawbacks. The 75 years clause in the Act is the biggest one. Secondly, there is the definition of village. Each state has its own classification. The Act says any settlement is a village but government does not function like that.

Thirdly, the women's question has been very vague. Actually, 70 to 80 per cent of the forest workforce are women. It is also not clear who will exercise power.

The forest rights committee at village level has been given the power to notify. But after that rejection of land claims takes place at the SDM (Sub-Divisional Magistrate) level. The forest department's role should be merely advisory. Rejection of claims should be at village level. Power needs to be structured.

What exactly are the community forest rights you are asking for?

First of all we are asking for rights to non-timber forest produce (NTFP) which supports livelihood. Secondly, within the Protected Areas, which are very critical areas where all rights are suspended, we are asking for the right of passage – the freedom to walk from your village to the market or to the hospital.

Thirdly, we want the right to regenerate and manage forests – without that you won't get NTFP or free passage. Old knowledge systems have to merge with new knowledge. There are people who would like to work with communities but the forest department does not allow them in. Many botanists approach us for specific information. If they ask the forest department it sends them to the Forest Research Institute in Dehradun which only has a few specific spaces.

In forest villages, which have now been recognized as revenue villages, what sort of development is taking place?

They do have plans of opening schools, building roads and water bodies without external investment. The villagers believe they can, through ownership of forests, regenerate natural resources. Women are concerned about the education and health of their children. For collective ownership we need to create new parallel institutions. The law does not allow for production-cooperatives, only for marketing cooperatives. ■

HYDERABAD HAUNTED BY DYING LAKES

Water scarcity, floods, pollution now hurt the city

T S Sudhir
Hyderabad

IN 1995, as Hyderabad began expanding, its residents would joke that the Buddha statue emerging from the waters of the Hussainsagar Lake would soon become a busy traffic intersection with honking vehicles disturbing the Buddha's peace.

In those days, even though Hyderabad was becoming congested, the Hussainsagar was still a pretty good lake. If you claimed to be a good swimmer, you had to prove it by swimming till the Buddha statue and back.

Now the challenge is to overcome the stench of the water. So bad is it that international sailors a few years ago grumbled about having to participate in a sailing championship in a lake of such poor water quality.

Hyderabad's lovely historic lakes are dying. Some have shrunk while others have vanished. Surviving lakes are filled with muck. The city's once freely flowing river, the Musi, is now just a dirty drain.

This January, as part of a project, students of a school in Hyderabad collected water from the Shamirpet and the Hussainsagar. The students reported that the samples from the Shamirpet resembled the urine of a person suffering from jaundice while those from the Hussainsagar were jet black.

What a far cry this is from the days of the Qutab Shahi and Asaf Jahi rulers. Hyderabad's royalty considered building tanks and creating lakes a 'sacred activity'. The Hussainsagar, built in 1561, 30 years before the Charminar, served as a source of drinking water till 1930. The water body was famous for its aquatic life and its delicious murrel fish.

Today, make sure when you drive along Tank Bund or Necklace Road to heed the statutory warning – cover your nose with a handkerchief.

The original size of the Hussainsagar was 1,600 hectares. In 1995, imagery by the National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA) showed that it had shrunk to 416 hectares, which means three-fourths of the lake had disappeared. In May 2000, the Hyderabad Urban Development Authority (HUDA) issued a notification which said the size of the lake was 549 hectares. Environmentalists believe the satellite imagery is more authentic. They point out that the sorry state of the



Anuradha Reddy at Tank Bund



A sewage treatment plant has been built right in the Hussainsagar lake



Anamula Kunta, another water body, was converted into a dump and then 'revived' as Vengal Rao Park in Banjara Hills.

lake is due to encroachments by the government and private land sharks.

"Whether it is P.V. Narasimha Rao's Samadhi or the eateries or the Necklace Road railway station all of them have cut into the lake," says historian and environmentalist Anuradha Reddy. "The government built Necklace Road claiming it will prevent further encroachments, but the road has strangulated the lake."

Civil society groups feel building the road was just a ruse to legalise change in the use of land and promote more tourism projects along the lake. In 2001, the Andhra Pradesh High Court directed that no permanent structures should be built near the water or the catchment area of the lake but violations have been rife.

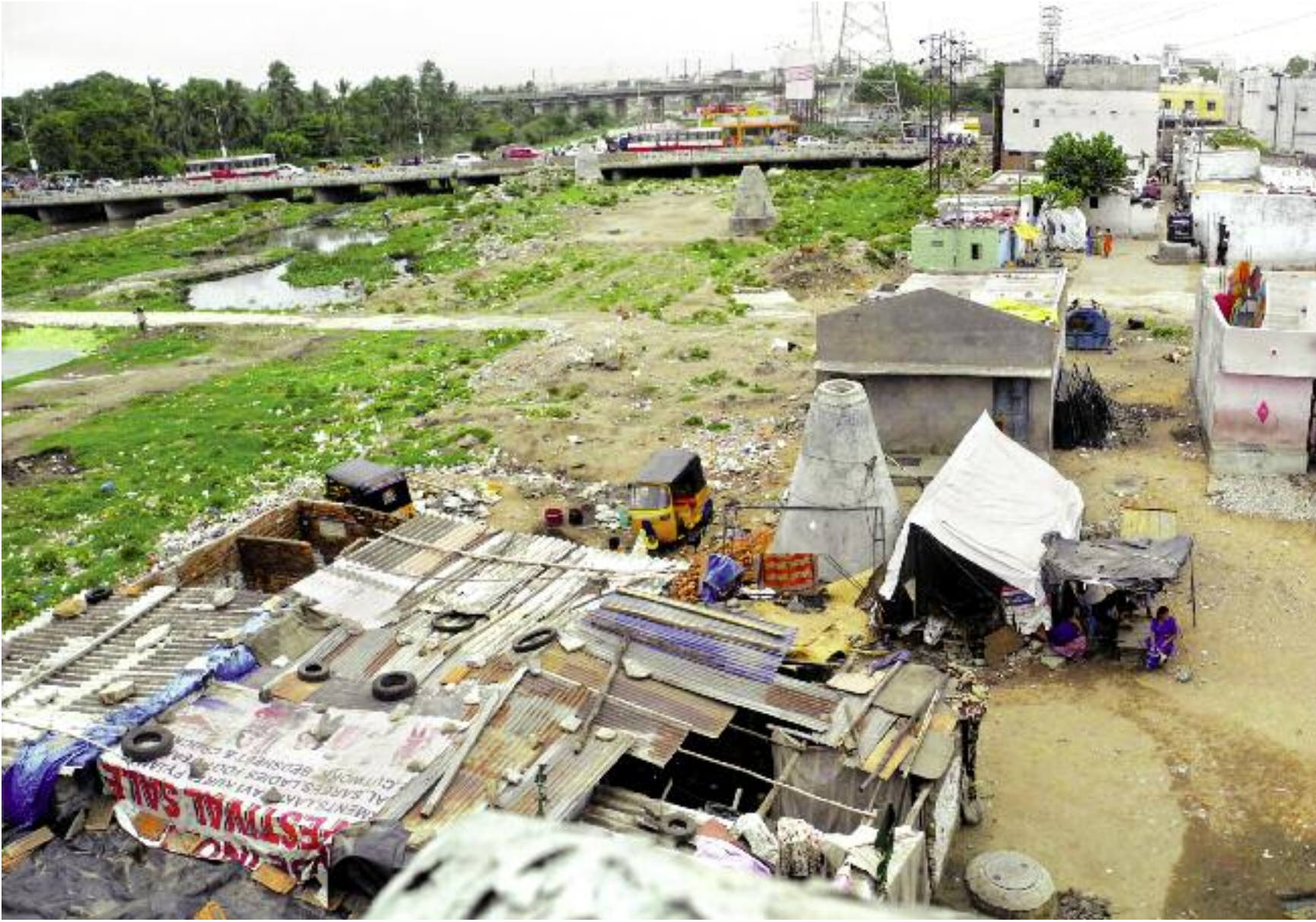
Hussainsagar at least still exists. Many other lakes have vanished under layers of concrete. Ask old timers of Hyderabad and they will tell you about the Masab Tank. It was converted into Chacha Nehru Park. The area still bears the old name and that is the only reminder of the old water body.

Anamula Kunta, another water body, was converted into a dump and then 'revived' as Vengal Rao Park in Banjara Hills. Environmentalists say this destruction is tragic since the location of the water body was very good for recharging groundwater.

Yet another lost lake is the Yousufguda Cheruvu. The municipal authorities filled it up with garbage. And next time you board a bus from the Jubilee Bus Stand in Secunderabad remember this spot was once called Picket Lake and if you care to look further down, you can still spot the sluice gates.

What's worse is the manner in which Cyberabad, the hi-tech part of Hyderabad, was developed. Several lakes were sacrificed for its construction. Former Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu 'connected' Hyderabad to the IT industry, but in the bargain disconnected the city from its natural resources. Lake beds, eyed by greedy land sharks, were converted into highrises.

"Even today, there are apartments constructed on the Durgam Cheruvu bed where you will find FTL (Full Tank Level) markings," says Anuradha Reddy. "At Dargah Cheruvu, which gets water flowing in from Durgam Cheruvu and further goes to Golconda Fort, we found a petrol bunk constructed on the lake bed. The owner was backed by a powerful individual and could never be removed."



This is what remains of the Musi river bed

The municipal authorities allotted 110 acres next to the Golconda Fort to the Hyderabad Golf Association. This area included three lakes around the Fort – Jamalikunta, Naya Qila Talab and Shatam Cheruvu. Jasveer Jairath of Save our Urban Lakes (SOUL) says while Jamalikunta has shrunk, mud is being dumped into Shatam Cheruvu.

Hyderabad's royalty created a scientific water system

Irrigation experts point out that the former rulers of Hyderabad realized that the city, located in the Deccan plateau, is in a rocky semi-arid zone. So they identified natural depressions in which rainwater accumulated and developed these into lakes and water bodies. In this way they made judicious use of the natural terrain and gradient and avoided unnecessary expenditure. What emerged was a cascading system of lakes. Water flowed from one lake to another through channels. The water that was stored was the water that was used for drinking.

Historian Mohammed Safiullah points out that the Bahmani rulers came to Golconda in 1370 from Central Asia and were therefore sensitive to the need for conserving water. "The engineers in the Qutab Shahi kingdom studied the rainfall pattern and used gravity to let the water flow," he explains.

The community saw the lakes as a resource and took care to conserve them. But as the city got overpopulated many water channels that used to carry floodwaters from one lake to the other in the catchment area were encroached upon.

The city is now threatened with water shortages and floods. In 2000, floods were caused because the holding capacity of lakes and water channels has shrunk. A swollen Hussainsagar was forced to release water downstream,

Hyderabad's royalty made judicious use of the natural terrain and gradient. What emerged was a cascading system of lakes.

flooding many low-lying areas of the city. And every monsoon, when Hyderabad receives even normal rainfall, low-lying areas get flooded since the shrunken lake cannot absorb so much water.

Environmentalist Capt J. Rama Rao says Hussainsagar's capacity at one time used to be 168,000 cu.m. "Now its capacity is much, much less. And since those surveys by NRSA and HUDA, the lake would have lost at least another 15 per cent of its area."

State government officials blame population growth for the hunger for land. The city's population has risen from 1.2 million in 1961 to 7.7 million in 2011. A lot of real estate activity has taken place along water bodies. Illegal and indiscriminate blasting has destroyed natural rock formations.

Historian Sajjad Shahid says if successive governments had developed satellite townships around Hyderabad, the city might have been spared this environmental mess.

"The government should lead by example. In this case it is the largest and most visible encroacher. To add to that, it displays lack of proper planning by not developing satellite townships which are 150 to 200 km from Hyderabad. As a result, new settlers far outnumber the original citizens of Hyderabad," says Shahid.

"I have seen a house constructed in the middle of the Ramakrishnapuram



Navin Mittal, Special Commissioner

Lake. We had to take a boat to reach the house," says Anuradha Reddy. "The owner bought the house when the lake was dry. During the rainy season when the first floor went under water, he panicked and then he wanted the water to be sucked out."

The government says it is unfair to blame it for water bodies being converted into buildings. Navin Mittal, Special Commissioner in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) and former Hyderabad Collector, says, "Unlike coastal Andhra where all natural water bodies are owned by the government, in the Telangana region it is not so. There are historically many private titles coming down from the time of the Nizam's rule."

The system followed was called 'Shikam'. It permitted the titleholder to farm on the lakebed during the dry season. Many of these titleholders sold off their rights to dubious

agents. Mir Nasir Ali Khan of MAK Projects says unplanned slums arose on these lakebeds.

"The problem is caused more by slums that occupy many of these lake beds. They are also the source of much of the pollution that gets into the lake. No developer will embark on a project unless he has all clearances in place on paper," he argues. Environmentalists say with land at a premium, it is not uncommon for government babus and builders to get together and plan real estate projects on a lakebed and share the profits.

A sewage treatment plant has been built in the Hussainsagar lake

Vanishing lakes and water bodies is one aspect of the problem. The other is the voluminous amount of sewage and other pollutants being dumped into lakes all over the city.

Four drains carry sewage into the Hussainsagar. And a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) has been built in this once pristine lake.

"The STP is just an eyewash," claims Rama Rao. "I had suggested that STPs should be set up by the administration at the point of origin to treat the water there instead of sending untreated water to the Hussainsagar STP, but that was ignored."

Rao points out that he had asked the then Hyderabad Metro Water Board chief to use the STP-treated water for gardens and toilets at the State Secretariat, just a kilometre away. "My idea was that if the quality of water wasn't good enough, VIP pressure would make it happen. But the officer asked me if I wanted him to lose his job by making such a suggestion. It was an admission that the STP was just for show."

"It was an obnoxious act to locate an STP inside the lake," fumes irrigation

engineer Krishna Rao. "The level of the lake is maintained by discharging treated wastes into it. This has, in fact, led to the wild growth of water hyacinth, breeding of mosquitoes and unbearable stench. Ultimately the lake will end up as a large sewage effluent tank in the heart of Hyderabad."

In fact, if you test the groundwater within a radius of 5 km from the Hussainsagar, you will find it extremely contaminated. Safiullah, who stays barely 800 metres from the lake, says he got his borewell water tested at a lab. He was informed that the presence of E.coli is 20 times more than the permissible limit. "They told me you can bathe with this borewell water at your own risk," he says.

The level of cadmium found in the sludge of Hussainsagar is very high due to industrial effluents from steel galvanizing and electroplating units making their way to the lake through different unmonitored drains.

And then you have the 10-day Ganesh festival. Despite several Public Interest Litigation (PIL) cases and representations to successive governments, over 30,000 idols made of Plaster of Paris and steeped in chemical paints are immersed into the lake every year. Since religious sensitivities are involved the administration prefers to look the other way.

As a result, say environmentalists, some 20,000 tonnes of Plaster of Paris and 300 tonnes of iron are dumped into the luckless lake. A survey in 2009 showed that the Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) jumped from 141 to 580 and the Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) rose from 50 to 145 after the Ganesh festival.

In the outskirts of the city the story gets murkier

The Katedan Lake beyond the Old City of Hyderabad has the misfortune of being near the Katedan Industrial Estate. Here textile dyeing and printing units, edible oil refineries and lead extraction units have mushroomed. For years they have been dumping untreated or at best diluted industrial effluents into the lake. The waters of the lake have become pink and emanate an obnoxious odour. The groundwater is badly polluted.

In fact, an agricultural university in the neighbourhood had to shut down its experimental grape fields because water from the lake had found its way into their field.

Rama Rao, who was part of the Supreme Court's monitoring committee, recalls how he was told by the owner of a textile unit that he had "10 MPs with him" and advised Rao not to waste his time there.

The state of Hyderabad's two reservoirs – Osmansagar on the Musi and Himayatsagar on the Esa, a tributary of the Musi – is no better. Despite Government Order 111, issued in March 1996, prohibiting any polluting industry or establishments within 10 km radius of the catchment of the lakes, the new Hyderabad airport has occupied 2,000 acres of Himayatsagar's catchment area. The Golconda Hotel is located on the banks of the Osmansagar. And land has been allotted for several residential projects.

"The maximum fuel consumption is during take-off and landing," points out Rama Rao. "And since the runway is aligned to Himayatsagar, the lake bears the brunt of the pollution. Besides all the oil spill on the runway is washed into the Himayatsagar. And that's the water we drink in Hyderabad."

Alarm bells rang in 2003, when both the Osmansagar and Himayatsagar reservoirs dried up within four months of each other. Satellite maps showed that the catchment area of both reservoirs had shrunk by 80 per cent! An area of 140 sq km was recognized as a 'dangerous zone' in the catchment areas of the two reservoirs.

C. Ramachandraiah of the Centre for Economic and Social Studies in Hyderabad in a report titled, 'Impact of Urban Sprawl on Water Bodies in Hyderabad' quotes a study that analysed rainfall and inflow patterns into the reservoirs over a 36-year period between 1961 and 1996.

"There was a progressive decline in the percentage of rainfall converted into inflows into the two reservoirs. In the first 18 years, both water bodies reached full reservoir levels 10 times (Osmansagar) and 11 times (Himayatsagar). But in the next 18 years, Osmansagar got full only five times and Himayatsagar six times, even though the rainfall was more or less the same during the period," says Ramachandraiah.

The study concluded that both reservoirs would go completely dry between 2036 and 2040. In the best-case scenario, the reservoirs will provide polluted water to Hyderabad.

In and around Hyderabad water has become so polluted that remedial action will take decades. Witness, for instance, the defilement of Patancheru's water bodies, just 26 km from Hyderabad.



A campaign to clean the Hussainsagar lake

Patancheru industrial area in neighbouring Medak district is a major production centre of generic drugs for the global market. Exhaustive studies on the quality of water in this industrial area by Greenpeace, foreign universities and government bodies have established that Patancheru's lakes, once famous for being rich in marine life, are now practically dead. Thousands of acres of agricultural land in villages in and around Patancheru have been rendered fallow due to unchecked effluents being dumped into these lakes by industries.

The government claimed all was well. In 2006, the University of Gothenburg in Sweden undertook an exhaustive study to corroborate the government's claims. The university's scientists analysed treated wastewater from the STP installed in Patancheru.

They found a cocktail of antibiotics in the water good enough to cure just about any ailment in the human body. Pharmaceutical units have become Patancheru's killer industry. The groundwater is severely contaminated. People suffer from various types of cancers and undiagnosed ailments.

The pharma units not only cause local mayhem but affect the health of people living downstream as well. The so-called 'treated' effluents from the Patancheru effluent treatment plant are discharged through municipal sewers to another STP and then partly into the Musi.

Once a river the Musi is now a dirty drain

By the time the Musi passes through Hyderabad, the city that arose on its banks, it is no more a river. The 20 km stretch it traverses through the city reduces it to a dirty drain.

Water samples collected from groundwater near the river and surface water contain high levels of lead, chromium, mercury and arsenic, according to a CAG report of 2001. Fish from the river and vegetables grown on the banks of the river would be contaminated too.

Veteran badminton coach and Dronacharya award winner S M Arif, who has spent his life in Hyderabad recalls that 35 years ago the Musi was a running river, full of life. "I remember during the monsoons there would be crowds on the bridges across the Musi to see the river in full flow. If you bent down, you could touch the water and it was good quality water too," he says.

Arif points out ever since Hyderabad became a concrete jungle its micro-climate has changed. The city no longer has a temperate climate.

Successive governments have looked at the river only from the real estate point of view. For instance, the Telugu Desam government's Nandanavanam

project conceived in the 1990s, reduced the width of the river. The flood fury of 2000 washed away all ongoing works undertaken on the Musi. The Congress government embarked on a 'Save the Musi' project in 2005-06 at an estimated cost of Rs 355 crore in Phase I and setting up of STPs in Phase II at a cost of ₹750 crore.

"I agree that sewage that flows into the Musi kills the river. Which is why we hope the number of STPs that are getting commissioned will solve the problem," says Navin Mittal.

Rama Rao however points out that just building additional STPs will not control Musi's pollution. "If Musi and water bodies in and around Hyderabad are to be protected, the industries, mainly the bulk drug units, should be made

to treat the effluents at source and not when they are being dumped into the river. Heavy penalties should be imposed on all polluters," he says.

Without lakes, arid Hyderabad will die

Predictably the end result of this water mess is beginning to tell on the quality of life in Hyderabad. The groundwater table is rapidly showing a downward spiral, by about 20 m in some areas. The summer of 2012 is expected to be terrible, thanks also to less than normal rainfall last year. Peak summer is two months away yet tankers have started doing their rounds in many residential localities in Hyderabad, Secunderabad and Cyberabad.

There is no coordinated attempt by the government and concerned citizens to resolve Hyderabad's looming water disaster. Politicians are eyeing the Krishna river as a solution to Hyderabad's water woes. Environmentalists condemn this idea as selfish and insensitive. It means authorities and land sharks will get away with destroying Hyderabad's water bodies. And neighbouring districts like Nalgonda will be deprived of their share of Krishna river water.

City planners say the concept of 24 hours water supply is not practical in Hyderabad. Groups like SOUL say whatever remains of Hyderabad's water bodies must be protected urgently otherwise the city will go dry even in the non-summer months.

In 2004, HUDA had announced a ₹300 crore project with aid from the Japan Bank International Cooperation (JBIC) to prevent pollution of the Hussainsagar. It even announced that by 2010, pollution in the lake would become history. That hasn't happened and in fact environmentalists are angry that the project is encroaching on the lake area.

"All the dumping of mud is happening in the lake," complains Jasveer Jairath. "Does it have court sanction? The STP that is being built is again on the lakebed. More harm is being done to the lake."

Almost everyone concurs there is no way water bodies in and around Hyderabad can be restored to their pristine glory. Safiullah says the municipal authorities need to take a leaf from history.

"In January 1922 the entire water of Hussainsagar was taken out and the lake bed was desilted. It was then refilled with fresh rainwater. That needs to be done once again," he says.

Another proposal is that instead of taking up lakes for restoration at random, an entire chain of interconnected lakes should be built once again. Hyderabad needs to study its past to secure its future. ■

Business

□ Enterprise

□ Inclusion

□ CSR

□ ICT

□ Go Green

Helping women scale up

Entrepreneurs get midlife advice at BIMTECH

Civil Society News
Noida (UP)

SEVEN years ago, Vijay Laxmi got the sister of her newspaper vendor hitched to a young man in Punjab. It was just one of those chance things. The girl's parents weren't too well off. The boy was earning around ₹20,000 a month and wasn't very successful in finding a bride. She got the two families together.

Vijay Laxmi is now a successful matchmaker. She describes herself as 'Director' of Milan Matrimonial, which she owns and runs from her home in Punjabi Bagh in West Delhi. Her visiting card has two roses and two wedding rings on it.

She earns as much as her husband who is in the real estate business. It is a fact she likes, but admits to after some prodding because that is not the kind of positioning she is as yet comfortable with.

She discovered she could be a matchmaker just like that – one case at a time. It was her growing phone bill that prompted her husband to ask what she was up to!

With only a basic college degree, Vijay Laxmi was resigned to being a homemaker. But she found she had the heart and warmth for arranging marriages. It came naturally. In fact, she gets so involved with families looking for brides and grooms that she sometimes ends up not taking her fees.

"It is difficult not getting swayed. I get a lot of love and affection from the families. It is not always such a good thing because when it becomes all so personal I sometimes lose out on my fees. But in the end bills have to be paid," she says.

So, to shape up the business side of her life, Vijay Laxmi enrolled in a course for women entrepreneurs at the Birla Institute of Management Technology (BIMTECH).

The course is part of a global initiative called 10,000 Women by Goldman Sachs, the investment management firm based in New York. The Indian School of Business (ISB) is the India academic partner and BIMTECH is the academic partner for the National Capital Region and Uttar Pradesh.

Goldman Sachs' intention is to promote economic development by improving the business education of women. The programme fosters partnerships between education, development and business experts.

Women like Vijay Laxmi have taken the plunge with an idea and shown that it can work, but they don't know how to get to the next stage of their businesses.

Some of the gaps they struggle with are very basic, like keeping books of accounts, looking for finance and shaping marketing strategies. These are things they never bothered with in the first rush of excitement while

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



Vijay Laxmi built Milan Matrimonial from her home



Taruna Ummatt runs an animation company



Manjula Mishra manufactures holograms

becoming entrepreneurs.

Their enterprises give them empowerment and equality. But they look around them and find that there is more that they could be doing. Vijay Laxmi, for instance, is very impressed by *Band, Bajaa Aur Baraat*, the hit Hindi film about two young successful wedding planners. Like the entrepreneurs in the film, she, too, wants to scale up.

"I am here to learn about business development. I have no knowledge about how to run a business. All that I have done has come from within,"

she says. "It is perhaps because of my sincerity that the business is successful. But now I need to understand systems and how to deal with clients."

Taruna Ummatt has altogether different social roots from Vijay Laxmi. She is westernized, speaks English fluently and wears a suit. She is the CEO of Morph Technologies and the Gecko Animation Studio. But her needs are no different from Vijay Laxmi's.

Seven years ago she gave up a job with an animation company to set up her own enterprise in animation together with a friend. They put ₹20 lakhs together as capital. With ambition getting the better of them, they took office space in South Delhi.

But the animation industry had just hit big time. So, though their timing was perfect, they weren't prepared for the demands that would be made on them. The ₹20 lakhs of capital was just about enough to put some basic infrastructure in place. Animation requires, among other things, hardware, which is expensive.

"When you start out and put your infrastructure together your money is gone before you realize it. That is when the trouble begins," recalls Ummatt. "You don't know what to do. There are people waiting for their salaries. There is a huge rent staring at you."

Faced with mounting expenses for advertising



Abha Rishi, course director

and marketing, she and her partner turned to debt.

"Our story turned really sad at this point. You know, when you raise money through loans it can kill you," says Ummatt looking back on that time. "Whatever you begin earning after that goes into paying off the debt."

But they got lucky and roped in a few investors and became debt-free. Seven years later they have a paid up capital of ₹2 crore, there are 30 employees and revenues of ₹15 lakhs a month.

Ummatt says she opted for the course at BIMTECH because she felt that she needed fresh thinking to exploit the opportunities that animation offers.

"In seven years we have scaled up a lot. We invest hugely in our business by hiring people and buying technology. But I also feel I'm on a treadmill: running, running, running."

"Animation as a business is huge. It is as big as Hollywood." Ummatt explains. "But we are so small and there are things that we need to do to get ahead and take the business to another level."

"I don't have any structured knowledge about accounts. I don't know anything about finance. Yet I'm the person handling all these things in my company," she says.

"I've been there and done that. It has been seven years of trial and error," she says. "I don't want to spend another seven years figuring out things the hard way. I want it to be faster. For me a course like this gives me that opportunity."

The 10,000 Women programme seeks to satisfy such requirements. Entrepreneurs with five years or so behind them and around ₹1 crore in turnover are most likely to pause, reassess their positions and seek new ways forward.

Survival is not the issue. The early bouts of nervousness over running an enterprise are also behind them. What they now want is to put struc-

tures in place, scale up and increase profitability.

The programme is for 16 weeks. It alternates between classroom teaching and mentoring. Each entrepreneur gets a mentor who helps her relate what she learns in class to the realities of the business she manages.

The programme seems to have an inbuilt flexibility of design, which seems to make it work for different women entrepreneurs.

Manjula Mishra, for instance, has a company which manufactures holograms. It is called Holosafe Security Labels and is a private limited company in which she and her husband, who has the technical knowledge, hold all the equity.

Mishra did an MBA course many years ago. She is now at BIMTECH to refresh herself. "I'm hoping to take away financial tools, marketing tools which I can apply in my business," she says.

She is measured and in control as we speak. A quiet sense of purpose resonates from her. Perhaps that comes from her work experience. She used to manage the Delhi office of an agrochemicals company before she went into business with her husband.

Mishra also has a public role. She is the chairperson of the Noida chapter of the Indian Industries Association.

But she sees in the 10,000 Women programme an opportunity to pick up new ideas through interaction. It is great opportunity to bond with women in roughly the same bandwidth.

Mishra's business is a little over five years old. The turnover is around ₹60 lakhs in a year. That is the kind of mid-life crisis in an enterprise when the founders begin to run out of steam. Ideas and strategies begin to feel stale.

There was also a careful screening of applicants so as to get a good mix and have only those people in who were most likely to benefit.

"It all started with a simple email which came from ISB saying they were looking for a partner in Uttar Pradesh and the National Capital Region for this initiative by Goldman Sachs. BIMTECH has always been interested in social causes and promoting inclusion. It believes in the empowerment of women. So we wrote back saying we were interested," says Rishi.

What followed was a lengthy process of documentation and selection. There were many institutions, including IIM Lucknow, which had applied.

"It was a competitive process through which BIMTECH was chosen," says Rishi.

After that it was the students at BIMTECH who got involved and began marketing the course by word of mouth.

"We used social media but no traditional media was used to advertise the course," says Rishi.

Finally, there were 125 applicants from which 25 had to be chosen.

"The main criterion for choosing a women entrepreneur was her passion to grow," says Rishi. "Goldman Sachs also asks for preference to be given to underserved women – those who wouldn't be able to get a management education through their own means."

BIMTECH has been a natural choice because it has tried to innovate with its management courses. BIMTECH's Director, Dr Harivansh Chaturvedi, is known to insist on a social orientation to the courses his institute offers. He encourages professors and students to bond with voluntary organizations and understand social movements. ■

Insights

- Opinion
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- Ideas
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Let the Jarawas decide

ZUBAIR AHMED

SELDOM has a news item published in a British newspaper created such a furor in India and that too over a group of less than 400 people in an obscure corner of this country. The release of video footage showing members of the protected Jarawa tribe in the Andaman Islands dancing for tourists has succeeded in creating an outrage across India. Predictably, it triggered the familiar ritual of blame-game, investigations by bureaucrats, political visits, media coverage and protests

by activists. The drama ended lamely with the Superintendent of Police arresting two people. Are we at the end of the hullabaloo created? Those concerned about the Jarawas think otherwise.

The questions raised by them before the controversy erupted remain unanswered. The debate on whether to include the Jarawas in the mainstream or not has, in fact, become more complicated, despite the storm that brought the issue to the fore.

Union Tribal Affairs Minister, Krishna Chandra

Deo, stated soon after the uproar that he is in favour of gradual inclusion. He also said that the Jarawas lead a beastly life in the forests.

This is the crux of the crisis that the Jarawas are facing today. Their life is being debated at various forums without a comprehensive understanding of the ground reality. How did the minister reach the conclusion that the Jarawas lead a beastly life? If a minister who is mandated to protect their interests says such frivolous things, how can one expect a

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Continued from page 27

fair assessment in his decision?

"The Jarawas should decide their own pace, which may take many years. The Government has no plans of imposing anything on them," said the Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram on the final day of his visit to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in January this year. Refusing to meet the Jarawas and disturbing them in any manner, he met residents of the villages that border the Jarawa reserve as well as staff of the quasi-government organization, Andaman Aadim Janjathi Vikas Samithi (AAJVS), that looks after matters pertaining to the primitive tribes of the Islands.



A road brings people and stalls to a restricted area

An independent investigation by a local weekly, *The Light of Andamans*, found that the video of the Jarawa girls being asked to dance in return for food was shot over three years ago at a location about 8 km from Jirkatang on the Andaman Trunk Road, known as Chowdhary Gumai; and that defence personnel were involved in the incident.

The bone of contention behind the entire video episode is the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR) that connects the district of South Andaman and the capital of Port Blair with the more sparsely populated North & Middle Andaman District. In May 2002, the Supreme Court had ordered closure of two stretches of Andaman Trunk Road, of 43 km and 13 km length each, which will divide the road into three sections, with the objective of preventing trespass into the Jarawa Tribal Reserve.

The Supreme Court order is yet to be implemented.

Today, tourists travel on the ATR to 'observe' the Jarawas, breaching the law of the land. Even after the shameful incident, reports that some travel companies are still offering titillating trips to remote areas to see the indigenous people (read tribals) continue to filter in.

Such incidents, and the righteous indignation that follows, promptly shifts focus to the debate

on mainstreaming the Jarawas.

Without any outside intervention, the Jarawas today lead a satisfied and content life. The notion that 'we' are privileged and the Jarawas are not is a faulty one. The Jarawas are a mature community, leading a sustainable life in their forest reserve of 1208 sq kms with an adequate food resource base – for now. Unchecked plundering of their forest resources by poachers, local and foreign, if continued unabated, is far more likely to threaten their survival by depleting their resource base. The agitated debates have detracted attention from the pressing matter of addressing the increasing interaction between the Jarawas in the area of Tirur and the villagers residing in the villages at the borders of the Reserve. Many incidents of poaching and trespass go unnoticed; and when culprits are apprehended, political pressures are exerted for their release. In the same vein, though, they harp about the mainstreaming of Jarawas.

The Jarawas, who still lead a sustainable nomadic existence, frequently travel from one section of the Reserve to another, often crossing the ATR on the way. They stay at temporary chaddas (Jarawa huts) along the way. The unsuspecting travellers on the ATR occasionally see the Jarawas for this reason.

For over five decades now, policy makers have been formulating Island development policies despite poor understanding of the needs of the Primitive Tribal Groups. Concrete efforts to sensitize the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and resident communities on the stated Jarawa Policy have not been taken. Feasibility reports on the assessment of alternate viable modes of transportation to close the ATR as per the Supreme Court order have not been completed as required. The present generation of educated youth on the Islands is aware that a political solution is virtually impossible without increased risk to the very survival of the Jarawas. A judicial solution is more likely, but its implementation has been delayed by the Administration. Crucial time has been wasted by the Administration in not working simultaneously on creating infrastructure and facilities which would

have caused less resentment among the communities living at the other end of the ATR, in the event of the ATR actually being closed.

An intelligent tribe which has lived for centuries in their forests is now at the crossroads. Numbering about 400 at present, there has been an increase in their population in the last decade. Their numbers have increased not because they started mingling with the 'mainstream', but because they are still protected from the invasion of the outside world.

Assimilation of the Jarawas is just a façade to continue our benevolent dominance of a tribe that is unfamiliar with our way of life. We forget that the line between assimilation and annihilation is very thin. Gradual inclusion is inevitable, but who are we to define the timeframe?

In a recent development on the much-debated issue of extending the buffer zone at the fringes of the present Jarawa Reserve, the Supreme Court on 3 February appointed a team of two lawyers to visit the islands and look into the matter. They have been ordered to submit a report to the Court within the next six weeks. This, when their order of 2002 is yet to be implemented. The Jarawas, oblivious to the storm created on their behalf, would perhaps have been amused. ■

Charkha Features

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Bt is a global pest

KANCHI KOHLI

MANY regions in Asia and Africa witnessed the 'official' inroad of genetically modified cotton aka Monsanto's Bt Cotton, into farmers' fields in the first few years of the new millennium. A decade later, countless stories are being recounted of crop failure, regulatory discontent and corporate unaccountability.

On 16 and 17 January an Afro-Asian Conclave held in Hyderabad brought together farmers, agricultural scientists, lawyers, NGOs and concerned citizens from West Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia to collectively imagine a world free of genetically engineered (GE) crops. Organised by Southern Action on Genetic Engineering (SAGE) and Deccan Development Society (DDS), the theme of the conclave was, 'Bt Cotton and Beyond: Status and Implications of GE Crops and post GE Technologies for Small Farmers in Africa and Asia.'

The conclave was attended by participants from Benin, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire (all in West Africa), Canada, Burma, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines besides Indian participants from several states. At the end of the meeting, the participants called for renewed Asian-African Solidarity to prevent the spread of GE technology and ideology.

Solidarity emerged after a range of issues, concerns and thoughts were discussed and participants drew parallels and learnt from each others real life situations. Broadly, there were five themes which emerged as major trends and caused common concerns.

The first set concerned the politics of genetic modification. It was noted that GE crops and foods are introduced in a very strategic manner in different regions. In some countries this has happened clandestinely. In countries like Indonesia, for instance, GE has been thrust upon people. Open public-private-partnerships including those being pushed by inter-governmental processes are playing a major role in making this possible. The Indo-US Knowledge Agreement on Agriculture in India and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in West Africa were two important examples which were cited.

Interestingly, the GE industry is essentially targeting two kinds of crops – main food crops and commercial export crops. The main food crops are staples like rice, corn, wheat, cassava, brinjal, sorghum etc. The main commercial export crops are those on which the livelihoods of farmers and national revenues depend, like cotton, for instance. The intention, said many participants from Africa, is to control food production, consumption and distribution by controlling seeds and food markets.

GE is being hardsold to countries with the 'convincing' argument that it will lead to increased yields, ensure pest control, reduce pesticides and allow for nutritional supplements in food. The



Protest against Bt brinjal

It was noted that GE crops and foods are introduced in a very strategic manner. In some countries this has happened clandestinely. In Indonesia, for instance, GE has been thrust upon people.

most 'clinging' and 'benevolent' of these iterations are those which claim GE is the solution to feed the large number of hungry people across the world. Ironically, this claim resonates with the Green Revolution assertions – except that this time it will lead to greater private control of food and farming.

There was also a debate around the '(Non) Science of GM.' It was emphatically stated that GM is not a science but a mere technological application. Moreover, it is against organic evolution, biodiversity, farmers, and food sovereignty. GM seeks to merge genes of species which would have never mated naturally. It is a fallacy of sci-

ence that the impact of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) can be contained and they will not contaminate farms which are cultivating crops with traditional seeds. It is against basic biological logic since natural pollinators don't know regulatory boundaries or physical fences as is being proposed through 'biosafety' regulations in different countries.

A crucial part of experience sharing were discussions on the impacts and failures of various GM crops. Participants from Indonesia pointed out that in 2001, according to data presented by the Head of Plantation Office of South Sulawesi, about 74 percent of the area planted with transgenic cotton in South Sulawesi had a productivity of less than one tonne per hectare. Not surprisingly, the company blamed the farmers and claimed they could not take care of transgenic crops.

What is ironic is that impacts and failures are sought to be resolved through 'creation and extension regulation of GMOs.' Dr. P.M. Bhargava, eminent scientist and member of India's Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) said that there are six elements of biosafety regulations which are essential but most of them are missing in older or newly proposed laws. These are – needs assessment, assessment of alternatives, biosafety tests, liability laws, labeling laws and ensuring that the vendors of GM technology or seeds do not become regulators themselves. Other

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Born to die

KAVITA KUMARI

INDIA is now officially the world's most dangerous place for the girl child. This appalling news, substantiated with new data released by the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, immediately hit the headlines. But disappearing girls is not a new phenomenon. Over the years, India has attracted global attention for its preference for the male child. The country has not only retained the infamy but has gone on to become the world leader in this horrible trend.

The question is, despite several efforts invested by the Indian government at national and state level, why are we unable to arrest this trend? Why is the situation worsening despite laws to prevent female foeticide and numerous schemes to encourage families to have girl children? The answer reveals a truly dark picture of what goes on within the four walls of a home.

Female infanticide has existed long before sonography and abortion techniques arrived in India. Today, insensitive people of the same school of thought have devised new methods of putting a stop to the lives of young infants. And they are not dependant on doctors or machines.

On the freezing morning of 17 December, I witnessed a ghastly incident which so far I had read about only in newspapers or heard on TV. That day, the garbage dump in my neighbourhood became the graveyard for a newborn baby who was ferociously being wolfed down by canines, that too, in front of several "human beings". By the time I reached the site, the dogs had already ripped off the body of the baby. For a moment, everything around me came to a halt and later the inevitable feeling of vulnerability, agitation and melancholy overwhelmed me into frozen inaction. How could anyone do this to their own child?

I informed a local news channel in the hope that the police will follow them. But much to my surprise they came, shot the video and left saying "we have covered the news, thank you." No action was taken and that hapless newborn became simply another 'breaking news' item.

This is not an isolated case. Pick up any newspaper around you and there are numerous such cases reported – a mentally ill father drowning his girl child in a drain in Delhi and a two-month old

girl found abandoned in Haryana.

Each state in the country, it seems, has chillingly evolved its own unique ways of killing baby girls – drowning the infant in a bucket of milk, feeding her salt or burying her alive in an earthen pot are few of the "easier" methods used to get rid of the baby.



Each state in the country, it seems, has chillingly evolved its own unique ways of killing baby girls – drowning the infant in a bucket of milk, feeding her salt or burying her alive in an earthen pot.

While visiting areas where female infanticide is practiced in India, Gita Aravamudan, author of the book, *Disappearing Daughters*, observed that traditional methods of female infanticide can often be traced successfully, enabling investigations to be launched against the perpetrators.

According to Aravamudan: "[To avoid arrest]

families adopt more torturous methods of killing [infant girls]... inducing pneumonia was the modern method. The infant was wrapped in a wet towel or dipped in cold water as soon as it was born or when it came back home from the hospital. If, after a couple of hours, it was still alive, it was taken to a doctor who would diagnose pneumonia and prescribe medicines which the parents promptly threw away. When the child finally died, the parents had a medical certificate to prove pneumonia. Sometimes the infant was fed a drop of alcohol to create diarrhoea – another 'certifiable disease.'"

This is the level where human sensitivity has stooped today.

The PCPNDT (Preconception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act) Act 1994, was modified in 2003 to target the medical profession. What we have achieved or not achieved by our laws is reflected in current statistics. Much hard work has gone into researching the reasons behind such cruel acts. Social and economic factors were found to play a crucial role. During her research, Aravamudan found that there was a strong link between female foeticide and wealth, education, success of family planning and medical progress.

What makes the fight harder is the involvement of fairly educated people. No law can change the mindset of people which education has failed to alter. Does this situation indicate a hopeless future? If this trend of killing the girl child, inside or outside the womb continues the entire country will bear the consequences.

More than education, we need to create awareness on the issue in every state, in every region. Community efforts are required to bring about that change which no law or education has succeeded in bringing till now. Women themselves need to come forward and fight for the rights of their girl child. Men should participate equally in the cause. If not taken seriously, the day is not far off when no girl will be available – no daughter, wife, sister or friend. A boy from Haryana bringing a girl from Orissa to get married due to a scarcity of girls in his region is just the beginning. ■

Charkha Features

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participants pointed out that public consultations and consent is completely missing from regulatory processes across the two continents.

The manner in which GM regulation is being encouraged is suspect. Francis M. Ngang from COPAGEN in West Africa warned participants that there seems to be a hidden agenda in putting biosafety regulations into place. The process is being supported by agencies like the World Bank and USAID which endorse GMOs. He said that establishing regulation is seen as a means of facilitating the entry of GM crops into regions. It tram-

ples on the sovereignty of local and national governments which can otherwise decide to reject GMOs altogether.

There are also new and emerging threats on the horizon – genetically modified animals, nanotechnology, synthetic biology and geo-engineering. Lucy Sharratt from CBAN, Canada, emphatically stated that 'Enviropig' and GM Atlantic Salmon are seriously being considered for introduction in Canada. Neth Dano from the ETC Group in the Philippines raised concerns about the invention of geo-engineered trees. GE too had been shrugged off as science fiction and it

became a reality, she warned. She noted that nanotechnology is already in our lives – take sunscreen, for instance.

Finally, the only hope in building these solidarities is growing resistance against GE and GMOs by farmers and citizens all over the world. There are efforts to declare GM Free Zones in the Philippines and in Indian cities such as Mysore in Karnataka. There are also consumer awareness campaigns. The movement against GM is intensifying. ■

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

Living

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

Chalti ka naam Sudha Car

Model-T becomes office in wacky museum

T S Sudhir
Hyderabad

KANYABOYINA Sudhakar's instructions on how to get to his car museum were pretty crisp. "Just before you reach the traffic intersection, look to your right. You will see a cycle. That's the entrance to the Sudha Cars Museum."

I wondered how a humble cycle had become a landmark for a car museum. That is till I came face to face with the largest tricycle in the world parked in the courtyard of Sudha Cars Museum. I understood then why this gigantic cycle is Sudhakar's calling card.

Standing 41 feet and seven inches tall, with a length of 37 feet and four inches, this tricycle was

unveiled by Sudhakar in July 2005 and it pedalled its way right into the Guinness Book of World Records. Big was beautiful, but most unwieldy. "No other creation of mine has given me as much trouble as this tricycle," confesses Sudhakar. "I must have failed some 50 times while putting it together. It weighs three tonnes and was very tough to move."

PICTURES BY ANIL KUMAR



Kanyaboyina Sudhakar in his office

A group of amazed tourists were making their way out. "How did he make such different kinds of vehicles," I overheard one of them wonder aloud. On an average, the museum gets about 700 visitors and 99 per cent of them pop the same query to Sudhakar.

True to his image as a creator of wacky automobiles, 49-year-old Sudhakar works out of a Ford 1908 Model T car placed in his office. He asks me to count till 10 and by the time I say five, the car is converted magically into a table. Adding to the ambience is a huge picture in the background of Henry Ford in Detroit in 1908 when he started the assembly line production of his car.

Sudhakar's favourite *adda* is the Bahadurpura area of Hyderabad in the vicinity of his museum. It is home to nearly 50 scrap dealers who sell discarded metal by weight. To Sudhakar's discerning eye not all of it is scrap. He rummages through the stuff, takes his pick, seeing potential that no one else can.

With a glint in his eye, Sudhakar points to the wheels of his Ford car-cum-table. He says he chanced upon the original wheels of the car in the junkyard of a scrap dealer. He bought all seven wheels for ₹300 each.

Henry Ford would have been proud to recline on Sudhakar's sofa. It has been converted from a Ford model whose wheels and mudguard he found with another junk dealer. A table in the centre is a 1927 Austin of England differential and suspension. A 1937 Willy's gearbox has been converted into a pedestal lamp while a 1932 Buffalo gasoline petrol pump from the USA is now a cutlery cupboard in Sudhakar's office. A 1930 Lagonda Tourer Horn completes the picture.

"The trick is to enter every junk dealer's shop and scout for material. To him it is just junk iron that he will sell it at ₹46 per kg. At these shops you can get classic vintage stuff, from rail engines to cars to trucks, even old private aeroplanes," says Sudhakar, the excitement of such serendipitous discovery palpable in his voice.

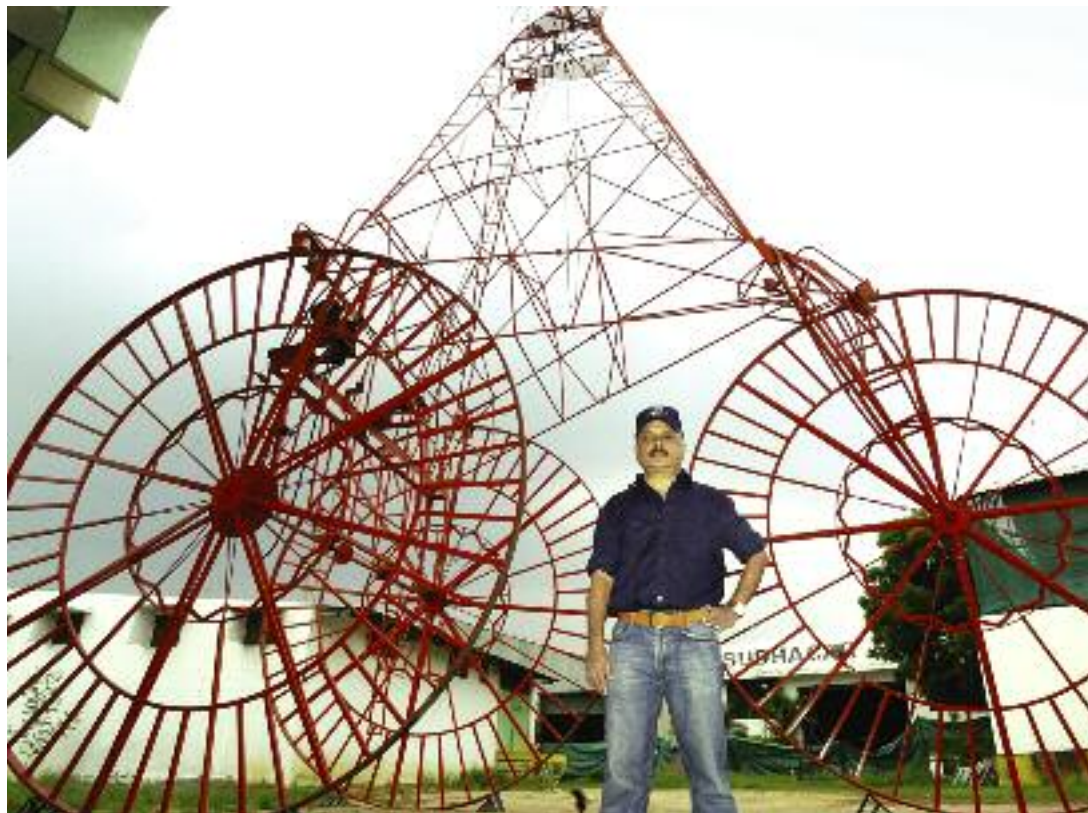
It was as a teenager that Sudhakar took to visiting scrap dealers and the Sunday market near the Charminar. Now three decades later, Sudhakar's yen for old-world automobile accessories is the city's worst kept secret. Dealers like Saleem approach him with stuff they know he would be interested in.

"He pays more than what we would get in the market," says Saleem. "And there is the thrill of knowing the junk will become part of some fancy vehicle and find a place in the museum."

Sudhakar points to the latest vehicle assembled at his museum – a 1941 Chevrolet Truck. "I found it lying in a junkyard some six months ago. The original Dunlop tyres and upholstery were intact although the engine and gearbox had been sold. I bought it for ₹36,000 although selling it by weight would have got the dealer only ₹28,000 rupees." The vintage truck with a fresh coat of paint, is now a much sought-after backdrop for photo-ops at the entrance to the museum.

Inside the museum, a guide regales visitors with details about every out-of-the-box creation. There is the cricket bat car that Sudhakar made to cheer the Indian cricket team in the 2007 World Cup. Unveiled by Kapil Dev, this creation is one of Sudhakar's costliest at ₹80,000.

Then there is the golf ball car, the cricket ball



The huge tricycle at the museum's entrance



Cars in all shapes and sizes

car, the tennis ball car, the golf ball car and the basketball car. There is a car for every occasion and it would seem Sudhakar produces cars straight out of his thinking cap.

On Valentine's Day Sudhakar create a Valentine mug car. On Christmas Day he played Santa Claus and unveiled a Christmas tree cycle. A lotus car using a Maruti car as the base was presented to the late Sai Baba of Puttaparthi on his 75th birthday. The football car was unveiled closer to the last World Cup Soccer. The autorickshaw engine-powered snooker table was built on the occasion of the 2009 World Snooker Championship. "You can drive it even while you play on it," boasts Sudhakar.

What makes Sudhakar's creations unique is that *chalti ka naam* is truly *gaadi*. Sudhakar personally drives each of his cars on the roads of Hyderabad to

prove to sceptics that they are not mere showpieces. Of course, he cannot drive these unusual beauties to work, given the traffic-stoppers they are.

Though Sudhakar has refused to sell any of his vehicles, he has tied up with government agencies to convert his cars and bikes into vehicles for social messaging. He has invented a cigarette car for the health department, a helmet car for Hyderabad Traffic Police and a condom bike for the AIDS Control Society.

The universal reaction to his cars is astonishment, wonder, excitement and squeals of delight. After all, it is not every day that you see a brinjal car or a commode car breezing its way down Hyderabad's roads. Or watch a computer car zip down to Hi-Tech city in Hyderabad.

Sudhakar remembers his first foray into the

Bangladesh's holocaust



The hamburger car



The helmet car

world of automobiles when as a student of Class 10 he redesigned a Yezdi 250 cc bike that now occupies the pride of place in his museum. But then you don't need a post-graduate degree to master the subject you love.

Although Sudhakar studied commerce, students from engineering colleges across the country line up at his museum to understand what goes into making these fascinating machines that are the products of one man's passion and hard work.

Automobile history excites Sudhakar. He bought India's first car, built by Hindustan in 1947, complete with its cow mascot from its owner for ₹50,000.

Sudhakar confesses that following his passion has only been possible because his family runs Golden Press, one of Andhra Pradesh's most successful industrial printing presses. So he didn't really have to worry about earning his bread and butter, he says. His father gave him the freedom to fiddle around with steering wheels, brakes and gears. He did not disapprove when Sudhakar used his money to buy scrap.

Sudhakar has four craftsmen who are mechanics, welders and engineers rolled into one. They have given shape to Sudhakar's ideas for the last 20 years. As we enter the workshop, they are tinkering away trying to fashion a ladies handbag car. The outcome would tempt any lady.

Also in the pipeline are a stiletto car, a pressure cooker car and a lipstick bike. His wife and 13-year-old daughter ordered this series of cars, grins Sudhakar.

His office table has a stack of jewellery magazines. They are research material for a jewellery train, whose idea has been flagged off in his mind, he explains.

The creator of 160 automobiles, Sudhakar now plans to drive an elephant car on the roads of Hyderabad. This car will be eight and a half feet tall, says Sudhakar. The king of souped-up cars will soon be lording over the city's traffic. ■



FREEDOM'S MOTHER

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Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

FORTY years after Bangladesh achieved its independence, the scars of a genocide that has few parallels in history remain. Despite India's widely acclaimed role in freeing East Pakistan from the ruthless military rulers of West Pakistan, the story of Bangladesh's bloody birth seems to have been forgotten here as well.

Many young Bangladeshi writers and valiant freedom fighters have taken up the challenge of recounting the terrifying events of that time. Among them, writer Tahmima Anam created ripples with her debut novel, *A Golden Age*, followed by *The Good Muslim*.

The most recent addition to this new wave of writing in Bangladesh is Anisul Hoque moving book, *Freedom's Mother*, a translation of his best-selling Bengali literary work *Ma*. Hoque is deputy editor of Bangladesh's leading daily, *Prothom Alo*. His book was launched at the India International Centre in New Delhi on 4 February.

Freedom's Mother is a graphic account of the heavy price ordinary people paid for Bangladesh's independence. Safia Begum is the central figure of the story. She is an epitome of courage, strength and endurance in the face of tragedy. When her husband marries for the second time she prefers to walk out of the family's huge mansion in Dhaka with her young son Azad, rather than face humiliation.

As a single mother, she struggles to bring up her son. When violent protests erupt in East Pakistan against the ruling military junta headed by Yahya Khan, Azad joins the freedom struggle as a guerrilla. Safia Begum does not deter him from his mission. Taken captive by the army during a

raid on their home, Azad refuses to break his silence on the whereabouts of his comrades. His anguished spirit does not give way despite brutal torture by his interrogators. Safia meets him in captivity and tells him not to give away his friends, knowing only too well that his fate will be sealed.

While Bangladesh celebrates its freedom, the grieving Safia ends her days 14 years after the Pakistani soldiers took Azad way.

At the launch of *Freedom's Mother* in Delhi, a visibly moved Hoque told *Civil Society*, that his work is based on a true story. It took him a year to research Safia and Azad's life stories. Other freedom fighters, friends and relatives of Azad provided information. Zayed, Azad's younger cousin who is an important character in the book, was a valuable source of information. He cried, he says, when he handed over the relevant documents to the Muktiyuddho Jadughar (Liberation War Museum) in Dhaka.

Hoque narrates Azad's story in a gripping style that combines a journalist's eye for historical detail with the lyricism of a writer. He has authored 15 novels, a collection of poems and

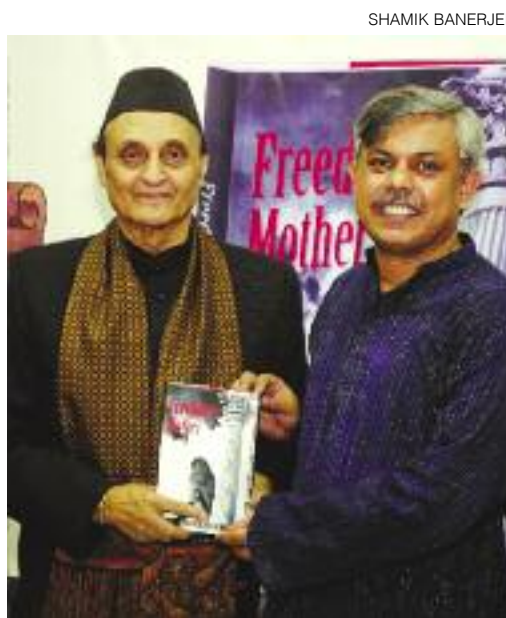
much non-fiction in Bengali. The best seller *Ma* from which *Freedom's Mother* has been translated will soon run into 50 editions.

A subsequent panel discussion on "Freedom: A Metaphor for a Collective Dream," was chaired by notable scholar and politician Dr Karan Singh, with three speakers – Tariq A Karim, Bangladesh High Commissioner to India, J S Sharma, who was a commissioned officer of the Indian Army in the Eastern Sector in 1971 and Dr

Chandan Mitra, MP, editor-in-chief of *The Pioneer* and now a voluble TV personality.

The speakers shared their perspectives on the Liberation War of 1971. The final word was of Karim who was acquainted with Azad. He described the book as defying classification as a novel, a work of fiction, a historical narrative or a single story. "The world has forgotten the angst, suffering, anguish and brutalisation of a nation in a genocide bigger than the Holocaust. Hoque's book relates a story that needed to be told."

The book will be a reminder to subsequent generations about the horrors of war. Even as the process of extraditing war criminals and collaborators to Bangladesh gathers momentum, the story will resonate in the collective consciousness. ■



Anisul Hoque with Dr Karan Singh

SHAMIK BANERJEE

Stories to heal little souls

PICTURES BY SHAMIK BANERJEE



Rupali with her parents Anna and Christian

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

RUPALI began life at Palna, a home for abandoned children run by the Delhi Council for Child Welfare. When she was 15 months old she was adopted by Dr Anna Grassi and her husband Christian JW Reintjes. Rupali is now 16 and lives with her adoptive parents in Cremona, a city in Northern Italy, about 100 km south of Milan.

Her Italian mother, Anna, is a writer of grammar books for schools and a linguist. Her German father, Christian, is an exports sales director at the Campari division of Sella & Mosca Commerciale SRL.

Rupali appears to be just like any other teenager – except that she has some angst and insecurity bottled up inside her. She knows she is adopted and aware that the colour of her skin sets her apart from the others. When she was three years old she was asked at a day-care centre: "Why are you black and your mother white?" "Did your real mom die?"

Anna shares Rupali's pain and has been a constant anchor. She has time and again relied on books to give her daughter a sense of security. Anna began with a children's atlas where she would often point out the different countries the family belonged to – India, Italy and Germany. After some successful and not so successful experiments, Anna introduced Rupali to a book called *Belly Mommy, Heart Mommy* written by Anna G. Milloti, a psychologist from Florence. The book, based on Rupali's own story, has illustrations derived from photographs of Palna taken by Anna and another adoptive mother.

Whenever Rupali read the book, it gave her a sense of calm. "I liked the book because the story was real. It was a reassuring message that left an



Minoru Hataguchi, ex-director of the Hiroshima Peace Museum

open ending for the imagination and mystery," recalls Rupali.

The story doesn't end there. "I have a few friends in Italy but many girls and boys still ask me rude questions. I don't like that at all. I don't read about adoption any more but I want to have a dialogue with other people on such issues," says the petite Rupali.

Rupali couldn't have chosen a better venue than 'Reading is Healing', an international conference on book therapy organised by the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC), the Indian Section of the International Board on Books for Young People (Ind.BBY). On stage, the gutsy Rupali seated beside her father and other participants including well-known poet and lyricist Javed Akhtar, told her moving story in her presentation titled 'Born in three pages of the Atlas'.

Rupali was among kindred spirits. Delegates from 15 countries had gathered at the India Habitat Centre to discuss how 'book therapy' can heal children affected by natural and manmade disasters as well as those suffering from psycho-social trauma. Participants included writers, illus-

trators, teachers, special educationists, librarians, psychiatrists, psychologists, activists and parents.

In India 'book therapy' began as a small effort by prominent AWIC members to distribute books to the victims of the 2001 Bhuj earthquake in Gujarat, and during the tsunami of 2004 in Tamil Nadu's coastal areas. The term acquired formal coinage after the 26/11 terrorist attack in Mumbai. "We were disturbed by the wave of frustration, agitation and pent-up emotion in the minds of young children in the city. We felt that we should give a new dimension to our reading promotion programme," says Dr Ira Saxena, a founder of AWIC and now its secretary. AWIC's Book Therapy Project was launched in December 2008.

A compendium of short stories titled, *Lighthouse in the Storm* by 24 leading Indian children's authors was launched. The stories try to tackle the fears and anxieties of children who have experienced disasters, psycho-social problems and calamities. The book sensitively deals with abuse, terrorism in Kashmir, disaster, rejection by peers, AIDS and other serious illnesses.

Well-known children's author, Paro Anand, recounted that her story, *Monsters in Paradise* was born out of her interaction with a young 14-year-old Kashmiri boy, Shabir Karam, who at the age of two had seen his father killed by a suicide bomber. "He was so steeped in grief that he had retreated into a shell," recalls Paro. It took her ten years to persuade Shabir to begin opening up.

Together they wrote his story. Now Shabir is 22 and working in a company in Srinagar. Paro has adopted him. And Shabir is helping her research a book on young people who have suffered similarly.

Paro calls her stories 'reality fiction'. Through her books, she says, children realise they are not alone and that there is light at the end of the tunnel. In the process she hopes to create empathy and awareness among more privileged children.

In *Friends Manorama Jafa*, a pioneer of book therapy and founder-secretary general of AWIC, relates the story of Mona, a young girl afflicted by AIDS. Nilima Sinha, president of AWIC, has written a story about a boy named Ashis Mittal who returns from a school in the US and has an American accent which makes him the butt of jokes. The story ends on a note of optimism and hope.

Minoru Hataguchi, former director of the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Museum, recounted his own moving experience. Hataguchi's father was just 31 when he was killed in the Hiroshima bombing. His 27-year-old mother was two months pregnant with him at that time.

Hataguchi said he developed an intense hatred for the US until he was 21. Later as he opened up and recounted the story of his father's brutal death to elementary and high school children who visited the Museum, he slowly came to terms with his grief. "Hatred cannot eliminate hatred, only love can do that," says Hataguchi, who conveys the message of peace wherever he goes. ■

SUSHEELA NAIR



Sunalini Menon in her Coffeelab

India's coffee queen

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

THE strong aroma of coffee greeted me as I strolled into Coffeelab, India's first private lab for testing coffee. Started by Sunalini Menon, Asia's first woman coffee taster, and India's Coffee Ambassador, the lab offers a variety of services to coffee growers and the coffee industry.

Surprisingly, instead of a white lab filled with apparatus for coffee testing and accreditation, I saw mugs, coasters, antique jugs, filters and other coffee paraphernalia from across the world on display.

The Coffeelab looked like a veritable museum. Its walls were bedecked with an amazing range of packaged coffee and coffee curios. Exquisite grinders, scented candles, filters and an entire shelf of old-fashioned tumblers were on display in every nook and corner. The highlight was a painting of the famed Mona Lisa done in coffee powder.

Sunalini began her adventurous career in coffee as an assistant taster with the Coffee Board of India. After acquiring a Masters of Science degree in food technology from the Madras University, Sunalini's first choice was to become a dietician, but fate decided otherwise. She had to choose between further studies at the New York Institute of Dietetics or a job with the Coffee Board. She chose the Coffee Board and it became a turning point in her life. The world of coffee was a male bastion and Sunalini had to face stiff opposition from her male colleagues from the start.

But she plunged into work with gusto. She

trained in cup-tasting, assessment of world coffees, international trade marketing and certification in standards for quality control. She also studied quality audit systems and biodynamic agriculture.

All this wisdom boosted Sunalini's career. At the young age of 28 she was appointed as head of the Coffee Board's Quality Control Department. She continued as Director, Quality Control, until 1995. She is recognized today as an accredited international cupper.

During her tenure with the Coffee Board, Sunalini focused on improving the quality of Indian coffee by providing technical know-how to coffee farmers on field harvesting practices. She also drew up norms on coffee processing at coffee farms and curing factories.

"My inputs helped frame quality standards for Indian green coffee besides developing coffee blends for overseas and domestic markets. It feels good to see how Mysore Nuggets Extra Bold, Robusta Kaapi Royale and Butter Cup Bold, which emerged as a result of these efforts, now occupy centrestage in the Indian marketing scenario," says Sunalini. The establishment of standards also helped her fix pricing guidelines based on quality for domestic coffee auctions. She focused on promoting the concept of quality in coffee. Sunalini's pioneering work has helped build countless blends. She has put numerous coffee estates on the global map. In coffee circles she has come to be known as 'Quality Menon.'

Sunalini says the coffee scenario in India and in many parts of the world has undergone a sea change. From being a beverage which was dark, unknown and drunk mainly at home, coffee has

today become a drink which can be had hot or cold and with unusual ingredients such as orange, strawberry and spices including green chillies.

"Espresso, cappuccino, macchiato, ristretto... unheard names in the coffee world of yesteryears have now taken the world of coffee including India by storm. Coffee is no longer a mundane beverage meant for the old, but a youthful, pulsating and vibrant drink consumed especially by the youth... as the slogan of a leading café in India Café Coffee Day, states: 'A lot can happen over coffee'," says Sunalini.

The demand for organic coffee in Bangalore and the rest of India is growing fast. "Biodynamic farming is catching on here and I think its something that comes from within. Coffee chains brought great visibility to coffee. They changed the face of coffee completely," says the coffee veteran in between sips of coffee.

In 1996, Sunalini set up Coffeelab Private Limited in Bangalore. It is equipped with modern equipment and accredited by the Coffee Board of India.

Sunalini tastes not less than 100 cups every day at her Coffeelab. She is often invited by the Indian and international coffee industry to independently evaluate coffees and to conduct coffee quality and cupping workshops. She also continues to render invaluable advice on a range of quality matters to the Indian coffee industry. "To promote awareness of Indian coffees we have been conducting small workshops for consumers like doctors, housewives, business women etc, focusing on brewing and cup quality," says Sunalini.

She recalls that the first brand that she helped a coffee farmer in Coorg to develop was a robusta coffee branded, 'Butter Cup Bold.' The beans were prepared from unique plant material and processed in a distinctive manner to develop soft, buttery and creamy notes in the cup. This coffee is now being sold as a standalone in Germany, a tribute to the quality of these beans.

"There are many other brands of green beans which my lab and I have helped to develop – today, these coffee beans are playing a major role in coffee cups around the world. We also helped when the first coffee café, Café Coffee Day, set up shop in India in 1996, by providing them with their house blend and by educating their personnel on coffee quality and brewing nuances. Since then we have never looked back. We look forward to enabling our coffee beans leave a footprint on the world coffee horizon.

"My lab has helped the Indian coffee farmer to understand the quality nuances of his coffee beans through training programmes which are now being carried out at their doorstep and at the lab. We evaluate the farmer's coffee beans by visiting his coffee farm and checking on his processing technology. We vary processing techniques to highlight the positives in his beans and see how best the negatives can be removed. We have helped not only in the branding of green beans but also in providing recipes for coffee blends which are brewed in cafes in India," says Sunalini.

With more than 35 years of experience behind her, Sunalini is one of Asia's most famous coffee cuppers. She is also Quality Ombudsman of the Specialty Coffee Association of India (SCAI) and has received several national and international awards ■

GREEN CURES

Tackling obesity

Dr G. G. GANGADHARAN

ACCORDING to Ayurveda, an emaciated body is better than an obese body because there is no medicine for obesity. But that does not mean that fatness cannot be treated and managed. It can. Fighting flab needs tremendous will power and cooperation.

In Ayurveda to tackle obesity three pillars of treatment are required: Aharam (food), Oushadham (medicine) and Viharam (lifestyle changes). It is only then that pacification can be brought out.

The most important sign of obesity is the way a person looks. If a person is felt to be obese by others then that person is obese. But to be more objective, if your body mass index (BMI) is more than 30, then you are officially obese. This can be easily calculated by dividing your weight with your height. BMI calculators are available on the Internet too.

Excess accumulation of fat in the adipose tissue below the skin and above the muscles is an expression of obesity. Obesity is graded into different levels of severity. The most severe condition is morbid obesity when a person is not able to even move around. At this stage only surgical intervention can help.

The starting point of obesity is defective metabolism. The ingested food goes through seven stages of transmission and gets assimilated at each stage to become a component of the body. Thus the ingested food becomes chyle, blood, muscle tissues, adipose tissues, bone tissues bone marrow and ultimately the reproductive tissues in male and female.

In obese people this seven-stage transmission does not happen. Instead, food gets accumulated at the adipose tissue level. As a consequence, there is a disparity in the distribution of nutrition to the body parts. On one hand, the body has excess accumulation of fat, and on the other hand, other tissues, especially bone marrow and the reproductive tissues do not get enough nutrients. So the person become bulky but malnourished.

Obesity can lead to many grave diseases like diabetes, blood pressure and heart disease. Obese people tend to sweat profusely because of the excess working of the adipose tissue. The person feels tired very quickly due to lack of quality blood in the system.

How to conquer obesity: Vyayamam (exercise), Urdwardhanam (dry powder massage) and Abhayangam (oil massage) can drastically change the body structure.

Vyayama: Walk five km a day. Start with one km at a slow pace and aim to reach five km in three months. You can also swim for one hour. Swimming is the best form of exercise as it involves the entire



body and since water is a heavier medium than air the body is exercised more. Swimming regularly can reduce flab.

Proper exercise is that which brings slight sweat to the forehead and the tip of the nose. Appearance of such sweat means you have exercised optimally for the day. Regular exercise with the above parameters will make the body lighter, improve digestion, make physical activities easier, reduce fat and form body muscles.

A pounding massage after the exercise is excellent. Vyayama is a very important component in the treatment of obesity.

Abhayangam: Abhayangam or oil massage strengthens the body by reducing the kapha or fat. It also improves metabolism at tissue level since whole channels of the body get dilated and energized. Regular oil massage of the body for 15 minutes is ample to dissolve fat and keep the body in shape.

Urdwardhanam: Urdwardhanam is a dry massage using medicinal powders which have fat reducing properties. A combination of Triphala and horse gram is normally used. Practitioners of Ayurveda highly recommend urdwardhanam for its fat-dissolving ability. A 14 or 21-day course of urdwardhanam for one hour every day can reduce weight considerably. This course can be done once in six months. According to Ayurveda, urdwardhanam dissolves fat and makes the body light and strong. The skin becomes unctuous and glows.

The ideal medical process to reduce obesity should be an oil massage followed by wet fomentation and then urdwardhanam. This is normally done for 14 or 21 days.

Panchakarma: People with obesity can be given vamanam (emesis), virechanam (laxative) and kashayavasthy (decoction enema). Virechanam can be done almost every month.

Food and drink: Roasted horse gram powder or soup, rice made out of shyamakam (a kind of German millet) and barley, soup of green gram, water with honey, whey with a little honey, fermented Ayurvedic products like varanasavam and ayaskriti can be used daily by obese patients.

Medicines: Obese people should take everyday:

- A tablespoon of Triphala mixed with honey early morning on an empty stomach.
- A decoction of Gudoochi, Abhaya and Mustha as drinking water.
- A course of Maha Panchamoola Kashayam or Gulgulu Kashayam.
- Regular use of shilajit in Bhasma form is another useful tip.
- A decoction of agni mantha (Hosa lakki) is also recommended. ■

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WONDER PLANT

Jasmine Joy

IN India most gods and goddesses are associated with some tree, shrub or creeper. The cult of tree worship is as old as civilization. In fact, one of the first objects to be held in reverence were trees. To hurt a plant was considered sacrilege. Even a sculptor had to perform prayers before using a tree to make a deity.

India has a long tradition of conserving sacred groves. These are forests that are not exploited and set aside in a pristine condition. One such forest, called Mullai vanam, can be found in Thanjavur's Papanasam taluk. It used to be a thick forest dominated by jasmine creepers. The goddess here is regarded as a divine gynaecologist. Lord Shiva it is believed took refuge in the Mullai vanam. The forest is known as a jasmine forest. The Shivalinga found here is offered fragrant musk from the civet cat. Jasmine is offered to the deity.

Our ancestors attached great importance to the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity. Conservation of nature had religious significance and reflected the character of the ruling king, the state and its citizens.

Ayurvedic properties: Jasmine or *Jasmine auriculatum* belongs to the family of *Oleacea*. Both the jasmine flower and jasmine oil can be used as an aphrodisiac, a sedative, an antiseptic and antidepressant. Jasmine has antispasmodic and analgesic properties. The root is used to treat headaches, insomnia and pain due to dislocated joints and broken bones. It is

reported to have anaesthetic properties.

Aroma-therapists use the jasmine flower as an antidepressant and a relaxing herb that can help dry or sensitive skin and tiredness. In vapour therapy, jasmine oil is used to cure addiction, depression, nervousness, coughs and to ease tension. Jasmine oil can be blended and used as a massage oil or diluted in the bath to relax muscle pains, coughs, stress and postnatal depression.

Jasmine oil can be used in a base cream or lotion for dry or greasy and sensitive skin. It helps to erase stretch marks and scars.

Where is it found? Jasmine is indigenous to Sri Lanka and India. A common climbing shrub along the outskirts of forests, from the foothills to scrub jungles, it is found at altitudes from 150 metres to 1,000 metres throughout India. It is widely cultivated in all households, gardens and temples.

Growing jasmine: *Jasmine auriculatum* is grown in gardens for its aesthetic value and fragrance. It requires plenty of sunshine and optimum water for soil moisture. As it grows



Jasmine auriculatum

it needs some support structures like strings and nails attached to walls or poles. Pruning is essential before flowering starts for an effective yield, especially from the ground level to half its length in the end of January. Cultivators do spray growth hormones for increase in flowering. This is a highly recommended jasmine for a scented garden or as an indoor plant.

SELF-HELP

For suppressing lactation: The aroma of jasmine flowers is so effective that it can suppress lactation. In the south, stringed jasmine flowers are tied over the breast of lactating mothers to stop lactation. Research has proven this practice to be an effective and inexpensive method of suppressing lactation.

For headaches and strokes: A compress using jasmine flowers can be useful for headaches and strokes.

For corns: Jasmine juice is useful for treating corns. In fact, various skin conditions including sunburn and rashes can be treated by applying jasmine in lotion form.

Jasmine tea: In traditional Chinese medicine, jasmine flowers are brewed and consumed as a herbal and remedial tea which is beneficial in treating fevers, urinary inflammation and other infections, relieving stress and anxiety. Jasmine tea can also be extremely beneficial for people suffering from heatstroke or sunstroke. The tea can also be used as a tincture to treat cuts and scrapes.

Jasmine oil: Jasmine oil is an integral part of aromatherapy. It is used in the form of incense, candles, and body oil. The oil uplifts a person's mood. The scent of jasmine is said to be useful in treating depression, especially postpartum depression and emotional depression. A body massage with jasmine oil lifts the spirits and relieve aches and pains. ■

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LOOK GOOD

Lustrous hair

HAIR fall is one of the most distressing problems of today's youth. Ayurveda terms hair fall as Indralupta or khaalitya. Hair problems like dandruff, scurf, brittle, greasy or dry hair, baldness and graying should be taken seriously.

There are many causes for hair fall. Age, diet, season, pollution, stress and anxiety affect the health of your scalp and hair. Using lots of chemicals in the form of hair colour, shampoo or hair sprays harms the health of your hair. Other reasons could be thyroid hormone imbalance or certain medications – especially diet pills. Hormonal changes during pregnancy and menopause, allergies, shock, long-term worry, over-processed food with added colours and dyes and genetic tendencies can also be responsible for hair fall. The health of your hair depends on nutrition, metabolism and hygiene.

Here are some tips for lustrous hair:

- Eat healthy. Consume fresh fruits and greens, especially vegetables which are rich in vitamins and minerals. A diet that includes dry fruits and eggs will keep hair healthy by providing protein. Avoid consuming excessive sugar, sugary products and junk food.
- Massage your scalp in a circular motion with warm coconut oil/ almond oil/ herbal oil for at least 10 to 15 minutes. Apply oil at least three times a week. Some of the oils that can be used

are Neelibringaraja coconut oil, Mahabringaraja Taila, Bhringamalaka Taila and Amala oil.

- Use natural shampoo to wash your hair. Use of Shikakai powder is the best. Do not use shampoo that has alcohol content. Washing hair daily will damage the hair follicle. Wash hair twice a week only.

- If you want to cover gray hair a natural colouring blend can be used. Mix together Mehndi powder, Bringaraja powder and Amla powder with freshly prepared tea decoction in an iron bowl in the ratio of 3:2:1. Keep the mix overnight and apply in the morning to your scalp and hair till it dries. This mix will give a nice burgundy colour to your hair with a natural shiny effect. To this natural mix you can also add fresh beetroot juice and hibiscus flower paste.

- A paste of fenugreek seeds, lemon and curd when massaged and used as a hair pack will give your hair a radiant shine. Leave the paste on your scalp for 20 minutes before shampooing. This is also helpful for hair growth. Do this once in 15 days regularly.

- For dandruff, mix a pack of Triphala powder with warm water. Keep it on your scalp for 15 to 20 minutes before shampooing. This is helpful for getting rid of dandruff. Apply this paste twice a week. Massaging the scalp with coconut milk also helps. ■

Dr. Ashwini V Konnur, BAMS, CFN, YIC

ORGANIC CHEF

Healthy cake

BLACK GRAM CAKE

Ingredients:

Black gram powder: 1 cup
Water: enough to prepare dough
Salt: To taste
Asafoetida: One pinch
Cumin seeds: ¼ tsp
Pepper powder: To taste

Method: Put black gram powder in a bowl. Add salt, asafoetida, cumin seeds and pepper powder. Now add water little by little and knead to prepare dough.

Prepare small balls of the dough. Apply a little black gram flour over it and press uniformly using a wooden plate and roller. You can sprinkle a little flour to prevent the dough from sticking to the roller.

Roll out round shapes in the size of a small plate. Dry the cakes in the sun. Alternatively, you can roast the rounds on a hot plate or deep fry in oil.

This dish is tasty and light to digest.

Contra-indications: The deep fried cake is not suitable for people with high cholesterol and hypertension.

RICE AND AMLA CAKE

Ingredients:

Rice flour: 1 cup
Amla (Indian gooseberry) juice: 1 cup
Sesame seeds: Half teaspoon
Asafoetida: A pinch
Salt: To taste
Plantain leaves: A few

Method: Wash the gooseberry fruits and wipe them dry. Cut the fruits into small pieces and crush to form a fine paste. Now squeeze out the juice of the paste. Place deep pan over medium flame. Add the rice flour, sesame seeds, asafoetida and salt and mix well. Now add the juice and keep stirring. Cook the paste until a soft dough like consistency is formed. Remove the vessel from the flame.

Make small round balls of the dough and place the rounds over the small 5-inch pieces of the plantain leaf. Pat lightly to spread evenly in a round shape of approximately 4-inch diameter. Steam cook for about 10 minutes over medium flame along with the plantain leaves.

Note: One can also add a little pepper powder for taste.

Benefits: These cakes are easy to digest and beneficial for diabetics. It is also good for your eyes.

Contra-indications: No known contra-indications. ■

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

PRODUCTS

SOLAR CAP

LAKSHMAN ANAND

KEEP a cool head this summer with Fuel Saver India's solar cap. This unique cap is fitted with a little fan and tiny solar panels. When you step into the blazing sun, the fan begins whirring and a cool breeze blows over your face. The solar panels charge on their own so you don't need clunky batteries or any other charger. The fan is perfectly safe since it is made of plastic.

This cool cap has been invented by Vivek Bhatia, an entrepreneur based in Pune. The cap works even during partly cloudy days. Bhatia has received many orders for his solar caps especially from cities like Kolkata where the weather is hot and humid for most of the year. His company has managed to create an entire customer base out of word-of-mouth publicity.

The solar cap is perfect for hot cities like Delhi too. The cap fits neatly on any adult head and you can buy it in three colours – red, blue and white.

The solar cap costs only ₹400, plus ₹25 for postage.

To place an order contact:

Address: Fuel Saver India, 17, Medha, Sanewadi, SBI Lane, Aundh, Pune-411007

Phone: 020-25898516. Mob: 09665642722

Email: info@cap-cap.com



SHAMIK BANERJEE



MUDDY PAINT

GOND art has its own distinctive style. There are trees, animals, plants and flowers painted in a harmony of earthy colours. Nature has made the deepest impact on the Gond mind.

"We used to paint these pictures on our mud huts," says Kalabai Shyam, a Gond artist from Patalgar village in Dindori district, Madhya Pradesh. "We now earn part of our livelihood by painting on paper." She says it was J. Swaminathan, former director of Bharat Bhawan in Bhopal, who discovered Gond art and gave it its due. He sent his students to villages to uncover tribal art and in the process Gond art came into the limelight.

"We don't need any training since we begin painting as children. It is part of our heritage. We know how to get naturally coloured mud from the jungle for our paintings," says Kalabai. The colours she uses are black, ochre, red, white and blue. She can also paint pictures according to sizes required by customers.

For orders contact: Kalabai and Anand Shyam at 09424418569, 08989208379.

Changing Lives



General health care in rural villages by SST

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

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

A routine check up at the hospital revealed that she was

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

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

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URL: www.tvsmotor.co.in



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

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

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

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

Because she is one of our own.

Because we can't fly if she crawls.

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

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

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

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

TATA STEEL
Values stronger than steel

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Asha Hansda
Beneficiary, Tejaswini Project