

Civil Society



CAN PRASAR BHARATI RAISE THE BAR?

Jawhar Sircar on public service broadcasting

Pages 6-8

BATTLE OVER PAVEMENTS

Pages 8-9

HIGHS & LOWS OF AADHAAR

Pages 10-11

MEERUT'S SPECIAL SCISSORS

Pages 24-26

THE WAYWARD RIVER

Pages 31-32

KILLING FIELDS OF MALWA

Page 34

PACIFYING ACHING JOINTS

Page 36

T S Sudhir
.....
Hyderabad

THE excitement was palpable. Colourfully dressed women came to Gollaprollu, a habitation in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh (AP), in thousands for the rollout of the cash transfer scheme based on the Aadhaar card. They believed the Aadhaar card in their hands was going to change their destiny, their lives. To see so much hope riding on one card was almost touching.

Aadhaar is a 12-digit number that can be used to access various government services. It is a unique identifier for every Indian citizen and resident.

Bharat Dogra
Saharanpur

A boy in Neena's neighbourhood kept trying to flirt with her. She was just 13 years old and very innocent. Somehow he succeeded in luring her to a place near Haridwar. Here he sold her to a group of gangsters. They subjected her to mass rape. Neena gave birth to a child after some time. The gangsters then sold her to another person. In this way she was sold several times. Finally, she reached Panchkula.

Here one day in the market Neena spotted a truck driver from her village. She managed to hurriedly whisper a message to him to please tell her parents and Disha, a voluntary organisation that helps victims of sexual violence rebuild their lives. As soon as Disha's activists got this news from the truck driver, they went to Panchkula and rescued Neena with the help of the police.

But Neena's problems did not end there. Her family refused to accept her. Disha had to persuade them repeatedly to keep her for a few days. Meanwhile they searched

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

THE Supreme Court recently cleared the Vishnugad Pipalkoti Hydroelectricity Project (VNP), giving the green signal for its construction to the Tehri Hydro Devel

ATTRACTING TALENT:

Glocal's professional, technology driven environment and its emphasis on quality healthcare has helped it attract talent.

Dr Arun Mathur quit Apollo Hospitals to join Glocal's Khargram hospital as chief anaesthetist.

"Here I am asked to heal patients, not to make money out of them," he says. Well-known gynaecologist Dr Nikhilendu Mahapatra is known as the "bloodless surgeon" since he conducts most surgeries without requiring blood transfusion. Glocal has rightly placed him at Khargram where there are no blood banks and getting blood in an emergency is often impossible. "I love the challenge of serving people in such an area," he says proudly.

Patients are equally happy. Habibur Mullick, 60, lodged in the male ward at Glocal's Bolpur hospital is recovering from surgery. He doesn't have the RSBY card but he is effusive in his praise. "The nurses, doctors and attendants should be given prizes for the excellent care they have taken of me," he says. Asked why he chose this hospital when Bolpur also has a government hospital, he said "I have been to PG Hospital in Kolkata and hospitals in Burdwan, Bolpur and Siuri. But no hospital is as clean as this place. Most importantly, people promise but don't really deliver. Here the service is so good. I don't know how they got such good people," he wondered aloud even as Shrivastava and other members of the management team stood around.

RSBY CHALLENGES: Azim gives a lot of credit to Anil Swarup who devised the RSBY for Glocal's success. "The RSBY is an absolutely amazing and highly intel-

A doctor attends to a patient in the OPD

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Patients being admitted at the Glocal Hospital in Bolpur

Habibur Mullick, 60, is recovering from surgery. He doesn't have the RSBY card but he is effusive in his praise. 'The nurses, doctors and attendants should be given prizes for the excellent care they have taken of me.'

ligent scheme. Anil Swarup should get the Nobel Prize for it," gushed Azim. "What RSBY has done is to use market forces to ensure free but high quality healthcare for the poor. It has encouraged private players like us to quickly build health infrastructure even in the most underserved areas," he said.

"There are concerns that RSBY has resulted in hospitals carrying out unnecessary surgeries so that they can get more money out of the scheme. No system will be perfect. What we do need to note is the low percentage of fraud that is possible under the RSBY system," said Azim.

"The premium is collected by insurance companies and they do not want to pay unnecessarily. Therefore, they have an incentive to conduct thorough audits. We also have an incentive to ensure that we get paid on all claims so if a doctor in our hospitals does too many procedures, the audit system alerts us too.

I can say the RSBY system uses market forces to ensure that both service providers as well as insurers actually end up working together to reduce fraud," explained Azim.

There is an unmet need for surgeries that has built up over the years. Glocal hospitals report that people live with hernias, hydroceles and debilitating growths for years because they cannot afford the so-called free treatment being provided by public hospitals. RSBY has provided a mechanism to fulfil this unmet need.

The problem is that in most states there aren't sufficient healthcare providers even when RSBY patients can pay. "But when other private players see that we are making money serving RSBY patients, they too will set up health infrastructure in rural areas," says Azim. ■

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



Skilled traditional metal workers grind and sharpen scissors in Meerut

Meerut scissors are special

Arjun Sen
Meerut (UP)

FOR nearly 100 years, Meerut's scissors have been the preferred choice of barbers and tailors throughout India. Around 70,000 traditional metal workers manufacture these scissors. Among them are Irfan Ahmed, Imran Saif and Kamar Ahmed. They work long hours, earning about ₹200 a day.

But, hopefully now, they are close to seeing better days. The Scissors and Razors Manufacturing

Cluster in Meerut, consisting of 200 micro-enterprises, has joined hands with metal workers to seek a Geographical Indication (GI) tag for their scissors.

"The GI listing will protect us from imitations produced by other makers in India. It will also help us to compete against imports from large scale industries in China, Germany, Japan, Italy, Brazil and Pakistan," says Sharif Ahmed, secretary of the Meerut Scissor Manufacturers Special Purpose Vehicle (MESMA SPV), the association that has applied for GI registration. It has sought the help

of the Intellectual Property Facilitation Centre (IPFC) of the Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME).

"The Uttar Pradesh (UP) government has allotted us land in Meerut's Lohia Nagar to set up a manufacturing cluster with a Common Facility Centre (CFC). This will improve working conditions for metal craftsmen, help technology and diversify our product range. The GI tag will fetch us better prices and bigger volumes. It will improve the lives of all those engaged in this traditional handicraft and boost local industry," says

Girish Kumar, Vice President of the Meerut Economic Development Forum and Central Executive Committee Member of FISME.

A GI registration is given to a product if it is unique, traditional and enjoys a certain reputation due to its geographical origin, which could be a town, region or country.

Some examples are Darjeeling Tea, Kancheepuram Silk, Mysore Sandal Soap, Bastar Dhokra, Kashmir's Pashmina, Lucknow Chikan, Goa's Feni, Banaras Brocade, Bikaneri Bhujia and Baluchari saris. So far the GI Registry office under the Union Ministry of Commerce has granted GI registration to 178 such products.

FISME is helping the MESMA SPV acquire the GI tag. Ravi S. who heads FISME's Hyderabad IPFC and Karmajit Singh Saluja, head of FISME's New Delhi IPFC office are both experts in intellectual property rights (IPR) and advocates specializing in GI applications. They are now preparing the final documentation required to get Meerut's scissors the GI tag.

While the application for GI registration was made on 19 December 2012, the process of registration may take at least another six months. "We will soon file all the supporting documents and after that the GI Registry office will appoint a panel of experts to verify the claim. The GI tag will be granted once they are satisfied," says Saluja.

"GI is a form of IPR like a patent or trade mark. Once Meerut scissor makers get the registration they will be able to put the GI tag on all their products. They can seek civil and criminal remedial measures against those who claim their products to be Meerut Scissors even though they are not members of the MESMA SPV or have not got permission from them to produce scissors according to their exact specifications," explained Ravi.

The reputation of Meerut Scissors will then be protected. Nobody can fool around with it. After all it is a brand that has been built over a century by inventive Indian blacksmiths.

"Meerut's scissors eminently qualify for the GI registration as they meet all the required criteria. We want to make this a model GI listing for traditional Indian products made in the MSME industrial manufacturing sector," says Anil Bharadwaj, Secretary-General of FISME.

"The scissors have all three criteria for getting the GI tag. They have certain unique qualities, they are manufactured using highly skilled traditional methods and they have a pan-India reputation," says Ravi.

The most important quality of Meerut scissors is that they can be re-sharpened and used over generations. It is said about Meerut scissors that *Dadu le, pota barte* or "Grandfather buys, grandson uses," says Sharif, who is owner of Sheikh Scissors Industry and specialises in making scissors for tailors.

"Unlike Meerut scissors, similar products including those from China and elsewhere are use and throw," says Kumar. This is the reason why tailors and barbers, especially in rural areas, prefer to buy Meerut's scissors. "The key advantage is that people in rural areas cannot afford to go to the city every time their scissors become blunt. They can easily get them re-sharpened locally," says Mohammed Alam, owner of Munco Industries, which specialises in the manufacture



Mohammad Alam with workers at his workshop



Scissors for tailors are heavier and have unbreakable brass handles



A skilled grinder at work

of barber scissors. His father Mizbahuddin registered Munco as a trademark in 1956.

Cheaper imports from China have hit the ₹25 crore Meerut scissor industry hard, said Sharif. "My orders have come down from 300 pairs to about 150 pairs now," says Alam.

But the ingenious Alam is trying to counter the Chinese threat. Using carbon steel he has developed high quality and well-designed scissors with plastic handles for beauty parlours. And the added beauty of his scissors is that they can be re-sharpened unlike the Chinese ones, he said.

The Meerut scissors industry has a long history. According to local legend, makers of swords and knives accidentally hit upon the idea of scissors when two swords placed across each other and tied together were found very effective in cutting leather some 360 years ago.

Documented evidence, however, shows that



Left to right: Girish Kumar, Sharif Ahmed, Hemant Kumar and Main Pal Singh



Barber scissors ready for riveting

the Meerut Scissors cluster is about 135 years old. According to an entry made 44 years ago in the UP District Gazetteers Meerut, 1965, "The scissors industry (in Meerut) is about 90 years old. It was first started by a dexterous blacksmith, Muhammad Akhon. He was able to produce three or four pairs of scissors of good quality in a day. His method was copied and gradually the industry grew, as did its reputation. The workmanship was improved by successive generations of blacksmiths." This is the key documentation that establishes the association of Meerut Scissors to its geographical location and is the basis of the GI application, said Saluja.

Also, the Meerut Scissors cluster is originally based on traditional technological processes that have been used by Indian blacksmiths since 400 to 500 BC. Natural iron ore lumps were converted into molten steel by using coal or wood. Different processing methods were followed to make the

iron hard and less prone to rusting.

At present, the Meerut Scissors cluster uses scrap leaf springs from scrapped heavy vehicles such as buses, trucks and railway carriages. These leaf springs are made from fairly high-quality steel.

The scrap leaf springs are flattened using traditional handcrafting processes by heating and hammering. The flattened steel of about one-eighth inch thickness is then cut into strips about one inch wide and six to 12 inches long. This primary work is done by blacksmiths in villages around Meerut such as Meerapur, Badagaon, Sarota, Qila and Mawana.

Scissor makers in Meerut, concentrated in Kotla, Zakir Colony, Sabun Gran or Shyamnagar, buy this raw material from village-based blacksmiths to produce scissors. In the case of scissors for tailoring, used and blunt files sold as scrap are also utilised as raw materials.



Molten brass being poured into a cast for handles

For barber scissors, which are much lighter and need less strength for cutting, the blade and handle is made from a single piece of metal. Handles for larger and heavier tailoring scissors are made from brass obtained from scrap brass utensils. The brass is hand forged into the blade using an open air-blown furnace to melt the metal. It is then moulded on the handles, using an age-old mould casting process.

"These heavy tailor scissors with unbreakable brass handles are also unique to Meerut," says Sharif. "It takes between three to six months for an artisan to acquire the skills to do this job to the required level of quality," he added.

The strips have to be drilled with great precision for riveting and curving and then grinding for sharpness. A process of tempering is also done to ensure uniform hardness of the metal. The blades are then sharpened to the right degree, again using handcrafted methods. Quality control is entirely through visual and manual inspection and this too requires a skilled and sharp eye. It is essential for scissor blades to have the right curve and sharpness to be able to meet only at the cutting edge. Then cutting can take place with ease.

"To get a GI for agricultural and food products the special characteristics that come from the geography, geology and climate of a certain place interacting with the plant or agriculture product is most important. In the case of manufactured products which have acquired a reputation for certain specific qualities, the method of production and skill required that are exclusively obtained in a specific geographical location is the primary requirement for getting a GI tag," explained Ravi.

And this is what makes Meerut Scissors a perfect candidate for a GI application, he said. The skills required to produce the perfect scissor is not available anywhere else. ■

Insights

- Opinion
- Analysis
- Research
- Ideas
- Angst

From village to global market

RAM GIDOOMAL

MY passion is to see the disadvantaged – both individuals and communities – transformed and restored. I love to see people and groups of people becoming empowered and gaining back their self-respect, whether they are marginalised because of poverty, faith, political persecution or some other reason.

Business has a lot to offer the disadvantaged, particularly the economically disadvantaged. Ethical business, in particular, has the values and the tools to transform whole communities, and this is something I have seen time and time again across the world.

This is because ethical business has a heart of compassion for the underdog. But it's an active compassion that sees a need and then does something about it. This might include enabling people who need empowering, who are denied basic rights by our modern society. It might mean seeing a need and linking up small communities with the wider world, for example, connecting villages with cities, or the east with the west.

I currently chair Traidcraft, where we help the world's poor build more sustainable businesses for themselves, expand their local markets and even sell their products to the Sainsbury's and Waitrose's of the world. Through Traidcraft, and other businesses with which I am involved, we provide an economically sustainable engine to promote social justice and stewardship of resources for generations to come.

How this translates, at grassroots level, is that disadvantaged individuals and communities get to experience transformation through business.

My recent visit from the UK, where I live, to India, provided several exciting examples of this. One particularly striking one occurred when I went south, and I'd like to tell you about that.

I visited India in September 2012 as part of my induction as Chairman of Traidcraft, having been appointed the previous year. On this trip, I had the pleasure of visiting Kerala, Mumbai, Goa, Delhi and Jaipur. The aim of the first part of my visit was to see various Traidcraft projects, and these took me to the villages.



Sustainable businesses can find robust markets

Ethical business has a heart of compassion for the underdog. But it's an active compassion that sees a need and then does something about it.

I had been to Bangladesh earlier that year and to Kenya, where Traidcraft also has offices, and so when I visited India, the villages were very much on my mind. So, I was looking forward to visiting Kerala, and was being hosted by FTAK (Fairtrade Alliance of Kerala) which works closely with the villages in the region, helping them to build their businesses and make connections further afield.

The first thing that struck me was the similarities of village life – the villages in Kerala were not far different from the ones I saw in Bangladesh or Kenya! I'm talking in generalities here, but I saw the same types of houses – ones that are not as

Continued on page 28

Continued from page 27

robust as ones in the city. The villages in the three places I mentioned also face the same challenges in terms of access to power, electricity and clean water.

The journey to the villages was very interesting, as we transitioned from tarmac roads to dusty tracks. I had just come from Dubai with its tall skyscrapers and evident affluence. My flight took me into Kozhikode airport in north-western Kerala, and I then had transportation that took me as close to the villages is possible, on roads that were excellent to start with. Then, as we approached the villages, we encountered the dust clouds that rose up from the dry, dusty tracks!

The interesting thing was when we started looking for satellite navigation directions to a particular village – the sat nav wasn't helpful at all! The easiest way was to ask a villager for directions, and of course everything is "five or ten minutes that way..." and then the next person tells you the same thing. Naturally, the journey was much longer than we were anticipating. The villagers we asked obviously knew the area, as we got there in the end.

The FTAK team took me to a hut to meet local businesspeople and it was exciting to sit down and engage with them. They also showed me some of their businesses. I was inspired by what they had achieved. They had set up small farming communities, and industrious individuals were producing rubber from many trees. They explained how they were able to transition from product to product, creatively and effectively, depending on market forces. I told them I was very impressed by what I was seeing and hearing.

When they asked us how they could find capital



There are investors for fair trade products

investment for ideas they had for new projects, which was partly the reason why FTAK had set up the meeting, my response was. "I think the answers are here in this room!" If people worked more effectively together to raise capital for projects that needed it, they would grow their businesses. I was told, "You are right, we have never discussed this together before, though we have occasionally pooled our savings to do a single project."

I asked whether they would consider setting up a 'fair trade exchange' – like a stock exchange – linking up people who have ideas with those who have capital to invest.

On one level, this concept could work locally, and I've seen this in Kenya. People who make more than others could trade resources or products with each other, or share business ideas and expertise. They could also invest in each other, so, farmers could get together as a mutual society enabling them as 10 or 20 individuals to club together to buy a piece of capital equipment to share.

The exchange could also work on a larger scale. I suggested to the villagers that if they were prepared to invest their own resources, I could link them with people from the bigger cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore, who have a heart for fair trade and the means to invest larger sums of money. The villagers were excited at the prospect.

The next challenge was that they would need to write their business plans. Again, the businesspeople I had in mind have the capability and resources to help write these and secure the investment. Again, the villagers were inspired by the potential investment and the practical ways in which FTAK could help them by linking them to others in the big cities. There was an atmosphere of hope and excitement.

Later on in my trip, I met up with some people from Opportunity International, a charity that specialises solely in micro-financial services for the developing world, in places like Mozambique and Malawi.

They had set up a multi-million rupee fund and were looking for opportunities to invest in micro-financing initiatives in India. They told me they had the funds in place and even had volunteers to help potential projects to write their business plans. Linking them up with FTAK meant that investment and expertise could go straight from the cities to the villages.

Rather than merely throwing money at a situation, this model has the power to equip a community to help itself. It means villages can gain new business skills, and partner with others using what they already have to offer: their own physical resources, business ideas and hard work. The result of this partnership is lasting change that will benefit the generations to come. ■

₹600 for 1 year; ₹950 for 2 years;
₹1,300 for 3 years; 1 Year International \$50

RATE FOR INSTITUTIONS

One year subscription for ₹ 1,000

Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Name: Mr/Ms/Institution First Middle Last

Institution: Department/Class:

Address: ☐ Office ☐ Residence

State: Country:

Phone: ☐ Office ☐ Residence Fax:

Tick (✓) appropriate: ☐ 1 year (₹600) ☐ 2 years (₹950) ☐ 3 years (₹1,300) ☐ 1 Year International (\$50) ☐ 1 year for Institutions (₹ 1,000)

I wish to pay by ☐ Cash / MO ☐ Cheque / Demand Draft (add ₹ 65 for outstation / non-Delhi cheque)

Cheque / Demand Draft No. Dated Payable to Content Services & Publishing Pvt. Ltd. Mail it to: E2144, Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana-122017.

Note: Order will be executed on realisation of your remittance. Please allow 4-6 weeks for us to process your order.

MoEF has no muscle

KANCHI KOHLI

ONE should be able to say with affirmed consideration that we are a country where the government seems to be at odds with its own people. With conflicts mounting in different shapes and sizes in every corner of India, it is difficult to fathom why the unrest is mostly not being noticed. Or if it is, why is it being kept at bay from envisioning policies. It is also perhaps comprehensible that laws are subject to interpretations and political decisions arrived at through negotiated compromise. But the intra-governmental conversations around 'natural resources' in the country appear to be ridden with conflictual debates.

The above statement has been said with trepidation because, beyond a point, it is difficult to draw details of inter-ministerial sessions and those with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) based on finalised documents and media reportage. But in the last few years, there have been three clear instances which show that the tussle for jurisdiction, mandate and the commitment of ministries don't seem to match. This game of give one, take two has left people gasping, because before one compromise is delivered the second is already under way.

On 24 January, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) uploaded on its website a July 2012 "Report of the Committee to Formulate Objective Parameters for Identification of Inviolable Forest Areas." The primary purpose of this exercise has been to come up with a formula by which areas can be declared as pristine and inviolable where coal mining (and not any other industry) is not to be allowed. What started as an exercise of declaration of "go" and "no go" areas during Jairam Ramesh's tenure as environment minister, evolved into this during the tenure of Jayanthi Natarajan, through many discussions with the Ministry of Coal (MoC), PMO and an Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) headed by Pranab Mukherjee. While MoEF wanted to apply limited forest density criteria to ensure that some forest areas are kept as "strategic energy reserves" for the future and therefore not opened up for coal mining, the MoC wanted that they be given independence to grant all approvals. Caught in the tussle were specific coal mining projects such as Mahan and Chhatrasal in Madhya Pradesh where MoEF said no, and EGoM said yes.

Such criteria sets a very problematic precedence, even though one seeks to locate it within the theory of political negotiations and saving "at least" some of these areas. The inviolable criteria is very limited again because it recognises forests for their biological landscape, wildlife and forest cover in order to identify what is "pristine". What this largely means is that the premise for protecting forests will take into account contiguity,

important species, tree cover and also forest/wildlife corridors. Notwithstanding its importance, this is simply not enough. Moreover, it will not go far enough in getting the social and political traction that is needed in the long run for the protection of forests. Further, the note does not address the overall issue of fragmentation of forests as it limits itself only to coal mining. Using such criteria if some areas are recognised as inviolable and the adjoining areas are opened up for

have the power to review the procedures followed by other ministries and departments to grant and refuse approvals.

In effect the CCI would have the powers to overrule the MoEF if it does refuse environment or forest diversion related permissions, either due to issues of environmental impact or incomplete procedure. There cannot be a more blatant messaging for the people of the country that ecosystems and ecosystem based livelihood

can be overlooked when high investment projects are to pave their way in. Leave aside understanding why there is so much unrest and conflict and how it is linked with the tussle between industrialisation, social security and environment, such instances only present a disconnect, not just between the people and the government but the government and the government too.

The latest in this repartee is the decision of the MoEF to dilute its August 2009 circular which mandates that the process of recognition of rights under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) is to be completed prior to any forestland being diverted for non-forest use under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA). One particular requirement under this circular is the consent of the gram sabha (village assembly) from where forestland is being diverted.

It appears that a report backed by the PMO suggested the environment ministry remove this clause. K.C. Deo, Minister of Tribal Affairs and Jayanthi Natarajan, Minister of Environment and Forests (MoEF) vehemently disagreed to any dilution of this law and from December to January this year there were several sit-ins to "discuss" the deadlock between ministries.

Eventually, on 5 February, the MoEF caved in. It issued a statement that linear projects such as roads/canals, laying of pipelines, optical fibre lines and transmission lines would be exempt from seeking the consent of the gram sabha. This is not just an arbitrary change to an otherwise strong constitutional and democratic requirement, it is also a limited view of how projects are designed and implemented.

Many transmission lines, roads and pipelines are required to set up a power plant, industry or port. Project authorities have successfully broken up these projects in the past and sought different approvals for various components. Not only has this issue gone unrectified, the fragmentation of projects is getting strengthened even more. It ends up giving enough reason for project authorities to ask for fait accompli approvals for other bigger components citing grounds of incurred investment. ■

PRASANTA BISWAS



mining it is likely that these designated no-go zones for coal mining will be negotiated for ancillary infrastructure, power or industry. There is no embargo on that.

The second big narrative around the inter-ministerial tussle was out in the open with the accepting of the proposal for the Cabinet Committee on Investments (CCI), rechristened from its earlier avatar, the National Investment Board (NIB) proposed by the Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram. This committee set up under the Government of India (Transaction of Business Rules), 1961, creates a new standing committee with overarching powers.

Going against the legal requirements of its own ministry's laws, the new notification/amendment allows for this committee to have powers to identify investments over ₹1,000 crores and other critical projects, set limits for the number of approvals/clearances that might be required for these and ensure that such projects be done within a "stipulated timeframe". The MoEF had strongly objected to this proposal calling it both unconstitutional and against the spirit of the environmental laws in the country but later seems to have not held on to its position openly when the cabinet voted for this committee to be set up. This, despite the fact that the CCI will

New law goes beyond CSR

AMITA JOSEPH

ON 18 December, the Lok Sabha finally passed the Companies Bill 2012 to replace the Companies Act of 1956. It has 29 Chapters, 470 Clauses and Seven Schedules. The Bill aims at improving corporate governance. It contains provisions to strengthen regulations for companies and auditing firms. In addition it has provisions on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) spend and its reporting – a welcome and long awaited step forward.

Most discussions of the Companies Bill seem to focus only on Clauses 134 and 135 that talk about CSR. What then is this widely debated section? This specifies that companies having a net worth of ₹500 crore or more, or a turnover of over ₹1,000 crore or a net profit of ₹5 crores or more during any financial year are required to constitute a CSR Committee that will formulate their CSR policy.

Such a company is required to spend at least two percent of its average net profits made in the preceding three financial years before the policy was passed. If the company fails to spend this amount its board will, in its report, specify the reasons why it could not do so, making it a binding obligation on the board. CSR spend will no longer be at the sole discretion of the CEO.

This takes out the arbitrariness that has often accompanied CSR funds, firms up the CSR budget and mainstreams it with the full knowledge of the company's board guided by an articulated policy that can now be monitored and analysed. Development deficits in the country can be addressed. Companies are expected to work in partnership with other organisations.

Section VII of the Companies Bill lists specific activities that qualify as CSR initiatives. These are: eradicating extreme hunger and poverty, promotion of education, gender equality and empowerment of women, reducing child mortality and improving maternal health, combating HIV/ AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, employment-enhancing vocational skills and social business projects. Also included is contribution to the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund or any other fund set up by the Union or state governments for socio-economic development. Relief and funds for the welfare of SC/ST, other backward classes and minorities and women qualify as CSR initiatives.

A CSR Watch by non-profits or academic organisations may be a good idea. Companies do not exist in a vacuum. Nor do they manufacture goods or services out of thin air. They are given subsidies, tax holidays, land etc. by the govern-

ment that often bends over backwards to oblige the corporate sector. Substantial revenue foregone in every budget is an indicator of the largesse extended to industry although it is no secret that industry associations lobby hard to wrench more from the government. This is an



Specific activities qualify as CSR

opportunity for companies to demonstrate goodwill, to walk the talk and to address issues that need attention such as a robust policy on Affirmative Action, skills training programmes and reach some of the most marginalized through ideas and funds.

However less talked about is that the Companies Bill intends to improve corporate governance. It gives teeth to shareholders who can take action against fraud. Independent directors will not get stock options. Clause 149 lays down that every listed company shall have at least one-third of the total number of its directors as independent directors. It seeks to provide that an independent director shall not be entitled to any remuneration other than a sitting fee, reimbursement of expenses for participation in the board meeting and a profit-related commission as approved by the members. It provides for rotation of independent directors who may hold office for a term of five consecutive years and shall be eligible for re-appointment on a special resolution.

The fixing of tenure is a welcome step as it will ensure independence in a true sense and shield the independent director from the pressures of the management. It caps the director's remuneration at five per cent of the net profits of a company. The Bill defines an Independent Director as one who is required to submit a declaration outlining integrity, qualifications including disqualifications.

The Board of Directors of every listed company shall also constitute an Audit Committee, a Nomination and Remuneration Committee and a Stakeholders Relationship Committee under clause 178.

Presently public companies with a paid-up capital of five crores upwards are mandated to have committees. These committees, made up of a minimum number, remains at three. But they are required to have the majority of their directors as independent directors to not only bring independence in their functioning but also to protect the interests of minority stakeholders.

Clauses 139 deals with the role of auditors which has been in the eye of a storm in India in recent times. The Bill provides for mandatory rotation of auditors every five years. An individual can be appointed as auditor for not more than five consecutive years, and a firm as auditor for more than two consecutive terms of five consecutive years.

It also empowers the members of a company to decide by resolution that the auditing team shall be rotated every year or that the audit shall be conducted by more than one auditor. The Bill states that the chairperson of the Audit Committee shall be financially literate. In addition, the terms of reference of the committee must include a review of the auditor's independence and monitor the end use of funds raised through public offers.

The present Companies Act has no such charter. Clause 212 creates the provision for establishment of a Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) by the central Government which can then assign an investigation into the affairs of the company. The SFIO will get a prominent role once this legislation comes into force. The Bill also stipulates establishment of a 'vigil' mechanism to safeguard whistleblowers.

Introduced by Clause 245, Class Action suits empower the shareholders or depositors or any class of them to file an application before NCLT (National Company Law Tribunal) if they are of the opinion that the management or conduct of the affairs of the company are being conducted in a manner prejudicial to the interest of the company or its members or depositors. The clause also provides the number of such members or depositors required to file suits.

Changes have been made regarding the grounds for winding up of a company. If it winds up operations it must pay two years salary to its employees. ■

(Views are personal)

Living

□ Books

□ Eco-tourism

□ Film

□ Theatre

□ Ayurveda

The wayward river

A film about life in a sinking environment



Soil erosion continuously changes the landscape forcing people to adapt

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

TEN years in the making, *Char-The No Man's Island*, posed daunting physical and logistical challenges. But much like the mighty river that the film is about, director Sourav Sarangi found his way around the hurdles to come up with a film that is going places.

Char-The No Man's Island, captures the many moods of a dramatic landscape on the India-Bangladesh river border while focusing primarily on the plight of its people, perpetually susceptible to the vagaries of nature and ill-advised development initiatives.

It is a searing critique of a big dam that has wreaked havoc as well as an empathetic anthropological study of an impoverished community dis-



Sourav Sarangi

placed by soil erosion. The epic-scale documentary is informed with as much cinematic ingenuity as urgent emotional force.

Char-The No Man's Island, a co-production involving India, Japan, Norway, Italy, Denmark and the UK, is making waves around the world. "The river never stops," says 47-year-old Sarangi. "It flows on no matter what comes in the way. It simply changes its course when it is up against an obstacle. I had to be a bit like the river during the making of the film."

Shot on the Indian side of the border, the project was hugely demanding on the unit. "It is the first long, elaborate venture of my career," says the director. Access to the location was arduous at the best of times and transport facilities were rudimentary.

The island has no electricity and nobody is allowed on or off it after sundown. Sarangi had to

Continued on page 32

Continued from page 31

keep riders on standby to ferry the camera batteries to the mainland for charging. And the cameras had to be set to night-vision mode after sunset for filming the villagers, which explains some of the film's most striking images in which humans assume the contours of spectral creatures in a strange, dark nether world.

The citation of the 2012 Guangzhou Documentary Film Festival, which gave Sarangi the best director prize, acknowledged the enormity of the risks the filmmaker endured in bringing the plight of the hapless inhabitants of this no man's land abandoned and forgotten by politicians on both sides of the border.

It read: "Director Sourav Sarangi paints a subtle but fearless portrait of the urgency of a group of people who belong to no one... desperately in need of a deeper stability as the earth they inhabit literally disappears beneath their feet. This is a story that, like the island itself, may have been lost without his inquisitive eye and courageous camera."

Not an iota of exaggeration there. The 150-sq-km island where Sarangi filmed is inhabited by tens of thousands of people whose lives are a daily struggle for survival. Smuggling of rice, cows and banned cough syrups is their only means of livelihood.

This barren patch on the Ganga is controlled by the border police of both countries. Its occupants are sitting ducks for the trigger happy, like 10-year-old Sofikul Sheikh's father, killed some years ago by security forces while trying to smuggle cows into Bangladesh.

Although the film's "principal character" is obviously the omnipresent river, it is the Ganga's timeless and ever-shifting relationship with the people that Sarangi explores. The focal point of *Char- The No Man's Island* is 14-year-old Rubel Mondal, who was only four when erosion wiped his village off the face of the Indian map.

"The river gives back what it takes," says Sarangi. "The land that was lost resurfaced as an island called Char." The homeless rebuilt their dwellings according to the old alignments – those that were neighbours in the submerged village became neighbours on the new island as well."

The spirited Rubel now lives, along with hundreds of uprooted families, on the island that emerged in the riverbed a few years later. Sofikul is his neighbour. The two boys help each other out on their dangerous sojourns across the border with their contraband. Life hangs by a thread here and death is a bullet away.

The story of Rubel sums up the plight of these people. He wants to cross the river and go back to his school in India but is forced by circumstances to frequently travel in the opposite direction to smuggle rice to Bangladesh for a living.

"It took me a while to zero in on Rubel," says the filmmaker. "But once I was introduced to him, I knew that he would be the voice of my film. He was good at his studies but he cannot go back to school anymore. He has to earn a living for himself and his family. He is only a boy but is very mature, intelligent and blessed with a sense of responsibility."

Sarangi first saw the effects of soil erosion in 2002, when he travelled to the village of Pasrashpur in Murshidabad, across the river from Bangladesh's Rajshahi district. "The village vanished before my eyes over a period of time," he recalls. "Trees, buildings, roads, temples, mosques, everything crumbled and disappeared into the water."

He captured what he saw on a digital camera. "I would go back every year to the edge of the village shoot as the villagers lost their land, one bit at a time," says Sarangi.

Since the Farraka barrage was commissioned in the mid-1970s to control the river and benefit the people of the area, it has yielded exactly the opposite result, says the filmmaker. "The landscape has changed completely, and so have lives," he adds.

In his director's note on the film, Sarangi describes the disintegration of an entire village thus: "You notice a small crack on the ground; the thin line widens, the grassroots still trying to cling together, and after a while the piece of earth where you stood minutes before jumps into the river with a splash. And sometimes it simply goes down in silence, in slow motion. The land is consumed much like a prey hypnotized by a recoiling anaconda..."

The villagers themselves, according to Sarangi, tend to use the metaphor of a snake to describe the river that has, in Hindu mythology, been associated with powers of healing and cleansing. Since the construction of the Farakka barrage, the Ganga, the villagers told the filmmaker, "has turned into a snake caught at her neck by modern technology (which)... for survival strikes back and forth to take away everything she gave us..."

But the river is all they have. "These people cannot turn their backs on the river. It is a part of their beings, so they coexist with it. They do not migrate to the city because it has nothing to offer them," says Sarangi.

The surface reality of the changing landscape and the lives that depend on it isn't what interested him in the first place. "I wanted to probe the minds of the people who were displaced, peep into their inner realities," he explains. "So I have no interviews in the film. I only have conversations."

The film is, in essence, a blend of cinema verite principles and authorial intervention, of reality blended with interpretation that reflects the mind of the filmmaker himself.

Char-The No Man's Island, which premiered last October at the Busan International Film Festival in South Korea before travelling to Jakarta, Dubai and Goa, had its latest screening in the International Forum for New Cinema of the 63rd Berlin Film Festival in February.

The Forum, "the most daring section of the Berlinale", showcases "avant garde, experimental works, essays, long-term observations, political reportage and yet-to-be-discovered cinematic landscapes". Sarangi's 88-minute film fits virtually all of the above qualifying definitions.

Indeed, like the river it was filmed around, *Char-The No Man's Island* has multiple facets, each flowing into the other almost imperceptibly. ■



A bird's eye view of Silent Valley

Silent Valley's splendid isolation

Susheela Nair
Palakkad

YEARNING for an escape from the heat and dust of Palakkad town, we headed to the Silent Valley National Park, ensconced in the high mountains of the Western Ghats. Located in the northeast part of Palakkad district, Silent Valley is the last vestige of the virgin rainforests of the Western Ghats. The park flaunts a wealth of biological and genetic heritage and is tagged as an 'ecological island'. It is indeed nature's gift to mankind.

There are many fascinating stories about the gen-

SUSHEELA NAIR



SUSHEELA NAIR



Bridge across the Kunti river

esis of the name, Silent Valley. According to one version, the park owes its title to the relative absence of cicada, an insect which produces a characteristic sound at night, common to all forests. But the forest does pulsate with the incessant chirping of the cicadas and other jungle sounds. Silent Valley is also believed to be an anglicized version of the region's local name Sairandharivanam. Another legend traces its moniker to the lion-tailed macaque, *Macaca silenus*, *Silenus* being a deity in Greek mythology.

According to Hindu mythology, Silent Valley is the place where Draupadi, the Pandava bride, stayed clandestinely assuming the name of Sairandhri throughout her agnaithavas. It is believed that the Pandavas, during their 13-year exile in these forests, were greatly impressed by this tranquil valley, and lived here for a long time. To add to the Mahabharata allusion, the eponymous river Kunti is named after their mother. It meanders through the valley's dense forests before joining the Bharathapuzha. And the dam site is named Sairandhri, the other name for Draupadi.

We hired a jeep from the check post at Mukkali, the base for entry into the Silent Valley National Park, to Sairandhri, 23 km away. Visitors are permitted only up to Sairandhri, the site of the proposed dam, and to the river Kuntipuzha. The topographical remoteness of the plateau has aided in preserving fauna and flora that is over 50 million years old. We saw different shades of green. The canopy of the tall moss-covered trees reduced the bright sunlight to mere beams of light. The floor of the forest was laden with a carpet of decaying leaves. The park has more than 960 species of flora, some exclusive to the park. The valley is adorned with blooming orchids of varied colours and shades. The Malabar orchid, the Queen of

orchids, the purplish red coloured bamboo orchids and the endemic Sri Lankan orchids can be seen here.

We clambered up the 30-metre high watchtower at Sairandhri, and were treated to a sweeping view of the valley with its gushing streams, waterfalls and rainforests. The Silent Valley National Park forms part of the core area of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. It boasts of a wealth of biological and genetic heritage. Sprawling over 90

square km, the rich evergreen forests of Silent Valley support exquisite flora and some endemic fauna. The 25-km Kunti river, originating at an elevation of 2,400 metres in the outer northern ridges of the Nilgiris at the confluence of three tributaries, traverses the entire length of the valley and then rushes down through a gorge formed between the mountains to the Mannarkad plains.

Trek to the interiors of the forests and discover its faunal diversity. The elusive lion-tailed macaque with its trademark white beard is the pride of this exotic Eden. The park's canopy of towering *Culinea* trees shelter a variety of animals – Nilgiri langurs, giant grizzly squirrels and birds, 25 species of mammals, 12 species of fish, 35 species of reptiles, 110 species of butterflies, 255 species of moths and over 700 species of insects.

If you are an avid nature enthusiast, you can learn to identify birds and butterflies and feast your eyes on rare orchids. For bird watchers there are more than 200 species of birds to spot. The park echoes with the raucous cries of common species and rare birds like Jerdon's Imperial Pigeon, Peninsular Bay Owl, Ceylon Frogmouth, Nilgiri Laughing Thrush, and the most elusive of birds – the Malay Tiger Bittern. But the dense foliage makes sighting difficult. The valley harbours more than 110 species of butterflies including many rare ones like the Malabar Rose, Malabar Raven, Buddha Peacock, Tamil Catseye and Blue Nawab. Though Mukkali is possibly the only place in Kerala where you can catch a faint glimpse of all three species of Crow butterflies – the Common Crow, the Double Branded Crow and the rare Brown King Crow – we were not fortunate to spot any.

We also stopped by the Interpretation Centre to see the photos on display and listen to the 'jungle' orchestra. A 1.5 km path from Sairandhri leads to the bed of the Kunthipuzha where a rusty steel suspension bridge dating to the dam construction days still provides the only means of crossing over. To get a feel of the jungle, one has to trek but wildlife viewing is very difficult due to the thick canopy and vegetation.

Silent Valley is a success story of survival against all odds. Its bio-geographic isolation, the uniqueness of its flora and fauna, the minimal degradation of this protected enclave, initiated a movement to save it from a hydroelectric project of the Kerala State Electricity Board. Following a monumental battle and sustained campaigns by environmentalists, the proposed hydroelectric project across the Kuntipuzha was stopped and the state government forced to declare the area a National Park in 1985. It is indeed a remarkable achievement in the history of the conservation movement. ■

FACT FILE

When to go:

The ideal time to visit the reserve is from October to March.

Tourist/ Forest Offices: The nearest tourist information office is in Palakkad.

Visiting time: 8 am to 5 pm

How to get there:

Air: Nearest airport: Coimbatore -90km

Rail: Nearest railhead: Palakkad-58km

Road: Mannarkad- 40km, Palakkad- 58km. There are bus services from Mannarkkad to Mukkali at one- hour intervals.

The killing fields of Malwa



THOSE WHO DID NOT DIE
Impact of the Agrarian Crisis on Women in Punjab

Ranjana Padhi
Sage

₹ 650

Civil Society News
New Delhi

EVERY day hundreds of people from the Malwa region of Punjab board the Bhatinda Express to a hospital in Bikaner for treatment. The train has been chillingly named the 'Cancer Express.' It's a story that surfaces in the media now and then.

Nobody has really delved deeper. There is more distress in Malwa than what meets the eye – the agrarian crisis, indebtedness, farmer suicides and the burden of cancer.

Ranjana Padhi, an independent writer and activist has sensitively joined the dots to explain what is happening in Malwa through the eyes of women whose husbands committed suicide. They left behind distraught families, struggling to cope.

Padhi's study covers eight districts of Malwa – Ferozepur, Muktsar, Bhatinda, Moga, Mansa, Sangrur, Barnala and Faridkot. She travelled to 54 villages and with the help of the Bharatiya Kisan Union-Ekta was able to reach out to the women.

Out of 2,890 suicides in Bhatinda and Sangrur, 61 per cent were farmers and 39 per cent were agricultural labourers. "A single village has so many incidents of suicide that sometimes a single lane has a succession of houses each of which has lost a family member," writes Padhi. Most farmers who killed themselves were young, between 18 to 40 years.

Jat Sikhs form the predominant peasant community here along with Mazhabis, Rai Sikhs and Dalits who are agricultural labourers. Mostly it is marginal farmers, small farmers and the landless who are committing suicide. Marginal farmers in Malwa took the most loans from informal sources like moneylenders.

Loans were taken to practice expensive Green Revolution farming. For a farmer with a small field, the rising cost of inputs or hiring of farm equipment has become unmanage-

able. A single agrarian crisis pushes a family into deep debt. Loans were also taken for giving dowry, to settle earlier loans and to meet medical expenses. In the case of the landless, loans are meant for sheer survival.

The status of the family in Punjab is gauged by how well a man provides for his family. The burden of patriarchy falls on his head. If he is forced to sell his land to repay his loans and he can't pay dowry or fend for his family, he loses his respect within the community. This loss of self-esteem combined with harassment and humiliation by the moneylender makes him take recourse to suicide.

His death resolves nothing. The entire burden now falls on his family, his wife or mother to pay back those loans, raise money for dowry and somehow keep the home fires lit. The women struggle economically and socially.

They have little say in decision-making. Often lands left behind are not in their name or the in-laws send them back to their maternal homes to prevent them from claiming the land. Jat Sikh women working outside the home is frowned

upon.

Small landholdings and nuclear families don't empower the women. Fragmentation places greater strains on women and the elderly. Often sons abandon the family after a father's suicide because they don't want to inherit loans. The result is that women-headed households slide into landlessness and unemployment.

While Jat Sikh women do backbreaking work on whatever little land they hang on to or from selling milk or leasing out their land, landless women toil for meagre wages from seasonal work. As one Dalit woman told Padhi: "When farmers are resorting to wage work in thousands how do you expect us labourers to get work?"

For cancer treatment, too, people have to take to loans. There isn't a single cancer hospital in the Malwa region. Pesticides kill not only the soil but sons and husbands too. Padhi talks to families where the son, father or husband has committed suicide and members of his family are suffering from cancer. Since the public health system is in shambles, farmers and farm hands rely on private healthcare providers who mint money – even from failed suicides.

There is rising malnourishment among women and children. The most undernourished are agricultural labourers. Women stress the need for a functioning public distribution system.

Padhi's book is a bleak picture of the Malwa region. It is a sad story with no succour in sight. Her research is thorough but not cold. There is compassion for the women she meets. Perceptively she writes that social structures in Punjab need to be changed. "Challenging the sexual division of labour would rescue men from the perceived failed project of being the breadwinners of the family and women from the increased dependence on the institution of family and marriage."

Punjab's skewed sex ratio is due to the lack of recognition given to women's work and dowry, a millstone round the man's neck. It doesn't enrich the young bride either.

Padhi's study is also comprehensive. While she has interviewed widowed women and their families, she has also taken a macro view at policies, economics, history, society and feminism to understand the death of the small farmer and its aftermath.

But where does one begin? By creating alternative employment? One study reveals that small and marginal farmers who left their fields for other work weren't happy. In contrast, 70 per cent of big farmers who left farming reported they were 'fully satisfied'. ■

For cancer treatment, too, people take loans. There isn't a single cancer hospital in the Malwa region. Pesticides kill not only the soil but sons and husbands too.



Madhubani with a social message

Shanti Devi's paintings reflect contemporary concerns

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

A continuous stream of youth from Bihar crowded around Shanti Devi as she painted pictures on contemporary themes. A national award winning Madhubani artist, Shanti Devi attracted as much attention as the literary celebrities who came to the World Book Fair held in Delhi this month.

Clad in a purple cotton sari with a traditional green border, Shanti Devi appeared to be enjoying the attention showered on her stall devoted to tribal and folk literature.

A minister from Kerala arrived and Shanti Devi proudly showed him what she was painting. It was a Madhubani rendition of the day's headlines from a Hindi newspaper. One picture depicted the Supreme Court with women on both sides and a line that said: "Mahila ko suraksha do". Another read, "Abala naari ka pukaar: bandh karo yeh atyachaar".

Shanti Devi has painted pictures of the gruesome rape of a young girl in a Delhi bus. She says somebody had suggested she paint on the theme of women's safety. "But this comes from my heart," she says.

"I have travelled around the world and earned money yet I am a battered woman. My husband did not like me giving money to my mother. He did not let me educate my older child. But my younger daughter, Sujata Kumari and my son Dinesh, are studying at the Indian Institute of Craft and Design in Jaipur."

This feisty woman has had to work her way around the men in her family since childhood. Her father died while she was still a child. Her mother was an agricultural labourer and an avid painter. Twice a year she would paint their hut before the festivals of Holi and Chhath.

Shanti Devi learnt to paint from her mother using natural colours. Her older brother was enrolled in an English medium school. Shanti Devi was determined to study too. Her mother quietly got her admitted to a local school. En route she would pass the home of a lady called Poona Devi who used to paint beautifully. The little girl

set her heart on learning from her. "I fell at her feet and asked her to teach me how to paint with traditional straw and dyes. I even gave her a sack of rice from my home as fees. She used to draw stories from the Ramayana and the Bhagvad Gita. I could not learn all of that but I learnt quite a bit," says Shanti Devi.

She got married at 16 in 1976. "I cried when I saw the poverty at my in-laws place" she reminisces. But her father-in-law was liberal and allowed her to continue painting.

Shanti Devi also fought for the rights of women. A victim of domestic violence she shows a bruise on her cheek where a hot lantern was thrown at her. "I might have got beaten. But in my mohalla women don't get beaten anymore. Women used to work all day and then get beaten up by their husbands in the evening. I bribed the policemen to pick up these men and threaten to beat them up. So over a period of time no woman gets beaten. Through a craft guild we have organized ourselves. Whenever we hear that a mother-

'Through a craft guild we have organized ourselves. Whenever we hear that a mother-in-law and sister-in-law are harassing a woman we reach there in a group.'



Shanti Devi shows her paintings

in-law and sister-in-law are harassing a woman we reach there in a group. We will not let any woman get harassed," she says rather determinedly.

In 1977 she came into contact with Raymond Owens, an American anthropologist who was stunned by the beauty of traditional Madhubani paintings. He bought some of Shanti Devi's paintings. She soon got to know more Madhubani artists. She met Ganga Devi, another Madhubani artist who used to exhibit her paintings in Delhi. But it was her sojourn to Denmark for an India Festival as part of Indira Gandhi's entourage, which made her famous.

"I stayed in the same hotel as Indira Gandhi, Priyanka and Rahul. I painted a cow and a calf for her," she says. Since then she has worked with the government to promote Indian art and craft.

She travels, paints for children's books and sells paintings made by herself and her guild. Currently her single-minded goal is to raise funds for her children's education. "My daughter has won a scholarship and we bought her a digital camera. Now she needs a laptop. Today all work in a design school is done on a computer. I dream for her now. I hope she gets a job overseas and learns to speak English fluently," says Shanti Devi. ■

Pacifying aching joints

Dr G. G. GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



DISARRANGEMENT of functions within the body may occur due to multiple causes like diet, lifestyle or environment. The resultant disease may manifest itself in a gradual way. In the initial phase there may be an absence of symptoms. At a later stage there may be

complex manifestations involving more than one organ. The illness may become chronic or of a long-standing nature.

One such affliction is Vatarakta (gouty arthritis), a condition caused by vitiated vata and rakta. Vatarakta can be defined as a condition in which the aggravated vata is obstructed in its course by an aggravated rakta, thus vitiating the rakta.

The subsequent association of vitiated vata and vitiated rakta is manifested as a disease called Vatarakta. The site where Vatarakta manifests itself are the hands, feet, fingers including toes and all the joints.

In the initial stage, hands and feet are affected. The illness then spreads to all other parts of the body because of the fluidity, mobility and subtle pervasive nature of vata and rakta. While they move through the blood vessels, they get obstructed in the joints which further aggravates them. Because of the tortuous nature of the course in the joints, the morbid matter gets lodged there.

Being localized in the joints, they get further associated with pitta (kapha and vayu aggravated because of other etiological factors) and produce different types of pain characterized by the nature of these elements. Therefore Vatarakta, a health problem representative of metabolic disorders characterized by changed lifestyle, diet, environment etc. results in pain in all the joints which becomes unbearable for the afflicted person. This can be correlated to gouty arthritis.

The classical sign of Vatarakta mentioned in Ayurveda texts is pain especially in the small joints characterized by a shifting and recurrent nature. The pain may originate from either pada (foot) or hastha (palm). Any condition that exhibits this sign, irrespective of the empirical cause for it, is diagnosed as Vatarakta.

Hence there could sometimes be more than one disease defined empirically into the definition of Vatarakta. On the

other hand, a disease defined as Vatarakta may fit into the Ayurveda definition in one instance and get excluded at another instance.

While bio-medicine has an empirical approach to defining a disease taking into account objective parameters like a specific laboratory or radiological parameter, Ayurveda defines a disease as a perturbation of vata, pitta and kapha in an individual from his or her homeostatic state enabling it to tailor a therapeutic regimen suited to the individual's physiology.

Clinical symptoms: General symptoms: Pain is the most common and predominant symptom present in this disease. Though initially joints of the hands and feet are affected, in later stages it spreads to other parts of the body.

Specific symptoms: Itching, burning sensation, pain, lethargy, pricking pain, throbbing pain, the outer skin color is black, red or coppery, oedema, stiffness, excruciating pain, deformity of the joint/inward curving of the joint, lameness, paraplegia

Treatment:

- Oleation therapy
- Purgation therapy
- Repeated basthi: Medicated oil/decoction enema

Besides this Seka (sprinkling), Abhyanga (massage), Pradeha (application of paste) should be adopted.

The diet, comprising of unctuous substances or food that does not cause burning sensation, should be consumed.

Pacifactory medications include Kashayas, Choornas, Arishtam, Guggulu, Rasaoushadas and Lepas.

Food & lifestyle suitable for gouty arthritis:

- Foods such as pigeon pea, chickpea, green gram, old barley, wheat, sali and shashtika rice, milk from cow, buffalo or goat.

- Abhyanga (massage), Seka (sprinkling), Upanaha (poultice), Virechana (purgation), Raktamokshana (leech therapy).

Food & lifestyle to be avoided for gouty arthritis:

- Foods that are pungent, salty and sour, and foods which are heavy and sticky. These include black gram, horse gram, peas, meat of wet and marshy areas, curd, sugarcane, alcohol, radish and sour gruel.
- Day sleep, exposure to fire, excessive exercise and sexual intercourse are to be avoided. ■



WONDER PLANT

Guggulu balm

AS a pain relieving analgesic, guggulu (*Commiphora wightii*) is an excellent alternative to non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). This plant relieves pain, inflammation and heals the underlying causes of such symptoms.

Today, NSAIDs are sold without prescription to millions of people for their analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties. These include drugs ranging from aspirin to acetaminophen. Most educated consumers are aware of the dangerous side effects of NSAIDs.

Guggulu is safe, acts quickly and has very effective anti-inflammatory properties. The plant also enhances circulation. Hence guggulu is a safe and effective pain reliever to NSAIDs. It is ideal for those who do physical labour – the zealous gardener, the yoga practitioner or the gym enthusiast. Guggulu relieves stiffness and pain usually within an hour or two.

Guggulu is a key component in Ayurvedic medicine. But today the plant has become so scarce that the IUCN has enlisted it in its Red Data List of endangered species. The plant has been over extracted in its two habitats, Gujarat

and Rajasthan.

Guggulu produces a resinous sap known as gum guggul. The extract of this gum, called gugulipid is used in the treatment of arthritis, high cholesterol, acne and other skin diseases. It can treat ailments ranging

from obesity, sores and ulcers to urinary problems, liver disorders, intestinal worms, leucoderma, sinusitis, edema, paralytic seizures as well as bodyache and pain. An important plant polyphenol, guggulsterone is an active constituent of guggul resin.

Location: Guggulu or *Commiphora wightii* is found mainly in the arid and semi-arid regions of Gujarat and Rajasthan. It also grows to a small extent in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and in the rocky tracts of western India and the eastern Himalayas.

Applications: The Sanskrit definition of the term guggul is "one that protects against diseases." The plant is important for Ayurvedic applications. It is considered useful for removal of 'ama' or toxic substances that accumulate due to sluggish digestion and circulation associated with a slowing down of the metabolism.

Guggul has a wide range of applications. It is used for alleviating rheumatic and arthritic pain and for obesity. Guggul is also used for treating a sluggish liver, malaria, stimulating the libido, alleviating nervous diseases, bronchial congestion, cardiac and circulatory problems, weak digestion, fractures, gynecological problems, leucorrhea, sterility, impotence, STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) and skin diseases including acne and psoriasis.



vaidya.ganga@frrht.org



Guggulu is one of the most important rasayanas (herbal tonics) of Ayurveda where it is described as warm, dry, pungent-flavoured, and aromatic with nutritive, lubricant, stimulant and digestion-enhancing properties. Acharya Sushruta recommends guggulu for medoroga (obesity). Current research substantiates its benefit for the treatment of elevated blood lipids and coronary and arterial plaque known as atherosclerosis. As a result, today standardized guggul extracts are being approved for lowering elevated serum cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

The traditional properties of guggul are demulcent, aperient, carminative, antispasmodic and emmenagogue. It serves as an astringent and antiseptic on the mucus membrane. Internally, its bitter principles stimulate appetite and relieve bloating and gas. Its oleo-resins are excreted through the skin, mucus membranes and the urinary system, stimulating and disinfecting their secretions. It is also a uterine stimulant, making it useful for regulating menstruation but contraindicated during pregnancy. The warming, circulatory properties of guggul also serve as a potent aphrodisiac.

Guggul is warming and stimulates metabolism. It is therefore one of the few botanicals that has been shown to treat hypothyroid conditions. Guggul also serves as an antipyretic in reducing fever and secretions from diseased surfaces of the body. It is excellent when used synergistically with other anti-inflammatory herbs such as *Tinospora* (guduchi), *Echinacea* and *goldenseal* (hydrastis).

Due to its varied taste – sweet, astringent and pungent – guggul alleviates vitiation of vata, pitta and kapha.

Gardening: The Guggulu plant can be propagated using seeds or by using stem cuttings 30 cm long with 10 mm thickness. The cuttings are treated with rooting agents, raised in nursery beds and protected from termite attacks. The beds are watered lightly after planting. These cuttings will sprout leaves first and then roots within a month. They are then transferred to polythene bags containing organic manure for two months. Finally, these are transferred to the planting site before the onset of the monsoon. The germination of seeds is low. In India flowering takes place from October to December and fruiting from October to January. Guggul should be taken under expert guidance. ■

R. Rangarajan is a Senior Research Fellow in the CHG Department of I-AIM, Bangalore, Email: rangarajan.rajaram2005@gmail.com

FEEL GOOD

Ear care

OUR lives are influenced by sound. Some are soothing like the rustle of leaves, the pitter-patter of rain or the lilting song of a bird. Others are jarring like the cacophony of traffic, wailing sirens and clanging alarm clocks on wintry mornings. We like to listen to what our friends and family say. Life is all about conversation. And to listen and talk we need to keep our ears clean and healthy.

Here are a few tips which will be music to your ears:

- A daily ear massage rehydrates. Dip a cotton bud in lukewarm sesame oil and smear gently on your ears. Begin at the top portion and use your thumb and index fingers to rub the rim, moving slowly down to the lobe. Then place a few drops of sesame oil just outside the opening to the ear canal to prevent ear problems.
- Clean your ears after bathing. Use soft cotton buds to dry your ears. Do not ever twist your wet towel and use the ends to clean your ears.
- Stretch ears gently to the left, then right, to the top and the bottom. Then move your ears in a clockwise and anti-clockwise direction gently.
- Meditation, pranayama and yoga keeps ears healthy.
- Don't use sharp pointed objects to clean your

ears. Ear wax, insects or other foreign bodies stuck in the ears should be removed by a doctor.

- Avoid exposure to loud levels of noise. Wear hearing protection to prevent ear damage. Use your ear phones at a moderate volume, for instance at a decibel level that enables you to hear someone talking to you at the same time.
- While flying, swallow and yawn frequently when the aeroplane is ascending and descending to equalize pressure in your ears. Earplugs with special filters can be purchased to help equalize air pressure in the ears during air travel.
- Swimming can lead to 'swimmer's ear'. Dry your ears after a swim and shake out excess water especially if you feel water has entered. Persons with ear discharge or wax or rupture should not swim. This may lead to severe ear and brain infection.
- Avoid foods that can increase your chances of catching cold. Influenza can aggravate ear problems. For the same reason, all refrigerated foods must be avoided.
- Some medications can affect hearing. Take medications only as directed and consult a doctor if you experience unusual hearing, balance problems, or ringing in your ears. ■

Dr Rekha R, RMO, IHC

ORGANIC CHEF

Sweet tooth

MODAKAM

Ingredients:

Rice flour: 1 cup
Water: 1 cup
Sesame oil: 2 spoons
Grated coconut: 1 cup
Powdered jaggery: 1 cup
Cardamom: 4 pods

Method: For outer covering: Boil the water. Add 2 spoons of sesame oil in it. Add rice flour while stirring constantly. Stir till it becomes thick and then keep aside for the mixture to cool. After greasing your hands with sesame oil, make small balls out of the flour. Now shape these balls into small cups.

For the inner stuffing: Mix grated coconut, cardamom and jaggery. Heat for a few minutes by constant stirring over a low flame till the mix is well-blended. Add a spoon of ghee, mix well and remove. Make small balls of this. Stuff the mix into the outer coverings made of rice flour and close each ball. Steam the balls for 10 minutes and serve.

Properties:

- It is the favorite sweet of Lord Ganesha

- Healthy since it is steamed
- Nourishing and strengthening
- Suitable for children and adults
- Balances vata and pitta
- Causes obesity if eaten in excess

GINGER SYRUP

Ingredients:

Ginger: 1 inch piece
Coriander seed: 1 tsp
Water: cup
Honey: 1 tsp
Lime juice: Few drops (optional)

Method: Smash the ginger piece. Coarsely powder the coriander seeds in a mixer. Add a cup of water and boil. Let the volume of the water be reduced to three-fourth of the cup. After the water cools, filter to remove coarse particles and add honey. Add a few drops of lime juice. Mix well and serve.

Properties:

- Increases appetite
- Improves digestion
- Relieves nausea and vomiting
- Gives energy

Dr. Rekha R, RMO, I-AIM.

PRODUCTS

LAKSHMAN ANAND

GARDEN DELIGHTS

IF you have a garden that doesn't attract wildlife don't worry. Buy green frogs, tadpoles, birdbaths and ladybirds made of clay by Sunderlal, a potter from Alwar district of Rajasthan. He has set up a little factory in Delhi which manufactures all the artifacts your green space will approve of. And so what if your wildlife is made from mud. There are pretty flowerpots too and small planters for your little verandah if you aren't blessed with a garden or a lawn.

Sunderlal says he thought up the designs himself. After all, he reasons, what else can a garden love apart from the birds and bees. "Observing the gardens of the rich has been a learning experience for me," he explains. "In Delhi I get customer feedback and that helps me design better." ■

For orders: Sunderlal, A-59 New Sainik Vihar, Mohan Garden, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi 110059. Phone: 09871983208



LAKSHMAN ANAND



PUNJABI STYLE

PUNJAB's fine art of phulkari is now available in a range of designs and colours for everyone. Traditionally this intricate needlework was done by Punjabi women for themselves. Phulkari was stitched on odhnis or long scarves and worn during festive occasions. Now 14 self-help groups (SHGs) of women in Badshahpur village of Punjab have been taught to stitch phulkari by Punjab's Department of Handicrafts. The state pays each woman ₹2,000 as subsidy while they undergo training, says Harshpreet Singh of Sabby's who sells their products all over India. It takes each woman 15 days to embroider one salwar-kameez set.

There are colourful odhnis too with embroidery and sequins. The suits are in cotton and silk. Prices are very reasonable. "We keep only a 10 per cent margin," says Harshpreet who is scouting around for bulk orders. ■

For orders: Satinder Pal Singh, 88A Hem Bagh, New Officers Colony, Patiala, Punjab. Phone: 9855107756, 9216997756, 9971176656