

Civil Society

A MODEL FOR INDIA S SMALL FARMS

RISING FRUITS

MYSORE RASPBERRY GOES TO HAWAII



WHY COOL MEN DON'T BUY SEX

Ruchira Gupta on curbing trafficking
Pages 12-13

LOKPAL AND PAK DICTATORS

Pages 6-7

NCPRI ON GRIEVANCES

Pages 8-10

MAKING ENTREPRENEURS

Pages 26-27

WEB CLOUT FOR CONSUMERS

Page 28

WILD TIME IN SAKLESHPUR

Pages 33-34

SHINY TEETH, HERBAL SOUP

Page 37



We are constantly engaged in providing **better basic healthcare, quality primary education, right skills for employment, and recognising & encouraging social entrepreneurs**

This has been made possible by our **4P Model** (Private-Public-People-Partnership) and the commitment of our team. Together we are endeavouring to energise the circle of prosperity for communities.

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CONTENTS



Civil Society

READ U S. WE READ YO U.

Lessons from Hawaii

RISING FRUITS

Hawaii increases the income of the small farmer with the 12 Trees Project in which Indian fruits also figure. Can this be a model for India?

20

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: SHREE PADRE

Stamps show big hit in Kashmir	11
Women find a friend in Goonj	14
Delhi's backward govt schools	16
At 60 ChildFund has many plans	18
No one listens to gram sabhas	29 - 30
Flowing with the river	31
Ghaghra's destructive trail	32
Homely cafe	34 - 35
Breath of life	38

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The magazine does not undertake to respond to unsolicited contributions sent to the editor for publication.

It comes as a happy surprise to us that the Malabar Raspberry and other Indian fruit trees are doing well in Hawaii. How much nicer it would be if innovative ideas like the '12 Trees Project' were to be taken up here so that horticulture gets the boost it needs and small farms find new ways of becoming viable. It has become the standard thing for governments in India to dole out sterile incentives. But the reality is that government initiatives by themselves don't deliver results. You can't do without a sense of mission and purpose and the Indian farm sector currently cries out for both. Multiple small and localised efforts nurtured by big-ticket policy are what really help farmers sort out their problems in the field and connect with markets. The single message is that you have to 'get down to it'. The opportunities are huge and no amount of theorising will do. Agricultural scientists should be out working closely with farmers to understand the problems that need to be dealt with.

The '12 Trees Project' underlines the importance of biodiversity. The farm sector's viability is underwritten by the multiplicity in nature. It is in the globe's interest that this biodiversity be allowed to prosper. Hawaii's example also shows us what small farmers can achieve if they are sufficiently networked across countries and continents. Cooperation can avoid duplication and open up valuable niche markets. Indian farms have a lot of catching up to do. There are increasing problems related to soil and water. Finance is difficult to come by. Opportunities in pre-processing and processing haven't been utilised. Traditional Indian fruits and vegetables have been put to good use in other countries resulting in a significant increase in farm incomes. On the other hand, here their value in terms of nutrition and providing livelihoods goes unnoticed. The jackfruit is one big example of this. Is a turnaround possible? Many believe it is, if only governments were to see the vast potential farming has for providing livelihoods and keeping people on their land.

Karamat Ali, the trade unionist and peace activist from Pakistan, spoke with us at some length on his long-standing demand for giving fishermen their rights and not locking them up in jail for straying across the undefined maritime boundary between the two countries. In the plight of the fishermen is the story of mistrust and tension between India and Pakistan. Karamat Ali argues for greater contact between people. Some of that happened when he and others accompanying him from Pakistan met Anna Hazare in Ralegan Siddhi. Karamat Ali worries about an omnipotent Lokpal, saying all Pakistani dictators have talked of ending corruption and it has only grown. Much better to strengthen democracy, he says.

We also caught up with the Wadhvani Foundation's CEO, Ajay Kela. The foundation has invested in a Chair in Delhi and a parallel one in Washington on Indo-US policy initiatives. But what we really found interesting was its entrepreneurship programme in 500 colleges. Small businesses, which provide jobs and spread prosperity, are the way to go.

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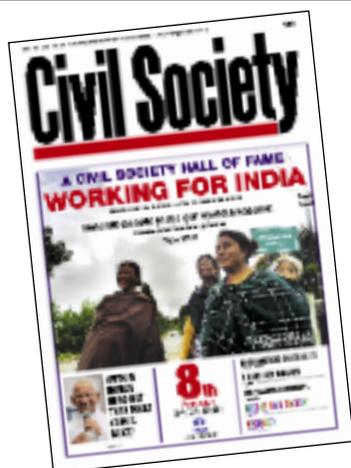


IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Hall of Fame

I must commend *Civil Society* for completing eight years as an independent publication. I have been a reader now for several years and look forward to my copy every month. I deeply appreciate the quality of your journalism. The issues you report on are contemporary and you deserve full credit for being ahead of the rest of the media.

The 8th Annual Special Issue was a pleasure to read. The *Civil Society* Hall of Fame is an important contribution that your magazine has made

to honouring fellow citizens who otherwise go unnoticed. Many of them do extraordinary work by contributing to society at large with a single point agenda to make the communities and the ecosystem in which they operate healthy. These small steps will ultimately contribute significantly towards sustainable growth and development.

The civil society space is an important one for taking all of us forward. It is in this space that we must rediscover ourselves and reaffirm the values that will take all of us ahead as a just and equitable society.

As someone from the corporate world I look forward to further coverage on companies and the genuine efforts many of them have begun to make to be sustainable and socially responsible. I look to *Civil Society* magazine for distinguishing between those who make a genuine effort from those for whom sustainability is merely a fashion statement.

Shiban Bakshi

It gives me great pleasure to send you our hearty congratulations for eight years of interesting and innovative reportage on major social issues facing India.

It is not merely what was covered

but how it was dealt with, not merely cold reportage but getting to the heart of the issue, which has made the magazine successful. Besides the unique get-up and steadily expanding coverage there are stories of inspirational value, of success achieved by workers in the field.

This is in contrast to the usual sensational coverage of social issues which look merely at the underbelly rather than report the issue in totality, keeping a balanced view.

Shankar Ghosh
President, Charkha

JUSCO Education Mission Foundation is an educational trust running four English Medium Schools in Jamshepur. The objective is to provide value based education to students. Towards this end the schools seek to adopt approaches that will effectively sensitise students on social and environmental equity and their individual responsibilities as citizens.

The social development sector in our country is replete with examples of social entrepreneurship and path breaking developmental initiatives. *Civil Society* is the only magazine in the country that captures these inspiring stories and brings it to

national attention.

We started subscribing to *Civil Society* for our school libraries four years ago as we wanted our students to know and understand the outstanding work being done by dedicated groups and individuals across the country and learn how simple ideas fuelled by passion can change the world for the better.

Our staff and students have learnt invaluable lessons from your magazine and used many of the articles to illustrate topics in our regular school curriculum. Your magazine has also helped students to appreciate our country and take pride in its positive stories, as they are constantly exposed to press coverage that mostly highlights the negative aspects of our society.

We adopted the learnings from BALA – the work done by Kabir Vajpayi in municipalschools....so now our students have started using the school "building as a learning aid" concept where part of learning has become self-initiated and fun!

Shakti Sharma,
Chief Education, JUSCO

CORRECTION

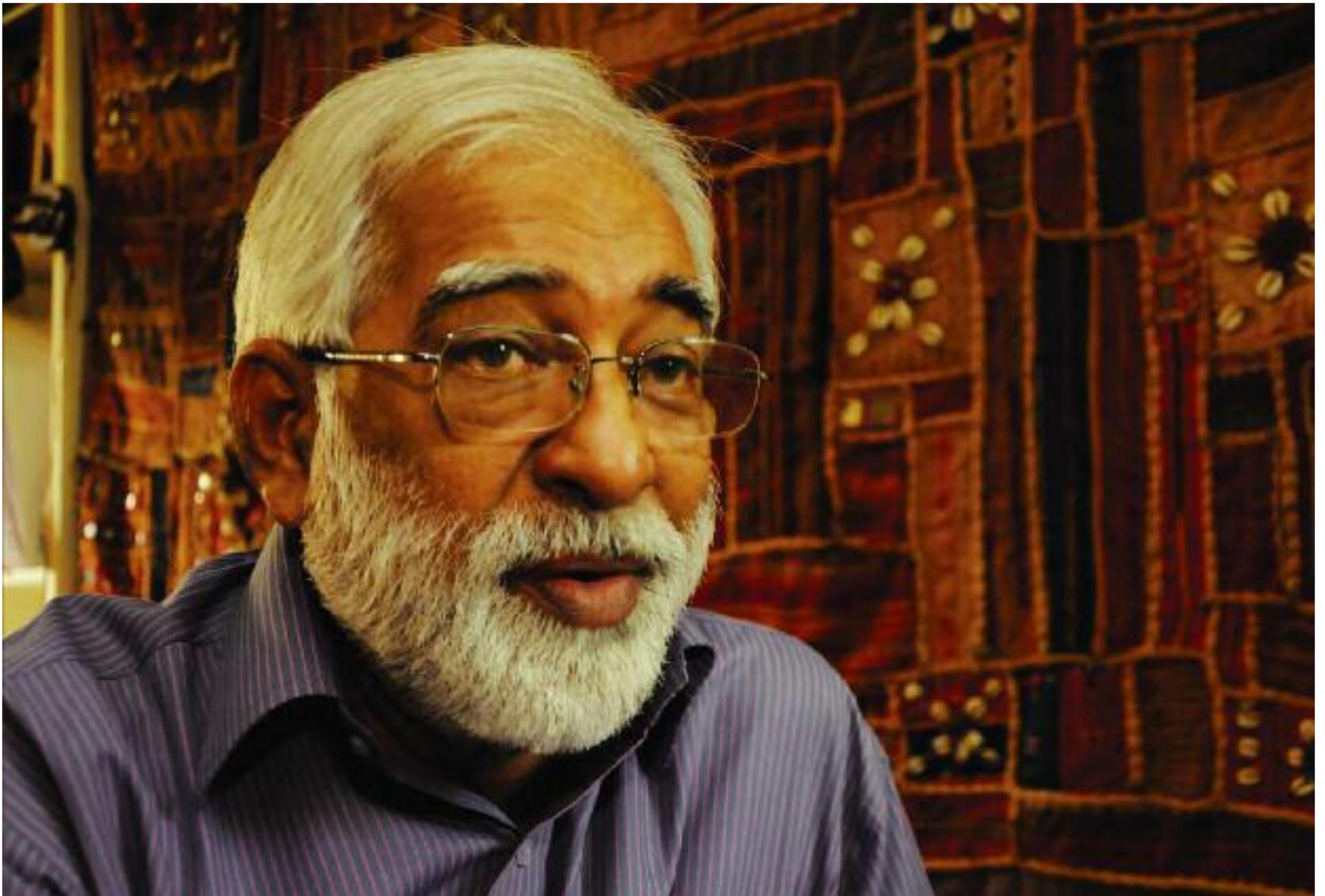
In our last issue the article, 'Jongksha's 3 Angels,' was written by Kramer Lakiang.

Editor

INTERVIEW Karamat Ali seeks more people

'Your Lokpal is not different

SHAMIK BANERJEE



Karamat Ali

Civil Society News
New Delhi

HUNDREDS of fishermen languish in jails in India and Pakistan for the minor offence of straying across an ill-defined maritime boundary.

The maximum punishment they can get is six months, but years pass before the wheels of the government bureaucracies on both sides move and set them free.

Karamat Ali, who has for long led efforts to get fishermen their rights, was here from Pakistan recently to find a solution to the problem. Ali is a peace activist who believes that many of the disputes between India and Pakistan can melt away if the people of the two countries are allowed to connect more freely.

The harassment which poor fishermen face, with their rights as citizens denied, is an example

of what is wrong in the relationship. For things to get better it is important to have less red tape and more human contact.

Ali and other members of his delegation visited Anna Hazare at his village, Ralegan Siddhi, to see his development model. But an omnipotent Lokpal, Ali fears, could resemble Pakistan's dicta-

tors. Asked why he felt there was not greater cross-border cooperation among civil society groups to solve common social and environmental problems, Ali says, "If you cannot come and go at will, what contact can there be?"

Ali is the executive director of the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER). He was the founding chairperson of the Pakistan Fisher Folk Forum. He is a veteran trade unionist and peace activist. He spoke to *Civil Society* in Delhi. Excerpts from the interview:

'When people are so disempowered how can you fight corruption by making a law? The idea of an all powerful, omnipotent Lokpal is flawed.'

How much of a problem is the jailing of fishermen in the two countries?

In Pakistan there are around 200 Indian fishermen jailed for straying and in India it would be around 250. But usually there are around 600 fishermen in India and Pakistan in jail for having strayed. They get released and then perhaps in

people contact and the rights of fishermen to a Pakistani dictator'

two months again approximately the same number are caught and jailed by both sides.

There must be a solution?

There is a simple solution. Don't imprison them. If they have caught fish from your waters, you can take away the catch or you can fine them and send them back. But instead they are sent to prison. Their boats decay over time. Eventually they are released at the Wagah border post from where it takes them three days to get home when they could easily be sent back in two hours by boat.

The Indian fishermen don't know anyone in Amritsar, the Pakistani fishermen don't know anyone in Lahore. If they are sentenced for trespass they go to jail for six months. But after the sentence is completed they remain in jail for years awaiting verification.

While there is no active war between the two countries there is this ongoing war. The fishermen are treated as prisoners of war and exchanged. They aren't released under the rights they enjoy as citizens. This is sad because it is a violation of Pakistan's Constitution and India's.

Was this the main reason for your visit?

Yes. Last year we had a meeting on this issue in Delhi and we decided to approach the courts. In Pakistan we filed a case in the Supreme Court and at that time we had 442 Indian fishermen freed. Before the court could pronounce its decision our foreign office said they had written to the interior ministry to release them but the ministry had not acted. On the basis of that they were released.

On another 250 fishermen, the Supreme Court told the lower court to take a final decision within six weeks. Within a week the lower court passed an order to free them yet they remained in prison since the Indian person who was supposed to verify them as Indian citizens took time.

So basically it is activists from India and Pakistan who are doing a job which essentially their governments should be doing?

In 1996 we met Indrajit Gupta, who was home minister, and Inder Gujral, then foreign minister. They said they would make arrangements so that fishermen are not caught and jailed. After all, no fisherman has ever been accused of smuggling or espionage.

But there is no demarcation of boundaries at the Sir Creek area even though it is required under UN conventions. A dispute has been going on since 1968 and the two sides have met six or eight times. The UN required the two govern-

ments to complete a demarcation by 2009.

When Gujral and Nawaz Sharif were in power both were sympathetic. They made a public announcement at a SAARC meeting to put up a mechanism so that fishermen would not be jailed for straying but unfortunately both governments collapsed. Last year when 442 fishermen were released we came here and met P. Chidambaram and HM Krishna. Sonia Gandhi promised a mechanism but nothing has moved so far.

You met Anna Hazare too on this visit.

He invited us to his village for lunch. South Asia has some common problems which should be taken up together, we told him. He spoke of the politician-bureaucrat nexus in corruption.

'The Indian fishermen don't know anyone in Amritsar, the Pakistani fishermen don't know anyone in Lahore. If they are sentenced for trespass they go to jail for six months. But after the sentence is completed they remain in jail.'

Both countries face corruption issues. You think Lokpal can be replicated.

It is a big issue but needs broader definition. It's not just financial in nature. Are we talking of people's empowerment or are we just looking at corporate interests?

When people are so disempowered how can you fight corruption by making a law? The idea of an all powerful omnipotent Lokpal is flawed. Now in Pakistan we have the institution of an ombudsman, taking the concept from the Scandinavian countries. But it is not effective. The reason is if you don't have the rule of law prevailing, if citizens rights are not there then the position of the ombudsman becomes secondary. We have federal and provincial ombudsmen.

In Pakistan, all the military dictators made it their agenda to fight corruption. Their argument was corruption could not be dealt with under ordinary laws. Martial law was needed. But after the departure of each dictator corruption only increased.

Let's pray India never faces this. But your concept of a Lokpal, it somewhat resembles this. The institution of the Lokpal should be within the framework of the rule of law and democratic principles and Parliament should be supreme. Don't trivialize Parliament, reform it. If you have criminals being elected to Parliament, change

the electoral system.

So we need to strengthen democracy.

Exactly. If you just want to get rid of corruption in isolation from overall democratization the danger is that you could end up with a minority civilian dictatorship.

Why is there so little cooperation between civil society groups in Pakistan and India?

Because both countries do not allow people to meet. It is tough to get a visa, you go through all kinds of procedures. Finally, when you arrive you have to report to the police station. You can only visit some cities, not the rest of the country. For the *aam aadmi* to meet is virtually unthinkable. If people begin to meet each other they will question the idea that we are enemies and wonder why such large military establishments have been set up. Unless people speak up, they will not allow them to meet.

There are non-political issues like education, health, water conservation on which there can be cooperation. Why has this not happened?

We can share knowledge in many ways. But if you cannot come and

go at will you can't plan anything. If you can normalize trade, we can trade goods directly. We can order machinery and raw material from India, we can trade in our own currencies, we can barter.

In India, education standards are good. In Pakistan, children are sent to Malaysia, Singapore and Europe to study. If you open this up the majority of our children can come here to study. This is about the only region in the world which is not integrated.

You are helping to organise the first South Asia Social Forum in Dacca. How did that come about?

The Pakistan India Forum for Peace and Democracy was started in 1994 with 20 people in Lahore. Our idea is to resolve disputes in a peaceful, democratic manner, remove suspicions, build people to people contact and propose solutions to our governments. We have had meetings in both countries.

In 2004 we had the World Social Forum in Mumbai. In 2006, it took place in Karachi. Bangladesh had not yet hosted a similar forum and it offered to host the first South Asia Social Forum which will take place from 18 to 22 November in Dacca. The main focus is on cooperation in South Asia. ■

NCPRI meet discusses grievance

Bharat Dogra
New Delhi

THE convention on Grievance Redress and Whistleblowers Protection, organized in Delhi by the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) started on an unusual note with a street play.

It told the story of a brave whistleblower, Mangla Ram. Moved by the grievances of the people he courageously decided to set things right. Using the Right to Information (RTI) law, Mangla Ram exposed how people were being denied the benefits of welfare schemes. He confronted the all-powerful sarpanch at a gram sabha meeting.

The upshot was that he was mercilessly beaten up by goons armed with lathis.

This is a true story which happened in Barmer district of Rajasthan. An awesome silence descended in the room as the real life Mangla Ram, a Dalit, walked up on crutches to face the audience. There was loud applause when Mangla Ram said with quiet determination that his fight against injustice would go on. From a sheaf of papers he read out many cases he has recently taken up.

Several organizations along with the NCPRI planned and took part in this important convention. These included the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), SNS, PUCL (Rajasthan), RTF, NFIW, RTI Manch, National Alliance for Peoples' Movements, NCDHR, NACDOR, Pratirodh, Sochna-Rojgar Abhiyan, Accountability Initiative, JJS (Bihar) and Inclusive Media for Change.

The convention took place at Bluebells International School. The generosity of the school in permitting use of their premises was deeply appreciated by delegates. Students from Lady Sri Ram College made an important contribution as volunteers.

Opening the convention, Aruna Roy highlighted the need for a diversity of processes to tackle poor governance, corruption and grievances. She said to be effective grievance redressal mechanisms must be decentralized, transparent and accessible.

Shekhar Singh said that lack of performance by state functionaries is equivalent to corruption and should invite punitive action. He called upon people to demand their due from the government instead of resigning themselves to half-measures. Kuldeep Nayyar chronicled the struggle for the passage of the RTI Act, and the innovative ways it was being put to use.

The convention sought to highlight the experiences of activists who have suffered much by trying to get the grievances of people redressed. Several such activists were invited to share their opinion.

Dr Binayak Sen, vice-chairman of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), spoke about escalating state repression against people who fight injustice. He recalled the repression of the struggle led by Shankar Guha Niyogi.

Kavita Srivastava, national secretary of PUCL, spoke about the recent raid of her home by the Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan police in search of an alleged Naxalite, Soni Sori. She said human rights defenders were being targeted by the state



Mangla Ram with crutches on stage



Kavita Srivastava

And they call

FIRST PERSON

Kavita Srivastava

PUCL's general secretary speaks out at the NCPRI conference on Grievance Redress and Whistleblowing after the police raided her house in Jaipur in search of an alleged Maoist.

I have come here amidst you to feel empowered again because there has been an attempt to weaken me with a single blow. I am a simple human rights activist and 70 to 75 per cent of my work relates to the protection of the rights of the common people. Whether the violation is to do with the police, the administration or the courts, I struggle for people's rights in their daily lives and try to provide them security. I am also associated with some big campaigns for the protection of rights violation of a collective. Most of my time is spent in Rajasthan where I deal with everyday

redress, protection for activists

SHAMIK BANERJEE



through undemocratic laws. She said progressive laws are but tools. Real change depends on people's mobilization for their implementation.

Himanshu Kumar who has devoted his life to tribal communities in Chhattisgarh emphasised the growing nexus between the state and companies resulting in people being displaced from their homes in the name of development.

The experience of such activists was captured imaginatively by the theatre group, Dastan Goi which performed, Dastan-e-sedition.

Anjali Bhardwaj and Nikhil Dey presented a summary of the draft bill on grievance redressal prepared by the NCPRI. This draft will now be circulated by its partners to other grassroots organizations for their opinion.

Venkatesh Nayak said that the bill on whistleblower protection pending in Parliament can be improved on to some extent by incorporating some of the suggestions made to Parliament's Standing Committee. NCPRI will also put forth suggestions made at the convention to the government.

But what was frequently raised at this meeting were concerns about the protection of human rights activists, media persons and groups working for the implementation of new rights-based legislation.

At a separate session with officials and politicians, delegates emphasised that implementation of any grievance redressal law requires resources commensurate to the entitlements being guaranteed. Secondly, privatisation of several government services and functions was tak-

ing place at a rapid rate. So Private-Public-Partnerships (PPPs) should be included within the ambit of a grievance redressal law.

Fifteen parallel workshops were held to discuss mechanisms to redress grievances. The sectors and services chosen were the Public Distribution System (PDS), education, health, panchayats, the Integrated Child Welfare Scheme (ICDS), NREGA, RTI, social security schemes etc. Recommendations from these workshops are being compiled.

Finally, several resolutions were passed by consensus. There was unanimous agreement that amendments to the RTI Act were not acceptable. If the government wanted to make any amendment, it would need to ensure public consultation.

There was agreement that a Grievance Redressal Law and Whistleblower Protection Act was definitely required. The government was urged to put up its draft Bills on Grievance Redressal and Whistleblower Protection for widespread public consultation immediately. The grievance redressal mechanism must be decentralized, independent and have people's support. The definition of whistle-blowing must be expanded beyond institutional and economic corruption to include injustice and arbitrary use of power. The grievance redressal mechanisms and other institutions must also have the ability to use the whistleblowers law to provide protection.

And private entities who have been handed over the responsibility of implementing any government entitlement, function or law must come within the ambit of the Grievance Redressal Bill. ■

me a Maoist ...

human rights violation as well as mass violation.

Recently, on 3 October, more than 60 to 70 policemen surrounded my house and my nearby office. Not just simple police in khaki. There were gunmen in black outfits and riot-control police in blue. They entered my house forcibly to conduct a search operation because they claimed I am shielding a "dangerous" Maoist in there. During the whole operation, no procedure was followed. Two independent persons are supposed to frisk the search team before they enter a place and when they come out. This was not done. We also did not get a copy of the search memo though signatures of those present in the house were taken on it.

I was not at home and tried to understand and question this arbitrary action over the phone. They said: "We have court orders." The main issue here is the context in which all this is happening. Today we have been talking about the

issue of corruption but we should understand that corruption is not limited to administration or welfare schemes. It's not about the police taking money to register an FIR. If that had been the case, the struggle would have been much

'The whole criminal justice system has been manipulated. It has become so easy to frame somebody in a false case or to get a legal order issued against him or her.'

easier. Here, the whole criminal justice system has been manipulated. It has become so easy to frame somebody in a false case or to get a legal order issued against him or her. This is such a dangerous situation.

Our struggle is for right against might. We are talking about this communal and corporate bias our State is following and using security forces to enforce it. Whether it's about right to information (RTI), about Kavita Srivastava who is now facing a challenge or about control of education by religious groups, we have to understand in what context we are living! This helplessness we are facing is cruel. Where did the right to information originate from? Dissent. We told them our thinking is different from yours and we want the RTI because in a democracy we are entitled to factual information. Soni Sori, the woman whom the police came searching for to my house, who is she and what was she going to talk about? As we sit here, there is news that Soni Sori has been beaten up in police custody and admitted to the district hospital in Dantewada, Chhattisgarh.

A distinct voice among tribals, Sori has been fighting both the police and the Maoists in her

Continued on next page

And they call me a Maoist ...

area. This is the reason why she has been framed in false cases. This is what corruption is. Tomorrow I can also be framed. Any two or three people can give statements against me. And this situation is not restricted to the police. It runs up to our judiciary. Sori's nephew, Linga Kodopi, was picked up on 9 September this year and labelled a Maoist. Linga was a young man, who came to Delhi and studied journalism for more than a year. He went back to Dantewada because he wanted to show the world the complex truths of his area, his people. Sori came to Delhi because she wanted to complain against the false cases registered against her and because she did not want to be a police informer. Sori and her family are people of communist legacy. They did not allow the Maoists to enter their area and they also stood up against the pressures of the police and the army. At the school where Sori teaches tribal children, Maoists threatened her not to unfurl the tricolour on 15 August and hoist their red flag instead. But she did not relent. She is one of the rare tribal girls who passed Class 12 and started teaching others.

Both Sori and Linga are objective people. Linga was picked up by the police because of corporate politics in Chhattisgarh. Recently, it was revealed that Maoists used to take money from the Essar company to let its pipeline pass through deep jungles. The police wanted their own cut and both Linga and Sori became a victim in this whole tangle. On 9 September, Linga was picked up. On 11 September, Sori was fired

at. She ran through the forest to reach Delhi.

She came to Delhi because that's where one is supposed to get justice when you are not heard at the local level, at district level and at the state level. In Delhi, she was helped by friends who submitted her 150-page application in the Supreme Court. However, the court had closed down due to festivities. Now, we all know that grievance redressal outside the judicial system, the National Human Rights Commission

swoop down on me. And it's not only about me. Each and every RTI activist is being monitored by the intelligence agencies.

Recently, I and Dr Binayak Sen organised a meeting in Kolkata to work towards repealing of the sedition law. We later got to know that the intelligence report of that meeting calls us frontal Maoist organisation leaders. Today, when we talk here, this school where we are having this conference is under suspicion. You all are under suspicion because you are with us. Just imagine how the picture has been distorted by those in power.

I am telling you this because you must understand that when we talk about grievance redressal and whistleblowing, it's not just about corruption in the administration. And this context is getting more complex. The situation is not similar to the one we had during the Independence struggle. There are companies and their interests, there is the brutality of the system against its own people and the whole situation is being run through the might of the security forces.

This danger bell is ringing for all activists whether they are working towards proper implementation of the RTI, NREGA, ensuring right to food or women's rights. And we are not even talking about atrocities being done on tribals. We are not even mentioning Kashmir. We are not even touching upon the crisis in Manipur. Please consider this context in which we are living when we talk about grievance redressal and whistleblowing. Whatever systems we have, they are not good. So should we keep establishing new systems? Even if you replace the NHRC what good will it do? Today the NHRC can't help Sori. Kavita Srivastava surely can't help because her actions are already criminalised. ■

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LAKSHMAN ANAND

A protest for the release of Dr Binayak Sen

(NHRC), is virtually defunct. Human rights activists are like doctors. We don't ask your ideology when you come to us seeking help. You can be an RSS person or a Communist, it does not matter. Neutrality and objectivity is the first cardinal principle of any human rights activist. And we will follow this faith till the end.

Those victimised by the State will come to us. They will also go to lawyers and journalists who will help raise their voice. I was targeted because I am a vocal activist. Nothing occupies my time and space other than working for the protection of human rights. This is why a team of Rajasthan police, the Chhattisgarh police and central intelligence agencies decided to

SAMITA S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



Stamps show big hit in Kashmir

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

HUNDREDS of Kashmiris turned up to see the four-day Philatelic Exhibition organized in Srinagar by the Department of Posts at the end of September. The event was being held in Srinagar after more than four decades. Jammu had last hosted a philatelic exhibition in 2001.

Special covers depicting facets of life in Kashmir and its tourist attractions were released. Senior citizens fondly recalled the past when they collected stamps as a hobby. Around 100,000 stamps were put on display.

Students from several schools participated enthusiastically. There was plenty of activity for them – letter writing contests, quiz competitions and stamp designing. A contest called 'My Stamp', which provided an opportunity to students to design their own stamp, was a big hit.

"Philatelic exhibitions take place globally but are seldom organized in our state. I enjoyed the exhibition since it showed the rich heritage and beauty of this land. Credit goes to the postal department for holding such an exhibition," said Ghulam Qadir, a senior citizen.

The state's Governor, Narendra Nath Vohra, inaugurated the exhibition. He said that stamps are an important means of learning about the geography, history, culture and other aspects of the country. He said the postal services continue to have relevance and importance despite the Internet, email and video conferencing.

The Governor also inaugurated the 'My Stamp' programme and with this Jammu and Kashmir became the first state in the country to formally launch a system by which a person can put his or her photo on a stamp issued by the postal department.

"Honestly speaking I didn't know what a philatelic exhibition would be all about. I went to have a look at the stamps and found the event interesting. Since I collect stamps I hope the event is held again so that I can display my collection," said Abdul Latif, a youngster.

Around 450 students from various schools participated in the let-



Narendra Nath Vohra, Governor of J&K, inaugurated the exhibition

ter writing competition on the theme 'letter to my mother'. Twenty schools took part in the quiz contest. Burn Hall School, Srinagar, came first and Linton Hall School, Srinagar, were the runners up.

Mehak Bashir of Linton Hall School won the first prize of ₹10,000 for the letter writing contest. Mahrugh Gowhar of Little Angles High School and Naindeep Kaur of Khalsa High School bagged the second and third prize of ₹5,000 and ₹2,500 respectively.

In the stamp design contest, Marya Janan of Presentation Convent School won the first prize and the Chief Postmaster General's Trophy.

The first prize for the quiz contest went to Sri Pratap College, Srinagar. Burn Hall School won the quiz contest in the schools category and also won the Philately Trophy.

Chief Postmaster General's trophies were awarded to Tyndale Biscoe School, Mallinson School, Presentation School and British School for maximum participation in all the events. A workshop on philately for students was also conducted. This was followed by a group discussion on the 'future of post offices'.

Special covers depicting tourist attractions were released. These included Pahalgam, Gulmarg, Dal Lake, Tyndale Biscoe, Royal Spring Golf Course and Sher-i-Kashmir International

Conference Centre.

The winning 'My Stamps' were also displayed. They depicted saffron, Gulmarg in winter, Gulmarg in summer, Kashmiri dress, Tyndale Biscoe, Hari Parbat fort, Dal Lake, Pangong Lake, Floating Post Office and double hump camel.

John Samuel, Chief Postmaster General-Jammu & Kashmir circle said that the department was pleased to promote the tourism, trade and culture of the state through the philatelic exhibition. He said the floating post office launched by the department would be an interesting feature for tourists visiting Kashmir. ■


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'Cool Men Don't Buy Sex'

Campaign hopes to curb trafficking of girls, women

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A newly launched campaign called 'Cool Men Don't Buy Sex' hopes to make prostitution unfashionable and curb trafficking in women.

Launched by Apne Aap Women Worldwide, an NGO which works to end sex trafficking and empower girls, the campaign is designed to capture the attention of young men. 'Cool Men Don't Buy Sex' was first flagged off in September by students of the Symbiosis College for Management and Human Resource Development in Pune.

Ruchira Gupta, founder and head of Apne Aap, says students were enthused enough to start an anti-trafficking group called 'Shapath' (Oath) after she spoke to them about how vulnerable girls are kidnapped and forced into prostitution by traffickers.

The campaign has got celebrities to ask men not to buy sex. Speaking up for it in promotional videos are Shashi Tharoor, Ritupurno Ghosh, Sourav Ganguly, the Dalai Lama and others. There are podcasts with activists and victims of sex trafficking. Radio jingles, street plays, Facebook, Twitter, catchy T-shirts...the campaign is going all out to get its message across.

The objective, explains Ruchira, is to dry up the demand for paid sex. If men did not buy sex, traffickers, pimps and brothel owners would be driven out of business. "Prostitution is not choice but lack of choice," explains Ruchira, busting some myths. "Neither is it the world's oldest profession. Pimping is. When men buy sex they are funding a multi-billion dollar industry that exploits girls."

Ruchira, a former journalist, has been an activist for the rights of women and girls for over 25 years. In 1997, her documentary, 'The Selling of Innocents,' on the trafficking of women and children from villages in Nepal to the brothels of Mumbai, won an Emmy Award. She founded Apne Aap in 2002. Ruchira's research has exposed the nexus between trafficking and prostitution. Her work has got countries to change laws and shift blame from the victim to the perpetrator. Along with other activists she got the UN to pass a protocol to 'prevent, suppress and pun-

ish trafficking in persons especially women and children.'

Globally, the movement to abolish prostitution is gaining ground. Nations are rethinking their laws. Rampant and easy selling of sex has made sex trafficking boom like never before. More vulnerable girls are being trafficked than even during the slave trade years, says Ruchira. In 2000 Sweden changed its laws and made buying of sex a stringent offence. Now Norway, Iceland, South



Ruchira Gupta

'Prostitution is not choice but lack of choice. Neither is it the world's oldest profession. Pimping is. When men buy sex they are funding a multi-billion dollar industry that exploits girls.'

APNE AAP

Korea have followed suit. Ruchira's testimony in the US Senate in 2000 helped the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

India is a signatory to the UN protocol against trafficking but its archaic laws continue to punish women. The objective of the 'Cool Men Don't Buy Sex' campaign is, first, to get the Union government to change the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act (ITPA) and second, to transform India's ambivalent attitude to prostitution.

"By 26th January we will send a petition to the President of India with at least 10,000 signatures asking for a change in the law," says Ruchira.

The campaign points out that the ITPA is a colonial relic. Its objective was to make disease-free women available to British soldiers for sex. If women solicited on the streets, they were jailed. Buyers and procurers were let off with light sentences. The brothel was segregated in keeping with Victorian notions of morality.

Apne Aap wants Section 5C of the ITPA amended to shift criminalization from women and girls in prostitution to men who buy sex and pimps who profit from the exploitation of women.

It wants to do away with Section 8 which jails women for soliciting on the streets. It is the pimps who make them stand on cold and dark streets sometimes all night. "The police are losing valuable witnesses against pimps with this section," says Ruchira.

Section 18 of the Act says living off the earnings of sex is illegal but the burden of proof is on the woman. "How can a traumatized, frightened girl or woman whose entry into prostitution started with rape, beatings, who is a victim of the Stockholm Syndrome, explain to the magistrate, exactly who is exploiting her?"

Section 5 should provide stronger punishment to pimps and procurers and Section 5C should shift the burden of proof from the women to the men. There is also urgent need to legally ensure victims of rape are gently handled while being examined medically.

And who should be rehabilitated under the law, asks Ruchira. Apne Aap women have been to hundreds of brothels and spoken to victims. They found men sought domination when they bought

sex. Many wanted sex with violence and were brutal with the women. "It is the men who need counselling. They should be punished for the violence they wreak on hapless women," says Ruchira.

Girls and women forced into the sex trade need housing, jobs and legal protection. Those lured or kidnapped into prostitution are invariably poor marginalized girls and women from SC/ST or from denotified tribes. They have no access to any entitlements from the government.

"In a village in Bihar we rescued Bedia girls, between nine and 13 years old," says Ruchira. "We put them in a government hostel. But the traffickers forcibly entered and snatched three girls. The Child Welfare Committee gave us custody but there was no protection. There is no patrolling of red light districts and no affirmative action to make sure these girls go to school."

Strong laws which instill fear can act as a deter-

Strong laws which instill fear can act as a deterrent. But the sex industry in India has become large and powerful. It owes a good measure of its growth to HIV/AIDS programmes funded by international agencies and NACO.

rent, believes Ruchira.

But the sex industry in India has become large and powerful. It owes a good measure of its growth to HIV/AIDS programmes, generously funded by international agencies and India's National Aids Control Organisation (NACO).

To prevent the virus from spreading the HIV/AIDS programmes hugely promoted condoms and HIV drugs. Overnight pimps and brothel owners became NGO workers distributing condoms and anti-retroviral drugs, spreading 'awareness' about 'safe' sex. The message that got broadcasted was that it was okay to buy sex so long as you used a condom. The sex trade was accepted as being 'normal'.

Nobody thought about those little girls kidnapped from their villages, trapped in tiny rooms forced to have sex with eight or 10 men every night. Or about the violence that women endured in the name of paid sex. So long as the man used a condom.

"Around three million women are trapped in prostitution, according to police records. Nearly 1.2 million are girls and there are 12 million rapes happening every night," says Ruchira.

She argues that organizations of sex workers like the Durbar Mahila Samanvaya Committee (DMSC) based in Sonagachi, Kolkata's infamous red light area, cannot seek union rights.

First of all such a union cannot get sex workers minimum wages.

The life cycle of a woman in prostitution is brief. Girls are recruited into the trade when they are between 9 to 13 years of age. At that time all their earnings go to their owners. They cry, they want to go home but they are told they are in debt bondage. After that age, they can keep half of what they earn. By then they begin having children and are on alcohol or drugs. They have no education, no skills and prostitution is the only work they know.

By the time they are 25, the brothel owner will want to replace them with their daughters. At 35 the brothel no longer has any use for them and from that age begins a descent into abject poverty.

Neither can such a union ensure minimum working conditions. Sex work means bodily penetration, psycho social trauma and violence by the client. The union cannot even ensure old age pension or any benefits. Besides, sex work demoralizes and takes away a woman's dignity. The price of her body is negotiated all the time.

"Sex and work should never go together," says Ruchira.

The HIV/AIDS lobby, led by the brothel system, merely wants to regulate and provide disease-free women for men, just like the British did, points out Ruchira. Nothing has changed for women.

The campaign also wants to change notions of masculinity. "Sex should be with participation and not with domination," says Ruchira. India is the third largest user of Internet pornography. Children as young as 12 or 13 are logging into sites which make violent sex appear exciting.

Society has to change with the times. Centuries ago, the horrible practice of sati was acceptable. Prostitution today is incongruous in a society which believes in women's empowerment. That can happen with education and now women do have a choice – of careers. ■



BERNARD HENIN

Apne Aap facilitator takes a counselling session



APNE AAP

An Apne Aap training session

Women find a friend in Goonj

SHAMIK BANERJEE



Anshu Gupta at his workshop in Delhi

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

GOONJ, an NGO committed to recycling urban waste, has embarked on a mission to produce 'the cheapest sanitary napkins ever' for poor women in rural and urban India.

Started 13 years ago by Anshu Gupta to provide clothing to the urban homeless in Delhi, Goonj has expanded its activities to the poorest districts of India. Goonj collects discarded clothes from the rich and middle-class in cities and redistributes them to some of India's most backward regions. During natural disasters like floods, Goonj manages to overcome all kinds of obstacles and reach hapless people who have lost all their belongings.

Goonj has now stepped up its work. It has begun organizing rural communities to improve their environment and render services to their village.

"Instead of paying people we give them cloth for work or 'vastra samman', as a respectful acknowledgement of the services they have rendered," says Goonj coordinator, Krishna.

In the course of its work Goonj realized that poor women suffered a lot of health problems since they did not use sanitary napkins. Instead, during their menstrual cycle they used discarded

jute sacking and dirty pieces of frayed cloth. This made them susceptible to injury, septicaemia and sometimes fatal diseases. Boils, grazing and rash were common ailments cited by the women. A study by Goonj revealed that just 34 per cent of women used sanitary napkins, while 66 per cent used cloth. The problem was cost, lack of availability and cultural barriers.

Compounding this problem was the lack of toilets in rural and urban India. Women often waited till it got dark to relieve themselves. There was no privacy. Sources of water, like hand pumps, were located in very public places. Besides, it was difficult for the women to speak frankly about what is perceived to be a very private affair.

There is nothing wrong in using cloth provided it is clean and hygienic, free from moisture and abrasive material. But the fact that 45 per cent of women reported menstrual-related problems proved that they were resorting to unhygienic options.

Goonj realized there was a huge unmet demand for inexpensive sanitary napkins. They sifted through the mounds of discarded clothing they had collected and picked out material which was soft and easily foldable. They found these could be easily converted into clean sanitary napkins. In

2004, Goonj started a full fledged sanitary napkins production unit.

Discarded cotton or semi-cotton soft garments are initially washed with antiseptic solution and then cut and resized to be made into sanitary napkins. The process is simple and hygienic. Goonj is also training women in villages and urban slums to make hygienic sanitary napkins themselves. "We tell them to never reuse cloth that is no longer soft or clean. The moment the cloth gets hardened, it has to be thrown away. Also, such cloth has to be dried in the sun so that it is devoid of moisture and fungus. And it should not be shared with any other female family member," explains Krishna.

Goonj is working with other NGOs to help slums and villages build clean toilets. It is running awareness campaigns on the importance of washing hands with soap and keeping slum and village surroundings clean.

Currently, Goonj supplies 70 tonnes of discarded clothing to 21 states in India. Sanitary napkins are being made available to women in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. "We intend to move in and work wherever we perceive a need. But then, we have our limitations," says Krishna. Goonj is also collecting discarded utensils to distribute in anganwadis for cooking. ■

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Delhi's backward govt schools

Sugandha Pathak
New Delhi

SCHOOLS run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) have a lot in common with government schools in the most backward regions of India. Like their counterparts in Kalahandi or Balaghat or tribal Thane, Delhi's MCD schools don't have drinking water, clean toilets or basic infrastructure, reveals a survey by Joint Operation for Social Help (Josh), a Delhi-based NGO.

The survey, which examined MCD schools in two resettlement colonies, Trilokpuri and Kalyanpuri in east Delhi, found such schools were hazardous for children. They could get sick, severely punished or assaulted by violent students. Instead of giving underprivileged children a good education, the MCD schools are violating the Right to Education (RTE) Act.

Josh was started in 2006 by Aheli Chowdhury, Saurabh Sharma and Thomas Antony. All three were previously working with NGOs. "We started a centre in Trilokpuri and Kalyanpuri to inform young people about the Right to Information (RTI) law. We began by teaching them English. We told students that they could question the authorities through use of RTI about irregularities in their areas. The children complained about the MCD schools," says Chowdhury.

She filed RTIs to find out if the local MCD schools were following RTE norms. "With the RTE becoming mandatory from 1st April last year, we had a law to support our claims and the RTIs helped us glean information," she says.

Josh trained nearly 150 local youth as volunteers. They visited 32 MCD schools and spoke to principals, aggrieved parents and children. Altogether 809 complaints were duly registered. It took four months to compile this data. And the maximum complaints which emerged were about dirty toilets (207) and lack of drinking water (170).

"The toilets are very dirty. Anybody who enters them can contact diseases. They have not been cleaned since so long. Our children rush back home in between classes to use the toilet. It worries us because the school is quite far from home," says Susheela Devi, mother of two teenage boys.

"The school authorities claim that drinking water is available. But the school tanks have not been cleaned for months. So the water is undrinkable. Therefore there is lack of drinking water," says Chowdhury.

One of Josh's RTI applications found that a



Saurabh Sharma, Aheli Chowdhury and Thomas Antony

school in Trilokpuri had paid the Delhi Jal Board a whopping bill of ₹2 lakhs for a three-month supply of water. But students in that school complained that no drinking water was available!

"So what was this money actually used for?" asks Chowdhury.

Around 87 complaints were registered about lack of desks and chairs. Josh confirmed that classrooms did not have basic infrastructure.

"When we asked the principals, they said that the fans and lights have been stolen. If that is true, how come all the principals have fans and lights in their rooms?" asks Thomas.

Around 67 complaints were also registered about discrepancies in the collection of fees. But under the RTE Act every child from six to 14 years of age has been given the right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school till completion of elementary education.

Sixty three complaints were received about scholarships for students from minority communities. "Such students are supported by the government with a scholarship amount of ₹1,000 per child. In many cases, scholarships entitled to a student were never given or half the amount was given. We need to know where all this money is going," says Chowdhury.

A few cases of corporal punishments were reported. In one case, a student who was the vic-

tim of an accident, died since the school authorities did not bother to rush him to hospital. Denial of admission into schools was also reported.

Parents also pointed to the lackadaisical attitude of teachers. "Many teachers come late. Many don't turn up at all. If they come, they leave the class halfway. With no directions from anyone the children get themselves into trouble," says Ramvati, mother of a 13-year-old boy who was beaten up recently by some bullies when the teacher was not around.

Midday meals in MCD schools are another bone of contention between schools and parents. The MCD official concerned claimed that the food served adhered strictly to stated norms. But parents disagreed. Around 34 complaints were registered about the quality and quantity of the food and the menu.

"The MCD official even asked the parents to come and taste the food while the meal is being distributed. Asking parents for their active participation is a step forward. Another problem cited was that the same menu was followed everyday whereas

there are specific menus for different days. The MCD official promised to put up a board with the day's menu written on it," says Chowdhury.

Another issue which surfaced was of lax security sometimes leading to dangerous and bloody fights. "Student carry blades, knives and other weapons. Teachers don't do anything about it. There are hardly any security personnel. We constantly worry about our child's safety," says Ramvati.

In July, Josh organized two public hearings to highlight the findings of their survey and get the MCD and the state government to act. The public hearings led to direct interactions between aggrieved parents and officials. The MCD has now taken a few positive steps.

"They have approved a recent order by the Delhi government to keep a janitor in every MCD school who will be responsible for cleaning toilets. The janitor will be paid ₹1,500 a month. This is a positive step," says Chowdhury. Officials have also promised to look into the problem of lax security in schools.

Some primary schools have harmful asbestos roofs which make the classrooms unbearably hot in summer. Separate toilets for girls, playgrounds, sports equipment, a library, computers and lack of cemented floors leading to water logging in schools during the monsoons are some issues Josh has been raising. This is just the beginning. ■

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Miss Sonal Natwarbhai, from the Virpura Village in Sanand, Gujarat. Sonal used to sit on the floor and study. Today she and more than 250 other students benefit from the classroom facility upgradation initiative of Tata Motors. The Company has a holistic approach to improving the access to and quality of education. The company supplements its infrastructural support to schools with training of teachers and extra-curricular activities or students.



Mr. Sujit Soren of Gopalpur village in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. He was the first in the village to adopt water conservation techniques of the Gram Vikas Kendra society of Tata Motors. Today, the village boasts of perennial irrigation for about 100 acres and about 10,000 fruit and timber generating trees.



Mrs. Rohini Bhanudas Wadekar of Pune in Maharashtra. A widow with three children, she was trained to become self-dependent with technical skills by Tata Motors' Grihini Social Welfare Society.



Mr. Jowahar Ram Paswan of Baranimdih Mohalla of Chaibasa district in Jharkhand. Today, he is an employee of Nav Jagrat Manav Samaj. It became possible when the Nav Jagrat Manav Samaj, supported by Tata Motors, intervened to manage his leprosy and found him a job with a permanent income. Today, Mr. Paswan intervenes to bring comfort to others.

Mr. Man Singh Murmu of Baijnathdih village in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. With mostly infertile land holdings, Mr. Murmu and other residents found meeting both ends difficult. Tata Motors helped him lead change by beginning a tree plantation drive. Today, Baijnathdih has a forest of income-generating trees, and a Forest Protection Group to nurture its economic turnaround.



Mr. Vinod Pachpute of Vasuli village in Pune district of Maharashtra. A diploma holder in mechanical engineering, he is also a trustee and an alumni of the Bhamchandra High School in the village – the only one in the vicinity covering seven villages. Tata Motors helped set up the school and continues to support it. About 600 students have passed through its portals till date.



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At 60 ChildFund has many plans



Ann Lynam Goddard in a child-friendly school in Tamil Nadu

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

IN 2006, a team from ChildFund India visited a government school in Bihar's backward Jamui district. They were appalled by what they saw – a ragtag bunch of 30 children in a dilapidated school building with a dispirited teaching staff. The school, which apparently had 200 children on its rolls, was just another moribund structure languishing in a far flung area.

ChildFund India stepped in. "We decided to support the school by improving its quality. We did a lot of planning with the government district authorities and local teachers. Fortunately, the headmaster of the school was a very motivated individual and now with political change there are 350 children in the school. Last year, two children got a first class in the Class 10 exam. So things are changing on the ground," says Dola Mohapatra, national director of ChildFund India with pride.

It is success stories like these that ChildFund is celebrating on its 60th anniversary in India. Their team believes this is a timely moment to reflect on their strengths, the areas they could do better in and the way ahead, says Mohapatra.

The statistics speak for themselves. Way back in 1951 ChildFund took over a boarding school for orphans in Kerala. Today, the NGO is a beacon of hope for over 1.5 million deprived, excluded, vulnerable children and their families. In partnership with 76 NGOs as well as community-based organisations (CBOs) and government agencies, ChildFund India works in 85 districts of 14 states and one Union Territory.

ChildFund's programmes focus on infants, school going children from six to 14 years and

youth between 15 and 24. The interventions are in health, education, livelihood education and training for youth, response to emergencies such as natural disasters and protection of children from violence, exploitation and abuse.

However, support does not extend to the children alone. Over the last 50 years, ChildFund India has broadened its reach. The team realized that creating islands within families and communities was not the answer. The route it took was to mobilise and empower communities by forming parent committees, youth groups and children's clubs. Currently, ChildFund has helped to form over 6,000 women's groups with around a million members. "These are not just self-help groups. We regard women as agents of change because they are able to come together, access resources and raise their voices whenever there is a need," says Mohapatra.

ChildFund India makes a 12 to 15 year commitment to the children and communities it works with in the form of financial, technical and institutional building assistance. Local people are involved in the design and implementation of their programmes, says Mohapatra.

He emphasizes the importance of building confidence, hope and resilience among marginalized and deprived communities. "Invariably in vulnerable pockets we find hope and resilience are the biggest casualties. We have succeeded in building

that. In 60 years we have reached out to at least 100,000 families who are well established. They have not fallen back into poverty. We have helped 10 million children to complete their high school education. We have also produced many doctors, engineers, army officers and aviation experts from amongst these children," he says.

Such work requires a lot of investment in resources, time and energy.

"It takes time to build confidence in the people we work with," says Mohapatra.

ChildFund works closely with the government. Their aim is to strengthen government facilities like anganwadis, schools and ASHAs. ChildFund does this by improving infrastructure, training workers and even running schools or other facilities until they achieve efficiency and can be handed back to the government. All this requires establishing a rapport with government officials and frontline functionaries – no mean task by itself.

However, as ChildFund India completes 60 years of its operations in the country, dark clouds hover in the horizon. Ann Lynam Goddard, president and CEO of ChildFund International who was recently in India to join the celebrations says that future funding to ChildFund India could be in

SHAMIK BANERJEE



Dola Mohapatra

jeopardy with imminent cuts in the US budget and the increasing focus by overseas government and private funders on Africa.

A dramatic increase in local funding will become inevitable, she says. The effort will be to replicate the successful strategies of ChildFund branches in Brazil, Mexico and Thailand. "These countries have developed an understanding of the market and introduced marketing initiatives that work," she says. The NGO has set up a separate marketing department at its US headquarters in Richmond to develop appeals and plans for raising funds for its international

operations.

But replicating fund-raising strategies adopted by other countries may not be easy in India where religious causes attract the most funds. Only 10 percent of middle-class Indians contribute to social causes, estimates Mohapatra. This situation is aggravated by the deep rooted ambivalence of the middle-class towards NGOs. The average Indian does not extend financial support to the needy at an individual level, so there is scope to build on that and attract funds at the institutional level, he says.

Good governance is an issue which could attract funds. ChildFund and Voluntary Action Network India (VANI) have embarked on an initiative to build model policies which could be adapted by civil society organisations. This may encourage government, companies and individuals to extend greater support to local NGOs. ■



PRAHITA SONI
Dungarpur, Rajasthan

Realizing the dream of self-reliance through Project Jyoti

Married at the tender age of 15, Prahita couldn't complete her 10th grade and got pulled into the responsibilities of family life. Her studies became a distant dream. 13 years on, marital discord left her emotionally dejected and forced her to return to her parents' home.

However, her dream to be self-reliant led her to Aide et Action, an NGO partnering with Project Jyoti, Microsoft India's digital literacy program. There, a course in Computer Fundamentals and Applications armed her with basic computer skills and spoken English. Moreover, it helped her regain confidence and equipped her to face the world. Today, she is a successful Client Servicing Representative for a leading satellite TV provider. Now, after work, she is often found in her father's tea shop, studying late into the night to make her dream of being a graduate come true.

The result – enhanced skills to pursue a career and renewed confidence for realizing ambitions.

GETTING CAREER READY Project Jyoti armed Prahita with: Documentation skills in Microsoft Office applications like Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Movie Maker.

The knowledge to browse the Internet for research and data analysis.

Basic computer knowledge and soft skills.

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This is one of the stories of enabling change in India by equipping people with job-ready skills. Partnering with 14 NGOs across 27 states and Union Territories, Project Jyoti – Microsoft's Community Technology Skills Program – has set up more than 1400 learning centers, and trained over 365,000 people in IT skills.

To know more about Microsoft's initiatives, visit www.microsoft.com/india/msindia



RISING FRUITS

MYSORE RASPBERRY STARS IN HAWAII'S 12 TREES PROJECT. CAN THIS BE A MODEL FOR INDIA?

Shree Padre
Hawaii

THE Mysore raspberry hails from Coorg in Karnataka. Dismissed as a thorny wild weed no one would ever dream of cultivating it there. You would be laughed at if you had the temerity to make such a suggestion. But far away in picturesque Hawaii, the Mysore raspberry earns an income for small farmers and has a loyal fan following.

"It was the number one choice of 54 chefs here," says Ken Love, president of the Hawaii Tropical Fruit Growers (HTFG) and the moving force behind the 12 Trees Project, an agricultural programme launched in 2005 which has boosted the income of small farmers.

Farmers in Hawaii's Kona region grow one of the most expensive coffees in the world called Kona. It is their main crop but they hardly make any money out of it. Many farmers were abandoning their coffee farms, migrating to cities and selling their fields to developers. The 12 Trees Project sought to reverse this trend. It helped farmers diversify by growing unusual fruits which would find favour with buyers, chefs and consumers.

The outcome has been a range of nutritious fruits which have quietly invaded markets, restaurants and homely dining tables 365 days of the year. Hawaii is a tourist hotspot. Chefs tickled tastebuds by conjuring up irresistible recipes with exotic fruits like cherimoya, fig, grumichama, kumquat, loquat, Surinam cherry, tree tomato and the tropical apricot.

Included in this list are fruits of Indian origin which have won Hawaiian hearts. The Mysore raspberry, though a controversial plant, is made into jam, dunked into smoothies or converted into a gooey syrup for pancakes. The Rangapur lime, Mysore banana and Mysore peach have their share of followers. The Malabar chestnut, whose seeds can be roasted and eaten like cashew nuts, is also relished.

In India we have many unusual fruits which could enhance the earnings of small farmers and provide more choice to consumers. There is kokum and jackfruit. Passion fruit is being grown in the northeast and is making inroads in Kerala and Karnataka. Another rising star is the rambutan which has been introduced in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

There are aspects of the 12 Trees Project in Hawaii which can be creatively put to use in India. Some agricultural scientists believe the next Green

Revolution in India will be in horticulture with fruit trees being raised on marginal and wastelands using drip irrigation.

COFFEE CHIMERA: "Till the mid-90s, you couldn't find fruits like abiu, fig, strawberry or guava in our Hawaiian shops," says Ken Love. "But look now fruits from our 12 Trees Project are found at different times through the year. There is the Surinam cherry, loquat, kumquat, tree tomato, grumichama, tropical apricot, kona lime... sometimes these aren't enough."

Aptly called the 'paradise of the world,' Hawaii is blessed with fertile volcanic ash which looks like black cotton soil. It has a range of micro-climates, tropical, sub-tropical and temperate, which yield a variety of fruits, some of which grow in the wild.

Kona coffee is cultivated in the mountainous western part of Hawaii and requires heavy labour. Production, harvesting and processing are all done manually. In specialty retail stores, Kona coffee could sell for as much as \$50 per pound. But since production costs are high and output is low, the farmer earns very little from it.

A bag of raw coffee sells for around \$125. After deducting picking expenses, the farmer is left with only \$75! If we subtract the cost of fertilizers and family labour for pruning and weeding, the farmer actually makes a pittance. Ironically, one of the world's most expensive coffees is a losing proposition!

"Hawaii is very different from the rest of the US," explains Love. "People here are very rich or very poor. Land value is very high. Most of our farmers have only one to two hectares. It's hard to make enough money from agriculture."

Hawaii's beauty attracts many middle-class families. Some buy coffee farms hoping to settle down to a happy bucolic life and a decent income. It doesn't take them long to realise that there is no money in coffee farming. By that time, their hard-earned savings have vanished. Their only option is to sell their land to a developer and find a job.

Most such families don't have any domain knowledge of farming. They love the land, but don't realize the work that goes into making farming successful. They give up. As a result, Hawaii's traditional coffee farms have been disappearing at a rapid pace.

12 TREES PROJECT: "If we don't make farming profitable, there won't be any



A fruit shop in Kona

farms left after a couple of decades," says Love, a journalist who became a farmer. "I lost two of my sons to the city. I don't want the city to grab my grandchildren now."

He made up his mind to draw up strategies which would help farmers stay out of the red. With the help of the University of Hawaii and friends, he formulated the 12 Trees Project to enhance the income of coffee farms.

After consulting 54 of Hawaii's chefs, fruit buyers and growers, Love and his team identified a dozen fruit trees which could be grown on coffee farms. Priority was given to seasonality and harvesting time while choosing trees so that fruit could be supplied through the year to local markets and farmers would not need to hire labour. A husband and wife team would be able to harvest different fruits at different times of the year all by themselves.

"If you have 10 acres would you prefer to harvest all of that within two months or would you prefer to harvest one acre a month?" asks Love.

The fruit varieties selected were: Cherimoya, fig, grumichama, kumquat, loquat, Mysore raspberry, Poha (Cape gooseberry), pomegranate, Rangapur (Kona) lime, Surinam cherry, tree tomato (tamarillo) and tropical apricot.

Every farm can't grow all these fruits. It is up to the farmer to choose what works best for him or her. "Figs and loquat are just two examples of fruits that are more profitable than coffee," says Love. "These fruits have higher value. Based only on fresh fruit sales one can make five to ten times more money."

After consulting 54 of Hawaii's chefs, fruit buyers and growers, Ken Love and his team identified a dozen fruit trees which could be grown on coffee farms.

At Gerry and Nancy Redfether's Kawanui Farm on the Big Island, Mysore raspberry and Mysore banana both find favour.

"We love berries," says Nancy. "We have only two native wild berries, the Ohelo and the Thimble Berry. Both are small, not very sweet. When we found that the Mysore raspberry yields fruit through the year, we were interested. We eat the Mysore banana as a snack. It is sweet and tastes different from our apple banana."

Love says the Mysore raspberry is a controversial fruit. It is listed as a noxious weed, as an undesirable invasive plant. "It is illegal to plant it outside the Big Island," explains Love who feels it is really a misunderstood plant species. "The main problem is its thorns, which can make it extremely painful to harvest. The fruit tastes very good, chefs like it. I hope in future a thorn-less strain can be developed."

Hawaii's economy is predominantly tourism-driven. So instead of selling a whole lot of a single fruit it is easier to sell a little of different fruits. As a result of the 12 Trees Project, fruits are available throughout the year. You can get jaboticaba for 10 months and mangosteen for eight months. Rambutan takes a break only for a few months. Different varieties of mangoes are grown at different levels, so you can buy mangoes through the year.

Another advantage in Hawaii is its tremendous biodiversity. Kona has 200 varieties of avocados, 200 types of mangoes and 100 kinds of bananas!

MYSORE RASPBERRY



ABIU

MALABAR CHESTNUT



DRAGON FRUIT

FIGS



LULO FRUIT

PASSION FRUIT



LONGON

SURINAM CHERRY



MAMMAE SAPOTE



Ken Love explaining the 12 Trees Project to farmers on site

Selling this basket of curious fruits to consumers needed inventiveness. Love says information proved to be critical. Informing consumers and buyers about the quality and seasonality of fruit helps in sales.

TEACH AND EARN: Selling this basket of curious fruits to consumers needed inventiveness. Love says information proved to be critical. Informing consumers and buyers about the quality and seasonality of fruit helps in sales. To help farmers explain their new offerings, Love painstakingly created signboards with full information about the fruit. These are downloadable from his website: www.hawaiiifruit.net. Such signboards are now displayed in many stores and farmers markets.

"With some of our rare Hawaiian bananas, we found giving chefs and grocery stores their fruit history on a signboard helped increase its value. Once growers are educated about what they have to sell, they in turn educate their customers." Some Hawaiian bananas are very rare and perhaps only 600 trees are left. Once buyers knew this, they were prepared to pay more.

Another strategy Love emphasises is farmer-chef relations. He found most chefs didn't know when figs would be available or which month they could expect lychees. So he designed seasonal fruit charts which showed which fruit would be available in which month.

"Chefs are always looking for something new to try. Hotels seek that competitive edge. As farmers we can provide that. It is a tool we should use to become more sustainable," explains Love.

Chefs too pass on information to their customers. Love recalls a funny incident. "To inform customers how a banana looks in its original form, we got one chef to put an entire bunch of bananas on the buffet table. Their customers rushed to get their pictures taken with the bananas. It was hard to get to the food, actually. When other hotels heard about this, they too started placing bunches of bananas on the buffet table."

More restaurants now source local fruits directly from farmers.



Ken Love with one of his fruit posters.



Ken Love inspecting newly harvested avocados



Diane, a farmer, has developed Joenuts from Macadamia

Restaurants like Four Seasons, Fair Mount and Mona Kea are using Surinam cherry, fresh figs and Hawaiian bananas. Four Seasons, a popular Hawaiian restaurant, buys 25 per cent of its fruit locally.

Another advantage for Hawaii's farmers is their strong local farmers' markets. Though coffee is their main crop, many farmers grow at least four or five minor fruits and make products with them. To stay in the profession they love, these small farmers are striving hard by doing value addition, diversification and earning that extra money by selling their products at farmers' markets.

Love and his wife Marguerite produce an unbelievable 150 products from a range of minor fruits. Interestingly, they are able to market more than 50 per cent of their products through the Internet to the mainland. Their glass bottles, nicely wrapped in bubble paper and packed neatly in boxes are sent through the postal department! Many small farmers have websites and sell a portion of their products directly through the Internet via mail order.

But Hawaiian farmers have their problems as well. The biggest one is the ban on sending fresh fruits to their mainland. Way back in 1908 inspectors from California spotted a fruit fly in an avocado sent from Hawaii. Ever since, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has prohibited transport of fresh fruit from Hawaii to the mainland. Only processed fruit cans or bottles can be exported to the US.

Another growing headache is fruit imports. Hawaii grows and sells several thousand pounds of avocado. Yet, over a million avocados are imported every year. This results in locally grown avocados rotting. Big business often takes advantage of local farmers.

As a result of 'buy local, eat local' campaigns stores do keep local fruits but tuck them away in some dark corner. Says a Kona farmer, "Though our fruits are far tastier, many stores price local fruits exactly half of imported ones. Some other

stores hoodwink customers by passing off imported fruits as local." But stores that genuinely showcase local fruits have seen good sales.

The most recent burning issue in Hawaii is the government's proposed move to make third party certification mandatory for farmers to sell their produce even in farmers' market. While the government argues this is a step to ensure food safety, farmers suspect big companies are behind this move. They want to diminish the popularity of farmers markets and subsequently bring small farmers under corporate control.



Jaboticaba is a popular fruit with farmers

INDIA'S HUMBLE FRUITS: Across south India, small farms are up for sale. Farm families, driven to the wall, are selling off their historic, traditional farms.

In India demand for land for housing, industry and infrastructure is growing. The money a farmer can get by selling his land is much more than what he can earn from growing crops. The cost of labour has also increased.

"We too should come up with a master plan similar to the 12 Trees Project. Of course, here the fruits would be different, but the underlying principle could work for our small farms," says Balachandra Hegde Sayimane, who is a farmer and journalist based in Sirsi, Karnataka.

Some fruits which small farmers could grow easily are jackfruit, kokum (*Garcinia indica*), a cousin of mangosteen (*Garcinia cowa*) and passion fruit. Currently, most jackfruit is wasted. (*Civil Society*, Aug 2010, July & Aug 2011).

There is demand for such fruits. At jackfruit fairs, consumers don't mind paying a little more for better varieties. At the annual jack fair in Bangalore, members of the Toobugere Jack Growers' Association made sizable profits by selling fresh jack bulbs. There would be a big domestic and export market for Indian farmers were they to do some minimal processing of jackfruit the way it is done in Malaysia.

Some innovation has already taken place with



Farmers markets are fruitful for both growers and buyers



Syrups made by Ken Love and his family

jackfruit. Recently, Jose Varkey, Corporate Chef of CGH Earth, a chain of 5-star hotels in Kerala, experimented with jackfruit flour. He peeled the unripe fruit, cut it into cross sections, dried it in the oven and then ground the jackfruit into flour in a wet grinder. He used the flour to rustle up more than a dozen dishes like shammi kababs, seekh kababs, koftas, cakes and cookies.

"All these processes which I did at the hotel can be easily mechanized. If jackfruit can be converted into flour, it would have many takers," he says.

In Hawaii, Marguerite Love said that the incidence of celiac disease is on the rise in developed countries. "Wheat flour and white flour are forbidden



Homemade breads are another attraction

powder can be used for ice-creams and to make desserts.

Ankura Food Processing, a new entrant, is introducing jackfruit granules. "It is a great product. Please ensure no sugar is put into it. We can use it in many ways," says Chef Jose Varkey.

Jackfruit ice-cream is also catching on. Natural ice-creams of Mumbai and MILMA, a giant milk cooperative in Kerala, are planning to produce jackfruit ice-cream.

What India needs are reliable supply chains, marketing infrastructure and promotion of jackfruit in its hundreds of value-added forms to consumers at home and abroad. In Malaysia, its Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority,

for celiac patients. My husband is one. We buy gluten-free coconut or millet flour. One pound costs anything between \$6 and \$13. Why can't your country produce unripe jackfruit flour or jack seed flour. We won't have any hesitation in buying it if the price is competitive," she says.

Polycorp Pvt Ltd's bakery section in Bangalore, Beekays, has incorporated jackfruit into its croissant, Danish pastry, cake and muffin selection. Says BS Bhat, managing director, "Jackseed flour can easily replace corn flour or cassava flour."

Hardikar's Food Technologies Pvt Ltd in Pune has innovated technology which can produce fine powder from jack carpels. This jackfruit

(FAMA) has been doing this job pretty well.

KOKUM AND PASSION FRUIT: Another indigenous fruit ideal for small farms is kokum (*Garcinia indica*) which is endemic to the Western Ghats. It has many medicinal applications. Kokum butter is a good cure for upset stomachs and burn injuries. Its sherbet cures *pitha dosha* (excessive bile secretion). Hydroxy citric acid extracted from kokum has anti-obese, anti-cholesterol properties and has a good export market. (*Civil Society*, June 2011).

Love predicts that kokum can be sold as fresh fruit in India. "I rate it far higher than mangosteen because kokum has a sweet and sour taste and a lot of nutritional value." The rind of the kokum is used for making syrups. An Indian hypermarket group has already decided to market kokum as fresh fruit.

Garcinia cowa, a lesser known cousin of mangosteen, has long shelf-life.

Syrup extracted from this fruit has an attractive flavour and colour. It can be used as a beverage and as a cocktail with other beverages.

Another fruit to watch is passion fruit which is being introduced in Kerala and Karnataka. "Passion fruit would grow well in the Western Ghats. In the past five years due to the initiatives of state governments, around 6,000 to 7,000 hectares of passion fruit have come up in the northeastern states. They have started three to four processing centres and plan to supply the beverage to our metro cities," says Dr PC Tripathi, Principal Scientist, Indian Institute of Horticulture Research (IIHR) at Chettalli in Coorg.

"Unfortunately in Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, passion fruit cultivation is still at a nascent stage with no commercial farms coming up. In fact, passion fruit cultivation is more suited to small farms of one or two hectares. Farmers can process the fruit and get additional returns."

IIHR has recently invented a maroon hybrid passion fruit named Kaveri. It is less acidic and more acceptable to consumers. The Krishi Vijnan Kendra, Gonikoppal, in the Kodagu district of Karnataka, has been offering training in value addition of passion fruit. Passion fruit syrup is popular at home-stays in Kodagu where it is made by many housewives.

Mountain Fruits, a new small-scale company in Kerala that produces passion fruit syrup without chemical preservatives, is probably the only one of its kind in south India. According to George Kurian, its proprietor, "Passion fruit is an ideal crop for organic farmers in high range areas. A healthy tree can bear up to 2,000 fruits per year. Our company plans to open direct procurement centres in Idukki district and the neighbouring high range districts of Kerala and Karnataka." Mountain Fruits is offering ₹20 per kg of passion fruit to farmers.

Dr LC Soans, a leading grower of fruit at Moodabidri, in Karnataka, has introduced several exotic fruits like the rambutan to southern Karnataka. He agrees new fruits need value addition and marketing strategies for farmers to earn a better income.

In Kerala, small farmers are showing an interest in growing fruits of Malaysian origin like mangosteen, rambutan, pulasan and durian. Growing

conventional crops earns them very little money. There is also the high cost of labour. Some nurseries now specialise in marketing their own selections that promise better sized fruits.

Osmo-dehydration, a process by which the fruit retains its original flavour, is also likely to catch on. For the first time in India, the PeePee Group, based in Chennai, is all set to launch dehydrated pineapple, papaya and amla.

Osmo-dehydrated jackfruit standardized at IIHR shows promise for the domestic and export market. Says Dr Tiwari: "If we exploit this technology correctly, we can give fruits and vegetables a different dimension. These fruits can be eaten as snacks, for breakfast or at tea-time instead of junk food being served."

"If you take an unusual fruit and create a market for it and value added products, you become a leader in the industry. It requires more work in the beginning but the rewards are much greater than just trying to sell every-



Osmo-dehydrated jackfruit

Mountain Fruits in Kerala produces passion fruit syrup without chemical preservatives and is probably the only one of its kind in south India.



Kokum tree



Products made from kokum



Kodagu women farmers with their passion fruit products

thing everyone is selling," says Love.

FARM TO TABLE: Though Hawaii and India are miles apart, there is learning that can be shared. Love advocates more interaction between farmers and chefs in India. "Food at Indian 5 Star hotels is very, very good and of ultra high quality. A large number of foreigners who stay at these hotels love Indian food and are keen to eat local. They don't want to go to the Taj West end in Bangalore and be served the same food they get in London or Chicago. What impressed me most about the Taj was that they put chikoo, java plum and Indian figs on the breakfast buffet. People would try a piece of chikoo then go back and get more and more. It just requires some education. We did that in Hawaii with signboards."

"Whether they admit it or not, some chefs need education about unusual fruits. Similarly, some farmers need to increase the quality of their produce. The bottom line is to increase communication so that both farmers and chefs can win. Hotel visitors would then have a memorable dining experience," says Love.

"Farmers must learn to communicate better with each other. We should learn to work together so that we have less competition with the types of crops and the prices we sell them at. We need to delight in each others culture and history, not fear it. One of the best ways to achieve this is to share information about what we all have in common. We must continue to strengthen our agriculture worldwide by supporting our local farmers and refusing to buy many imported goods." ■

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

Creating a Silicon Valley mindset in India

Wadhvani Foundation helps students become entrepreneurs

Civil Society News
New Delhi

SMALL businesses provide the jobs and innovations that keep an economy moving. But the promotion of entrepreneurship is a challenge which governments find difficult to measure up to. It is complex, fostering the spirit of taking risks and linking finance and skills to garage operations. A beginning has to be made at the college level and then new ventures need handholding as they look for a presence in the marketplace.

In the past eight years, the Wadhvani Foundation has been trying to change the way young Indians perceive employment and the opportunities that a growing economy has to offer. It has been partnering colleges and institutes in promoting a sense of enterprise among students.

It is a slow process. It means changing mindsets and redefining policies. Reaching the student involves training faculty. There is also a need for mentors who provide the spark and make dreams seem possible. But even if young graduates are enthused enough to do their own thing, they need seed capital. For money to flow to them, the government and banks have to think differently. Angel investors have an important role to play

and so rich Indians have to go beyond mutual funds and listed companies to game-changing new-age businesses.

The Wadhvani Foundation, set up by US-based billionaire Romesh Wadhvani, has many quiet successes to its credit. Most recently, it has invested in a Chair on Indo-US policy initiatives. In Delhi, the Chair is the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, (ICRIER). There is a parallel Chair in Washington DC at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

Ajay Kela, President and CEO of the Wadhvani Foundation, spoke to *Civil Society* about its work in India and the expectations on the policy front after the setting up of the two parallel Chairs.

What do you hope the Wadhvani Chair in Delhi will achieve? What is its importance in the context of your foundation's work?

The foundation's primary mission is to accelerate economic development in India and then go to other emerging economies. The belief is that if you can deal with systemic problems and make a nation rich, the rising tide will take care of the underserved as well. We do that in two thrust areas: large-scale job creation and skills development. These initiatives are in the long term over



Ajay Kela

five and 10 years. If you talk of being at the national level you cannot achieve scale unless you impact policy. That is one of the reasons we are investing in the Chair.

India needs more entrepreneurship if it is to continue to grow at nine and 10 per cent. Globally most new jobs are created either by entrepreneurs or small businesses. The entrepreneurial mindset and culture in the country has so far been limited to business families. Not many middle-class people think of being entrepreneurs. We want to bring the Silicon Valley mindset and culture to a college student in India.



Today through the 500 colleges and 1,200 faculty members who are a part of our network – we build capacity through them – we reach out to half a million entrepreneurs each year. They are exposed in varieties of ways such as multiple semester courses and programmes. So, half a million are exposed, 100,000 show a deeper interest, 500 graduate and start companies.

The way we measure our success at the end of each year is not how many were exposed, but by how many started companies. And then we measure how many jobs these companies are creating.

In these eight years how many entrepreneurs have you created?

One of the mistakes we have made in these eight years is not to have a strong tracking system. In the early years we were mainly building infrastructure and getting going. In the past two or three years, we are seeing where people are jumping in and creating companies. Last year 500 entrepreneurs created 213 companies.

Now we are tracking them. The other thing that we need to track is that even as we inspire people to be entrepreneurs not all of them do so straight away. They tend to work for three or four years and then start companies. Now we are trying to track those people as well.

The only way to do that is to have a pull. We offer them online continuing courses so that they register with us. Today about 100,000 have registered with us and we plan to keep track of them.

We feel we have cracked the nut in creating entrepreneurs. But what needs to be done is to support them otherwise we feel we have done a disservice.

We have ignited their passion to be entrepreneurs – mind you these are first generation, just out of college, very raw. But the financial ecosystem in the country is not very supportive, mentors are not easily available.

From last year we have begun supporting them. We have a mentor platform. There are 1,500 people who are seasoned business executives or successful entrepreneurs who then we connect with these guys. Next is the financial ecosystem. In the same way as we created these entrepreneurs, now we want to create a network of angel investors.

Facebook, Google and many such successful companies have come from angel investors. Entrepreneurs need the guys who will give you the first ₹50 lakhs, ₹10 lakhs.

The second initiative on job creation is innovation. If India is going to be a power house economy, it needs to be – besides being number three or 10 as an economy – recognised for value creation. What we are trying to do is create research institutes across the country in a variety of industry segments.

What kind of entrepreneur do you see emerging and what are the businesses?

They are young people from the middle-class. The hit rate is small. Half a million are exposed and 100,000 show a deeper interest. What we have done with this 100,000 is to start student body clubs which we support. Through these clubs we do things like campus companies. So before they graduate they run a company on the campus, the target audience being the students and the facul-

ty. They sell services and products to them and get a hands-on experience. Then 500 of those last year started companies and we hope that in years to come a lot more of these 100,000 will start companies.

At Mount Carmel College in Delhi there is a bunch of women who have started a women's magazine. They get a lot of ad revenue from local businesses, which find a target audience of 4,000 women to whom they can sell their products.

To reach all these colleges you must need a sizable presence.

In this initiative we have a team of about 50 people across the country. There is a massive leverage model as well. We are making investments in bringing in professors and entrepreneurs from all over the world to come and teach this faculty of 1,200 that we have. Consultants help the faculty members to keep them upgraded.

How do you make your entrepreneur programme sustainable. It is fair to assume that you won't do this for all time to come. Do you expect banks or the government to take over?

We think the beneficiaries here are the government and the institute. One thing we are beginning to see now is those who are part of our entrepreneur clubs are getting far superior job offers. We now expect the institutes to contribute to the running of these courses and this will make them self-sustainable. The Department of Science and Technology (DST) is now funding a part of this programme. So the government is getting involved.

For the first six years 100 per cent was funded by us. Last year we provided 60 per cent of the funding – 40 per cent came from charging for courses, getting the DST and some funding agencies to invest.

Funding agencies?

Goldman Sachs, the Cherie Blair Foundation. But that is not a model to pursue because it is not self-sustaining. You need a model where the institutes pay and the government says, okay, you are creating hundreds of jobs. We have been making good progress. In fact now with the DST we have been looking at a programme to introduce incubation centres across colleges.

So you have moved to another level.

If we want to achieve scale and sustainability we will have to impact policy. That is why we have funded two Chairs: one Chair in Washington DC and one Chair which we are launching here. Indo-US collaboration has gone well. The friendship is building. But there are still certain areas where we can have certain focussed policy initiatives.

Take FDI flows into India. It is a fraction of what goes into China. What are the policy changes that are needed or the research we can do to improve FDI flows into India? There is a huge gap in terms of the infrastructure needs of the country. We could smoothen infrastructure investments.

Both these Chairs would develop policy ideas and then champion them in both countries with lawmakers. There are models for supporting small businesses in the US which have been successful. Can we have them here? ■

Consumers get Internet clout

Akosha shows how to make companies listen

Vidya Vishwanathan
New Delhi

ANKUR Warikoo, the CEO of Groupon India, took a car loan from HDFC Bank for ₹4.5 lakhs. The terms mentioned that a processing fee of ₹3,000 would be charged. But he was charged ₹9,000 instead. He wrote an email to the bank asking for an explanation. This resulted in a series of email exchanges but nothing came out of it. An irritated Warikoo put up a status update on Facebook asking if somebody knew anyone senior in HDFC Bank. Someone posted back saying that he should possibly try Akosha, a company which resolves consumer complaints online.

Warikoo went to the Akosha website, filled up a form and paid up Rs 499. An Akosha representative called him back, understood his problem and asked him to forward his correspondence with the bank to them so that they could take it from there. The next time he heard from the bank was through an email which informed him that his account had been credited with ₹6,000.

"They know how to write a mail that is a balance between requesting and aggression. Customers tend to be agitated and threatening. Companies don't really respond to threats about taking them to the consumer court any more. They, however, do respond if they can do something to make you a happy customer again. Because of the volume of customer complaints that it gets, Akosha has managed to figure out what works," says Warikoo.

When his wife had a problem with some reservations with makemytrip.com they approached Akosha even before they approached the customer service of the company.

Yet all this volume of customer complaints is being handled by a four-man team, three of whom operate out of the CEO, Ankur Singla's two-bedroom apartment in Nehru Enclave in Delhi. The fourth team member is a stay-at-home mom qualified in law operating out of Mumbai. "We need happy customers," says Singla, who is a graduate from the prestigious National Law School in Bangalore.

"So we spend a lot of time understanding the problem. We talk calmly both to the customer and

the brand that they are unhappy with. It is not that the customer is right every time," Singla adds.

Every time Akosha gets a customer complaint they call her back, try to understand the issue, draft a formal letter for the customer and mail it. They make sure that they understand the laws in that industry. "We are not practicing lawyers representing the customer," points out Himani Subramaniam, the researcher who usually drafts

cases but increasingly since the brands know us, it is becoming easier," Subramaniam adds.

Akosha's goal is to become the intermediary between the aggrieved and the company. Their experience is that many brands want to resolve issues amicably but they do not know how. Harpreet Singh, an IAS aspirant from Chandigarh, is an example. He had paid for a series of aptitude tests at the Chandigarh centre of Career Launcher,

a coaching company. When the tests did not happen on schedule, he made a personal visit to the centre and called them up repeatedly for a couple of weeks. He was losing precious time.

He then called up Singla, his former schoolmate, and he had the Vice-President of Career Launcher, located in Delhi, calling him back. Singh was given individual attention.

Singla hopes that one day the brands will approach him pro-actively. He would like to become an aggregator of complaints. He makes presentations to large companies on the possibilities. But today his company deals with about 10 to 15 complaints a day.

"We spend a lot of time with each unhappy customer. Each issue we resolve creates word-of-mouth awareness about us," says Singla. Each happy customer also Tweets about Akosha who further re-Tweet it to their friends. So the word-of-mouth multiplies. Singla does not want to increase volume. "I do not want to take 20 complaints about a brand when I do not have the relationship to resolve it," he says.

Currently, the company charges ₹99, ₹299 or Rs 499 depending on the complaint. A complaint against a telecom company might cost ₹99 as against ₹999 for an insurance complaint. Singla is not sure how his business will pan out in the future. So far he is running with his savings and ₹5 lakhs that they got from an early start-up funding company called Morpheus. Will they become a free site for the customers? Will they turn activists? Will they influence policy? These are the possibilities that play in his mind.

But for now Akosha is searching for unhappy customers on Twitter – looking for tags that say 'sucks' and such words and forwarding them suggestions or articles on an issue on their website. They are in the process of building a brand for themselves. ■



Nitin, Ankur Singla and Avinash

the letter after talking to the customer.

"We are just writing the letter for him," she adds. It takes an average of 45 minutes to an hour each time. In most cases the issue gets resolved at this stage since most companies are also keen to solve the issue. Akosha has also developed relationships with many brands.

In case they do not get any response, Singla himself tries to escalate the case to higher echelons in the company. This is also his chance to make a pitch to many companies on what Akosha can do for them. He shows them an image of the dashboard of complaints that he hopes to generate for each brand. At the outset, though, they are content to resolve each customer's issue. If the company does not respond at this stage they resort to a social media campaign.

"We had to resort to Twitter when an airline lost a customer's baggage and even after repeated requests did not respond. When the company's team discovered the Twitter message, the response was immediate," explains Subramaniam. If none of this works, Akosha helps the customer draft a formal complaint and directs the customer to the correct consumer court. "We have done it in a few

SHAMIK BANERJEE

Insights

- Opinion
- Analysis
- Research
- Ideas
- Angst

No one listens to gram sabhas

MANSHI ASHER & PRAKASH BHANDARI

SINCE 12 April, the people of eight panchayats in the Saal Valley of Chamba, under the banner of the Saal Ghaati Bachao Sangharsh Morcha, have been peacefully demonstrating against the attempts of the Hul Hydro Power Private Limited (HHPPL) company to enter their villages with the police and begin work on a hydropower project.

The history of this long struggle dates to 2003 when villages here started opposing the construction of the 4.5 MW Hul micro hydroelectric project due to its impact on local forests, water and the environment.

Himachal Pradesh, which boasts of a hydroelectric potential of nearly 21,000 MW, has slotted around 750 MW of power from 'small hydro' or 'run-of-the-river' projects. Such power projects produce less than 5 MW each and can make do with weirs rather than dams and reservoirs. The

river is diverted and channelled so that a strong downward rush can be used to generate power.

The power created by these small hydro proj-

ects is not distributed to surrounding villages. Rather, it is sold by its producers to the State Electricity Board. Nonetheless, such 'run-of-the-river' projects are enthusiastically promoted by the state as eco-friendly, cost-effective and decentralised. The number of such projects have been witnessing an increase.

To attract micro hydroelectric projects, the state government is offering private power producers incentives in the form of easy land acquisition procedures and speedy clearances. The Hul project is one such example. The company, HHPPL, signed an MoU with the government of Himachal Pradesh way back in 1996 for the construction of a 4.5 MW hydel plant on the Hul stream or *nala* of the Saal river, a tributary of the river Ravi in Chamba district. Seven mini and micro hydel projects have been proposed on the Saal river alone.

The history of this long struggle dates to 2003 when villages started opposing the construction of the 4.5 MW Hul micro hydroelectric project due to its impact on local forests and water.

PRAKASH BHANDARI



Villagers protesting in Chamba against the hydel project

Water lifeline

In hilly Himachal, smaller rivers and streams are lifelines for people. They depend on these waters more than the bigger rivers for their livelihood. The Hul project will ruin around five km or one-fourth of the catchment of the Hul stream, a tributary of the 28 km Saal river, which in turn is a tributary of the Ravi.

"The Hul *nala* has been supporting the livelihood of nearly 6,000 people directly or indirectly. It is used for irrigation, drinking water, fishing and running water-mills. The projects coming up on the Hul are planned in some of the most pristine oak forests of the valley. Those forests will be destroyed and so will people's livelihoods based on livestock rearing. A scarcity of milk, ghee and honey will be created in Chamba town," says Ratan Chand, an ex-Zilla Parishad member and leader of the Saal Ghaati Bachao Sangharsh Morcha.

Himachal Pradesh's micro-hydel policy clearly states that the consent of the affected gram sabhas is necessary before the construction of any project. Yet, despite all the local gram sabhas passing resolutions against it, the state government has been trying to push this project. Several

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

memoranda and resolutions have been sent by the grams sabhas to all the government officials concerned, including the Chief Minister, but there has been no response.

"In 2007, three MLAs from Chamba region brought up this issue in the State Legislative Assembly and asked for cancellation of this project. While assurances to review the project were given by the government, no such action has been taken," says Man Singh, pradhan of one of the affected panchayats who has actively led this struggle.

The state government's apathy has, it seems, encouraged the company to try innumerable tactics to break the movement. In February 2010, its contractors and goons allegedly attacked members of the Saal Ghati Sangarsh Morcha in village Chungah with swords, guns and sticks while they were conducting a peaceful meeting. Five members were grievously injured. Ratan Chand and Man Singh had to be hospitalised for months even as the perpetrators managed to get out on bail.

As a response to this attack, a public hearing was conducted by the local administration but its findings have not been made public. More than 1,500 villagers from Jadera, Gulera, Chugha, Sungal, Barour, Chambi, Chaminu, Dhar, Muhal, Kega, Oyle, have objected in writing to the project.

"We obtained a copy of the report of the public hearing from sources and found that the committee has acknowledged the concerns of local communities and is in their favour," says Ratan Chand. "The report says that the wishes and aspirations of the local people should be honoured. It says the act and conduct of the project authorities in the whole episode was very suspicious."

Despite this the company is trying to start the project on the basis of a High Court judgment which in its order stated that the police should render all necessary and effective protection to the company for carrying out the work. The judgment also said that people could protest peacefully without creating any law and order problem at the site.

And so women, men and children from the affected villages have been holding peaceful demonstrations even during the harsh monsoon



Saal Valley

months until finally the police stationed on site was forced to withdraw. On 12 August, the morcha held a massive rally in Chamba town.

Global capital

People find the government's obduracy in the face of local opposition for years rather strange. A project like this one does not really matter in the state's larger scheme of things. But it is also surprising that a small company has enough finance to hang around twiddling its thumbs, waiting for the project to start.

The profits must be worth the wait. A look at the profile of HHPPL provides some answers. HHPPL is a joint venture of the Astha Projects (India) Ltd and Indus Power & Infrastructure, a Mauritius based company. Through Indus, a US based company holds stakes in HHPPL in India. Apart from this, the son of an Andhra based politi-

cian has stakes in this project. A US based hedge fund, Wexford Capital LLC (Wexford) also has stakes in the project. Wexford Capital has interests in the natural resources and renewable energy market. And so what on the surface appears as a small enterprise trying to promote this 'eco-friendly and tiny project,' has clear links with global finance capital trying to make profits from the natural resources of poorer countries.

According to Himachal Pradesh's water policy, priority must be given for drinking water, irrigation, environment, biodiversity, forestry and tourism over hydropower and industry. But the government in its hunger for power and revenue seems to have forgotten its commitments. For the people of the Saal Valley, however, this compromise is far from acceptable. ■

Writers are members of Himdhara, a Himachal based environment action collective.

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Flowing with the river

KANCHI KOHLI

IN its flow is its life and in its freedom lies our existence. All of us who have over the years sought the power to intervene in this river philosophy have done so with our own vision for river systems. This might be through proactive alteration of a river's trajectory or by being beneficiaries of its use. We have justified this, first through the creation of river civilisations and at a later stage by feeding our unending aspirations of growth. Rivers and their basins have continued to be used to meet consumptive targets in agriculture, industry and energy generation, all of which are only on the rise.

When a group of activists, river basin planners, scientists, researchers and media representatives met for a dialogue on river basin planning in New Delhi from 9 to 11 August this year, the human induced crisis was foremost on their discussion agenda. While some river basins have already been built upon extensively, others have been subjected to years of pollution. And then there were those rivers they had in mind which were extremely vulnerable in current times, ones where human intervention so far have been minimal.

This meeting organised by River Research Centre (Kerala), Gomukh, (Maharashtra), Manthan Adhyayan Kendra (Madhya Pradesh), Legal Initiative for Forests and Environment (New Delhi) and International Rivers deliberated on the possibilities of river basin planning. While the title of the meeting threw open the need to mainstream river basin planning, the three-day discussions went into deeper questions about what the practice of mainstreaming has meant till date. Further, are the current models of planning the way ahead to resolve multiple river crises? If not, can new models be evolved which make possible a more inclusive and holistic process of river basin planning?

While the meeting raised some very crucial questions about the future of rivers, what was challenging was the diverse understanding of what a river is, how far its basin extends and what planning for it implies. For some a river is the essence of nature and even though it has supported human beings from the time of our existence, we don't have the right to alter its flow for irrigation, power generation or extrac-



Kashang Nala in Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh

The core issue which kept resurfacing at the meeting was the need to talk about planning within the hydrological and ecological limits of the river rather than its potential use.

tion in a way that would artificially modify the ecological functions of a river.

But ever since rivers have been viewed as instruments of human desire, we have managed to find scientific logic which seeks to "balance" river functions. And this has also to a large extent determined what rivers should be planned for. There are those for whom river basin plans always have to do with tapping the potential of the river keeping human requirements in mind. In this situation the river has to be under extensive management and control. But the core issue which kept resurfacing in the Delhi dialogue was the need to talk about plan-

ning within hydrological and ecological limits rather than the potential use of rivers.

A river and its plan would both have a bearing on its basin which most often extends beyond national boundaries and throws up issues of upper and lower riparian rights. What would a Nepal limited plan for the River Kosi mean for India and how does Bangladesh view India declaring the Ganga as a national river? Is it actually possible to bargain for dams exercising methodologies like cumulative impact assessment of the construction of dams on the river Teesta or Brahmaputra without taking into account how China is tapping waters upstream and how Bangladesh will be impacted downstream?

With varying perceptions of a river, its basin and what planning for it means, the dialogue was not conclusive in its recommendations. But it flagged some uncomfortable questions that we would have to engage with if the many river world views are to be reconciled in the light of current time threats facing the rivers of the world. In many ways then any intervention in a river cannot be regarded as one with a large or small impact. Number crunching cannot alone determine how much one can risk a river's flow depending on the convenience of our intentions.

Therefore, even as we attempt to mainstream river basin plans from our own river visions, do we look for out-of-the-box solutions? Here it was felt that the present focus of tapping the hydrological potential of rivers needs to be replaced by the planning premise which looks at the ecological limits to hydrolog-

ical alterations. Any legal, governance and institutional reforms that follow would be based on such foremost planning priorities.

Rivers are also socio-cultural and political spaces other than being ecological entities, and river science should not isolate itself from this while attempting to plan or manage a river and its basin. It also cannot wish away the fact that planning will throw up uncomfortable questions and require negotiated trade-offs, many of which might only complicate the river planning process rather than be able to resolve it. ■

The author works and writes on social and environmental issues. She can be contacted at kanchikohli@gmail.com



Flimsy huts perched on an embankment in Bahraich district of UP

Ghaghra's destructive trail

BHARAT DOGRA

HAVE you ever seen a family digging up the foundation of their house? This strange, destructive act is all too familiar in Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh. When thousands of homes are threatened by the rising Ghaghra or its tributaries, villagers try to salvage whatever housing material they can to build a makeshift dwelling elsewhere by digging up the foundation of their home.

But there is no way they can salvage their farmland. In recent years, thousands of families have lost their farms, the main source of their livelihood, to river erosion.

Jwalaprasad was a middle-level farmer in Kaharanpurwa hamlet, Golganj panchayat, Fakharpur block of Bahraich district. He owned 19 bighas. The Ghaghra swallowed 14 bighas. Jwalaprasad is left with just five bighas. Due to the treacherous river, he is now just a small farmer leading a precarious existence.

Ramjanki is a widow who had about 11 bighas in Atodar panchayat. But the destructive Ghaghra river eroded all her land. She and her family fled leaving behind most of their belongings. Now they live in a flimsy hut perched on an embankment. The remorseless cold wind howls inside their shanty.

Ramchabile is a farmer who used to live in Munsari village of Mehsi block in Bahraich district. He now lives in Korva panchayat, also in Mehsi block. The Ghaghra eroded land in his village so badly that he had to flee. He settled some distance away but the river destroyed that land too. So he moved to Korva panchayat. Now his farm here is being threatened by the Ghaghra once again.

Tetra, a middle-aged woman, lives in Makhanha panchayat in Comperganj block of Gorakhpur district. She is actually a resident of Dhuswa hamlet. Some years ago due to a breach in the embankment her house was destroyed. In fact her hamlet was washed out. The community broke up due to the floods. Families had to scatter and they settled wherever they could in a precarious way.

After having lost their farms and homes, many such villagers take shelter on embankments, erecting thatch structures that provide little protection from the wind and rain. They become the rural homeless, neglected victims of disaster who are frequently denied even the relief they are entitled to under the Calamity Relief Fund and its related provisions.

After having lost their farms and homes, many such villagers take shelter on embankments. They become the rural homeless.

Kaharanpurwa hamlet in Golganj panchayat has lost 75 per cent of its farmland to erosion but farmers here have not yet received any compensation. Most of them were small farmers and have nothing left to subsist on except daily wage labour. Their crops, grown on whatever land was left, are destroyed due to floods this year but no compensation has been given to them.

The people of Atodar panchayat have been devastated by erosion. They too have received no compensation for eroded land or lost crops. However, they have received a small compensation for housing. The people of Atodar and Silouta who were forced to leave their villages are now living mostly on embankments in conditions of extreme distress including hunger, malnutrition and exposure to cold.

Munsari village in Mahasi was devastated by erosion. Its families started settling some distance away from the river, but the Ghaghra, changing its course, attacked their new settle-

ment as well. They had to abandon their homes for a second time. Now they have settled on land belonging to the Korwa panchayat. Unfortunately, the river arrived there too. Land belonging to about 50 farmers from Mansuri has been eroded. Therefore many families have lost their land thrice to river erosion.

Nearly two-thirds of farmers from Murowa village in Mahsi block have lost their land to river erosion. They have left their village to take shelter on roadsides or on embankments. They have not received compensation for loss of farmland, although they have received some compensation for loss of houses.

Living on embankments or on roadsides villagers are badly exposed to hunger and malnutrition. They lack basic facilities like clean drinking water, sanitation and health care. Women suffer due to lack of toilets and bathing places.

However, some initiatives have proved very helpful for villagers. These include raised hand pumps which provide clean water in flood situations.

A training programme initiated by UNICEF has helped to reduce several flood-related health problems in parts of Mehsi block. Villagers remember the timely distribution of relief material by NGOs like the Panchsheel Development Trust.

Despite these initiatives, such refugees live a precarious existence in their makeshift shelters, unprotected from cruel cold winds. Children keep telling their mothers that they want to go back home. Their mothers know only too well that their homes have vanished forever. Clearly more needs to be done for such refugees.

There is a ray of hope for some villages like Munsari in Bahraich district. The river has receded from some parts of their land. In such cases, villagers can be helped to rebuild their lives. People in Munsari are eager for such an effort. In other villages, where some land has been returned by the receding river, timely land identification can prevent land grab by the local mafia. ■

Living

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

Wild time in Sakleshpur

Trek through dense Shola forests

Susheela Nair
Sakleshpur (Karnataka)

THE journey to Sakleshpur, 240 km from Bangalore, was an exhilarating experience. We passed by vast verdant coffee, pepper, cardamom, ginger and tea plantations and estates that dot its scenic landscape. Rows of coffee bushes covered with sparkling white blossoms greeted

us and the whole area was heavenly with their exquisite fragrance. After reaching Sakleshpur town, we took a 14-km detour to Hanbal town. From Hanbal, we proceeded towards Agani where the tarmac ends and the natural terrain begins.

Our first stop here was a pile of stones linked to a heroic story. Legend has it that over a century ago, a wild Indian gaur attacked a tiger. The fight lasted an entire day with the roars and groans of the two

animals keeping frightened people indoors. At the end of the heroic battle, the boar emerged victorious. It finally succumbed to its injuries, but not before killing the tiger. Like all travellers, we too commemorated the honour and bravery of the gaur by placing a stone in reverence when we passed by. Over the years the heap has piled up high.

At the end of our journey sheer bliss awaited us. Tusk and Dawn, the eco-resort we were stay-

SUSHEELA NAIR



Eco-friendly cottages with the Western Ghats in the background

SUSHEELA NAIR



A natural fish pond connected to an island with a log-bridge

ing in, made its appearance on a clearing by the hillside nestling within the folds of the Western Ghats. Spread over 70 acres of pristine environs its landscape is 100 per cent natural. It was heartening to note the measures taken to protect and preserve the environment. The materials used for construction were locally sourced – bricks were made from clay taken from the land. Not a single tree has been felled to make way for the six cottages, a dormitory and a *gol ghar*.

After a quick check-in, we were ushered into our cottages. Each room in the cottage sported a huge glass window offering a view of the lush, dense jungle in the backyard. The bathroom had a cute fern garden and a little board informing you that the bugs that accompany you through your stay are friendly. After gorging on a delicious Malnad-style lunch with *akki roti*, spicy curries, hot steaming rice and *rasam*, it was time to go exploring. We clambered up a neighbouring hill. From the machan, we had an awe inspiring view of rolling hills in the green Shola forests. The twittering of the winged beauties kept us company.

After a power nap, we walked to a fish pond connected to an island with a log bridge. We sat on a rock gorging on hot *bhajjis* and watching schools of tadpoles. Then it was time for a trek. Winding lanes meander off the resort to a nearby waterfall. A descending pathway with towering trees entwined with creepers led us to the icy cold water. The gurgling stream formed limpid pools and milky-white cascades. The back massage under the falls was an invigorating experience.

At 5 pm we went on a drive off the road and through the forest. This short ride took us to the top of a mountain from where we could get a panoramic view. Tyres crunched the dry mud path and we heaved a sigh of relief as the car managed to plow through the terrain. Stomachs churned and we kept a plastic bag handy if anyone had a delicate tummy.

The resort provides an excellent base from where to explore the delights of the Western Ghats. There are many trekking opportunities nearby. Also within driving distance, the Bisle Ghat

is an extremely picturesque destination. There are ample possibilities for picnicking in Bisle Gudda or sunny mountain, while the Bisle Betta or Bisle View Point offers a spectacular view of the surrounding mountain ranges. The ghat borders the Bisle Reserve Forest, one of India's most magnificent rainforests. Its diverse habitat is home to an amazing selection of flora and fauna, making it a must-see for nature lovers. It is a great place for trekking and bird-watching. There are several observation points which provide vantage positions to see the reserve's birdlife, or simply sit back and enjoy the panoramic view.

Another site worth visiting is the Manjarabad Fort, set at a height of 3240 ft. above sea level. It is believed to have been built during the reign of Tipu Sultan. The Sakaleswara Temple at the entrance of Sakleshpur town is equally interesting. It is a marvel of Hoysala architecture and is a remnant of the Hoysala Empire that ruled this region between the 11th and 14th centuries AD.

In the evening we sat by the crackling fire listening in rapt attention to Vikram, a wildlife enthusiast, coffee planter and eco conservationist. He briefed us on every aspect of these ranges, be it trekking, wildlife photography or bird-watching. Having lived all his life in the region, Vikram knows every yard of the forest like the back of his palm. He lamented the threats to its ecology from insensitive projects, rampant construction, deforestation and unplanned tourism. Local people, trekkers, nature lovers and wildlife enthusiasts have urged the government not to sanction any hydel project in this ecologically sensitive taluk as it would cause irreparable damage to the flora and fauna of the region. Vikram felt that all stakeholders in tourism should resort to low impact, sustainable tourism in this virgin tourism destination. ■

FACT FILE

HOW TO GET THERE: Sakleshpur is 240 km from Bangalore and 150 km from Mangalore. The road from Bangalore via Kunigal-Channapatna-Hassan Sakleshpur on the Bangalore-Mangalore highway (NH 48) is excellent.
Contact: Tusk & Dawn: 080- 4091 5393

Homely café

Anjali Pathak
Ahmedabad

AT Seva Café 'living is giving'. So when you are through with a meal the bill comes in a pretty envelope and you pay whatever you want to. But so infectious is the atmosphere that everyone pays. Conventional business wisdom wouldn't have given Seva Café long. Instead, it is doing just fine.

Started in 2005, Seva Café is the brainchild of Jayesh and Anar Patel and Veeren Joshi. They founded Manav Sadhna, an NGO which works with women and children in the slums of Ahmedabad, nearly 20 years ago.

Five young men, graduates from Manav Sadhna's 'EarnNLearn' programme work as chefs in the café. Volunteers do the serving and cleaning up. Anybody can sign up as a volunteer. As word of Seva Café spread, mostly through Manav Sadhna and its upmarket loca-



tion on Ahmedabad's CG Road, volunteers started turning up.

Sandeep Vaghela, 26, is the Operations Manager. He draws up a weekly roster for the volunteers. Their first task is dish washing, second is serving food and third is helping with cooking. Nine volunteers serve the guests each evening. Most are college students or young working people who are attracted to Seva Café for various reasons.

The menu at Seva Café changes every day. Its list includes pizzas, pastas, noodles, soups, pulaos, parathas, Gujarati dishes, vadas, kheer, ice-cream and cakes. Beverages include nimbu pani, sharbat, panna, tea and coffee. There is no fixed thali system at Seva café. Gujarati foods like undhiya, muthiya, patrel and desserts like aam rasa are served.

Travails of farming



Fridays are for meals made from organically grown food. Akshar Gram, an organic farm, supplies the cereals, vegetables and spices. Now some guests make it a point to eat at the café every Friday night.

Seva Café serves around 60 diners every evening. Patrons are generous and the café breaks even. If a profit is made, it is used for social service. At 10 pm the café closes for its guests and its cooks and volunteers eat dinner together amidst much lighthearted banter. Sometimes guests linger till 11 pm and the café can be closed only by midnight.

Sandeep Vaghela is an artist and a graduate in English Literature. He says he now understands the importance of cooking, cleaning and service. These traditionally feminine tasks are the path to spiritual development, he says, and Seva has made him feel humble.



Bhaskar Kulkarni, whose task is cooking, says dish washing is a form of meditation. He tells youngsters who come to volunteer to plunge into dishwashing like a Zen monk!

Pranav Patel, a young volunteer, has done his masters in computers from Australia. He feels that working with an eclectic young crowd is an interesting experience. He enjoys explaining the Seva concept to new guests.

However, Seva Café is more than food, volunteering or hanging out with a college crowd. It is an experiment in building community spirit amongst the young in Ahmedabad. The café's Satya Gallery is also a space for budding young artists to display their work.

Every Sunday special films are screened from 3 pm to 6 pm. A money box has been kept in the gallery room for donations. Their little library has a good collection of books that have been donated by guests and volunteers.

Just walk into Seva Café any evening and enjoy the food and camaraderie. It is a good place to hang out for upcoming artists, college students and families. ■

Seva Café, Shoppers' Plaza, C.G. Road, Opp. Municipal Market, Ahmedabad.
Phone: (079)32954140, Mob: 09979857780.
Website: www.sevacafe.org.
Open 7.15 to 10 p.m. Monday closed.



DIARY OF AN ORGANIC FARMER

Gautam Vohra
Har-Anand Publications
₹ 795

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

GAUTAM Vohra's newly launched book, 'Diary of An Organic Farmer' is not another weighty tome on organic farming. Instead it is a first-hand account of how Vohra set up an organic farm in Haryana surmounting all odds.

The start-up process required nerves of steel,

three 'Fs' – fuelwood, fodder and fruit trees. A small patch was kept aside for growing vegetables for his kitchen. "We proved that a two-acre plot could be made productive and sustain a family of five," says Vohra.

Vohra is a strong votary of planting trees on wasteland. In his book he writes that while cereal production is essential for food security, the solution lies in promoting cereals on rain fed areas, pastures, degraded forests and wastelands.

"More such land needs to be brought under the plough. Pulses too need to be cultivated on such lands," he says.

Vohra's book is the outcome of his NGO, the Development Research & Action Group's (DRAG) work with marginalised tribals in Pen taluka, Raigarh district, Maharashtra. They got the tribals registered as BPL, set up people's committees and generated awareness of their rights. The people were then able to reap the benefits of the

SHAMIK BANERJEE



Suman Sahai of Gene Campaign and Gautam Vohra (right) at the book launch

recalls Vohra. There were excruciating delays at every step – from land registration, to taking possession, to finding water. To add to his woes, Vohra found himself battling the shady world of real estate agents. Everybody was hell bent on extracting their pound of flesh from him from the patwari upwards.

He managed to dodge all these roadblocks through sheer perseverance. He has now proved that he has what it takes to be an exemplary organic farmer.

Today, Vohra's two-acre organic farm in Manger in Haryana's Faridabad district is a model for small, marginalised farmers. "I wrote the book to show that if we can make farming sustainable, then we can check migration and tackle the issue of rural poverty," he says.

The strategy was to develop a new model of the

Integrated Tribal Development Programme which entitled them to get loans for small businesses and to buy livestock. In 1996-1997 DRAG moved from Maharashtra to northern India.

Vohra's personal experiences on the organic farm relieve some of the tedium that sometimes creeps into his diary. There's the errant mali who allows the grape cuttings to perish while Vohra is away, the quirks of Raju, the caretaker of the farm or the delight of just watching a peacock go by.

"Gautam's book makes the dry subject of agriculture quite racy. With a crisis in food and food security, farming has become very tough. In an engaging way, Gautam has brought us closer to a subject which is otherwise difficult to read about," said Dr Suman Sahai, founder-director of Gene Campaign at the book launch. ■

GREEN CURES

Managing dementia

Dr G. G. GANGADHARAN

ELDERLY people require more attention, more care and love from their family members.

These days, people above the age of 60 reconcile themselves to the fact that with old age they will face gradual memory loss and other age-related diseases. The ageing population is increasing all over the world due to more comfort, better lifestyle, life supporting systems and healthy foods. But, many senior citizens are forgetting the names of their loved ones. Corrective options are not far away. Many of us feel, 'Adding life to years is the need of the day.'

Dementia: Dementia is a serious loss of cognitive ability in a previously unimpaired person beyond what might be expected from normal aging. Dementia may occur independently or be associated with Parkinson's disease or stroke.

As we age, the brain starts losing neurons which in turn affects short-term memory. Dementia or memory loss that includes the dreaded Alzheimer's disease silently makes the afflicted person's life slow and difficult. Actually in dementia, the Vaata-dosha gets aggravated and Kapha is depleted. Kapha is the base of all activities related to memory and is unctuous personified. The brain is in a state of unctuousness, that is, its cells are well lubricated with all essential fluids including neuro-transmitters without any blockage. The memory of a person will be intact if Kapha facilitates this condition.

Management of dementia: Dementia is not an easy condition to treat. It needs medicines, lifestyle changes, good diet and proper counseling.

Nidana Parivarjana (avoidance of causative factors) is an important component of treatment. Exposure to toxic substances and excessive consumption of alcohol should be avoided. Metabolic, endocrine disorder and vascular diseases, if any, should be managed first.

For people in tropical countries, taking a daily oil massage or at least once a week proves to be quite beneficial. It improves the functions of the neural system and activates the cells. Seven days of Dhara with oils such as Lakshadi mixed with Ksheerabala is very effective. Dhara serves as an important tool to improve memory.

Medicines prepared from Ashwagandha, Satavari, Brahmi and Amla are quite helpful in



the management of dementia. It is most important to improve the digestive and tissue metabolism because proper assimilation of food or medicine is a prerequisite for improvement of these conditions.

Consumption of small quantities of cow's ghee (one teaspoon) added with a little bit of Ashta Chooranam (one-fourth teaspoon), one teaspoon of Brahmi juice (*Bacopa monnieri*) and half teaspoon of onion juice in the morning on an empty stomach for 41 days is a good prescription for

dementia.

Application of cooling hair oils like Brahmi thailam etc. is also advisable.

A few tips to prevent and manage dementia:

Pure cow's ghee is actually the nectar of life. Daily use of ghee with hot food at least once a day helps to maintain a healthy long life. Ghee is the only food which Ayurveda considers synonymous with longevity.

There are some medicinal plants which are very useful in improving memory and increasing alertness.

- The root of Shankapushpi (*Clitoria ternatea*) is an excellent remedy. The dried root (20 gm) is boiled in 200 ml. of milk for 15 minutes, filtered and taken at bed time for 41 days.

- Vacha (*acorus calamus*): One gram mixed with honey is good.

- Panchagavya Ghritam: One teaspoon in the morning on an empty stomach followed by warm water is an excellent remedy for this condition. Panchagavya Ghritam will not cause any harm such as an increase in cholesterol.

Yogic practices – Yogasana and Pranayama will help to manage the condition. Shavasana, Sarvangasana, Matsyasana, Anuloma-viloma, Kapalabhati, Bhastrika, and Trataka are some yogic exercises which should be done under a yoga therapist's guidance.

Diet: ● Use of green vegetables and yellow fruits (apple, papaya, guava, mango, banana etc.). ● Rich antioxidant foods like carrot, milk, mango, gooseberries. ● Avoidance of incompatible and hot spicy food articles.

Above all, caring and affection from family members and friends will definitely add many happy years to old age.

Depending upon the person's physical and mental attributes some modifications may be necessary in this treatment protocol, but generally, the above explained advice will be very useful. ■

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WONDER PLANT

Pepper tang

WHAT makes your food taste good? Spices! Indispensable in ethnic cuisines, spices pep up your food. And India is the 'home of spices'. Ayurveda enumerates the medicinal use of a variety of spices besides their fabulous flavour and taste. One such spice is Piper longum, popularly known as the Indian Long Pepper.

Piper longum is an evergreen shrub with dark green foliage which belongs to the family Piperaceae. It is known for its hot and sweet fruit spikes. Long pepper is a noble rejuvenator and helps in stimulating appetite. Petite berries are used for throat pain, paralysis of the tongue and hoarseness of voice.

Gardening tips : The queen of spices demands partial shade, fairly high temperature, sufficient water and well-drained soil. Long Pepper grows in all seasons through the year. It prefers well drained loamy soils rich in organic matter. Propagation is usually by stem cuttings. Semi-hard stem cuttings with five to six nodes are most suitable. Cuttings are planted in polybags in a way that two nodes are inside the soil. Soil mixture containing sand, soil and farmyard manure in the ratio of 2:1:1 favours early sprouting. These bags should be kept in a shady place to prevent scalding by the sun. Sprouting starts within 15 days, rooting after three to four weeks. Observed success rate of propagation in this method is 70 per cent. Transplanting in the field should be done in the early morning during the rainy season.

Make your medicine: The dry spikes of



ORGANIC CHEF

Recipes

MOONG DAL SOUP

Ingredients:

Moong (whole green gram): 1/4 cup
Black pepper: To taste
Lemon juice: To taste
Cumin (jeera) seeds: 1/4 tsp
Ghee: One blob
Water: 2 cups
Asafoetida (hing): A pinch
Turmeric powder: A big pinch

METHOD: Pressure cook washed gram till very soft. Keep aside one tablespoon of boiled gram. Blend the rest, after cooling. In a pan, heat ghee. Add cumin seeds. When the seeds splutter add the asafoetida and blended moong soup. Add salt, turmeric, lime and pepper. Boil 5-7 minutes. Add the tablespoon of whole moong. Boil till thick enough for soup. Serve hot.

This soup is excellent for people recuperating from fever or from a debilitating condition. It is very nutritious for children.



the female long pepper fruits are used in Ayurvedic preparations like Pipalarishta, Pipplayasava, Panchakola, Pippalaya-diluha and Lavanabhaskar churnam. It is the major constituent of an Ayurvedic preparation, Triaktu, which is prescribed routinely for a variety of diseases.

For indigestion: The dry fruits of long pepper are crushed to make a fine powder and sieved through a fine cloth. One teaspoon of this powder with jaggery is advised for indigestion. It should be taken orally half an hour before food for four to five days. **For toothache:** The same long pepper powder mixed with honey and ghee can be kept in the mouth for toothache. **For cough:** Two teaspoons of the powdered fruit are added to one glass of boiled milk and four glasses of water and then boiled and reduced to one glass. The mixture is filtered and sugar candy powder is added for taste. Three to four teaspoons of this drink can be taken for five days (three times daily) to relieve cough with sputum. **As an appetizer:** A compound powder of five ingredients, named Panchakolachurna consisting of long pepper, fruit and root, dry ginger, stem of pepper plant and chitraka is a good appetizer. **As a hair tonic :** Paste made from long pepper and neem leaves is mixed with cow's milk and gingelly oil and is applied to the scalp wherever there is hair loss. ■

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AMARANTHUS WITH SPROUTS

Ingredients:

Amaranthus leaves: One large bunch
Green gram sprouts: ¼ cup
Onion: One chopped fine
Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp
Coriander powder: 1 tbsp
Powdered rock salt: To taste

For garnishing:

Cow's ghee: 1 tsp
Cumin seeds: 1 tsp
Garlic: 3-4 cloves, crushed
Dry red chillies: 2
Asafoetida powder: A pinch

METHOD: In a thick bottomed pan, heat ghee for garnishing. Add cumin seeds. When the seeds begin to crackle, add garlic, chillies and asafoetida. Add the chopped onion and sauté for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the green gram sprouts with a little water, turmeric, coriander powder and salt. Stir well. Cover with lid and allow to cook till the sprouts are cooked well. Now add the chopped greens and cook for three more minutes. Switch off the flame.

This dish is ideal for aged individuals and people with weak/sluggish digestion. It is nutritious for children. ■

LOOK GOOD

Sparkling teeth

SPARKLING white teeth make a person look vibrant and charming. A good set of teeth enhances your personality.

Teeth are an important attribute of humans. A dazzling smile, a display of sparkling white teeth is enough to get all the attention you want.

Good care of the teeth and the mouth is essential not only for shiny teeth but for complete physical health.

The mouth is the seat of Kapha dosha and if oral hygiene is remiss then you develop problems like Bad breath, Yellow/ filthy teeth, Mental decay, Loosening of teeth, Bleeding gums, Toothache

Health tips must be followed on a regular basis to get the best results. Ayurveda prescribes complete oral care, not just a good teeth.

- Always rinse your mouth after eating any food.
- Reduce consumption of tea, coffee and other beverages as these stain the teeth. After every drink rinse your mouth immediately to avoid staining.
- Avoid chocolates as they make teeth dull and may cause caries. After eating chocolates, rinse/wash your mouth thoroughly so that your teeth remain shiny and white.
- Apply gingelly oil on your teeth to reduce teeth problems. This is useful for preventing cavities.
- Gargle your mouth with either warm water or a warm decoction of triphala/ neem/ babul/ khadir.
- Avoid chewing of betel leaves as it discolours your teeth.
- Chew the tip of a neem or a babul soft twig and brush teeth

Dr. Ashwini V Konnur, Senior Research Fellow, CCR, IAIM

INVENTION

Herbal soup

FRLHT's idea was to develop a herbal soup that is packed in a sachet as a free flow powder which can be dissolved in hot water to provide an instant refreshing liquid. The ingredients in the soup should be selected as per Ayurveda norms.

The soup developed by FRLHT has been formulated keeping Ayurveda principles in mind. It has beneficial herbs such as coriander, lemon, pepper, turmeric and yellow split beans. The soup was prepared with all fresh ingredients using the traditional way of cooking. No preservatives have been added to maintain the natural status of the soup.



The ingredients, process and product have been standardized using organoleptic, physical, chemical and microbiological parameters.

The product is a light yellow coloured, free-flowing dry powder packed in Paper/PE/Aluminium/PE structured sachets. Trials have been completed at lab scale, pilot scale and at large scale.

The physical, organoleptic, chemical and microbial quality of the product have been tested for 12 months. Selected herbal ingredients that can impart a refreshing feeling when consumed have been used. ■

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Breath of life

SAMITA RATHOR

RECENTLY I had the opportunity to study some subtle aspects of pranayama from Anand Mangala, 85, an ex IAF fighter pilot, and a wonderful teacher from the Bihar School of Yoga. I would like to share some wisdom I imbibed from him.

A regular and healthy pranayama practice can prolong your life and balance all aspects of your physical and psychic energies.

Prana is the energy in breath. Prana is called life's vital force for it is responsible for life. In general we breathe 15 times a minute, 900 times per hour and 22,000 times in a day. Pranayama forms the fourth limb of Ashtanga Yoga as per the Yoga Sutras, the ultimate authority on yoga. Certain guidelines need to be followed for an effective pranayama experience.

PREPARATION: ● An investigating attitude is essential. ● You need to be in love with your breath. ● Awareness of breath is very important. ● Sit comfortably. Your body must rest on a strong foundation.

OBJECTIVES: ● To enhance energy levels. ● To balance the prana and the manah shakti which are always unequal. ● To discover the effect of breath on the mind and deeper psyche. ● To remove thought obstructions in your mind.

YOGIC BREATHING: Breath measures the life span of a living being according to ancient scrip-

tures. If you slow down your breath then your life span can be increased. When we breathe in the stomach should bloat out and on exhalation the abdomen gets sucked in. Many of us without realizing do the opposite. This needs to be corrected because breathing the wrong way can create many psychosomatic diseases. In yogic breathing the abdominal and thoracic capacity is utilized so that the lungs get the maximum air.

BENEFITS: ● Re-educates our breath and wrong breathing habits. ● Oxygenates the body fully and eliminates coughs, colds and respiratory ailments. ● Vitality increases due to more oxygen, so we are less prone to tiredness. ● Slow breathing calms the mind. ● Helps to alleviate diseases like angina. ● Psychosomatic diseases are alleviated.

RULES: ● Always breathe slowly and deeply. ● Breathe through the nose and not the mouth. ● Ensure the abdomen swells during inhalation. ● Pause after inhalation and exhalation is important. ● Make all muscles relax after exhalation and induce a sinking feeling.

BRAHMARI: Brahmari means bee humming. The practice of Brahmari makes the exhalation longer which is the objective of a yogic practice. These pranayamas should be learnt only under the guidance of a qualified teacher.

BENEFITS: ● The humming vibrations massage the brain and the mind relaxes. ● During inhalation the pulse is a little faster than during exhalation. This slows the pulse down giving the heart a good rest. ● Massages the vocal cords and rectifies respiratory problems. ● Improves concentration. ● Strengthens and improves the voice. ● Influences the pineal and pituitary glands.

CONTRAINDICATIONS: ● Always do this in an upright position. ● The exhalation or humming should not be forced. ● In case of an ear infection avoid doing this.

NADI SHODHANA: This is a very important pranayama and it is also described as alternate nostril breathing.

We need to balance our sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system, the physical and mental faculties, ida and pingala nadis, introversion and extroversion. This pranayama requires preparation and a lot of supervision and guidance under a qualified teacher.

BENEFITS: ● During inhalation the entire body gets oxygenated and during exhalation the lungs are emptied of all toxins and germs. ● Blood system gets purified. ● Brain centres work at their optimum. ● Results in vast improvement in health and mental balance. ■

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SHAMIK BANERJEE

PRODUCTS

VIBRANT GRASS

MONEY grows on grass for villagers of Bhadohi in Uttar Pradesh. They fashion a range of colourful products with a wild grass called sarpat which grows near ponds and rivers. Around 350 women in Kasauli, Bairiparwa, Ramchanderpur and Badiyanikari villages earn a livelihood by weaving sarpat into baskets, dustbins, lamps, table mats, laundry bags and pen stands. The men add the colour.

The villagers were trained by the Dastkar Haat Samiti, says Deen Bahadur. Dastkar has helped them keep up with market trends. His eye-catching products were displayed at Dastkar's annual Nature Bazaar held at Crafts Museum in Delhi and attracted many buyers. ■

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Solid waste collection Community participation by the residents of Kadakola to clean the village



Kadakola is a major panchayat in the Mysore District of Karnataka. It is one of the 56 villages adopted by the Srinivasan Services Trust (SST) in Karnataka.

This panchayat has 903 households and 80 commercial shops. Every day the panchayat generates about 1.5 tons of solid waste. In the absence of any regular system of cleaning a huge amount of solid waste had accumulated in the village. It posed a serious health hazard.

SST interacted with the members of Self Help Groups (women and men groups), and constituted a Village Development Committee (VDC), comprising of members of various Self Help Groups, the asha worker, the anganwadi worker, school teachers and the elected representatives of the panchayat. Now, the VDC meets every month. Its major concern was disposal of the solid waste. After a few meetings the VDC, on the advice of SST, resolved to collect Rs.30/- per month for commercial shop and Rs.10/- per month from each household. The amount so collected was resolved to be used for ensuring regular clearance of garbage and composting the degradable solid waste.



SST on its part contributed a cycle cart with dust bins. Each household segregates its garbage in two packets viz., degradable and non degradable categories. A person has been appointed by the VDC to collect it from each household. Now the cleaning is regularly carried out in six streets of the panchayat. The collected garbage is transported to a distance of 750m and deposited in compost pits.

The community's initiative has helped to resolve a long standing issue of the village.

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Asha Hansda
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