

Civil Society

BEYOND GAY PRIDE

QUEER QUOTIENTS
IN EVERYDAY INDIA



**WHAT DOES 26%
OF EQUITY OR
PROFITS IN
MINING MEAN?**

The idea is good but more discussion is needed, says Chandra Bhushan of CSE

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BEYOND GAY PRIDE

Same gender sex is no longer a crime under the law. But what is life like for gay people after Section 377? Is their world different? Four profiles.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

The latest outcry over corruption

FROM time to time we become very agitated over corruption in our economy. It is the rich and middle-class who complain loudly and then when they have spent their anger and the dust has settled on some scam or the other everyone goes silent. After that it is business as usual till the next scam.

In the latest season of concern, there are marches and demonstrations. Some prominent individuals, among them bankers, industrialists, ex-bureaucrats and ex-judges, have also issued a statement asking the political class to take measures to check corruption and bridge the governance deficit in the country.

These are valid demands with which no one can disagree. Corruption is rampant and comes in the way of us realising our true potential. It is a fact that our governments do not perform. But if petitions could solve the problem of corruption and put governments to work we would have done so a long time ago.

Clearly the answer lies in going beyond mere displays of our concern. It has to be found in a continuing commitment. There is a need to engage from one day to the next and not petition from a distance.

A major source of corruption in India is the cosy relationship businessmen have with politicians. It should worry us that such a situation prevails even as we claim to be reforming our economy and making markets more transparent. It is only a small section of the Indian corporate sector that sticks to principles. Tata, Premji and a few others mean what they say and lead by example. They are seriously interested in nation-building. But by and large Indian businessmen have shown they are more than happy to play along with politicians. If corruption is to be curbed in any meaningful manner, the corporate sector's involvement must be examined.

For better governance to become a reality there is a need to ensure our democracy works for the weakest – Gandhiji's last man. This requires a vigorous reorientation of priorities which give the vast majority of Indians access to health care, education, finance, housing and natural resources. We don't even have a semblance of such policies as of now.

Inclusion is a complex process. It requires honest consultation and debate and a commitment to democratic principles. If the elites who are protesting say there is a trust deficit, imagine what the poor in this country feel like. We should ask the people who get pushed off their land for mining projects and SEZs what they have to say.

If a democracy is all about creating aspirations, the better off among us have a huge responsibility.

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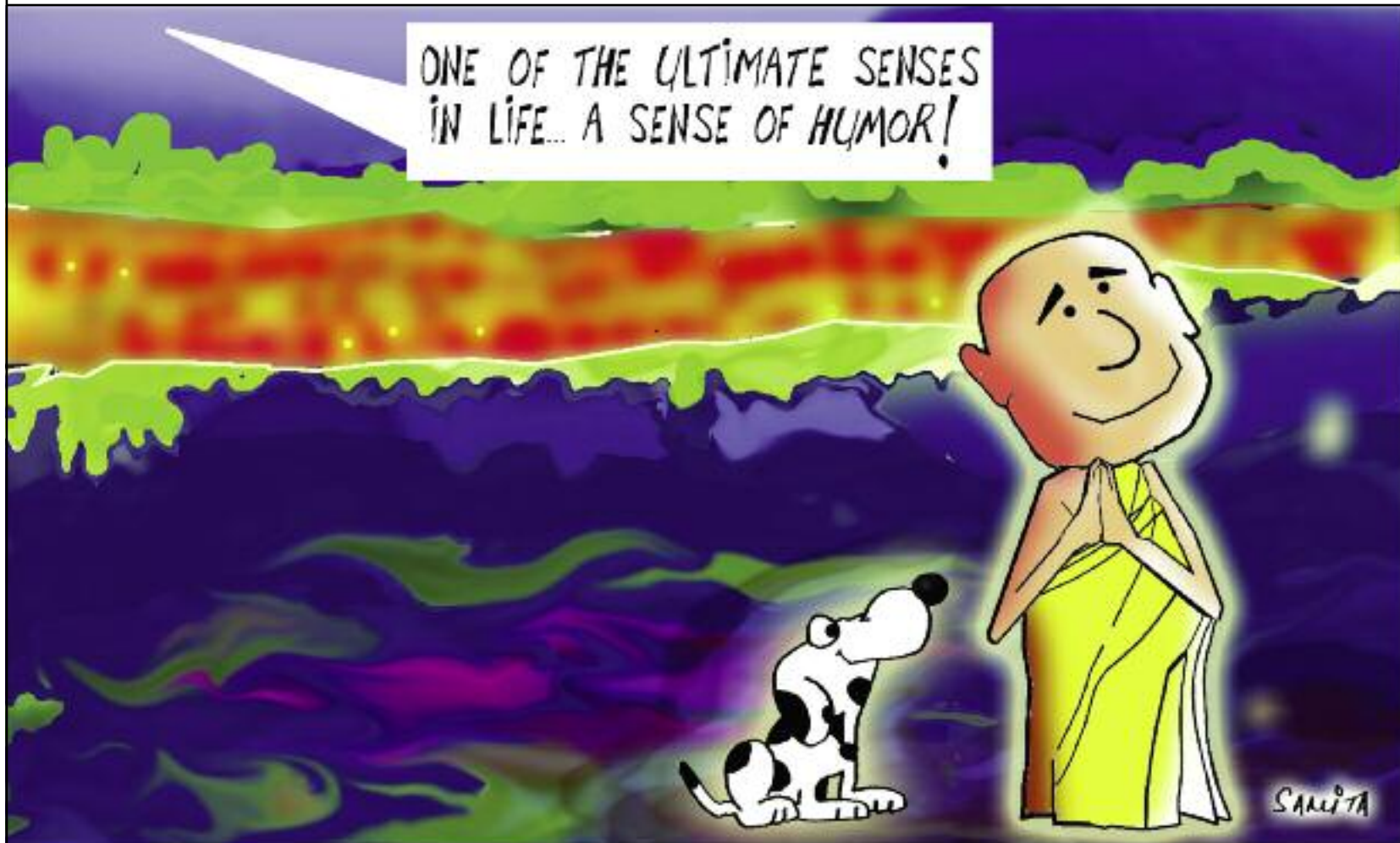
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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Ideas for 2011

Your January issue was good but it left out the cancer of corruption. Even if Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi have good intentions, formulate the right policies, devote money to such plans, these plans don't achieve their full potential mainly due to corruption. We need honest, tough, hardworking people to head critical government agencies.

Nehra

The last decade has been good for India but this would have been better if the Union government had worked on corruption. Today corruption has come to the forefront despite all the economic progress. And yet the government still has to make sure Indians get basic things such as rice, onions and oil at reasonable prices.

Vikram

The importance of infrastructure for sustained economic development is well recognized. High transaction costs arising from inadequate and inefficient infrastructure can prevent the economy from realizing its full growth potential regardless of progress on other fronts. Physical infrastructure covering transportation, power and communication through its backward and forward linkages facilitates growth. Social infrastructure, including water supply, sanitation, sewage disposal, education and health, which are in the nature of primary services, have a direct impact on the quality of life.

shoba@aol.com

The condition of government schools in India is pathetic. Except

for two or three states, all Indian states have poor educational statistics. There is a need for urgency. Education levels need to be improved. Proper incentives should be given to teachers and public expenditure should be increased for education.

Apoorva

One problem is that we don't have a unified vision for government schools. Let's get our objectives clear. We want our poor children to become scientists, engineers, doctors, biotechnologists. We want them to leapfrog from being poor to rich in one generation. So let's work with that vision in mind. To fulfill this we need government schools to become state-of-the-art. Nothing more than the best will do.

Gayatri

Price rise

We would like to know the real reason for price rise in items of daily consumption like vegetables, pulses, oil and rice. There is an endemic problem in agriculture which the media and the government are not talking about. We know farmers are committing suicide, agriculture is

limping along, there are protests against land acquisition. But there is a conspiracy of silence. Price rise is not due only to the vagaries of the weather.

Dr Saugata Das

The Congress led UPA government should understand that at this moment we don't need high GDP. We need to lower prices of food. If GDP comes down because of these efforts, so be it. Price rise is a sensitive political issue. When the price of onions goes up, see how people react. They get angry.

Reena

Soul Value

Thanks for the piece on the waning and waxing of the moon and its baleful effect on humans. This is a rather complex subject since it involves psychology, spirituality, science and cosmology. It is interesting that scientific research suggests that there is no connection between how we react and the planetary system. But in Hinduism the connections are very strong. We place our faith in astrology and horoscopes and this tradition has become stronger.

Sridhar DS

INTERVIEW Historic mining law seems adrift in v

LAKSHMAN ANAND

What does 26 per cent of equity or profits really mean?

Umesh Anand
New Delhi

A proposed amendment to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act envisages benefit-sharing with people in forests who are displaced by mining. It has been suggested that mining companies give 26 per cent of their equity or their profits to communities.

The proposed law is revolutionary in its implications. Never before in India have the rights of communities over minerals been accepted. Benefit-sharing has all along been a grey area with evicted people being fobbed off with some kind of compensation. Often they end up getting nothing at all.

But so poor is the groundwork for the new law that there are serious doubts about whether its provisions can actually be implemented. No one is quite sure what 26 per cent of equity or profit really means.

The mining sector is plagued by illegal operations and small fly-by-night companies. Mining companies routinely stray into areas for which they have no permission. Despite an elaborate government mechanism at both the local and national levels there is virtually no regulation.

The result is that perhaps two-thirds of the mining industry is not accountable. How then will benefit-sharing be implemented?

It is also not known how forest communities will engage with industry. How will they figure out a company's profits? What will they do with share-holding?

To understand some of these issues, *Civil Society* spoke to Chandra Bhushan, Deputy Director, at the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

Chandra Bhushan interacts with industry across sectors as head of CSE's green rating initiative. Two years ago he anchored a CSE study on the mining industry which was later published as a State of the Environment Report.

The following are extracts from an interview:



Chandra Bhushan

'If it is 26 per cent profit, what happens if a company is making losses? Many mining ventures make a loss in the initial years. What then happens to the money which is due to the community?'

New legislation has been drafted which gives forest communities a 26 per cent share in the equity or profits of mining companies. What is your understanding of this measure?

The sharing of profits with communities is an established international practice. It comes out of the principle that, if the land is owned by a community, then the minerals also belong to the community. We don't practice it because our laws are different. Here even if you own the land you don't own the minerals. The proposed law changes land rights by making communities owners of the minerals and therefore entitled to compensation. As far as this is concerned it is a good thing and we welcome it.

When we undertook a study of mining which was published as a State of Environment Report two years ago, we found there was a direct correlation between poverty and mining. The top 18 mining districts in the country were

Vote-bank politics

also among the poorest. What this essentially means is that that profits from mining are not being reinvested in these areas and people are not benefiting.

So from this perspective we are quite happy with this proposed legislation. But having said that, I don't know from where this 26 per cent has come. There has to be a rationale for 26 per cent. If we go back to the Samata judgment in Andhra Pradesh, the high court had said that in Schedule 5 areas either 20 per cent of profit or five per cent of turnover, whichever is higher, should go to the community. This would ensure regularity and a good amount of money going to the community.

But I don't know where this 26 per cent has come from. If you look at the draft law, it has been written in a very cursory manner that 26 per cent of equity or profit should go to the community. Now what does equity mean? Is it that 26 per cent of the shareholding will be distributed to the people? On the other hand, if it is 26 per cent of profit, what happens if a company is making losses? Many mining ventures make a loss in the initial years. What then happens to the money which is due to the community?

I don't think they have understood or really fleshed out this provision of 26 per cent. They haven't put out a rationale for 26 per cent.

But a Group of Ministers has sat on this.

Yes a Group of Ministers has sat on this. But I don't think the ministers have asked the question: why 26 per cent? What is so beautiful about of 26 per cent? Why not 36 per cent? Why not 33 per cent? Why not half the profit?

So, are we looking at a situation in which such a key law bestowing benefits on communities is coming into existence without adequate debate?

You see what happened was that the previous Union secretary for mines, Shanta Sheela Nair, felt very strongly that communities have to be taken care of if you want mining projects to go on. She has therefore pushed this idea of 26 per cent of profit or equity. I don't think there has been a debate with activists and others in civil society on how this money will be given or what kind of institutional mechanism will be required to implement it so that the community actually benefits from it. A few meetings have been held, but all these debates have not taken place.

What do you think is driving this law?

There is a sense within the country, and especially in the bureaucracy, that people are stalling mining projects and we need a way out of this situation. People are essentially saying, 'mining not in our backyard'. There is therefore a feeling that unless benefits are not given to communities, mining projects are not going to go ahead. So that is what is driving the bureaucracy.

But I think there is also vote-bank politics behind the move. The government wants to take credit for a policy which provides money to people when mining projects are taken up in tribal areas.

It is a combination of vote-bank politics and a realisation within the bureaucracy that most min-

ing projects are being held up because people are protesting and in some cases violently. The whole idea is to get people to start supporting mining projects.

You have looked at mining closely. Perhaps as much as 70 per cent of the mining industry consists of small and fly-by-night operators who can't be held accountable. Now if this is so, what are the chances of implementing a law on benefit-sharing in a meaningful way?

I think the ratio of organised and unorganised sector actually depends on what mineral you are talking about. As far as major minerals are concerned, the organised sector would be the major chunk.

Major minerals meaning?

Coal for example. Or iron ore. Even if you have 50 hectare mine leases these are big companies. Look at Goa where you have Dempo and Salgaoncars. They are big organised companies. It is only now in certain parts of Karnataka, Bellary in particular, where smaller companies have become big by mining iron ore. Or take limestone where cement

'I think the govt needs to consult much more widely. We have expertise in the public sector, private sector and in civil society. The govt needs to open up the draft for further debate.'

plants have captive mines. In minor minerals like stone you do have a majority of unorganised players. In bauxite too you have smaller players.

But take Jharkhand. A large number of iron ore mining leases have gone to small players. I don't think the big players have got them.

In a way you are right. Those who have got it are small players.

Yes if there are smaller players, implementing this law will be very difficult. How do you identify community in the case of a very small mining project?

Let's come to that later. But first of all how do you identify who is going to pay?

Well, yes, if the company is running away after digging....

It is also possible to get a lease for one area but end up digging somewhere else?

It is possible. Companies have been digging in areas beyond the leases given to them. This has come to light in Bellary. Illegal mining is a big problem. For instance in Orissa illegal iron ore mining is a major thing. It is said that Orissa has lost close to ₹40,000 crores because of illegal mining. Similarly, the Karnataka government has lost

thousands of crores of rupees because of illegal mining.

So, it doesn't seem that the new draft law addresses the problem: which is how to regulate mining and ensure that benefits reach communities which are losing their land.

I don't think the draft has looked at the institutional mechanism for regulating mining very closely. For instance, at the last Group of Ministers meeting it was decided out of the blue that a separate institution would be set up to regulate illegal mining.

Now take a look at the mining sector. You have the state mines and geology department at the local level, state pollution control board and the state forest department. If mining is happening in a forested area, then the forest department is supposed to ensure that it is not affecting wildlife. Then of course you have excise, sales tax and so on. At the central level you have the ministry of mines, the Indian Bureau of Mines, Directorate General of Mines Safety, Ministry of Forests and Environment, Central Pollution Control Board.

Now on paper you have all these institutions. In fact, I think we have overdone institutions. I don't think the government has actually mapped the institutional design to ensure two things: that the laws are complied with and multiplicity is avoided. The draft of the new law is similarly very poor on institutional design.

When illegal mining cannot be checked and institutional design is so flawed, how will it be possible to handle something infinitely more complex such as the sharing of profits and disbursing of equity?

I think the government needs to consult much more widely. We have expertise in the public sector, private sector and in civil society. I think the government needs to open up the new draft for further debate. Not on the principle. Like I said in the beginning, I fully agree with the principle. But we need to think about how it should be implemented.

Now let's take the issue of profit. Isn't profit a difficult thing to determine? Also how do communities with no experience of dealing with companies ensure they get their rights?

It is an unequal relationship. It is always an unequal power relationship between communities and industry. One party has all kinds of information and the other party has no information.

Often shareholders can't pin managements down. How will disadvantaged communities?

In Papua New Guinea, which is a celebrated case, there is a benchmark for what the company has to share with the community. It could be 20 per cent (I don't know the exact figure) of profit or turnover. After that the community begins negotiating with the company. You have civil society groups which support communities in this process. You have groups which have come up in countries where profit-sharing takes place. They support the community with knowledge, information, negotiating positions and so on.

The landholders will negotiate, the landless will negotiate, those who are losing livelihoods will negotiate. Ultimately they will come out with a formula where there is a certainty of payment.



Sharmila Tagore and Aparna Sen with other artistes at the protest meeting

Defending Binayak

Satya Sivaraman
New Delhi

ON 24th December a Raipur Sessions Court, after a trial lasting nearly three years, convicted Dr Binayak Sen of 'sedition' and 'conspiracy' against the Indian State.

Apart from the drastic charge of 'sedition,' a throwback to the colonial era, what has shocked most people is the verdict of life imprisonment handed to a person with a record of impeccable public service. And that too based on flimsy, even planted evidence and in the face of appeals from around the world to drop the false charges against him.

Dr Sen has worked among the rural poor and tribals in Chhattisgarh for over three decades doing stellar public health work among them and in later years taking up cases of human rights violations by the police. He is the recipient of numerous international awards for his work including the Jonathan Mann Award for Health and Human Rights, of which he is the first South Asian to win.

"Any intelligent person would find that the judiciary acted very peculiarly. I hope the high court or the Supreme Court quashes this," said Prof. Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize winner for Economics, at a function on 8 January to release a new book on Dr Binayak Sen in Delhi.

"It is not sedition in my view," said Prof Sen. "His work has been extraordinary, exemplary. Being a doctor, he could have been earning huge amounts of money, but he decided not to play it that way. He chose to serve the people."

On the face of it the charges against Dr Sen of abetting or facilitating activities of the outlawed Maoist rebels – dubbed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as 'India's biggest internal secu-

rity threat' – are serious ones. The Maoists, who have presence in tribal and forested areas of central India, have been engaged in an armed struggle against the Indian State for the past several decades.

The specific charge against Dr Sen was that he allegedly passed on letters from Narayan Sanyal, an imprisoned Maoist leader, to Piyush Guha, a tendu leaf contractor who – according to the police – was to hand them over to Maoists in West Bengal. The prosecution account of how and where they arrested Piyush Guha and 'recovered' these letters is filled with contradictions that are enough on their own to collapse the entire case.

Even if these charges were true, however, the mere act of passing on letters does not constitute an act of 'sedition', which according to several Supreme Court judgments should be a charge invoked only when there is 'incitement to violence' against the government. The content of the letters, written by Narayan Sanyal, also have nothing that can be construed as provocative in any manner. The Raipur Sessions Court judgment has been strongly criticized by many top lawyers, including some former Chief Justices of the Supreme Court.

"I submit that my prosecution is malafide. In fact it is a persecution. I am being made an example of by the state government of Chhattisgarh as a warning to others not to expose the patent trampling of human rights taking place in the state. Documents have been fabricated by the police and false witnesses introduced in order to falsely implicate me," said Dr Sen in his final statement to the Sessions Court a week before the verdict was announced.

Lawyers for Dr Sen have appealed both against the Sessions Court verdict and also for a 'suspension of sentence' in the Chhattisgarh High Court. But the process could take a long time.

"It has been a political trial and we made the mistake of assuming that it was possible to get justice at least from the judiciary in Chhattisgarh," said Ilina Sen, Binayak's wife and a scholar of women's studies who has also spent three decades in the state working on social issues.

Dr Sen roused the ire of the BJP government in Chhattisgarh by producing several hard hitting fact-finding reports on police atrocities against innocent tribals, while ostensibly carrying out 'anti-Maoist' operations. As vice-president of the Peoples Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Dr Sen had gone on from being a public health doctor to a human rights activist taking up issues in the conflict ridden Bastar area of the state.

"It is impossible for any doctor today to remain apolitical while treating poor communities whose problems arise from their poverty and bad living conditions," said Dr Vandana Prasad, a pediatrician and member of the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan.

Apart from the patently biased nature of the charges and trial what has upset the people is that the authorities chose to persecute someone working in delivery of healthcare to the poor – an area where India ranks among the worst in the world. Dr Sen is well-known for his innovative work with low cost diagnostics and delivery of healthcare to remote and inaccessible areas.

A particular focus of Dr Sen's work has been on malnutrition. According to the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB) over 33 per cent of the adult population has a Body Mass Index (BMI) of less than 18.5, and can be considered as suffering from chronic under nutrition.

Dr Sen uses the term 'genocide' in the technical sense as defined by the United Nations by pointing out that malnutrition is concentrated among specific communities with over 50 per cent of scheduled tribes, and over 60 per cent of scheduled castes having a BMI below 18.5.

It was in recognition of his emphasis on nutrition issues, that on 4 January, Dr Sen's 61st birthday, the Free Binayak Sen Campaign together with other groups launched an initiative to distribute blankets and feed homeless people in Delhi.

The initiative is meant to help the homeless tide over the coldest part of the winter with additional nutrition. Many homeless people die every year in Delhi and other parts of northern India due to severe malnutrition during winter months.

"Binayak's fact-finding reports on malnutrition in Chhattisgarh played an important role in the Right to Food petition that was filed in the Supreme Court a decade ago," said Colin Gonsalves, Supreme Court lawyer, who pointed out that Dr Sen's work on nutrition had helped revise food security policies in Chhattisgarh itself.

Announcing the initiative to provide food to the homeless, Indu Prakash Singh of the Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) appealed to the public to donate food materials at designated shelters around the city. The current initiative is being led by the IGSSS which has been bringing public and government attention to the problems of nutrition and shelter in the city. The campaign, from 4 January to 15 February, will also organise seminars and discussions on hunger, health and the Right to Food.

For contributions to the Free Binayak Sen Campaign's 'Feed the Homeless' initiative contact: Indu Prakash Singh: 9911362925

Street vendors want law like MNREGA

Civil Society News
New Delhi

In the run-up to the Commonwealth Games in Delhi last year, vendors were made to vanish from the streets, their impromptu markets demolished, since Delhi wanted to look world class.

The National Association for Street Vendors of India (NASVI) is now rooting for a Union law to protect their rights. A consultation was held in Delhi with SEWA to discuss its provisions. A National Policy for Urban Street Vendors was passed in 2004 and revised in 2009. But Arbind Singh, head of NASVI, says this policy is really just guidelines to the states. Critical provisions from a draft law drawn up by NASVI for the Home Ministry were inculcated into a 'model law' for street vendors.

"They tell us to go talk to the states. The Union government only wants the states to draw up schemes. Now if every state draws up its own laws, there will be no uniformity and weak protection," points out Arbind. "But a strong Union law on the lines of the Right to Information (RTI) Act or the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act (MNREGA) will override all weak state laws and help protect vendors."

In an interview, Arbind says his association will mobilise public opinion and lobby with political parties for such a law.

Why do you want a Union law for street vendors? In October 2010 the Supreme Court in the *Gainda Lal vs Others* case said that the right to livelihood of street vendors cannot be left to various schemes made by the government from time to time. Thus the government must enact a law to protect the right to livelihood of street vendors by 30 June, after taking into consideration the right of pedestrians.

Where the Supreme Court erred was it said the appropriate government must define the law and it did not define which government and what law. The Home Ministry interpreted it as meaning the city of Delhi. Kumari Selja, Minister for Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, wrote a letter to the Home Minister requesting him for a law for Delhi. Even if you enact a law for Delhi it will be of great help in terms of publicizing it. In the meantime we thought we must keep up our pressure for a law for street vendors.

You have asked for a law like MNREGA. What exactly do you mean? Street vendors are self-employed.

See MNREGA has got a provision that no panchayat can take up a scheme if it is not passed by the gram sabha. Similarly, you cannot declare an area a

no-vending zone or a vending zone until you consult the Town Vending Committee. But because we don't have a law even if we have a Town Vending Committee, officials take arbitrary decisions.

We would like to go beyond MNREGA in terms of organizing vendors like the Gujarat cooperatives. The very nature of those cooperatives promotes organization. So vendors in a vending zone should be regulated, organized. They should have leaders who organize the market.

Now MNREGA has got minimum guarantees like wages. So we also want minimum guarantees that we will not be removed. For instance, in Hong Kong if vendors have to be removed for more than 15 days for security reasons or for an important activity then by law the authorities have to provide them alternate space.

We are also asking for action against inaction by

Vending zones should be organised. MNREGA has got minimum guarantees like wages. So we also want minimum guarantees that we will not be removed.

the authorities. So if the authorities are not registering vendors, not giving licences or accepting applications, or if the police are harassing vendors or there is misuse of power, then there should be provision for stringent punishment against the authorities.

But who will ensure all this?

That is why we are rooting for a strong appellate jurisdiction at the city level which may or may not be headed by a judicial authority but should have judicial powers like the RTI Commissioner. So if I am a vendor, I have not received my licence or an injustice has been done to me, I can approach the appellate authority.

In fact both Andhra Pradesh and Bihar are in the process of enacting a law for street vendors and we have suggested a strong appellate authority, otherwise it will be a law merely on paper.

It is difficult for vendors to go to the courts. It's a time consuming process, the police are not willing to listen, it takes years and the vendor suffers emotionally and financially.

What if the municipal corporation doesn't listen?

There should be a grievance redressal system.



Arbind Singh

That is why we have asked for an appellate authority. If the corporation does not listen, the vendor can go to the authority. Right now we have to go to the courts. All our energy is expended in activating the municipality by holding peaceful demonstrations, *dharnas*, protests. It has limited impact. The municipal corporation is very good at thwarting people's pressure, you know. In cities/towns where the municipal corporation is big and strong we have a tough time convincing them. It is easier for us to influence smaller municipal corporations. The big ones bulldoze all our efforts and adopt strong arm tactics.

What will be the composition of this appellate authority?

We think it should be headed by a judge of additional district rank, preferably a woman. The judges know how to make the police and municipality work. They do not just pass a judgment. They call the officials, scold them, put pressure on them to restore the market or the pushcart of the vendor. They know how things work at ground level.

Will your policy address the concerns of women vendors?

Yes, definitely. Wherever vending zones are being marked or markets being constructed, or identity cards being given, we would like at least one-third to go to women. They look less in number because of their lack of visibility. Our own estimate says they comprise around 30 per cent of the vendor population. We are recommending one-third reservation for them in all vending committees and forums. All vendors struggle for space in markets but the women get left out since they have to manage both home and business. They also find it hard to cope with corruption.

Also every city should have at least five markets for women. The provision of natural markets should be there. In the 2004 policy it is stated 2.5 per cent of the population are street vendors. So we are saying reserve 2.5 per cent of land in the city for vending.

India rising against corruption

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

In the past few months, India has been hit by a deluge of financial and administrative scams. As the nation seethes in anger at the government's sluggish response, prominent civil society personalities are planning to unleash a concerted people's movement against corrupt politicians, bureaucrats and judges.

The activists point out that an anti-corruption body envisaged under a draft government Bill that is currently before Parliament will bring the bureaucracy and judiciary within its purview. They have therefore recommended an alternative legal structure that would have jurisdiction over all arms of governance and be vested with power to punish those caught with their hands in the till, no matter how high and mighty.

The first salvo has already been fired. On 30 January, the day of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, thousands of people under the banner of a social movement called 'India Against Corruption', will take to the streets of the national capital and march from Ramlila Grounds to Jantar Mantar. Their demand: enactment of a law to set up an effective anti-corruption mechanism.

The nationwide movement has brought together religious leaders, civil society activists, legal eagles, former bureaucrats, writers, sportspersons and artists, besides ordinary citizens. India Against Corruption was formally launched at a press conference in Delhi on 1 December. It was attended by, among many others, retired IPS officer Kiran Bedi, former CBI director BR Lall, social activist Swami Agnivesh and anti-corruption crusader Anna Hazare.

The Commonwealth Games loot, the 2G spectrum allocation rip-off and the Adarsh Society scam have given the Opposition much ammunition against the UPA government. Parliament has been brought to a standstill over the demand for a JPC to probe the 2G spectrum scam. But the India Against Corruption movement goes well beyond the confines of politics. Swami Agnivesh put it in perspective at the December 1 press meet: "This is a people's war against corruption. It's a social movement. We will take it to each of India's six and a half lakh villages. The corrupt will have no place to hide."

The current scenario is indeed daunting. India is the world's ninth most corrupt country and, according to a survey by Transparency International, over half of its population has paid a bribe to government officials in the past 12 months.

The Global Corruption Barometer 2010 revealed that 74 per cent of Indians think corruption has increased in the past year. Political par-

ties, members of parliament and the police force are perceived as the most corrupt sectors of Indian society. No prizes for guessing who follows on that list of infamy – the judiciary and the corporate sector.

Explaining why there is a pressing need to take a collective stand against corruption, Kiran Bedi says: "Corruption has increased steadily in India in the past 60 years. The nation has lost huge amounts of money that are locked in bank



People under the banner of the 'India Against Corruption' campaign will take to the streets to demand an effective anti-corruption mechanism.

accounts and assets in India and abroad."

She adds, "If all this money were brought back, India would be able to fulfill the need for schools, dispensaries, vocational training institutes and other facilities for all its citizens without anyone of us having to pay taxes for the next 30 years."

A sweeping Lokpal Bill has been drafted by Kiran Bedi, Karnataka Lokayukta Santosh Hegde, former Chief Election Commissioner JM Lyngdoh and senior Supreme Court lawyer Prashant Bhushan. This has been done to counter the official Lokpal Bill that is before Parliament. "The Bill before Parliament is a smokescreen," says social activist Swami Agnivesh.

The leaders of the movement pointed out as much in an open letter that was written to UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi calling for prompt action against Congress leader Suresh Kalmadi and other officials of the Commonwealth Games organising committee.

The letter, dated 14 November, 2010, stated: "Dr Manmohan Singh is believed to be one of the most honest Prime Ministers our country has had. But, ironically, he presides over arguably the most dishonest government machinery." It went on to enumerate the reasons why the CBI and CVC are toothless and completely ineffective entities and could not be trusted to bring the CWG wrongdoers to book.

Arvind Kejriwal, social activist and long-time crusader for transparency in governance, wrote in a recent blog: "No one gets punished for corruption in our country... there is not a single anti-corruption agency that is independent of the government or has complete powers to take action...CVC and CAG are independent but merely recommendatory... CBI has powers but is completely dependent on the government."

India Against Corruption has demanded a Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayuktas in the states. In the proposed law, the CBI and the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) would be merged with the Lokpal and the Lokayukta and both bodies

would have complete powers to take action against corrupt politicians, bureaucrats and judges.

The Lokpal has been envisaged as a 10-member body with a chairperson completely independent of the government. Significantly, one of the salient features of the draft Bill is that the Lokpal would be vested with powers to provide whistleblowers in the system protection from physical and professional victimisation.

In its open letter to Sonia Gandhi, India Against Corruption has written: "The Whistleblower Protection Bill recently introduced in Parliament proposes to entrust the responsibility of investigating complaints of corruption from whistleblowers and providing protection to them to the CVC. Obviously whistleblower protection is required in those cases where high and mighty politicians and bureaucrats are involved. Interestingly, CVC does not have jurisdiction over politicians."

The Lokpal, as envisaged in the proposed Bill, "shall have the powers to initiate investigations and prosecution without needing permission from any other agency." Moreover, it is proposed that "members and chairperson of Lokpal shall be selected through a transparent and participatory process (and that)... the functioning of the Lokpal shall be completely transparent to prevent it from becoming a hub of corruption."

A corruption-free India? Might seem like a pipedream at the moment, but those behind this crusade believe it is in the realms of possibility. Political will and a strong social shove are all that is needed.

Orissa gets a radio voice

Biswajit Padhi
Konark (Orissa)

ORISSA'S first community radio station, Radio Namaskar, is making its voice heard, loud and clear. This feisty radio station launched from Konark in Puri district seven months ago, has become a real life hero for villages living in its 10 km radius.

NA Shah Ansari, the young founder of Radio Namaskar, says like the famous actor, Amitabh Bachchan, he too was turned down by All India Radio. And he too has gone on to make waves.

"As a youth volunteer it was my ambition to work for a radio station. But the station director of All India Radio not only rejected me but made an insensitive comment about my abilities during the audition," recalls Ansari.

He then started writing for local vernacular dailies. Ansari says whenever he filed a story on injustice, his piece would get spiked. The indifference of the editors to stories of peoples' struggles egged him to do something different.

In a short span of seven months, Radio Namaskar has already become a brand name. The station became famous in Orissa for making 15 villages in Gop and Kakatpur blocks of Puri district, 'No Dropout' villages through their *Chala School Ku Jiba* (Let's go to school) programme.

"We run campaigns on Right to Education," beams Rosalin Pradhan, a young volunteer with Radio Namaskar. "Our programme educated people about their entitlements under the Right to Education (RTE) Act. Volunteers in the village helped dropouts return to school."

Education was just a dream for the villagers of Tailo in Kadua Nuagaon Panchayat of Kakatpur Block. Since most were daily wagers, they found it tough to send their children to the nearest school which was two km away. Out of 55 children just 25 were enrolled.

"We repeatedly informed the administration about this anomaly through our broadcasts. Succumbing to pressure built up by our broadcast, the administration announced that they were opening a school in the village," says Rosalind. The community buoyed by this success enrolled all their children and are now asking for an anganwadi centre for their village which has a population of 1,000.

"We are waiting for the anganwadi centre to come up shortly," said Rasika Behera, a villager of Tailo, confidently.

The much touted Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGA) was a non-starter in Gop block. Not many had heard of it. "I never thought I could demand work from the block authorities and they would have to give it to me," says an amazed Ramia, a villager in



N A Ansari with villager



Helena in studio

his early forties.

The job giver, the Block Development Officer, Srimanta Mishra, is not complaining. "We have a *mo pukhari* (my pond) scheme. Not a single farmer had applied for it. We sent word about the scheme through all our extension officers and Panchayat Raj representatives. Then somebody told me about Radio Namaskar. They were very eager to help. The results were astounding. We received some 123 applications soon after the radio announced the scheme," says Mishra.

After the radio broadcast the scheme, volunteers helped villagers to apply. This was very critical for the success of the broadcast because many villagers knew about the scheme but they did not know how to fill up the forms.

"The volunteers helped the applicants fill the forms," says Rabi Naik of Mahalapada village. The BDO, after examining the applications, issued work orders to 97 applicants.

This incident benefited all stakeholders. Government officials gained since a record number of applications were filed making their district the best block in terms of achievement under MNREGA. Villagers got the opportunity to benefit from a government programme. Radio Namaskar got recognition and created an edifice for attracting volunteers.

But there has been confrontation as well. Radio Namaskar broadcast the story of Kau Kahala, a widow in her sixties who was not getting her old age pension. "Banakhandi panchayat officials refused to release my pension," says Kahala. "After I spoke about my plight on radio, the administration took note."

The administration released ₹4,000, Kahala's pension of the last 20 months. But they had not been giving her pension for almost 10 years! When this information was broadcast, the administration panicked. According to one villager from Tailo, the BDO explained it away saying Kahala had gone to Dubai so no pension could be released during that period.

Radio Namaskar persisted. "I don't know what a passport is so how can they say that I had gone to Dubai," retorted Kahala via radio. Now a state level inquiry is going on and Kahala hopes to get the money soon.

Young listeners have backed the radio. Babuli Das from Gop has started a Radio Listeners' Club which now has a membership of 26 youths. "The passion to benefit the oppressed drove me to start this club," says Babuli.

Helena, a science graduate, records and edits programmes for the radio and manages the studio with her colleague, Bishwanath. "Women are expressing themselves through radio," she says. Health, education and

employment issues are discussed. Broadcasts have also got girls thinking. They don't want to marry if the boy's family wants dowry. Domestic violence is seeing a downswing. However Radio Namaskar faces financial problems. The recurring expenses of airing programmes has been straining the finances of Young India, the civil society organization that promotes the radio. More than 60 per cent of the programmes are produced for the local community.

"We can only air only 40 per cent of the programmes which are not local," says Ansari. "Generating local content requires money."

Also, community radio is only allowed to air five minutes of advertisements per every hour of transmission. So raising money through ads is also difficult. Radio Namaskar has managed to thrive because of community support. Most staff managing the radio are volunteers from villages. Local folk singers volunteer to sing for the radio. All this has reduced costs.

The radio is introducing innovative solutions to finance its programmes. For example, soon the community will pay for a programme of their choice. Also, the radio will air birthday greetings for babies for a small fee. This idea has become a hit with the community.

How schools learn to catch up



BALA

systems do three things to enhance classroom learning: they change structures, improve resources (more staff, money) and they change their processes by improving curricula, teaching methods and headmaster leadership. Out of the three, researchers found that improving processes had the most impact.

Secondly, interventions matter at each level. All school systems carried out similar interventions despite big differences in culture, geography, politics and history. But at every stage the interventions were different. So what they did to move from fair to good was very different from what they had done to go from poor to fair.

Should schools be mandated to reform or be persuaded? Most systems adopt both tactics. Mandating from above appears to have worked faster in the first stage. "Poor to fair schools have limited capacity so scripted lessons and standardisation works. Incentives work too – like giving bicycles, midday meals, better salaries and whole school improvement," says Mourshed.

Researchers also found that while a mandated approach works in the poor to fair grade, in the

Civil Society News
New Delhi

QUALITY education continues to elude the vast majority of India's children though most children are going to school. Now is the time to improve learning standards on a war footing.

"The good news is that schools can transit from poor to fair standards in six years or less," said Dr Mona Mourshed, leader of McKinsey and Company's global education practice, speaking at a conference on 'Transforming Schools, Transforming Education,' organised by the Azim Premji Foundation in Delhi.

Mourshed's crisp presentation explained McKinsey's report on, 'How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better.' The report analysed 20 school systems around the world and what exactly they did to achieve excellence. How did they enhance their quality of education by going from being poor to fair to good to excellent?

McKinsey traced some 600 interventions and pinpointed the reforms the school systems carried out. These reforms can be replicated by any school system wanting to improve.

"More than money, it is practices and processes which improve education," said Mourshed. "Children have to learn more in a shorter period." The best part is that improved education closes the equity gap. A child from a poor family reaches the same standard as a child from a rich family. In India, researchers analysed Madhya Pradesh and found its schools were transiting from poor to fair.

So what can India learn from this report?

First, it is important to improve how children learn in the classroom. The report says school



BALA

'Poor to fair schools have limited capacity so scripted lessons and standardisation works. Incentives work too - like giving bicycles, midday meals, better salaries and whole school improvement.'

next stage of fair to good it is important to give the school more flexibility/responsibility and the teachers more freedom to decide their teaching methods. To prevent standards from sliding, schools can adopt collaboration between teachers, peer pressure, career pathways based on merit not seniority etc. Identifying and spreading best practices works too.

Six interventions boosted quality. These are improving teaching methods, the management skills of principals, student assessment, better data, revised curriculum and standards, reward and remuneration for teachers and principals and good laws/policies on education. But schools

did these interventions differently. So while Armenia relied on a centrally driven teacher training programme, Singapore opted for more flexibility to teachers in choice of curricula.

It was also found that leadership and continuity were very important. Reform was most often sparked by a change in leadership, either from a political leader or a headmaster/teacher. Continuity or nurturing the next generation of leaders took reforms further.

Can India make the grade? Policy and money are not an issue. There is the Right to Education (RTE) Act which has now been tagged to the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The government should take the lead helped by all. "It should be a national effort," said Anshu Vaish, Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). She laid emphasis on educationists, administrators, NGOs and foundations coming together.

The SSA has been given more money and education departments will be responsible for implementing RTE.

The Indian government's focus is on access, equity and quality. It wants to get street, homeless and migrant children into school. It sees the need to reach out to the disadvantaged: scheduled castes and tribes, Muslims and disabled. It is open to starting residential schools.

"Children should study in formal schools with all amenities and with a 30:1 ratio in class," said Vaish. There is the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) to determine teacher qualifications for government schools and this could be extended to private schools. Public-Private Partnerships could facilitate the training of teachers and provide model examples.

Ramya Venkatraman of McKinsey emphasised the role of government in improving quality with all stakeholders as partners. It is important that the state provide the mandate and template for reform. The district should own the reform plan. The block and school should be the implementers.

But the government's institutions are weak and dysfunctional right down the chain of command from the State Council Educational Research and Training (SCERT), to the District Level Institutes of Training (DIET) to block level organisations. DIETS were set up to improve classroom teaching in districts. A study by the Azim Premji Foundation found that 80 per cent vacancies existed in DIETS, they hardly had any infrastructure and 43 per cent had done no research in two years.

Government school teachers by themselves did not have the resources to improve teaching methods or enhance leadership skills. There is no external evaluation of teachers. Assessment of students is also not up to the mark. Accreditation standards are non-existent.

It was also uncertain whether cluster-level schools which imparted multi-grade education could provide quality education. May be encouraging children to go to a bigger formal school and ensuring transport was a better idea.

S Giridhar from the Azim Premji Foundation said a study was carried out in 896 schools in seven educationally backward districts of northeast Karnataka to find out why some schools are successful.

It was found that what made a difference in successful schools was the presence of the head teacher, literate parents, a neat and tidy school, involvement of teachers and parents, special tests, improved learning methods and teaching aids. Leadership mattered. Winning schools made a greater effort to improve teaching, reaching out to children doing badly and giving them special classes. A pupil teacher ratio of 30:1 or less was found to be best.

Clearly the government needs to lead school reform in partnership with industry bodies and NGOs. There are nearly 1.5 million NGOs working on education some with very innovative methods of learning. But there is no unity among them, said Dileep Ranjekar, CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation.

He said the foundation found that state governments were keen to contribute to systemic change in education. But the foundation which is setting up a University with education and development as its main focus, has been hardpressed to find a sufficient number of professional education experts.

The new university has plans to pick talent, issues, best practices, technology etc for improving school education. There are also plans to set up resource centres right from the district level which will help teachers improve all aspects of classroom learning. Gender, equity, inclusion, teaching and research are focus areas. The university is 'for social change and not for degrees' said Rangekar.

One interesting example to watch is the Brihanmumbai Municipal Schools. All stakeholders led by the government and McKinsey have launched a plan to improve the quality of education in those schools.



Tara Gandhi Bhattacharya at the homeless meeting

Caravan for homeless

Civil Society News
New Delhi

RAIN or shine, the homeless are always out in the cold. The Supreme Court has said that there should be one night shelter for every 100,000 people in a city. Delhi is one of the few to be equipped with night shelters. Now Gurgaon has two.

To remind citizens and the government to provide at least a roof to the homeless, the Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) based in New Delhi launched a five-month campaign called the National CityMakers Caravan for their rights. IGSSS calls the homeless CityMakers – because these are the people who build the city. They construct your homes, offices, get your vegetables, clean your streets and keep the city running.

The National CityMakers Caravan began its journey from Rajghat on 17 August. It travelled through 22 states. In every city, activists held meetings, performed street plays and organised signature campaigns for shelters, food and blankets for the homeless. They also made submissions to politicians, Mayors and senior bureaucrats who run cities. The team used RTI applications to find out if any steps were being taken by state governments to build shelters for the homeless.

A positive outcome was that awareness about the rights of the homeless got spread. A large number of NGOs participated in meetings held by Caravan activists. As a result a network of groups sensitive to the plight of the homeless has been created.

On 12 January the Caravan arrived in Delhi, their starting point. Two thousand members of the homeless community gathered at Gandhi Smriti. They were addressed by Indu Prakash Singh, Technical Advisor, CityMakers Programme, IGSSS, and Bipin K. Rai, Programme Coordinator, CityMakers Programme. The gathering was also addressed by Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee, Vice Chairperson, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, who was also the Chief Guest.

The homeless in our cities have been voiceless and faceless for too long. After nearly 10 years of sustained campaigning by NGOs and the Right to Food movement, a sensitive judiciary in the High Court and Supreme Court is finally ordering governments to give the homeless their due rights.



Anushka Rai, Age 6, Zed resident.

My Story of ZED

Bina Rai can't stand the heat. She needs the AC always on, in the 'chill' mode. "Friends say I should live in a freezer!" She didn't bother when her power bill soared. With 100 pc power back-up at her apartment, the need to 'switch off' was never felt.

But something stirred in her one day. "You're a careless mother," declared her daughter on return from school. "Teacher says we've to be careful about using electricity. We make 'dirty things' when we produce power. It fouls the air we breathe, makes us sick." Little Anushka started switching off lights and fans at home. "I was actually ashamed," says Bina. "She made me feel like I was personally shoveling pollution into the air."

For Bina, the 'awakening' came in the shape of her daughter.

She looked around, until she found a Zed Home.



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6 awards, from 5 nations, in 3 years so far.



Wet nuts dry up in Soorya

Shree Padre

Shimoga (Karnataka)

LAST year it rained and rained till December in Shimoga, Karnataka's arecanut growing region, sending farmers into a tizzy. "How will we dry our wet red nuts," they thought anxiously.

The monsoon usually vanishes by September. Bright sunshine follows. This weather pattern is convenient for arecanut growers. Nuts are harvested from November to April and sunshine is needed to dry them.

Last year areca growers were nervous about the weather. So thousands of them built 'solar' driers, which looked like greenhouses, in a hurry. But those driers performed poorly. They tended to retain moisture and attract fungus.

At this critical juncture a farmer from Uttara Kannada, Raghavendra Hegde, came to the rescue of farmers. He invented a low cost, do-it-yourself drier which he named Soorya. It can be quickly assembled, does not retain moisture and costs very little.

The drier is proving so popular that Hegde is receiving inquiries from tea growers in Assam. Even a small, marginal farmer can afford to build one easily.

TWO NUTS: Based on the system of processing, arecanut is divided into two types. The 'red type' is mostly used in pan masala and gutka. Tender green nuts are harvested, peeled and then boiled. Shimoga district is famous for this type of betel nut.

The other type of arecanut, locally called 'chali,' is harvested only after ripening. Then it is sun-dried and peeled.

Arecanut growers were building driers by covering an inverted 'U' or 'V' type pandal with a Silpaulin sheet. The sheet is stabilized against ultra-violet rays and can withstand strong sunshine. An ordinary plastic sheet would wither away in the sun. But Silpaulin sheet is expensive.

These 'greenhouse' driers are large, almost like a small house you can walk into. You need a strong scaffold to rig it up. Depending on size and material used even a small drier would cost between ₹4,000 to ₹8,000.

The disadvantage with the greenhouse drier is that moisture does not have an outlet to disperse. A little humidity doesn't do much harm to the unhusked chali supari. But it ruins the red arecanuts since fungus develops. The quality of the arecanuts goes down and the crop fetches less in the market.

Raghavendra Hegde's Soorya drier looks like a huge cap. It is supported by PVC pipes. An ordinary 200 micron transparent plastic sheet is used. For the red arecanut farmer the major advantage is that this drier has a better exhaust management system. It doesn't allow fungus to develop.

Another plus point is that the drier can be assembled and set up anywhere. A farmer can construct, dismantle and even shift the drier to

another place. A small drier, say about 15 feet by five feet, costs only ₹1,000.

Of course, this cost doesn't include the expense of constructing the platform. But Raghavendra Hegde points out that areca farmers can easily make a platform with broken or dead trees.



Raghavendra Hegde explaining his invention

Raghavendra Hegde came to the rescue of farmers. He invented a low cost, do-it-yourself drier called Soorya. It can be quickly assembled, does not retain moisture and costs very little.

Hegde is a farmer from Kengre-Balegadde. He is a qualified mechanical engineer. For many years Hegde worked in a rural technology centre called Tantravidya Nidarshini near Sirsi.

Since the drier uses heat from the sun, Hegde has named it Soorya. He explains that greenhouse type driers are not suitable for drying arecanuts.

"The purpose of a greenhouse or poly-house is to increase humidity inside so that a congenial

environment is created for plants to grow. This design is not at all suited for drying red arecanut," he says.

The Soorya drier allows moist air to escape. Unlike the greenhouse drier which has a flat roof, his drier has a sloping roof with a hole at its tallest point for ventilation.

Crops for drying should not be spread on the bare ground since they will absorb moisture from the soil, explains Hegde. A platform should be built at least eight inches above the ground in a south-north direction. A net or bamboo mat has to be placed on the platform before spreading the nuts for drying.

Once the nuts are spread, the drier can be placed over them. To prevent the platform from absorbing moisture from the ground a plastic sheet is placed under it. By evening the arecanuts absorb heat and expel moisture. To enable moisture to exit, the mouth of the drier has to be kept slightly open for an hour during twilight.

On cloudy or rainy days, the temperature inside the drier should not be allowed to go below 35 degree Celsius. To prevent this, a room heater can be kept inside the drier. It generally takes seven days for red arecanut to dry in the sun. Inside the Soorya drier it takes only four days.

For these reasons the popularity of the Soorya drier is spreading. The Totagars Sale Society (TSS), a leading marketing cooperative in Uttara Kannada district arranged for its demonstration at its three centres. Four of its demonstrations have drawn more than 5,000 farmers.

"After we harvested arecanut, it rained heavily. We were in a fix. At that juncture I saw this drier's demo. I myself could set it up. It is a very convenient device," says RS Hegde, a farmer from Manadoor. Another farmer, RN Hegde, is drying pepper, cardamom and papads in the Soorya drier.

News of this low cost drier has spread far and wide. Power, an NGO from Bijapur, was so impressed that they bought the demo piece.

"This was the dream drier I was looking for since a long time. I travelled to different areas in search of an efficient drier. Some needed wood, some labour and yet others, electricity. This, I think, will help our cereal growers, chili farmers and noodle-makers. We are showcasing this drier and we will encourage our farmers to use it on their own."

Officials of the Earthwatch Institute were also impressed with Soorya. "The concept is wonderful. This is affordable to a large section of poor farmers," said Dr Monowar Alam Khalid, field director of the Earthwatch Institute at Sirsi, "With a little improvisation Soorya might be of use to farmers in other parts of the country where moisture in crops is a problem."

The Soorya drier will no doubt cross the borders of Karnataka and warm the crops and hearts of farmers in far off states.

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raghavendra.hegde09@gmail.com

PUBLIC HEALTH

Dementia challenge grows. Ho

'It takes a whole village to take



GAUTAM SINGH

Dr Sumer Verma
Gautam Singh
Chandigarh

As populations grow older, the task of dealing with dementia becomes more intricate. This is especially so in the developing world where health-care infrastructure is already under stress. Dr Sumer Verma, MD, has spent four decades as a geriatric psychiatrist studying end-of-life care. He has a deep interest in care for people with dementia and whether care at home is a better alternative to being admitted to a hospital or institution.

Dr Verma graduated from medical college in Amritsar in 1963 and trained in internal medicine at the Post Graduate Institute in Chandigarh. He studied psychiatry in the United States and has, since then, lived and worked there. He is an associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Boston University Medical School and has lectured on psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. He is the Alzheimer's Program Medical Director at Briarwood Healthcare and Rehab Center in Needham, Massachusetts.

He spoke to *Civil Society* on recent medical developments with regard to dementia and the challenges in dealing with the condition in India.

You've been involved with treating the elderly for more than four decades. Where do we stand now as far as research in dementia is concerned?

In the last 30 years or so, there has been an exponential growth in research, on both the cause as well as the potential management of dementia, but despite all of this effort, we are still sitting on a public health catastrophe. The number of older

people is growing very rapidly, especially in what is traditionally known as the third world. In India and China, this is continuing to be a huge problem. As people live longer, the chances of developing dementia becomes progressively higher. And so far, we have no clear idea of what the cause is. The treatments that we have are at best offering modest, short-term beneficial effects, and that is going to be a problem for the next 25 to 30 years. Even if we were to find something today, it is not going to help me, or even you. It may help the next generation, but right now you and I face a rather bleak future.

The beta amyloid is no longer being thought of as the main reason for Alzheimer's. A recent report of the National Institute of Health has also stated that many treatments are not really successful or helpful. So, what is the position? Are we back to square one?

The beta amyloid theory, which for the longest time has been the holy grail of dementia research, is being increasingly questioned and they're now looking at amyloid in a far more sophisticated way.

(The beta amyloid is a small part of a larger protein. It appears to be the main constituent of amyloid plaques that are considered one hallmark of brains affected by Alzheimer's.)

The question is not so much is this responsible, but why is it responsible and it's not so much that it is being overproduced, but that it is not sometimes cleared from the system appropriately. The question of viruses is being looked at. Prolonged anaesthesia of a certain type may also be causing

brain damage. Ultimately, it could be a brain that is genetically susceptible. There are some lifelong patterns, maybe someone is a lifelong drinker, there may be the case of a few minor strokes, you fall down, break a hip get anaesthesia – and all of that put together leaves you in a state like this. There are multi-factorial causes. But there's nothing that I can point to and say by tomorrow I'm going to find out. It could be a virus of some sort. I mean, who knows?

Are we in a better situation as far as diagnosing dementia is concerned?

Again, it's very much the same. First, people in the West at least, don't want to expose their memory shortcomings to anyone. To diagnose it or spot it early, it would require someone to come up and say 'I'm getting very forgetful, something is the matter with me'. I think the world over there is a stigma associated with mental illness, and dementia is very much seen as a kind of mental illness for the elderly. The same stigmas apply. We tend to hide it or not to acknowledge it, so it is a problem in both East and West.

Secondly, the amount of time that people have with their doctors in the West is getting shorter and shorter because of the need to be financially more expedient. It takes a prolonged time of development before you begin to find out that there is something really very wrong out here. It's very difficult to spot the early case of dementia, and say this is the difference between normal aging and abnormal aging. But early diagnosis is becoming very much of an effort in the US. A lot of it has to do with public awareness of this illness and an openness that you go to your practitioner and be open about the problems that are occurring with your memory.

And what of the drugs on offer? I suppose they're a little better than placebos?

Some people would say that and I would tend to agree with them. I think if you really dissect the studies down for all of them, the four of the commonly available cholinesterase inhibitors as well as the NMDA (N-methyl-D-aspartate) antagonist Namenda, their effects are short-term, and modest. But if I can give someone time to put their affairs in order, then I will give it. Secondly, if it's hope I'm going to give someone, then it's fine. But in the later stages, it's doing nothing. Absolutely nothing. And it's a complete waste of time, effort, money. I think the British have really come to a much clearer understanding. The NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) studies, have said that it's almost worthless.

You've been looking at home care as an alternative versus hospitalization. Are patients better off

Home care is the only thing that works care of the grandparents'

treated at home with intervention or at hospitals and nursing homes?

I think, in general, home-based care is much more effective provided you can add in the additional resource. In the end of life, where it is kind of like a decline, the behaviors of very old people are in many ways very similar to that of small babies. You don't put children in institutions, you take care of them at home. But you do have to provide additional resources which can be expensive. So the question right now is not whether it is better, but whether it is cost-effective. And so far, the cost-effective solution has been nursing home care.

Tragically, for many years in the US, it became synonymous with just giving them medicine after medicine and keeping them quiet. But you don't need to use so many medications. If you provide a lot of psychological and social stimulation to these people, they do reasonably well. In the institution where I have been working, we are using very few drugs, but instead a lot more of staff – to help people eat, to help people walk around the place, to the toilet, keeping them clean and so on. We reduced the use of atypical antipsychotics by almost 80-90 per cent and found surprisingly that our patients were no more disturbed than those that were on lots of drugs. For the last three years, not a single person has fallen down and broken a hip and that I think is a kind of success that we like.

But doesn't that work out to be more expensive?
Human care is always more expensive, but I think it is much more an issue of dignity, and quality of care even if it costs more. The ultimate analysis will probably have to come in the next few years,

as people do more cost-effective studies, to see whether we have saved them money by not having people fall down and break their hips, after all hip surgery is expensive. Or bringing them back to life for nothing at all, only to have them, as they say, three times treated and still once dead.

I strongly believe that life has to end at some point and there is no point in continuing to pro-

'You don't need to use so many medications. If you provide a lot of psychological and social stimulation to these people, they do reasonably well.'

vide all kinds of medical care that are unnecessary.

There have been recent developments in research about the use of spinal taps, PET (positron emission tomography) scans in predicting Alzheimer's. But there's a huge debate whether it's worthwhile to go ahead with them...

There's demand and supply because people want to know what's going on here, so they will grasp at straws. And yes, using a spinal tap or advanced radio imaging can give you some idea. It can show you that a brain is shrunken or that it has a deficit. It's not going to the microscopic level, it's just telling you that the brain is not

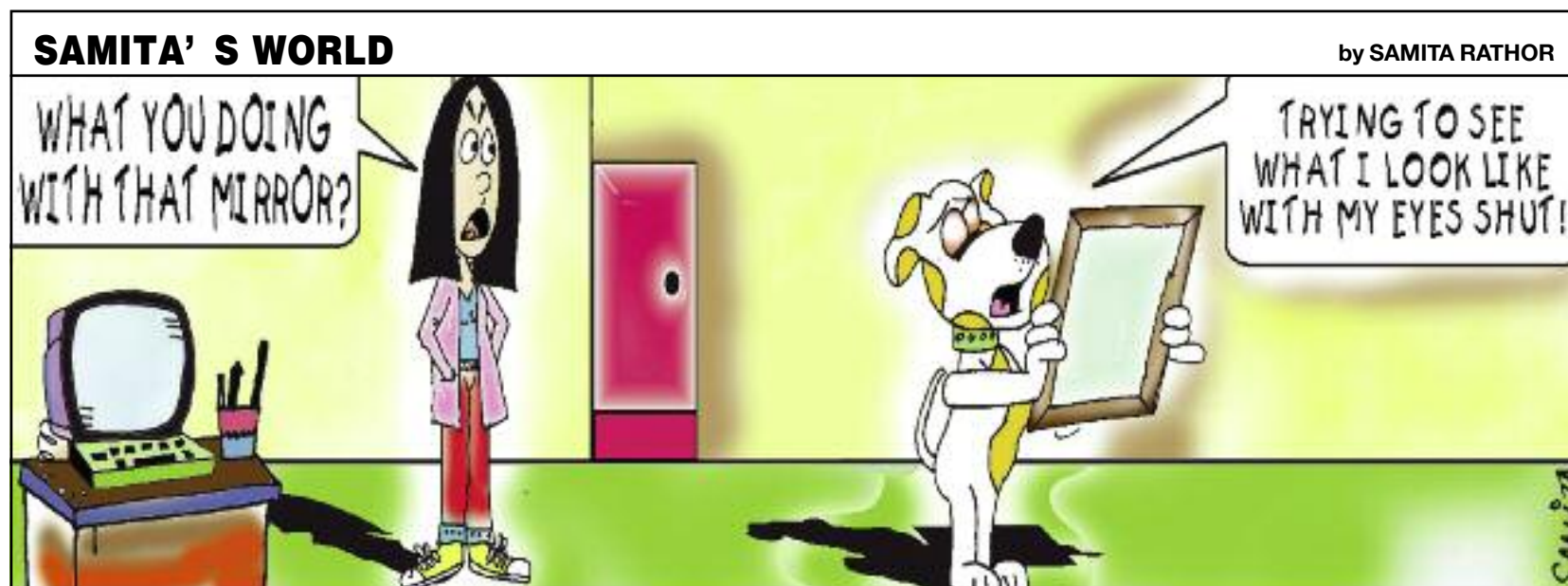
what it used to be. There's no linear correlation between brain change and the degree of cognitive decline and when it started. For that we need to be imaging people on a regular basis. That is going to be frightfully expensive and just can't be done.

There have been other technologies like the apolipoprotein e studies that were done some years ago, but they talk about risk factors, in much the same way as you say if you smoke you have a risk factor. But it is not cause and effect because not everyone develops lung cancer. And we still have no effective treatment. So why do I want to tell my patient, 20 years ahead of their cognitive decline, 'You are going to develop dementia and there's nothing I can do about it.' The ethical question is also a huge problem. So, I don't believe in getting all of these done to my patients.

It's a question a civilized society has to face – how well do we take care of the old? In India it's a question we can't avoid. There are an estimated 3.5 million people with dementia.

Absolutely. You may remember a statement by Hillary Clinton where she said it takes a whole village to raise a child. My slogan is it takes a whole village to take care of the grandparents. You can't just abandon them. In a society such as India, you have much more of a family effort which is why the public effort has been diminished.

But I think in due course of time, there is going to be no way of ignoring this population of elderly as it increases in numbers. We are going to have to teach young doctors what the care of the elderly is all about. Not just for dementia, but for a whole lot of other illnesses. Geriatric care requires its own kind of thinking.



An Ode to Earth

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

MOYNA Chitrakar holds up a patua (scroll painting) on the epic Ramayana as she bursts into a song about the heroic deeds of Rama. Based in Medinipur, West Bengal, she is the repository of a rich oral tradition of folklore that has come down the generations. She has learnt the art from her mother and now wants to pass it on to her young son.

That's not Moyna's only claim to fame. She is the moving force behind the Self Help Group (SHG), Patua Mahila Unnayan Samity. The Samity trains women to make patuas and helps them sell their products at exhibitions.

Like Moyna, many rural artisans gathered at the Ode to Earth Market Fair in Delhi to sell an array of products, ranging from handcrafted, hand spun and hand woven attire to fashion jewellery in lacquer and stone, hand block prints, blue pottery, vegetable tanned leather to organic produce from farms and forests.

Sanjeeda came from Jaipur to Delhi for the fair. Coordinator of Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samity, she says her organisation has set up 25 SHGs each of which consists of 14 to 20 women. At her stall were a range of hand woven attire embellished with fine embroidery (aritari) made by women from the SHGs. Though Hunar, as the enterprise is known, has objectives like social security, employment and gender justice for Muslim minorities, Dalits and other marginalised communities, it essentially works to upgrade women's skills by giving them exposure to new designs, fabrics and techniques.

Though Moyna and Sanjeeda said that they have made some headway in freeing the women from the clutches of avaricious middlemen, both were not entirely pleased with their sales at the Ode to Earth exhibition. Says Sanjeeda, "I am a



bit disappointed with our income at the exhibition. I think that this is due to lack of publicity about the fair."

Vipin Sharma, CEO of the non-profit ACCESS Development Services, which spearheads the Ode to Earth initiative under its sustainable livelihoods vertical, has his own explanation for the complaints. "I don't know how many of the 65 groups that had put up their stalls are aware of the publicity that went into getting footfalls here. We made a fair effort and we can do still better. It is all linked to the kind of resources that are available. Big corporate houses can do their publicity very differently but we did make quite an effort and as a result we have had more people coming to this fair than in the previous two events. We

are close to sales of around Rs 30 lakh in four days of the exhibition and that is not too bad."

ACCESS has set its sights higher. "Our effort is to link up with craftsmen, NGOs, producer groups, even the private sector which is working with producers but who are transparent with their pricing. Within the livelihood space, one of the things we want to do is to make markets work for the poor, which means improving their access to markets and increasing their income," says Sharma.

Ode to Earth is extending its ambit to include support for marketing, packaging and standardisation to agricultural producers. The organisation began with coffee, honey, kidney beans and cashew nuts while ginger and chillies are being targeted now.

Many challenges lie ahead, acknowledges Sharma. "To support poor artisan groups and primary producers, you need substantial resources, which is always a crunch. Then there is the question of getting good professionals, a large number of whom want to be in the corporate sector."

"We are lucky that we have a good, dedicated team but the biggest challenge is that many primary producers haven't seen big city markets so they don't always fully understand or capture the value and the sense of what we are trying to communicate."

The future, however, looks bright. One of the ideas in the offing is to set up Ode to Earth as a social enterprise. This would mean spinning off a company in the next 15 months co-owned by the artisan groups themselves. The groups would then have an equity in the company and there could be other promoters as well. "I think that would be more sustainable. We need formats where there are round the year selling prospects so there is the possibility of tying up with organisations such as Fab India, Good Earth and Dastakar," says Sharma.

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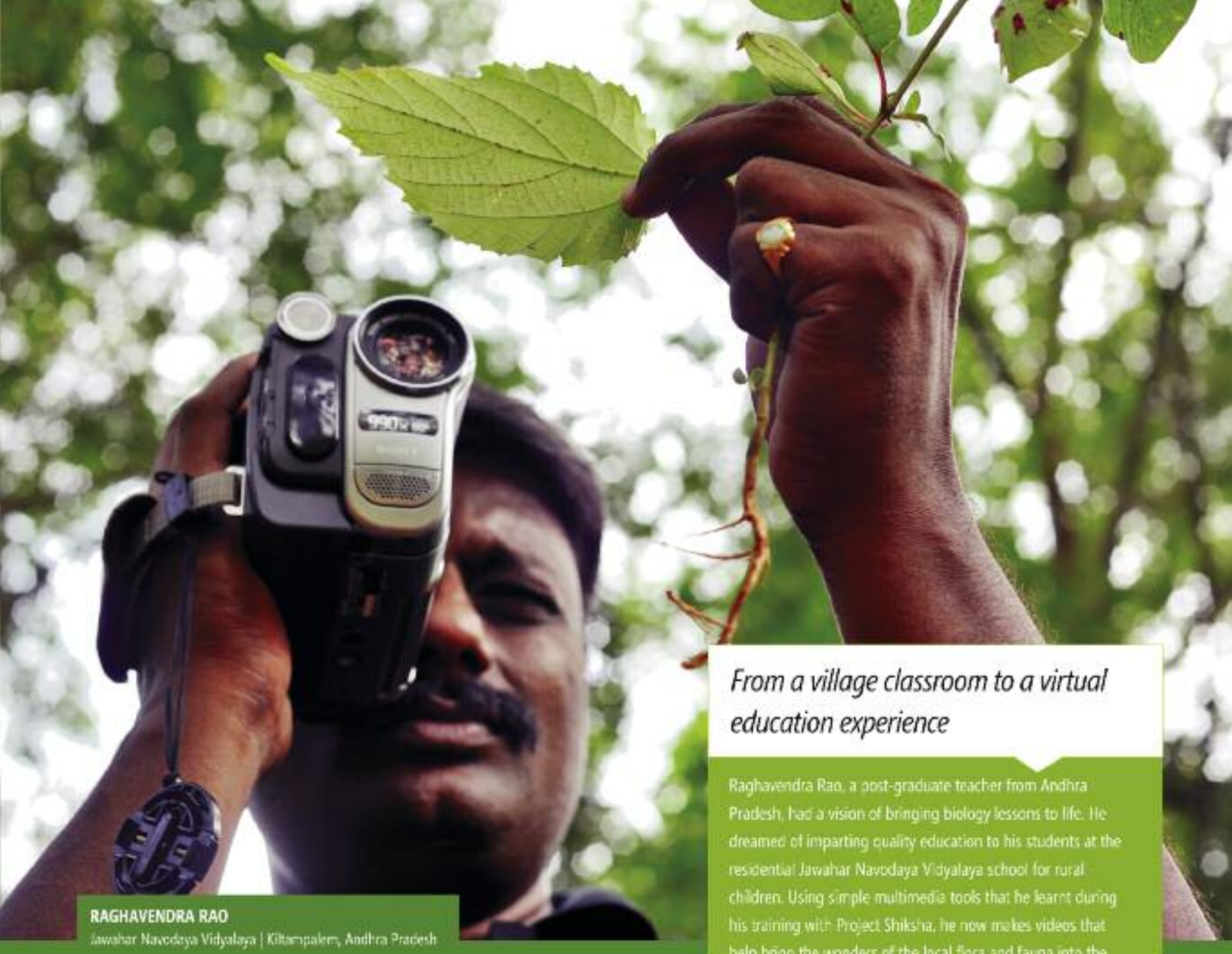
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RAGHAVENDRA RAO
Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya | Kiltampalem, Andhra Pradesh

From a village classroom to a virtual education experience

Raghavendra Rao, a post-graduate teacher from Andhra Pradesh, had a vision of bringing biology lessons to life. He dreamed of imparting quality education to his students at the residential Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya school for rural children. Using simple multimedia tools that he learnt during his training with Project Shiksha, he now makes videos that help bring the wonders of the local flora and fauna into the classroom.

Rao's learning experience with Project Shiksha has extended the borders of his classroom to the entire learning community. His brainchild www.biology24x7.in is now a means for students to delve into the world of biology and access learning resources like reference materials, question papers and discuss ideas. Even visually challenged and physically challenged students who cannot come to school, now learn through podcasts and the interactive virtual classroom.

The result — answers for curious minds, a livelier classroom and education for all!

THE ONLINE CLASSROOM Raghavendra Rao inspires students to learn more with lessons powered by:

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GAY PRIDE AND LIFE



The Gay Pride Parade attracts more participants especially the young every year

BEYOND SECTION 377

LAKSHMAN ANAND

**Shreyasi Singh***New Delhi*

It is more than a year since the Delhi High Court ruled that it isn't a crime to be gay. The court struck down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, a relic of the British Raj. But has a change of legal status made a difference to the way gay people live their lives? What happens when they want to get married, rent an apartment, open bank accounts, apply for passports or adopt children?

Prejudices, especially in relation to sexuality, take a long time to fade. The change in the law allows gay people to proclaim their status. The gay pride parade in Delhi is charged with a new energy. But the challenge is in going beyond loud assertions to the subtleties of daily acceptance.

Gautam Bhan at 29 finds it easy. He has been openly gay since his early adulthood, getting his middle-class family with parents in government service to accept him as he is. For others the journey out of the closet hasn't been quite so smooth.

Bhan, who plays an activist role among gays, has been prominent in his public life. He says acceptance is a process. The court order makes it less likely for gays to be harassed by the police. But that is not enough. Sublime equations are needed so that the gay community finds integration effortless.

Bhan believes that like the defunct law the prejudice against gays is colonial. In the Indian tradition there is an intuitive understanding of homosexuality and the complexities of gender. "When I speak to groups in small towns of eastern UP and Bihar they have less difficulty in understanding gay sensibilities than western educated audiences in the big cities," he says.

But new ground is being covered every day. In a world defined by seamless technologies and shifting preferences, it is not quite clear what is queer any longer. Bhan helped us meet four gay people to see how the court order and changing perceptions have made a difference to their lives.

'People openly advertise gay brunches for Rs 900 or something of the sort. This was unthinkable earlier.'



Sunil Gupta

It's not something I expected to change in my lifetime, says well-known photographer Sunil Gupta of the Delhi High Court's repeal of Section 377, in a warm, unhurried tone. In his mid-50s, Gupta, with his salt and pepper hair, woolly cardigan and causal jeans cuts an elegant picture.

We meet on a winter morning in his ground floor apartment in upmarket Greater Kailash. He's leaving for a holiday the next day. Before that, he needs to take a visiting European friend, who leaves that evening, shopping for quirky Indian treasures. An hour or two spent with us is certainly an inconvenience. But, even amidst a packed day, Gupta has an enviable aura of settled calm.

For him, this feeling of being at home in India has been a pleasant, unexpected surprise. The discomfort of feeling trapped in a "funny combination of sleaze and criminality" because he was gay kept him in the United Kingdom for many years. "I never thought I could live here," he says simply. When he moved back in 2005, things had changed a little. "The social scene had expanded in Delhi beyond weddings. There were places to go to get a drink and be yourself."

In any case, his South Delhi, English-speaking world and the artsy, creative circles he operates in as a photographer, Gupta admits, has kept him protected from the petty harassments that gay people are subjected to on the streets. Even for him though the last year has been heartening. Several positives, intangible changes are evident. "It's tough to define. But, there is definitely greater comfort."

"The public face of the gay community has become bolder, or more emboldened. Parties and events are publicised, venue details given out," he begins. There are fewer anxieties that these gatherings can be vulnera-

ble. "People openly advertise gay brunches for Rs 900 or something of the sort. This was unthinkable earlier."

Many more gay film festivals, panel discussions and book launches take place as well, some beyond even Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru. "I was recently in Pune for a two-day event. A lot of local people came."

Gupta has lived through legal transformations and gay rights in other countries. "What I find interesting here is that that rate of change has accelerated rapidly." Ten years back and certainly before that, it looked impossible because nobody mentioned it, he adds.

His extended family, particularly a first cousin in the Air Force whom Gupta is close to, has invited him and two of his full-time partners for family lunches and dinners. There is easy banter. "Typically, at these things, women and men end up in different rooms. I joke with my cousin – are the men safe with us," he says laughing.

Gupta comes from a conservative, Hindi-speaking baniya family of Uttar Pradesh. His mother, who died a couple of years back in her mid 80s, lived with him during her last few years.

Though she knew he was gay, she was never happy about it. "She was great friends with my partners after we broke up. For her, it was fine to be gay – as long as her son wasn't," Gupta says bemusedly.

Other than with his two first cousins, Gupta avoided "coming out" with his sexuality, not because he was uncomfortable but because he just couldn't find the right words. "My whole vocabulary about this is in English. I didn't know how to explain it to them in Hindi. In Hindi, it just sounds sexual and mechanical."

They found out through an article in *India Today* which reviewed his photo exhibition in New York, and also mentioned he was gay and HIV+. "They focussed on that actually. Special pujas were done for my health."

Much of the change, Gupta feels, is a result of shifting social dynamics in general. "The fantasy family is breaking down in the urban metro setting at least. That helps people like us." He recalls his former landlady, a regular,

upper middle class Punjabi woman, who liked him because he took care of his ailing mother. "On the other hand, her son had moved in with his in-laws."

Taking care of ageing parents is often definitive of the gay child now, he explains. Many heterosexual siblings busy with spouses and children palm off the responsibility, ostensibly "because we have the time." "I see many of my gay and lesbian friends, those in my age group certainly, doing that. Parents are smart. They know which child will take care of them. So, the sexuality question isn't as stark."

Of course, much needs to change, both socially and legally. "In London, I took a mortgage to buy a house with my partner. Here, everything, inheritance, bank nominations is around bloodlines."

But, Gupta says he's more confident now than he's ever been before. The young gay community, those in the early 20s, he says, are incredibly assertive, demanding and impatient. "They are not going to wait."

"In any case, there is a whole gap between making it legal and eventual societal acceptance." The United Kingdom legalised homosexual sex in 1967. But it was only a recent survey that showed for the first time that a majority of the population thought it was fine.

"Here, it's the tip of the iceberg." Over the last year, a much greater diversity of people have come out. And, that's flavouring the movement. "Earlier, it was like Noah's Ark. Everybody got together." Now, people have choice with over two rival gay nights on a Saturday. "One is more upmarket. Social and economic strata are coming into play." Even as that might be undesirable for a movement, it hints at an unprecedented expansion of possibilities for Delhi's gay community.



Bharat Bhushan with his mother

‘Marriages, equal rights, property shares will need to come. I just hope it happens in my lifetime.’

THERE is nothing queer about a winter morning in Bharat Bhushan's home. His mother waves me in enthusiastically and immediately offers hot tea. His dog barks a loud, exuberant welcome. Bhushan, a criminal lawyer practising in Delhi's lower courts, bustles about putting last-minute items in a big backpack for a weekend trip to Mumbai.

It's any urban home, really. The most striking thing is a long, stunningly bedecked passage wall that has been painted rustic stucco and embellished with small, round mirrors. But the living arrangement really isn't your everyday arrangement.

Bhushan's mother, Lal Jethwani, who lives with him, knows he is gay, and accepts it fully. "You love your child the way he is. If I don't support him, who will," she says matter-of-factly. She, in fact, has accompanied him to picnics and parties, and fusses over his friends, many of them gay and lesbian couples, when they come home.

Bhushan, who came out to his mother only a couple of years back, says he has been heartened by her wisdom. "She isn't a well-travelled, super-educated woman. This couldn't have been easy." So, for him, she symbolises the core change, beyond legislation and legal rights, that is truly needed. "Till parents don't change, till they aren't aware, nothing will change."

Succumbing to marriage, something many gays and lesbians are counselled into by parents is a result of their inability to understand sexuality. "They don't understand they are forcing their children to lead artificial lives."

"Great, Section 377 has been repealed. But, when did it really affect us," questions Bhushan. "Your hesitation to be yourself isn't because it's illegal. Or,

what society thinks. You come out to your family. That's the fundamental."

The journey is tough on the family, he concedes. Bhushan's pictures appeared in the *Hindustan Times* after the gay pride parade last year. "People called up my sister and made life difficult for her. Just yesterday my mother told me that my sister used to cry when that happened." His sister has known for a while that he is gay. "Society does make things difficult."

Bhushan admits that over the last year, it has become much easier to organise parties and events in Delhi. "The scene is more active. At the gay pride parade, I was surprised, to see the crowd. Thousands of people were there. There were people who work in the government and the corporate sector as well. Most were without masks." The petty harassment has certainly come to an end.

"There were anxieties when we got together earlier. Even I would at times feel what if the police comes calling. I am a lawyer after all. It did feel strange to think of yourself on the other side of the law."

But, the road to dramatic change continues to be slow and arduous, he rues. Even lawyers, typically, well-educated are immensely prejudiced. Bhushan has contested for positions to the Bar Council of Delhi.

"My being gay has been used by my opponents to trump me." He recalls how the *Hindustan Times* photographs were used to embarrass him as well. Many lawyers caught hold of the picture, made photocopies and distributed them. "It was extremely painful especially because many of them already knew I was gay."

He measures true comfort around gay identity from that point of view. "I feel comfortable within me. I am open. I am easy. But, some people around me are still not comfortable. That's evident."

In smaller towns, understanding continues to be much more limited, he says. People think being gay is either gross sexual perversion or in some cases, just creative sexual experimentation that should have nothing to do with normal rites of passage – marriage, children etc.

Bhushan tells us about a friend, a young, gay government doctor posted in small town Uttar Pradesh. The doctor's parents are pushing him into marriage. "I told him to try and get a job in Delhi, and to get out of there." His parents were unlikely to understand so Bhushan counselled him into keeping quiet. "There is a time and a stage to come out. Don't do it if you can't deal with the consequences," Bhushan believes.

It isn't that he is not optimistic that the crusade for rights will continue, or possibly even gain pace. He is confident that the Supreme Court will repeal Section 377 as well. "Marriages, equal rights, property shares will need to come. I just hope it happens in my lifetime."

"Otherwise we'll just go abroad," he says.

‘It’s easier for lesbian couples. People think women stay together because they can’t afford the rent... I don’t care anymore though. I give my partner’s name everywhere, and tell the banks or whoever else that this is the only name, take it if you want to, or don’t.’

SUMANA wants to open a gay bar in Delhi where she can organise special L Nights. “There are so many gay nights, but there are no lesbian nights. Only the boys come. The women still need to be convinced that there is a safe place for them.”

But, even as she frets about that, Sumana concedes that within that complaint itself lies a huge movement forward. As does the fact that despite us meeting in a neighbourhood coffee shop, there is no hesitation in her speaking comfortably and passionately about her sexuality, or her full-time partner.

“Things have changed more than 100 per cent from my time,” she says, somewhat enviously, adding that especially the last year and a half after the repeal of Section 377 there has been dramatic change. “The masks are off now. People are so much more open. The words flow out of people’s mouths so easily. It was earlier an abuse.”

At the gay pride event last year, there was incredible energy, she says. “There were so many people carrying placards that said, my sister is a lesbian, my son is gay. It was wonderful.” A big sea change was a listing of LGBT events in a magazine like *Time Out*, both in Delhi and Mumbai. “There are so many new people at these parties and events, so many people we don’t know.”

She recalls how different things once were, not even so long ago. As a volunteer for Sangini, a helpline for women, she remembers putting up stickers and posters in wash rooms of upmarket cinemas like PVR in Delhi. “Within an hour, they’d be ripped out. We have no right to advertise, no space to access.” Today, the LGBT movement isn’t limited to being fought by people of the community. “There are so many non-gay lawyers and activists working on this cause.”

Things weren’t as easy for Sumana as a young woman in Delhi. She could-



Sumana

n’t muster up the courage to tell her family. She succumbed to an arranged marriage which ended within the year. That proved to be the point of no return. She moved to Pune and then to Mumbai to live independently. She has been back in Delhi for many years, and works as a travel researcher for a media group.

Her parents are no more. “My mother had guessed I was a lesbian before she died.” Now, with her immediate family, things are more transparent. “I have come out to my nephew but I haven’t told my sister. She knows though, I think.” Sumana’s live-in partner is often invited to her sister’s place for meals. “And, if I get a Diwali gift, my partner does so as well. There is acceptance. But, we haven’t talked about it openly.”

The media has catalysed the image change. For her, personally, being honest with it has helped her avoid the need for several discussions. “When the first parade happened and my pictures came in the newspaper, I was happy because my family would find out now and I wouldn’t have to tell them.” Similarly, she hopes a recent article she wrote for a women’s magazine will be read by her partner’s sister so she could realise the truth.

Still, assertive women’s sexuality, an outcome of women’s growing financial independence and role in the urban economy, is a prickly issue for a society like ours in general. Age and economic empowerment have much to do with it. “I care less now that I am settled in my career.”

Also, in bigger cities it’s easier for lesbian couples to stay together without raising eyebrows than it is for gay couples or definitely for heterosexual live-in arrangements. “It would have been tougher for me to live in with a boyfriend without marriage,” says Sumana, who has been with her partner for over three years now.

“Most people think the women are living together because they can’t afford the rent, or because of safety reasons. If you want to hide it, it’s easier to do that as a woman.”

Of course, expansion of legal rights is something she is personally interested in seeing happen. She and her partner have four dogs in their South Delhi residence. “But, I’d love to adopt a girl,” she says. It is frustrating not to have formal entitlements.

“I had to submit my LTA form, and I wanted to give my partner’s details. But, of course, it wasn’t accepted because only family is considered,” she says irritably. “I don’t care anymore though. I give my partner’s name everywhere, and tell the banks or whoever else that this is the only name, take it if you want to, or don’t.”

‘The pink rupee is getting incredibly powerful. There are already seven gay magazines in India. There are gay travel agencies. Last Valentine’s, Archies launched gay greeting cards.’

NARAYAN KAUNDIYAL



Mohnish Malhotra

AT 23, Mohnish Malhotra personifies urban, new-age youth. He’s articulate, well-informed and confident. Some might even call him cocky. But, whichever way you look at it, he’s a voice any cause gains much from having on its side. There’s little surprise then that he is widely known in Delhi’s gay circles.

Malhotra, a successful public relations professional, organises the capital’s most happening gay parties in upmarket clubs across the city. “I started right after the repeal of Section 377 in 2009. More than about exclusivity, it was about creating a safe place for people to get together.” Invitations were sent to a select few, generally through mobile texts, personally by Malhotra. Within weeks, he was getting phone calls from friends, acquaintances and people he didn’t even know. They were all seeking invites to his next bash.

Today, the numbers have swollen beyond his design. “On an average Saturday night, the turnout is 300 people. I don’t know half of them. It’s crazy. And, the crowd is ridiculously diverse.” New restaurants and clubs invite him to hold the bashes at their eateries. “The pink rupee is getting incredibly powerful,” says Malhotra, adding that there were already seven gay magazines in India.

“There are gay travel agencies. Last Valentine’s, Archies launched gay greeting cards. There are online gay bookstores, online gay pride stores.” It’s a commercial niche marketers are hoping to commercially exploit, adds Malhotra. Spiffily attired in his lean jeans and puffer jacket, he exudes an unmistakable sense of pride in his gay identity. But, that this identity could be courted in such a way seemed completely impossible even a few years back.

In fact, Malhotra insists his personal journey and experience of coming out with his conservative family be kept off the record. “I am not a victim. I am not a poor thing. I earn handsomely, more than most people my age do,” he says almost haughtily. “I love my mother. My father and I don’t speak very much. But, I am very happy.”

“There still might not be acceptance, but there is a lot of tolerance,” he begins explaining. That people should be nonchalant about how others live their lives is an invaluable first step. “There are gradual changes.” Malhotra, who has been closely involved with organising Delhi’s gay pride parades, says what’s heartening is that he has felt the tolerance travel to the grass-roots.

He recalls an incident eight months ago at a club where a gay party was taking place. “People had begun leaving. There was a line of auto rickshaws to take those using public transport home. I overheard two drivers talking to each other. Basically, they were saying how this was ok because even the government had repealed the law.”

“When things are debated, the words float around. The discourse ensures there is a reference for understanding a phenomenon.” Malhotra says. Although his grandmother, who knows he is gay, still hopes he will get married, Malhotra says he has seen how the coming out has become easier for many of his friends compared to five or ten years back.

“A very close friend of mine who is 26 years old came out to his parents. He didn’t want to wait for them to get on the marriage bandwagon. There was much drama for two days. But, then things were absolutely normal.” That friend’s parents now hang out with them, joke with them, and are proud of their professional achievements, like parents anywhere else, says Malhotra.

He credits the media for playing a vital role in spreading the message. “It’s not only a particular section of society that is aware. Everybody today is aware, some acknowledge it, some don’t, some are fine with it, others not.” Even the unfortunate case of Aligarh Muslim University professor Dr SR Siras indicates some positives, adds Malhotra. “At least, he was able to stand up for himself. Many others also supported him.”

Much like the new, go-getting, ambitious India he belongs to, Malhotra is confident the youth power the gay movement has will accelerate movement. “Today’s young transcend all boundaries. It isn’t about being gay. There is so much impatience.”

“There is so much spending power. Youngsters are courted by large multinational companies, make fat salaries right after college.” Nearly 70 per cent of India’s population is below 35, he adds. It’s a group challenging itself to come out as young opinion-makers and young influencers. In the context of the expansion of legal rights, things will happen much faster in India than they could in the United States of the 1960s.

He witnessed the power of youth while helping organise Delhi’s first gay pride event in July 2008. “The first meeting was on June 16, 2008. There were just 13 days for the pride. All of us stepped up.” It’s an ability that is sure to shape the movement into a revolution.

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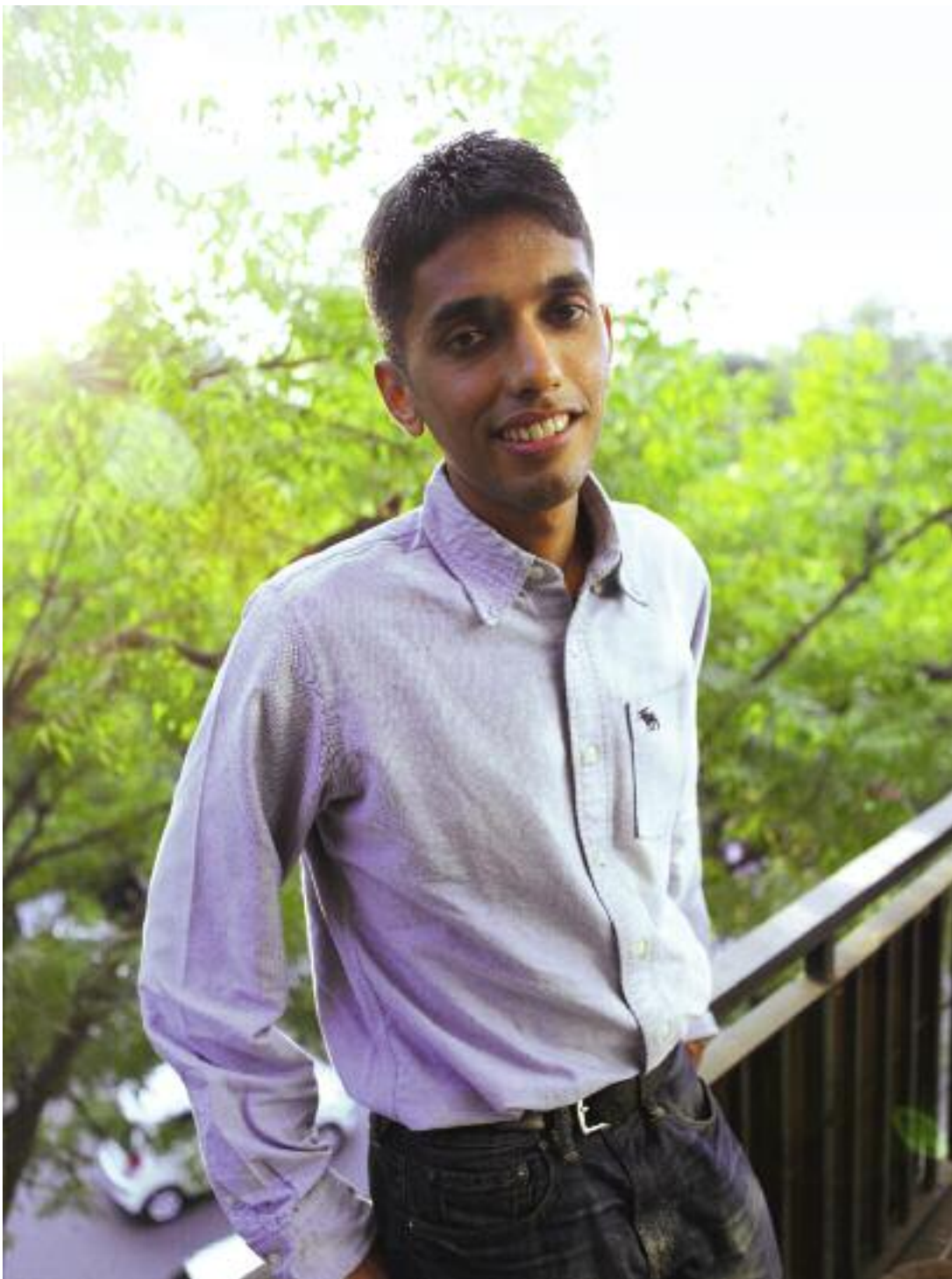
□ ICT

□ Go Green

Farm films on tap

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Shreyasi Singh
Gurgaon



Rikin Gandhi

RIKIN Gandhi has great faith in the power of good story telling. Dressed in scruffy jeans and sneakers with a distinct American accent, Gandhi, 29, doesn't look as if he could connect in any way with rustic Indian farmers.

But surprise, surprise, he is the founder of Digital Green, an agricultural non-profit which makes videos to get information to small farmers. Around 850 videos have been produced since he started his outfit in 2007. The films tell farmers about agro-related programmes ranging from government subsidies, pesticide use to innovative water harvesting techniques. Over 30,000 farmers across Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Orissa have benefited from watching or filming Digital Green's videos.

His non-profit trains local people in the 450 villages it works in to use simple hand-held camera recorders and basic editing software to make local videos.

"These videos are of the farmers, by the farmers and for the farmers," says Gandhi, who last year was one of three Indians chosen by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Technology Review magazine as a top global innovator below 35.

Doordarshan, India's state-owned broadcaster has a similar television programme, Krishi Darshan aimed for the eyeballs of the country's 600 million people dependent on agriculture. But Gandhi says agricultural practices must be localised down to a few villages to have real impact. He cites the example of *azolla filiculoides*, a fern which the government has been encouraging farmers to grow as fodder for cattle since it increases milk yield. *Azolla* grows well in swampy patches of land.

"A video we did in Karnataka on *azolla* became very popular. One of our Madhya Pradesh partners tried it out in western MP. People were excited about it. But the culture of *azolla* dried there. They had introduced it in summer. It was not going to work," he explains.

Digital Green, which is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, employs three to five local people per district and trains them to make inexpensive local videos. "Amortized cost is pretty low. The video camera we use costs around ₹6,000.

Each camera produces around 10 videos a month."

Locals who are chosen for training earn around ₹2,500 for each project. They are trained to identify topics of interest, how to work out a storyboard, shoot the video and do basic post production. Digital Green partners with seven non-profits like Pragati, BAIF and ASA. All of them are devoted to agriculture and livelihood enhancement. Subject matter experts from the non-profits vet the storyboard for accuracy before it is shot and distributed.

"We amplify and support the objectives of our partners. The videos should supplement their interventions," says Gandhi. Partners are chosen if they can demonstrate what Gandhi calls the "three pillars" – domain expertise, scale of operations and sustained community rapport in the regions they work in.

Gandhi has attempted to bring scientific rigour to a sector beset with outdated policies and inefficient yields. Digital Green's ingenuity does not end with democratic production output. It has detailed standards on how the videos must be screened and how feedback must be collated.

"These videos are watched by self-help groups in intimate settings of 15 to 20 people where give and take can happen," he says. While the videos do serve as community entertainment, catalysing action is critical. "We want people to actually follow through, take concrete action. It has to go beyond passive curiosity. Human facilitators do



that." Each of the nearly 12,000 video screenings, Gandhi says, has followed the procedure.

Thirty to fifty people per district are trained to show these videos and act as facilitators. Screenings take place once a week with the help of mobile projector devices in school buildings, panchayat offices or other common meeting points. Metrics like adoption rate and average attendance per dissemination are analysed to evaluate impact. Digital Green claims the adoption rate is 21.73 per cent.

Born and brought up in the United States, Gandhi had his heart set on joining the US Air Force after his Masters in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering from MIT. He was even selected for NASA's space program.

But a few weeks spent helping a friend set up a biodiesel venture in rural Maharashtra changed his path for good. Using technology for economic development in rural areas became his new navigator. He 'reverse-migrated' to India to research at Microsoft's Technology for Emerging Markets lab in Bengaluru in 2006. "It was really exploratory, to see if technology had a role in improving agriculture."

His six-month pilot in Karnataka's Kolar district demonstrated that community-produced videos persuaded seven times as many farmers to adopt new ideas as opposed to an existing programme of training and visits that the non-profit they partnered with was then running.

With his findings now validated, Gandhi is in scale-up mode. In the next two years, Digital Green wants to expand to 1,200 villages both within and outside the four states they work in currently. There are active discussions on with possible partners in Africa.

In October last year they launched an automated, pre-recorded message helpline that routes agricultural queries to local or district experts in Madhya Pradesh. They are also exploring if this community level media exchange can be extended to other verticals like healthcare and education.

When he moved to India, Gandhi's puzzled parents hoped he would get his new rural fix out of his system in six months or so. Four years later, Gandhi is digging deeper for a bigger harvest.



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EKA is stylish, ethnic

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

STEPPING inside EKA, an ethnic lifestyle store, is a bit like entering Aladdin's cave – it is filled with a bewildering collection of arts and crafts. The store features Indian lifestyle products that reflect the art, culture, craftsmanship and diversity of the country and its people.

EKA is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Ekam' which means one or singular. The idea from the start was to set up a store which would be one of a kind, distinct and not run of the mill. "At EKA we do not sell mass produced work, be it a shopping bag or a wall hanging or a Ganesha statue. No commercially mass produced goods are featured at EKA," emphasizes Kimiko Thakur Menezies, the store's proprietor who quit a corporate career to set up her own business venture in April 2000. Combining business acumen and her experience in the corporate world, Kimiko transformed EKA into Bangalore's most distinct ethnic lifestyle store with a loyal clientele.

The store has eco-friendly interiors right from the bulbs they use to the windows designed to allow maximum light into the store and thereby minimize the use of lights. EKA reinvented itself when it shifted to a new location and appointed retail specialists Design For Change (DFC) to create eco-conscious interiors. All light fixtures at EKA are CFLs or CDMTs. Both conserve energy. Levels of lighting have been designed to complement natural light available through the day. Even the generator at EKA is powered by LPG instead of diesel.

The fixtures are minimal. Bajaj eco-boards have been used extensively in place of hardwood or normal plywood. The warm yellow flooring was created with a new concrete spray technique which uses only 10 per cent of energy as compared with more traditional floors. "DFC was very patient in understanding retail display needs specific to EKA. The overall design concept is frames or windows through which you look into the world of EKA. The space has been effectively utilized to create open floor displays, flexible shelves and wall displays as well as ceiling displays," explains Kimiko.

Most products are handcrafted from natural materials, custom designed and contract manufactured or culled from traditional artisans, craftsmen and manufacturers from across the country by Kimiko. The enterprising entrepreneur scours the country to collaborate personally with NGOs, artisan groups, fair trade organizations as well as export manufacturers, most of whom custom craft



Kimiko Menezies, the proprietor of EKA

All EKA products are of Indian origin and are handcrafted using natural materials such as stone, wood, metal and sand.

products for EKA. They currently source hand-knotted jewellery from Maya Bazaar, silk soft furnishings from Sukruti, handmade Indidolls from East West Education Charity among others. As a socially responsible organization, they adhere to fair trade practices and support artisans and craftsmen with design interventions and processes as well as improvement inputs to upgrade native skills. The store which sources a large part of its merchandise from rural artisans encourages green, artisan skills which eventually help in providing non-farm based incomes to rural people.

All EKA products are of Indian origin and are handcrafted using natural materials such as stone, wood, metal, sand, fabric, glass etc. "Our objective is to offer unique, high quality and design rich products at value prices. Products that preserve and interpret traditional and tribal crafts in a contemporary context so as to enrich global lifestyles," affirms Kimiko.

EKA showcases an amazing variety of products comprising rustic art, old furniture, antique wood and metal embellishments. There is also handcrafted linen, articles for home décor, gifts and other artifacts. There is a lot to choose from – candles, vases, T-light holders, ornaments, gift sets, gift bags, boxes and wraps in decorative handmade paper, furniture, ceramics, fish on a stand and figurines of

fishermen. The hand-knotted jewellery – beads and stones linked into anklets, bracelets, chokers, earrings and necklaces from Maya Bazaar in Mumbai give a contemporary twist with fashionable colours.

Also on display are tuned wind chimes, Kundan table décor, tissue streamers, handmade greeting cards, monogrammed towels and lots more. The store sells clothing made by tribes in Gujarat. The designs look like prints but they are actually intricate embroidery. There are also art forms from artistes in Kolkata and jewellery from different corners of the country.

At EKA, there's plenty to catch your fancy. But what's most prominent here are the Ganeshas of all hues, sizes and material. The exquisite collection of Ganeshas in classical, abstract, tribal, contemporary and original designs is awesome. In addition to traditional brass, wood and stone Ganeshas, there are Ganeshas in mediums as diverse as ceramic, sand, slate and silver, paintings and murals of Ganesha by local artists, exclusive T-shirts designed in-house and stationery. EKA's vast repertoire also includes antique look-a-like fans and rustic chandeliers. Its collection of Xmas gifts and décor include figurines of angels, Santa, Xmas trees, kings, reindeer and more. Other eye catchers are the lamps of celebration- kundan rangolis, floating lamps, hand painted clay diyas, puja thalis, torans crafted in tissues and pearls. The murals and mirrors ingrained on natural slate stones also strike one's attention.

Prices range from ₹20 for a pack of agarbattis to ₹1.25 lakhs for a large-size Ganesha. Some of the hand-knotted jewellery pieces start from ₹100. It would be advisable to buy during EKA's monthly exhibitions when the best of their products are showcased and sold at reasonable prices.

Address: 19, Opp. RBANMS Grounds, Gangadhar Chetty Road, Bangalore 560 042. Tel: 080-2554 4371/0876. Open: 10 am to 7 pm

Insights

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City and citizen

V RAVICHANDAR

It is UID times. And that gets you thinking again about identity in the context of a city. Who for instance qualifies to be a Bangalorean or a Mumbaikar or a Delhiite? Is there a Unique City Identity (UCI) that exists and what chance of it being recast in an FMCG brand manner to reflect some core values that uniquely define and differentiate one city from another?

Being a researcher, I set out seeking answers by asking around in my city, Bangalore, with the hope that many of the issues addressed would be reflective of any city. The first port of call was a geeky 14-year-old who had relocated from the US a few months ago. I asked him: "Are you a Bangalorean?" "I am not one," he said. "Why?" I asked. "I don't litter" was his prompt reply as if there was a bad behaviour criteria to qualify!

Lesson One – what one does (or does not) makes a 'citizen' and so maybe we have good and bad 'cityzens.'

Next call was our maid originally of Andhra stock. She was emphatic that she was a Bangalorean since she was born here, lived here all her life and spoke Kannada. And, for good measure she ruled me out as a Bangalorean since I don't speak the local language! So our wise maid ended up raising more questions starting with birth place entitling 'citizen' qualifications.

The issue of being domiciled is an interesting criterion. The local development authority reckons 15 years stay as decent enough to allow you to apply for their land sites. Her case showed that regional ancestry did not matter. She also threw up the most emotive subject when it comes to city identity – language spoken, as a qualifier.

I am a Tamilian by birth and that has my more worried family members scurrying for cover at the mention of Cauvery! However, my mother-in-law was supportive of me. "You are certainly a Bangalorean. You get involved in city issues, you write, give quotes about Bangalore – that surely makes you one!"

Another lesson – it does not seem to matter where you came from but what you do.

My wife tries passing herself off as a Bangalorean – been here since 1983. I tell her maybe not based on the Michael Tebitt test (who do Asians root for when England is playing an



LAKSHMAN ANAND

Asian country). My wife roots for Chennai Super Kings – does that disqualify her? At cocktail parties, many intone the city is not what is used to be and reel of some tales of woes vis-a-vis the good old days.

Question – does nostalgia make you a Bangalorean? And while we are at it does cribbing about a city act as a qualifying criterion?

Sachin Tendulkar certainly got it right. We are all Indians first, then a Mumbaikar, a Ahmedavadi or a Chennaiite. So within a country context, what makes any of us to be considered a local 'citizen'? One strongly feels that what you feel and do about the city is what determines your identity in the context of any city.

You have feelings for your city if your heart flinches every time you see the wanton destruction of the city (trees indiscriminately being cut, disappearing water bodies) or poor civic behaviour in terms of littering, violations, et all. You feel an earthy connect with your city irrespective

of where you are in the world. And you do not miss an occasion to catch up on your city news on the Net. You miss its weather, its sights, sounds and smells when you are anywhere else. You have a sense of belonging and you love your city, warts and all as a Karan Johar would put it.

To me, it is what you do within the city which truly determines your claims to be a local 'citizen.' It starts with being respectful of local tradition and culture. Language is an important element and every 'citizen' (particularly those with other native tongues) needs to make an effort to speak the local language. If done we will see less of the language chauvinists setting the inflammatory agenda across our cities and would force all of us to embrace greater cultural diversity.

Another key element to qualify as a local 'citizen' is what one does to make the city a better place for all citizens. Simple actions like following the law of the land, responsible behaviour

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Stingy middle-class

CHANDRASHEKAR HARIHARAN

LAKSHMAN ANAND

THERE is a peculiar challenge that goes beyond my understanding. Maybe as a discerning reader, you have a solution. Life in the city would not be possible without some very basic elements – electricity, water, gas, phones and public transport. These contribute significantly to a good quality of life in any urban environment.

The rise of the middle-class and their drift to the big city from the small town has phenomenally boosted the demand for phones, buses, trains, energy and water. But only the last two utilities have languished without enough attention being paid to their economics. Remember the days you paid ₹150 for your phone in the early 1980s? Today you pay anywhere from ₹400 to ₹5,000 and you don't even grumble.

We prize water and energy. We know these are two absolutely vital resources that we simply cannot do without. Yet we refuse to understand or are unwilling to pay more for them. Every time there is an attempt by the utilities to bring their problem to the Government and ask for a tariff hike, or to appeal to consumers, there is a hue and cry. The ministers for energy or water get defensive and pull back. The situation is even worse when it hurts that 'holy cow' of the electorate – the farmer.

The festering problem of endemic revenue deficits in the budgets of agencies responsible for water, energy and waste management are brushed under the carpet. The government finds more money to subsidize their operations. Today every energy or water utility in the country spends about six to ten times more to 'create' and 'sell' these two 'commodities'.

Of course, it makes for very bad business. It paralyses any effort at building quality services or creating new infrastructure or even maintaining what we have. The Indian Railways were in such a morass until about 15 years ago. Then one Minister of Railways woke up and offered greater autonomy to the Railway Secretary and the teeming thousands who man that mammoth utility. They turned a loss-making utility into the envy of the public sector. They won.

As consumers we must brace for a tariff hike of at least ₹8 per unit for energy consumed at home. When Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala can accept such costs, why can't other cities across India? Pondicherry pays a measly ₹1.50!

The upper income segment must accept at least ₹50 per 1000 litres as water tariff. This will cover about a third of total water consumers and any adverse impact on the poorer sections will be avoided. This also means only about ₹800 or ₹1000 a month on your water bill. Do you honestly know how much you pay for your water every month? Well, that's the point. And at ₹8 a unit for energy consumed, we will still be paying an average of ₹2,000 for AEH category homes.

Remember, we are only postponing the really serious crisis on the energy and water front by



resisting such tariff revisions that are only reasonable and don't make too much of a dent on any urban consumer's pocket. In cities like London, New York, Paris, the average middle-class householder pays around 30 per cent of his or her income for water and energy. The costs are as stiff in Germany that has turned extremely conscious of these threats befalling urban regions.

Right here in India it is not that officials in the bureaucracy or the energy utilities are not aware of the inequitable pricing structures. In a few industrial estates in Greater Chennai, the Energy Board has quietly introduced tariffs that are as stiff as ₹18 a unit of power consumed in peak hours, with day time consumption being priced at Rs 9 and above! It is the fear of political reprisals from the vocal middle-class and backroom negotiations of big corporates with political parties that deter such tariff rationalisation across the board.

Such rationalisation of energy and water tariffs will give the energy board and the water supply board enough money and viability to ensure that they are able to invest in upgrading infrastructure that will serve us better in the long-term.

These utilities can then lead the way in smart grid activity. How do we get water and energy supply agencies to present an atlas for meeting the needs of the next 30 years? Both utilities have a share in the public domain their plans, demand analyses and estimates, population forecasts, evaluation of sources for power and water availability and quality, diagnosis of water and energy produc-

ing systems and solutions, and a blueprint of options before us as consumers.

Beyond these two vital resources, what is even more galling is that most households in cities pay nothing at all for disposing the waste that we create in our homes – whether from the kitchen or the rash of plastic and packaging materials that we need to clear from our homes. A recent Eco-pulse survey that BCIL conducted showed that nearly a third of the city's households paid about ₹30 a month, but they paid this amount unofficially to the Corporation's contractors who in any case are paid for clearing up waste, door-to-door.

In cities like Amsterdam, urban laws demand that you not only pay, but that you segregate your wet and dry waste and that you hand over your waste at designated places. If you 'forget' to give in your waste on a particular day, you pay a stiff spot fine, apart from driving up to the landfill to dump your waste.

If there has to be compliance on efficiency norms for energy, water or waste, it can't be voluntary. Regulation alone will show the way. If there has to be innovation in areas that increase use of renewable resources and bring conscious demand-side management, it can only be with stiff and realistic pricing of these vital resources in our cities. We can't fail to remember that the one big solution to the energy deficit that permeates all these vital infrastructure needs of our daily living, is energy efficiency.

The writer is founder of BCIL Zed Homes, a green buildings pioneer in India.

MoEF's conditions mean nothing

KANCHI KOHLI

HOW does it matter if Parliament created history with the Lok Sabha meeting for just around seven hours in the winter session? Between November and December there have been other serious happenings! And since my lens invariably focuses on environment and agriculture here's a little of what's been happening so very relevant to Maharashtra.

My spotlight is on two critical projects which have been given a green signal by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) – the Navi Mumbai International Airport and the Jaitapur Nuclear Power Plant. The website of the MoEF has uploaded long justifications by Jairam Ramesh, our environment minister, stating why these projects have been approved despite strong opposition and impacts on people and the environment. While we continue to debate the validity of these justifications, there is one significant point to be noted which is common to both these projects – the laying down of what are being seen as stringent conditions for environmental protection.

The Jaitapur Nuclear Power Plant to be constructed with French nuclear reactors was granted environmental clearances by the MoEF on 26 November, 2010. This approval came just before the visit of French President Nicholas Sarkozy to India in December. The project was cleared with 35 conditions for environment protection. It is all set to roll in Madban village in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. The listing of conditions came with a justification from the minister through a press release which stated that the decision had been difficult and that a delicate balancing act has been done. There are weighty strategic and economic reasons which favour the project now even though the issue of safeguarding marine biodiversity has been raised.

Jaitapur's approval was reported in the media highlighting that fact that it came barely a week after an approval was granted to the controversial Navi Mumbai International Airport for which three extra conditions were imposed. The clearance was regarded as being a 'satisfactory compromise' following MoEF's negotiations with the City and Industrial Development Corporation of Maharashtra Ltd and the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

But, in effect, what does listing of these conditions really mean? What happens to these negotiat-

ed terms once approvals are granted? When permission is granted, the MoEF and its thematic expert committees put forth a set of conditions which need to be followed during construction and/or execution of these projects. These conditions range from general ones of following standards and stipulations prescribed by environment laws to more specific ones based on the nature of the project and the region where it is likely to be set up. For instance, clearance conditions for hydroelectric projects include extra care regarding dumping of debris generated during construction and con-

With no significant action taken against non-compliance, violations have continued and have often even been recorded by regulatory agencies.

trolled blasting. In the case of industrial projects, conditions include the establishment of effluent treatment plants and continuous monitoring of various parameters including air, noise and water pollution levels.

In a study titled *Calling the Bluff: Revealing the State of Monitoring and Compliance of Environmental Clearance Conditions* (2009), Kalpavriksh assessed the status of compliance and monitoring of all environment clearance conditions of industrial and infrastructure projects. These conditions are laid down as part of a process which these projects need to go through. It is a mandatory requirement under the Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 1994. As of 2009, the report revealed that the MoEF had cleared around 80 to 100 projects related to thermal power, dams, irrigation projects, industries, ports and other infrastructure and real estate projects. All of these had a range of conditions that went along with the approvals. Updated figures as of November 2010 reveal that the number of approvals have increased with an average

of 97 projects being granted approval for four just sectors – mining, thermal power, construction and river valley/hydroelectric projects.

The monitoring of these projects is supposed to be carried out by the regional offices of the MoEF. At present the MoEF has over 7,000 projects to monitor through six regional offices with a staff of two to four officers per office for the task. With this quantum of approvals before them, projects granted environment clearance are monitored once in three to four years. What is most ironic is that the MoEF has no centralized record of how many projects are complying with these conditions.

Project authorities are known to turn a blind eye to compliance of these conditions. Most of these projects are rendered as not having been complied with. With no significant action taken against non-compliance, violations have continued and have often even been recorded by regulatory agencies. Only they don't become deterrents against lack of compliance.

Take, for instance, the case of the Parbati II Hydroelectric Project in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh. There is officially recorded evidence of continued dumping of muck/debris in rivers and down hill slopes ever since construction work was initiated in 2000. While these observations were noted in monitoring reports and site visits from September 2003 to April 2007, they were regularly denied in compliance reports submitted by the project proponent, National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC). The construction of the project had gone on unabated at the time Kalpavriksh's 2009 study was released.

So what does it really mean when one says that stringent and extra conditions have been imposed? Is there any guarantee that the environment or people's livelihoods will be protected? The MoEF has never revoked a clearance for non-compliance of conditions. In recent times show cause notices have been issued but there is no threat that an already granted approval will actually be withdrawn.

Ratnagiri and Navi Mumbai are sensitive coastal areas where agricultural and fishing populations depend on current land use. How will a range of conditions help in the long run? Both areas will transform forever.

Kanchi Kohli is a member of Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group and is based in Delhi

Continued from page 29

on city roads, not littering, avoiding building violations, respectful of others rights, etc. are necessary behavioural traits to make the grade. It would be the icing on the cake if you can engage with local community and neighbourhood issues constructively.

Akin to individual identity in a city context, city leaders need to pay attention to infusing their cities with unique core values that give the city a differentiated advantage in the global market-

place for jobs and liveability. Taking Bangalore as an example, there is a huge opportunity to make it an example of what is possible within the country if one does the right things by the city. The place has global recognition thanks to the success of the technology sector. Locally, it has one of the most diverse population groups – at partition, the place had a near equal mix of Telugu, Kannada and Tamil speaking populace. Today it has a more eclectic cosmopolitan mix with Indians from all over the country locating to Bangalore. The city

can be a guiding light on how diverse groups can blend and create a vibrant, liveable city where anyone is welcome. It will need enlightened leadership and considerable sensitivity on the part of 'local' and 'outsiders' to make it a role model.

It is UID times. While personal identity in the UID sense is uniquely determined the case I have tried to argue is that 'cityzen' and city identities can be moulded for desired outcomes. Are we up to it?

V. Ravichandar, Chairman Feedback Consulting considers himself an Indian and a Bangalorean

Flood victims wait and wait

BHARAT DOGRA

VILLAGERS shivered as cold winds whipped through their tumbledown homes in Gonda district of eastern Uttar Pradesh. Four months have passed since floods ruined their houses and fields. Yet just a few have received compensation from the government. The story repeats itself in Bahraich and Gorakhpur districts. Homeless and malnourished the majority continue to wait for some relief. Though this region is prone to floods, this year the deluge was particularly severe. An embankment breached, inundating many villages in Gonda district.

A survey of 10 flood-affected villages in these three districts conducted by this writer with the cooperation of local voluntary groups, Sahyog and the IAG network, revealed that most relief provided under various provisions of the Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) and the National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF) had not reached villagers three to four months after the flood disaster.

As per CRF and related provisions, small and marginal farmers whose crop loss is more than 50 per cent are supposed to get help – or more precisely ‘agriculture input subsidy’ – at the rate of ₹2,000 per hectare in rain-fed areas. Areas under assured irrigation are to receive ₹4,000 per hectare and for loss of perennial crops like sugarcane the compensation is ₹6,000 per hectare. Bigger farmers are also eligible for compensation up to a ceiling of one hectare and two hectares in case of successive calamities.

Besides, small and marginal farmers are eligible for assistance at the rate of ₹15,000 per hectare for loss of substantial portion of land caused by change in the course of a river. Assistance for a fully damaged *pucca* house is ₹35,000 and for a *kutchha* house,

₹10,000. The rates for severely damaged houses are respectively ₹5,000 and ₹2,500, while the rate for a partially damaged house is ₹1,500. The rate for a damaged or destroyed hut is ₹2,000.

In Tapra hamlet of Radauli panchayat, Gonda district, crop loss has been between 80 to 100 per cent. Yet no farmer has received compensation. Almost all of them are small and marginal farmers. Tapra was devastated by the breach in the embankment. So it is surprising that no farmer has been compensated.

I talked to about a dozen farmers separately and held a group discussion. Everyone, including the village Pradhan, Surendra Tiwari, confirmed that no crop compensation has been received. Tiwari also said that the house loss compensation has been received at the lowest lump-sum rate of ₹1,500 per house by 12 families in the panchayat although many more qualified for this compensa-



The state of a village surveyed in Gonda, people have received no relief

tion. Those selected were not necessarily those who had suffered the most, he said.

In Maharampur hamlet in Gopsarai panchayat, Gonda district, farmers have lost 70 to 100 per cent of their crops this year. This is the third continuous year of severe flood damage. Even well-to-do farmers have been devastated. Yet this hamlet's small farmers have not been given any compensation for crop loss or for damaged houses. The voices of women were choked with distress as they related how difficult it is to just survive. It has become tough for devastated and indebted farmers here to sow the next crop.

In Makhanha village, Gorakhpur district, too farmers have not received any compensation for crop loss or housing loss, though both suffered heavy damage. Recalling a breach of the embankment some years ago, these villagers said Dhuswa hamlet was completely destroyed but even then relief was minimal, a pittance compared to the damage suffered by the people.

Banjarha hamlet in Mainabagar panchayat, Gorakhpur district, suffers flood-damage almost every year, yet people say in the last five or six years they have received a little relief only once. This year despite heavy damage they have not received any relief.

In Mahuasar hamlet, Jangal Aghai panchayat of Gorakhpur district, people say that the kharif crop loss this year was 90 per cent and many huts collapsed. But so far no compensation has been paid. Floods have been inflicting damage since the past two or three years. But again no compensation was

paid. People thought since this year the inundation resulted in huge damage, compensation would be paid. That hope has been dashed. To add to their distress, their best quality land in a flood-free zone of village has been forcibly acquired.

In Golaganj panchayat, Bahraich district, people's lives have been devastated by the combined fury of floods and river erosion. Here too people said they had not been compensated for loss of crops and homes. No payment has been given to them for land loss due to river erosion. However, they have been offered very small housing plots measuring 100 sq. metres at another place which they don't find suitable.

The overall result of this denial of relief is that the sufferings of the people have increased manifold. Most of them suffer from hunger and malnutrition. They are forced to borrow at a high interest rate of 10 per cent per month for bare survival needs. As they are in no position to pay back money borrowed at such high interest rates, they are trapped in a cycle of high indebtedness and distress migration. Child labour including migratory child labour is increasing. More children are forced to drop out of school. More families are being pushed into conditions of semi-bondage and never-ending debts.

As the cold wave conditions were intensifying while we were carrying out the survey, we found women extremely anxious about the health of their children. The health of the women was precarious but they were much more concerned about their children.

Since people are deprived of food, clothing and shelter, it is clear that mortality during the winter particularly child mortality is likely to rise unless the administration makes up for its earlier lapses with a substantial relief effort. Also, the government has to seriously explore why calamity relief funds fail to reach so many genuinely needy people in disaster-devastated villages.

Most people suffer from hunger and malnutrition. They are forced to borrow at a high interest rate for bare survival needs.

Living

□ Books

□ Eco-tourism

□ Film

□ Theatre

□ Ayurveda

Bellary in the pits

NARAYAN KAUNDIYAL

Civil Society News
New Delhi

YOU have no doubt read about the scams and scandals associated with the infamous iron ore mines of Bellary district in Karnataka and Ananthapura district in Andhra Pradesh. Now you can see the film. Titled *Blood and Iron* it is a documentary of two and a half hours which will leave you angry and dismayed.

This is a dark and chilling film which explores the nexus between business, crime and politics. Bellary is a microcosmic example of how mines are operated illegally in forests and the ramifications this has for people who live in those areas and the nation as a whole.

Blood and Iron is what good journalism is about. It tells the story as it is seen and heard by Paranjay Guha Thakurta and his team. Thakurta has 30 years behind him as a reporter, editor and a TV anchor. He is also a visiting lecturer at institutions such as the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad.

Bellary has been written and filmed by journalists earlier. This film is different because of its investigative quality. It doggedly tracks all actors involved in the scandal and presents a picture which leaves an impression.

"I saw my role as a person who is documenting what is happening. My intention was to make people think, move the issue forward," says Thakurta.

The film is in three parts: New Republic of Bellary, Red Gold and Red Earth.

Bellary/Ananthapura was once green with forests, a flowing river and wildlife. The camera shows you what it is today – a dusty desert with a large deep hole in the ground where everything is tinged with red – earth, water and air.

The story in a nutshell is this: Three sons of a police constable in Bellary, Gali Janardhan Reddy, Gali Karunakara Reddy and Gali Somasekhara Reddy take to mining iron ore here without even the fig leaf of an environmental approval, constantly expanding their operations through mafia tactics, silencing local people.

Bellary is located on Karnataka's borders with Andhra Pradesh and the Reddy brothers conveniently shift border markers as they encroach into the adjacent state.



Paranjay Guha Thakurta

Bellary contributes a fifth of the iron ore exported from India. It is of high grade. China requires large amounts before the Olympics. Prices shoot. Money is minted by the Reddy brothers. The government doesn't even get its measly two per cent royalty.

This huge money from illegal mining is funnelled to political parties – the BJP and the Congress. The Reddy brothers enjoy patronage across the political spectrum, from the who's who of Indian politics. Sushma Swaraj, BJP MP and leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, the former chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, YSR Reddy, and now allegedly his son, Jaganmohan Reddy.

So the Reddy brothers wield immense unbridled power. They are ministers in the BJP government in Karnataka led by Chief Minister YS Yeddyurappa. Supreme Court orders, various inquiries and surveys are all waved away. Bellary is a dictatorship in the heart of the world's largest democracy.

Toxic dust floats from the mines to Hospet, crops wither away, wildlife disappears, people fall sick. The film contrasts the rich lifestyle of those who benefit from illegal mining to their emaciat-

ed mine workers – men, women and children.

Hope has been pinned on the state's Lokayukta, Justice N Santosh Hegde, who is seen to be rooting against illegal mining and corruption. A second report by him is reportedly going to be more devastating. There is the curious case of his resigning and then withdrawing his resignation persuaded by LK Advani whom he sees as a father figure.

To break the darkness of the film it is interspersed with folk songs and clips from Bollywood films. There are interviews with a range of people.

Paranjay Guha Thakurta spoke to *Civil Society* about his film.

This is your second film on the ravages of mining. Do you see mining as a burning issue?

I would say it is about the resource curse. Those parts of India well endowed with natural resources are the poorest. Tribals who live on those lands have no rights to what is on the surface or what is below it.

I think this is one of the most important issues facing India. The Prime Minister has said left-wing extremism is the biggest internal security

Continued on next page

South Asia's craft bazaar

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

SCARVES made of lotus fabrics, handicrafts fashioned out of palm leaves, exquisitely woven attire, hemp bathroom accessories...all these exotic products were on display at the "Crafting Friendships" exhibition in New Delhi which brought together 29 craftswomen and experts from seven South Asian countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The event was a collaborative effort of the South Asian Women's Network (SWAN), Dastkari Haat Samiti, Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Jamia Millia Islamia.

A two-day seminar on "Sustainable Livelihood through Crafts for Women of South Asia" was also held. Experts from each country described their successes and experiences in providing sustainable livelihoods through crafts.

"We wanted to share our experiences, expertise and infrastructure and somehow help our neighbouring countries to strengthen themselves because that creates partnerships that our political leaders talk about, but always in the form of speeches and platitudes," says Jaya Jaitly, president of Dastkari Haat Samiti and founder of Dilli Haat where the event was held.

"Craftswomen should be able to emerge from poverty and become independent. They need a lot of help with product design, product development and marketing," says Dr Veena Sikri, convenor of SWAN and professor in the Academy of Third World Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia.

She said participating countries should look at each other for markets and not only rely on the



The Myanmar stall
West.

While there was a fascinating array of crafts on display, the show stealer was the Myanmar stall which had hand woven lotus and silk scarves, a range of home products, cotton embroidered attire and little knick knacks for gifts.

If the products in the stall were unusual so were the four enterprising women behind the table. Each of them, once struggling craftswomen, had through sheer hard work become highly successful entrepreneurs and are now members of the prestigious

Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association.

The most vocal of the foursome was the nattily dressed Cherie Aung-Khin, CEO, designer and owner of the Elephant group of companies which are in the business of designing and manufacturing home decorative items and furniture. Elephant House uses natural fibre, rattan, wood and bamboo for its products which are exported to many countries.

Then there is a chain of three well-known Green Elephant restaurants which turn out Myanmar cuisine in major cities of Burma.

Other success stories surfaced at the exhibition. Take the instance of craftswoman Shobha Baroi from a village in Barisal district, Bangladesh. Shobha makes star streamers, bangles and decorative items from palm leaves. She belongs to the Keya Palm Handicrafts enterprise managed by Prokritee, a service-based agency located in Dhaka.

The widowed Shobha's skills have taken her a long way from her early days of struggle, says Suraiya Chowdhury, director of design at Prokritee. At one time she could barely manage three square meals a day.

Today she has her own house and is able to educate her two nephews (her son died some years ago). She has made her presence felt internationally too. In 1986 she accompanied Suraiya to the US at the invitation of buyers. Here she held demonstrations of her craft. A film was also made on her life to educate store managers and narrate her story to end customers.

Other stalls that had crowds milling around were Pakistan with its glittering embroidered attire, Bhutan with exquisite woven textiles. Afghanistan, like Myanmar, aroused much curiosity as it was displaying its crafts for the first time at Dilli Haat.

Continued from previous page

threat facing the nation. The Red Corridor extends, it is said, from Pashupati in the Himalayas to Tirupati in the South. In Bellary and Ananthapura we still don't see the kind of left-wing extremism we see say in Dantewada in Chhattisgarh or Gadchiroli in Maharashtra or Lalgarh in West Bengal. But I would not be surprised if it happens sooner or later. The way iron ore has been extracted by flouting even existing rules, iron ore which may have lasted for 25 years won't even last for five years.

Is Bellary in any way distinctive?

The situation here is a huge problem for three reasons. One, you see in other parts of the country there is this nexus between criminals and politicians and business and politicians. But what you see over here is a complete convergence of crime, business and politics in a way you have never seen anywhere else in India. It is so blatant. The same guys who are politicians are also the mine owners and the exporters through their cronies and associates.

Secondly, the iron ore extracted is one of the best qualities available in the world. You can pick

up a fistful of earth and two-thirds is iron ore magnetized. It is converted into finished steel in China, another developing country for buildings or whatever. The point is the steel is there for them for all time. It is not a perishable commodity. But what has been lost to this country will never come back because these are non-renewable resources. There is also the complete destruction of the environment.

The third aspect is the profits which have been generated from that small area which is like a republic of its own. It has funded, overtly and covertly, the two largest political parties the BJP in Karnataka and the Congress in Andhra. It is a recent phenomenon, a decade old, it is because the demand for steel peaked in China in the run-up to the Olympics.

It must have been tough to make a film with so many undercurrents.

For me it was a huge challenge. I don't understand Kannada or Telugu. I was lucky to put together a dedicated team. We started in March 2010. When you see things in front of you...fields, ponds, blood red...it has a different impact.

As far as risks to us were concerned we fol-

lowed the standard procedure – shoot and scoot. We never stayed at any one location for more than 24 hours or at a hotel or guest house for more than one night. We didn't seek permissions.

Did you get any silent support?

Enough people supported us. Some remained anonymous. We got support even from people within the BJP. There were a lot of people who said please go ahead and do this. Local people said we have lost our lands, we are breathing toxic red dust, this is slow suicide in any case.

Are they afraid?

When copies of the film were screened in Hospet, Bellary, people began inviting Justice Hegde to the screenings. It was their best insurance against the goons. Karnataka has this system of designating ministers in charge of districts. In this case Janardhan Reddy is the minister for Bellary so he literally controls the administration. No officer whether in the police, administration or forest department can step out of line. Justice Hegde has said wait for our second report it is going to be even more devastating than the first.

Contact: paranjoy@gmail.com

BILAL BHADUR



Left: Ali Emran Qureshi

First step to Kashmiri regional cinema

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

VERY few attempts have been made in Kashmir to produce quality films. The Valley's score card as far as production of regional cinema is concerned is an embarrassing zero. So far no film maker has been able to match the standards set for film making at national or international level.

Finally, a young film maker, Ali Emran Qureshi, is trying to close this gap. After considerable struggle he has produced a film which puts him on the path to professional film making.

Qureshi studied to become an engineer. But his heart was in becoming a film maker. He agrees that no worthwhile attempt has been made by local Kashmiris to produce good cinema. No one has dared to tread this path. Most Kashmiri parents want their children to become doctors and engineers and more recently, join the civil services or the government. Perhaps it has also been lack of know-how, money, or may be it all looked too ambitious and daunting for young Kashmiris. Qureshi has succeeded in breaking through this iron curtain.

The name of his film is *Khudi*. It is an adaptation of Ayn Rand's bestseller novel *The Fountainhead*. "The film is an inspiration from the novel," Qureshi said during the promo release function of the film held in Srinagar. "In fact it is my tribute to Ayn Rand since my film was the fifth adaptation of her novel."

The film is in Urdu and English. The Urdu version is of two hours duration while the English version, meant for an international audience, is of 90 minutes. *Khudi* will also be released in New Delhi. Qureshi says he has ambitious plans of organizing a world premiere of his film.

"*Khudi* is Kashmir's first international feature length film. I am proud to say this is my product," says Qureshi. "It has taken me many years to complete the film. Today I would like to thank the Almighty who gave me the courage to complete it. The film may be liked or disliked by people. What is important to me is that this is my work. I have entered the domain of feature film production," said Qureshi obviously proud of his achievement.

The story of *The Fountainhead* centres around its chief protagonist, Howard Roark, an individualistic young architect who prefers to struggle in obscurity rather than compromise his artistic and personal vision. He battles against all odds to follow his heart and his ambition to design modern architecture.

The character of Howard Roark is played by Bashir Dada, a veteran actor of theatre and television in the Kashmir Valley. Old hands in the acting profession here, such as Zameer Ashai and Pervez Masoodi, also comprise the cast of the film. "Most of my actors have much more experience than me. It was great experience to be working with them. I learnt a lot. But when it came to production, I wanted things to be done according to my plan of action," said the young film director who also stars in the film.

It took several years for Qureshi to complete his film. "In the pre-production phase it took me one and a half years. Another two years went in post-production work," says Qureshi.

The film has been made under the banner of XMITA (Experimental Moving Images and Theatre Association), Hot Ice and Media Work.

Noted historian Professor Fida Mohammad Hasnain, INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art, Culture and Heritage) convener for Jammu & Kashmir, Mohammad Saleem Beigh and some members of the cast of the film were present during the promo release.

The actors were all praise for Qureshi saying that the film maker exuded self-confidence throughout the making of the film.

"Working with Emran has been a new and great experience. This boy was always confident about his plans and I must salute him for his professionalism. There is no dearth of talent in Kashmir. Young people here should plunge into making films. I hope Emran shines on Kashmir's film horizon," said Zameer Ashai.

Yet another actor, Pervez Masoodi, said that people need to support film professionals like Emran so that they make good cinema. He said he enjoyed working with Emran. Mohammad Saleem Beigh said that Kashmir has not been portrayed in the right perspective on screen. He said that no credible documentary depicting various facets of Kashmiri life has been produced in Kashmir.

"There is a gap when it comes to projecting the image of Kashmir in the visual media. This needs to be filled and for this we need to have people like Emran. There is lack of support for film making in Kashmir. Local people should come forward and invest in the film media," said Beigh.

Professor Fida Mohammad Hasnain said that talented persons should be encouraged by Kashmiri society to make films. It is Kashmiri film makers who can best capture what is happening in Kashmir.

"Like the novel the film tries to generate hope and celebrate honesty and truth," Qureshi said.

Prior to *Khudi*, the director tried his hand at making several other small films like *Ninth Act* and *Know Me*.

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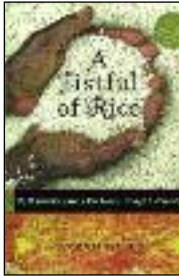
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RANDOM SHELF HELP

A quick selection from the many books that turn up for review

Fleeting glory of microfinance



A FISTFUL OF RICE

Vikram Akula

Harvard Business Review
₹ 495

IN this rather readable book Vikram Akula, now at the centre of the storm raging over microfinance, explains how he started SKS Finance and charted its phenomenal growth.

From a business perspective Akula's microfinance company was a success. It grew and grew and reached small loans to millions in rural areas. Akula launched India's first microfinance IPO which raised millions from the stock market. After that came controversy and SKS found itself in the dog house.

Overnight, as it were, microfinance went from being celebrated as a means of fighting poverty to being criticised for the personal wealth it was generating for a few. SKS hired a CEO with a compensation package running into crores of rupees a year and then after a successful IPO dumped him in what looked to all to be a murky board room battle.

SKS's transition from a non-profit to a company isn't quite clear. But it is a matter of record that both Akula and his CEO sold their shares in the company even as preparations for an IPO were in final stages.

Just as this controversy began to die down, suicide deaths among the poor began to be reported from Andhra Pradesh allegedly due to coercive methods of recovery by microfinance institutions (MFIs). The Andhra government clamped down on MFIs passing an ordinance to curb their activities.

Akula's book was written before these developments. The *Harvard Business Review* undoubtedly meant to showcase microfinance driven by profitability as a way of helping people out of poverty. The reality is a bit different. Events have clearly overtaken the thesis even as it was coming off the press.

Nevertheless, Akula's story is an interesting one, funny and even moving in parts. He is from a backward caste in Andhra. His father became a doctor and migrated to the US during the brain drain years. But his son returned not just to find his roots but to remove poverty. Akula appears passionate and idealistic about his mission during the early years.

He joined the Deccan Development Society (DDS) on a sparse salary of ₹1,000. DDS runs a spate of programs on agriculture, livelihood, education, health, microfinance, a community radio and so on. When the NGO got funding to expand Akula bravely volunteered to go work in a really remote village. He ended up in a two-roomed building with no door and no amenities.

What struck him, he says, was how much people cared about small loans. They saw it as an opportunity to become entrepreneurs. Akula thought it best to help the poor by providing small loans. He did a stint at Grameen Bank then went back to DDS, working on their microfinance programme and noting the inefficiencies of the lending system. He went on to raise the initial seed money for his own MFI in the US and subsequently ran it with efficiency. The high repayment rate combined with high interest rates added figures to his company's balance sheet which eventually attracted investors.

Akula puts across the SKS model with perfect clarity. But super imposing a purely commercial model on a vulnerable population has serious implications for banks and their clients.

A small loan can help a woman buy a goat or a cow so that she can increase her income. What

happens if the goat or cow dies? And if there is also a drought or a flood? Or if somebody in the family is very sick? Will she take another loan to pay back the first loan? The government can waive farm loans but an MFI will continue to collect its money.

There also isn't much evidence that microfinance erases poverty. Research by non-profits suggests that by and large loans given by MFIs have been used to meet survival needs. MFIs are also accused of leaving out Dalits and Scheduled Tribes. Feminists say microfinance does nothing to address literacy, health, education and it doesn't square gender relations. Women get caught between peer pressure within the Self-Help Group and from the husband.

Sure, loans have financed *kirana* stores and home-based work but the promise was that microfinance would help sprout cooperatives and small industries and bring real wealth to the grassroots. This has yet to happen in any significant way.

Non-profits who ventured into microfinance understood that by itself loaning small sums was not a panacea for poverty. That is why early NGOs were fairly ambivalent about small loans embedding such programmes with others on education, health, livelihood, agriculture. We did not hear of suicides or multiple lending then.

Akula is well aware of these issues. In the last chapter of his book he mentions an 'ultra poor' programme, a school run by SKS (with fees), links with food-for-work programmes and so on. But these appear to be mentioned almost as an after thought. There are no details of the spread and depth of such initiatives.

What has happened is that the MFI has become rich. You can say these are commercial outfits so profit is a natural outcome and will help financial inclusion. But then why do MFIs claim they are out on a mission to eradicate poverty? Why ask for celebrity endorsements and cheap loans when the intention is to merely make profits? Why not be honest and frank about your intentions?

You cannot delink microfinance from development programmes. The MFIs have shown efficiency and enterprise in setting up their companies. But they need to link more closely with NGO development programmes. Or help villages gain access to existing government schemes and programmes on education, health, water, sanitation and agriculture.

Much of the current debate around microfinance is reflective of the larger debate about rampant capitalism. Just as we need capitalism with a human face we need microfinance with strong roots in welfare.



A microfinance meeting at an Andhra village

Read a book, heal a heart

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

AFTER a gigantic earthquake struck Bhuj in 2001, Manorama Jafa went with a team of five or six women to reach out to children shattered by the disaster. They visited relief camps and distributed books to children.

They told her – we have received food, clothing and all sorts of aid. But you are the only person who brought us books which lifted our spirits and made us smile.

This appreciation, says Jafa, is her most cherished tribute.

In many ways septuagenarian Manorama Jafa is the unsung heroine of children's literature. She is the author of several books for children and the driving force behind the promotion of traditional and creative children's literature in India and abroad. Recently she was honoured as, 'A Living Treasure of Children's Literature in India' at the Nambook Festival in Korea.

Manorama is now promoting book therapy for children and adults, a pioneering effort that could make a difference to the lives of children traumatised by disasters and conflict situations.

"Children suffer fear and maladjustment problems because of natural calamities, man-made disasters and psycho-social traumas both at home and at school. By helping them read and giving them suitable books, book therapy has a far reaching impact on the mental health and all round development of children. Stories and books can reduce stress, instill positive values, build hope for the future and heal traumas," says Jafa.

Book therapy has been used in Bhuj, Gujarat, and during the tsunami of 2004 in Tamil Nadu's coastal areas. A team from the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC), of which Jafa is the founding secretary-general, was sent to the affected areas. Here they distributed books in libraries and started story-telling centres.

Manorama is equally moved by international conflict situations. She was deeply affected by the plight of Afghan children. To heal their wounds she developed 'Books for Afghanistan' which promoted the idea of helping the needy as well as enjoying simple activity based stories. The books, in Dari and Pashto, used many colourful illustrations to meet the needs of a country where literacy levels have plummeted alarmingly.

Manorama's humorous picture story book *Gabbar and Babbar* was especially written for



Manorama Jafa

NARAYAN KAUNDIYAL

Says her daughter, Navina Jafa, a dance and culture historian who accompanied her mother for the interview and has grown up surrounded by books: "All her children's stories are humorous. The moment you are didactic with children they will switch off. Take a great personality like Gandhiji. The reason why children in particular reject Gandhi is because he has been presented in a very didactic manner. In my mother's works there is no moralising but a big dose of humour."

Though Manorama has used books as therapy for children since the tsunami, the term 'book therapy' came into formal coinage when she saw the famous picture of Jewish baby Moshe clutching a ball for comfort after his

parents were killed in the terrorist attacks of 26/11 in Mumbai.

A visibly moved Manorama describes how the idea of book therapy developed further when she pinned six photographs of the baby in the diary she carefully preserves for this purpose.

Book therapy has been extended to young adults as well. Among them a fictional work, "I am Sona," relates the story of a young HIV/AIDS victim and how she comes to terms with her condition.

Manorama has many plans up her sleeve. She is looking forward to an upcoming International Conference on Book Therapy which will be held in New Delhi from 2 to 11 February in 2012. To be organised by the Association for Writers and Illustrators for Children, the event will have seminars, research, sessions on writing to heal, reading to heal, activities to heal through books and the role of books in disaster management.

A book for teenagers titled *Stories to Heal* is being collated. A catalogue is also being developed to identify children's books on countering trauma.

The irony is that despite Manorama's many contributions to children's literature and wide international acclaim, she remains relatively unknown in her own country.

For all the efforts she has put into developing children's literature which includes numerous writers' workshops, writing a one-of-its kind book on the art of writing for children, organising international conferences in India to promote links between well known writers, editors and illustrators from all around the world, and of course her own sensitive yet effective writing for children, she certainly deserves more recognition in India.



'Book therapy has a far reaching impact on children. Stories and books can reduce stress, instill positive values, build hope for the future and heal traumas.'

children traumatised by the tsunami. It talked about displacement, loneliness and how two small monkeys help each other to get over the trauma generated by sea waves.

"Animal stories are very popular because tiny tots easily identify with them," says Manorama. "We have counselling and other methods of dealing with adult trauma too. But it is much more difficult to address the trauma of small children. So illustrations play a major role in book therapy."

Manorama's literary works carry a subtle underlying message – the need for sharing and camaraderie in the face of acute trauma.

The true path of yoga

SAMITA RATHOR

SOUL VALUE

POWER Yoga, Hot Yoga, Cold Yoga, Colour Yoga... the list goes on. Have these names been thought up to create spiritual sightseeing? Do these tags warn us that we have wandered away from the true principles and path of yoga? Is this commercialization and exploitation of the underlying principles of yoga, of the term itself? The names above work completely in the opposite direction.

So is that really yoga? Food for thought!

The very essence of yoga is truth and clarity so that we leave behind aspirations and desires. People who study yoga for a month get a yoga certificate and start calling themselves teachers of yoga. Studying yoga is not a one-time exercise in certification but a lifelong journey. A yoga seeker remains a student for the rest of his or her life span.

We, as human beings, have been given a unique and wonderful gift that our animal friends do not have. This gift is to rationalize, understand and investigate. When we fail to use this ability then a very thin line divides our thinking methodology from animals.

The segregation of yoga into a physical form or just a spiritual form is misleading. If yoga is restricted to physical postures then it is not yoga. Yoga is a compilation of the systematic principles of Ashtanga Yoga or the eight limbs that unite to form the entire philosophy of yoga. That is why yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Yuj' that

means 'to unite.'

The Indus Valley Civilization found seals that had yogic asanas embossed on them. This dates back to nearly 5000 years ago. Yoga is very much part of the Hindu tradition and if one comprehends that the terms yoga and asanas are not synonymous, then one would have a more realistic perception of yoga.

The West played an important role in popularizing just one aspect of yoga, the physical. The ultimate principles of yoga have been totally lost or relegated to the backburner. Just because yoga has picked up momentum in the West does not mean a pure form of yoga is being practiced there. In fact, what is being practiced by a majority of people is not yoga.

As mentioned earlier, yoga asanas have been emphasized so much in the West that the true sacred essence of yoga has been folded and put aside. The ultimate goal of yoga is to transcend all desires and reach a state of Samadhi.

Now I will share something that may surprise you. In the Yogasutra of Patanjali which is considered to be one of the most authoritative texts of yoga there is not one mention of a single asana, except for the mention of the eight limbs of yoga. Similarly Swami Svatomarama's Hatha Yoga Pradipika has four main sections out of which

only a part of the first section throws light on asanas.

TIPS FOR A REAL YOGA PRACTICE:

- First understand the term yoga and then be sure this is what you want to do.
- Ask yourself if you are ready.
- If you are not ready and you still go along in a half hearted manner it could prove dangerous as yoga is a psycho spiritual process and has a lot of biochemical effects on the body and mind.
- Be honest with yourself and ask yourself why you really want to dive into the ocean of yoga.
- It is very essential to be comfortable with your teacher. Yoga is about evolving and establishing an honest relationship with your true self. The teacher has to be a guiding force.
- If you want just a physical form/workout then be very clear in your mind that this is what you are doing and don't make or call that practice equivalent to yoga.
- Remember if you start your yoga journey with an honest approach the results will help you evolve holistically. If not it could have the opposite effect.
- Don't get carried away by names and hearsay. Investigate yourself and discover a teacher from a valid source.

Email samitarathor@gmail.com

LAKSHMAN ANAND

PRODUCTS

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Buy parsley, rosemary, thyme and oregano in attractive bottles from Aarohi, an NGO which works with 100 villages in Almora and Nainital districts of Uttarakhand. Just a pinch of fresh herbs will enliven your soups, casseroles, grills and bakes. A cookery booklet by Aarohi will tell you how to conjure up divine dishes.

Aarohi's headquarters are in Satoli village, high up in the Himalayas. Under their Apricot and Herb Growers Initiative, hundreds of small farmers in remote villages have graduated to growing herbs and apricot and thereby boosting their income.

You can also buy apricot oil, scrub and soap. The oil is handpicked and crushed in the traditional cold press way. It's good for your skin. The soaps come in five fragrances: rosemary, geranium, orange, cinnamon and vetiver. The ingredients used include apricot scrub, coconut and other vegetable and essential oils. The soap is recognized for its exfoliating and moisturizing benefits. Peppermint and chamomile tea are also available.

Aarohi is well known for its health, education and natural resource management programmes.

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