

Civil Society

DOES ANGLING SAVE INDIA'S TIGER FISH? MAHSEER MUDDLE



CAN THERE BE A SOUTH ASIAN IDENTITY?

Meenakshi Gopinath on peace, democracy and identity in the region

Pages 10-11

HOMELESS WELCOME AADHAR

Pages 6-8

NITISH GIVES BIHAR A FUTURE

Pages 8-10

INDIA'S NEW AGE ENTERPRISES

Pages 22-25

KASHMIR REALITY IN FILM

Pages 31-32



COVER STORY

MAHSEER MUDDLE

India's tiger fish was on the brink of extinction. But catch and release angling increased its numbers. Now angling has been banned and conservationists are divided.

18

Forgotten witness to Gandhi's killing	12
No green gold for rural India	13-14
Forest rights in doldrums	14
Talking about bunkers	15
Bright school from nothing	16
The code for inclusion	24-25
Reaching the last mile	26-27
The power of pink	33
Reforming global finance	35
Namdah magic	38

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READ US. WE READ YOU.

Swimming with the mahseer

MANAGING India's biodiversity is a complex responsibility. It requires a vision for natural resources and their ownership which goes much beyond government control.

Our cover story on the mahseer is all about the travails of India's super fish and how it has been saved from extinction by opening up stretches of the Cauvery to sport fishing. Anglers find the mighty mahseer a great challenge. They have for several years now come from all over the world to the banks of the Cauvery in Karnataka to live in camps and catch the mahseer but also to be careful enough to put the fish back into the river.

The result is that the mahseer has gone from being threatened to now being available in plentiful in these parts. The money earned from the anglers and others who would come to savour the joys of eco-tourism was used to turn former poachers into guides and to feed the fish and maintain the banks of the river.

However, sport fishing along the Cauvery has recently been stopped because some of the camps were found to be within the sanctuary located there. A question mark now hangs over the future of the mahseer. The camps as long as they were around ensured that the super fish wasn't plundered. Now old-fashioned policing will have to deliver the same results.

It is well established that conservation works when people earn from their natural resources and therefore have a robust interest in perpetuating them. In the case of the mahseer, poachers became tour guides. Many other benefits accrued from eco-tourism. If there were downsides such as camps breaking rules they needed to be dealt with.

The mahseer's case is interesting because India's amazing biodiversity is subjected to stress daily. Saving it will require flexibility and imagination. There is need for recognition of local ownership and the advantages of community management. This is as relevant to the mahseer as it is to bee-keeping or propagating medicinal plants or banking traditional seeds.

For sometime now the Indian law on biodiversity has existed only on paper. The problem it seems is the inability to truly involve local people and make them beneficiaries of the natural wealth they have traditionally been so good at preserving.

Both in terms of conservation and economic development this is an opportunity missed. Communities which can assert their commercial rights over their natural resources have a lot to gain from the world's interest in India.

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LETTERS



Microfinance

Microfinance is being increasingly seen as a major development tool. Its promise to help the poor by providing financial services is seen as the major reason for its support. Nevertheless, micro finance's effectiveness in actual poverty reduction is not yet clear and therefore it generates some unresolved ethical questions.

These become even more prominent in the process of commercialization. The impact on poverty is usually measured in financial terms.

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Microfinance is one of the most important tools for development. It has been misused because of the failure of public sector banks in reaching out to the poor.

MFIs are there because the public sector banks are not there. The beneficiaries are well aware of the interest rates of MFIs but they do not have any option. Banks have to be proactive and user-friendly to release the SHGs from the clutches of MFIs.

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The most difficult aspect of microfinance is that debts can become public knowledge in the community.

razia121@aol.com

Anything claiming to help the poor, but works for profit, is a sham. These microfinance companies get cheap funds, why should they use this money for profit? They must just cut out the operating expenses and pass the rest on to the poor. When you focus on profits, you don't focus on helping the poor! As simple as that!

vikas@isec.co.in

Almost everywhere around the world stock markets have been falling due to things like banks losing money in subprime loans. But not everyone is losing money. The microfinance industry is developing and more traditional financial institutions are opening their eyes to microfinance because they are starting to see huge opportunities. Investing in microfinance and helping people start businesses means profits for both the lender and borrower. It is a stable and secure investment since the repayment rates are on an average close to 100 per cent.

paul@aol.com

Improvement in disclosures is required to make the microfinance sector more accountable. Improved corporate governance would enable a more transparent and regulated sector. It would also create more faith in customers, regulators and competitors.

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It seems to me that many top industrialists who take the moral high ground appear to be in micro-financing this days.

aarthy.thyagarajan@infosys.com

A clarification

Vijay Mahajan writes in to say that there is one inaccuracy and one com-

ment which he regrets in his interview on the microfinance sector published in the November issue of *Civil Society*:

"My interview has come out well, but there is one inaccuracy and one regret I have. The inaccuracy is that the point about disgorgement (being forced to pay back ill-gotten earnings) was not only about Suresh Gurumani. I meant it to apply pari passu to Vikram Akula and other shareholders of SKS, and, subject to an investigation proving any wrongdoing, to Padmaja Reddy and the shareholders of Spandana and to Udaia Kumar and the shareholders of SHARE.

My regret is that I made a mention of Mr Rosaiah's caste. In principle, I am against casteism and I should not have made this comment even if to prove my point. I apologise for this thoughtless remark."

Vijay Mahajan, Hyderabad

Prabhat Khabar

Its great to read about the success of *Prabhat Khabar*. This shows that a regional newspaper with quality in content can take on heavy weights in the media. Congratulations to *Prabhat Khabar* and its team.

vijay2010@rediffmail.com

The picture of Harivansh at his press is brilliant. Where do you see editors in the press anymore?

Anupam, New Delhi

CSR diktat

The article 'CSR diktat won't work' by V Ravichandar in your November issue raises a very vital and explosive question – whether mandatory CSR initiatives by corporates might be leveraged by future state governments to shirk their own responsibilities and outsource them to the private sector. Indeed, thought-provoking!

On another note, may I request you to make articles like this shareable with non-subscribers as well since the issues *Civil Society* writes about need a much broader forum. The article on Lafarge's revocation of environmental clearance is one such piece. Stakeholders, especially conscientious vendors, need to know how the cement giant is flouting environmental laws. Can we look forward to a 'share' link soon on your website, please?

Amit Kumar Bose, Kolkata

Companies need to do much more

I have a serious difference of opinion with V Ravichandar's 'CSR diktat won't work.'

The corporate sector gets large freebies from the government in terms of tax holidays, revenue foregone, subsidies, incentives, etc. In an analysis of the 2010 Union Budget, P Sainath, pointed out that the government gifted over \$ 109 billion in write-offs, direct and indirect. The revenue foregone in this budget in direct tax concessions to corporate taxpayers is close to over Rs 17 billion. This means that in direct tax freebies alone the corporate sector has had the equivalent of some 15 'farm loan waivers' since 1991.

One farm loan waiver has everyone up in arms. Then, revenue foregone on excise duty in the 2010 Budget is over \$37 billion, customs duty \$54 billion. Together with more than \$ 17 billion in direct write-offs, the total nears \$ 109 billion.

This alone is reason enough to ensure that a two to five per cent CSR diktat at the very minimum gets underway soonest. The public sector has a guideline already in place with some proactive work done by Bhaskar Bhattacharjee.

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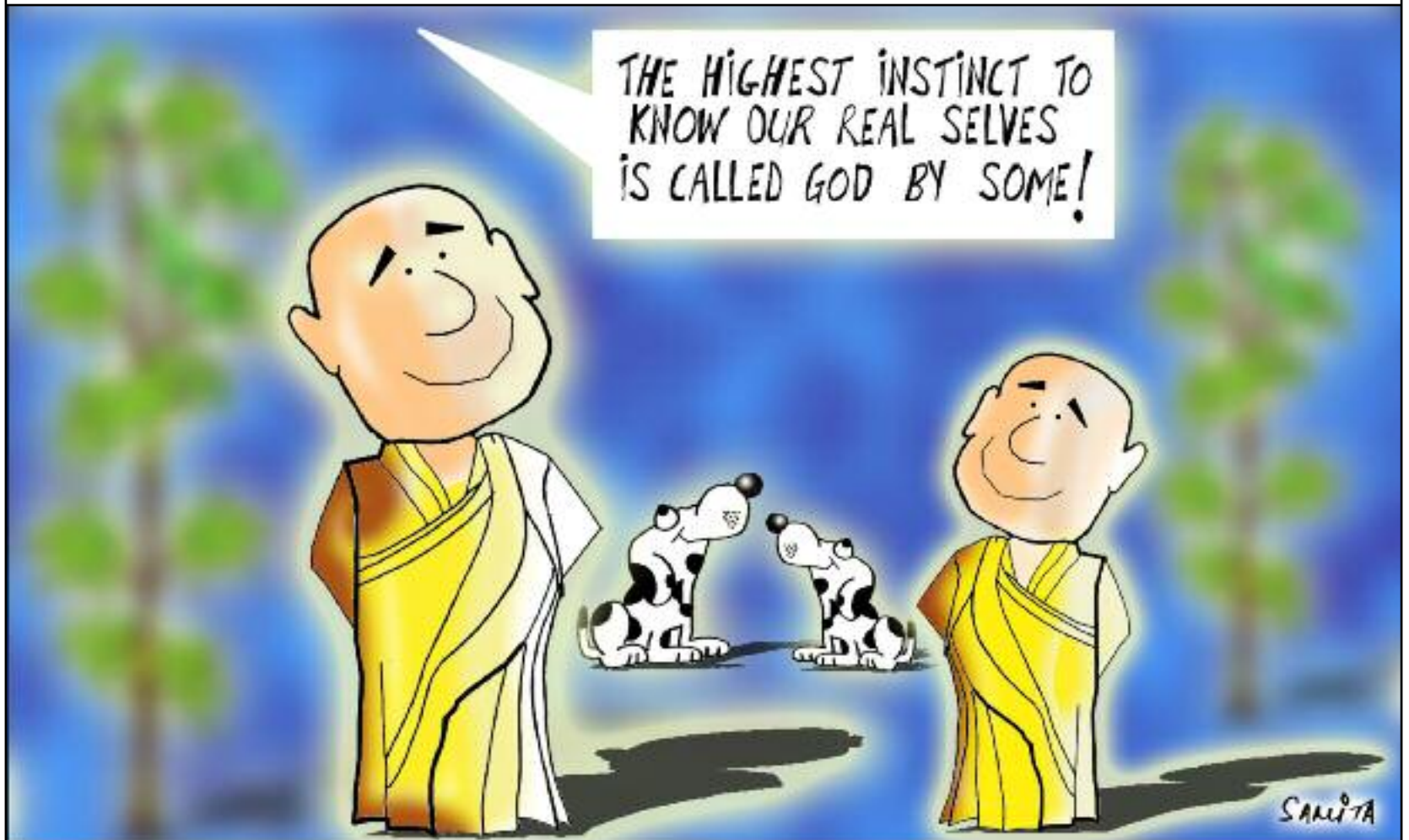
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READ US. WE READ YOU.

IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



Secretary, Public Enterprises.

Consider also that corporates annually spend lavishly on advertising and public relations. The IT sector enjoyed a 10-year tax holiday and is asking for extensions. Isn't it time the corporate sector gave back? What it has done so far is mere tokenism and this has given CSR the sorry reputation it has earned!

It is no secret that the major role played by industry associations is to lobby for themselves. Look who is opposing the progressive Mines Act that aims at sharing no less than 26 per cent with local communities. Industry has also not hesitated to ask for CSR credits.

The India@75 programme and the City Connect programme on urbanization are flawed because they completely ignore 600,000 villages and instead concentrate on creating world class cities. India's villages do not have basic electricity, potable water or functioning Primary Health Centres (PHCs). A recent article pointed out that rural India pays a high cost to access private health care for which it has to travel to cities.

The privatisation of health care has eroded the public health care system in the country. And yet the

Abhay Bhanga or Amtes who have done exemplary rural healthcare work do not ever get to accompany the Prime Minister on an official trip while representatives of private hospitals do. It is always the corporate class that is heard and wooed.

It is time to draw some comparisons between the non-profit and for-profit sectors and their contributions to nation-building. India's diverse civil society has rendered pathbreaking and innovative services to the nation, yet a Dr Binayak Sen gets put in jail.

It is time that the non-profit sector stood up and got counted and recognized for its services. At every stage despite a harsh FCRA and tax regime it is the vibrant civil society sector that does India proud and distinguishes it along with our democracy, from China. If rural India fails, the rest of India will crumble too. Already an agrarian and water crisis stare us in the face, malnutrition and hunger stalk our countryside and cities and we slip further down the human development index.

It is time CII and FICCI decided to dedicate a session or two on how to tackle the growing divide between India and Bharat, address the water

crisis, affirmative action, and provide strategies to tackle the human development index as part of its inclusion agenda. It has been rightly said: "nothing can succeed in a social environment that fails" – not even business.

Without the CSR diktat even the meager one per cent that a few companies have voluntarily allocated will not flow to the priorities in the country that need urgent support. ONGC recently pledged ₹ 16 crores in a long term vision to provide mobile health services in the north-east. This is a welcome step.

Of course it is not only funds but strategies that need to be channelised to tackle hunger, malnutrition, farmers suicides and homelessness seriously. Will Corporate India sit up and take notice?

Amita Joseph,
Director, Business and Community Foundation

Not diktat but partnerships

V Ravichandrar replies to **Amita Joseph**: My limited point in the article was that Government diktats on CSR spending will not achieve the desired objectives. It will lead to definitional issues on what constitutes

CSR and firms resorting to fudge. I am all for companies doing social good in excess of the suggested two per cent of profits mandate – the nuanced point I was making that there is greater chance of this happening if there is an interest alignment with business goals. Companies need to see that investing in the greater social good makes for better business profitability and it is in that context I chose the example of getting involved with government in improving quality of life for all citizens (particularly the urban poor). This should become as important as thinking about talent pool, retention issues, processes, etc.

It was never my case that rural is unimportant or can be ignored. The problems in the country are vast and we need all hands on deck to work in areas that ignite individual and group passion. Each of us can choose areas where we can make a positive difference.

Belittling those who choose to work in the urban space or damning all corporates with broad villainous brush strokes does not help anyone's cause.

V Ravichandrar
Chairman, Feedback Consulting

Homeless welcome Aadhar,

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



Ruby with her daughter
Civil Society News
New Delhi



Ansari Razzak Ali

ACROSS the road from the Oberoi and the Aman, two of Delhi's most expensive hotels, people are checking into a night shelter called Apna Ghar.

They turn up in a dribble, picking their way through the surrounding slum and climbing a dingy staircase to a large stark hall on the first floor.

Night shelters are dreary places and this one is no exception. It is an extension of the mean world of the streets. There is little to look forward to.

But these days there is a buzz at Apna Ghar. It is about Aadhar, a system of personal identification which involves a unique number and a card with photograph.

Some 250 people at Apna Ghar and living in nearby shanties and parks have been given Aadhar numbers and cards. Another 200 will get their numbers soon.

Thanks to this identity, many of them now also have zero-balance bank accounts with the Corporation Bank branch at Lajpat Nagar.

For these homeless people, the number, card and bank account are emblems of a status they never imagined could have been theirs. Long accustomed to being pushed around and harassed by the police, the Aadhar identity now serves as the government's acceptance of their existence.

Aadhar has been made possible by the Unique Identification Authority of India whose chairman is Nandan Nilekani. He is one of the founders of the information technology company, Infosys, and was its managing director before he shifted to government to take up this project.

The Aadhar number involves taking images of the fingerprints and the iris of a person. The name, age and address are also recorded. In the case of



Sheikh Kamal



Adil Khan

For these homeless people, the number, card and bank account are emblems of a status they never imagined could have been theirs. They are accustomed to being harassed.

the homeless the address of the NGO running the night shelter is given. This information is stored electronically on computers and made available universally through the Internet.

There are some 30,000 homeless people identified in Delhi who will be given the Aadhar number. But the problem of identification relates to millions of people who may not technically be homeless but don't have papers to prove their identities.

Across India more than 500 million people are not part of the banking system because of problems related to identity.

Aadhar, with its use of information technology, is regarded by the government as a quick and efficient

bank accounts

way of establishing identities on such a large scale. It is seen as a tool for inclusion, particularly for bringing more people into the formal banking system.

Serious concerns: However, several serious concerns have been raised about Aadhar. Several leaders in the social sector feel it is too intrusive. There are fears that it will be misused and lead to civil rights violations. Others find it too costly as a nationwide initiative.

There is criticism that the Manmohan Singh government has not been transparent and needed to have public debate before launching Aadhar. The choice of Nilekani is also questioned.

For many the jury is still out on whether the system will work at all. There are doubts whether it is feasible to store hundreds of millions of identities in a technologically foolproof way.

Homeless feel empowered: But at Apna Ghar on the floor of the night shelter, homeless people are happy to show their identification cards with their Aadhar numbers.

They are also excited about having bank accounts. The Aadhar number has made it possible. Earlier they didn't have the identification

papers the bank would ask for.

It is just weeks since the accounts were opened. So, there is some hesitation in going to the nearby Lajpat Nagar branch of the Corporation Bank.

But people are already dreaming of what they can do. Many of them have decided that what they need are ATM cards so that, being homeless and footloose, they can access their money as and when they need it.

The shelter is run by the Society for the Promotion of Youth and Masses (SPYM). But before this NGO took charge it was run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD).

On 2 October, on the eve of the Commonwealth Games, Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit presided over a ceremony at the Apna Ghar night shelter to give away 40 Aadhar numbers.

Since then the demand for the number has kept growing. An Aadhar counter opened at the shelter makes it simple to register. Young computer oper-



ators in yellow sweat shirts with the Aadhar logo work in shifts, collecting personal data and transferring it online. The process takes about 20 minutes. (See pictures on next page)

Ansari Razzak Ali says he came to Delhi from Mumbai three years ago after a rift with his family. He is 51 and used to work on a small loom somewhere near Mumbai. In Delhi he lost all his papers, he says. But now he has an Aadhar number and card and a bank account too.

Asked how he came to apply for the Aadhar number, he says SPYM had done a survey three months or so earlier and taken pictures of the regulars at the shelter saying they would be given identity cards and numbers.

Did it worry them that their details were being taken? Ali says there was a lot of talk at that time that the purpose of the pictures and collection of personal information was to throw them out of Delhi. But SPYM assured them that the ID would be good for them and save them from harassment. "They said to us that the police take us away and ask us questions. But with an ID we would be safe."

Asked if he was afraid of giving his personal details to the government, Ali says, "People on the street

Continued on next page

'The poor will clutch at any form of official identity'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

DUNU Roy leads the Hazards Centre, a Delhi-based organisation which works to empower the urban poor. Roy has valuable insights on questions of rights and access. He is a champion of the unorganised sector and seeks recognition for the contribution it makes to Indian cities. Here he discusses Aadhar, saying it is not enough.

You have been critical of Aadhar? What is wrong with it?

First of all there is a class element involved. The lower classes are desperately in search of an official identity. The government does not recognise their existence and neither is there a political lobby to speak for them on this account.

If the government offers any kind of identity, they will take it. But Aadhar is a poor option. Its primary weakness is that it does not offer citizenship. So, what good is it? It is just a number.

Now the middle and upper classes don't need an Aadhar number. They have driving licences and passports and so on.

But many in the middle and upper classes are upset because Aadhar involves the collec-

tion of personal data which will be passed on and shared among arms of the government.

What worries them is the integration of data. How do you ensure confidentiality so that other institutions and private players don't get hold of personal data?

Are the upper classes worried only about themselves or about the civil rights of the poor being violated?

They speak in the name of the poor because they need a constituency. But they are really speaking for themselves.

Homeless people we have been speaking to are happy to have the Aadhar number. They have been able to open bank accounts, which is so difficult to do in this country. Isn't this an important step towards financial inclusion?

It is an excellent step forward. But much more needs to be done to give them access to mean-



Dunu Roy

ingful finance and allow them to access the banking system.

It is necessary to revive schemes like the Group Guarantee Scheme so that the credit needs of the poor are met.

If you give the poor a number and a card, they will creatively use it to assert themselves, but we have to go much beyond that to empower them.

What would you consider to be a better alternative to Aadhar?

I would say change the citizenship law so that in addition to residence, birth and naturalisation, work is also recognised.

Working and contributing to the economy entitles one to citizenship. It is part of the contract between civil society and government.

In our cities 60 per cent of the people are poor. But they are productive and make a contribution in terms of goods and services. They deserve legal recognition. Aadhar is a very poor substitute.

Continued from previous page

as it is have nothing. They are always harassed. What have they got to lose?" he asks. "At least this number gives me an identity. I can show it."

"Sheila Dikshit came here on October 2, a day before the Commonwealth Games, and gave us her personal assurance that no one would be harassed. We were convinced and it is a fact that no one here has been harassed," says Ali.

Ali works as a daily wage labourer in the city. The Aadhar identity makes it easier for him to



A woman at the Aadhar booth has her iris scanned

get work, he says. "People look at the card and take me."

Ruby is 24 and from Bihar. She lives in a shack in the park nearby. She works as a maid in homes in Nizamuddin. She has two daughters aged four and five. There is no father.

Ruby has given her particulars for an Aadhar card and is waiting to get it. Asked what is the first thing she will do when she gets her identification, she says she will open a bank account.

"I want to open a bank account and put money in it for my two girls," she says.

Asked if she had tried to open a bank account earlier, she replied: "I tried earlier but they asked for proof. I had no papers, no proof."

Was she worried about disclosing her personal details to the government? "I live in the park nearby. There is no one to protect people like me. The police harass us. Take us away. We have no security as it is. So, for me an identity is a good thing. I don't mind giving my details because I have nothing to fear."

Adil Khan is 29 and from Kishanganj in Bihar. He has some kind of homestead there and has been moving about the country. He has spent time in Bangalore.

Khan has an Aadhar identity and says he had heard about similar identity cards being given out in Bangalore. So, he was familiar with the idea and had no hesitation in applying for the Aadhar identity.

He has a bank account too now thanks to

Aadhar. But then it is not as though he has a lot of money to put into the bank. A day's wages could be ₹ 200 or ₹ 250 and he doesn't find work every day.

Khan spends 11 months of the year in Delhi. It is not an easy life. He doesn't always sleep in the night shelter and sometimes prefers to be under a tree in the park.

Sheikh Badal is more organised. He is 36. He wears a clean red shirt and holds onto a medium-sized bag. He is from the North 24-Parganas in West Bengal where he has parents and a wife.

He comes to Delhi because it is easier to earn here. There is nothing much in West Bengal. Like the others he does odd jobs, often as a labourer.

He has managed to build a surplus of ₹ 6,000, which he carries with him in his bag. Now that he has an Aadhar number and an account he will be able to put his money into the bank.

Like the others, he hasn't begun visiting the bank as yet. But he looks forward to using the account and putting an end to the uncertainties associated with carrying his meagre savings with him.

"They should give us ATM cards," he says. "That will make it easier for us to access our accounts."

Others listening into the conversation agree. Everyone seems to know what an ATM card is though they have never operated bank accounts.

There is much approval of Sheikh Badal's suggestion. It is as though the ATM represents another level in empowerment and access.

Manoj, who is on duty to manage the shelter on the night we are there, says the demand for Aadhar identities has grown rapidly. He has a BSc in physics from a college in Bihar.

Manoj has been working with the homeless for sometime now. "These are people who have nothing. An identity is a big thing for them. I don't see how it can do them any harm when they are so badly off."

"With an identity it is more difficult for homeless people to be denied their rights. The police can't just pick them up as they do now. If someone dies or meets with an accident it is possible to know and, where a family exists, inform them."

Near about 30 per cent of Delhi's population lives in slums, mostly without identification. They aren't all homeless in the strict sense of the term. But in the absence of a formal government-recognised identity they are denied their rights as citizens.



Nitish Kumar at an election rally in Bihar

How Nitish

Harivansh
Patna

IN his five years as Chief Minister, Nitish Kumar has many achievements to his credit thanks to the sincerity with which he has governed.

He has also second guessed the mood of the nation by highlighting corruption and promising to eliminate it. His key slogan in the recent Assembly elections has been, 'Abki bari bhrashtachari' or 'This time we will deal with corruption.'

The question now is whether Nitish Kumar has not only changed politics in Bihar forever, but also raised the bar for what is good governance nationally.

Undoubtedly the most important change that he has brought about is in the social equation in Bihar.

It is not without reason that his election rallies drew genuine crowds and the people who came were from among the poorest of the poor. This is an historic achievement. You could say that Bihar will never be the same again.

There was a time when Bihar's politics and administration was in the stranglehold of upper castes. The Mandal Report and its implementation saw a shift of power to the middle peasantry. But Nitish Kumar's tenure has succeeded in putting power in the hands of the most backward classes. In doing so he has achieved a radical sociological change which will be difficult to reverse.

Nitish Kumar's other big achievement has been to



has given Bihar a new future

restore law and order. Just think about it. An entire Assembly election has been conducted in Bihar without the usual violence and capturing of polling booths which have been the hallmark of elections in the state. It was first in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections that polling was by and large peaceful except for some minor incidents. But the recent Assembly elections show an even greater improvement and the strengthening of the administrative machinery in Bihar.

Before Nitish Kumar became Chief Minister in 2005, the law and order situation in Bihar's cities, particularly Patna was so poor that citizens wouldn't venture out at night. There were kidnappings every other day.

In five years, Nitish Kumar has dealt with the situation with a firm hand and irrespective of political considerations. Troublemakers have not been spared and the police have been given freedom to act. Some 48,000 offenders have been tried in fast-track courts and punished between 2006 and 2010.

It is also five years now since Nitish Kumar has been focussed on fighting corruption in the government. Four years ago he enacted a law to deal with corruption and sent it to Delhi for the Central government's approval.

The law languished in Delhi because the Congress did not want to give Nitish Kumar the



Nitish Kumar's tenure has succeeded in putting power in the hands of the most backward classes. He has achieved a radical sociological change which will be difficult to reverse.

credit for being the first to pass a law to fight corruption.

Corruption today is a major public concern across the country. But it was the Bihar government under Nitish Kumar which led the way in highlighting corruption and seeking to deal with it.

Much of what he has said and done in relation to fighting corruption has captured the public imagination and raised expectations. Some of it may be dismissed as demagoguery but his message has gone home. For instance, he has promised to set up schools in the fancy houses built by corrupt bureaucrats in Bihar.

People in Bihar blame their poor development on corruption and the nexus between politicians, bureaucrats and business interests. The issue of corruption has been raised from time to time. In 1974, the JP-led campaign against corruption in public life began in Bihar and Nitish Kumar at that time was one of its footsoldiers.

By drafting a law during his first tenure as chief minister and making clean governance a promise, Nitish Kumar has made it clear that corruption will be the focus of his administration in a second term.

He has also introduced a new work ethic in the state government by himself working long hours

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

and clearing files within the day. He has surrounded himself with efficient and honest officers, giving them the freedom to take decisions and implement orders.

In Bihar, politics has invariably been a family affair. Wives, daughters, sons, brothers-in-law have dominated political parties, often at the cost of better talent. This is true of Lalu Prasad, Ramvilas Paswan and Rahul Gandhi and the Congress.

The commitment of Bihar politicians has invariably been first to their family members, then to their cronies and finally to the people of the state.

Nitish Kumar has done it differently. As Chief Minister, he hasn't given tickets to relatives and associates. He has kept all of them at arm's length. He has demonstrated that it is necessary to put the state's interests above personal interests.

Electricity reached his village five years ago and it has seen many improvements. But his own house in the village is as it used to be – made of mud and cow dung and without electricity. It consists of three rooms. When people say to him to at least get his house remade, his reply is: "*Pehle Bihar banayenge, phir apna ghar dekhenge*" or "Let's first remake Bihar and then I will attend to my house."

Slogans aside, growing public sector investment in the state has been a reality under him. When he came to office in 2005, Bihar's Plan size was ₹ 4,490 crores. Now it is ₹ 20,000 crores. Some ₹ 70,000 crores have been invested in the state in the past five years.

His government told the 13th Finance Commission that Bihar needed ₹ 380,000 crores in investments between 2010 and 2015 to catch up with the rest of the country. The commission has sanctioned only ₹ 172,944 crores.

A year ago Bihar's growth rate of 11 per cent was the topic of discussion. It was just behind Gujarat which is the number one state in the country in terms of growth.

But Nitish Kumar's vision goes beyond growth figures because no matter how fast Bihar may grow it is unlikely to catch up with the more prosperous states in India. It has to shake off a very long history of neglect.

His approach has therefore been to rebuild Bihar from within and strengthen the processes and institutions which would be able to sustain a higher growth trajectory and ensure that the benefits reach ordinary people.

He has insisted on senior bureaucrats going out and meeting the people to hear from them what their problems are. The result has been a level of interaction between government and people that Bihar has never witnessed before.

Such interactions provide all kinds of insights into what needs to be done. They are an opportunity to build public confidence.

Nitish Kumar's public hearings have created all kinds of opportunities to govern Bihar better. For instance, one of the complaints to the government was that graveyards were a source of communal tension because they did not have clearly defined boundaries.

The government didn't take the complaint lightly. It surveyed graveyards and spent ₹ 360 crores on building boundary walls for them.

There are other such examples as Nitish Kumar has gone from the micro to the macro and vice versa. The result is that Bihar now exists at a threshold which defines the priorities and aspirations of the next five years after these elections.

Indian or South

A workshop explores democracy



Dr Meenakshi Gopinath

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

EVERY nation in South Asia today describes itself as a democracy. Imperfections abound, but the deepening of democracy is a process which is being explored. And the desire for more freedom has implications for peace-building and resolution of conflicts in South Asia.

To explore the relationship between democracy and peace-building, a workshop for South Asian youth leaders and university students was held in Delhi. It was organised by Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP), an initiative of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of the Dalai Lama in collaboration with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict.

Delegates from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and other nations from South Asia discussed how peace-building could strengthen democracy, particularly local-level governance. It became apparent during discussions that it was important to move beyond bilateral dialogue to diverse dialogues to foster sustainable peace.

WISCOMP was founded by Dr Meenakshi Gopinath in 1999 to work at the confluence of

peace-building, conflict transformation and security studies from a gender perspective. She now serves as honorary director.

Dr Gopinath is also Principal of Lady Shri Ram College for Women under Delhi University. She was the first woman member on the National Security Advisory Board. She is a member of the Neemrana Peace Initiative, Dostaana-e-Kashmir, and the Pakistan India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy. She is also the author of *Pakistan in Transition*.

Civil Society spoke to Dr Gopinath after the WISCOMP workshop concluded.

What were the interesting debates that came up during the workshop?

Young people at the workshop expressed the need to put in place, within the democratic framework, processes and structures which could specifically transform conflict. The tools and methods of peace-building in South Asia are still at a very, very nascent stage. We continue to import much of that vocabulary from the West. While a great deal of it is very useful, it is important for us to move beyond the Western-centric understanding of conflict, its resolution and then transformation. The overwhelming sentiment at the meeting was the need to craft a peace-building vocabulary spe-

Asian?

and peace

cific to South Asia.

We were locating this largely within the trajectory of democratic experiments within our regions. Since 2008, there have been many democratic transitions in the Maldives, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Nepal. It's not about electoral politics but getting more voices in, of not just having a top-down approach. This was the thrust of the conversation. What emerged is the amazing level of intellectual sophistication. There was a very large delegation from Afghanistan, people from Sri Lanka and there was a real desire to look at examining our identities in a constructive sort of way. Can there be a South Asian identity? If so, can we retain our national identity? Many such questions came up.

You emphasised moving away from Western notions of peace building. What are the differences in perception?

They take a lot of democratic structures for granted. Their's is a general consensus building approach where a liberal democracy is taken for granted. That is a contested concept in India and in South Asia.

Here the question is what Beena Agrawal calls "participatory exclusion." We have all the formal processes of democracy like electoral processes. But, there are serious exclusions here on the fault lines of caste, class, religion and gender. We have to begin by fixing our democratic processes – to break the silence on that, to push the envelope. When the concept of democracy is itself contested and conflicted, things change. The process becomes much more dynamic.

But can peace be taught? What are the skills the programme aimed at inculcating?

There are some skills that need to be learnt. There is also a great deal of writing on these subjects. There are theoreticians on conflict transformation one must read. One skill that we South Asians must re-learn is active listening. Especially we in India love to talk, to debate. You also have to be able to listen in a particular way if you want to build peace. But, more than skill-building, the workshop is about a shift in perspective.

Do you worry India has been unable to set benchmarks of peace-building with our neighbours?

If you look at security as primarily people-centric security, not militaristic, jingoistic security, it's in India's strategic interest to have democracy working within and in the region. For that, we have to get out of our paternalistic approach. We are large so we will naturally trigger insecurity. We need to accept that. We must have certain humility when we deal with our region.

We need to show that we can learn from them too. And there is a lot to learn – the NGO movement in Bangladesh, environmental awareness in the Maldives. We should encourage and engineer true partnerships. That will bring a different approach to peace-building. Peace-building is not about sitting at a table. We need to have a multi-constituency, multi-track approach. We need to shift from dialogues to multiple interchanges. I feel optimistic about the vibrancy of voices. Of course, there are democratic deficiencies. But, I think we are close to achieving a critical mass. Things will change here.

At the workshop there was a great deal of discussion about India's democracy. There were very candid conversations about the warts and benefits of our democracy. The one thing we all need to do together is to bridge the level of contestation within our democracy. We need to seed the idea that we can agree to disagree. We need to find common ground.

In your interaction with young leaders from across South Asia are you often struck by similarity of vision? Are the cultural understandings huge?

We have been working for 10 years on this. We

started with an India and Pakistan dialogue. The one thing we figured very early on is that to say we are all one is wrong. They are a different country and they are proud of that like we are of being Indian. For any peace-building movement it's very important to recognise who we are. But yes we need to delve into our histories to see if there are opportunities or possibilities to work together. There is a sense that somehow South Asia is larger than the sum of its parts. It's a very nascent sentiment.

While at one level there is suspicion of India's aspirations, there is also appreciation of India's newly acquired status. And our neighbours understand that this has spinoffs for the region. That, I think, takes over the negative sentiments. In India, we need to create and develop enough confidence so that our neighbours see a possibility for themselves in the region. It's about figuring out how we can share the joy of collective growth.

Endeavours like strengthening democratic practices and building youth participation are indefinable tasks with difficult measures of success. How do you assess impact?

Peace work is very slow. It's not very dramatic. There has to be slow, consistent work. The personal transformation of the peace worker is very important. You can't look at it as a project with a definite goal. The process of personal transformation and impact has to be constantly reflected. We always go back to the drawing board to examine if we pitched each session right. There are heartbreaks but there are also great highs. When you see two people who had been in a conflicted relationship being able to talk to each other, it is very heartening. We also follow up. For example, we have set up a peace circle for South Asian students living here that will meet once a week.

Has there been any crucial learning from the workshop for you?

One of the things that came out was revisiting concepts of secularism and communalism. There is need for greater clarification on this. We cannot have a purely antiseptic approach to religion in this part of the world. Is it possible to think of purely secular models of conflict transformation?



The forgotten eyewitness to Gandhi's killing

Civil Society News
New Delhi

SIXTY-two years ago, a young programme officer of All India Radio (AIR) was making last-minute checks on his equipment on the lawns of Birla House when three shots ended the life of Mahatma Gandhi.

Krishan Dev Madan, then just 24, had been assigned the task of recording Gandhi's speeches made after his daily prayer meeting. Till the assassination shook the world, 30 January, 1948, was yet another day for Madan whose job it was to ensure that Gandhi's voice was transmitted via telephone lines to the studios of AIR where the speech would be recorded and later broadcast.

But as dusk settled on Birla House and Madan vetted his arrangements and watched Gandhi approach the spot from where he always spoke, history was rewritten. Madan became eyewitness to the murder and what followed. He saw Mountbatten and Nehru arrive and it was on the equipment that he had set up for Gandhi's speech that Nehru's famous emotional outpouring, "The light has gone out of our lives..." was broadcast live by AIR.

Assignment over, Madan returned to the AIR studios and resumed his anonymous life as a programme officer. And he remained that way, retiring from government service, doing some travel writing and slipping into old age with its attendant health problems.

Then on 4 October this year a chance meeting with Anupam Mishra of the Gandhi Peace Foundation put the spotlight on Madan as a forgotten eyewitness to Gandhi's killing.

Mishra found a very old man hobbling into the US Ambassador, Timothy Roemer's residence to attend an event to mark Gandhi's birth anniversary. Mishra gave him a helping hand and led him to a chair.

As they talked, Mishra revealed that he worked for the Gandhi Peace Foundation. Madan said that he had been an eyewitness to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

Mishra was taken by surprise because he had never heard of Madan. He was also not known to the many institutions set up in Gandhi's name.

It was also by coincidence that Madan came to be on the US Ambassador's guest list. He had found himself seated next to the Ambassador and his wife at a prayer meeting at Gandhi Smriti. As they had got talking, Roemer and his wife learnt that Madan was an eyewitness to the assassination. They exchanged cards and the invitation to the Ambassador's residence followed.

Mishra decided not to let Madan slip back into obscurity. He spoke to fellow Gandhians and on 10 November Madan was invited to Gandhi Smriti to recount the events on the day Gandhi was killed.

Wireless microphone in hand, Madan, who is spirited but old and infirm with breathing problems, moved across the lawn of Gandhi Smriti to point out where he had been making final checks on his equipment and how he had seen Gandhi walking down the pergola-covered garden path.

As Gandhi took two steps up from the path on to the raised lawn, the first of the shots were fired. Madan mistook this for a firecracker. But with the second shot he realised what had happened. As he turned he saw the third shot being fired.

"I saw the man pulling the trigger for the third time. In a moment



Krishan Dev Madan

Gandhi fell. Those nearest him knelt down and formed a ring around the fallen body. As legend unfolded later the last words, it was said, to emanate from Gandhi's lips as he fell down were 'He Ram!'"

Madan says "from the place I was positioned at the moment" he did not hear these. In fact he says it seems to him that given the speed with which three bullets were pumped into Gandhi it is unlikely that he uttered the words 'He Ram!'"

He also saw a tall strong man with a flowing beard pick up Gandhi's body in his arms and carry it indoors. Madan says he could never find this man again and he remains a mysterious figure though he was undoubtedly one of the Gandhi followers present daily at the prayer meetings and speeches at Birla House.

As the crowd surged behind Gandhi's body into the house, he noticed someone had placed a circle of twigs and lit a candle at the spot of the killing.

The radio journalist in Madan saw all this in one sweep. But there was no time to waste. He had to attend to his equipment, call the AIR studio and tell his bosses that Gandhi had been killed.

In minutes, Mountbatten, Nehru, Maulana Azad, Sardar Patel and others arrived at Birla House.

Madan recalls how Nehru spoke and wept unabashedly and the crowds which had gathered wept with him.

In the weeks that he recorded Gandhi's evening speeches, Madan came in close contact with him. Though he didn't begin as a devotee it seems he soon became one.

Gandhi's greatness was in his simplicity. When Madan faced a problem with having to edit Gandhi's speeches because they went beyond 30 minutes, Gandhi told him to just raise his finger when he wanted him to stop.

Thereafter, as soon as Madan would raise his finger, Gandhi would stop speaking with words to the effect, 'For now this is enough'. All Gandhi's speeches in the archives end like this.

No green gold for rural India

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Nagoya Protocol of 30 October drawn up at the 10th Conference of Parties (COP-10) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in Japan has been hailed as historic. It spells out how benefits from genetic resources will be shared with communities.

To discuss the Nagoya Protocol and link it to grassroots reality in India, a meeting was organised in Delhi by Kalpavriksh, Panos and Grain on 9 November. It was attended by activists, researchers, representatives of international agencies and the Indian government.

For some 18 years developing countries have been negotiating for an Access and Benefit Sharing agreement. The pharmaceutical and cosmetics industries make big profits from exploiting genetic resources and the traditional knowledge of communities in the South. In the past substances like turmeric, neem and basmati have been subjected to patents. Around 2000 international patents are applied for every year based on Indian plants.

The CBD in 1992 recognised the rights of countries over their genetic resources. But dealing with bio-piracy or putting in place access and benefit sharing systems requires international consensus and not just national legislation.

Activists say the Nagoya Protocol is remarkably ambiguous. It is vague on the inclusion of derivatives, compliance mechanisms and the international regulation of publicly available traditional knowledge. To avail of benefits a country will need to catalogue all its genetic resources to prove its origin and claim international property rights. A lot has been left to national legislation.

Shalini Bhutani of Grain said it was a myth that national governments were in a position to regulate bio-trade or prevent bio-piracy. Neither has access and benefit sharing generated wealth or development for communities so far, she said.

In 2002 India passed a Biological Diversity Act. A National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) was set up to implement it. This law streamlines procedures to access and transfer biological material for research, commercial use or for intellectual property rights (IPR). It is also meant to curb bio-piracy and help conservation.

Under the NBA there are State Biodiversity Boards and below them Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC) which are supposed to document local village biodiversity into a people's register.

Today, 25 states have State Biodiversity Boards, 33,000 BMCs have been formed and there are now 419 registers. Around 325 approvals have been granted by the NBA but details of these applications are missing on the NBA website, said Kanchi Kohli, researcher with Kalpavriksh.

An approval for access to genetic resources is followed by an agreement laying down terms and conditions for use and benefit sharing. But no consultation with BMCs or in their absence, panchayats, has taken place, she said.

In two cases PepsiCo applied for a seaweed and Novozymes Biologicals for non pathogenic strains of *Bacillus* and *Pseudomonas* from the Kalakkad forest in Kerala to the NBA. But the NBA took only a measly five per cent royalty. No money has been given to any community because specific rules on benefit sharing are yet to be framed. Officials were in the dark about how much to ask for a product which would take time to fructify.

No money has been given to any community because specific rules on benefit sharing are yet to be framed. Officials were in the dark about how much to ask for.

'Potential' benefit could be overvalued or undervalued and working out benefits between suppliers and producers was difficult.

It is also unclear who will identify beneficiaries. They could be spread across villages, districts and even national boundaries. Knowledge holders too may not be in the same place as resources are. In a survey carried out in Nepal, Sikkim, Nagaland and Meghalaya, it was found that people shared similar knowledge of Ayurveda, Chinese pharmacopia and

the Unani systems of medicine. ICIMOD has been working on a regional approach but only India and Bhutan have biodiversity laws in place.

Prior informed consent was missing from the entire process, said Sagari Ramdass of Anthra in Andhra Pradesh. The word being used is 'consultation.' The Nagoya Protocol specifically says prior informed consent has to be sought from communities for use of their biological resources. The community should have the right to refuse.

The problem is of priorities and perceptions. The government wants the NBA to be richer so that money can be spent on village development and conservation. It wants villages to register their biological resources. And it wants to use genetic resources for 'public good,' pointed out Dr RS Rana.

Most applications to the NBA are from government organisations to create agricultural products that can boost farming. Genetic resources, like traditional seeds, are accessed from farmers for research. Activists say the government itself can be accused of biopiracy. The CSIR or ICAR would finally pass on the fruits of their research to the private sector.

So what was getting created was a new PPP: Panchayat-Public-Private-Partnership. Out of these the panchayat was the weakest link. Villages were more worried over their rights to *jal*, *jangal* and *jameen* rather than bio-piracy. Loss of biodiversity including animal wealth was taking place due to building of dams, roads, mining and these issues related to the pattern of development.

Continued on next page

Naga wisdom

NAGALAND is likely to emerge as a role model for access and benefit sharing of biodiversity. Ninety per cent of the state's forests are owned and managed by communities. Nagaland accepted the Biodiversity Act and set about framing its draft Nagaland Biodiversity Rules by involving its people. Discussions went on for two years, says Amba Jamir who was part of the committee which framed the rules. Traditional institutions said: we own the forests so we will decide.

Thousands of questionnaires were sent out to villages, women's groups, the church and students groups. Around 40 per cent were duly filled up and sent back.

There was unanimity that Articles 370 and 371 A of the Indian Constitution which recognise people's traditional rights should be strongly upheld and that the customs, traditions, institutions and knowledge of the Naga people must be respected.

Some highlights of the rules include:

- A specific definition of community

intellectual property rights since intellectual property law in India is individual.

- The principle of prior informed consent along with the processes by which this is to be reached.

- A new tier of District Biodiversity Management Committees which will incorporate all local bodies. The work plans of each level of committee have been carefully elaborated and their relationship with each other.

- The State Biodiversity Board will be autonomous. The chairman will have the rank of a minister and will need to be an expert in biodiversity.

- A tripartite agreement between the people, the state and the District Biodiversity Management Committee is envisaged for access and benefits.

- At the grassroots the Hoho councils will endorse that traditional knowledge belongs to a particular village or villages.

"The overarching objective has been to reduce conflict, respect traditional institutions and knowledge," explained Jamir. "The communities here have strong rights to their resources. Local laws on conservation are also pretty strong."

Forest rights in doldrums

Rakesh Agrawal

Rewa (Madhya Pradesh)

It is four years since the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Right to Forests) Act (FRA) was passed but its implementation is in tatters. "Getting it applied is proving to be a bigger challenge than getting it passed by Parliament," says Munni Lal, regional convener, National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPPFW), a national coalition of forest dependent people.

This was very apparent in Rewa district of Madhya Pradesh (MP) where the state government passed an order to implement the FRA in January 2008. Yet in two years, most Forest Rights Committees (FRCs) have been wrongly formed, more claims have been rejected than accepted and applicants have received a fraction of the land they asked for.

In most villages, the secretary of the FRC is either the gram panchayat *sarpanch* or the secretary or the president of some erstwhile Forest Conservation Committee established by the forest department in 2001 to implement joint forest management programmes. No wonder most claim forms have been rejected and those who got land received just a tiny patch.

In Madhya Pradesh 400,000 claim forms have been submitted and less than 75,000 have been accepted. Nobody knows the sum total of the land that has been approved. Around 925 forest villages can't file claims since the state government has not converted them into revenue villages.

In Durkum, an Adivasi village of 100 households in Rewa district, only 39 out of 96 people got some land. "I've done my duty wholeheartedly and submitted the claims," pleads Kamata Prasad Adivasi, president of the village's FRC. "It is the district committee that rejected the claims. We are helpless."

The problem appears to be that no administrative structure has been created at district level to implement the Act. "In Madhya Pradesh, the Tribal Welfare Department is the implementing authority. But this department does not have any structure below district level. So district officials are doing haphazard work and people don't have

any access to them," explains Siya Dulari of Birasa Munda Bhu Adhikar Manch, a group affiliated to the NFFPPFW which is working for the implementation of the FRA in Bundelshand region.

Almost all claim forms have been submitted due to the efforts of groups like the Birasa Munda Bhu Adhikar Manch. In Rewa district the manch submitted 5,500 claim forms out of which 1,424 were approved. But finally only 336 people actually got the paper confirming their land rights or the *adhikar patra*. And even those few received just a bit of land meant for a homestead, not a proper field to grow crops.

For instance, Dina Nath Kol, an Adivasi of Durkum village got just 0.12 ha of parched land. So too did Ram Kishan Kol and Moti Lal Kol. "We settled here in 1961. In five decades we did exemplary work growing and saving forests. Now look at the reward for this," rues a dismayed Dina Nath Kol.

But those who didn't get anything consider Dina Nath lucky. "My claim was rejected for no reason and now I've nowhere to go. At least those who got some land cannot be evicted," pointed out Lal Mani Kol. His claim was rejected on the ground that he had not submitted evidence of residing in this area since the past 75 years! But this 'evidence' is not required from tribals.

"Yes it's true we tribals don't have to submit such proof. But the authorities just don't bother to check whether the claimant is an Adivasi or a traditional forest dweller," explains Dulari.

In Thakara village, Rewa district, the same story is repeated. In this Adivasi village of 60 households just 11 people received *adhikar patras* and that too because the president of the village FRC is from this group. "Although the authorities rejected many forms we put pressure on them to allot more land than they generally do," claims Prem Lal Adivasi, president of the village's FRC. That seems to be true as most people have got about 0.25 ha.

Still, it is far less than what the Act allows.

Tribals here can be given 4 ha. This is certainly less than what they are already holding. "I have about 5 acre (about 2.2 ha). But my rights have been confirmed for just 0.25 ha. Do you think I'll give up the rest of the land that I am cultivating?" asks Buddhi Lal Adivasi.

Moreover only individual claims are being accepted. Community property is not being restored. "There has been loss of such property in our village by so-called development projects. We don't have any ponds or grazing fields. These

must be restored by the government to implement the Act properly," says Lalita Devi of Badach village. As the village is drought prone, the village needs a pond and a grazing ground.

The NFFPPFW has been agitating for the rights of forest people. On 6 and 7 November it rallied around 100 Adivasis from Rewa and Satana districts of MP and Chitrakoot and Manikpur districts of

Uttar Pradesh to demand their rights. Eight groups affiliated to the forum took part. "We'll force the government with our unity and power to fully implement this Act," swore Ram Naresh of Samaj Chetana Adhikar Manch.

On 13 and 14 November the NFFPPFW held another rally this time in Dehradun. Adivasis and forest dwellers from Uttarakhand and UP turned up in full strength.

"The Act has gone beyond its narrow aim of extending rights to forest dependent people. It is threatening big business as it was instrumental in cancelling the Vedanta Project at Niyamgiri Hills and the Posco project, both in Orissa. No wonder authorities are afraid and are doing their level best not to implement it. But we won't let them succeed," said Ashok Chaudhary, founder of NFFPPFW. Senior officials, though invited, were conspicuously absent.

"We are the real conservators of the forest, not the forest department," announced Noor Alam, a respected Van Gujjar leader. "We are ready for a fight to the finish. *Lado ya maro.*"

No administrative structure has been created at district level to implement the Forest Rights Act in MP.

Continued from previous page

Activists suggested convergence between the Forest Rights Act, PESA and the Biodiversity Act to strengthen rights, including user rights to minor forest produce. If villages don't themselves have access then how can they benefit? Most forests are under the forest department. So panchayats and gram sabhas need to be given more powers over forests and pastures.

Another viewpoint is to rescind the CBD and return to an 'open access' system. Priyadarsanan Dharma Rajan of Atree said since the CBD was signed there has not been any green gold rush to countries of the South. The demand for such

genetic resources by the North has been grossly exaggerated. The shift is to bio-prospect for micro organisms and marine forms and not plants.

In fact all countries including India have always replenished their genetic pool by taking from each other. Nearly 60 per cent of India's rice varieties have exotic progenitors. Among industrial crops 92 per cent are exotic. Therefore national genetic independence is a mirage. Its effect on food security could be drastic. Let's go back to treating biodiversity as a common heritage and use it for its ecological and scientific value, he said. Such a move would fit with India's ambitions of being a biotech leader.

But if genetic resources are 'common heritage' then why have the present patent/IPR regime? It is not only the plant but the traditional knowledge that goes with it which is of value. Not all knowledge is endemic.

The trend today is to work out a more just IPR system. Convergence with TRIPs-WTO and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) for regulation of publicly owned traditional knowledge is in the pipeline. An international certificate system which would state place of origin is being mooted while applying for an IPR. So far Bhutan is the only country to have merged IPR, access and benefit sharing and protection of plant varieties into one law.



Bunkers being removed from Srinagar

Talking about bunkers

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

SINCE 11 June, more than 100 people have been killed in the Kashmir Valley due to firing by police and security forces on protesters. The Omar Abdullah led government, a coalition of the National Conference and the Congress, announced many measures to tide over the crisis. One of these was the removal of bunkers.

The Unified Command which meets under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister decided to remove 50 bunkers in a phased manner from Srinagar city. Initially it was decided to remove 16 bunkers. An official decision was taken by the Unified Command on 29 September.

The process of removing the bunkers got underway on 6 October, the day the Chief Minister said in the legislative assembly that Jammu and Kashmir had acceded and not merged with the Union of India.

Bunkers were removed from Batmaloo, Khanyar, Magharmal Bagh, National Institute of Technology-Hazratbal and SKUAST-Shalimar. In the coming weeks more than two dozen bunkers are expected to be removed from other areas of the city.

People have diverse opinions about the removal of bunkers. There are people who feel their disappearance will not help much in normalcy returning. Others think removing bunkers is a good confidence building measure. But everybody wants the bunkers removed from Srinagar and other towns. Each person interviewed pointed out some bunker he thought was fit for removal.

Shaheen Iqbal, a government employee, welcomed the removal of bunkers. "It is a beginning

albeit a small one," he says. "Bunker removal is a confidence building measure which the government should take forward so that people get relief."

He says he would like the government to remove bunkers set up deep inside localities where people are living. "The removal of bunkers will send out positive signals. It will ensure that people can move freely without interference," says Shaheen.

He also pointed out that bunkers on main roads need to be removed so that there are no more traffic bottlenecks and accidents are minimized. The security forces should vacate from hotels they have occupied as it infringes the privacy of people living in the vicinity, he said.

Rauf A Punjabi, a prominent trader and former President, Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) terms the removal of bunkers as mere eyewash. It won't serve any purpose, is his

There are people who feel removing bunkers will not help in normalcy returning. Others think it is a good confidence building measure. But everybody wants the bunkers removed from Srinagar.

opinion. He says that the CRPF should be shifted out of the city and recalled only if there is a dire emergency. "The situation can become better only when the security forces are marshaled out of Srinagar city and the government stops imposing curfew. Restrictions are imposed on a regular basis. I believe there is no significance in removal of bunkers. I fail to understand why a decision like this is taken by the Home Minister when it can be decided by the magistrate or SSP of a particular district," said Rauf.

Javed Ahmad, an auto-rickshaw driver, believes that the Omar Abdullah government needs to be patted on the back. Bunkers have been removed after 20 years, he points out. He says that more and more bunkers should be removed not only from the city, but from other towns as well.

"There is no harm in criticizing the government for its inefficient functioning. At the same time it should be appreciated if it takes some positive steps. The removal of bunkers is a positive action and it needs to be understood in the right perspective. We should not attach politics to this issue. We should view this process with a positive frame of mind," said Javed.

Shahid Zameer, an advocate, says that removing bunkers will not change the situation very much. The only silver lining is that the stone pelters will have fewer targets to aim at.

"There is nothing special in this process. The only positive outcome I see is that since there will be fewer bunkers, there will be less chances of stone pelting," says Shahid.

Mohammad Yousuf, a resident of Court Road says that in addition to the removal of bunkers the government should concentrate on other dimensions of the turbulent situation in Kashmir.

"Removal of bunkers is a good step, but how about relocating security forces from other areas and towns. In the Lal Chowk area CRPF camps are located in Palladium Cinema and important buildings. These buildings need to be vacated so that people can move about freely," says Yousuf.

Rameez Hamid, a resident of Eidgah in downtown Srinagar says that the removal of bunkers holds no importance for him since CRPF personnel continue to remain posted there.

"There is a huge bunker near the Aali Masjid in our area. If the government was serious they should have removed this bunker also. It is irritating the people. Let them take a bold decision and remove it," says Rameez.

People living in other towns want the state government to announce the removal of bunkers in their respective areas so that they too can get some relief.

"A beginning has been made from Srinagar. I hope that this decision will be implemented in other towns as well. We are fed up of the daily hassles. We want an end to this mess," says Hilal Ahmad, a resident of Baramulla.

Bright school from nothing

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

SCATTERED here and there in Gurgaon's colonies are buildings called community centres built by the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA). Most often they serve no purpose and lie abandoned in a derelict state. One such building caught the eye of Shanta Sharan when she moved to Palam Vihar.

Sharan had worked as a teacher for many years in Loreto School and Ryan International and Amity International. She had also done a stint with Vidya, an NGO dedicated to educating children in slums. But she was most inspired by Udayan Care where she had volunteered for a while. She saw how education and love could help orphaned children to blossom.

Sharan wanted to run a school for poor children. All over Gurgaon you can see little ones playing in the dust and grime as their parents slave away in India's Millenium City. So she wondered if she could house her school in the government's empty building.

KC Johri, 80, a retired bureaucrat came to her aid. With the infectious enthusiasm of a young man on his first job, Johri submitted applications and chased various government departments with vigour. Finally, one Dr G Anupama, an IAS officer in HUDA, agreed a school was a good idea and under a Public-Private-Partnership the building was handed over to Sharan.

But the building was in poor shape. Window panes were broken, there was no electricity or running water and the backyard looked like a left-over jungle. There was no boundary wall either. Termites had chomped through the doors.

Sharan named her school Diksha. It is registered as a society. She decided it would cater to tiny tots from pre-nursery to Class 2. "I was quite clear that I wanted to provide them a very high quality of education," she explains.

As she set about fixing the building and scouring nearby slums for students, people from the colony turned up at the school to offer their services as volunteers. By a curious twist of fate, they were exactly what Sharan was looking for.

Indira Dayal was walking her dog one morning and noted the activity at the building. She inquired from Sharan what was going on. The two got talking. It turned out Dayal was a social worker who had served as a medical counsellor with GB Pant Hospital and with Vidya the same NGO Sharan had worked with. Dayal offered to help



Children at the school



Shanta Sharan, second from right, with her colleagues

and she became headmistress.

Neelam Jain, an expert in early childhood education, had shifted to the colony after working for 30 years as a teacher in various Delhi schools. A gentle, soft spoken lady, she had converted her backyard into an informal school for poor children. One bedraggled child told her about Diksha. Jain came to take a look. She now works as academic coordinator, designing the syllabus, innovating learning methods and training teachers. Sushma Hurria, a neighbour, looks after the kitchen. RP Singh, who retired after working for many years with an NGO, now handles the school's sparse accounts.

Diksha opened formally on Gandhi Jayanti in 2008. Sharan managed to get 13 children to join. At that time, parents saw Diksha as a convenient crèche where they could drop off their child before going to work. In six months, 75 children had enrolled. Attrition rates were high. But soon things changed. Parents saw their children being transformed. Their little ones were now going to school in proper school uniforms, speaking a smattering of English and learning computers. Attrition rates began to tumble.

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND

And now parents synchronize their trip to their villages with school holidays, says Sharan.

A year later Diksha has 100 children. On a shoestring budget Sharan, a staunch Gandhian, has managed to stick to her vision. The education being offered is as good as a child would get in an elite private school. The teacher-student ratio is 25:1. The school is clean and cheerful. There is a red classroom for pre nursery children and a yellow classroom for nursery children. Computers for the children have been donated by SAP Laboratories.

Best of all the children are brimming with joy and energy. They come from all corners of India and every festival is celebrated. In sing song voices they recite poems with gusto. The school follows the play-way method of learning. Learning evolves naturally from activity and observation. So children begin with colouring and then make strokes and finally shape letters. Neelam Jain explains that care is taken to relate the classroom to home life. Poems too have been invented so that they are pertinent to the child's reality.

The backyard now is a neat playground with swings and slides. Two classrooms have been added. Sharan plans to increase classes. A mid-morning snack of a banana and biscuits plus a midday meal of rice, lentils and vegetables is served to each child every day.

Every child is also given a winter uniform and a summer uniform. The children take care to come neatly dressed but it hasn't been easy turning them angelic. "They were quite wild at first," recalls Sharan. "They would jump out of the school's low windows."

As for the parents the impact has been immense. Slightly better off parents want to get their children admitted here. The debate within the school is whether they should charge a small fee or not. Opinion is divided. So far no money is charged and the poorest children get preference. But its tough making ends meet and the school is looking for donors. So far Sharan has relied on small donations and her own resources. Her faithful group of volunteers keep the school going.

But money is a constant problem. The school's expenses are a modest ₹ 60,000 a month. Some homes in the colony donate on a monthly basis. It costs ₹ 500 per month to sponsor a child and Sharan is thinking of how to get more people to pitch in.

Contact Diksha: sharanshanta@gmail.com

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A guide holding up a large mahseer

MAHSEER MUDDLE

India's tiger fish caught in a controversy

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

EVERY November angling enthusiasts journey to three fishing camps on the banks of the Cauvery river near the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka. The trip for them is an annual pilgrimage. The anglers come to pit their wits against India's mighty fish, the mahseer.

As a sport fish, the mahseer has no equal. It has been named India's 'tiger in water' because of the stiff fight it musters to wriggle off the hook. The mahseer can grow to a sizeable 110 lbs. The tug of war that ensues between the fish and the angler can go on for nearly 30 minutes. The mahseer provides unparalleled recreation to anglers.

This tiger fish is angled on a 'catch-and-release' basis. After the mahseer is

caught, it is weighed, a picture is taken with the proud angler and the fish is then dunked back into the river.

But this year anglers have been turned away. The fishing camps along the reserved stretch of the river are in disarray. Some are moving on. The reason is that angling has been banned by Karnataka's forest department.

The three fishing camps at Doddamakali, Galibore and Bheemeshwari along the Cauvery river were being run by Jungle Lodges and Resorts (JLR) an enterprise floated by Karnataka's own tourism department. JLR's eco-tourism project turned out to be a feather in its cap. It received several awards and was lauded for its sensitivity to the environment and the community. JLR's camps, located a few hours by road from Bangalore, were becoming popular with local tourists. Apart from angling, a gamut of outdoor activities like coracle rides and bird-watching, were on offer.

A fourth fishing camp, the Bush Betta Fishing Camp, was deeper into the sanctuary. It was owned by Saad Bin Jung, who describes himself as a relative of the Nawab of Pataudi. Bush Betta was accorded 'exclusive rights' to six km of the Cauvery from Mekedaatu up to Tamil Nadu.

When Tiger G Ramesh, a techie in Bangalore and a wildlife enthusiast, issued a legal notice to the forest department wanting to know on what basis permission was granted to Bush Betta to set up camp inside the sanctuary, he sparked off a chain of events which resulted in the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) intervening and the forest department hurriedly banning angling in Karnataka.

But the ban has ignited a sharp controversy between conservationists. It's true that the mahseer figures on the list of endangered species, say pro-anglers. But the mahseer is now plentiful in the river.

The efforts of JLR and other voluntary groups have helped revive the mahseer and save it from the brink of extinction. The revenue earned has boosted local incomes. Ex-poachers have become river guides. All this good work will now come to naught, they say.

The anti-anglers, on the other hand, say fishing is akin to hunting and could set a dangerous precedent for other forms of wildlife and areas within or close to sanctuaries.

ANGLING HISTORY: Angling as a sport has a long history. Legend has it that the Chalukya king, Someshwara, enjoyed hunting the mahseer as early as in the 11th century. In pre-Independence India, the British popularised angling. The mahseer was much sought after and since fish abounded in rivers, conservation wasn't a concern. The mahseer as a species was first identified by Hamilton in 1822. One characteristic of the mahseer of the Cauvery and its tributaries is that the fish here are bigger than those found in the snow-fed rivers of Northern India. The first large mahseer to be recorded was from the Kabini river in 1870.

Among the British angling fraternity the mahseer was known as the 'Sanderson Fish' as a big one was caught by GP Sanderson, author of the book, *Thirteen Years among the Wild Beasts of India*. Trapped by a hand line and not on rod and reel, the mahseer he caught was estimated to weigh about 110 lbs. In 1906, CE Murray-Aynsley, hooked a 104 lbs fish on rod and reel from the Cauvery, close to Tipu Sultan's fort at Srirangapatnam. This was recorded as the first fish which weighed over 100 lbs caught on fishing tackle.

With the construction of dams in adjoining areas, the migration of the mahseer got restricted and even blocked at some places. Alongside, the indiscriminate fishing of brood and juvenile fish led to the decline of the mahseer population. Moreover, some migrant settlers in villages along the Cauvery used nets and explosives to catch fish, thereby destroying all aquatic life forms including fingerlings.

SAVING THE MAHSEER: The last refuge for these giant fish today is the stretch of the Cauvery between the falls at Shivasamudram and Mekedatu. The state government could not make much headway in controlling poaching activities. The burden of chasing away poachers fell on the forest department's skeletal staff.

Consequently, the number and size of the mahseer population began to decline drastically. The threat of extinction loomed large. It was obvious that the habitat of the mahseer and the adjoining riverine stretches of forest needed to be safeguarded. With these objectives in mind the Wildlife Association of South India (WASI) was formed in 1972-1973, soon after the Wildlife Protection Act was passed. WASI then approached the state government to run seasonal camps in the region to keep a check on the fish population. The state government readily offered fishing rights to WASI.

"For the past three decades we have been involved in the protection of this stretch of the Cauvery," says Arun Srinivasan, president of WASI. "We are the oldest angling NGO in the country. Due to the decrease in both size and specimens of the mahseer, we decided to adopt the strategy of responsible angling or the practice of 'catch-and-release.' This method has given a fresh lease of life to the mighty fish. We have been protecting the mahseer by

adopting conservation, stocking and management measures."

The pioneering efforts of WASI were subsequently supported by JLR which set up, over a period of time, three angling camps called the Cauvery Fishing Camps on the banks of the river to promote eco tourism and angling on a commercial basis. These camps which combine the thrill of hooking the game fish with the rugged existence of camp life are a haven for nature enthusiasts, river lovers and a paradise for hardcore anglers.

The camps offered bird-watching, coracle rides, trekking, wildlife safaris and white water rafting. Every year, Angling Direct Holidays' head guide, David Plummer, would escort a limited number of anglers to these camps.

"As a leader in the eco-tourism field, JLR believes in low-impact tourism and the maxim of 'quality and not quantity' to minimize ecological impact in a sensitive environment," explains ND Tiwari, Indian Forest Service (IFS), Managing Director, JLR. "Conforming to the spirit of eco tourism, we have also adopted a strategy of low capital investment, local employment, use of



A river guide helping an angler



Sandeep Chakrabarti



Releasing fingerlings into the Cauvery

locally available materials and visitor education for conservation of nature and wildlife. All our properties are definitive statements of care for the environment. Right from its inception in 1980, JLR has promoted nature tourism with the objective of exposing and sensitizing visitors to nature."

JLR camps don't have televisions and neither do they provide room service. The idea is to encourage guests to spend time in nature-related and adventure activities. Local inhabitants have also been roped into the eco tourism project so that they have an incentive to protect the natural habitat.

Tiwari points out that angling tourism supports conservation of the mahseer. "Anglers not only contribute to tourism coffers. Their prolonged presence on the river deters fish poachers. If it were not for the records of fish caught and released by anglers, it would be difficult to monitor the health of the mahseer population. The size of the fish has grown over the years because of protection. The mahseer has received more protection in stretches of the Cauvery where angling is allowed, as compared to those stretches where angling is not permitted officially."

The angling revenue generated by JLR has helped in several ways to curb poaching. Ex-poachers have been rehabilitated as fishing guides. Anti-poach-



An angler enjoying his wait for the mahseer

ing camps have been set up. Local people have got involved and now help conservation efforts especially keeping the mahseer in mind. Most of the rehabilitated poachers, for instance, are employed as river guides and guards to patrol the river stretch at the fishing camps. They appear concerned and involved in protection.

"Being experienced fishermen ourselves, we guide anglers with our knowledge of the waters. We know every tract of the forests, every inch of the river, where each eddy and whirlpool lies, where the fish likes to school," says Bhola, a rehabilitated poacher-turned-river guide at Bheemeshwari. "Now we have self-esteem, social acceptance, security and a steady income. With a gradual increase in tourism and our involvement in the project, the population of the mahseer has increased in the river." Bhola emphasised that he has benefited financially from conserving the tiger fish.



BK Singh

According to Sunder Raj, the manager of one of the JLR camps, "We have set up mahseer feeding camps. Every season we feed 5,000 kg of *ragi* to the mahseer to keep them within the protected 30 km stretch of river. If they weren't fed, the fish would most probably migrate up and down the river where destructive dynamiting, netting and poisoning have been rampant."

The Coorg Wildlife Society (CWS), another voluntary organization, has also pitched in to help the forest department and strengthen its hands. It is actively involved in protecting the mahseer in the Cauvery stretch in Valnoor in Coorg district. It has a lease for 28 km of the river here. CWS has been stocking young mahseer along this stretch since 1993. The voluntary organisation protects this part of the river, issues fishing licenses, organizes sport fishing and maintains fish catch statistics.

TIGER VERSUS NAWAB: Everything was going hunky dory on the angling front in Karnataka till Tiger G Ramesh stepped in. A Bangalore-based techie, hardcore wildlife enthusiast and ex-CEO of Wilderness Resorts Private Limited which owned Cicada Resorts in Kabini and Bandipur, Ramesh issued a legal notice on 17 April, 2009, under Section 55 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, to the following persons – the Secretary, Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the Director, Project Elephant, Director, Wildlife Protection, MoEF, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), Wildlife Warden, the Chief Secretary and Principal Secretary, Forests.

Ramesh sought an explanation on how permission was granted to Bush Betta



The fishing camps offer plenty of outdoor activities



Coracle rides at the JLR fishing camp

Ex-poachers have been rehabilitated as fishing guides. Anti-poaching camps have been set up. Local people help conservation efforts keeping the mahseer in mind. Most rehabilitated poachers are employed as river guides and guards.

Wildlife Adventure Resort for an angling sports facility and for setting up a camp inside the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary. This was a gross violation of the provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, he pointed out. Ramesh wanted to know how the State Forest Department could grant permission to Bush Betta to put up any construction whatsoever in a wildlife sanctuary without prior approval from the National Wildlife Board and Supreme Court.

BUSH BETTA CONTROVERSY: Exclusive permission was granted to Bush Betta Wildlife Adventure Resorts on 2 December, 1997, by the then Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife), Karnataka Forest Department for angling, camping and boating on the River Cauvery for a period of 10 years at a nominal deposit of ₹ 25,000 and ₹ 10,000 per annum for angling and camping inside the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary.



Tiger G Ramesh
Fishing Camp.

To make matters worse, the Bush Betta camp located inside the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary was touted as a 'Private Reserve belonging to Indian Royalty' as the owner hailed from an erstwhile royal family.

Ramesh followed up his legal notice by writing to the Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) pointing out that the Karnataka Forest Department had blatantly violated provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. It had permitted angling which amounts to hunting inside the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary, a protected area for the Asiatic Elephant covered under Project Elephant. It had permitted a tourism camp to be put up inside a protected area.

As per an office memorandum on 27 February, 2007, further exclusive angling and camping permission was granted by the then Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden, Karnataka, for a period of 10 years from September 2007 to September 2017 against a security deposit of ₹125,000 and ₹ 50,000 for exclusive fishing and camping.

Following Tiger G Ramesh's application, the CEC served notice to the PCCF and Wildlife Warden and the MoEF. The MoEF replied that whatever the Karnataka government had done was wrong. In February this year the forest department was asked to reconsider the permission given to the Bush Betta

have grown from under one pound to some over 100 lbs. This very fact is an indication that the fish has benefited from the protection provided by WASI and JLR over the years," says Sandeep Chakrabarti, an ardent angler and a member of WASI. Since there is a co-relation between the size and weight of the fish with the age of the fish, it would be safe to infer that a substantial population of the mahseer is breeding in the wild on this protected stretch of the river.

Other anglers believe that fishing on a 'catch-and-release' basis cannot be equated with hunting. The practice being followed by JLR and WASI is to release the fish within the shortest period of time. Adequate care is taken not to hurt the mahseer while landing and handling it. Besides, sport angling is not about 'killing' fish, whereas hunting is entirely about 'killing'. And for every fish caught by an angler, there are several hundreds or thousands which swim away freely. The substantial population of the mahseer found on the protected stretch of the Cauvery is evidence that such fishing supports conservation, points out the pro angling lobby.

"If the mahseer still exists today it is only because of the long term conservation measures adopted by JLR and NGOs like WASI and CWS with their unique eco tourism and catch-and-release practices," says Dr AJT John Singh, ex-Dean of Wildlife Institute of India and renowned wildlife scientist. "This is an excellent model worth emulating throughout the different ranges of varied species of mahseer in the country. Projects like these benefit the fish, the habitat and the local people."

Reacting to the ban, Srivatsa, advocate of Saad Bin Jung said, "No proper study has been done by the forest department before imposing the ban. It is only a knee-jerk reaction to a letter sent by an individual to the CEC. The Bush Betta Fishing Camp has been protecting the mahseer and has helped in anti-poaching. Apparently there is a concerted effort to edge out private operators. The ban will be counterproductive to the well-being of the mahseer. Actual poaching will start, government apathy will set in and there will be no accountability."

Recreational angling also mints money for the tourism sector all over the world. In India statistics relating to the number of anglers, the revenue and jobs generated through such an activity are woefully lacking. Both the UK and France are estimated to have four million recreational anglers each. Europe has around 21.7 million anglers. In the US the economic impact of recreational angling is estimated to be \$ 30 billion. Around 12 million anglers create jobs for over 350,000 people involved in the recreational angling industry.

Chakrabarti, who has been campaigning for the river and mahseer conservation, says angling tourism is an example where eco-tourism is working. "It has thrown a lifeline to communities in terms of economics and social benefits, apart from biodiversity benefits. The future of river guides is intimately connected with the well-being of the endangered mahseer and its habitat. The substantial population of mahseer found on the protected stretch of the Cauvery proves that fishing supports conservation. If the ban on sport fishing is here to stay, the revenue from angling will decline to zero. Hence measures to protect the river such as patrolling and settling up of anti-poaching camps will also come to a halt," he warned.

Many anglers feel that the revenue generated from angling should be used for anti-poaching and patrolling efforts by those having a stake in angling tourism. This is critical for the survival of the mahseer since the Forest Department has neither the manpower nor the financial resources to carry out anti-poaching activities. Chakrabarti lamented that several local people who are earning an income from angling tourism would now lose their jobs and then revert to poaching.

In short, 30 years of laudable conservation work done by WASI and JLR could be undone.

Fishing camps are now planning to move to non sanctuary stretches of the river. Tiger Ramesh points out that protection of the mahseer cannot be achieved by putting the fish through trauma whether inside or outside the sanctuary. Setting up resorts inside Protected Areas does not augur well for Indian wildlife. It could set a precedent and spawn tourist camps in Protected Areas across the country including critical Tiger Habitats. Such a big tourism footprint would lead to exploitation of Indian wildlife which is in delicate health.

The angling community here feels that wildlife sanctuaries in Karnataka should not be singled out. If there is a ban on angling it should apply to all the angling hotspots in wildlife sanctuaries all over the country.

The letter from the MoEF to the Karnataka Forest Department categorically states that, "the capture of mahseer fish in the sanctuary and its release in the river water immediately will also amount to hunting as it is clearly mentioned in Section 2 (16) b) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, whereby capturing, coursing, snaring, trapping, driving or baiting any wild or captive animal and every attempt to do so amounts to hunting. Presuming that capturing of the mahseer is a sport is not correct. It may be mentioned that earlier even hunting was considered as a sport, which is banned at present."

The Karnataka State Forest Department then sought a further clarification from the MoEF on precisely from which dates construction within the sanctuary area should be regarded as illegal.

The MoEF's written reply stated that any construction even before 1 April, 2003 and after the Supreme Court order dated 9 May, 2002 Writ Petition No. 337 of 1995 is illegal and against the clear-cut direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

"Following the receipt of the clarification from the MoEF, we have directed JLR and all others involved in angling to suspend angling operations in all stretches of the river Cauvery allocated to them in the sanctuary," says B.K. Singh, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife).

The angling lease given to Bush Betta thereby stands cancelled. Subsequently Bush Betta moved the High Court challenging the ban.

ANGLE TANGLE: But anglers and other wildlife experts do not think that the ban is a wise move. They have come out in open support of JLR and WASI.

"The mahseer which have been landed and released over the last 38 years

When to visit JLR's Cauvery Fishing Camp:

November to February end (outside sanctuary area).
Angling charges: ₹ 1,400 for Indians and 50 euros for foreigners.
Accommodation charges are extra.
Contact details: info@junglelodges.com

Business

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India's new age enterprises

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

THE Aajeevika Bureau which has given more than 50,000 migrant workers identity cards in southern Rajasthan has been adjudged Social Entrepreneur of the Year by the Schwab Foundation and the Jubilant Bhartia Foundation for its annual award.

The awards are five years old and promote entrepreneurial solutions that have a clear social impact at the grassroots. There were more than 100 applicants this year. After several stages of rigorous assessment, four finalists were chosen. "These awards are a testimony to the innovation and impact that flows from sustainable inclusive growth," said Hilde Schwab, Co-founder and Chairperson, Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship.

Winning the award ensures Aajeevika Bureau enters a prestigious global



Krishnavtar Sharma and Rajiv Khandelwal on the left and right of Kapil Sibal at the Social Entrepreneur of the Year award in Delhi

network of 200 leading social entrepreneurs of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship. They will receive mentorship, global attention and opportunities to take their learning to other countries.

Since it started, the Schwab Foundation awards for social entrepreneurship have become the defining recognition in this category. Previous Indian winners include Vikram Akula of SKS Microfinance, Vijay Mahajan of BASIX, Harish Hande of Selco India, Planet Read's Brij Kothari and SEWA's Ela Behn and Mirai Chatterjee.

WORKERS' HUB

Established in 2005, the Aajeevika Bureau develops financial products, photo-identity services and partners local governments and businesses to help rural seasonal migrants in Rajasthan. Migrants are assisted both at the source point, that is, their resource-poor rural economies and at their destination points – exclusionary urban markets where they migrate to.

In over five years, more than 50,000 seasonal migrants, with annual incomes of less than Rs 36,000 have directly accessed the Bureau's services through its head office in Udaipur, and centres in Ahmedabad, Jaipur and seven blocks of southern Rajasthan. Most of Aajeevika's clients are unskilled, semi-skilled men and women who are

unviable for self-help groups and microfinance loans due to their migratory status and lack of assets.

"The idea came from our experience that a large number of young people were not engaged in agriculture anymore because there wasn't enough to do," says Rajeev Khandelwal, Aajeevika's co-founder. "There was no option for people but to migrate. In fact, young people were entering labour markets right after school at the bottom level," adds Khandelwal, who has over 10 years experience working with development projects in tribal Rajasthan. Krishnavtar Sharma, the other co-founder, is also a senior development practitioner and has worked on legal aid and self help programmes in the desert state.

An estimated 800,000 workers migrate seasonally to Gujarat and Karnataka from the state.

The Aajeevika Bureau develops financial products, photo-identity services and partners local governments and businesses to help rural seasonal migrants in Rajasthan. Migrants are assisted both at the source point and at their destination points in urban markets they migrate to.

"When they migrate, lack of identification becomes an impediment for them. They can't get mobile phones and are harassed by the police." Aajeevika's photo identity cards, their flagship innovation, are often the migrants' only identity. These cards are authorized by the state government of Rajasthan and verified by local panchayats. They enable migrants to access banks, get mobile connections or avail various citizenship entitlements.

The Bureau also gives out travel loans and micro insurance products. They run skills training and job placement programmes for rural unemployed youth at the threshold of migration. Those who have registered for these have seen a 50 to 80 per cent increase in family incomes. Additionally, Aajeevika's model has been chosen to be adapted and replicated by more than 30 civil society organisations in Bihar, Orissa, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

Khandelwal hopes recognition such as the Social Entrepreneur of the Award will help mainstream their work even more. "It evokes interest in our work, helps us reach the national platform on such issues. Cities like Delhi and Mumbai need bureaus like ours."

"Of course, we do also become more fundable. That's important to scale," adds Khandelwal. He admits such attention was never part of the plan for them. So, even now, he says simply, "it's

important not to let it overwhelm you".

Clearly, Aajeevika seems well poised to stay the course. They have just signed a first-of-its-kind MoU with the National Identification Authority of India to ensure inclusion of the 100-million strong base of seasonal migrant labourers in the ambitious AADHAR project.

RURAL GURU

Santosh Kumar Choubey was a finalist at the social entrepreneurship award but he continues to be modest about his success. "We didn't realise we were social entrepreneurs," says the founder of the All India Society for Electronics and Computer Technology (AISECT), a rural education franchise based in Bhopal.

Choubey has never had time to think about branding. Founded over 25 years ago, AISECT has pioneered a model of ICT based education in rural India. It has set up over 8,000 education centres in 27 states and three Union Territories. The centres respond to the growing demand for technical and vocational education from the rural youth. A whopping 100,000 students graduate from AISECT centres every year with training in any of the 100 courses available. Over half the students come from the most backward districts of India and avail scholarships of up to 50 per cent of their course fees.

All curriculum and teaching material developed by AISECT are in the regional language. Almost eight in 10 graduates are placed by centre owners in best-fit local jobs. Moreover, AISECT runs these centres on a franchisee model and has created a chain of rural education entrepreneurs – 32,000 people from local communities are cumulatively employed by these centres. Also, AISECT centres often double up as multi-purpose community centres. They become citizen hubs that are linked to government schemes and development programmes.

"We started as a charitable organisation. But within a year we were financially viable," recalls Choubey who gave up government service to set up AISECT. Even as he remembers the obstacles, he says the recognition that has come his organisation's way over the last decade has been heartening. "We won the NASSCOM Innovation Awards, the TiE Award. Venture capitalist money is coming to us," he adds.

AISECT has also set up a private university in Bilaspur, the first of its kind in a tribal district of Madhya Pradesh. They are looking to soon launch the country's first rural employment portal service too.

GIVING LIFE

More than feeling validated by the recognition of being a Schwab finalist, Anant Kumar is thrilled at the way his staff at LifeSpring Hospitals, a chain of nine low-cost maternity hospitals in Andhra Pradesh, have responded to the honour.

"For every enterprise now, social or otherwise, talent is a crucial challenge," says Kumar, who led the pilot of the first LifeSpring Hospital and has executed its subsequent growth. "Being recognised not only motivates your employees, it also helps attract talent outside – even when we can't match market-rate salaries."

Incubated by Hindustan Lifecare Limited,

Continued on page 25





James Thurston

The code for inclusion

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

TECHNOLOGY is empowering but it is important that it be inclusive so that people with disabilities aren't left out. As part of Microsoft's Trustworthy Computing Group, James Thurston is closely involved with innovations for promoting digital accessibility. Often these very innovations become the mainstream technologies of the future.

Thurston was in India recently to attend two key international conferences, Inclusive Digital Libraries and EDICT-2010: Enabling Access to Education through ICT.

In an interview with *Civil Society*, Thurston spoke about Inclusive Innovation, a Microsoft project to make computer use easier for people with impairments like visual difficulties, hearing loss or cognitive challenges. Both Windows 7 and Windows Vista have in-built features like screen readers, magnifiers and speciality hardware, specifically for people with disabilities.

Thurston says creating awareness about these features is a key challenge for the company. Microsoft partners non-profits, governments and consumer groups to enable more people to use technology. India, he says, is emerging as an important centre for brainstorming on several such issues.

Which disabilities are covered by the various innovations Microsoft products carry?

At Microsoft we are committed to understanding what kind of functionalities can be brought into our products so that they help various kinds of impediments people face the world over. Research shows that 10 per cent of the world's population faces some form of impairment. It is important to take into account the special needs of this section. We have several accessibility functions built into our products. On top of that, we have 300 or so assistive technologies that can be mounted on top of our products for added functionality. In specific, we have made great movement on features that affect the visually impaired. And, here I would say industry in general has been able to do a lot, not just Microsoft.

What is the disability that you think a lot of work still needs to be done on?

We have a deep focus now on cognitive disabilities. They present a huge challenge mainly because there are so many kinds of cognitive disabilities and limitations. A lot of understanding needs to go into that. I can't say how close we are to breakthroughs. But it's heartening that there is globally more awareness of cognitive disabilities. I am confident we will see progress on important assistive technologies arising out of this.

How do you market these products to people who would need them?

We have an Accessibility Business Unit that is responsible for marketing our features, of putting them out for our consumers to use. But yes we recognise that awareness is a big challenge. A part of the problem is that people don't want to associate themselves with disabilities they might have. There is a certain stigmatisation they feel. This happens even in advanced markets like the United States. A lot of disabilities develop with ageing – poorer vision, hearing issues. But many want to deny this. We work with associations, non-profits and other partners to create awareness. We also work closely with the National Blind Association and The Association of Senior Citizens in the US. These partnerships are critical. We have entered into good partnerships in India as well like with the DAISY Forum.

We have worked on Windows to ensure that users don't need to hunt for our assistive technologies. Windows 7 has an Ease of Access Centre which provides a centralized location in the control panel where the user can adjust accessibility settings and programs. The user can also get recommendations for settings to make the PC easier to see, hear and use. It requires lesser adjustment. We have also tried to make our products more intuitive. The

feedback has been positive and encouraging.

More often than not, technology sprints ahead of policy or regulation. Has that been a challenge? Is it difficult to get governments and regulators to be in sync?

It's interesting you should ask that. Yes, technology does race past law several times. But it was the US government's Section 508 eight or nine years back that substantially helped the advancement of assistive technologies. The US government mandated that all technology must be assistive. Technology providers had little choice but to introduce these functionalities because the US government is the biggest client around. That was groundbreaking. But technology transforms so rapidly that it does become difficult to stay relevant. Look at your mobile phones now and what they were like, what they could do eight years back. Smart phones didn't even exist then.

I see governments now understanding that this is bound to happen. Countries are trying to be more flexible in their regulations so that newer innovations can be more easily adopted.

Is legislation on disability in India outdated?

I wouldn't say that at all. In fact, India was the first to sign and ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled. Many countries signed it but India is the first to ratify it. That was a great step. It gives India a huge leadership position on this issue. I am here for two very important international conferences on disability. It's no coincidence they are held in India. They are here because of the growing interest in these issues here. See, there is no perfection in this business. There's always more you can do. That's true even in the US and Europe where much advancement has been made.

What are the futuristic innovations on the horizon that you are excited about?

There are two areas. Natural user interface is the first. For many of us, our user interface has been the keypad and the mouse. Touch technology has also come up. The next step is how to make user interface more natural. It will essentially enrich your interaction with technology. X-BOX is our gaming device. We have a new component coming out. It's pretty intuitive. Like in the Wii, you hold the joystick and it simulates your hand movements on to your screen avatar while you play tennis or a wrestling game. With our new component, you can do that by movements of your body. Your body will move and the technology will capture that. Somebody recently asked me if it could help them perfect their yoga asanas. This will have a big impact on assistive technologies also.

Cloud computing also presents a great opportunity for people with disabilities. It will help them access technology even from Internet cafes or airports by helping them deploy products or features.

What are the horizontal applications that arise out of assistive technologies?

We keep saying the assistive technologies of today are the mainstream technologies of tomorrow. Take speech recognition, for example. It came up as an assistive technology. It had a huge impact for the blind. Now it's used in so many different ways, in car music systems, GPS devices, gaming and entertainment modules.

Continued from page 23

LifeSpring has mastered the art of doing a lot with little. Each LifeSpring Hospital, six of which are in Hyderabad, has 20 to 30 beds. The hospitals are strategically located within easy reach of their target customers, women from low-income families that earn between ₹ 3,000 to ₹ 7,000 per month.

To ensure the hospitals are truly accessible, tariffs are stringently maintained at a half or third of the prevailing rates in private hospitals. The cost of a normal delivery in the general ward is between ₹ 2,000 to 4,000. The doctor's consultancy fee is ₹ 75. LifeSpring has achieved profitability despite its low tariff structure by focussing on efficient resource utilization and a high throughput, both of which keep unit costs low.

None of this compromises their attention to medical care. More than 7,000 healthy babies have been safely delivered. And, over 100,000 outpatient cases have been treated. LifeSpring's morbidity rate is less than one per cent and its incident of caesarean procedures is under 35 per cent.

The hospital has mandated over 100 standard procedures including clinical protocols and identical surgery kits to ensure all patients are treated equally. Much of this has flowed from its partnership with the Institute of Healthcare Improvement, USA.

LifeSpring's focus on maternal health is a critical need for India where 100,000 women die each year due to pregnancy and childbirth related complications. Shamefully, India contributes to almost one-fourth of global maternal deaths. And, nearly 70 per cent of all births here are unattended by a skilled health worker.

Anant Kumar understands both these challenges and opportunities. "We want to launch 200 hospitals covering 30 cities and towns by 2015."

LOW-COST HOSPITAL

Ashwin Naik fits the bill of the modern social entrepreneur. A qualified doctor from Karnataka Medical College, Naik went to the US for higher studies and worked in a cutting-edge genomics company that specialised in oncology research. But, after six years in the land of opportunity, Naik retraced his steps home to plug some of the gaping holes in India's health

care infrastructure. Along with Dr. Virendra Hiremath, Naik set up Vaatsalaya Hospitals, a chain of rural and semi-urban, low-cost hospitals.

"We understood there was a need to provide accessible, affordable and efficient primary and secondary healthcare services. Although 70 per cent of our population lives in rural and semi-

urban areas, the massive majority of hospitals are in cities," explains Naik. Vaatsalaya targets middle and low-income families, typically those who earn between ₹ 2,500 to ₹ 12,000 a month.

Founded in 2004, Vaatsalaya now has a network of 10 hospitals, each with about 60 to 70 beds. Eight of these are in Karnataka and another two in Andhra Pradesh. Service fees at Vaatsalaya are at 10 to 20 per cent of what an average urban hospital would charge its patients. Consultancy fees range from ₹ 25 to ₹ 100 and hospital beds are priced at ₹ 100 to ₹ 300 per night.

"We believe in no frills health care," says Naik, but adds that his hospitals are well equipped with modern operation theatres, maternity services and adult ICUs. They cater to four basic specializations – gynaecology, paediatrics, general surgery and general medicine which together cover nearly 70 per cent of a local community's health needs.

The chain already serves over 300,000 customers a year. Volumes help drive sustainability at Vaatsalaya which Naik says is firmly a

"for-profit" enterprise. Economies are built by optimising capital and operation expenditures. For example, the hospital leases or rents its premises instead of owning them to keep costs low. Naik chooses his team carefully. Doctors with semi-urban and rural backgrounds are encouraged to be entrepreneurial and given responsibilities early on to grow a committed cadre.

Over the next three years, Vaatsalaya plans to expand to more than 40 locations in southern India.



Ashwin Naik of Vaatsalaya



Anant Kumar of LifeSpring

Insights

- Opinion
- Analysis
- Research
- Ideas
- Angst

Reaching the last mile

V RAVICHANDAR

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND

ACROSS the country, we have instances of being disappointed after waiting for years for transport infrastructure to materialise. We find new 'last mile' problems that crop up once the mega infrastructure touted as a panacea for all our transportation woes are implemented. Consider three *kal, aaj aur kal* examples of this problem:

- In the 20th century, Madras (Chennai now) got a mass rapid transit rail system (MRTS) that on paper continues to look like a great transport network. However, on the ground we have maintained seedy train stations and poor last leg connectivity. This has ensured that the MRTS is an addition to the growing list of expensive assets that do not meet the desired outcome of end-to-end connectivity solutions. What chance of the well-heeled airport traveller legging the last stretch from Trisoolam MRTS station to Meenambakam airport? Why bother about the rich folks you might ask? For public transport options to be the chosen vehicle, it is necessary for the option to work for all sections of society – unless fewer private vehicles are used on a daily basis, we will not fix our urban traffic woes.

- Gurgaon just got its Metro stations recently. Cause for joy you should think. Not so, it would appear, if you consider that Gurgaon has no local public transport system (including black and yellow autos, taxis), the cycle rickshaw network is miserable and pedestrian walkways, negligible. This forces more commuters to take their cars choking the entry and exit to the many glass facade complexes. All in all a devil and deep-sea choice between not so clean last mile options or hours in gridlock traffic.



Gurgaon now has a Metro but lacks public transport to get there

You might think that someone would have given thought to 'multi-modal' connectivity - where you can change between buses, autos, taxis, Metro and maybe a future day mono rail. Far from it.

- Bangalore will get its first four Metro stations end 2011. The city resembles a war zone across its length and breadth and there is talk of a high-speed rail link to the airport. You might think that someone would have given thought to 'multi-modal' connectivity – where you can change between buses, autos, taxis, the Metro and maybe a future day mono rail. Far from it since we normally prefer to be reactive to connectivity problems that arise instead of pro-actively dealing with it. However, there is the proverbial silver-lining in this case – the Bangalore City Connect initiative of non government players is working in conjunction with government agen-

cies to look at possible solutions through feeder buses, multi modal pick up / drop points and better pedestrian walkways to and from the stations. Bangalore today has great Volvo bus options to and from the airport and even to the IT corridors but the proverbial last mile lack of decent bus options or haggling with the autos makes the end-to-end experience less than wholesome.

The starting point in fixing desirable transport outcomes is to define the problem we are trying to solve. Citizens want to move from place X to place Y as quickly as feasible within their respective budgets. This implies the need to think end-to-end (think home-office and back or home-

office-mall-home or whatever), the need for alternative options (walk, bus, train, auto, taxi, personal vehicle, etc. though the battle on the ground is lost if personal vehicles are taken out in the first place) with relatively easy availability.

Unfortunately, our current system DNA is to think in silos and integration across agencies/ modes of transport, is negligible. For example, the Metro is seen and lauded as an engineering marvel. Consequently, the Metro agency hardly spares a thought about the rest of the network connectivity – simply put it is not their job! In Bangalore, we had a situation where the Metro did not even deign to give its alignment to the Bangalore Development Authority, the agency mandated with the city master plan until the very last moment and that too after escalation to the highest levels. Talk of inter agency cooperation!

We are to overcome many challenges in our quest for the holy grail of end-to-end connectivity with fewer traffic woes on the ground. However if we are allowed only one reform, we should choose to fix our governance architecture that endorses silo- based agency operations. For example in any city we have a multiplicity of agencies like the RTO, bus operators, Metro Rail Agency, City Corporation, Development Authority, Transport Department, Police among others who have varying roles with respect to transport outcomes. We need a 'tsar' who is finally responsible and accountable to the city and has powers over these multiple agencies in respect of ensuring desirable transport outcomes.

This is the model for the Singapore Land Transit Authority – the person in charge oversees all transport modes to ensure smooth, timely, economical mobility across all modes of travel. So you will find the agency calibrating the duty (and permits) for private vehicle ownership (more expensive than the base car cost), deciding on areas needing congestion charges/access control, route planning between bus and train (including tariff rates, frequency), allow private taxis, parking areas, etc. The agency head is empowered to align individual agency roles in sync with the overall transport and traffic objectives. The system works as anyone who visits Singapore will testify.



If we are allowed only one reform, we should choose to fix our governance architecture that endorses silo- based agency operations.

Whenever an example from Singapore (or China) is cited, the standard response is that this does not work in a democracy like India. Nothing could be further from the truth in this case. What one needs is a mix of political willingness to mandate such an agency with the task of fixing the city transport and traffic woes followed by an administrative firmness in implementation. Empower the agency and make them accountable for results.

A move in the above direction has begun through the Urban Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMTA) suggested across our cities. It is a good start but there are miles (kilometres in our case) to go before this can truly work. Why is one a sceptic? Take the case of the Department of Urban Land Transit (DULT) that exists in some of our cities under the UMTA framework. A close look at their charter shows that they are consigned to collecting and maintaining statistics about the city transport situation and call for meetings across agencies. Further, the IAS officers posted here are relatively junior in the hierarchy – so what chance of their calling the shots (and they do not even have the necessary powers) over agencies headed by their seniors. The way out is to make the posts more powerful (akin to the Singapore Land Transit Authority). Do this and post an Additional Chief Secretary level person in charge. Watch those *kal, aaj aur kal* transport problems disappear!

V. Ravichandar, Chairman, Feedback Consulting, is an advocate for focusing on outcomes over projects in our cities.

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Big changes in food laws

KANCHI KOHLI

THE winter session of Parliament began on 9th November. Even as we wait for discussions and decisions to fully unfold, this session could be an extremely significant one for food producers and consumers – three new Bills related to food and farming are on the anvil. If they are finalised, these new laws will be able to potentially transform the way food production and distribution operate in India in the coming years. These new laws are the Seed Bill, Biotechnology Regulatory Authority Bill and the National Food Security Bill.

The fundamental question to ask is how much public debate has gone behind any of these proposed legislations? With applications under Right to Information returned, lack of direct access to draft laws and internal debates, many are scouting around for news through informal channels and select media disclosures. The National Food Security Bill has been able to set itself partially apart by making available decisions and documents under finalisation through the Internet. However, the other two crucial legislations stand out for their opacity.

The Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India (BRAI) Bill was approved by the cabinet in August this year. It was thought that this proposed law would be introduced in the monsoon session of Parliament. Since that did not happen, there is a big likelihood that the winter session will see a debate or simply a safe passage. This Bill proposes to streamline the approval and introduction of genetically engineered and other biotechnological material into the country. It also seeks to replace the current system of regulating the use and propagation of genetically engineered products in food, farming, pharmaceutical and other sectors by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) housed in the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF).

The BRAI Bill originates from the corridors of the Department of Biotechnology, which is the biggest promoter of modern biotech. Unhesitatingly it leads us down a path which will further deepen the dependence of farmers on foreign seed companies and agricultural research stations. Under such a new regime there is little value for traditional seeds and agricultural systems. Agriculture is then seen only as a business of crop production, this time vulnerable to all the unresolved risks new technologies like genetic modification (GM) and transgenic alterations bring with them.

The National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by Sonia Gandhi recorded their recommendations on the proposed National Food Security Act during their meeting on 23rd October in New Delhi. From media reports, there seems to be a clear indication that the NAC members themselves are divided on the nature of the Bill. The NAC has proposed subsidised food grains to 75 per cent of Indians (about 900 million) in phases, beginning April 2011. In a very significant move, the NAC has abolished the below poverty line (BPL) criteria and has suggested two broad categories – priority and general. These



A right to food protest in Delhi

categories will henceforth enable 90 per cent of the rural population and 50 per cent of the urban population to get subsidised food grains by 2014. The first phase will cover 85 per cent of the rural population and 40 per cent of the urban population from April 2011. What is unfortunate is that the food proposed to be distributed continues to be rice and wheat predominantly. Even though the mention of millets is a critical step, it is only limited to major millets like *jowar* and *bajra*. Most minor millets which for many of us would still be staple food in remote corners of the country have no minimum support price or inclusion in the PDS.

The third legislation in the pipeline is the Seed Bill which seeks to replace its 1966 version. The Union cabinet approved the draft Bill on 20th October with the stated purpose of regulating the quality of seeds and planting materials. Ironically, what remains available in the public space is only a 2004 version of the proposed law.

Questions have been raised about the content of the Bill. Apprehensions exist that the proposed legislation seeks to take away seed control from farmers and clears the path for private sector participation in seed production and distribution. Amongst many concerns that farmers and farmer's groups have expressed is the provision which gives certification to imported seeds by virtue of their foreign certification, based on trials done outside the country or inside laboratories.

For many foreign seed and fertilizer companies and those in India aligning with them, this would be welcome. But where would that leave small and marginal farmers? Would the proposed seed inspectors be able to hamper the age old and innovative methods of seed storage, exchange and reuse which farming communities have been prac-

ticating for generations? The proposed new Seed law will also award royalties to genetically modified seeds, another significantly contentious issue.

We might have differing opinions on whatever I've said about these three new legislations in this limited space. But seriously, how many farmers or consumers of food are even aware of the contours of these laws? Have we been given the opportunity to understand the implications of these new laws, leave alone influencing their need, scope and nature?

Today growers of food are systematically kept away from determining the future of what they can or cannot cultivate (and consume) along with its regulation. What are the changes in store for them when the government decides to introduce these new regulatory mechanisms? There is enough evidence to suggest that disconnected decision making in the past has led farmers into debt traps and vulnerabilities and the desperation of suicide.

What is also important to note is that these Bills are being finalised around the same time as President Barack Obama's visit to India. Given the history of US interests in India, it should not come as a surprise that we might have newer versions of the Indo-US Knowledge Initiative in Agriculture which was signed in 2006. This initiative had ensured that seed giants like Monsanto, Walmart as well as leading US agricultural research centres along with their Indian counterparts had a significant role to play in determining agricultural research in the country. Once the funding and conviction for privatisation of agriculture and agricultural technologies were in place, setting into place regulatory structures becomes the necessary next step.

The author is a member of Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group and is based in Delhi

What UP panchayats want

BHARAT DOGRA

IN the run-up to panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh (UP) in October, seven workshops and public hearings with panchayati raj representatives and social activists were organized to identify key issues of reform in rural decentralisation. These meetings, in various parts of UP, were arranged by the Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) and Association of Local Governance of India (ALGI) in collaboration with grassroots organisations.

The first workshop was held at Chitrakut with ABSSS, a leading voluntary group in Bundelkhand. An important achievement was that nearly 120 panchayati raj representatives and social activists unanimously issued a declaration on the reforms needed. This was called the Chitrakut Declaration.

This declaration emphasized complete transparency in the functioning of panchayats. Corruption should be opposed at all levels. Villagers should not allow any commissions to be given for development work in their villages. All ward-members should be accorded clear cut duties and be treated with respect. Similarly, at block and district level all members should be able to fulfill their role and responsibility properly.

And the greatest importance should be given to gram sabhas. The entire budget and final approval of all development works should be placed before the gram sabha. Village planning should be on the basis of gram sabha consultation. Planning should be from village to block to district to state and not the other way around. Gram sabhas should have the final say on matters relating to *jal, jangal, zameen*.

The declaration also said panchayat representatives should get adequate honorarium and allowances in accordance with their responsibilities. Special care should be taken to create a conducive atmosphere for representatives from weaker sections and women so that they can discharge their responsibilities effectively and independently. Care should also be taken to avoid bureaucratic interference. The familiar scenario of the pradhan and secretary dominating proceedings should be avoided.

Also emphasized was the need for strong steps to ensure fair and free panchayat elections. Sensitive areas where terror or unfair methods have been used in the past to influence election results should get special attention. Alongside, a strict watch was required to ensure candidates kept their expenditure within legally permissible limits. Citizens' groups could be roped in to ensure free and fair elections, peace and harmony. They could also see to it that elected representatives from weaker sections or women were not

bullied in any way and could work without fear.

The Chitrakut declaration got a lot of support at subsequent workshops in Gorakhpur, Varanasi and Saharanpur. The Gorakhpur workshop was organised in partnership with the Gorakhpur Environment Action Group. At this meeting, delegates emphasized that panchayats should play a more active role in solving local disputes and protecting land rights. Delegates were also concerned about elected representatives not resisting demands for commissions by lower level officials. Why did they not confide in the people and seek their support?

The next workshop was in Varanasi with the



Women panchayat members

Gandhian Institute of Studies Trust. An important point made was that it is not fair to ask villagers to choose four representatives together. It is difficult to get information about candidates contesting at all four levels. Sometimes the mafia try to bully panchayats. This should be resisted. Several women speakers said despite reservation it is still difficult for them to play an independent role in some panchayats.

The scene then shifted to western UP's Saharanpur district. Here Disha was the partner. An important suggestion made was that in the election for the village pradhan, the candidate who gets the second place should be given a legally sanctioned role in the panchayat. This would help a democratic opposition to emerge at village level. If no effective role is given to block level members, then why are they elected in the first place, was the question raised. A similar complaint was made by ward members who said that they had been given no effective role during the last five years of their tenure.

Delegates repeatedly said the principles of fair and free elections were being violated. They said that they would resist this but needed wider help. However, there were also examples of panchayats which had functioned very well with a great deal of harmony and cooperation.

Two public hearings in Chitrakut and

Gorakhpur further brought to light weaknesses in the functioning of panchayati raj and the need for reforms.

In the first hearing at Gorakhpur, Govardhan Prasad Gond, President of Bhoomi Bachao Sangharsh Samiti (Save the Land Struggle Committee) said that in Kaasyaan block of Kushinagar district about 660 acres of farm land in seven villages are being acquired for what is essentially a statue and park project. Some medical and educational institutions have been added to give it some legitimacy. He said 90 per cent of this land is irrigated. This is three-crop land. People are firmly opposed to the project but panchayat pradhans are reluctant to openly oppose the administration. He said that they will have to launch an ongoing struggle and dharna to stop land acquisition.

The second session was on serious pollution problems being faced by 10 villages of Sardarnagar block in Gorakhpur district. The villagers have launched several agitations. Some compensation for crop loss was given but later, discontinued. Villagers who protested were beaten up, jailed or carried away to far away places where they were released. One pradhan, Santram, of Dudhai village, played an active role in opposing pollution. Villagers said other pradhans did not openly support the anti-pollution movement and restricted themselves to writing letters to officials.

The overall assessment was that the capability of panchayats needs to be strengthened. Whenever such serious threats appear, gram sabhas should be able to pass strong resolutions. They should be able to reject projects which threaten their existence.

In the second public hearing held in Chitrakut, injustice and oppression faced by Dalit and Adivasi panchayat representatives was highlighted. A social activist, Uma Shukla, from Kanpur Nagar district related how Chotelal, a backward caste villager was beaten up and harassed. He was elected pradhan of Nagva panchayat in Bidhan block. Chotelal wanted to help weaker sections. However, a powerful feudal person, who had been pradhan earlier, attacked and badly wounded Chotelal because he did not like the assertive, pro-poor pradhan. Chotelal is now forced to somehow spend his days in fear outside his village. His family, with two children, faces a crisis of survival.

Prem Kumar, a social activist from Naraini block of Banda district related how in Bilharka panchayat. Rajabai, a Dalit woman pradhan had been held captive by a powerful feudal man who exercised all powers on her behalf. Her entire five year tenure had been spent like that.

Your natural space

CHANDRASHEKAR HARIHARAN

GREEN EDGE

It is not often that we reflect on the essence and significance of a home or office that is 'green' and those elements inside your house that make living sustainable for you while leaving a softer ecological footprint on every purchase you make to convert your house into a home.

It was only recently that a friend and a city infrastructure expert called me. He wanted to know how a solution could be devised to have a city-based university go grid-free. "It has a genset today feeding about 120 kw," he said. The questions were simple: so what is the energy-load analysis? What are the low, high and zero-induction appliances in use at the campus? What is the extent of use in peak-load hours and in the non-peak load? What is the distribution pattern of energy utilized in the building, and how could he find options that could be multiple and dynamic, and not unitary and static – apart from, of course, being reliable, economic, efficient and functional?

As he himself admitted at the end of an extended conversation, there is no single equipment you can procure to address those solutions that you need for whatever demand you choose to have for a set of buildings. You could say that of many products that you buy. It eventually goes back to how you could bring that connect between simple devices, systems and technologies – sometimes old, and sometimes new – you secure from vendors and market sources who cannot supply or offer the elements you need for the solution that the building demands, without your having to experiment or invent. If you could be a smart system-integrator of many options that are available, you could maybe find the right technical talent out there who can bring to you that unique blend of out-of-box approaches. Then, you have won the game.

The trouble with most of us today – as consumers, manufacturers and service-providers – is that we do not want to fret too much and too often on the challenges of making or buying efficient systems. We buy what is available; we do not reflect on the damage caused upstream on the supply chain with every single thing that is used in making those products.

There is a more depressing thought, though. Try this mental exercise some time: imagine an old-fashioned two-tray balance scale like that held by the classic image of the blindfolded goddess of justice. On one of the trays, put the total benefits that accrue from all the recycling, use of green products, and other environmental, public health-minded and socially concerned activities you engage in over a typical month. Now, on the other tray, place what as an ecologist one might assess as the harmful impacts of everything else you buy and do over the same month: the miles you drive in a car, the kilometers on flights and trains, the hidden consequences of producing, transporting and discarding materials that you buy at home, like your vegetables, the newspaper and such.

How do we change all this? This will critically

depend on you, and what you decide as a consumer to keep pushing the envelope of such market possibilities. There are a few, even if isolated, examples of companies that not only offer efficient products/services, and at the right price, but also insist on telling you of all the things that make their effort ethical and ecological in the



A BCIL green housing project

work environment they create within the organization. Now, how do we have more such companies? Or get all organizations to take this path of ethics beyond reproach while they protect their bottom lines?

Almost all of us go shopping while being completely ignorant of the true impacts of our purchases and our habits. It has to do with a lack of crucial information. The old saying goes: "What we don't know cannot hurt us."

In at least the current larger context of your city and the world, the truth today is just the reverse: what we do not know about what goes on backstage, out of sight, harms us, others living with us, and the planet which is our only home.

For example, look behind the light switch to glimpse the environmental cost of electric power; take the trouble to read and assess the chemicals used by everyday foods and products that are absorbed by our bodies; take a hard look through the supply chain of everything you buy to grasp the human cost of the goods we enjoy.

If you step back and look at how we have dramatically changed our living and lifestyles in the last three generations, you'll then see how it seems impossible for us to be blind to the threat

before us.

There are experts whose prognosis is that our brain, as humans, are attuned to pinpoint and instantly react to a fixed range of dangers that normally fit within the perimeters of our comprehension. It is like what a threatening facial expression, or a snarling animal is to a child.

But nothing in our evolutionary past has shaped our brains to spot the indirect and yet palpable threats like the slow heating of the planet. All you

have to do is to sit in an air-conditioned room for half an hour at 24 degrees C, and then raise it by just one degree: you will see the tangible difference it makes. Now imagine the entire planet, or your city's climate increasing by that one degree C! Further imagine the real threat of an additional one degree rise in such average temperature of the world in about 50 years when your grandson has turned older. Now reflect on how the last Ice Age occurred only 10,000 years ago when there was an average drop of 2 degrees C around the globe!

As humans, we can spot a menacing dog's sinister face and quickly walk in the other direction. But when it comes to global warming, we shrug. Our brain excels in handling threats in the moment but falters at managing those coming at us in some vague and indefinite future.

So when we speak of green homes, there are many specific sets of solutions that one can derive even within today's constraints of technology. Those are things that we will discuss in this column.

But it'll be useful for you to know that a green home actually combats and counters threats that the world and all its inhabitants, including humans, have before us.

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

Living

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

Kashmir's eternal autumn

Bashir's film captures the daily grind of life

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

HE has helplessly watched his home state, Kashmir, simmer for two decades. Mumbai-based actor-turned-director Aamir Bashir, therefore, simply had to tell this story.

His debut film, *Harud* (Autumn), about a young man struggling to come to terms with the loss of his elder brother, grasps the sheer enormity of the problem with a sense of urgency that no Hindi film about the Kashmir situation has ever done before.

Since the outbreak of insurgency in 1989, the Valley has seldom been at peace with itself or with the way life has panned out for its disgruntled, unemployed youth. Fiction films about the impact of the unrest on the people of Kashmir have occasionally emerged from the movie industry mainstream – Mani Ratnam's *Roja*, Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Mission Kashmir*, Shoojit Sircar's *Yahaan* and, most recently, Piyush Jha's *Sikandar* come to mind. But they have all been trapped in the usual "good versus evil" narrative matrix.

Harud is clearly in a different league. It is the work of a man who has seen the Kashmir tragedy unravel from close quarters. Says Bashir: "I left the Valley in 1990. The friends that I used to play football with as a boy now look through me when I visit Kashmir. They have aged much faster – they all appear 10 to 12 years older than me.



A still from the film



Aamir Bashir

***Harud* is a grim and angry film, but it is no less a heartfelt plea for the return of normalcy. It is a plaintive ode to a land where the hope of peace has wilted under the shadow of overbearing military presence.**

Psychological decay has reduced them to mere shells of who they once were."

Harud, meticulously crafted, captures that reality with disturbing starkness. In the context of Indian cinema, it has no reference points. Both in terms of substance and treatment, this meditative, minimalist film is the first of its kind, completely original. As its co-screenwriter and cinematographer Shanker Raman says, "It represents

a different approach to filmmaking." There is no exaggeration in that claim.

The unhurried pacing of *Harud* approximates the severely disrupted rhythms of the lives of people on the brink, and the aimless meanderings of the 20-something protagonist is a stinging comment on the sheer vacuity of existence in the Valley.

This is a place where autumn is a constant. It is a place where young men trudge around like the old and wizened, weighed down by tension and anxiety, even as men in uniform and their guns seem to outnumber people on the streets.

Harud is a grim and angry film, but it is no less a heartfelt plea for the return of normalcy. It is a plaintive ode to a land where the hope of peace has wilted under the shadow of overbearing military presence.

The film took seven years to attain fruition. It was in 2003 that the idea first struck Bashir. It was the year mobile phones were introduced in the Valley, a government decision that triggered a veritable

scramble among the people.

"The desperation to acquire the device was best exemplified by Kashmiris who even paid migrant labourers to stand in queues on their behalf. All conversation centred on the arrival of the device. People thought mobile phones would change their lives, usher in greater safety. But nothing changed," says the director who left Kashmir to

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

study history in New Delhi's St Stephen's College.

Bashir says: "We started with a wafer-thin 55-page screenplay. It went through a four-year process of distillation, of constant paring down of the dialogues. The idea was to feel rather than just understand."

After his elder brother, Tauqir, a tourist photographer has gone missing, a listless Rafiq makes an abortive attempt to cross the border into Pakistan. Nabbed, he is returned to his family. Rafiq's life, like that of his ageing father – a traffic policeman grappling with post-trauma paranoia – is a dead-end. He goes through the motions like an exhausted automaton.

A flicker of hope flashes across his otherwise expressionless face when he stumbles upon his brother's old camera with a roll of undeveloped film. The gadget provides him a window on the past and a means of coming to terms with his present and future. But like all dreams in the Valley, this one, too, is destined to die young.

"The Valley has for years been in a state of magnified insecurity, a situation that causes great psychological damage especially among the youth," says Bashir, explaining a complex situation in a nutshell. "I visit the Valley occasionally only to feel rootless. I cannot return. Similarly, in Mumbai, I am an outsider," says Bashir, who essayed a crucial supporting role in Neeraj Pandey's terrorism drama, *A Wednesday*.

The cast of *Harud* is headed by globally feted Iranian veteran Reza Naji, seen in Majid Majidi's *Children of Heaven* and *The Song of Sparrows*. Says Bashir: "Naseeruddin Shah was my first



choice but once he pulled out of the film, I decided not to cast a local actor in the role of the old father. An actor of that age from the Valley would have come with a lot of baggage. Naji's face is extremely expressive and cinematic. It is like a mirror capturing the reality of the place."

The low-budget, self-financed film, made with the support of the Hubert Bals Fund of the Rotterdam Film Festival, was shot non-stop for 30 days in Kashmir by a 15-member crew. Says

Shanker Raman, "As you can imagine, it isn't easy shooting in the Valley. It was a constant process of negotiation with the locals."

Harud is now doing the rounds of international film festivals: Toronto, London, New York, Mumbai and Kolkata... Pushing the film into the mainstream exhibition circuit will call for another round of negotiations. One can only hope for the sake of a film as good as *Harud* that it isn't as difficult as shooting in the Valley.

From a son to his father

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

FILMMAKER Pankaj Johar's new film, *Still Standing*, is about his quadriplegic father, Rajinder Johar, who has not only come to terms with his disability but is a source of inspiration to many. The film is an emotive tribute by a son to his father, a man of immense courage.

"I knew that this is a story that the world needs to know," says Pankaj. "My father has turned a personal disaster into an opportunity to serve society. He is doing some amazing work which is beyond even able bodied people. This film is a dedication to the unbreakable spirit of this man."

Still Standing turns the camera on the everyday life of Rajinder Johar – from his many triumphs such as receiving the CNN-IBN Citizen Journalist Award in 2008 to the frustrations of being bedridden and the difficulty in doing routine tasks like writing or brushing his teeth or dealing with laid-back employees to get things done.

Then there are vignettes of his family, interviews with people who know him well, the lives that he has touched and transformed. The wonder is that despite the trauma that he and his fam-



Rajinder Johar

ily have lived with, Rajinder Johar has learnt to accept his disability with stoic acceptance and even good cheer.

Among the many case studies presented in the film, is one of Sabina who was four years old when she lost both her legs in a train accident. Life became really tough for her. Her small shop was demolished and she didn't know whom to approach for help. She went to Rajinder Johar who had in the meantime set up an NGO, Family of Disabled (FOD). He helped her set up a small

shop and later gave her a tricycle which she now uses to go to work and ferry her children from school.

Rajinder Johar was also the driving force in the endeavour to help artists with disabilities exhibit their paintings on a national scale. The film shows a talented painter, Sheila, at work. She lost both her hands in an accident at a very young age. But she has trained herself to do a lot of things with her feet, including painting.

"When she came to meet my father, she was looking for a platform to showcase her talent. My father helped her but unfortunately she has not been able to find buyers for her paintings," says Pankaj. But other painters like Imamuddin, who is speech and hearing

impaired, have been luckier.

Rajinder Johar's family bore the brunt of his disability. Pankaj recalls that the family would never go on vacations and he was always embarrassed to bring his friends home. Today Pankaj considers himself lucky to have had the opportunity of watching his inspiring father at close quarters.

"People have different celebrities as their role models. I had one right at home," he says. It shows in his loving portrayal of his father. *Still Standing* is a moving film for the audience.

The power of pink

A film on Banda's gutsy women

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

SAMPAT Pal Devi is an unlikely warrior in a frontier where battles are lost every day. One-time child bride and victim of domestic violence in rural Uttar Pradesh, this feisty activist is today an intrepid vigilante who fights for the rights of women similarly wronged by a brutal, exploitative, casteism-ridden patriarchy.

Fifty-year-old Sampat's incredible crusade for justice in the boondocks of northern India and the plight of those who arrive at her doorstep for help constitute just the stuff that globally acclaimed British documentary filmmaker Kim Longinotto revels in as a chronicler of our times.

Her latest film, *Pink Saris*, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September before travelling to London, Copenhagen, Abu Dhabi and, of course, the 41st International Film Festival of India in Goa, has pushed these rough-and-ready rustic champions of women's liberation on to the global stage.

Even as a student of Camera and Directing in England's National Film School, Longinotto had made *Pride of Place*, a film openly critical of her residential institute. Now 58, she hasn't relented: she still scours the world looking for challenging subjects. Her cinematic *oeuvre* is dominated overwhelmingly by extraordinary women contending with daunting familial, social and political odds and triumphing.

Over the years, Longinotto's camera has made its way into the midst of the lives of women who are not merely crying out for help but also fighting back. The approaches differ, the goals are the same.

Longinotto has told the world about Iranian women negotiating the nation's intractable divorce laws in a Tehran family court (*Divorce Iranian Style*) to Kenyan girls taking legal action against their parents to stop a tradition of female circumcision (*The Day I Will Never Forget*) to a quintet of Durban women who stand up for neglected, abused children (*Rough Aunties*) to two activist female judges in a small courthouse in southwest Cameroon delivering landmark verdicts in favour of those that are most in need (*Sisters in Law*).

The story of Banda district's Sampat Pal and her Gulabi Gang, hell-raisers in pink, is only the latest stop in the filmmaker's outstanding career. "My aim is to create awareness," says Longinotto. "I am not looking for awards or money."

Just last month, *Pink Saris* bagged the best documentary prize at the Abu Dhabi Film Festival. Longinotto promptly announced that she would

use the prize money (one half of \$100,000; her film was a joint winner) to help the girls featured in *Pink Saris*.

Among these victims of oppression and abuse is Sampat herself. Married off very young, mistreated by her in-laws and up against a wall of gender prejudices, she raised the banner of rebellion. "In these parts, Sampat is a very well known figure," says the filmmaker who has brought her alive on screen both as an activist and a woman. "People



A still from the film



Kim Longinotto

listen to her wherever she goes. In fact, they are scared of her."

Besides the principal protagonist, *Pink Saris* features four women: Rampyaree, Niranjani Devi, Rekha and Renu. Through the stories of the first two, Longinotto underscores the price girls who are given away in marriage in their adolescence have to pay. And through Rekha and Renu, she turns the spotlight on how the caste divide

impacts young female lives.

Longinotto and her crew spent ten weeks in and around Attara village of Banda capturing details of these stories of heartbreak and hopelessness. But the focus of the film is firmly on Sampat, a foul-mouthed, self-styled dispenser of on-the-spot justice to women whose lives are on the brink. In her own unique way, she signifies the dawn of change.

"These girls," says Longinotto, "were proud to tell their stories on camera. It shows change and how mindsets are shifting."

Rekha is 14 years old, pregnant, unmarried and homeless. She cannot marry the boy she loves

because of her low caste. Renu, 15, has been abandoned by her husband and sexually abused by her father-in-law. While Longinotto emphasises that these are universal stories, "everything is much more extreme here because there is so much more at stake".

In essence, *Pink Saris* is a searing portrait of the harsh conditions in which women live in parts of 'modern' India. But the film isn't without its moments of amusement and humour. And the charismatic Sampat is at the centre of them all. We watch her as she plunges headlong into complex family situations watched by scores of people who can only stand by and marvel at this woman's amazing gumption and courage.

Her labours may be a tad Quixotic, but Sampat has no doubt whatsoever in her mind that her approach is the best available in the circumstances. But not everybody around her is as sure – certainly not those bruised and battered girls that are most

vulnerable. And Longinotto is fully aware of that.

As she unflinchingly records her and the Gulabi Gang at work, the film never suggests that Sampat's intervention is all there is to this complex situation. The protagonist's battle is at best a work in progress and it has miles to go before it can achieve closure: *Pink Saris* drives home that point without any ambiguity.

"A girl's life is cruel... a woman's life is very cruel..." Sampat says on camera, summing up the enormity of the task at hand. Indeed, it is the sheer magnitude of the problems that she is out to resolve that makes her such an inspiring woman.

Says Longinotto: "Sampat Pal is a hard character but at the same time she is such an inspiration for what she tries to do for everyone who comes to her for help." But all said and done, her brand of justice, given the uninterrupted history of violence against women that she is fighting, can only be a quick-fix solution.

But the war is on. "I like making films that chronicle the changes that happen as we shoot. That's what so great about *Pink Saris*." In capturing an irrepressible catalyst of change caught at the crossroads of her struggle, Longinotto's powerful documentary has served an undeniably significant purpose.

RANDOM SHELF HELP

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

More muscle for NGOs



STRATEGIC RESEARCH AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION FOR NGOS

Accenture- Stiftung
The Banyan
Sage
₹ 325

Frederick Noronha
Panjim (Goa)

RECENTLY, I got caught in the thick of an online debate, that surfaced about our profession, writing. Should writers be creative or should they be productive? Can they be both? Does productivity come only at the cost of creativity? Do we 'lose our soul' when we attempt to simply attain productivity at all costs?

If you transfer this debate to NGOs, one could ask: do NGOs need corporate research? Can strategy tools (like market and organizational analysis) actually help them? Are there 'remarkable similarities' between the NGO sector and the for-profit sector?

This is exactly what this book does. It raises the question of how to take efficiency to the non-profit organisation. Some of us, old-school types, might be sceptical. But it might make sense to give such ideas a careful ear before making up our mind.

First of all, something about the book's origins. This slim publication of 178 pages is the joint work of Accenture-Stiftung, Germany; the School of Communication Management at the International University in Germany; and the 1993-founded Chennai based NGO, The Banyan. The last evolved from a non-profit to a for-impact organisation.

"This publication aims to add value to the work being done by NGOs and social entrepreneurs," say Vandana Gopikumar and Vaishnavi Jayakumar, founders and managing trustees of The Banyan, India. They point out that in a country with huge unfinished tasks like India "most often, skilled, committed and socially charged individuals who run such organisations are bogged down with day-to-day interventions and sometimes lose focus of the larger issue."

The Banyan has worked on the rescue, treatment and rehabilitation of mentally ill women. In their case, they say, they were often caught up with issues of providing food, clothing and treatment... and this overtook the goals of "scientifically evaluating their impact, accessing gaps or creating a strategic game plan to combat the problem in its entirety".

QUALITY OF LIFE

The book raises a number of issues.

NGOs, we are reminded, do not operate to optimise profits or shareholder value but to increase the quality of life and dignity for every citizen.

NGOs come in varied shapes and sizes – INGOs (international NGOs), BINGOs (business-orientated international NGOs), ENGOs (environmental NGOs), GINGOs (genuine NGOs funded 100 per cent by membership fees), GONGOs (government-operated NGOs), QUANGOs (quasi-autonomous NGOs), networks of NGOs, and social movements.

After discussing issues like the role of NGOs, and the size of the NGO sector, the book points to key challenges facing such bodies. Increased financial transparency and accountability are among these.

Chapter 2 focuses on NGOs in India, and the book then moves to 'the role of political communication in agenda setting.' Ideas mentioned here go from using opinion polling and computerised databases, to conducting of "opposition research". Search for the last entry on the Wikipedia to know what all it involves. Taken to its extreme, this can be controversial!

Next, we get some 'best practice case studies'. Briefly put, these look at Amnesty International, Germany, The Banyan, Butterflies and iCONGO (New Delhi), Indian Network for People Living with AIDS/HIV, MV Foundation (Secunderabad), Room to Read (San Francisco) and Young European Federalists (Brussels).

CASE STUDIES

Strategic research, market and organisational analysis, industry analysis, SWOT analysis and a whole lot of other management jargon creep in too. Strategy, political communication, strategic communication planning, advocacy and evaluation and policy change are also tackled. Case-studies are interesting and well chosen. One is impressed by the impact Amnesty International, Germany, has and you realise that the impact of this 11 million Euro budgeted organisation doesn't come by accident.

Meanwhile, the snazzily-named iCONGO, The Indian Confederation of NGOs, is said to have downsized from 150 NGOs members to just 80 "as they only want absolutely transparent and accountable NGOs with huge integrity and commitment to the cause as members."

MV Foundation is not a direct implementing agency in its war against child labour. On the contrary, it is a facilitator to the programme. It focuses on strengthening local institutions. It sets up forums, committees or pressure groups.

Launched in 1981 in memory of educationist-his-

torian Professor Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya, it worked on abolishing child labour in three villages since 1991. Today it claims to have withdrawn 400,000 children from work in about 6,000 villages.

Its external communication strategies include liaising with journalists to write small articles on MVF's success stories – like, portraits of the children, not directly about the NGO. It reaches out through "true" volunteers and "paid" volunteers who take up child rights issues.

European institutions have longer traditions, and, more importantly, access to more funds. The Young European Federalists (JEF) fits in this category perhaps.

Room to Read, founded in 2000 by former Microsoft executive John Wood after a trek to Nepal, is a story we have probably heard, viewed on TV or read about. Such you-can-do-it-too stories are the kind of inspirations we all need. Room to Read claims to have constructed 442 schools, set up over 5,100 libraries, donated over 2.2 million English language children's books, published 226 new local language children's titles, funded 4,000 long-term girls' scholarships, and set up 155 computer and language labs.

PLAN AND STRATEGY

If we go by this book, strategic planning and political communication "are the prerequisites for successfully initiating policy change."

Case-studies mentioned are quite impressive. But are these NGOs doing well because they lean on strategic planning and political communication? Or, do they lean on the latter because they are anyway successful, and can easily afford this luxury? Does their success depend on some wholly unconnected variables?

One of the non-profits this reviewer was associated with (BytesForAll) managed to get a whole lot of attention simply by communicating – more in the past than now – and doing its job well and completing it with sincerity. There was no planning, and not even an idea of 'political communication.' You might say we did it without knowing it...

Whatever the case, if one can be effective in work we care for, then it's worth clutching on to just about any straw. There's a whole lot of work waiting to be done. The challenge is how to spread the impact, how to build sustainability, and how to gain scale.

This is a title definitely worth reading. At least it pushes you to think of other options too.

Frederick Noronha is a journalist based in Goa.

Reforming global finance



FIXING GLOBAL FINANCE - A DEVELOPING COUNTRY PERSPECTIVE ON GLOBAL FINANCIAL REFORMS

Kavaljit Singh
Madhyam

Subir Roy
Bangalore

If there is any good that the financial crisis of the last two years has done, it is to make us realise that the global financial system is broken. There is thus a lot of rethinking going on in academia and elsewhere about evolving a new model. There is the realization that state intervention is no longer an untouchable concept. The Great Recession that the world is struggling to get out of has put an end to the intellectual hegemony of the economic fundamentalism whose father figure is considered to be Milton Friedman and whose key historical practitioners are Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.

But that is about where the good news ends. We know that the old order does not work but those running it are nowhere near realizing what the new order should be. In fact, they are still practising the old imperatives and coming to grief. The greatest example of this is Barack Obama who promised change to come to power but went by what practitioners from the past like Larry Summers and Ben Bernanke knew best and has been administered a resounding thumbs down by the US electorate in the mid-term elections.

What is more, the crisis was caused by the masters of the global economic system in the developed countries and most of the current discussion in the world is centred around how things can be set right, keeping largely the needs of the developed economies in mind. Virtually ignored in this whole exercise is the state and prospects of the developing economies which have to live with the mess created by those who should have known better. This is where Kavaljit Singh comes in with his thoughts on how to fix the global financial system, keeping specifically in mind the needs of developing countries.

He is a product of the Delhi School of Economics and has been associated with the Public Interest Research Centre set up in the early nineties by progressive thinkers to look at the new economic policies then being introduced. They brought out the alternative economic survey. He is also a long term activist in the civil society space with a keen involvement in civil liberties ever since the Delhi riots of 1984. Plus he has founded an alternative imprint Madhyam which has published this book.

The book argues that since a large number of big foreign banks are in the midst of turmoil and financial distress in the aftermath of the crisis, it raises

serious questions about their efficiency, 'best practices,' state-of-the-art risk management models and corporate governance structures. Hence the agenda of market-driven reforms and the large presence of foreign banks should be seriously reconsidered by Indian policy makers. A detailed cost-benefit analysis of the impact of the entry of foreign banks in the Indian banking sector is needed.

Post-crisis, the real challenge is to create a new international institutional structure which can address the consequences of the interconnectedness of financial markets and regulatory arbitrage. The proposal for creating a global regulatory institution which can oversee the entire financial system in totality is not new but has picked up momentum in the wake of the global crisis. Such an institution can identify systemic risks posed by interconnected institutions in the global financial system and can work with national regulatory agencies to overcome such risks. It can also effectively check the rampant regulatory arbitrage.

Kavaljit Singh lays great store by the usefulness of capital controls for developing economies. An outwardly innocuous culprit is trade and investment agreements which can hinder the ability of countries to use capital controls to tame currency and market volatility. Since such agreements have 'lock in' obligations, surrendering the ability to deploy capital controls in return for more favorable market access should set alarm bells ringing in the developing world. If bilateral trade agreements banning capital controls become de rigueur, a country using them to defend its economy will end up compensating foreign investors for the inconvenience caused to them!

What is the solution? As financial crises are increasingly taking global dimensions, social movements likewise have to take a global stance. Although the arena of popular mobilization may remain national, cross border alliances and linkages with international groups need to be developed and strengthened. The campaigns on reforming global finance cannot be launched in exclusivity, rather they should be an integral part of cross sectional movements for democratic control and accountability of global economic governance.

The real challenge before civil society organiza-

tions, according to Kavaljit Singh, resides in enforcing the adoption of a genuinely participatory agenda in the operations of financial markets and regulatory bodies. Citizens and their representative bodies will have to develop innovative approaches so as to bring discipline and democratic accountability in the operations of both markets and public institutions.

Singh lays stress on domestic demand and not export driven growth. There should be a progressive broad based direct tax system to generate the resources for public investment and credit control should be used to transfer resources to agriculture,

LAKSHMAN ANAND

small business and the poor, he says. There should be no tax havens or offshore banking spaces, a keen watch has to be kept on the external short term debt burden, countries should go slow on capital account liberalisation and rethink the opening up of banking and financial services are some of his suggestions.

The cardinal principal that he would have everyone remember is that "financial stability is a global public good" and a voice should therefore be given to developing countries at international forums. Civil society must be made a part

of the debate over global private capital flows so as to help the real economy and people at large. His overarching idea is that there should be a "new deal" which will outline the path of global financial reforms through a process of democratic renewal.

There is little to disagree with the individual points that Kavaljit Singh makes but, taken in their entirety, they seem a partial going back to some of the pre-liberalisation paradigms. There was steeply progressive taxation then but tax revenues jumped only after growth picked up and tax rates were lowered. And there is no question that a maddeningly complex system of industrial licensing, an overvalued exchange rate and draconian exchange controls, administered by a self-perpetuating bureaucracy, stifled growth.

Singh's answer to that is the need for a well functioning bureaucracy and the primacy of better governance, enforced under the watchful eye of a participatory civil society. The good news is that the system now has a new *brahmastra* which can partially help it deliver all this – the Right to Information law.



Kavaljit Singh

The path to peace within

Samita Rathor
New Delhi

THE underlying principles of Buddha's perennial teachings on the Four Seals of Dharma are like healing remedies for the mind. Knowledge and information are today freely available. What we lack is practicing this knowledge in our day to day existence. And knowledge without practice is like the sun without rays. Just as religion without spirituality has no meaning, knowledge without practice is meaningless.

By practicing the Four Seals of Dharma we can get liberated from suffering. The Four Seals of Dharma are interrelated and are a systematic recipe to attaining a state of peace in the Buddhist tradition.

From 7 to 10 November a workshop was conducted by the Venerable Geshe Lhakdor in New Delhi which explained the philosophy and practice of 'The Four Seals of Dharma' to an interested audience. The workshop was organized by The Foundation For Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

These Four Seals are the foundation of a sensible and effective spiritual practice. They boost your moral fiber so that you find a sense of comfort in any situation. If we follow the Four Seals things can only go right.

These are:

All compounded phenomena are impermanent.

Every phenomenon we can think of is compounded/composite and therefore subject to impermanence. Impermanence is a transient nature of reality. Any phenomenon that undergoes change is momentary and all momentary phenomena are impermanent. The very cause that brought the phenomena to life will bring it to its death.

The moment there is life the process of death begins. There is no secondary condition for its degeneration. Our physical body is a good example. Being mindful of the impermanence of all compounded things, including ourselves, helps us to accept loss, old age and death. This may seem cynical but it is realistic. There will be loss, old age and death whether we accept them or not.

Buddhists have a single statement – namely this first seal, phenomena, are impermanent because they are composite. Anything that is assembled will, sooner or later, come apart.

If we are mindful of impermanence we will arrive at understanding the teaching of interdependent origination. All compounded phenomena are part of a limitless network of interconnection that is relentlessly altering. Phenomena become because of conditions created by other phenomena. Elements gather and dissolve and reconstruct. Nothing is detached from everything else.

All contaminated phenomena lead to suffering.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama translated this seal as: "All contaminated phenomena are of the nature of suffering." The word 'stained' or 'contaminated' refers to actions, emotions and thoughts



Venerable Geshe Lhakdor

The moment there is life the process of death begins. There is no secondary condition for its degeneration. Our physical body is a good example.

conditioned by selfish attachment or by hate, greed and ignorance.

Anything produced is under the control of factors other than itself like its causes and conditions. Causes here refers to our fundamental ignorance, afflictive emotions, cognitive events and contaminated actions. Ignorance is a deluded state of mind and should not be perceived as a passive state of mere non awareness. Physical and mental suffering are not the only forms of suffering. All fundamental experiences of uneasiness and discontentment are also suffering.

The Buddha said, "Understand suffering." That is the first Noble Truth.

All phenomena are empty. They are without inherent existence.

By practicing impermanence and suffering one can develop genuine renunciation, a deeply felt spontaneous wish to be free from the bondage of suffering. To attain this state of freedom, the

third seal becomes evident. As ignorance is a state of misconception and misapprehension our experiences have no valid foundation or reality and are therefore empty.

Mahayana Buddhism teaches the doctrine of shunyata, or 'emptiness.' Phenomena have no existence of their own and are empty of a permanent self. In shunyata there is neither reality nor no-reality – only relativity. However, shunyata is also an absolute reality.

The fourth seal is nirvana or true peace.

The nature of cessation is true peace, nirvana. The Buddha taught that nirvana was beyond human concepts or imagination and discouraged his students from wasting time speculating. "In many philosophies or religions, the final goal is something you can hold on to and keep. The final goal is the only thing that truly exists. But nirvana is not fabricated, so it is not something to be held on to. It is referred to as 'beyond extremes.'"

Nirvana is defined in diverse ways by various schools of Buddhism.

Without these Four Seals, the Buddhist path would become theistic, religious dogma, and its whole purpose would be lost.

According to Venerable Geshe Lhakdor negative emotions are facilitating factors of suffering. This should be obstructed by negative antidotes like anger.

A meditative practice needs to be done stage by stage. By focusing we need to become aware which negative emotions are predominant in us. Anger is one of the most destructive emotions. Countless killings are happening because of anger and hatred.

Heal the mind by taking steps to do away with negative emotions and remove imprints of negative emotions from their seeds. When we plant a seed it is important to remove the obstructing factors and make place for facilitating the factors of growth. A self grasping, self cherishing attitude needs to be done way with. Identify the fluctuation of negative emotions.

Any task that we undertake needs to be practiced systematically. There may be obstructing factors which can retard this process. But if all causes are complete no one can stop the fruit. Difficult should not be a justification and one should eradicate any negativity present. One should get used to positive emotions.

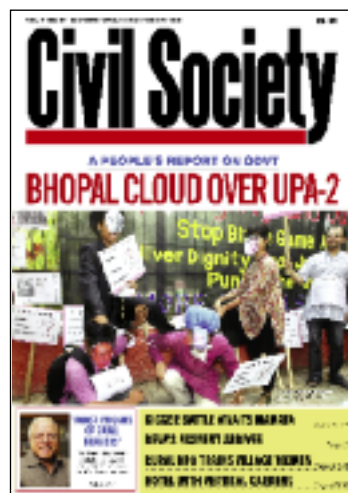
From the very beginning we undergo suffering. Pleasure leads to suffering. Therefore uproot the root cause of suffering. Let's not forget that the main source of happiness lies within and not in sensual objects.

Venerable Geshe Lhakdor is a distinguished Dharma teacher. He was the official translator, interpreter and religious assistant to the Dalai Lama for several years. He currently serves as Director, Tibetan Library and Archives, Dharamsala. He received his Geshe Degree (Doctorate of Divinity), the highest degree of learning in Tibetan Buddhism from the Drepung Loseling Monastic University in south India.

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POLITICS IS NOT JUST ABOUT POLITICIANS



UNDERSTAND DEVELOPMENT
UNDERSTAND POLITICS

Civil Society
RIGHT PLACE FOR POLITICS

Purify your mind

SAMITA RATHOR

THROUGHOUT the day we are surrounded by pollution. Pollution makes all its victims murky and dirty. We are blessed with nature's gift, water, which helps us to physically clean ourselves. Water to some extent is tangible and accessible for most of us in varying quantities. Without water there would be no life. Everything would be even more contaminated. When dust particles stick to the surface of our skin we use water to remove them.

But what happens when we need to undergo mental cleansing? We cannot really use water or any other element of nature. In India we hire domestic workers to clean our homes everyday. But whom do we hire to cleanse our mind?

MIND BATH

- A mind bath can be done in different ways.
- Just as we need to bathe our bodies daily we need to practice mind cleansing everyday.
- What happens to our physical body if we don't bathe daily? The same will happen to our mind if we don't cleanse it on a regular basis.
- The results of an unclean mind will appear in the form of negative emotions like depression, worry, addiction, confusion and anger – all of which we can do without.

Everything that takes shape in our lives is the result of our thought process. Sometimes we may not be aware of these thoughts. We may develop a pattern of behaviour without realizing how deep rooted these thoughts are. When these patterns of behaviour surface, they form our personality. Deep rooted negative patterns may cause a lot of mental agony and suffering.

SOUL VALUE

There are two important factors that may adversely affect our minds.

- What we eat.
- Our lifestyle.

Do you really think a chemical disparity in the brain is merely responsible for mental ailments like depression and addictions? Could such afflictions not be directly linked to a person's eating habits and lifestyle? Alcohol addiction, for example, creates a negative pattern in the brain and leads to physical addiction when the alcohol gets absorbed in the blood stream.

WHAT WE CAN DO

- There are certain emotions that delude and contaminate the mind.
- We are all aware of this. The emotions are simple to understand but difficult to let go of. These are obstructing diseases that retard our spiritual development.
- If one can learn the art of consciously becoming aware of these perverse patterns of thinking then one can enhance the quality of one's mind.

Negative thoughts are numerous. Some familiar ones are mentioned below. I think at some point of time we have all experienced these. Once we become aware of negative thoughts we can slowly start removing them. This negative energy can be channelized to positive energy by a positive thought conversion process. A person does not have to go to jail to be a prisoner. He can be a prisoner of his own negative concepts, ideas and

thoughts. This needs to be avoided.

NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

- Jealousy • Ignorance • Ego • Desire
- Hatred • Fear • Greed • Violence • Stealing
- Lies

Positive thoughts push open the blocked passages of the mind caused by negative emotions and allow the free flow of superior emotions. Just imagine a blocked pipe which transports water filled with all kinds of debris. The flow of water will not only get retarded, the pipe may burst due to the pressure.

The same situation may happen with our minds. If negative thoughts keep collecting we may have a mental breakdown due to the accumulation of negative thoughts. The antidote for negative thoughts are positive thoughts. This happens by slowly and mindfully understanding, then building and nurturing positive thoughts to avoid a negative crises in the future.

Some positive thoughts that we all have within us and can put it into practice are:

POSITIVE THOUGHTS

- Prayer • Spirituality • Gratitude • Compassion / Kindness • Truth • Acceptance • Tolerance / Patience • Humility • Contentment • Self contemplation • Love for all beings

Ralph Waldo Emerson rightly says, "The ancestor of every action is a thought." So by keeping thoughts positive we give rise to a sparkling and evolving mind.

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LAKSHMAN ANAND

PRODUCTS

NAMDAAH MAGIC

Namdahs from Kashmir are no longer staid. Those warm, woolly rugs have gone wild with a range of sizes, patterns and styles. You can now buy namdahs in zany geometric patterns. Or with floral designs. The Craft Development Institute (CDI) in Srinagar, Kashmir, has given the namdah a makeover. While the National Institute of Design (NID) provided the blueprint, around 300 namdahs were creatively developed by Arifa Jan, a postgraduate in craft management. She got namdah weavers to go through a refresher course and learn anew. The weavers had stopped making namdahs since they had lost their market. "In CDI we focus on design interventions which can improve sales," says Yasser Ahmed, a lecturer at CDI. There is a craft management course and a programme in entrepreneurship. The artisans are given a stipend while they train. "All three aspects – design, management and computer aided tools – are combined," says Ilyas Wali, a lecturer who oversees the IT section at CDI. The namdahs were displayed at Dastkar's annual Nature Bazaar on the lawns of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in New Delhi.

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