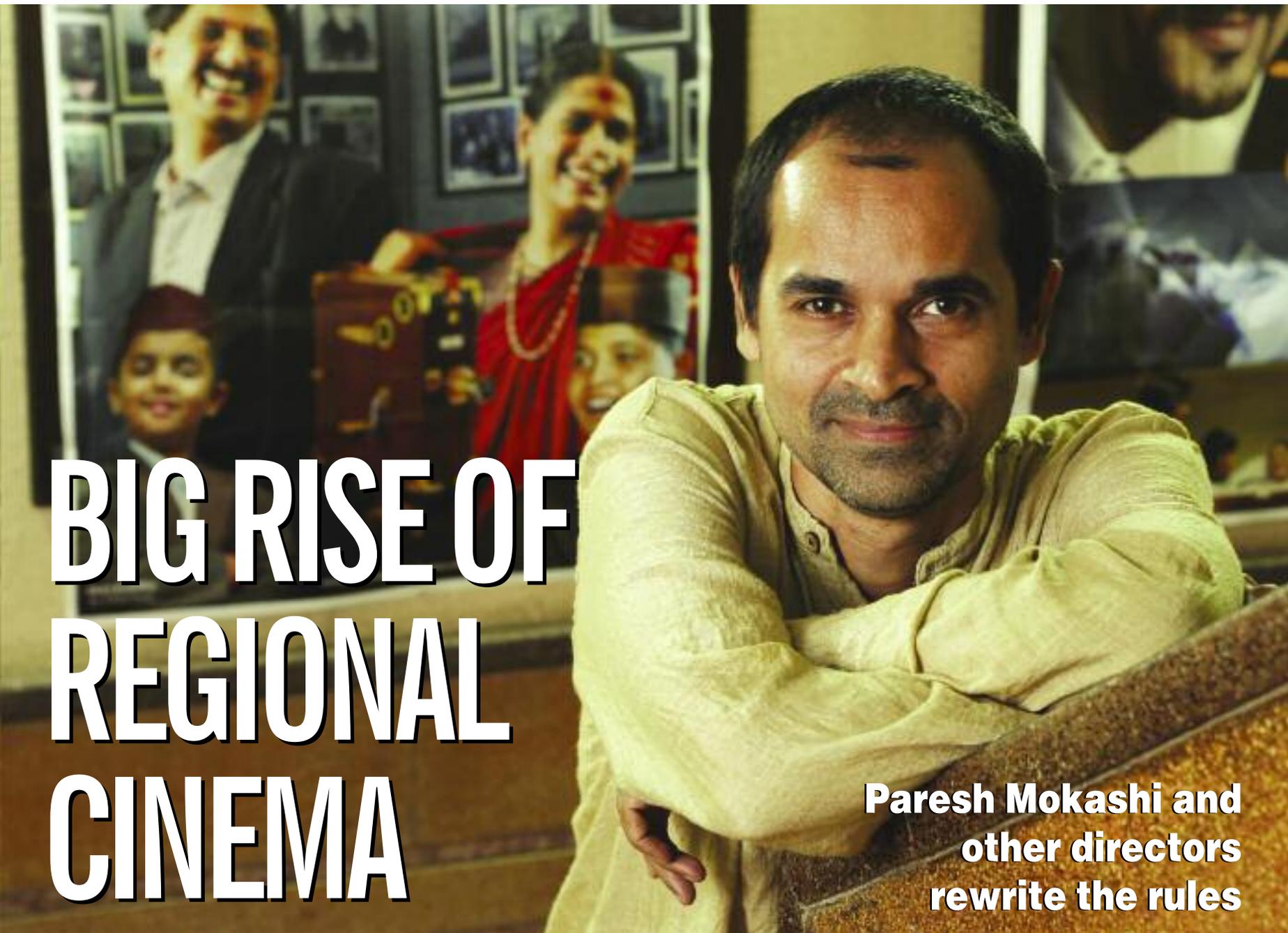


Civil Society



BIG RISE OF REGIONAL CINEMA

Paresh Mokashi and other directors rewrite the rules



STREET TO SCHOOL WITH LITERACY INDIA

Children who once worked as ragpickers and domestic help join formal schools and dream big

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POLICE REFORMS IN DOLDRUMS

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FOOTBALL WITH A SIXTH SENSE

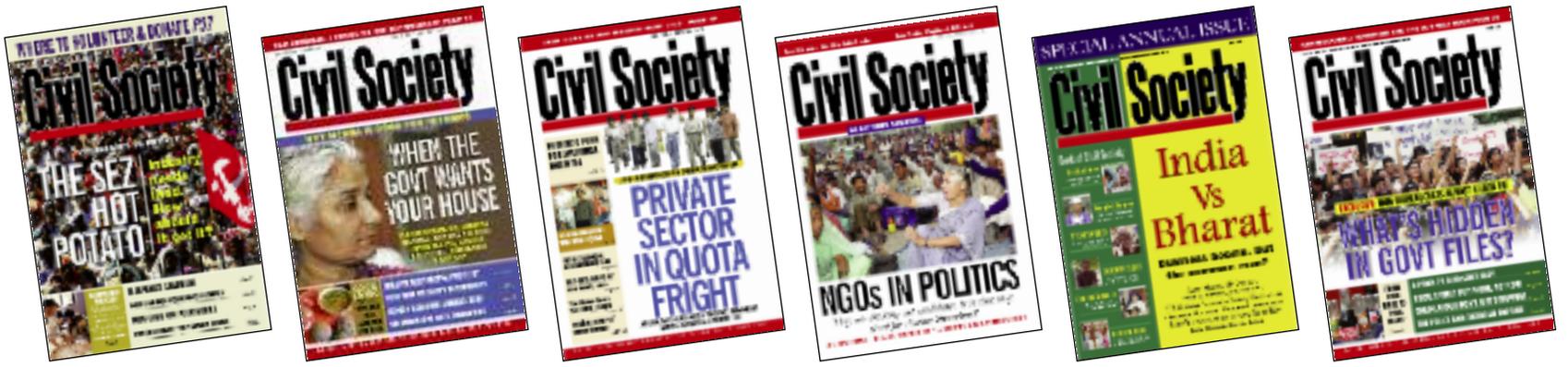
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GREEN HUNT TARGETS ACTIVIST

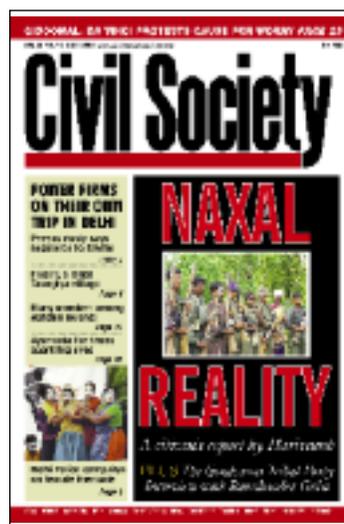
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FOR A GLOWING SKIN

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POLITICS IS NOT JUST ABOUT POLITICIANS



UNDERSTAND DEVELOPMENT
UNDERSTAND POLITICS

Civil Society

RIGHT PLACE FOR POLITICS

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COVER STORY

BIG RISE OF REGIONAL CINEMA

Young regional language directors are making films which are indigenous, original and global in scope. Will these free-spirited film makers be the future of Indian cinema?

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Local and global

REGIONAL cinema is making waves in the hands of a new breed of directors who are fiercely independent and rooted in their local realities. They aren't attracting nationwide audiences as yet, but that perhaps has more to do with the way films are marketed and distributed than their own formidable talents. It is a question of time before the demand for such films grows and in these early offerings is perhaps the first truly original Indian cinema in a long while. It is a measure of how much attention these films are capable of attracting that *Harishchandrichi Factory* by Paresh Mokashi was an Indian entry at the Oscars.

Is regional cinema representative of a larger trend in the country? Are people demanding a better hearing for their local problems? Are new technologies helping them to express themselves nationally and globally? The films not only speak of local realities, but they also show flowering of talent which seeks to be recognised on its own terms.

Behind the tragic story of Ruchika in Chandigarh is the long history of poor police reforms. We have in this issue a story which looks at the Ruchika case from this angle. Politicians want to continue using policemen for their own ends and the result is a force that doesn't really bother to serve ordinary people. But modernisation of the police force is critical and can no longer be ignored. What appears to be certain is that reforms are not working. Police reforms need to be debated by a wider section of society. A cue could be taken from RTI and NREGA and other laws which have been crafted by peoples' movements.

It is necessary that more than one voice be heard on national issues. It is because of this that we have interviewed Sunita Narain of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). The view CSE has on the so-called Copenhagen Accord is very different to the official claim of success. It is a view taken by this magazine as well and expressed in our January issue. There is a need to differentiate between the right to develop and the right to pollute. Climate change is a reality whether glaciers vanish in 2035 or later and it is the developing world which will be a victim.

Serious open debate is needed in India on our claims that we will reduce emissions. The government has so far not shown any real ability to push the economy in this direction. It is also most unlikely that we can hope to shift to a low-carbon emission regime without money and technology from the developed world. We need representatives who can argue in India's best interests in contemporary terms. Instead we choose to be taken for a ride.

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Civil Society

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The magazine that goes places Now make your connections

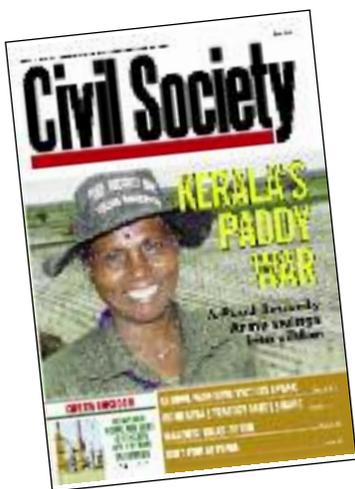
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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Paddy farming

Shree Padre's article on mechanisation of paddy cultivation is an incredible story that gives hope to the rest of us fighting similar agricultural battles in the rest of the world. Above all we must make agriculture a desired and profitable profession in the future.

Ken Love

Shree Padre's story was very informative for a person like me who has

no experience in the field. At least I will be able to sympathise with farmers if not share their problems.

Shailaja S Bhat

As a farmer I always believe that knowledge and the availability of mechanisation of agriculture does not correspond with the shortage of labour created by economic development. Workers don't want to work with their muscle power. Instead they like to use machinery. The scientists took the right decision and I welcome the transfer of knowledge from lab to farm.

D Ramesh

Community farming is the ultimate way for sustainable agriculture and food security in our country. Mechanisation is possible only when farmers with small holdings come together. I am happy the days are not far off.

Anusuya Sharma

I hope this movement spreads to other states and prevents paddy fields from being converted into ginger fields and areca plantations.

Soumya Bhat

This is a good approach by Dr Jaikumaran. I have seen agricultural

scientists conduct research on a few cents of land and project the results in hectares. That is why their results fail on farmers' fields. Since our land holdings are fragmented, cooperative farming system may be promoted to adopt this type of technology. It is really a war against shortage of labour and to win the minds of the younger generation of farmers who see their future in cities. Good effort by Shree Padre.

G Ganapathy Bhat

This work should inspire farmers across the country. Hats off to Dr Jaikumaran and his team!

Seetaram Bhat

Coordinated efforts by Dr Jaikumaran are really laudable. Such an initiative was what farmers were looking forward to. Hope this experiment comes out well and encourages youngsters to become farmers.

Neethu Mohan

Global warming

Your story, 'Global warming victims not heard in Copenhagen' was excellent. India is bearing the brunt of climate change. I agree the developed countries should pay us so that we can help the victims of their lavish

lifestyles and make the costly shift to a low carbon economy.

Shailey Singh

The Indian government must put in place better pollution control mechanisms. Currently the pollution control boards are a joke. People can also help by respecting nature in all its manifestations. We must not degrade our forests and beaches.

Pat Fonseca



THE RIGHT PICTURE

Inadvertently, an incorrect picture of the Drag school was published in the January issue. Here is the correct picture. The error is regretted.

Editor

Pune murder shows RTI activists in need of protection

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE brutal murder of right to information (RTI) activist Satish Shetty once again emphasises the need to provide protection to those who put their lives at risk by exposing corruption.

On 3 January, Satish Shetty, 38, was killed by three men in Talegaon, Pune. Shetty had been using RTI to expose land scams and fake registration cases in the Talegaon, Lonavala and Dehu Road regions of Maval. The DIG

(Registration) stated that Shetty's complaints had led to investigations that unearthed tax evasion and illegal sale of government land. The investigation in the Sabele Whaghire 500 acre land scam, that is still in progress, had also led to the suspension of a sub-registrar.

Shetty, a longstanding activist, had earlier uncovered scams around the Mumbai-Pune expressway and exposed the setting up of banquet halls and restaurants in residential areas. He had revealed cases of illegal selling of kerosene to bogus

ration card holders and the abuse of power by government officials. He had been working on spreading awareness about RTI and was popular with Talegaon residents who regularly sought his help for solving their problems.

"The murder of Satish Shetty is not an isolated incident of threat to life and liberty of people using RTI to expose malfunctioning and corruption," said the National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information (NCPRI) in its press release. "All across India, RTI activists face threats and attack. However, too frequently, even where they ask for police protection on grounds of significant threats, it is denied them."

The DSP, said NCPRI, has admitted that despite Shetty's requests, protection had not been provided because the procedural police verification process takes time. "This is not a good enough reason," retorts the NCPRI.

Vijay Kuvalekar, state information commissioner of Maharashtra, said that the murder of Shetty had seriously hurt the RTI movement in the state.

"RTI exists to ensure transparency in a democratic system of governance. If those who use it do not get protection, it defeats the system," said the information commissioner.

Shetty began his work as an activist when he joined the anti-corruption movement launched by Anna Hazare many years ago. When Anna Hazare undertook a long fast at the pilgrim town of Alandi in protest against corrupt practices in government offices, Shetty was by his side.

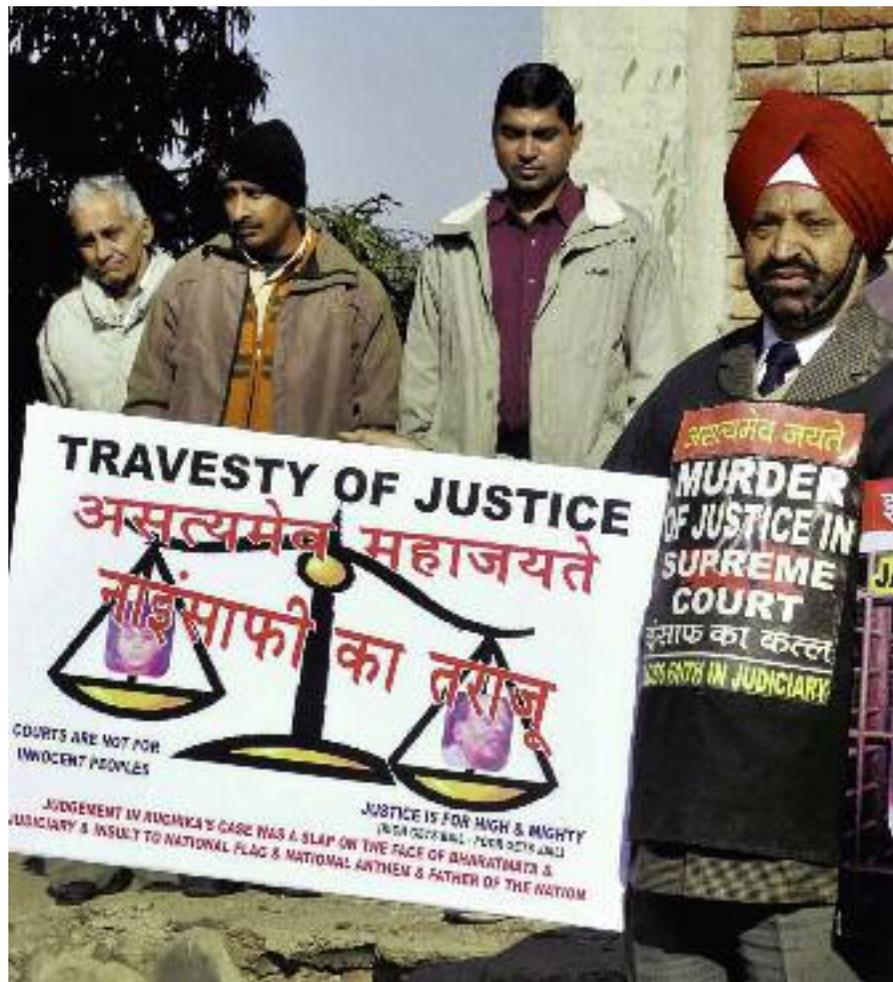
"The swords that pierced Satish Shetty did not just kill an RTI activist, but also stabbed the spirit of democracy," said Anna Hazare.

Three persons including a lawyer have been arrested in connection with the murder of Satish Shetty. Vijay Dabhade, the lawyer, and his accomplices Pramod Waghmare and Parshuram Telegu, allegedly gave a contract to kill Shetty.

"The murder of Satish Shetty is a deeply painful but important instance of the potential of RTI to curb corrupt elements within government and society but also a reminder that those defending the law and blowing the whistle on wrongdoing must be assured adequate protection," said the NCPRI.

The murder of Satish Shetty is not an isolated incident of threat to life and liberty of people using RTI to expose corruption.

Police reforms



Local residents protesting outside the Panchkula district court against former Haryana DGP, SPS Rathore, convicted in the Ruchika molestation case

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Ruchika Girhotra case has once again put the spotlight on police reforms. After 19 years, SPS Rathore, a retired Director-General of Police, (DGP) in Haryana, got off with a light sentence of just six months on charges of molesting 14-year-old Ruchika in 1990.

Rathore allegedly got Ruchika thrown out of school and had her brother, then a minor, arrested on false charges of stealing cars. The boy was handcuffed and tortured while illegally kept in detention. Ruchika finally committed suicide unable to cope with the stress that she and her family were subjected to.

Ruchika's case is unfortunately not uncommon. The highest number of complaints made to human rights commissions in India are of human rights violations at the hands of the police, according to a report by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), one of the few NGOs which studies policing and prison reforms.

The Indian police, it is acknowledged, are known for rights abuse, corruption and lack of efficiency. It is also known that the police are poorly paid, badly trained and 'kicked around like footballs' by politicians.

Successive governments have not taken measures to improve the police force which has been governed by an archaic law passed in 1861. To recap, in 1997, the Union government set up a National Police Commission (NPC) to improve the functioning of the police. It produced eight reports and several recommendations which just gathered dust.

In 1996 two former Directors-General of Police filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court, asking the court to direct the Union and state governments to address the poor quality of policing in India.

The court asked the Union government to set up a committee to study the

are in the doldrums



Most state compliance is merely on paper. Around 12 states have new Police Acts, a mish mash culled from all three committees. Not one is a model Police Act.

recommendations of the NPC. Accordingly, the JF Rebeiro committee and the K Padamanabhaiah studied the recommendations. In 2005, the Soli Sorabjee committee drafted a Model Police Act and submitted it to the Union government.

To set police reforms in motion, the Supreme Court in September 2006, in the historic Prakash Singh vs Union of India case, issued orders to the Union and state governments to comply with seven directives for police reform. The court's objectives were to increase police autonomy and accountability.

But things are murky on the ground. State governments don't want to give up control of the police or modernise the force. In fact, activists monitoring police reforms are wondering whether states are merely creating another dysfunctional bureaucracy.

"Its business as usual and the Supreme Court does not seem very interested," says Nawaz Kotwal, coordinator at CHRI and editor of a study on police accountability in action.

In 2008, the court appointed a monitoring committee consisting of Justice KT Thomas, Kamal Kumar, retired DGP and Dharminder Sharma, Additional Home Secretary to look at state compliance of the court's directives. CHRI is an informal member of the committee.

Most state compliance is merely on paper. Around 12 states have new Police Acts which are a mish mash culled from all three committees – the JF Rebeiro committee, the K Padamanabhaiah committee and the Soli Sorabjee committee.

The states with new Police Acts are Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Tripura, Rajasthan, Kerala, Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat. Bihar was the first but its new law is supposedly worse than the 1861 Act. Not one is a model Police Act.

To ensure the police are insulated from political interference, every state is supposed to set up a State Security Commission headed by the chief minis-

ter or home minister with the DGP as secretary. Haryana does not have any such commission and neither does Rajasthan though both have passed a new Police Act.

A Police Establishment Board, headed by the DGP and four senior officers is to decide transfers, postings, promotions etc. Such boards function only in name. Using the right to information (RTI) law, CHRI found out that transfer of police officers blithely carries on.

To look into complaints of serious misconduct against police officers, Police Complaints Authorities (PCAs) are supposed to be set up at state and district level. According to CHRI, such PCAs are functional in just five states, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Goa, Assam and Tripura. The only state to have district level Police Complaints Authority is Kerala.

The job of the PCA at state level is to examine cases of death, grievous hurt or rape by officers above the rank of Superintendent of Police. The district level complaints committee is to also look into cases of extortion, land-grabbing and other abuse of authority by police officers below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police.

PCAs are supposed to be independent bodies headed by a retired judge of the High Court or Supreme Court out of a panel of names chosen by the Chief Justice. But all members of these PCAs are being appointed directly by the state government. In Gujarat, sitting MLAs have been appointed. In Kerala, serving police officers have been appointed.

"People will naturally be fearful of approaching a police officer with a complaint against another police officer," says Kotwal.

No state has earmarked funds from its budget for the PCAs. Everywhere PCAs lack permanent offices and facilities. In Goa, the chairman of the PCA kept it functioning with money from his own pocket for nearly a year.

The PCAs have been vested with the powers of a civil court. They can file an FIR, summon witnesses, receive evidence. But they don't have any investigating staff. Except for Assam, Himachal, Goa and Kerala, the PCAs recommendations are not binding. Neither do PCAs have any rules of procedure till date.

So now we have one more toothless body to handle serious complaints against the police. CHRI is going to different states to find out through RTI how these various commissions are doing. "They don't even keep minutes of their meetings," says Kotwal.

As for modernisation of the police force, a key concern of the middle class, the Union government sets aside a budget every year. The states are supposed to come up with a plan and a budget. By the time they get around to doing this, the year is almost over. They can't spend the money appropriately and use it to pretty up the police headquarters, buy some vehicles or wireless sets.

Police training has remained static. The sub inspector undergoes just a six-week course before being put on the job. Serving officers who are sent to police academies for training see it as a punishment posting, though they may be good officers. As for awareness of human rights abuse, there are hurried lectures covering the entire gamut of issues delivered breathlessly in two or three days non-stop.

'Ask for the right to develop,

Does the Indian government want to legitimise the US' right to pollute and in the bargain get India's right to pollute?



The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has been a strong critic of the Copenhagen Accord on climate change. Sunita Narain, director of CSE, spoke to Civil Society on what she finds wrong with the new Indian position in negotiations on climate change and why a place at the high table of polluters is not such a good thing for the Indian economy.

You have been critical of the Copenhagen Accord. What do you find wrong with it?

The first problem we have with the accord is that it is very bad for any talk about reducing emissions. At the end of the day any accord, any agreement on climate change has to look to one thing; reduce global emissions, reduce them quickly, reduce them drastically, reduce them on the scale that is needed. This accord is disastrous because it is essentially built on an understanding that countries will do whatever they are prepared to

do: it will be domestic pledges and an aggregation of these domestic pledges will add up to an international agreement.

So no longer is the accord setting up targets and asking the world to agree that we have a carbon budget of so much and the budget has to be allocated on the basis of historical emissions and therefore the US has to cut 40 per cent and India has a chance to increase.

This accord says that all that should be thrown out of the window and we will go by whatever countries are agreeable to doing.

So, why won't this work?

It won't work because it is not enough. If the US had put on the table that 40 per cent cut to meet the two degree target by 2020, it could be a workable accord.

But the US has not done so. The US has put on the table a target of cutting three per cent over

1990 levels. But it has added to it the fact that it would like its right to pollute because it would like to look at a framework under which it could possibly peak its emissions by 2030. Now can you imagine what the world would be like if the US does not have any controls on it?

To my mind this is what is devastating about the accord. I think the Indian government, or rather a section of the Indian government, which is supporting the accord is doing so because it wants India's right to pollute as well. It wants to legitimise the US' right to pollute and in the bargain get India's right to pollute.

I believe that India should be asking for the right to development and not the right to pollute and there is a big difference in that.

In the popular mind there is not much difference between the right to development and the right to

not pollute'

pollute. The two are seen as one and the same.

That is a good point. I agree with you that the difference is not very well understood. It is a fine difference that comes from the fact that when we ask for our right to develop we are basically saying that we understand that climate change is a challenge, we understand that we as a country will have to take on actions to reduce our emissions, leapfrog to better technologies and do things with greater efficiency. We will have to move towards a low-carbon economy, but the transition will be costly.

If you do not agree to equity as the basis of the agreement then you have no right to development. Then all the world can agree to do is say that we will protect your right for the moment to pollute. The right to development means that you have the right to emit, but since the world has run out of carbon space it will pay for the right to development. It is a very important distinction for which we need (the concept of) equity to be built in.

We seem to be taking this transaction out of global negotiations...

We have taken it out. The Copenhagen Accord does not make it mandatory that our development costs will be paid for.

And this is a transaction rooted in social justice.

It is a transaction rooted in carbon justice, okay. Social justice unfortunately for a large section of decision-makers in this country is an old-fashioned term used by 'evangelists'.

The Indian government has said that it is going to cut emissions...

Which is very good.

It has also said that it does not need money and technology. You seem to disagree with this.

I think the Indian government must be phenomenally gifted if it can make the transition to a low-carbon economy without the money and technology. Nowhere in the world has it happened. Remember India has 600 million people who do not even have access to energy today. So, we are a criminally incompetent country in the fact that we have not been able to provide even the basic (development) to our own people.

Let me remove my cynicism from it and give you a more blunt answer. I am very happy with the Indian government's decision to come forward with a domestic target to reduce carbon intensity. It has everything we as environmentalists are asking for. However I have seen the basis on which the Indian government has come up with that figure and it is clearly half-baked and done on bad science, bad maths and definitely bad politics. It has extrapolated the past reductions in carbon intensity to the future without giving any idea as to how it will actually move towards it.

Ironically, it is after announcing the targets that



Sunita Narain

'The Indian government must be phenomenally gifted if it can make the transition to a low-carbon economy without the money and technology. Nowhere in the world has it happened. Remember India has 600 million people who do not even have access to energy today.'

it has now come up with a committee under the Planning Commission to provide a road map. I would have thought that the road map should have been made first.

As an environmentalist in India, I would want that carbon intensity target to be met. The Planning Commission already has the target of reducing carbon intensity by 20 per cent and increasing renewables by 20 per cent. I think it is about time the Indian government grew up and took its own targets seriously.

A good example is the solar mission. When we started with the mission we were told we would do 20,000 MW of solar, but when we saw the workings of it we could not even do 1,000 MW because you have to pay for that transition. So we agreed in the mission document that we would do 1,000 MW, which itself would require the Indian government to put in a huge amount of money. The rest could only be done if we got

money and technology from the industrialised countries.

I believe that the people who are saying – and they represent only one part of the Indian government, not the whole Indian government – that we don't need money or technology are saying so to erase or diminish the notion of historical emissions. It is only when you give up notions of historical emissions and equity that you get a place at the high table of pollution, among the big boys.

Have we been over zealous in taking a position that is not tenable?

I think it is very difficult to say. Future generations of Indians should be allowed to judge. But I do believe that that what we are doing is very wrong. It is clear that our position today is that of the US. Now whether it is a matter of wisdom or collusion it is difficult to say. But I think we are definitely in for trouble.

What kind of trouble?

For one, the Copenhagen Accord is bad for climate change. For me as an environmentalist I do believe that climate change is real. Any agreement which says that 'you don't cut and we won't cut' is basically an agreement made for polluters. Such an agreement will hit our development in the long term because we are victims of climate change. Secondly, because it wipes out historical emissions and equity it is bad for our future negotiating position. When we go and say that the world really does need to cut we will be told that we are part of the big club of polluters.

You know the world has been negotiating and negotiating. Kyoto is a failure. The developed and developing countries are not on the same page. It is against this backdrop that other equations are being tried. One interpretation is that the environmental movement has failed.

I think that it is a fair point that the pragmatists are making. I was reading a comment by one of the US negotiators who was saying that you can't eat an apple in one go. Any agreement that brings the US on board on the US' terms is possibly better than one where it is not on board. There is one view on that. It is also the view of people who believe that this situation is the result of the failure of the environmental movement. You believe you can't get anything better so you might as well accept this.

Now I believe that we should be getting something better. We are not a global NGO. We are an Indian NGO and we feel strongly about what we can get done in India. I believe it is my role and my job to inform people in India about what needs to be done. If our minister goes to Copenhagen he cannot go with this sense of helplessness, saying this is the best I can do.

How do you want the Indian government to engage?

We need to take the position that we are victims of climate change and that the world must cut emissions on the basis of historical emissions and equity. We must assert our right to develop. We need public transport in our cities, solar power, distributed energy ... but there is a cost and the developed world must pay.

Football with a sixth sense

LAKSHMAN ANAND



A tense moment in the match between the teams from Jodhpur (in yellow) and Madurai

Civil Society News
New Delhi

ANKUR Dhama has magic in his feet. Or at least so it would seem from the way he traps a football, keeps it in control and gets it into the goal after making his way down the centre of the ground. On a good day he has been known to score six times and in the few years that he has been playing, his name has come to be mentioned with considerable awe.

But if Ankur's celebrity status is growing, Dhanna Ram is not far behind. He has got as much grit and likes to pound the opposition. Dhanna in full flow is cause for concern because he can turn a match around. If there is a player

who likes to win as much as Ankur does, it is Dhanna.

No less impressive is Ishrafil. Once he gets going, pinning him down is almost impossible. Ishrafil seems to enjoy quiet aggression and has a record number of goals to his name.

Ankur and Ishrafil live in Delhi and Dhanna in Jodhpur. They clash at least once a year. And of course they meet when they are at the same place for a tournament. But there is this one small missing link in their healthy rivalry – they have never set eyes on one another other because all three are completely blind.

As the Sixth National Football Tournament for the Blind got under way in Delhi on 26 December, nine teams from six states took each other on in

a robust clash of wills. Not all the players were as skilful as Ankur, Dhanna and Ishrafil. But what they may have lacked in craft they made up in enthusiasm and spirit. They were there to compete and in the rigorous forays across ground of the Delhi Blind Relief Association (BRA) (on Lal Bahadur Shastri Marg near the Oberoi) there were plenty of spills. Players sometimes collided with such force that they had to be taken to the medical tent run by Fortis with nosebleeds and bruised limbs.

If the players were in full flow, so were their supporters who cheered loudly from the sidelines. There was wild exultation over goals scored and sighs of disappointment when chances were missed.

Football played by the blind can be noisy. The managers of the two sides stand behind the goalposts and shout out instructions, directing play-

The ball is specially manufactured to make a jingling sound. So, the really good players are the ones who learn to listen for the ball.

ers to the ball, telling them to watch out for opponents. The pace is brisk and tensions run high. It could be just about any match played with enthusiasm anywhere. But the fact is that it isn't. For all the rough and tumble, it is those with a strong sixth sense who prevail.

There are five players in a side. All the players, except the goalkeeper, have to be B1 blind – which means they cannot see anything. The goalkeeper, usually B2 or B3 blind, has some vision. He usually directs the other players and feeds them with the ball. But he has to stay within the confines of the goal box.

The other players wear cotton pads on their eyes with headbands that serve as blindfolds. This ensures that those players with limited vision (except the goalkeeper) are all B1 while playing and can't see at all.

The players wear protection for the knees and shins. There is padding on the goal posts. Nets and buffers along the sides of the ground keep the players from toppling out and straying. The ground at 18 m by 32 m is smaller than a normal ground.

The ball is specially manufactured to make a jingling sound. So, the really good players are the ones who learn to listen for the ball. In the absence of sight, a player makes judgments on sounds he hears and relies on a heightened sense of direction and surrounding activity. Mobility for the sightless footballer is defined by many things.

This is a different arena with its own priorities.

LAKSHMAN ANAND



The winning team: the Equal Opportunity Cell in Delhi University

Narain Singh, who is the manager of the team from Netraheen Vikas Sansthan in Jodhpur, says: "Players develop an understanding of the dimensions of the field. They can sense where to go and what to target."

The blind are sharp. The loss of vision seems to give them other advantages. A chat with Narain Singh and his players from Jodhpur is revealing. He says: "The blind learn quickly. These boys come here (to the BRA campus in Delhi) once or

twice and they know their way around. They move about as though they can see: up, down, everywhere."

Dhanna is part of the conversation. He says he has been playing for a few years, though Jodhpur is really lagging behind the other centres in football. He has been blind from a small age and is 18 now.

Asked if in a football match players with partial vision have an unfair advantage even after they are blindfolded, Dhanna disagrees. "On the contrary, being totally blind gives you a special perspective," he explains. "A person with partial vision who puts on a blindfold is no match for a totally blind person. In fact being able to see a little and then having to wear a blindfold is to be at a disadvantage. A fully blind person has a heightened sense of mobility, direction and balance."

Better skills come from practice. The two Delhi teams – Jormal Periwai Memorial Senior Secondary School (JPM) and the Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC) of Delhi University – have been playing for six years. Boys from JPM graduate to EOC and so there is continuity.

"They have better planning and understanding. They know to analyse the game," says Absalom David of the BRA who has a significant role in promoting the game among the blind.

Finally, this year's tournament was won by EOC which defeated JPM 2-1 in a hard fought final. Ishrafil of EOC was the top scorer of the tournament with 13 goals to his name.

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Operation Green Hunt combs out

Tanushree Gangopadhyay
Dantewada (Chhattisgarh)

SAMBO and 20 other tribals trudged all night through forests and undertook a day-long bus journey to reach Dantewada in Chhattisgarh on the evening of 5 January to tell a public hearing about atrocities committed by the police and security forces.

The public hearing was to be held on 7 January by Himanshu Kumar, director of the Vanvasi Chetna Ashram in Dantewada. The tribals had received information that P Chidambaram, Union Home Minister, would himself attend the public hearing.

Sambo had a very personal story to tell. He wanted people to know the plight of his wife, Sodi, who has a bullet injury in her leg. Thanks to

the intervention of the Supreme Court, Sodi has been moved to Delhi and has undergone surgery at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

Sambo never made it to the public hearing. Instead he, along with others, were detained by the police. In a related episode, civil rights

activists including Medha Patkar and Sandeep Pandey were attacked by supporters of Salwa Judum and Special Police Officers.

Salwa Judum is a government-backed vigilante effort against tribal people who could be supporting Naxalites.

SATYEN BORDOLOI



Himanshu Kumar

‘ We are fighting violence of all shades’

Before he secretly left his ashram, **Himanshu Kumar** spoke to Tanushree Gangopadhyay explaining that the state had really left him with no choice.

Do you plan to leave the Vanvasi Chetna Ashram ?

I have nurtured the ashram and the tribals for the past 17 years. I will return soon. The case of Sodi Sambo, victim of Operation Green Hunt and a prime witness in the Gombad massacre, is in the Supreme Court. I want to see all the other 600 cases filed against atrocities on tribal communities by paramilitary forces through. Besides, there is so much work to be done.

What is the case of Sodi Sambo?

Sambo is from Gompad village on the Andhra Pradesh border. She is a victim of Operation Green Hunt. On 1 October, nine innocent people were killed and they were labelled as Naxalites. She was in the fields with her husband when a bullet slit her leg. She was spared as her two children fell on her. The paramilitary forces had entered her village under the pretext of combing operations after a massacre in Ganampally on 17 September where 19 ‘Naxalites’ were killed. Sambo was the only witness who came forward. Her relatives brought her to the ashram as she was in need of medical help as well as security. She stayed here for two months.

What happened on 3 January when the police whisked her away?

She was abducted by the police when we were going to Raipur to take her to Delhi for her surgery. While we broke for lunch at Kanker, the police swooped down on us and took her away. We were detained at the police station as we refused to leave her alone since she is a Dorla tribal and does not know any other language.

I fear the police will tamper with evidence. She was in the ashram for the past two months and they could see her as she lived in the compound with other ashram inmates. In Kanker police station a dozen police constables surrounded me for eight hours. It is like the murderer telling the victim that I want to help him.

Does the Union government want to know what is happening in the tribal heartland?

Union Home Minister, P Chidambaram, had expressed a desire to attend the public hearing when I invited him. But obviously for strategic reasons he has stayed away. The Raman Singh government has not allowed the hearing as it would expose them. Political parties of all shades are united over the Naxalite issue.

The government does not realise that we are fighting against violence of all shades, whether Maoists, or state sponsored Salwa Judum. They have clubbed anyone who opposes the Salwa Judum as a Maoist. In fact the Vanvasi Chetna Ashram has helped to rehabilitate Nendra and several villages which were evacuated due to the violence by Naxalites, the Salwa Judum and the SPOs, many of whom are underage tribals. Since 2005, as many as 644 villages were evacuated.

Schools have been occupied by the paramilitary forces, thus depriving the tribals of education or health. These Scheduled Areas under the Constitution should be the concern for the Union government.

What according to you is the right path?

People have picked up arms. Violence foments violence which further complicates matters. My interest is to create awareness amongst people. Large numbers are killed for mines which benefit those who live in cities. The middle class is cut off from the mainstream of society.

activist

On 1 October, 2009, paramilitary forces of Operation Green Hunt barged into village Gompad, on the border with Andhra Pradesh, allegedly killing nine people. Sodi was shot in the leg. It is said her small children fell on her and saved her. Sodi is now a prime witness in the complaint against the security forces and SPOs in the Supreme Court.

Operation Green Hunt was launched by the government to weed out Naxalites in Chhattisgarh in September 2009. Instead it is seen as resulting in the deaths of innocent tribals. In Bastar it is alleged that at least six tribals of five villages including Ganhanpalli, were massacred by paramilitary forces and SPOs on 17 September. There are allegations of other such acts of repression.

Bastar district is the hub of Naxalite activity since it intersects the states of Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The area sits on rich deposits of iron ore, mica, bauxite, tin and precious stones. Several companies are seeking to set up projects here.

There are disputes over acquisition of land and charges that tribals are being pushed out of their habitats. Naxalites thrive in Bastar which has seen little development and where tribal people have been traditionally exploited. Now there is additionally the fear of displacement to make way for industry.

Himanshu, 44, describes himself as a Gandhian. He has been working in this belt for the past 18 years, inspired by his father who was a social worker. Himanshu has been providing tribals with legal aid and other assistance. He went to Sodi's village and helped her and 12 others file a petition in the Supreme Court. The court accepted the petition and directed the state to file a response.

He gave shelter to Sodi at his ashram and tried to help her get to Delhi for medical attention but was intercepted by the police.

The police question Himanshu's credentials and accuse him of being a front for the Naxalites. The director-general of police in Chhattisgarh, Viswa Ranjan, says: "Himanshu Kumar is no Gandhian. Where does he get all the money from? He is not able to explain his expenses and sides with the Naxalites in each and every situation. He tells Home Minister P Chidambaram that he cannot afford to annoy the Naxalites as he needs to live in the remote forest area."

Himanshu started the Vanvasi Chetna Ashram in Kawalnar village near Dantewada in 1992. It has been a hub of development activities in Bastar, implementing government schemes in health care, watershed development and sanitation.

But with atrocities on tribals mounting, the ashram felt duty bound to highlight police excesses. Himanshu also opposed Salwa Judum. "We are against the violence of the Naxalites as violence merely fuels violence," he says.

The ashram provided legal aid to the tribals. It had also helped the government in the rehabilitation of Nendra and more than 10 villages of the

'Himanshu is not a Gandhian'

Viswa Ranjan, Director General of Police (DGP) in Chhattisgarh, has an impressive record. He has had a long innings in the Intelligence Bureau, holding important positions in Gujarat and Delhi and was a Superintendent of Police in the undivided state of Madhya Pradesh.

He is credited with having a thorough knowledge of policing in Bastar. Ranjan is the intellectual face of the police force in Chhattisgarh. He shows journalists films on Naxalites and Power Point presentations he made at Berkeley, which he says impressed academics there. "Should we follow Mao's strategy of massacre in India?" he asks.

Extracts from an interview with Tanushree Gangopadhyay:

How do the Naxalites operate?

Naxalites belonging to the Communist Party of India (Maoists) have their camps in dense forests where they are given intensive training. From the books and films we have seized from them we find that their training is very rigorous and professional and very similar to ours. Getting training material today is not difficult as it can be downloaded from the Internet.

The Naxalites are virtually running a parallel government with their militia. They have been interfering in the collection of tendu leaves. They are indulging in high-powered violence and harassing tribals. They extract commissions from contractors.

What do you have to say about Himanshu?

Himanshu Kumar is no Gandhian. Where does he get all the money from? He is not able to explain his expenses and sides with the Naxalites in each and every situation. He tells Home Minister P Chidambaram that he cannot afford to annoy the Naxalites as he needs to live in the remote forest area.

Naxalites have a united revolutionary front with fraternal movements like the PUCL, PUDR etc. Maoists adopt non-constitutional methods. They are against a constitutional democratic state. Violence is non-negotiable. I do not say that the police are above the law. We shall fight it out in the court. Naxalite violence needs to be inquired into by police officials. But when we do this, they begin to make a noise.



Viswa Ranjan, DGP

Himanshu thinks that he will hoodwink the Chhattisgarh police. He takes tribals to Delhi with their thumb impressions and holds press conferences and calls himself a big human rights activist. We sent him a notice about Sodi Sambo. He refused to meet the police and kept the woman with him.

Why is he under police surveillance?

We gave him protection as he claimed that the police would kill him and blame the Naxalites. It was only because of police protection that we learnt he was taking Sodi Sambo to Delhi. Be truthful when you make allegations. He ran

away from the backdoor of his ashram in the wee hours of 5 January. The media persons in his ashram attacked local journalists when they went to find out about him. This abusive behaviour has made him unpopular with the local people. The local media told Medha that they had no problems with her but with Himanshu, whom they dislike.

Why did you demolish his ashram?

His office and living quarters have been demolished while his ashram is running well. He had encroached upon forest land for which there was a case against him. He didn't go to court so it was demolished.

These people don't realise whom they are fighting against. I am a very popular man. No one has read all the 38 volumes of Mao's works and understood those tactics like I have. No one knows Bastar as well as I do. I was the Superintendent of Police there in the 80's when Naxalites entered the arena.

Why is Sodi Sambo not being allowed to meet journalists? Why was she taken away from Himanshu when he wanted to take her to Delhi?

Since she is a petitioner she is not under our custody. She has her parents, her relatives who had complained to us that she is missing and has been confined in Himanshu's Ashram. How could he take her to Delhi without notifying the police? There was no need to take her to Delhi since our medical college in Jagdalpur is good enough. Our personnel are treated there.

644 villages evacuated by the terror of the Salwa Judum, SPOs and the paramilitary forces.

The state, however, did not want atrocities inflicted by Salwa Judum or the police and security forces highlighted. In June 2009, Himanshu Kumar's ashram was bulldozed. In May 2009 he moved to a makeshift ashram in Dantewada rent-

ed to him by a Zilla Panchayat employee.

Himanshu has fled Chhattisgarh because he is afraid that the police will arrest him on false charges of confining Sodi to his ashram. Sodi, on the other hand, is recuperating in Delhi with her case being argued in the Supreme Court by activist-lawyer Colin Gonsalves.

Literacy India takes children from

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Kutty (left) and Rehana (right) now study in a private English medium school

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

EIGHT-year-old Rehana and her elder sister, 10-year-old Kutty, have ambitions. Rehana wants to be a teacher. Kutty dreams of becoming a gritty, tough-talking police officer. It isn't unusual for children to aspire. Except that two years ago, Rehana and Kutty, sunk in poverty, couldn't imagine that such careers were within their reach. They spent all day helping their mother, a single parent, eke out a living picking waste around the posh PVR Cinema in Saket, South Delhi.

Now Rehana and Kutty go to an English-medium school called Little Ones Public, not far from Saket, a journey made possible by Literacy India's Street To School programme. Indraani Singh, India's first Airbus pilot, is the founder and head of Literacy India, a non-profit based in Gurgaon.

"When PVR Nest, the charity arm of PVR Cinemas, wanted to rehabilitate children around their movie halls in Basant Lok and Saket, we jumped at the chance to do this with them," says Indraani who is passionate about empowering underprivileged children.

"We targeted children who had run away from home, who are orphans or have single parents. We focussed on the ragpicker community, junkies and drug addicts. We wanted to get them off the

streets and into classrooms," she explains.

The Street To School programme began in May 2006 with three hours of informal learning organised in a public park near the PVR Cinema with students picked up from the streets. Indraani says each child was identified by programme volunteers. The volunteers counselled children and motivated their parents to grab this opportunity to study and to look beyond street life.

"It was not enough to just provide an atmosphere of learning. Our work began with motivating and convincing these children to come to our classrooms. That was tough to do. Street life is so fluid that they find it difficult to adjust to routine. Some children dropped out too. We try to counter all this by caring. Often, it's the first time the children have somebody to consistently care for them," she explains. Nutritious meals were also provided as an incentive to encourage the children to stay on in the programme.

The strategy has clearly worked. The Street To School programme has shifted from the park to a full-fledged learning centre in the Said-ul-Ajab neighbourhood in southwest Delhi, complete with classrooms, a computer lab, a play area and an activity centre. Indraani says the need to have a centre with permanent classrooms was imperative. Literacy India wanted children to have a genuine school-going experience, something that was

difficult to do in a makeshift learning environment within a public park.

Books following National Literacy Mission guidelines are used to introduce first-time learners to basic Hindi, English and Maths. Children who studied earlier but had gaps in their education are brought up to standard with the aim of enrolling them into formal schools.

Over 110 street children, mainly migrants from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, who are between four to 16 years of age, have benefited from the programme. Forty-five children, like Rehana and Kutty, have successfully enrolled in the formal school system. Literacy India funds their annual fees of Rs 12,000 per annum, and provides them with uniforms and books. The children continue to come to the learning centre after school for tuitions, remedial help and extra-curricular activities.

"Many are doing extremely well in school. They are eager to learn and they are hardworking. We are able to mainstream younger children in a year or a year and a half of working with them," explains Sohit Yadav who manages the Said-ul-Ajab learning centre.

Over 50 children are currently enrolled in classroom study at the Literacy India centre till they are mainstreamed. Yadav says the emphasis is on experiential learning to enable children to

street to school

enjoy education. "We have seen these children respond very well to extra-curricular activities. They learn so much through dancing, painting, theatre. When we do things creatively, they enjoy the experience."

Arif, who is 17, couldn't agree more. Arif has been in the Street To School programme for nearly two and a half years and is preparing for his Class 10 exams through the National Institute of Open Schooling. A dropout of a mosque school, Arif was working as a domestic help in a large bungalow in Saket where his mother cleaned and cooked, when he first heard about Literacy India from his friend Sonu.

"After I clear my Class 10 exams, I want to be a dancer. I got the chance to learn dance here. My parents are so proud of me now. My mother was thrilled when all my relatives and friends complimented me on my dancing prowess at a wedding we went to," says Arif after giving us an impressive dance performance to a blockbuster Hindi film song. He has also learnt to play the drums very well, picking up the skill from a foreign volunteer who spent a few weeks at the Said-ul-Ajab centre. He likes to impress fellow classmates and visitors by playing the drums.

Like Arif, his friend, 14-year-old Geeta likes to display her skills. Daughter of a domestic worker and a vegetable seller, Geeta is diligently preparing for her Class 10 exams. She enjoys the edge she has in English, undoubtedly seen as the passport to a good life by all students at the centre.

"After I dropped out of school, I thought my life was over. But now I know we need to build

our careers ourselves. I study a lot so that I can be successful," the young girl says. Geeta is doing well in the digital animation and paintbrush curriculum Literacy India runs in its computer lab. She proudly shows us an animation strip she is working on. Geeta has, in fact, become an ambas-

Forty-five children, like Rehana and Kutty, have enrolled in formal schools. Literacy India funds their annual fees.



Arif likes to play the drums

sador for the programme. Two of her friends have enrolled in the programme after seeing her progress.

These stories undoubtedly give programme workers the drive to carry on. But Yadav is quick to point out problem areas too. "Hygiene remains a big concern. It's very obvious in Little Ones Public School, for example, where children of more privileged families come too. I don't blame our children though. There is no water in the settlements where most of them live. We have managed to deal with some issues but several remain unsettled."

To educate mothers on issues like hygiene, Literacy India has taken up literacy and vocational training for women. Many mothers are first-time learners.

Indraani says it's been wonderful to see so many benefits emerge from the street to school programme. "We have evolved a digital education programme from our experience with teaching these children. I am often surprised that even children right off the streets know how to download music or what a file or folder is. I think being

LAKSHMAN ANAND

tech savvy is in the India DNA. Our digital learning programme recognises this. Even children who find classroom learning boring are excited about learning digitally. These tools break the monotony of their world," she explains. "A well-rounded digital learning programme can open up education for the urban poor."

Street To School is currently funded by PVR Nest, Tata Consultancy Services, National Basket Association Cares, the philanthropy arm of the American professional basketball organisation, and Encore, a software outsourcing firm. Literacy India is now looking for additional funding to expand the programme and open other centres. They say they have managed to put in place a rehabilitation model that can be easily replicated.

SAMITA' S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



OBITUARY

Champion of fish workers

Civil Society News
New Delhi

HAREKRISHNA Debnath, tireless crusader for the rights of fish workers, passed away in Kolkata at 11 am on 30 December 2009. He was 60.

As chairperson of the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF), Debnath championed the cause of India's 3.5 million fish workers with sincerity and courage. He understood that the lives of fisher folk were inextricably linked with the sea and the coast. Yet traditional and customary rights were often brushed aside by state governments in a hurry to sell land and resources to industry. Attempts were consistently made to take away India's golden coast and hand it over for Special Economic Zones, ports and tourism. Even fishing villages were not given legal recognition. Debnath devoted his whole life to fighting for the rights of fisherfolk to coastal lands and waters.

He always said, 'Save the coast, save the fishers.'

For 20 years, Debnath worked with great energy to organise disparate fishing communities in India under the banner of the NFF. The forum became a common ground for fisher folk to express their aspirations and sufferings to other strata of society and to governments. Many meetings were held in Delhi at Jantar Mantar where fishing communities from across India assembled to protest and lobby with the Union government for their rights.

In 2008, he led the Macchimar Adhikar Rashtriya Abhiyan, a two-month yatra that traversed the entire coast of India from Kutch to Kolkata, to mobilize support for better implementation of the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification and for scrapping of the controversial draft Coastal Management Zone (CMZ) Notification. Finally, a Peoples' Parliament was held in Delhi. These efforts led to the withdrawal of the CMZ Notification, a major victory for fishing communities.

When the government of West Bengal announced the setting up of a nuclear plant at Haripur, Debnath opposed it staunchly, pointing out its dangers to coastal ecology and to the people. 'Good fish needs good habitat,' he always said. 'We are proud to provide India with a great source of protein and that too with zero investment.'

Debnath did not limit his activism to India. As General Secretary of the World Forum of Fisherpeoples (WFFP), he made important contributions to the struggles of fisher folk worldwide. He was also member of the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB).

The NFF has lost a great leader. In many ways Debnath was the leading light of the fish workers movement, a great inspiration and a great leader. He will always be remembered by the fishing community to whom every minute of his life was dedicated.

Deeply rooted in the religiosity of Tagore, Debnath was fond of quoting from Tagore's songs whenever he addressed fishing communities. He was friendly to all who approached him and had a sense of humour.



Harekrishna Debnath

For information contact: 09892833815

Less food in hills

Rakesh Agrawal
Tehri (Uttarakhand)

J ANAKI Devi, 43, a farmer from Palla village, Chamoli district, scanned the sky with hope in December. "Not a flake of snow," she said despondently. "My apple crop will be surely ruined." People living in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand have been saying for years that the weather is changing. Not many paid attention. Now a research study appears to confirm their worst fears.

Jandesh, an NGO based in Joshimath, Chamoli district, carried out a study in eight villages of the district documenting production of food grains, vegetables and fruits, condition of water sources, rainfall and snowfall. The NGO gathered primary data collected with baseline surveys and people's observations. Their findings are an eye-opener.

Farming is the primary source of livelihood in Uttarakhand. Most people are small and marginal farmers. Jandesh found that from 1970 to 2008, production of wheat and *rajma* (a legume) and vegetables like potato and *chaulai* (a leafy vegetable) has declined by over 35 per cent!

In fact, potato has been the worst hit. In Tapowan village, potato production declined from 640 kg to 160. "In the old days, potato was the crop that saved us. We sold it at the nearby market and slept with a full stomach. Now we hardly grow enough for ourselves," said Puran Negi, a small farmer with 0.1 hectares (about five nali).

Similarly, *rajma* production has gone down from 18 kg a nali to just eight kg, robbing people of a vital source of protein. "Four children of my family are weak," said Gita Panwar, a farmer. "They find it difficult to walk to their school which is two km away because they don't get enough nutrition."

The condition of fruit crops is equally pathetic. This region is regarded as the 'fruit basket' of Uttarakhand and Urgam and Tapowan Valleys are well known for apple production thanks to the copious snow they used to get. Apples were a good source of income for these far-flung villages. Not any more. This December, people had to wait for snow. Last year too, the snowfall was scanty.

This has had its impact on the apples. Jandesh's participatory rural appraisal in 12 villages revealed that per tree production of the fruit has reduced from 150 kg to 36 kg on average. In some villages, this yield has gone down to zero, as in Palla and Salana villages. Some villagers say they now see no option but to head for the city, bag and baggage "At least, I can provide food to my family of six, even if I have to toil as a construction worker in hot and humid Dehradun," sighed Umesh Rawat, 48.

The study claims that rainfall and snowfall have reduced in 38 years. People's perception of rainfall has been recorded through baseline surveys in 12 villages. People say that they now receive about 20 per cent less rainfall. The reduction is more prominent in villages at higher altitude. People in Maikot village that is located at 5,000 feet now get about 20 per cent less rain than they used to get earlier. Those in Palla village which is at 7,000 feet think rain has reduced by 30 per cent. However, as the study is not supported by secondary data, no definite conclusions can be drawn in this regard.

It is the scarce snowfall which is worrying people the most. Old people fondly recall the good old days when several feet of snow would fall. "I was married in 1970 and I remember we got four feet of snow that year. Now my grandson will be lucky if he sees an inch of snow this year," grumbled Nain Singh Jamwal of Urgam village, Chamoli district.

Scarce snow and rain has affected natural water sources. The NGO did a survey in seven villages evaluating the condition of 85 natural water sources, out of which 40 were perennial and 45 seasonal. The survey revealed that in 60 years, 16 perennial water sources like *naulas* and *dharas* have dried up. Out of 45 seasonal sources, 20 have completely dried up.

"Besides less rain, deforestation, change in weather patterns and forest fires are the main reasons for disappearance of natural water sources in the hills," explains Laxman Singh Negi, secretary, Jandesh.

Jandesh's research is supported by research done by the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, an important institute in Dehradun. The institute did a study in 2005, covering 11 hill districts on the condition of water sources in Uttarakhand. It found that out of 5,587 natural water sources, 67 have completely dried up and 2,544 are endangered.

Climate change is not just affecting food production and water resources, it is also impacting the region's rich biodiversity. For example, many species, especially herbs used as traditional medicines are on the verge of extinction. Now, *banj* (oak) trees, mainly used for fodder, are disappearing as the region gets less rain and snowfall and is warmer. Similarly, *atis* (*Aconitum heterophyllum*), *kutaki* (*Picrorhiza kurrooa*) *jatamasi* (*Nardostachys jatamashi*) and *vankakadi* (*Podophyllum hexandrum*), traditional herbs, are almost extinct.

Our policymakers should listen to their own *aam admi*, and not to the *khas aadmi* in the West.

Microsoft



Photo for illustration purpose only

Everything seems possible now.

Being a science teacher at a government school in Jalandhar, it was always disappointing to see a majority of students not opting for the science stream after the 10th standard. Having spent nearly two decades teaching science, I often wondered what I could do to inculcate a passion for the subject among students.

The solution wasn't far away. In Microsoft's Project Shiksha sessions, I discovered how effectively computers can be used in teaching. My mind was flooded with ideas. I organised engaging classroom sessions, conducted various science and math quizzes, and saw that students were slowly using computers to explore and make their reports better with relevant information and logic.

Our school was adjudged the best in 'IT Practices & Computer Literacy' in the district. And yes, many more of my students started opting for the science stream at the +2 level. Technology has truly made it possible. And made me feel proud!

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BIG RISE OF REGIONAL

GAUTAM SINGH



Satish Manwar, director of *Gabricha Paus*

Directors craft films that are rooted in the soil and yet world class

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi/Mumbai

A recent Marathi film made by a first-time director has a wild bull for a principal character. This animal is blamed for every untoward incident that occurs in a sleepy little village. So a concerted drive is launched to tame and cage the marauding bull. A district forest officer is summoned. The human denizens of the hamlet, led by two local political leaders opposed to each other, are desperate to restore order and establish their might. But can the free spirit of the wild bull be reined in once it has been unleashed?

This racy but intricately structured allegory was *Valu* (The Wild Bull) and it was directed and co-written by FTII Pune alumnus Umesh Vinayak Kulkarni. The film garnered unstinted critical accolades and substantial box office returns when it opened in 2008. It propelled Marathi cinema into a new zone. The energy that *Valu* set free has steadily grown in strength and scope.

He has made another equally good film, but Kulkarni's name does not yet

command instant nationwide recall. Nor do his intimate little films activate the kind of ho-hum hype and hoopla that usually accompanies the work of Bollywood's new-generation mainstream brat pack.

But he and others of his ilk are on their way. With their diligently crafted, often stylised but always socially and culturally relevant cinematic essays, young regional language directors around the country are scripting a dew-fresh narrative minted entirely with indigenous ingredients.

This rooted yet globally clued-in lot – independent, free-spirited and fiercely original – represent the future of Indian cinema. They are young yet mature, strapped for cash but high on enthusiasm, and they make films that are thought-provoking yet endowed with the power to grab eyeballs.

Indeed, what sets these Marathi, Bengali and Tamil filmmakers apart, is the culture-specific yet universal fare that they deliver in much the manner of the true greats of Indian and world cinema. They tell stories that are derived from their own socio-cultural milieus, and they tell them in ways that are markedly indigenous.

CINEMA

Unlike their better-known Hindi cinema counterparts who are enamoured of borrowed plumes, they aren't falling for the lure of western moviemaking styles; they do not worship at the altar of Quentin Tarantino and Guy Ritchie. Nor do they embrace storylines and characters that are out of sync with the realities of much of 'real' India. Says Paresh Mokashi, director of India's official Oscar nominee this year, *Harishchandrachi Factory* (Harishchandra's Factory): "We know where our roots are – Phalke, Shantaram, Satyajit Ray... We have masters in our own backyard, why should we ape the West?"

So, these new directors create fascinating emotional landscapes and human scenarios where we are introduced to figures that we rarely encounter in the confines of mainstream Hindi cinema – a seven-year-old village boy desperate to prevent his impoverished farmer-father from selling the family's incapacitated bull to a butcher, a nondescript big city clerk who communicates with his favourite movie actresses in his night-time fantasies, a gay filmmaker working on a documentary about a folk theatre actor who specialises in feminine roles, and a landless farmer and passionate wrestler who assumes the persona of a *lavni* dancer of folk theatre.

It is as if these films have sprung from an imagination that has been unshackled from the cold logic of commerce. It is a world unto itself and it is expanding.

Resurgence of Marathi films

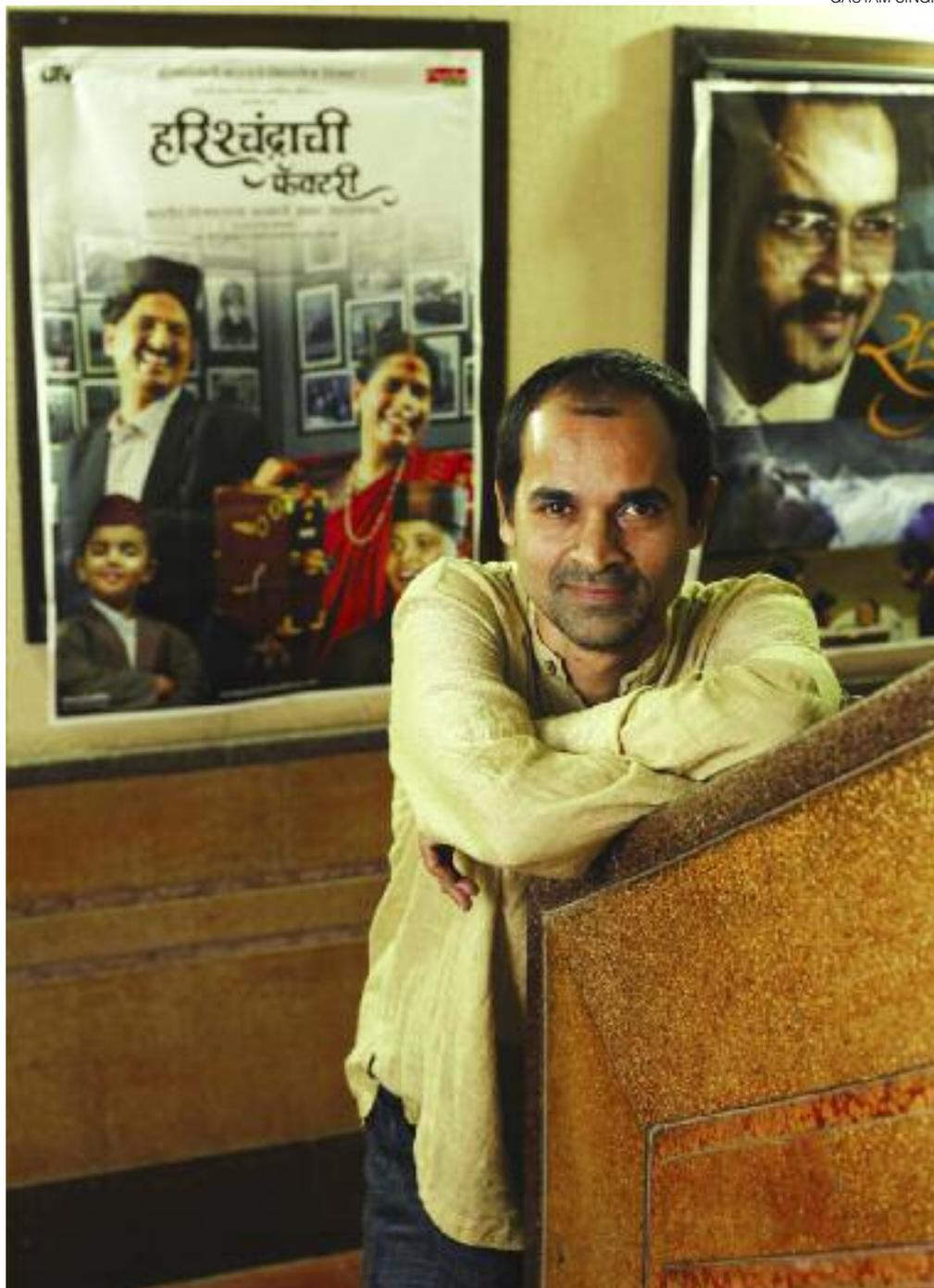
Leading this quiet but hugely significant revolution is a steadily swelling tribe of Marathi filmmakers based in Mumbai and Pune. Paresh Mokashi, Ravi Jadhav, Satish Manwar, Mangesh Hadawale, Umesh Vinayak Kulkarni and Sachin Kundalkar, whose directorial experience ranges from one film to three, are beginning to make waves across the world. Films like *Tingya*, *Harishchandrachi Factory* and *Vihir*, to name only a few, have quickly given Marathi cinema a profile that had eluded it for many years.

It isn't just rave reviews that are coming their way; the commercial prospects of their films are also looking up. *Natarang*, adapted by ad filmmaker Ravi Jadhav from a classic novel by Anand Yadav, is a case in point. This new film stars Atul Kulkarni as a poor farm worker and part-time wrestler who ventures into the world of tamasha performances in the hope of playing the role of a king only to end up donning the garb of a *nachya* (a female dancing-clown).

Natarang has not only raised the bar for quality cinema in the language, it has also yanked open the hitherto firmly shut multiplex doors for small budget Marathi films. The film, which hit the screens on January 1, is holding its own against big-banner Bollywood extravaganza. *Natarang* deals with multiple themes – gender identity, masculine pretensions, homosexuality and village dynamics – with striking self assurance. *Natarang* falls back on an old Marathi cinema convention – the tamasha – but employs it to boldly question present-day assumptions about virility and its implications.

Says veteran actor and filmmaker Amol Palekar, whose contribution to non-mainstream Indian cinema as a whole has been substantial: "It is really wonderful to see the position that Marathi cinema has today. It now occupies the space that once belonged to Bengali and Malayalam cinema."

It is no coincidence, therefore, that India's offi-



Paresh Mokashi

cial nomination for the Oscar in the best foreign language film category this year is a Marathi film – *Harishchandrachi Factory* (Harishchandra's Factory). The roots of its writer and director, Mokashi, like those of several of the other directors mentioned above, lie in the state's rich theatrical traditions.

In some quarters of Maharashtra, Mokashi has been accused of reducing Dadasaheb Phalke, the Indian film industry pioneer, to a "well-meaning buffoon", but it is this daring experiment with characterisation that sets this biopic apart. "Films about pioneering achievers have a template. Such personages are always depicted as heroic, sombre, earnest and revered. Phalke was flesh and blood like you and me, and that is the way I wanted to project him," says the debutant filmmaker whose work in Marathi theatre over the past two decades has been marked by the same sort of individualistic and experimental derring-do.

Mokashi employs a liberal strain of the comic in narrating the story behind the making of India's first full-length fiction film, *Raja Harishchandra*. The unusual tone of the film has become its principal talking point. "The comic style is germane to the tale," says Mokashi. "It is inspired by Dadasaheb Phalke's remarkable adventures as he laboured for two years to lay the foundation of the Indian film industry. A strong element of humour, a natural humanity was an essential part of the story."

The growing importance of quality Marathi films

It isn't just rave reviews that are coming their way. The commercial prospects of these films are also beginning to look up.



Gandha



Padmapriya and Cheran in Pokkisham



Valu

LAKSHMAN ANAND

is also borne out by the fact that *Harishchandrachi Factory* has been acquired for distribution by Bollywood major UTV Motion Pictures. Similarly, Umesh Kulkarni has had the support of the mainstream Mumbai industry for the two films he has directed so far. *Valu* (The Wild Bull) was backed by Subhash Ghai's Mukta Arts; his latest film, *Vihir* (The Well), is an Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Limited (ABCL) production. *Natarang* was bankrolled by Zee Talkies, a division of Zee Telefilms.

Vihir, which premiered at the Mumbai Academy of the Moving Image (MAMI) film festival late last year, has since been feted at South Korea's Busan Film Festival. Kulkarni's new work has now been selected for the Berlin Film Festival coming up in February. Reviewing *Vihir* after its Busan screening, *The Hollywood Reporter* (THR) described it as a "carefully observed meditation about how children process grief".

Significantly, one of the most glowing comments in the review was reserved for the film's cinematographer. THR's reviewer wrote: "Sudhir Palsane's lush and emollient cinematography is *Vihir's* greatest strength; the DOP (director of photography) avoids flash and dash in favour of steady, traditional shooting that captures the essence of place and allows the family dynamic to reveal itself within the unfettered frames."

The ability to resist the temptation to use technique to get ahead of his film's theme stands Mokashi, too, in good stead. All through *Harishchandrachi Factory*, he uses a 'still' camera format, holding his frames steady while letting all the movement happen within its boundaries. "The camera doesn't move," he says, "but the film has a sense of pace because there is plenty of movement in it. The challenge was to sustain that particular form all through the entire film."

The striking feature of resurgent Marathi cinema is that while the new generation of filmmakers here, like new Bollywood's leading lights, has been exposed to a wider variety of world cinema than directors of earlier decades, it has adopted a completely original approach to filmmaking.

"It is our theatre training that has helped us no end," says Satish Manwar, the maker of *Gabhricha Paus* (The Damned Rain), yet another recent

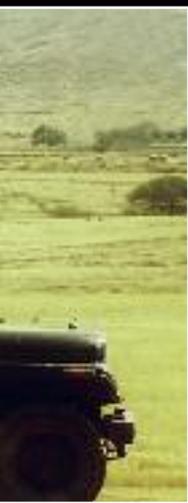
Joydeep Ghosh, director of *Mayabazaar*

Marathi film that has made the world sit up and take notice. "When you grow up in the theatre, you also evolve as a human being. It suffuses everything you do in life," adds the debutant director who belongs to Yavatmal, Vidarbha, was trained in dramatics in Pune University and is now associated with a theatre group in Mumbai.

Gabhricha Paus addresses the theme of farmer suicides in Vidarbha with a remarkably well orchestrated mix of solemnity and restrained humour. "I belong to Vidarbha and I am aware of the plight of the farmers there. Although my characters aren't modelled on people that I personally know, *Gabhricha Paus* is an expression of my grave concern at what is happening," says Manwar.

Even as it celebrates the spirit of one particular farmer who is in no mood to give up despite the nature-induced and man-made odds that are stacked against him, *Gabhricha Paus* never abandons its realistic approach to the depiction of the worsening agrarian crisis. Much the same could be said of Mangesh Hadawale's outstanding film, *Tingya*, released in 2008 to great critical and commercial acclaim. This tale of a little boy's bonding with a working bull blends an authentic rustic feel with the virtues of solid storytelling shorn of

Our theatre training has helped us no end, says Satish Manwar, the director of *Gabhricha Paus* (The Damned Rain).



Gabhricha Paus



Chaturanga

unnecessary technical gimmickry.

Among these commendable new Marathi films is Sachin Kundalkar's *Gandha* (Smell), which attempts a difficult and unique task – it narrates separate stories about three women of different ages and binds these tales together with the theme of smell. In a medium that is visual and aural, smell can be conveyed only through narrative elements and images that have the power to suffuse the viewer's senses with the imagined. Kundalkar gets it right almost all the way through.

"As more and more such films are made and distributed, people will get used to a different kind of cinema," says the Pune-based director. *Gandha* is his third feature film after *Restaurant* and *Nirop*, both of which were very well received.

In the first story of *Gandha*, the female protagonist, a young art college clerk, falls in love with an aspiring painter who works in an incense stick factory to make a living. The second episode homes in on an HIV positive photographer and his estranged wife, while the third story is set in a village lashed by heavy rains as a menstruating woman is segregated while her sister-in-law gives birth to a baby.

Kundalkar links the three stories through the fragrance of incense sticks, the stench of a dead rat under the dying photographer's bed and the regenerative odour of the rain-swept earth and a newborn baby. Although the director is known to be more at home with urban themes, in *Gandha* he is at his best in the third story: he subtly captures the inner feelings of a woman whose own infertility is contrasted against an abundance of symbols of fertility – the rain, the wet earth, a woman in labour.

"There is a new energy in Marathi cinema today," he says. "To ensure that this lasts, we need great discipline in terms of budget and execution. The happy augury is that silly old comedies are losing their currency. People are increasingly responding to stories of contemporary relevance."

Gandha, as the credits announce, is a tribute to two of Kundalkar's favourite directors – Hong Kong's Wong Kar Wai and Spain's Pedro Almodovar. But there is nothing in the film that would suggest a slavish imitation of the masters that he admires.

Back to Bengali roots

In an emerging segment of contemporary

Bengali cinema, the push is as much into taboo thematic terrains as it is into new modes of filmic expression. Suman Mukhopadhyay, who has a huge fan following as a theatre director, has already marked out his territory as a filmmaker with *Herbert* and *Chaturanga*. While the former is based on a Sahitya Akademi Award-winning novella by Nabarun Bhattacharya, the latter is a reworking of Rabindranath Tagore's *Char Adhyay*, a complex exploration of love and lust, rationalism and spirituality. In both films, Mukhopadhyay plays around with time and space in a manner that seems western while being firmly rooted in hoary Indian narrative traditions.

"There is nothing in the world that has a more fragmented narrative than the epic *Mahabharata*," asserts Mukhopadhyay. "It has layers and layers of meaning and perceptions. The West did experiment with fragmented narratives in the manner of Bertolt Brecht, but this has always been a part of our culture."

Herbert, the story of a neglected orphan who grows up in a crumbling Kolkata household, is an allegory about a city grappling with decades of decay. Mukhopadhyay's third film, *Mahanagar@Kolkata*, which adapts three stories by Nabarun Bhattacharya, presents the megalopolis itself as a character. "The three stories and their characters are telescoped into each other," the director says of his new experiment with a non-linear narrative style. "Characters from one story walk into another, and vice-versa," he adds.

Similarly, the controlled minimalism of Subhadro Chowdhury's cinema, for all its western connotations, stems from his own moorings. His first feature, *Prohor*, fetched him a National Award for Best Debut Film. It tells the story of a nurse who plots to kill a grievously injured criminal who molested her six years ago but is now at her mercy as he lies comatose in a hospital bed. The film was told in a style that was the very antithesis of how stories are narrated in average Hindi and Bengali films.

Chowdhury has just completed his second feature, *Clerk*, toplined by Bengal's reigning superstar, Prosenjit Chatterjee. He plays a timid lower middle-class man who assumes a completely different persona once he is back in the safe confines of his humble home at night – he strikes up conversations with movie actresses that he is obsessed with.

"This is a character-driven film and it need-

GAUTAM SINGH

Sachin Kundalkar, director of *Gandha*

NILAYAN DUTTA

Subhadro Chowdhury, maker of *Clerk*

NILAYAN DUTTA

Suman Mukhopadhyay, director of *Chaturanga*



Clerk



Mayabazaar



Angshumaner Chhobi



Gabricha Paus



Valu

ed somebody of Prosenjit's stature," says the director who asserts that he does not believe in making films for a target audience. "I go by my instincts and hope others will relate to my vision. In any case, *Clerk* has more narrative dynamism than *Prohor*," he adds.

This streak of independence is an essential part of the mental make-up of filmmakers who dare to go where nobody has gone before, as Kaushik Ganguly has done in *Aarekti Premer Galpo* (Just Another Love Story). It stars writer-director Rituparno Ghosh (in his acting debut) as a gay documentary filmmaker who is in a relationship with his bisexual cameraman. *Aarekti Premer Galpo* is probably the first-ever Bengali film that tackles the theme of homosexuality and gender-bending without cloaking them in laboured euphemisms. It has none of the flippancy of a *Dostana* – *Aarekti Premer Galpo* is a serious, sensitive look at alternative sexuality inspired partly by the life of famed jatra actor Chapal Bhaduri who made a career out of doing female impersonations on stage.

In this fecund season of experimentation, another new Bengali film, Joydeep Ghosh's *Mayabazaar*, deals with the paranormal through three different stories drawn from Bengali literature. "The film is targetted at anybody who visits book fairs, and buys and reads literature. There is no dearth of such people," says Ghosh. The human stories in his film transcend the here and now, and blend the deadpan with the magical.

Television veteran Atanu Ghosh's debut film, *Angshumaner Chhobi*, the story of a filmmaker who returns to Kolkata after a stint in Italy, embraces a wide swath of characters who come together during the making of a film, including a gigolo in love with an actress. Low-budget, meaningful Bengali cinema is exploring the margins of society like never before.

New voices in Tamil films

While in the Marathi and Bengali film industries, the new path-breaking films still belong to the non-mainstream space, in Tamil cinema the story is

a little different. A new breed of 30-something directors in Chennai have broken away almost completely from the industry's dependence on stars and are yet delivering one box-office hit after another.

In the past five years, Venkat Prabhu's *Chennai 28*, which built its youthful drama around the phenomenon of street cricket, Sasi Kumar's *Subramanipuram*, the story of four unemployed Madurai friends who lose their way in the maze of life, Balaji Sakthivel's *Kadhal* (Love) and *Kalloori* (The College), Ameer's *Paruthiveeran*, Vasantha Balan's *Veyil*, Gnana Rajasekharan's *Periyar*, Pandiraj's *Pasanga* and Cheran's *Autograph*, *Thavamai Thavamirundu* and *Pokkisham* have rewritten the rules of the game.

These films – realistic evocations of small-town milieus – fuse the vitality of commercial cinema with the heart of non-mainstream movies, eschewing the excesses of both. Says the National Award-winning Cheran, who often acts in his own films: "People who go to the movies in Tamil Nadu today are all in their 20s and early 30s. Older people prefer to watch films at home. We have a new audience. The screenplay is now the real star."

Cheran's latest film, *Pokkisham* (Treasures), illustrates what these young filmmakers are seeking to achieve. The unrequited Hindu-Muslim love story at the heart of the film is seen through the eyes of the now deceased man's young son, who himself is in love but is unable to quite understand the sustained intensity of his father's feelings for a woman he rarely ever met in person, communicating with her only through letters. In Tamil Nadu, young directors are making love stories, mounting action films and rustling up rousing tales of youthful valour – genres that have been done to death – but they are investing them with a new narrative rhythm and sensibility. A new audience has evolved quickly to provide this movement a huge boost.

This cinema is Indian at heart but increasingly global in scope. It has begun to find takers in the states of their origin as well as among cineastes around India. The world is the next stop.

Tamil cinema now fuses the energy of mainstream movies with the spirit of art films, eschewing the excesses of both.

Business

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Investing in sports talent

Children from humble roots get a chance to excel

Rina Mukherji
Jamshedpur

ANISHA and her sister, Anita Tirkey, travel 16 km by bus from their home in Gadada village to the JRD Sports Complex in Jamshedpur to use its boxing facilities. Their father works as a labourer in an industrial unit in Jharkhand.

Anita used to play hockey at their school in Rahrgada. In 2005, encouraged by coach A K Lakra, Anita and Anisha decided to learn boxing at the sports complex. In 2008, at the sub-junior nationals at Kakinada, Anisha won a silver. This was followed by a bronze at the junior nationals in Patna the following year.

Anita's career has been following a similar trajectory. Both sisters spend long hours at the boxing ring after having achieved a level of success at national level.

Like Anisha and Anita, countless children from underprivileged families have built a career in sports thanks to Tata Steel's sports programme.

You can say the Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puraskar awarded to Tata Steel in August 2009 by the Government of India for 'Community Sports Identification and Nurturing of Budding Young Talent and Establishment and Management of Sports Academies of Excellence' has been well-earned over the years.

Although Tata Steel has always encouraged sports, the company expanded its involvement in 1996. It set up training centres for 13 sports – basketball, badminton, boxing, chess, cricket, golf, handball, hockey, *kabaddi*, tennis, table tennis, volleyball and weightlifting.

Three sports – archery, athletics and football – were singled out for special attention and full-fledged academies were set up for them. The football academy was the first to be set up in 1987. The archery academy came up in 1996, while the athletics academy was started in 2004.

The JRD Tata Sports facility spots talent in remote villages and then sponsors the child's education and training.

"Each of our four feeder centres at Kalinganagar, Jamadoba, Noamundi and West Bokaro is headed by a coach," explains VVS Narasimha Rao, technical



Deepika Kumari

adviser at the archery academy. "Inter-feeder centre tournaments throw up the most potential candidates whom we then select for our academy. Every year, 12 boys and girls who show promise are chosen for archery, football and athletics."

The youngsters are helped by the company for four years. They are provided boarding, lodging and they continue their education, attending school or college. "The youngsters are put up in well-furnished hostels of their respective academies. They avail of our gymnasium and yoga facilities and get equipped to perform under pressure. Tata Steel spends approximately Rs 12,500 per selected youngster annually," says Rao.

Besides these feeder centres, which operate in villages and towns, there are centres of excellence in 12 urban schools which select the best in sporting talent.

After initial training, the best candidates are then recommended by the academies for admission to the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) residential hostels across the country. Rao's experience as the person who spearheaded the central government's Special Area Games project has also helped a great deal. The academies are in close touch with SAI and budding sports talent



Young boxers show off their medals

gets a boost with both institutions working together.

Children from in and around Jamshedpur are helped with sports equipment and intensive coaching to excel in the sport they have showed an interest in. Established sports persons also come to the JRD Sports Complex to use its facilities and further perfect their skills.

There are many moving stories about children from humble backgrounds achieving great success in sports.

Laxmi Khallku is a rising boxing star. She has just completed school. Her father works as a labourer at the Jamshedpur dumping ground. She opted for boxing and began training in 2005. Since then, she has won a silver at the Junior Nationals at Patiala in 2006, a bronze at the Andhra Pradesh Nationals in 2007 and a bronze in Goa in 2009.

Another rising boxer is Ramashankar Yadav, who comes from a family of milkmen. For six years he trained as a boxer. In 2006, he struck gold at the sub-junior nationals. But he lost his father and due to financial pressures discontinued boxing in 2007 and 2008. Instead he was delivering gas cylinders all day long. Despite this, he took part in a boxing tournament at Aurangabad in 2009 and won a silver medal. Currently, he is attending the all-India camp in Kandivli, Mumbai, and will soon be joining a company in Danapur on a permanent basis.

Likewise Krishna Kumar's father runs a food stall in Jamshedpur. He trained as a boxer at the JRD Sports Complex five years ago and won a bronze medal at the Junior Nationals in Sikkim last year.

Children have done very well in archery, a traditional sport in Jharkhand. Fifteen-year-old Deepika Kumari's father is an auto-driver. Her mother works as a nurse in a government hospital. She joined the Tata Archery Academy in May 2008, after a brief stint at the Seraikela-Kharsawan Archery Academy. At the 11th Youth World Archery Championship in the US in 2009, she struck gold and was catapulted to fame.

Apart from children living in urban and semi-urban areas in and around Jamshedpur, children from very remote villages, deep in the interiors have been given the opportunity to develop their sporting talent. These youngsters are selected and nurtured in football, archery or athletics at the academies and are given all facilities for education, lodging and boarding.

M Ramesh from Ravoor village in Warangal district in Andhra Pradesh is

one such youngster. Son of marginal farmers, Ramesh's first exposure to archery came at his school in Kallada. In 2007, he got selected for the Tata Archery Academy. Ramesh won a silver medal at the sub-junior nationals in archery and secured a team silver. He followed this up with two team silvers in 2008 and 2009.

Helen Munda and Gujan Kumari have also shone in archery. Helen is from Khiriburu village in West Singhbhum. She got selected to the Tata Archery Academy in 2007. Daughter of a tribal family in Jharkhand, her father works in the mines at Keonjhar, Orissa. Helen was in Class 10 when she came for the selections to Jamshedpur. She has won a bronze at the junior nationals and now dreams big.

Gujan Kumari of Rajivnagar village in West Bokaro district, Jharkhand, was selected to the Tata Archery Academy when she was studying in Class 12. She has already won a gold at the sub-junior school nationals, 2009.

Another sport which is attracting local talent is golf, a game which is traditionally associated with the rich. Children from humble backgrounds are breaking this glass ceiling.

Take Sheikh Ahmed and his brother Abbas Ali. They come from a poor family which lives in Dainkiri basti in Jamshedpur. Ahmed is one of 10 siblings. Being a golfer was as remote to him as aspiring to live in a bungalow. But the Beldih Club's manicured lawns beckoned him.

His father worked as a green keeper at the club. As an eight-year-old, Ahmed would accompany his father and watch seasoned players. He dropped out of school since his family could not afford his education, and began working as a caddy in the club at the age of 15.

"The job was paying and I felt my future lay in caddying," says Ahmed.

But club members advised him to go back to school and offered to pay. Ahmed joined

Loyola High School for afternoon classes. It was during these years that he picked up the finer nuances of the game and began taking part in caddy tournaments.

When training facilities for golf were set up at the JRD Tata Sports Complex five years ago, Ahmed and his brother Abbas Ali were among the first to join through the Beldih Club. "A golf club was gifted to me by one of the members. Later, I was given all equipment through the Sports Department. Alan Singh began to coach me and I started taking part in tournaments," he says.

In 1995, Ahmed got his first break. He stood second in the Steel City's golf tournament.

In 2006, he won second place at the PGA Qualifying School tournament at the Pune Golf Club. He put in a sterling performance at the PGTI Qualifying School tournaments at the Qutab Golf Club in 2007, coming second.

"This breakthrough at the national level was followed by many more prizes at various tournaments," he says. In 2008, he came fifth in Mumbai, winning Rs 1.85 lakh as prize money. He got Rs 40,000 at a Bangalore tournament as prize money. In 2009, he was appointed Golf Course In-Charge at the Beldih Club in Jamshedpur where he is currently employed.

Ahmed's younger brother, Abbas Ali, too started his career as a caddy. Sponsored by Tata Steel, he began playing professional golf in 1992. Coaching facilities helped young Abbas blossom into one of the finest golfers in the country. After 12 years in the professional circuit, he got a job as a golf instructor in a Hyderabad hotel. He now works as a golf instructor at Fort Aguada, Goa.



Anisha Tirkey

The farmer's ambassador

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Vidya Viswanathan
Bilaspur (Haryana)

DURING the day, Amanjeet Gill is a diplomat, tall, urbane and well travelled. Catch him in his apartment in Chanakya Puri and he will offer you a drink, play some exotic music from his iPod and hold forth on a Chilean singer who lives in France.

But on weekends, 41-year-old Gill becomes a farmer. He is the driving force behind a non-profit called the Farmer's First Foundation which runs a model farm in Bilaspur village, around 65 km from Delhi. The farm demonstrates that integrated organic farming is sustainable and propagates this idea around the countryside.

Gill says the farmer has lost control of agriculture. Small farmers think innovation belongs to a guy in a lab coat, marketing to a guy in a suit and farming is only about chucking some seeds.

"This is the result of decades of spreading a one-size-fits-all solution. We want to change that and make the farmer think like an entrepreneur. Our inputs to him are information and managerial ability and not just seeds, manure, labour," says Gill.

Farmer's First partners government institutions and the private sector. "They are large consumers and have resources. Urban consumers will also be partners. The farm will be a spiritually recharging experience for them. They could come when they have time and buy their weekly needs. We have linked about 20 families to this farm," says Gill. "Our goal is to reach produce from the farm to the consumer within 12 hours," adds Ashma, Amanjeet's wife who promotes the farm and looks after the consumer network in Delhi.

Gill's ambition is to transform perceptions about agriculture and small farmers. "In 10 years we want soccer moms to brag that their children want to be farmers like they do today about wanting their children to be space scientists," he says.

A large part of his plan is to bring school children over to the farm. "The experiential learning from the farm can transform education," he says. Children from Manzil, a non-profit which runs a learning centre for the underserved, have visited the farm.

Gill got his idea in 2006. "One motivation was the agrarian crisis. We were reading about farmer suicides when I was posted at the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka. MS Swaminathan came and spoke about the ever-green revolution that we needed," he recollects.



Amanjeet Gill (third from left) with his band of organic farmers

In the aftermath of the tsunami, Gill did development related work in Sri Lanka. That set him thinking about how he could make a difference to the lives of people in South Asia. He also came in contact with Rajbir Singh who had helped set up an organic farming project in Sri Lanka.

Farming wasn't a strange new profession for Gill. His father was a horticulturist who had worked with MS Randhawa to landscape Chandigarh. He

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Local farmers learn organic methods

had spent summer holidays at his maternal grandmother's place where they had about eight acres. "It is in my DNA," he says smiling. Every weekend he takes his family in his Lancer to the farm. His children take classmates along sometimes. Gill's wildly enthusiastic four-year-old son, Ujai, is comfortable milking a cow, digging out earthworms from the vermi-compost or bringing in little chicks to weigh.

When he first started, Gill wrote a concept paper and roped in trusted friends who also happened to be bureaucrats. "We are a very tight team and know each other for many years. We are in touch over all big decisions," says Gill.

His team includes Sanjay Sudhir, an IFS officer who was commercial counsellor at the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka when Gill was posted there, Amardeep Singh, an IAS officer currently on a fellowship at Duke University and Gill's classmate, Amardeep's wife, Aparna Bhatia, a bureaucrat in the finance ministry, Sudhir's brother-in-law, Nar Singh Dev, an Indian Information Services officer and Sudhir's father, a retired IAS officer who is also chairman of the foundation.

In 2006, Gill and his team met experts of the Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (IHBT) in Palampur and the National Dairy Research Institute (NDRI) in Karnal. They signed an MoU with NDRI and registered as a society. The government gave them permission to start a non-profit though they were serving officers. Their first demonstration farm was a large project in Sakhera. It was funded by a private com-

Continued on page 26

Continued from page 25

pany. Then they decided to hire Rajbir Singh.

That did not work out and they began searching for an alternative, talking to acquaintances and friends. Finally, some people living in Delhi who had six acres lying idle got enthusiastic about Gill's idea and agreed to rent the land to the foundation. They even chipped in with some investment.

Each founder member also decided to invest Rs 20,000. "Our model was to get a donestor (donor plus investor). As founder members, our investment is also time and energy. We have now converted this farm from barren land. There are hundreds of farm houses around Delhi which are lying idle with expensive walls built around them so our idea is easily replicable," he points out.

As time went by they got more help. Sonalika Tractors donated a tractor, Sterling Agro funded their buffaloes and HSBC bank helped with some minor investments.

The team expanded and other founder members too began to help. One of them was Kamaljeet Singh, who runs Srishti Vigyan Kendra in Rohtak.

"I work with extension counters in all 11 districts of Haryana," says Kamaljeet, who has a master's degree in agricultural technology. "I conducted a survey in Dobh village in Rohtak and interviewed 800 farmers. Only two had been trained five or six years ago. We need model farms to train farmers. We have to show them that they can innovate and earn from a small farm."

Another valued member is SL Mehta, the former vice-chancellor of Udaipur University who is propagating sustainable agriculture by setting up cooperatives among tribals in Rajasthan. "Mehta told us to buy the Nirbeek variety of chicks which are more resistant," says Gill. The foundation's first effort at poultry was not quite successful.

In 2007, the land that the foundation acquired was completely barren. They planted leguminous plants and plants for fodder. "We think animals are critical to a sustainable organic farm. So dairy is central to our plan," says Gill. The farm now has three trainers. "Do farmers know organic farming? It is in their blood. That is how Guru Nanak did it. It is in the Vedas. We have to help them reconnect," says Gill.

After the soil was conditioned, they brought in composting. Three kinds of composting are done



The foundation would like to set up at least one model farm in each state near a large city and connect it with urban consumers.

including vermi-composting and Albert Howard's Indore composting method.

Nothing in the farm goes waste. A nursery was set up. Poultry was started to control termites in the nursery. Panchgavya methods improved soil fertility and boosted immunity from pests. Once the land was sufficiently enriched, mustard and moong dal were cultivated and then vegetables. Now the farm does mushroom cultivation and medicinal plants and herbs are being experimented with. Three farmers live on the farm. The foundation has

helped form a self-help group of seven farmers.

"The farm is successful now. Farmers nearby whom we have trained have started selling vermi-compost. They used to throw away the dung away earlier," says Ram Singh, a farmer who is now farm manager. "Mintu, who is also from my village, is my partner here. His brother grew one quintal of organic cauliflower this season in Punjab. What we need are our own stores in all the states to fetch the correct price," he adds.

The income from the farm covers about one-third to one-fourth of expenses. In three months the farm is expected to break-even. The idea is to generate an income of about Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000 from this land which costs about Rs 15,000 per month. So a family with two people working on the land could make Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000 with some help. Ram Singh who has now been made a life member makes a back of the envelope calculation. "Many people visit us from around Delhi and from far. Some have 50 acres and want us to turn their farm organic. We will charge Rs 20,000 per acre. That could be an income for the foundation" he says.

The foundation would like to set up at least one model farm in each state near a large city and connect it with urban consumers. These farms can work as demonstration and training centres and be run by farmers keen to turn organic.

The foundation could also connect with those who have idle land. It could raise resources and buy land. "We are flexible in our business model and we will tailor our partnerships accordingly. We will also continue to look for life members. That is a source of income for us and helps to continue to make it a movement," says Gill.

What happens to the farm when Gill is posted overseas? "This farm will run by itself," he says. "We have trained farmers to keep several books like the visitors books, the dairy observation book, the assets register and the daily income and expenses book. We now run it very transparently with a lot of public scrutiny. But we are looking for leadership to expand the concept. We already run it like a movement and let anyone who wants to help chip in. I am a writer and a thinker who is happy making connections. We will make way for an implementer who can lead the foundation," says Gill.



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Geography has a market

KUMAR GAUTAM

IN more than six workshops for handicraft producers held in state capitals in the last one year the resource person asked this question to participants, including artisans and some heads of NGOs: "Have you ever heard of Geographical Indication (GI) goods or do you know about the GI Act? Surprisingly, none of them had heard of either.

This Act in India is supposed to protect the community rights of producers over their products. But the irony is that communities themselves are unaware about the features and provisions of the Act. The purpose of the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 with rules 2002, remains largely defeated even after seven years of its enforcement in 2003.

Since our childhood days we know of India's rich regional diversity which yields unique products, either because of the distinctive environmental characteristics of the region or the inimitable skill of its craft workers. We did not know about the need to legally protect our unique products until it was noticed that Darjeeling tea was being sold in world markets more than what was being produced. The message was clear – producers of non-Darjeeling tea were selling their tea in the name of Darjeeling tea.

Darjeeling tea is not an isolated example. Many fake varieties of rice are selling outside the country riding on the reputation of Basmati rice. Even within the country, Benarasi power loom saris are sold as Benarasi handloom saris. While deceptive producers and traders make money, the livelihoods of real producers suffer a severe blow. The GI Act is intended precisely to remedy this.

The GI Act is a fallout of India's obligation under the TRIPS agreement, as a signatory to the WTO. Under the GI Act, by definition, only those goods qualify for registration and hence protection, whose given quality, reputation or other characteristics can be essentially attributed to their geographical origin. These goods can be agricultural, manufactured, handicrafts or even foodstuff.

The Act recognises the essential role played by geography, climate and traditional knowledge in providing quality to certain products. While it seeks to help producers differentiate their products from competing products in the market and helps them



Tea estate in Darjeeling

build reputation and goodwill through premium prices, it also intends to prevent consumers from being misled by deceptive traders. Some of the famous Indian GIs are Kashmir Pashmina shawls, Indian Basmati rice, Darjeeling tea, Benarasi Sari, Alphonso mangoes, Tirupathi ladoos, Pochampalli silk, Hyderabad pearls, Goa feni etc. So far, around 120 products have been registered as GIs and many more are in the pipeline.

Recollect the recent award winning film *Kanjeevaram* by Priyadarshan where the protagonist of the film is a weaver of the famous kaanjeevaram saree. The lifelong earnings of this highly skilled weaver were so meagre that he failed to marry his daughter in a silk sari. The same kaanchipuram silk sari is now registered and therefore protected under the GI Act. But the critical question is: Will this Act or can this Act actually benefit artisans and weavers of GI goods?

The proven uniqueness of a product could be due to regional climatic factors or the traditional human skills of an area. For example, a weaver of the Benarasi silk sari may migrate to another region

and weave the same sari on a loom. But he is forbidden to call it or sell it as a Benarasi handloom sari.

However, if a weaver migrates into Benaras, learns the traditional skill and weaves a Benarasi handloom sari, it will be protected under the Act. This is significant because if the Act is successful in providing protection and commercial benefits, it has the potential to not only protect the regional and cultural identity of the product but to improve rural livelihood opportunities and reduce distress migration to cities.

Perhaps the most crucial feature of the GI Act is that it is a community right unlike other intellectual property rights such as trademark, copyright, patent etc. It follows logically from this feature that the process of registration for a product under GI should be community driven. Unfortunately, in a rush to register as many products as possible, only a handful of interested parties are involved in the process, bypassing the concerned communities. How can the weavers of Benaras or Kaanchipuram

Continued on page 28

Bartering food security

SHALINI BHUTANI

THE Government of India (GOI) is negotiating several bilateral trade and investment agreements with other countries. The Ministry of Commerce is currently exploring nearly 20 regional trade agreements. In the last three years India started FTA talks with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the European Union (EU) and Japan.

These are generating debate for their content and the secrecy that shrouds their talks. If all the terms of the proposed FTAs are agreed to, they will require India to alter farm policies and intellectual property rights (IPR) legislation to the detriment of small peasants, fisher folks, pastoralists and agricultural workers. The impact on the informal food, fish and farm sector will have a ripple effect on food, health and nutrition.

After WTO, many countries in the South were arm-twisted to provide for IPR on crop varieties through plant variety protection (PVP) laws that impose restrictions on farmers' activities like seed-saving, re-sowing, exchange amongst themselves, etc. Currently India has a mild version of a PVP law – the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001. It attempts to reconcile farmers' freedoms over planting material and commercial interests of plant breeders seeking to market 'new' crop varieties.

EU and Japan insist that their trading partners have a UPOV 1991 compliant PVP law. WTO does not ask for its members to be part of UPOV, so such provisions in FTAs make them WTO-plus. The UPOV Treaty and its 1991 version further curtail the natural rights of farmers and make them subject to the economic rights of corporate breeders. It brings in two big restrictions. One, that farmers cannot save seeds other than for their own use, nor exchange them with their neighbours.

This strikes at the very root of on-farm research. Countries like Japan and the seed MNCs they foster, for example Sakata, welcome higher IPR 'protection' for their products. Sakata opened a 100 per cent subsidiary in India in June 2008. Corporate control over seeds and agrichemicals is advanced through IPR. Traditional farm-saved seeds and soil health is already poisoned with chemicals from European companies like BASF and Bayer.

Second, strict PVP disallows researchers from using IPR-protected crop varieties without royalty.

This will impact public sector crop research. FTAs demanding corporate breeder rights re-orient agricultural research toward marketable products. This inhibits grassroots innovation that is farmer-responsive. It undermines the freedom of farmers and severely limits the climate resilience of small farm agriculture.

With more IPR being pushed in via FTAs, one can foresee more proprietary agricultural technologies being promoted, some more serious like genetically modified (GM) seeds, GM fish and other transgenic products. This is a bonanza for

Agriculture is a State subject and many state govts are affronted that the Central Government is unilaterally signing such texts.

biotech companies and a bane for biodiversity. It is companies such as Roche and Syngenta of Switzerland that lobby their government to ask for higher levels of IPR in negotiations with India in the EFTA-India FTA. Likewise, the March 2009 report of the Joint Study Group of Indian and New Zealand officials doing the groundwork for a proposed FTA between the two governments, clearly expresses the interest of NZBIO – representing the NZ biotechnology sector to be in India.

There are also livestock-related concerns that arise in the light of FTAs. Animal diseases that threaten human health and livestock diversity are already a serious issue. FTAs spur further privatisation of viruses, vaccines and related materials and technologies for commercial purposes. With the experience the world has had with the Avian Influenza and now Swine Flu, governments ought to wake up to these risks.

Another big threat through bilateral investment agreements is the loss of farmland. In a new wave of 'offshore farming', countries and investors are

seeking to buy or lease agricultural land and eyeing water resources with it in foreign lands, posing new problems of displacement of local land-dependent communities. Investment liberalisation provisions in FTAs, facilitate investor takeover of land and domestic food production. People's rights to farmland, coastal areas and water use are compromised. This also pushes conversion from food security crops to non-agricultural activities. Orienting agriculture for further trade does not help to put a stop to real waste of energy and pollution from the international agro-industrial food system: the processing, packaging, freezing, cooking and moving of food and farm products around the globe.

The 'free trade' agenda in agriculture has been set by and for corporate agribusinesses. FTAs are being used by them to further liberalise farming sectors, or gain access to new markets for agricultural exports. Drastic WTO-plus cuts in tariffs negotiated under FTAs, leave the farm and fishery sector highly vulnerable to volatilities of the global market with no space for domestic safeguards from import surges. This drastically affects local producers in informal agriculture, fisheries and small scale processing.

Agriculture is a State subject and many state governments are affronted that the Central Government is unilaterally signing such texts. Even protesting states like Kerala, whose plantations, fisheries and spice farms face the severest brunt of the India-ASEAN FTA, have reportedly not been given a copy of the FTA! The access by citizens to official texts of international treaties that directly impact the lives of ordinary people remains even more distant.

FTAs often include provisions on sanitary and phytosanitary standards and technical barriers to trade which constrain the power of local communities and national governments to set their own standards in relation to biosafety, food safety and other health concerns. Hawker federations in the country have been raising their voices in protest.

The cumulative effect of all these is on the Right to Food. While the above factors worsen the agrarian crisis, they also create an import dependency for food rather than promote local procurement for food entitlements.

Shalini Bhutani works for GRAIN

For more see www.bilaterals.org and www.forumagainstftas.org

Continued from page 27

benefit when they are not even aware of this law?

In fact, this hurry for registration without due diligence may harm the interests of the concerned communities. According to some artisans of Bagh printing in Madhya Pradesh, the map submitted to the GI registry office while putting in an application for registration, excluded certain parts of the region where the same Bagh printing has been in practice since the inception of this craft.

States and concerned authorities must not allow this to happen. A large scale awareness drive should

be organised for the communities associated with already registered GI goods and potential GI goods. Otherwise, the GI may be reduced to mere 'Good Intention.'

Some studies suggest that for original guaranteed goods more than 40 percent of consumers surveyed are willing to pay a price premium of 10 percent. But how will this commercial benefit go to the actual producers? Given that legal provisions have not benefited people at the grassroots, sceptics outnumber those who believe in the goodness of the Act. Producer's communities by and large have no

idea of how to muster its benefits.

A mechanism to ensure effective enforcement of the GI Act is almost non-existent. There are very few encouraging initiatives. The Tea Board has succeeded in preventing misuse of the 'Darjeeling' logo and 'Darjeeling Tea' as a Certification Trade Mark in US and many other markets. But how many of GI right holders can afford such huge legal expenses apart from all the preparatory expenses required before legal remedies are sought?

Kumar Gautam works with All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA).

Brinjal vs brinjal

ANITHA REDDY

A unique festival that celebrated the diversity of brinjal was held in the heritage city of Mysore on 13 December. Called the 'Desi Badane Samskruthi Mela' it took place at Rangayana, a theatre institution of national repute. Indigenous brinjals of all shapes and sizes converged here from the southern states of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Around 50 varieties of brinjal with their wild relatives were on display. Each variety has a unique feature and is used for different culinary preparations. Some varieties have medicinal value, like *sunde kai* is used for joint pains and *ramagulle badane*, a wild variety, is used to remove tooth cavity. *Mattu gulla*, from Udupi district, is cultivated for its distinct flavour.

The festival was organised by a number of consumer groups from Mysore to spread awareness about the threat posed to indigenous varieties of brinjal by Bt Brinjal. The government is all set to approve genetically modified (GM) crops and Bt Brinjal will be the first to be launched for human consumption.

The consumer groups who came together to launch this festival were Nesara (Organic Farming Services Society), Nisarga (Centre for Marketing Naturally Grown Crops) and Aaramba (Fraternity of Organic Farming Growers). They partnered the Sahaja Samrudha (Organic Farmers Association) which is based in Bengaluru.

These groups are campaigning for a GM free Karnataka. They are working together to prevent the entry of Bt Brinjal by informing people about the harmful effects of GM foods on their health and environment.

"It is time to get up and oppose GM foods before they fill our markets", said Krishna Prasad, director of Sahaja Samrudha. "With the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) giving the green signal to commercialisation of Bt Brinjal, It is important to conduct campaigns and festivals to educate people about safe and healthy food. They need to know about the devastating effects of GM food and its impact on our agro-biodiversity. Losing our traditional varieties will make our farmers dependent on seed companies."

The *Mattu gulla* brinjal, for instance, is already threatened with extinction. "It is being tampered with at the University of Agricultural Sciences in Dharwad," alleged Krishna Prasad. "Bt gene has been introduced into *Mattu gulla* and field trials have been conducted."

The festival was inaugurated by Srinivasa Murthy, a model progressive farmer, who gained recognition for growing 30 species of native paddy on a single plot. KS Puttannaiah, President,

Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) said in the past farmers never faced problems with agriculture. Today, despite science and research institutes 'working overtime', farmers are facing problems. The speakers said farmers' interests should be a priority with the state. They called upon the farming community to shun exotic species being thrust upon them by multinationals.

BRINJAL RULES: The king of vegetables is part of



Some popular varieties of brinjal

Groups of farmers are campaigning for a GM-free Karnataka. They are working together to prevent the entry of Bt Brinjal.

the diet of rich and the poor. It is grown all over the country, through the year. The cultivation and use of brinjal is of great antiquity to India.

It is uniquely ours. Studies indicate that brinjal moved to West Asia and Europe from India. So brinjal is the perfect example of a truly Indian vegetable that has "become globalised" over the years.

At the festival the wide diversity of brinjals on display included, *haduru gula*, a native of Thirthahalli, Shimoga district and a rare variety, *billi gulla badane* known for its exclusive taste. *Udupi gulla badane*, a native of Udupi is cultivated for its unique flavor. *Malaka badane* is a small variety, *mola badane* is popular for masala rice, *mangalooru badane* is very tasty and cooked in *sambhar*. It is also used for making chutney.

Gulla badane, grown widely in Bangalore rural district, is best suited for barren land.

"*Gulla badane*, is the best variety and when we cook this brinjal it melts like butter in the mouth," said Sarojamma, a farmer from Chennapatna in Mysore district. She has conserved about six varieties of brinjal and continues growing them. She vows that she will never use seeds supplied by the government.

The *Kari badane* variety is very popular in the Jamakhandi area of North Karnataka. *Kadu gula badane* is a variety available in the forest range of Kollegal in Chamarajnar district. It is used by the migrant population to prepare *sambhar*. *Makala badane*, native to Mysore region, is fleshy with less seeds. It is unique for the brinjals grow in a cluster. The *Bili badane* plant grows to five feet, and each fruit weighs half a kilo. *Aadu mole badane* is thin and long and grows in clusters. *Kothithale badane*, a native of Bangalore rural district, is very soft and popular for its taste. *Akki chikki badane* is a creeper variety and has medicinal value. *Eramgere badane* a native of Mysore is a popular variety and more than a quintal was sold within two hours of the inauguration of the festival. The list of indigenous brinjals was very long.

Sridhar, a business man who lives in Mysore said that he visits his village Mattu in Udupi district mainly to taste *sambhar* made with *Mattu gulla badane*. "No other brinjal tastes like *matu gulla*," he said. He visited the mela mainly to buy kilos of this brinjal as it is not available anywhere except in Udupi.

STALLS AND FOOD: Stalls at the festival were designed to provide enough space for product displays. The stalls sold preparations of brinjal like chips, chutney powder and pickles. They also stocked spices, dry fruits, organic rice, unpolished rice and sweets. Brinjal seeds, brinjal saplings and books, posters, leaflets and manuals were likewise sold.

A distinctive feature of the event was a cooking competition. Women from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds shared rare recipes with a common ingredient – brinjal.

There was brinjal salad, brinjal raita, brinjal curry, brinjal *dosa*, *badane mosaru bajji* (a traditional curry prepared with curds, coconut and green chillies), *yengai* (an authentic recipe of North Karnataka served with rotis), brinjal coriander chutney and lots more.

For further information on Bt Brinjal contact Sahaja Samrudha, 'Nandana', No-7, 2nd Cross, 7th Main, Sulthanpalya, Bangalore-560 037 Phone: 080-22715744 / 9880862058

What farmers want

KANCHI KOHLI

"When private/multinational corporations conduct farm trials on their own fields or on the fields of farmers, the effects of these trials on farmers' health, changes in soil and the impact on the surrounding environment must be monitored by citizens groups that include farmers. This information should be made known every year to the farming community through the media and gram sabhas. If there are negative consequences from such trials, the companies/corporations must be held responsible and accountable for those consequences."

Verdict of a 30-member farmers' jury, Bengaluru, 5 December, 2009.

DURING this conference held in Bengaluru, farmers and scientist sat face to face. They were discussing the future of millet farming in India. Farmers demanded that the research agenda for these grains should be led by them. The scientists resisted making it clear that policy does not make farming communities participants in university research.

Farmer's practices, knowledge and cultures have been under scientific and policy scrutiny for decades. Their living heritage has more often than not been minutely examined by governments, scientists and private companies. In almost all instances the scientific ability of farmers has been pronounced inadequate. Some regard for farmers' practices in the form of basic information which needs to be reformed, revamped or restored, exists. In many ways farmers have accepted the opinion of literate scientific experts with humble grace.

But what happens when such roles are reversed and scientists, private companies and government institutions with their agendas come under scrutiny for four intense days? The conclusions which emerge ask for a paradigm shift in the way agricultural policy and research are drafted and implemented in the country today.

Thirty farmers from different parts of Karnataka sat as a jury, hearing depositions from different people for four exciting days, a few kilometres from the city of Bengaluru. On the fifth day, they returned to the city to announce their verdict at the Institute for Agricultural Technology. The verdict included 22 simple yet clearly articulated points for action.

One statement highlighted the dilemma that farmers in India face. Policy and ground reality have ensured that they are neither able to return to traditional farming with ease, nor can they pursue expensive modern farming practices. To tackle this, they said there was a need for pro-farmer agricultural research which does not have the agenda of hybrids or Genetically Modified (GM) crops. Hybrid seeds, as we are all aware, are the high yielding varieties invented during India's Green Revolution.

The Green Revolution changed the face of agriculture and brought in undeterred elements of pesticides, monoculture farming, heavy external inputs and complete loss of control on farm produce. GM



Farmers presenting their verdict to Justice Venkatachaliah

crops are being touted as the saviour crops for the world's farm and food crisis. Amongst raging debate and controversy GM crops have found place in India's plans for a second green revolution and are to be taken to areas that are still biodiverse and where traditional farming practices are thriving.

For the farmer's jury, this was not the way to move forward. Instead, they said, there is a need for seed banks or local seed varieties in every gram panchayat.

The women and men who sat in judgment opposed anti-farmer seed laws and land grab that are prevailing today. These are increasingly making it difficult for small and marginal farmers to continue to till their land. Such policies are killing biodiversity in agriculture and allowing for massive change of land use from agriculture to industry. Special mention was made of the land grab in the name of development and Special Economic Zones.

While many other points of the verdict can be reflected on, what is equally important to understand is the process through which such conclusions were arrived at. The farmers were not alone. The meeting was organised after discussions by a Steering Committee comprising agricultural scientists, media, representatives of farmer's organisations like the Karnataka Rajya Raita Sangha and NGOs. They identified the farmers, contacted them and explained the entire exercise to them. While deliberations were taking place, a panel comprising of persons of national and international repute kept a careful watch on proceedings so that the farmer's jury was not taken lightly.

Those who withstood the scrutiny of farmers

included scientists from the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), government officials from the Department of Agriculture, Karnataka, media persons, researchers, international university professors, farmer's organisation representatives and others.

What is also interesting is that in their verdict, the farmers did not think only of themselves. This is not surprising. Farmers belong to a community of varied occupations. They cannot isolate fellow pastoralists, artisans and other members of the village. With this spirit, the 5 December statement remarked, "Small farmers, farm labour, artisan communities such as carpenters and potters who produce farm related implements must be taken into partnership in the formulation of agricultural policies that are location specific."

The role of a South Asian alliance is also noteworthy. The Alliance for Democratising Agricultural Research in South Asia (ADARSA) is an effort to bring together farmers, farmers' organisations, scientists, NGOs, academicians, researchers and the media to collectively salvage research from the controls of the current institutionalised, neo liberal framework and restore it to the farming community. (<http://www.raitateerpu.com/adarsa.html>).

The lesson of this interaction was that by submitting scientists, seed companies and government institutes to the scrutiny of small farmers, the political economy of the current agricultural research can be rectified.

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

Living

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

Visit Athirampilly before it drowns

Susheela Nair
Athirampilly (Kerala)

THE only sound you can hear from the Rainforest Resort overlooking the Athirampilly Falls is of water plummeting down the mountains and joining gurgling streams. It was a heady experience to watch the Chalakudy river crashing down on hard granite rocks and breaking into a cloud of foamy spray in the lush landscape of the Sholayar range.

There was something magical about the undulating hilly regions which stand sentinel to the Falls. The ceaseless music of the myriad falls and the hush of the densely wooded forest surrounding it lend a special charm to the small hamlet of Athirampilly which has been drawing holidaymakers and filmmakers. Once unexplored, Athirampilly used to be a fatal attraction claiming the lives of many tourists who ventured to take a dip. From a filmy location and a suicide spot, Athirampilly has metamorphosed into a popular tourist paradise.

The pristine environs of Athirampilly have formed the backdrop to many fighting sequences, rape scenes and romantic interludes of various movies. Heroines have crooned and danced beneath the falls. Heroes have bashed up villains under this beautiful canopy of green. Athirampilly attained tinsel fame with the release of the Tamil blockbuster *Punnagai Mannan* starring Kamal Hassan in the eighties. Many other blockbusters were filmed here. Incidentally, Athirampilly shot to prominence when Mani Ratnam chose it as a locale for the movie *Ravana* starring Aishwarya Rai and Abhishek Bachchan.

The Athirampilly Falls originate in the Sholayar river and traverse through the Vazhachal Falls just past the Peringalkuthu Dam. To the east of Athirampilly are the lesser known Charpa Falls which plunge down to the road during torrential rains. The Vazhachal Falls are not as breathtaking as the Athirampilly Falls, but they hold a special charm being close to the dense forest. Although this spot is called Vazhachal Falls, it is not a waterfall in the true sense. The river tumbles over myriads of rocks down a slope at this spot, creating a profusion of foam and a waterfall like impact. Further east from Vazhachal on SH 21 are the Anakkayam Falls.

The Chalakudy River flows gently through it all, past dense forests teeming with swaying bamboo,



SUSHEELA NAIR

The captivating cascades of Athirampilly

grass, flora, chirping birds, frolicking Malabar squirrels, slithering snakes, butterflies, black-faced langurs, screeching insects and the shrill call of the jungle fowl. Athirampilly and its green environs are a haven for adventure and nature enthusiasts. The vegetation swoops down like a dark canopy and it is very common to sight a herd of elephants grazing amidst the bamboo clumps. With a huge and amazing variety of birds and plants, the forest is an ornithologist's delight and if you are lucky, you will be rewarded with the

prized sighting of the Great Indian Hornbill. The place resonates with birdsong, orchestrated by hundreds of winged creatures especially the mellifluous song of the Malabar Whistling Thrush.

The maintenance and upkeep of the tourist spot is done with the active participation of the Eco Development Committee, Vana Samriksha Samithi and Kudumbashree Self-Help Groups. Subsequently to avert accidents and sensitise tourists, some signboards of caution and details of the location were put up by the Forest Department.

But state authorities need electricity desperately so the government wants to construct an additional dam up the river from the falls. Meanwhile activists argue that the economics of the project will benefit very few and impose colossal environment and social costs with impacts on the river's flow, the forests and the fauna in the region.

If the proposed Chalakudy Hydrel Project, the seventh along the 145-kilometre journey of the already dammed river comes up, it could submerge 140 hectares of prime forestland, and wipe out the region's bewildering biodiversity which comprises

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Activists say the economics of the project will benefit very few and impose colossal environment and social costs.

Continued from page 99 fish species and diverse species of fauna including four rare species of the hornbill, the rare Cochin forest cane turtle, the lion-tailed macaques, tiger, leopard, and the Nilgiri langurs. It will also affect the elephant corridor between the Parambikulam Sanctuary and the Pooyamkutty forests and sever the link between the Peechi-Vazhani Wildlife Sanctuary and the Idamalayar basin of the Periyar River. Large, old trees in vast tracts of the Sholayar jungles are bound to be submerged, depriving the endangered Great Indian Hornbill of vital nesting sites.

Any relocation will sever their links with the forest. The Athirampilly and Vazhachal Falls, which

SUSHEELA NAIR



Charpa Falls

are visited by 600,000 domestic and foreign tourists every year will lose their glory and create a setback in tourism in the region. This will result in colossal loss of revenue and affect the livelihood of local people who depend on bus loads of tourists.

The proposed dam will also affect 500,000 people from 19 panchayats and two municipalities which depend on the river for water. Submergence is bound to have its impact on climate change. The decreased flow in the river for almost 20 to 22 hours a day will imperil agricultural operations in almost 20,000 hectares spread over Thrissur and Ernakulam districts.

So far the dam hasn't come up, though survey work for the project continues. The proposed 160 MW accounts for a paltry three per cent of the state's electricity production but the damage to the environment and people is huge. Such short-falls could be met through sensible measures. Some scientists have suggested alternatives to the project like the reduction of transmission losses, hike in power tariff to induce transmission, purchase of power from power exchange, negotiating change in power sharing and introduction of energy efficiency subsidy. If these alternatives are implemented, the impending threat looming over the fate of Athirampilly will be averted. It remains to be seen whether the need for development will supersede the pristine charm of the place.

FACT FILE

Nearest airport: Kochi-55km

Nearest railhead: Chalakudy-33km

Where to stay: The best option is Rainforest

Resort-0484- 4118000, 2315301,

Mobile- 094460 16166

Things to do: Boating, trekking, camping, jeep safaris, birdwatching, wildlife viewing etc.

Festival teaches how

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

FOR Kajal Das, who studies in Class 6 in a Bengali-medium government school, jets were something that zoomed in the sky. How a jet engine worked was a theoretical premise that she learnt by rote. But now she knows. A children's fair called *Hareka rakam ba*, the Kolkata version of the Bal Vividha exhibition, helped her understand.

"It was great fun learning to make a miniature aeroplane with a jet engine and a propeller. I now know how those flying machines take to the sky," she beams. Gudiya Roy, her friend from Class 7, said it was wonderful learning how to convert waste materials into Japanese dolls and butterflies, and see how the flapping of wings can propel insects forward.

Primarily aimed at children and teachers, *Hareka rakam ba*, the education festival completed four years in December 2009. Subha Das Mollick, a documentary film-maker and education researcher brought the festival to Kolkata. She lived in Mumbai earlier and noted the overwhelming response that *Bal Vividha* received from children and teachers there.

The Birla Industrial and Technological Museum (BITM) already had the necessary infrastructure to host the fair. And the Development Research and Coordination Services Centre was working at the grassroots to increase scientific awareness through a network of partners. So Das Mollick thought of roping in their support. A few other aspects worked in her favour.

At that time, Comet Media Foundation was also looking for somebody to take it up. So the



The festival included puppets and kites

foundation responded enthusiastically to Das Mollick's request. Around that time Shikshamitra had just established itself as an alternative school aimed at the underprivileged. Bal Vividha was along the lines of what Shikshamitra sought to achieve. Hence, Shikshamitra readily agreed to co-host the very first children's festival in Kolkata. BITM happily joined the band wagon as a collaborator and

Actors tell a green story

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

THEATRE troupes have always taken up social issues. *Pukar - Speak for Yourself* is a little different. It speaks mostly for the environment. Formed in June 2009, this theatre group recently staged a play in Delhi where its actors played the roles of endangered species like the blue whale, the female turtle and the Chinese panda. In the 25-minute play titled *Unheard Voices*, the starring cast of animals staged mock debates on climate change and urged humans to "act now or never". Combat climate change was the message for your survival depends on it. Perform or perish.

The animals in the play discussed rising sea levels, water pollution and vanishing species. *Pukar* used creative techniques to leave an impact like a

bird dance sequence set to a beautiful song from the Mani Ratnam blockbuster *Bombay*. Unheard voices are heard as a penguin and tiger debate with each other.

This production was staged during the Climate Satyagraha, an initiative by the Indian Youth Climate Network, SEEDS India and Greenpeace during the Copenhagen Summit. The story was enacted in the street play format at ten informal venues across Delhi from December 11 to 18.

"Our core belief is that theatre should be entertaining. We want the appeal of the medium to be mass. Serious messages need not be depicted seriously. They can be driven home with enthusiasm and enjoyment. We want to inform, educate and entertain at the same time," says *Pukar's* director Aditya Uppal, a journalist and the main script writer for *Unheard Voices*. Aditya earlier worked

to learn



Children have fun playing with colours

Workshops like *Colourful Blackboard* presented innovative methods of teaching to teachers from schools run by the government, schools in slums and private schools. "It was a refreshing change to see the blackboard so innovatively used to make our lessons interesting," said Sumona Madhur and Madhumita Sanyal of Future Foundation School.

There was Manab Chetana, a group that teaches how solar power is harnessed and how hand pumps work to adolescents and children from Class 5 to Class 10. Similarly, there were researchers from Shikshamitra to explain new methods of learning to teachers and students. Life skills for adolescents was also taken up by experts.

The festival had plays, skits, films, interactive science, story-telling sessions through the blackboard and myriad aspects of education. However, Das Mollick realised that in the excitement, films were being put on the backburner. Children, she found, enjoyed seeing good documentaries as much as they enjoyed well-made works of fiction. There was also

tremendous interest among children to see films from different countries. But in the maze of activities it was impossible to give films the importance they deserved. Hence, a separate session on films called *Shabda Kalpa Bhrom*, was organised ahead of the main fair.

The films looked at the world through the eyes of children. There was *Wagah*, which was about how a border suddenly separates two neighbours who had been part of a single country and *Little Terrorist* which looked at how an accidental crossing of the border by a

little boy in quest of a cricket ball affected several lives.

Little Peace of Mine was about an Israeli boy's efforts to make friends with Palestinian children his age. There were films about children of nomads in Mongolia, mentally and visually challenged children in Iran, Mongolia and India, and the effects of unrest on children in Kashmir. There were also stories of underprivileged and unfortunate children in Bangladesh and India that presented another side of childhood.

The films were certainly well-received and Das Mollick now aspires to get some special short films for children produced every year.

The challenge of raising funds deters the organisers. "The corporate sector is not interested in our prime target group, marginalised children and those belonging to lower-income families," says Das Mollick. "The state government is not keen to fund a Mumbai-based organisation." Coordinator Anshuman Das says they had to raise money by selling paintings gifted to them by several notable painters.

lent their premises for the festival. At the first brain storming meeting at BITM, the fair was rechristened *Hareka rakam ba* to reach out to Bengali-speaking students from government and municipal schools.

Keeping the primary aim of Bal Vividha in mind, *Hareka rakam ba* tried to bring individuals and organisations who have devised innovative methods of teaching together.



Pukar troupe performs *Unheard Voices*

with NDTV and has anchored and produced several programmes for various television networks.

But his love for theatre which he dabbled in as a student at Delhi's Jagan Institute of Management Studies during his Bachelor's in mass communication, eventually won over as his preferred career choice. Aditya is determined to

tread paths differently. "I want to break the clichéd image of theatre." His two batch mates from journalism school and fellow theatre enthusiasts, Geetanshu Kathuria and Shweta Sharma, share his vision.

Before the Climate Satyagraha, the 20-member group staged *The Green Bollywood Theatre Show* at the Green Jobs Fair, a three-day event hosted by The Climate Project India (TCPI), an independent chapter of Al Gore's non-profit body, The Climate Project, at Delhi's Habitat Centre in September last year.

For this Bollywood spoof, Uppal's team picked four iconic Hindi blockbusters and gave it their special eco-twist. In a 10-minute play titled *Sholay In 2050*, the female protagonist, Basanti, defects and becomes the love-interest of badman Gabbar Singh, leaving hero Veeru nursing his wounded heart. Gabbar seduces the heroine away because he loves plants and has a green ranch. Veeru, on the other hand, lives in a sunless, crowded, concrete urban settlement. Gabbar's green credentials are foolproof. In the play, the belt he wears

proudly displays an 'eco-friendly' tag.

The other three spoofs were based on the movies *Pati, Patni Aur Woh*, *Dak Bangla* and the Amitabh Bachchan starrer, *Deewar*. In Pukar's new interpretation of *Pati, Patni Aur Woh*, a newly wed bride leaves her husband of a few hours because he commits a crime – he wastes water and is nonchalant about it. When he refuses to get his kitchen's leaky taps fixed, his bride realises he just cannot be the man of her dreams and walks out!

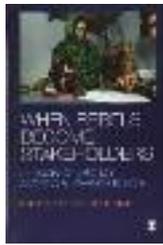
"Reduce, recycle and reuse is what we want people to do. It's a message that is frequently repeated. But maybe never like this," says Aditya, who at 23 is the oldest actor in a group largely composed of students and young professionals.

The group is battling problems all new enterprises face – talent crunch and insufficient funds.

"We might not be trained actors. We certainly aren't the most qualified. But we understand our audience," says Aditya.

Visit Pukar at www.pukartheatre.com.
Aditya Uppal can be reached at 91.9910884698

Why India always votes



**WHEN
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WE know that at least one-third of people in India are very poor, though we have a thriving democracy. Social change has been slow, not dramatic. Many would say our democracy has failed to perform. Have citizens lost faith in it?

This book answers questions on how India feels about democracy and development. Using public opinion data from three national surveys of the Indian electorate held in 1971, 1996 and 2004 to gauge political understanding of India's voters and their leaders, the book comes up with some surprising findings.

In India social change and democracy have happened together. Over the years, the level of political participation has deepened and broadened. In fact, Dalits, women, back-

ward castes and ethnic minorities and so on have moved from the margins into the mainstream of politics and have more political clout today. People may not have much faith in politicians but they still have faith in institutions. And institutions have acted as agents of change. Democracy and social change, the authors argue, are institutionally linked.

Post independence the Congress Party and the Constitution provided the template. The Congress had a fairly varied social base and its notion of governance was radical and liberal. Political competition was opened to the Left and Right. Politics got defined as both the distribution of resources and the redefinition of values. The template ensured that by and large differences were

articulated. The terms of discourse are changing, though, moving to issues of identity and indigenous values.

The key focus of the book is on how people feel about politics and development. The percentage of people who believe their vote matters politically has gone up from 48.5 per cent in 1971 to 67.5 per cent in 2004. To the question, 'do you think you would have better governance without parties, assemblies and elections,' 72.2 per cent of voters said, 'No'.

Chapters in the book explore the role of the state, the continuation of colonial policies, the changing profile of Indian society, analysis of the social bases of parties and how the party system has changed, regionalism and inclusion etc. This is an interesting book.

Faith in democracy has grown over the years. There is optimism and hope that India's politicians and bureaucracy will finally deliver.

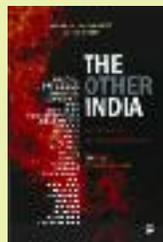
Think India

SWAMI Agnivesh has devoted his life fighting for the rights of the marginalised in India. This book is a tribute to his unstinting efforts on his 70th birthday. The editor, Rajesh Chakrabarti, teaches finance at the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad. He has brought together an eclectic group of well-known writers, activists and thinkers from the development sector, judiciary, environment, education and science. There are spiritual leaders as well.

The broad themes the book tackles are some of the issues Swami Agnivesh has stood for - social justice, communal harmony, peace, environment.

The book begins with seven sketches of India as it is today. Tapan Mitra, Asghar Ali Engineer, Sadanand Menon, MS Swaminathan and MGK Menon write on this subject.

There are interesting pieces on violence and identity as well. The section on justice examines caste, bonded labour, the unorganised sector and the judiciary. There are also three pieces on the big successes of activism: the right to food movement, traditional water harvesting and the SEWA experience.



**THE OTHER
INDIA**

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Look east for peace

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

WRITERS will validate that apt book titles are hard to conjure. That's a problem seasoned journalist and author Subir Bhaumik says he has effectively countered with his book title, *Troubled Periphery - Crisis of India's North East*, his second work on the insurgency-ridden region.

"That's really where the trouble begins. Mainland India thinks of the northeast as a periphery, an area not really part of the core of the country," says Bhaumik who is BBC's Kolkata-based correspondent for eastern India.

Bhaumik, a journalist and researcher, has been with the BBC since 1994. He has also worked for Reuters, Ananda Bazaar Patrika, PTI and the Time magazine, extensively covering the northeast for over 30 years. It's this long, sustained understanding of the region along with a large body of original data, documentation and field interviews gathered over the years that, he says, has helped the book transcend limitations of other works on the northeast. Bhaumik dismisses most of those books as either pseudo fiction quickies by journalists, or dull accounts by academics or memoirs of retired bureaucrats.

His 324-page book maps the reality of the region but goes beyond mere history to analyse why the region has been in perpetual crisis since Independence. It highlights how land, language and leadership issues have been talking points in the northeast and how factors like ethnicity, ideology and religion have shaped conflicts. Much of this, he adds, is a consequence of the Indian government's wrong approach to the region.



Subir Bhaumik

"There have been insurgencies in other parts of the country too. But, many of them peaked and ended. In the northeast, insurgents have petered away only to be replaced by other insurgents. What makes the northeast such a point of crisis? Why are draconian laws allowed to exist here? Why is armed struggle the first recourse instead of the last?"

"State after state and throughout the last 60 years these mistakes have been consistently repeated. The centre needs a new attitude. The northeast needs to be more than a conflict zone. We need to understand that it's not just a region of liabilities but one

of immense opportunities," states Bhaumik who earlier authored 'Insurgent Crossfire'.

The government's Look East policy, he says, is a positive development. "For a lasting solution though, looking east might not be enough. You have to act east too."

Northeast observers say Bhaumik's book comes at an interesting time in the dynamics of the region as it experiences growing conflict fatigue. Things are

also looking up thanks to Bangladesh's recent willingness to partner India in curbing insurgency.

"The northeast is a fluid corridor. It has such a strategic location. It actually shares shorter boundaries with mainland India than it does with other countries, Burma, Bangladesh, China. Chinese weapons easily find their way here as do Burmese drugs. Placing it in this neighbourhood is key to understanding the region," he states.

Troubled Periphery has briskly captured top bestseller slots in the non-fiction category in several bookstores across the country.



**TROUBLED
PERIPHERY**

Subir Bhaumik
Sage

Rs 595

The fine print of violence



MUMBAI POST 26/11

Edited by
Ram Puniyani
Shabnam Hashmi

Rs 395

Sage

Amit Sengupta
New Delhi

WHENEVER Shabnam Hashmi of Anhad used to visit Gujarat with her friends and youngsters in 2002, working in the relief camps where thousands of survivors of the genocide took shelter with the fear of another murderous mob arriving every night, we used to wonder whether she would ever come back. The same narrative would unfold week after week in the many traumatic months of the terror that stalked the denizens of the camps — and others exiled, condemned and internally displaced in Narendra Modi's Gujarat.

But she, along with Ram Puniyani, Harsh Mander, Zakia Jowher, Gagan Sethi and countless others staked their lives and compassion in this struggle against state-sponsored communalism. They entered the bylanes of terror and took the hands of the survivors across communities and religion and helped them restore their own courage and self-reliance in thousands of study circles across Gujarat and the rest of the country. Hundreds of NGOs, civil society groups, students and teachers were trained by eminent historians, journalists, feminists and sociologists on how to preserve the original map of India after the freedom movement and how to redesign the vitiated inner soul of a battered society.

"This was a struggle against barbarism," says Shabnam Hashmi. "And I was not the only one involved. The country's basic foundations of democracy and secularism were at stake with the BJP at the helm and Narendra Modi going berserk. Every institution was being threatened by the BJP-led regime. There was no option but to fight it out

till the last."

That is why let us not forget that the surprising margin of victory of the Congress and the Left in the 2004 general elections was, in many parts of the country, made possible by a spectrum of civil society groups who worked against the ideological propaganda of the fascists. This is one dimension which has been ignored by the political class.

Indeed, it was not the Congress or the 'official' Left that fought in Narendra Modi's Gujarat. They were bankrupt, discredited and without imagination or social commitment. It was not they who brought the number of Lok Sabha seats of Modi's party down to almost half in that memorable election. It was women like Shabnam, Malini Ghosh, Farah Naqvi, Teesta Setelvad and their esteemed companions such as Mukul Sinha, who stood tall among many pygmies in those turbulent times.

They were the ones who were fighting legal cases, extending help in the transit camps and outside, writing and distributing pamphlets in tens of thousands, holding street plays, rock concerts, youth campaigns, even cricket matches. The 'victory' in the Bilkis Bano case and the scathing observations of the Supreme Court in the Best Bakery case as much as the current investigations by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) are the result of these efforts. And Shabnam Hashmi and Ram Puniyani were the roots of this struggle.

This is the thread which moves beyond the terror attack which killed innocents in *Mumbai: 26/11*. The book reminds us of the many octopi which are floating, entrenched in the political, bureaucratic and security establishment even now. They continue to block the secular current using insidious and

organised forms of ideological actions.

This compilation analyses the terror attacks on 26/11 in Mumbai from various angles, based on the understanding that deeper issues are hidden behind every such tragedy. It discusses terrorism, law, Indo-Pak relations and the deceptive role of the Indian State. Most of the chapters have been written in the immediate aftermath of the Mumbai carnage and they tangentially and tangibly move around, before and after the complex patterns of terrorism and investigations.

The broad contours of the analysis include the killing of non-combatants, the political motive or the secret planning of such attacks where the actors are even willing or keen to lay down their lives for bringing about such devastation.

"I can name top officers who are completely anti-secular and who are at the helm in important investigating agencies even now. Look at the number of encounters in Gujarat: not only Sohrabuddin and his wife's murder by top cops close to Modi, even Ishrat Jahan's murder seems a clear case of this conspiracy," says Hashmi.

"The Hyderabad public tribunal is a pointer how innocent Muslims are being picked up and tortured with no evidence.

The Batla House case clearly seems a fake encounter but the 'secular' UPA regime is not even ready to institute a judicial inquiry. Why have they gone so slow on the Hindutva terrorist cases including their clear hand in the Samjhauta Express, Mecca Masjid Hyderabad and Malegaon blasts, including the latest Hindutva terror networks discovered in Goa? We have serious doubts about the stated facts behind the killing of Hemant Karkare and other officers. We want an independent investigation into their murders and we don't believe in the official version," she says.



Ram Puniyani



Shabnam Hashmi

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For a glowing skin

Dr G G GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



THE skin is the largest organ of the body. It is made up of multiple layers of epithelial tissues and guards the body. As the skin interfaces with the environment, it plays an important role in protecting the body against diseases. The health of the body is reflected by the appearance of the skin. In humans, skin pigmentation varies among populations and skin type can range from dry to oily. Healthy skin is an essential part of health and natural beauty. A balanced diet is the most important skin care product. A balanced diet with a variety of nutritious food maintains

health and also keeps the skin glowing. To have a healthy skin, your food should have all six tastes in minimum quantity with the sweet taste dominating.

GRAINS AND VEGETABLES: Food should be unctuous and easily digestible. For a good, healthy, glowing skin food should include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, good fat that is found in vegetable oil, nuts, etc., Fruits and vegetables have antioxidants which are very essential to promote skin health and slow down the aging of the skin.

VITAMINS: Vitamins also have antioxidant properties. Vitamin D consumption helps in calcium absorption, bone formation and skin healing. Good sources of Vitamin D include egg yolk, fortified milk and fish. Vitamin A is necessary for growth, vision and immunity. Lack of Vitamin A results in skin disorders, along with eye disorders. It causes splitting and breaking of nails.

FATS: Some amount of fat is necessary to maintain the health of the skin, hair and nails. Omega 3 fatty acids can protect against fungal and bacterial infection of nails. Fibre intake reduces cholesterol levels and improves bowel functions, which in turn enhances healthy skin.

MINERALS: Apart from vitamins the diet we consume should also include minerals. Iron and zinc are important for the health of the skin. Iron is essential for proper oxygen transport. This helps to regulate cell growth including the cells of skin. Iron deficiency causes fatigue, decreases immunity and leaves the skin pale. Consumption of eggs, peas, legumes, dried fruits, green leafy vegetables forms a good source of iron. Zinc promotes cell reproduction and the growth and repair of tissues. Whole grains, poultry, sea foods are the best sources of zinc.

VEGETABLES: Consumption of vegetables like ladies finger, drumstick leaves, citrus fruits like oranges, lemon and fruits which are rich in Vitamin C like gooseberry, help in the promotion of good skin. Consumption of vegetable juice and fruit juice is recommended in order to promote the glow of the skin.

NO SUGAR: Sugar provides calories without nutrients. This increases weight and tooth decay. Excessive intake of sugar leads to skin aging. Foods which are high in sugar include soft drinks, puddings, ice cream and baked goods. So cutting down on sugar will make your skin appear younger.

WATER: Water has to be consumed in proper quantity to prevent dehydration, which leads to dry skin. A person should not wait until he/she is thirsty to drink water. One should consume eight to ten glasses of water a day. The amount of water consumption may increase in those who exercise regularly.

ABHYANGA: The life of the skin largely depends upon on the kind of unctuation it gets. Abhyanga or massage is one of the most important measures prescribed by Ayurveda to keep the health, beauty and texture of the skin. Massage with appropriate medicated oil preferably everyday is a good method of keeping the skin healthy. Massage is also an anti-aging and stress releasing agent. Ayurveda highly acclaims everyday massage. Abhyangam acharet nithyam (Ashtanga Hridayam Sutrasthanam).

Actually, Abhyanga is the food of the skin. It also helps the skin to breathe. It increases the blood flow and the neural conductivity and in the process brings in micro-nutrients to skin membranes.

It removes old and dead skin and the unctuousness delivered on the peripheral parts by the process of oil massage gets reflected in the internal organs by the principle of 'like increases the like.'

Skin care and diet will be complete only if one considers massage as part of the diet to the skin. According to the skin type, skin health, age and gender of the person and conditions of the body the type of oil for the massage will be different. There are more than 50 types of massage oils available in the market used in the day to day practice of Ayurveda. A good physician can select suitable oil or oils which match the individual.

The health of the skin depends on the food one takes, the liquid one consumes, the exercise, massage, and the state of

mind one possesses which is devoid of the six enemies of the mind namely kama, krodha, mada, matsrya, irshya and dvesha.

Some important things to remember in skin care:

- Include fruits and vegetables in every meal
- Have a balanced diet
- Consume good amount of water
- Reduce consumption of sugar
- Avoid fast food and bakery items
- Make time to do things to reduce stress
- Say no to alcohol and smoking
- Cut down on saturated fats
- Do Abhyanga every day
- Take unctuous food like pure ghee according to your strength and digestion.

E-mail: vaidya.ganga@frlht.org. Dr GG is a senior physician with FRLHT, Bangalore.



How to de-stress your child

SAMITA RATHOR

Do not train a child to learn by force or harshness; but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each.

– Plato.

CHILDREN are in contact with their inner self and have a unique sense of spirituality. They exist in the 'now' and are energetic to the vigor of life. But like adults, children are also vulnerable to stress. The pressures of modern life are a catalyst to enhancing stress in children. Children who are resilient are in a better position to withstand stress. Protective factors involve spiritual development, cognitive ability, family, relationships, personality, degree of risk and compensating experiences.

Stressed out and negligent parents, high expectations in academic or other fields, an abused or deprived childhood, growing up tensions and demand for familial responsibility put children under immense stress. Parents, who are not emotionally available for their children or lack positive coping mechanisms themselves, often spur stress in their offspring.

Stressed children show signs of emotional disabilities, aggressive behavior, shyness, social phobia and often lack interest in otherwise enjoyable activities. Research tells us that children, who are forced to live prematurely on adult levels, sometimes resist following the parents' rules (or those of society). Such children tend to respond to stressors with aggression and indignation.

Many teenagers tend to become nonconformists in response to a variety of growing up anxieties. However, stress induced anxieties and fears adversely affect children's performances at various levels.

HOW TO AVOID STRESS: Talk with your child. Find out what's happening in his or her life. Be honest and open with your child. He or she should talk about problems or write them down. Teach your child to transfer coping strategies to other situations.

- Don't burden children with your problems. But,

SOUL VALUE

tell them about the family's goals and discuss difficulties in a friendly manner.

- Compliment children when they do well, and don't forget physical contact and display of affection.

- Use humour to buffer bad feelings and situations. A child who learns to use humor himself will be better able to keep things in perspective.

- Don't overload your child with too many after-school activities and responsibilities. Let children learn to pace themselves. Don't enroll them in every class that comes along, and don't expect them to be first in everything.

- Set a good example. Demonstrate self-control and coping skills. Your child can benefit by seeing how you cope successfully with stress.

- Get help from a professional or a friend when problems seem beyond your skills.

- The first step for parents is to be aware of possible stress triggers and to recognise signs of stress.

- Be sensitive to changes in your children's behavior and respond to them.

- Provide opportunities for them to learn stress management techniques.

- Have reasonable expectations and set manageable goals in academic and extra curricular fields.

- When you are under extra stress, be sure that you are not passing it to your child.

- Yoga, physical exercise and sports are good stress reducers, provided there isn't a debilitating level of competition, pressure to perform or fear of failure.

- Encourage relationships with extended family members, friends and helpful neighbors. Just knowing there is someone else to turn to share their feelings can be relieving for children.

- Spending time together or having a few good laughs together goes a long way in reducing stress and in building solid family relationships.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO: Self-esteem can be fragile and stressed and anxious children may feel unworthy and not value themselves. They need to maintain their natural self-confidence. If you are concerned about some of your children it might be a good idea to follow this advice:

- Believe in your child's unique talents and show it.

- Give lots of praise and positive feedback for all kinds of achievements.

- Reassure your child that it's okay to make mistakes.

- Encourage your child to listen and read to understand problems.

- Help them to express their feelings.

- Respect your child's interests – even if they seem boring to you.

- Take a genuine interest in your child's friends and what is happening at school.

- Accept and talk about any genuine insecurities your child may have.

- Encourage appropriate independence.

- Focus on your child's successes – never on their failures.

- Remember the saying by Ralph Waldo Emerson "The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child".

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apple and mint, rhododendron etc.

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Cycles and the BRT

RITA ANAND

WHEN trial runs for the Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) corridor began in Delhi about two years ago, there was utter chaos. They caused huge traffic jams. The rich and the middle class fumed in their cars and said, just take it away. The media amplified their demand. Assembly elections were round the corner so the BJP joined the chorus. Congress politicians sheepishly followed. Bus commuters said they loved the BRT, but who listened?

By some curious miracle, the BRT survived. It was rescued by people's movements, NGOs and the tearful guys from the Transport, Research and Injury Prevention Programme or TRIPP at IIT who designed it in good faith. The Delhi government let the BRT stay but treated it as a bit of an embarrassment.

Let me explain the BRT to readers who don't live here. The BRT runs for six km in south Delhi from the Moolchand flyover to Ambedkar Nagar. A corri-

ridor, or bus lane, is created in the middle of the road for buses to run seamlessly. On both sides of the bus lane, cars continue to run. There is a dedicated corridor for cycles and footpaths for people to walk.

By dividing up road space, the BRT introduces democracy. For too long, cars have hogged road space with impunity. Flyover upon flyover has been made. Traffic jams have only worsened. Delhi is the most car crazy city in India. It is also the rudest. People don't just drive here, they go to war on the road.

Growing numbers of cars have increased pollution, road rage and accidents. Yet, as we all know, owners of cars comprise a small minority. Most people commute by bus or cycle but cars don't leave any space for them. The people who get run over and killed are invariably poor cyclists, rickshaw-pullers, pedestrians and the homeless who sleep on footpaths.

The BRT emerges as a symbol of equality. That is why people's groups in the city keep an eagle eye on it to make sure it is never demolished. Last month Medha Patkar flagged off a BRT cycle rally on World Cyclists' Day. Before that the Hazards Centre organised a rally by slum-dwellers, auto-rickshaw drivers and cyclists in support of the BRT.

The BRT stretch has become a symbol of solidarity for people's movements – strange for a

government project. It is not replacing Jantar Mantar as India's protest street. But it is still a symbolic stretch of road for it was the site of a battle for road space between rich and poor.

SPACE FOR ALL

Over time the BRT has attracted wider support than the urban poor. The road has also caught

cards to have a go on the cycle track. A Delhi Cycling Club has come up which cycles occasionally on Sundays even in the sweltering heat of June.

You can change the character of a city by building humane infrastructure. If you look at the BRT it will strike you that this is what a city road should be. It has space for everyone. This is because, may be for the first time, an infrastructure project was designed by socially responsible academics and rights groups.

Rajendra Ravi, a stalwart of the road rights movement, is director of the Institute for Democracy and Sustainability in New Delhi. He says he was approached by Geetam Tiwari of TRIPP to help design a lane for non-motorised transport. Ravi helped to do a study of the entire road through which the BRT would run, along with its catchment area.

His survey found out how people went to bus stops, what they expected from a road, what happened every day on it and other minutiae. Such grassroots insights were incorporated into road design.

Ravi's protest rally was the first to be held on the newly opened BRT stretch when the government was washing its hands of it. He recalls the hurriedly done almost surreptitious, inauguration and the Delhi government's nebbish behaviour.

Eventually, the Congress government's fears that it would lose votes, proved unwarranted. Colonies along the BRT stretch voted hand-somely for Sheila Dikshit. New green buses ply down the stretch and the bus ride is smooth, that is, whenever the BRT is functional.

Most of the time, this stretch is 'under repair'. Signages have not been put up and you can see noisy motorcycles speeding into the cycle lane. Cars crowd into the bus lane. After a lot of hesitation, the Delhi government is warily extending the BRT to Delhi Gate in the Walled City, linking Purani Dilli with Nayi Dilli.

The BJP opposed the BRT in Delhi but its state governments are rather busy with it. Chhattisgarh is building a BRT to connect Naya Raipur with Purana Raipur.

And the BRT in Ahmedabad recently got the Sustainable Transport Award by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, Washington.



Cycle stand at the BRT

the fancy of the rich and middle class. The bus ride is perfect. And the cycle track for non-motorised transport has ignited an interest in cycling. By excluding cars from a slice of the road, a safe corridor has been created for girls, the elderly and children.

This is not surprising. The BRT cuts through rich colonies and colleges, mostly girls' colleges. There is the Lady Shri Ram College at the Moolchand end. As you move right there is Gargi College and Kamala Nehru College, not very far away.

Many college students live in paying guest accommodation in south Delhi. For them to get to college the easiest way is to commute short distances by cycle. For girls, a cycle track means freedom from molestation in a bus or from paying big sums to auto-rickshaws. Linking campuses would be a great idea.

TRIPP has put up a cycle stand which rents out cycles for Rs 10 for four hours. The person manning it says the elderly rich turn up for a cycle early morning to exercise. Nobody can get their hands on the cycles, though, since they have to produce some form of identification and the cycle stand opens only at 9 am.

Most college students come from other cities and, like working class migrants, don't have voter ID cards, ration cards or passports. Children turn up clutching their parents' ID

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Changing Lives



Health

Family health has always been a priority for SST, especially in rural areas. SST aims to provide accessible and affordable health care to all sections of society. As the first step, SST undertakes improvement of infrastructure in Primary Health Centre. SST also provides new centres in the area that did not have access to health care. SST has undertaken number of activities for preventive and curative health care.

“Availability of medical facilities was difficult for us earlier. This was changed once SST started a primary Health Centre in our Village. A Doctor visits the Primary Health Centre thrice a week. People get advice for both curative and preventive health. A nominal fee of Rs 5 collected per patient. The money collected used for development in the village”

*D. Appathurai, Appankoil,
Navathirupathi*

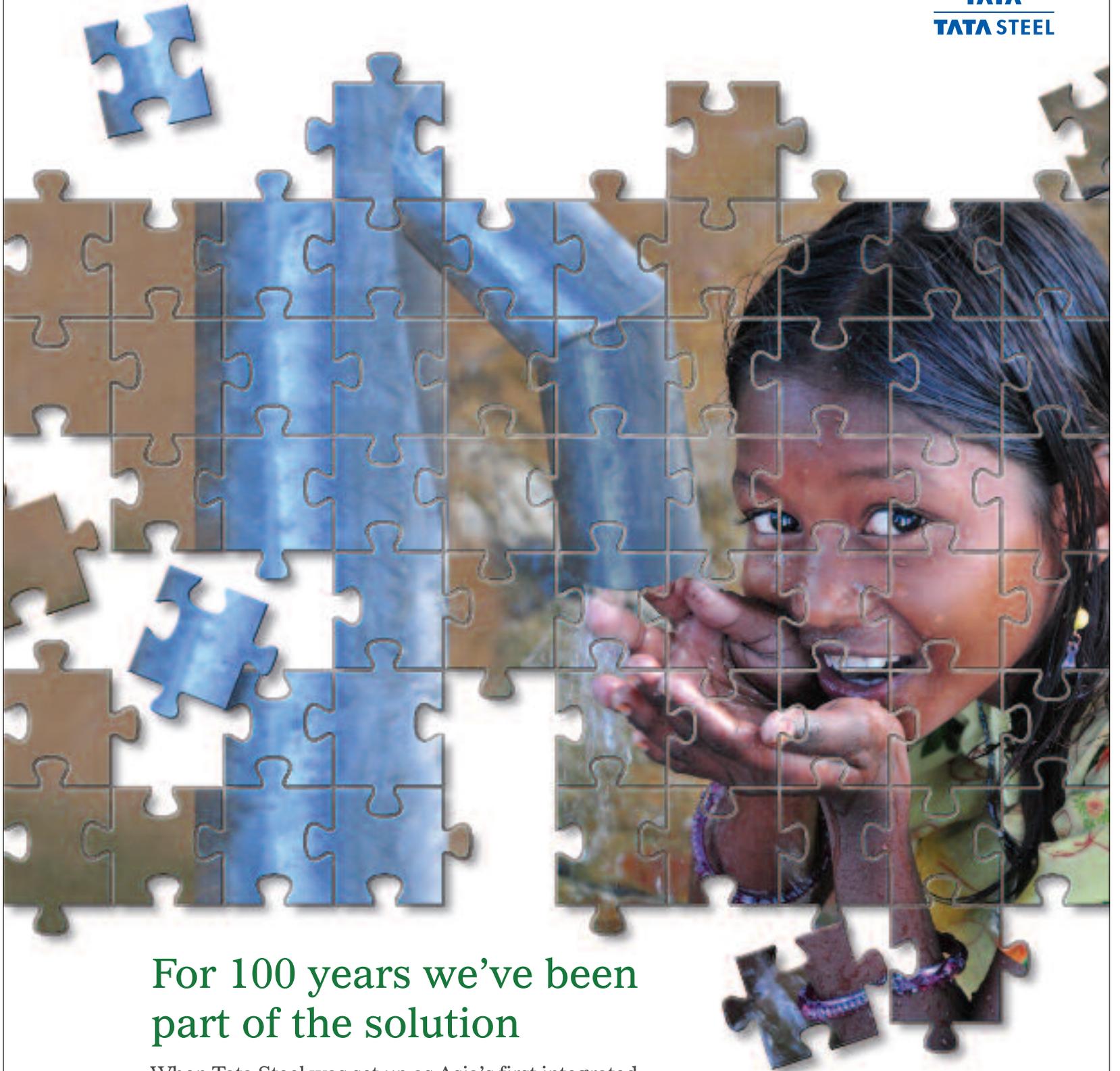
Achieved as on December 2009

Infant Mortality Rate / 1000 live births	1.5
Maternal Mortality Rate / 100000 live births	0
Number of children free of malnutrition	10722
Number of women improved from anemia	27030
Percentage of Morbidity	6
Access to safe drinking water in villages	449
Number of Individual toilets constructed	35091
Number of Community toilets constructed	63
Number of school toilets constructed	208
Number of balwadi toilets constructed	180

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