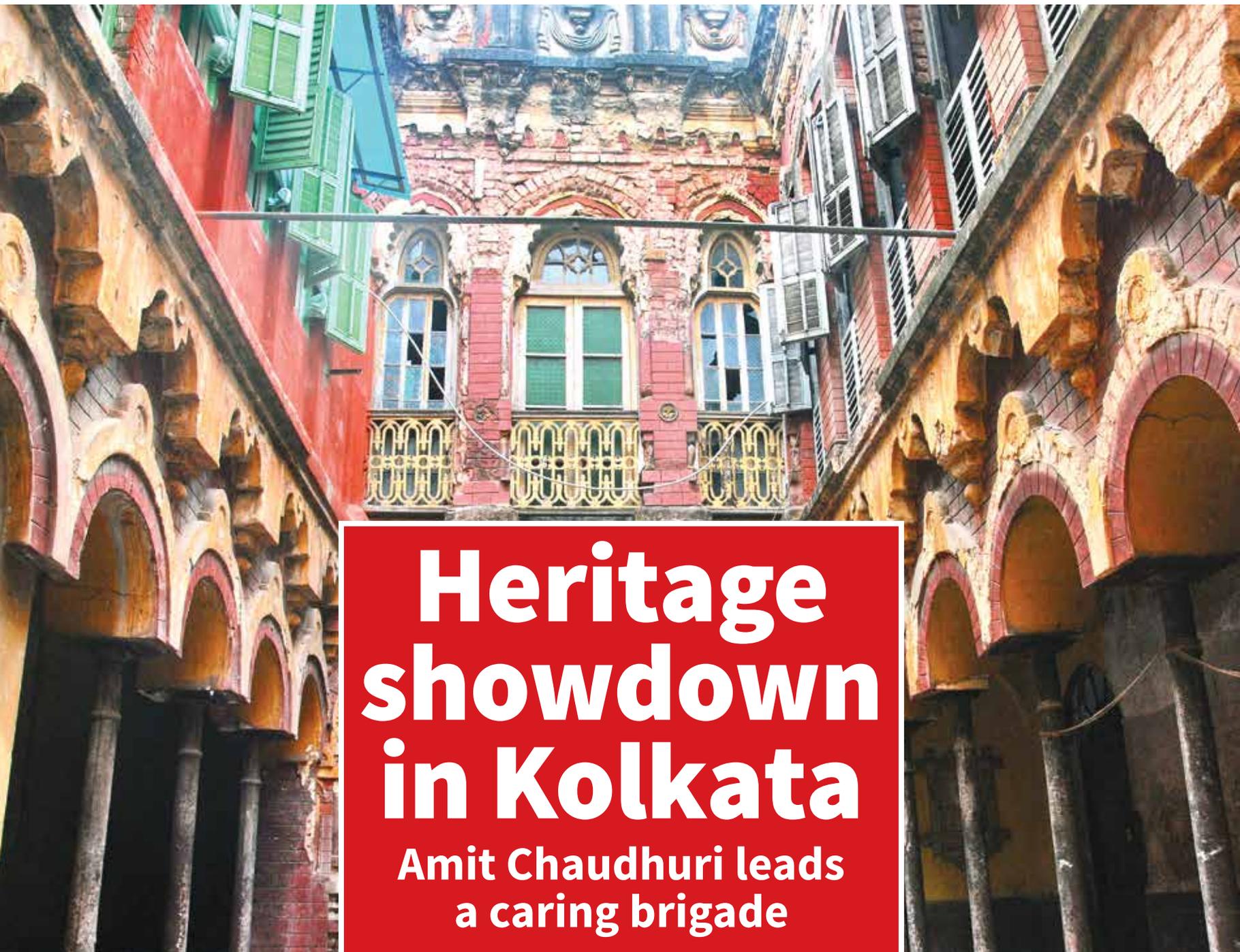


Civil Society



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Amit Chaudhuri leads a caring brigade

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Harvesting Rain for Profit

Name: Shri Muniraj,
Village: Muthur, Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu

Muniraj, a marginal farmer with seven acres of land from Muthur village of Krishnagiri district, had a greenhouse where he practiced floriculture. However, a falling water table meant that irrigation became a problem – especially during summer months even for drip irrigation.

To overcome the problem of insufficient water, Srinivasan Services Trust (SST) encouraged Muniraj to save every drop of rainwater falling on his green house. SST provided technical information and engineering support for creating a pond, next to the greenhouse, large enough to collect six lakh litres of rainwater. To prevent loss by seepage, the pond was lined with a polythene sheet and a shade net was used as cover to help arrest loss by evaporation. The pond gets filled up with 3 days of rain. The water saved in this pond is sufficient for the crop needs for one season.

IMPACT: Muniraj is now financially secure and earns more than ₹30,000 per month. He has built a pucca house and also bought a car. He has become an expert on rainwater harvesting and offers advice to several villages in the area.

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Civil Society
READ US. WE READ YOU.

A city's character

GREAT cities thrive on their own identities. It is what draws the world to them. How they are governed today matters for sure, but so does the past. Invariably the two overlap. The architecture of homes and public buildings and the ways in which neighbourhoods once shaped themselves tell their own stories.

A city like Kolkata is full of history. Its special character comes from its colonised past and its emergence from it. The way people lived their lives shaped the city. Some years ago, P.T. Nair, a dedicated barefoot researcher, did a 1,000-page book, *The History of Calcutta's Streets*. It was based on research funded with his piffling savings. He checked records and went from locality to locality collecting anecdotal material.

The current effort to preserve homes and the *para* or locality ambience in South Kolkata similarly helps the city rediscover itself. It is our cover story because we believe this is great citizen action by author Amit Chaudhuri and a whole lot of others who care. Kolkata is the city they have known for the longest time and they would like to see its special character survive in its architecture and neighbourhood design.

Indian cities in general need to take a closer look at themselves. In Kolkata, as is the case elsewhere, it is expensive to keep old structures in good shape. So it is that developers step in and high-rise buildings come up. Reversing this process of rapid-fire urbanisation is work for citizens and local governments to do together. It is work that goes beyond cultural concerns because it involves finance, tax-breaks and legislation. The Kolkata effort will succeed on a meaningful scale if it discovers such traction and other cities should watch closely for the lessons to be learnt.

This month we interview Nikhil Dey of the MKSS on the findings of a 100-day Accountability Yatra across Rajasthan. Is e-governance working as well as it is cracked up to be? Dey says there are serious problems with biometrics and connectivity. The MKSS recorded a flood of complaints as it went around asking people whether they were getting their pensions and could access their bank accounts. Such feedback needs to be understood better because there are great expectations of better delivery through biometrics and other tools of e-governance.

Doctors have finally begun speaking up against the widespread commercialisation of healthcare in India. The country desperately needs to make a choice that works better for the vast majority of Indians. Corporate hospitals and aggressive privatisation of healthcare isn't delivering the results that we need though 80 per cent of healthcare in India is delivered in the private sector. By allowing healthcare to be a business without effective regulation and by ignoring investment in public sector facilities dissonances have been created that will take a long time to correct. Strong collective action is required and the time to start is now.

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

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South Extension Part 2,
New Delhi -110049.
Ph: 011-46033825, 9811787772
Printed and published by Umesh
Anand on behalf of Rita Anand,
owner of the title, from A-53 D,

First Floor, Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya
Nagar, New Delhi -110017.

Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt. Ltd.,
B-88, Okhla Phase II, New Delhi - 110020.

Postal Registration No.
DL(S)-01/3255/2015-17.
Registered to post without pre-payment
U(SE)-10/2015-17 at New Delhi PSO
Registered with the Registrar of
Newspapers of India under
RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607
Total no of pages: 36

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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



include rainwater harvesting. In villages there is no local leadership. People are not empowered. The government could also begin a public campaign in local languages for rainwater harvesting six months before the monsoon every year for the next 10 years.

Ritu

Dog count

The report, 'Delhi to count its dogs,' is worth reading since it focuses on the problems being faced by us and by stray dogs. Urban local bodies have failed to address the issue. However, if dog lovers would adopt one dog each then the problem may be solved to some extent.

Srikant Mohanty

We must practise the art of living with stray dogs in our cities. There must be some checks and balances over their increasing numbers. At the same time these dogs should be given love and care. NGOs and those who love dogs should take care of them.

Bidyutprava Mohanty

Betel victory

Thanks very much for Biswajit Padhi's story, 'Radio Kisan's betel victory.' Your magazine is one of the few to report the success of this feisty radio station. This is the real power of the media. The problem is that at village level people do not have access to this kind of activist media. The media can change society and bring about equitable development by providing the right information. Radio Kisan is an example.

Debashish Boi

Letters should be sent to
response@civilsocietyonline.com

LETTERS



Kodagu coffee

Thanks for your cover story, 'Kodagu coffee stays in the family.' We have heard of sick factories being taken over and revived. This is the first time I am reading about sick coffee estates being resuscitated. It is a wonderful idea. I hope many more businesses with a social conscience like Care T Acres come up and help revive our ailing agricultural sector. Small farms can be clubbed together and given a new lease of life. Orchards can be taken over. There are many possibilities.

Anisha Shah

Kudos to Kodagu Chinnappa. This is a really innovative concept and an inspiring endeavour. May his tribe increase. I hope the younger generation will realise the need to return to the earth so that Chinnappa and his team can expand their work.

Harshavardhan

I would like to congratulate Bose and Chinnappa. One of my relatives owns an estate in Pandya. Can they take it up?

Jagannath Ballupet

Drought

Thanks for the interview, 'Monsoon has the last laugh' with Anupam Mishra. This is called earthy wisdom but is anyone listening?

Manoj Misra

An absolutely remarkable interview – brilliant, biting and wonderfully put. It is so clear and so simple. Why aren't people listening?

Jo Chopra McGowan

The interview with Anupam Mishra was very bold and informative. It was

an eye opener. This publicity stunt of sending water by train must be stopped and those politicians must be rapped. These people who have killed groundwater will soon turn Maharashtra into a desert.

As pointed out by Mishra, smart cities are not those where you have six-lane roads and wi-fi. Smart cities are those which have water harvesting infrastructure. They should be independent in terms of water and be in a position to lend to nearby areas in need. We have age-old solutions to tackle drought. The need of the hour is to implement.

Naresh Shami

We have been talking about rainwater harvesting for two decades now. Everybody knows the solution to drought. In cities, housing plans must

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‘We have become guinea pigs

Nikhil Dey says IT is not getting govt benefits to the poor in Rajasthan towns, villages

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FOR the past decade state governments have launched a series of Internet-based initiatives to deliver services more efficiently. Technology has been seen as the best way of bypassing red tape and corruption in the system to reach the poor directly with benefits. Beneficiaries are identified through biometrics and a series of tech solutions like smart cards, micro ATMs and so on. The result of these efforts is that India is the only country in the world using biometrics on such a large scale.

But is this new architecture working as well as it is cracked up to be? What do the poor say in rural and small town India? To find out, the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) undertook a 100-day Accountability Yatra from December to March across Rajasthan.

The yatra went to all 33 districts of the state and held nearly 400 meetings. A large number of complaints were recorded. Internet-based solutions weren't always working. The complaints ranged from delays and harassment to exclusion to fudging of transactions. It appears that the biometric system of identification doesn't perform to satisfaction.

To understand the findings of the Accountability Yatra, *Civil Society* spoke to Nikhil Dey of the MKSS.

What was the learning from the 100-day Accountability Yatra?

The objective of the Accountability Yatra was to raise people's awareness on issues of transparency and accountability. We found that people understood two issues — transparency and the right to information.

It was day-to-day issues of not being able to get your road built or your ration card made on time or get your pension that obsessed people. We registered 10,000 grievances and linked them with the broader idea of an accountability framework.

We laid down two or three things:

First, that any person who works in government or is elected has a responsibility to the people. They



Nikhil Dey: 'We have registered 10,000 grievances from 33 districts across Rajasthan'

should have a job chart just like a National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) worker. Second, if they don't complete their work their wages should be cut like an NREGA worker. They too should be penalised just like NREGA workers. Third, if people's work isn't done on time, they should be compensated. These three ideas really connected with people in their day-to-day issues.

We have a sample size of 10,000 grievances from 33 districts across the state. We recorded them on the government's own webpage. We got 30 per cent complaints about the actions the government took, so we know their actions are in a mess.

When we talk to the administration we know exactly what issues are causing them the biggest problems. Ten per cent of complaints are about pensions. We know the reason for the problem, patterns across districts and what is peculiar to a particular area. We were able to give feedback to administrators and people at the grassroots on what they should do.

We were in a district for three days. We would make contact with all the local civil society organisations, people's groups, trade unions, women's organisations. We have built a rainbow coalition across the state. What has struck us is what is currently happening on the development side.

What is happening on the development side?

Mining is creating havoc. We didn't know till we saw it. People have cut hills, dug deep into the ground and higher than the hill was. There are gorges all over, the water table is in a mess, plants and vegetation are caked with dust and silicosis is becoming rampant.

It wasn't as if mining and quarrying did not take place before. But now people are looking hungrily for something they can exploit quickly with no concern for the environment or people.

Are there specific areas you are talking of?

About 13 districts are affected by silicosis. They give ₹1 lakh to people who are alive with silicosis and ₹3 lakh to their families when they die. The entire obsession of people with silicosis is to just get that money somehow before they die. There is no cure for silicosis so this is literally blood money.

What has been the government's response?

The administration has started taking note. They have identified 20,000 people with silicosis so far. They say it's just the tip of the iceberg.

In Karoli district, the administration estimates that about 100,000 people need to be tested for silicosis. There is a medical board that examines

for biometrics'

LAKSHMAN ANAND

signboard saying those who have zero balance accounts please go to the business correspondents (BCs).

When pensions were not being lifted it became clear to the government. The district collectors would tell us during meetings that pensions were doing great since they had transferred it to bank accounts. We asked: how much is being picked up from those bank accounts? Those people aren't going to leave it in their account. They admitted that only 10 to 15 per cent of people had picked up their money.

Clearly, there was a bottleneck. The BC is a fellow with a micro ATM. Actually, that is a misnomer. These are just guys with a machine in hand and cash in the pocket. Like the post office guy, the BC makes

unjustified. He talks of saving billions of dollars.

Let me give you an example. There were around six million beneficiaries after pensions were expanded. They cut 500,000 out by saying they were not deserving. We were down to 5.5 million. Then they shifted 420,000 out of 5.5 million pensioners into banks from post offices. Now 600,000 are left in the post office. That makes 4.2 million. It leaves out 700,000 people. They say that is their saving, the corrupt people that they claim to have weeded out. The category they have put them in is: not coming to claim pensions.

I spoke to their IT man in charge. I asked who are these people. First, eight signatures are needed to authorise a pension. So about 10 people should be in jail for sanctioning a false claim. These can't be false claims. He agreed. I asked do you feel these people are dead because that can happen. So he said yes. I asked how many. He couldn't answer.

Thousands of people have approached us saying their pension has been stopped, what should they

'In a crowd of elderly people 60 to 70 per cent will tell you that it's almost impossible for them to get their pension. The machine rejects you if you get a scratch on your thumb.'

it clear that he will take his commission of ₹20 or ₹40 for handing over the pension money. Aged people are authenticated by placing their thumb impression on his machine, but it does not work for the elderly.

Why doesn't it work?

It doesn't work for hundreds and thousands. In a crowd of elderly people 60 to 70 per cent will tell you that it's almost impossible for them to get their pension. The machine rejects you if you get a scratch on your thumb, or your hand gets calloused.

It's a myth the way biometrics has been sold in this country. Nowhere in the world has it been used on this scale. So we are guinea pigs and now they all realise it. When we talk to top people in the administration they say we understand and recognise that biometrics change. No part of our body remains the same and neither do our fingerprints. If you make that machine more sensitive it will just recognise more changes.

Have you spoken to Nandan Nilekani?

I have spoken to him personally. Like all technocrats he keeps saying, 'Oh, these are teething problems, give it time'. A reporter came with us and saw what was happening. She contacted Nilekani's main man. He wrote back and said don't throw out the baby with the bathwater. We will remove these machines and bring in iris scan machines. They bring in one machine after the other.

But this is real experience at ground level. Doesn't Nilekani want to see why biometrics don't work?

No, he doesn't. He says we are getting reports. We are handling it. People are talking with their feet because they are registering such large numbers. You see his interviews. The claims he makes are abominable and

do. Are these not your 700,000 people? I want to ask Nilekani: is there a single case of de-duplication you have prosecuted for taking the state for a ride and stealing money from the poor?

They make three claims. One, of inclusion. In reality they have excluded vast numbers of people. Two, they claim efficiency. In reality, people are making eight trips to ration shops to try and get those damn thumb impressions on those machines. Each transaction takes eight to 10 minutes extra. Three, they are supposed to reduce corruption. In reality, if you are doing manual override for 50 per cent of cases you have actually opened the door for corruption.

We run a ration shop in Devdungri. The machine has been out of order for 10 days. It takes time to repair a computer in the heart of Delhi. So can you imagine getting these machines repaired in some village in a little ration shop?

What can be done?

Okay, you say biometrics is this great thing. What is wrong, then, in doing a localised biometric? You can feed the biometrics of all the people in that area into the machine. So, as soon as you put your thumb impression it doesn't have to go via the Internet anywhere. The machine itself has its database and it immediately checks against it and says yes.

Under the present system every time a person puts his thumb impression on the machine, it goes to a central server, which checks against duplication and de-duplication against everyone in that database. It then gets matched and comes back each time I take my rations. I mean, can you imagine the inefficiency and cost of that? It's an SMS going and coming, conveying a fingerprint-matching message

Continued on page 8

eight patients a week. But they don't know if the affected people have TB or silicosis. The entire testing mechanism is all new ground.

Then the food security situation is a complete mess. It's an indication of how shallow the understanding of political parties is. Given the anger and distress over the lack of implementation of the Food Security Act, all the opposition parties should have been on the street and the ruling party on the back foot. But food is just not on their radar.

You have taken up the issue of pensions. Tell us about your understanding of the problem.

Pensions made a big breakthrough when Ashok Gehlot (former chief minister of Rajasthan) universalised it. He said anyone in a rural area with an income of less than ₹50,000 a year was entitled to pension. That means 80 per cent of the population.

A large number of people actually got access to pension. Delivery was always poor. This government shifted from post offices to banks as part of the Jan Dhan Yojana system of delivery. Pension was originally a cash transfer and was always a direct benefit transfer.

It's true the post office wasn't delivering. But the banks don't want to service these people either. They are too overloaded. The rural banks even put up a

Continued from page 7

to a central server and for what reason?

There is this dictatorial attitude to this technology. Maybe somewhere smart cards are better, or maybe biometrics work elsewhere. Maybe you don't need technology in some places.

How can government speed up delivery?

The idea that all problems will be solved through technology should be dropped. It is hard work to deliver government entitlements and stuff in a country like India. You need systems.

My thumb impression is akin to a signature on a cheque. As an elderly person I place my thumb impression on the BC's machine. He says it doesn't work, wash your hands and come back. I place my impression a second, maybe a third time. He gives me my pension of ₹500. Let's say I have ₹20,000 in my account. He now has two blank cheques.

Supposing I have a smart card. I give my RuPay card to the BC. He asks me my ATM number. I pull out a piece of paper and give it to him. Would you give your ATM number to someone on the street? Here, take my card and pin and bring me money?

So we are opening up an institution like banking to massive fraud, except that we will be taking away a poor person's money. Maybe it will happen only in five or 10 per cent of cases. That's a huge number and damages the whole credibility of this system.

What should the government be doing?

Giving cash through banks and post office accounts was a step forward. This was done years ago. NREGA itself opened 100 million accounts in which cash was being credited. People went through a whole lot of torture because institutions weren't able to cope but they made them start to cope. They didn't get defrauded in the process. The problem here is that it's just been thrust down everyone's throat. No attempt was made to work it out as you go along. This should have been piloted, tested. You can't distribute machines to 90,000 shops across the state and then say, 'Oh, now we realise there is a problem'.

Maybe it would have been better to just strengthen the old institutions that were not working?

Absolutely. There are tried and tested systems. In Chhattisgarh – and I am no fan of that government – I acknowledge that they gave rice and made the PDS work. What did they do? They stopped private shops. They took responsibility. They used technology. They tracked every damn truck that went. They had chips on trucks. They had SMS going. They made sure there were *melas* for food distribution. There is no better way of distribution than by doing it in public.

So you are saying that the government has to do this work itself on the ground?

Yes, and the current government and dispensation combined with technocrats does not really care about people's pain. If you have some sensitivity to pain you immediately correct yourself. They are concerned with achieving targets. They aren't concerned with the reality of what is happening on the ground.

The Niti Aayog must have approached you to share your findings?

Not at all. For all the faults of the former Planning Commission it still was a public consultation body. The Niti Aayog talks to a very small set of people. ■

Doctors speaking up,

Civil Society News

New Delhi

DISSATISFACTION with the medical profession is widespread. There is hardly anyone who doesn't have a story to tell. Doctors either don't have time or are too greedy or lack education and values suited to their noble calling. It is also believed that they are in the pockets of pharmaceutical companies and in unholy deals with laboratories where tests are conducted.

But if falling individual standards are a matter for concern, it is also worrisome that institutions in the medical world have been tottering. The Medical Council of India (MCI) hasn't lived up to the faith placed in it. The public hospital is all but finished. Colleges gobble and spew cash and teaching standards are poor. Corporate hospitals have turned healthcare into a business, assessing their success in terms of turnover and profitability. They have sucked doctors into this equation and caused the steady collapse of government facilities.

For those of us who have wondered why the public-spirited doctors who care about their profession don't speak up and try to stem this rot, we now have battle lines being drawn for the first major showdown of its kind.

A book, *Dissenting Diagnosis*, by Dr Arun Gadre and Dr Abhay Shukla has 78 physicians speaking up on record about the shady practices they know about and calling for wholesale reform. This is unprecedented because responsible doctors have in the past stayed quiet for fear of being targeted.

A public gathering of doctors in Delhi, among them leading lights like Dr Samiran Nundy, recently called for the disbanding of the Medical Council of India (MCI) because it has failed in its duty to protect the values and scientific standards of the medical profession — and by extension the right of patients to proper treatment.

A Parliamentary Committee has already sought an overhaul of the MCI. So the mood in the nation has been changing, making it easier for doctors who feel concerned about the deterioration in their profession to come out.

The Delhi meeting was also an occasion to launch *Dissenting Diagnosis* and felicitate Dr Gadre and Dr Shukla for their work as authors on a subject that has long deserved documentation.

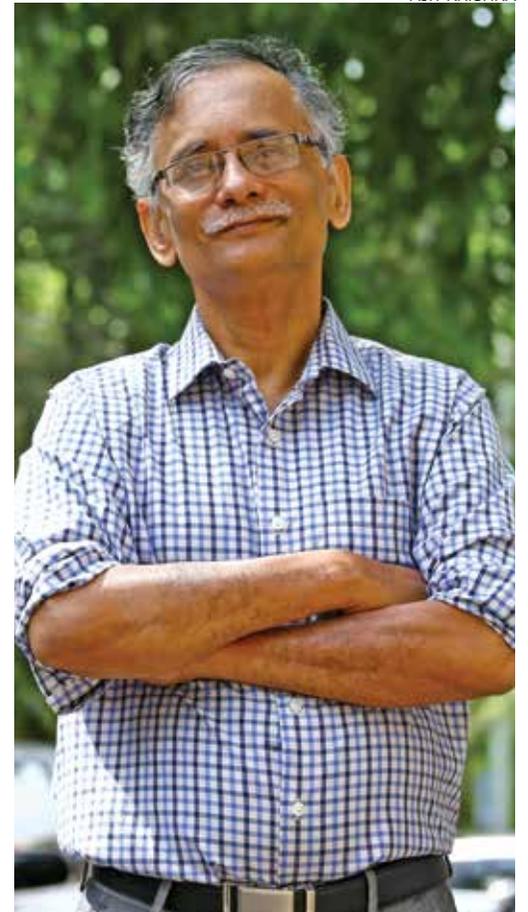
The MCI is a self-regulatory body with the responsibility of maintaining standards. It is supposed to ensure that doctors don't stray and patients' rights are protected. It also has oversight over the colleges that produce doctors. By all accounts it has failed miserably on these fronts.

"Society has given the highest honour to the medical profession by creating the MCI. Unfortunately, the medical profession has not honoured the trust placed in it. The MCI began with towering personalities like Dr B.C. Roy. But



An overcrowded government hospital in Bihar

AJIT KRISHNA



Dr Arun Gadre

but will the MCI be reformed?

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Dr Abhay Shukla

more transparent and effective. But the big reform that is being proposed is that it should be taken out of the dominance of doctors and government servants by including patients' representatives and civil society groups. This, it is felt, will force the profession to open up to society and be more accountable. The system of Health Councils in Brazil is cited as an example though it may not be the perfect solution. There are other suggestions such as doctor-patient councils for aligning the medical profession with society's needs and expectations and also creating patient awareness.

At the core of the doctor-patient relationship, there is an asymmetry of knowledge about medicine and the human body. The purpose of regulation is to protect the patient from being manipulated. When healthcare becomes commercialised, as we are witnessing with corporate hospitals in India, the manipulation of patients increases.

Commercialisation also distorts the entire public healthcare system. Doctors earn much more than they do in government service or as ethical and rational practitioners on their own. Private hospitals are dressed up to be more inviting than overworked and under-funded government facilities or for that matter small private clinics and nursing homes devoted to honest dealings with patients. As the balance shifts, patients tend to gravitate to the more expensive but often less ethical and scientific private hospitals. Often it is because of nifty marketing and sometimes because of the lack of choice.

Are reforms possible or has too much time been lost? Has the profession surrendered to market forces that are much beyond its control? Dr Gadre, Dr Shukla, the 78 doctors interviewed for their book and many others who are nameless and faceless are concerned that restoring the old balance in which doctors primarily served society won't be easy.

It is an effort that requires the involvement of government, civil society groups, the judiciary, patients as a community and of course aware doctors themselves. Reform will have to begin with medical education where there are deeply entrenched interests because of the money that is being made from medical colleges.

The authors quote the legendary Dr Paul Farmer from *Pathologies of Power*: "We find ourselves at the crossroads. Health can be a commodity to be sold, or it can be considered a basic social right. It cannot comfortably be considered both of these at the same time. This, I believe, is the great drama of medicine at the start of this century. And this is the choice before all people of faith and goodwill in

these dangerous times."

A new social vision is needed for healthcare in India, particularly because it is the key to equal opportunity and a functioning democracy. Restoring the primacy of teaching hospitals is crucial because the profession draws its energy and sense of purpose from them.

Dr Gadre is soft spoken and gentle. But when it comes to medical education he speaks forcefully. He recalls that his medical education in Mumbai three decades ago was almost entirely subsidised. Among his teachers was the inspirational and socially driven Dr Antia. It didn't cost Dr Gadre more than a few thousand rupees to get a medical education.

Since Dr Gadre didn't spend huge sums on his medical degree he had no problem in seeing himself as serving society and went on to set up a practice as a gynaecologist in poor tribal areas in Maharashtra.

He recalls that the first nursing home he set up was with a loan of ₹90,000 on which he paid 15 or 18 per cent interest. He charged ₹3 for a consultation and ₹300 for a delivery. Quite obviously, he couldn't keep his practice going. He gave up and then tried again in another tribal area and this time hung in against difficult odds till he developed a heart condition and needed angioplasty.

Running a rational and ethical practice was not easy for Dr Gadre. The system offered him no support though he was reaching good treatment to the poor. He is particularly grateful to his wife, Dr Jyoti Gadre, an anaesthetist, for standing by him. Finally, the heart condition and the angioplasty forced him to give up.

He then began working for Sathi, a Pune-based NGO, which specialises in health policy advocacy. Dr Shukla is a senior programme coordinator at Sathi. He is a public health physician with a post-graduate degree from AIIMS.

Their book, *Dissenting Diagnosis*, began as a project for Sathi. Dr Gadre set out to interview doctors who were willing to speak on record about their concerns over the falling standards of the medical profession in India and their fears that rampant commercialisation was eroding the core values with which a doctor needed to be imbued.

The solution lay in doctors reforming their own profession. But the general belief was that no one really wanted to speak out for fear of taking on powerful quarters. Dr Gadre travelled extensively, beginning by meeting ethical doctors whom he personally knew. At the end of the exercise there was a total of 78 doctors on record and almost all of them speak openly about malpractices, the role of pharmaceutical companies in influencing doctors and the ways in which corporate hospitals bump up their bills.

The result is a rare book, which should make not just the medical professional, but all Indians think about what their expectations should be from a public healthcare system. ■

we have let society down," says Dr Gadre when we meet at the Indian Social Institute in Delhi on the morning after the launch of *Dissenting Diagnosis*.

"MCI is an autonomous society with which even the government can't interfere. But commercial elements have taken it over. Secondly, with the onset of private medical colleges the very purpose of the MCI has changed," says Dr Gadre.

"Society at large told doctors to regulate themselves through the MCI, to keep education standards high and enforce ethics. But we are grieved that the MCI shifted its focus to more of medical education than enforcement of ethics. I know I am not alone in saying this. There are 78 other doctors who I have spoken to me on record," says Dr Gadre.

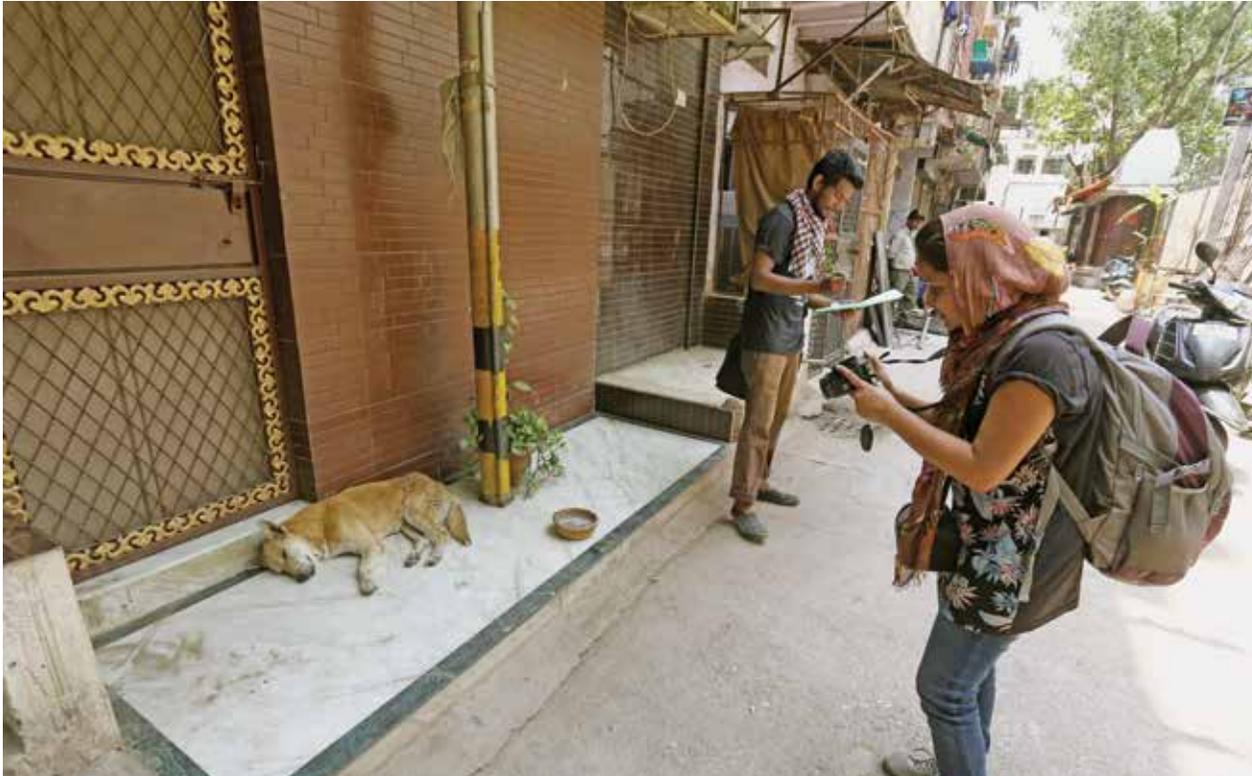
He points out that hardly any doctors have been punished. No registrations have been cancelled. When hearings were conducted on the role of the private sector and patients' rights in Mumbai, Dr Gadre was stunned and moved. Patients, who felt that they hadn't been given the correct treatment, had to run from pillar to post in search of justice. Perhaps not all their complaints were valid, but the absence of an easily accessible redress mechanism is unforgivable.

"In certain cases I could tell you in five minutes that the doctor was at fault, but the complaints were dismissed in the state medical council as having no merit," says Dr Gadre.

There are many suggestions for making the MCI

Delhi dog count under way

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA



A volunteer takes a picture of a stray dog in Paharganj

Donita Jose
New Delhi

A dog census has begun in the Paharganj area of north Delhi with the idea of identifying stray dogs and finding a sustainable solution for reducing their population in a humane way.

The census is the first of its kind in India where most cities face a serious problem of too many dogs running loose on the streets. Dog bite figures are contestable, but it is widely established that packs of stray dogs have harmed human beings. Small children are known to have been killed.

No civic authority has been able to come up with a solution. But the North Delhi Municipal Corporation has decided to be innovative and has brought in Rishi Dev, an Ekistician and Urban Planner, to conduct the census and find a community-based solution.

Dev has been studying animal behaviour in urban settings for a while and it is his view that the best way of reducing the dog population in an urban area is to selectively adopt a few dogs per neighbourhood and thereby disperse the entire population over several neighbourhoods.

Dev says when a couple of dogs are adopted and fed on the street, they become territorial and the message goes out to the other dogs to stay away. In this way, when dogs are domesticated across neighbourhoods, their number becomes more manageable. Vaccinating and sterilising them becomes easier.

Dev is with the little-known Institute of Urban



Rishi Dev discussing strategy with volunteers

Dev says when a couple of dogs are adopted and fed on the street, they become territorial and the other dogs stay away.

Sciences and Design. More significantly, he has researched this issue for the past 14 years at Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi. He has published a book on his findings, *The Ekistics of Animal and Human Conflict*.

Dev says the population of any species depends on ecology and the natural inclination of a species to prevent itself from going extinct by reproducing when threatened. So the population of dogs in a city depends on the built environment. The way homes, roads, lanes and markets are built, shady spots, parks, the position of garbage dumps all decide the kind of wildlife that thrives there.

Domestication and migration of dogs reduces their population. If an area has a pack of 20 dogs on the streets, and residents domesticate two of them, the other 18 will migrate out of the area. "There is an understanding between them. Dogs are a keystone species and intelligent," says Dev.

"When a dog is domesticated, people become their primary source of food instead of the garbage dump. They begin to protect the people and the locality. Most bites happen around garbage dumps by undomesticated dogs," he says.

TRACKING DOGS

The first survey, being carried out by volunteers, will be followed by two more surveys based on inputs provided by the municipality's sanitation workers and locals. "The census is highly area specific. The figures of Paharganj would greatly vary from that of Nizamuddin," says Dev during the pilot run of the census. The survey notes down several indicators that can be critical to understanding the movement and location of dogs in the locality.

"We will be checking various parameters like building heights in this area to see the kind of shade they cast. This is useful in understanding the movement of dogs in summer and winter. We also note things like garbage dumps, the presence of low-income groups, meat shops, water sources, secluded areas and so on. This detailed information can be useful in managing crime and other urban issues as well," says Dev.

The survey divides the area into various zones depending on built environment. It helps in understanding the kind of dogs that would inhabit each terrain. "Zone 1 is near main roads where the dogs have no permanent territory and are mostly

Continued on page 12

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Delhi dog count

Continued from page 10

feral. In case of a conflict they have spaces to escape. Zone 2, which comprises inroads and *galis*, doesn't allow the free movement of dogs and so the ones there are highly territorial. If the dogs in Zone 2 aren't domesticated, the chances of conflict are high,"

The MCD sanitation worker of the *gali*, Ravi, also agreed. "Only two or three dogs sit permanently on this stretch of the road. The rest keep coming and going." A volunteer asked him whether the dogs got into a spat with anyone. "No," he said. "They sometimes chase cars but that's mostly because this area doesn't see much traffic." Farther on the trail we came across a hotel that had an unsterilised semi-

Every day we sterilise four or five dogs. But still everybody blames the MCD," he says.

These contrasting reactions about stray dogs within the same locality underlined the necessity for such a detailed survey. "We are urban planners and this census is of spaces and responses. For some, dogs are vermin and for others friends," remarked Dev.

Akshay Shrinagesh, a volunteer, is an architect. He says he received many complaints about the 'dog menace' from the Army Welfare Housing Organisation (AWHO) in Noida. He went to investigate. Shrinagesh found that there were only 65 dogs in 85 acres. Most of them were sterilised. Yet, conflicts were high. The reason was that none of the dogs had been domesticated. They were seen as a nuisance. "The moment you see the stray dog as an asset we can solve this issue. We want to create a buffer of sterilised, domesticated dogs against the feral ones," says Shrinagesh.

Dev says the problem is deeper. "It also has to do with the Western concept of a planned city enforced on the traditional Indian *mohalla*. Most lanes in Paharganj have a width of less than 10 feet. Despite that they have a more sustainable relationship with animals. The architecture of the area seizes the benefits of the weather and keeps any massive dog menace at bay. Just tweaking sanitation would do the trick for this space."

But, he says, scientific population control doesn't end there. "In the third stage of population control after domestication and sterilisation comes the need to ban the sale of pedigree dogs. The pedigrees aren't ecologically from the area and have weaker immune systems. If their owners discard them they can become an easy carrier of rabies and other diseases, which the Indian stray is immune to. But a mixing of genes can complicate the situation further."

Shrinagesh says a better solution would be to make it obligatory for owners to register their pets. This would make it mandatory for them to look after their dogs and not abandon them.

The challenges in this ambitious census are many, lack of volunteer support being one. The degree of specialisation the census demands makes the volunteer pool smaller. Despite a positive nod from the NDMC's veterinary department, they talk off record about being forced to cater to the public demand to remove dogs. The biggest challenge would be to convince people about the validity of this project for long-term solutions.

"Once the results of this census are made public, it will be evident that the hysteria and fear psychosis created around dogs was for the commercial benefits of a few," says Dev.

He disputes data about rabies put out by the WHO. "Rabies data that newspapers publish are based on the sale of vaccines that doesn't even distinguish between a cat bite and dog bite. Five injections are administered to each patient, each of which gets counted separately, increasing the figures exponentially."

Big pharma companies, he says, are benefitting by exaggerating the extent of rabies. NGOs are benefitting from dog sterilisation drives. They get paid between ₹800-1,200 per sterilisation. The anti-dog lobby wants to get rich by selling dog meat.

The census, he feels, would sensitise people about dogs at a time when capture and kill is the order of the day and, hopefully, make India a furry-friendly nation. ■



Two stray dogs hang out with a benefactor

We came across a hotel that had an unsterilised semi-domesticated stray. 'This one will keep ferocious dogs away, but that doesn't solve the issue entirely. He should be sterilised to complete the cycle.'

explains Dev.

Considering the high density of people in Paharganj, the number of dogs was rather few. Surprisingly, most dogs that we came across were sterilised. Dev says birth control isn't useful. "Sterilisation only curbs the population. As long as domestication of a few dogs doesn't occur, the bites and dog-human conflicts will continue." He is critical of the Animal Welfare Board's ABC (Animal Birth Control) project that promotes mass sterilisation with no scientific basis. "Dogs are highly territorial and very much part of the ecosystem. We can't expect them to not exist with us. We have a choice of having either two friendly sterilised dogs or 20 aggressive feral dogs in an area."

His observation proved right in the streets of Paharganj. People here seemed to have already found this dog-friendly formula. Susheel Yadav of Chuna Mandi, Gali 1, vouched for his four-legged friends. "They guard this area. They will never harm anyone unnecessarily. I have also ensured that they are sterilised," he says. Other locals were wary of the municipality's staff, fearing their beloved dogs would get captured and taken away.

domesticated stray. "This one will keep ferocious dogs away, but that doesn't solve the issue entirely. He should be sterilised to complete the cycle," said Alka Parihar, a census volunteer and Ekistician herself.

FRIEND OR FOE

But farther down we found the reputation of stray dogs rather sullied. P.C. Handa, a local resident, complained about them. "The municipality is useless. They pick up dogs and bring them back here. This should be a dog-free zone since dogs have bitten many people here. The sterilisation never works. Walk ahead. You will find a new litter."

Parveen Kapoor, another resident, showed her bite wounds. "I have been bitten four times in the last six months. My son has lodged several complaints online, but it's of no use. I can't get out of the house in fear." The area has a Mother Dairy booth a few metres away and is largely hostile to stray dogs, thereby worsening the conflict.

The municipality's vet department, though, had a different version. "The residents don't want us to drop the dogs back in the area. But that is the protocol. Eighty per cent of dogs here have been sterilised.

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Sadiq Ameen Khan, London's new mayor, in a bus

London's first Muslim mayor doesn't want to be typecast

Shyam Bhatia
London

JUST days after being elected with a significant majority, Sadiq Ameen Khan has already distanced himself from the far Left leadership of the Labour Party.

The outgoing MP for Tooting, South London, was in fact one of those renegade Labour MPs who originally nominated party chief Jeremy Corbyn to become leader of the opposition in Britain's House of Commons.

Subsequently, Khan, the son of a Pakistani migrant who became a London bus driver, set out his stall during the campaign vowing to become London's most business-friendly mayor, rather contrary to the Labour leadership's determination to identify the rich as the source of the country's problems.

In his acceptance speech at City Hall after a comfortable victory over his nearest rival, Conservative Zac Goldsmith, Khan pledged to

bring unity to London and to tackle the city's acute housing crisis. It is consistent with his pre-election pledge when he declared, "I want all Londoners to have the same opportunities that our city gave me: a home they can afford, a high-skilled job with decent pay, an affordable and modern transport system and a safe, clean and healthy environment."

Since the election he has broadened his objectives by holding several meetings with the metropolitan police commissioner, Sir Bernard Hogan Howe, to discuss the ever evolving terror threat facing London.

Despite London's police force, undoubtedly the best prepared in the country to face a terrorist attack, Sadiq Khan says he is determined to press ahead with a full capability review to ensure the capital is as protected as possible from the murderous aims of extremists from the likes of Al Qaeda and ISIS.

The new mayor has significant powers of control over how the police force functions. That is just one of the many executive powers that single him out as

more than just a figurehead chief executive of a major Western capital. He also controls the fire authority, transport budget, has access to a small percentage of local tax yields, wields influence over the many local councils that help to run London, as well as representing the city at major trade events.

For these reasons this mayor and his term of office inevitably attract more interest than, say, the mayor of the Dutch city of Rotterdam which also has a sitting elected Muslim mayor in Ahmed Aboutaleb.

Where London is concerned the 45-year-old dark skinned, silver-haired city chief would not seem out of place as mayor of South Asian cities like Delhi, or Mumbai, or Karachi, but in predominantly white, Anglo Saxon Britain his election inevitably draws attention to his ethnic roots.

Most political commentators say the London mayor's powers are an indication that he has considerably more authority and prestige than a middle-ranking cabinet minister. Currently, there is one Muslim cabinet minister, Business Secretary

Sajid Javid in the British Conservative government, but the London mayor is guaranteed to get much more day-to-day coverage of whatever he does.

Given popular fears surrounding Islam, described by some as ‘Islamophobia’, Khan’s election could be seen as a victory for multiculturalism and equality. The next four years will be key in persuading British voters and voters in other Western countries whether Islamic values are indeed compatible with high elected office on behalf of many who will always arguably, understandably, regard Islam with a degree of suspicion.

Memories of Osama bin Laden’s attacks of 9/11 are still fresh among Americans where there are weekly if not daily reports about how Muslims and Muslim converts have succumbed to extremist Islamic ideology.

In Europe recent terror strikes in Brussels and Paris have inevitably fuelled the agendas of right-wing politicians who warn that Islamic terrorists will use the cover of migration from North Africa and the Middle East to spread their tentacles of panic on every street.

Statistics culled from some European Muslim communities — constantly bombarded with questions about whether their faith and democracy are compatible — tell their own story.

In the UK a survey carried out by the ICM polling company revealed how some 39 per cent of Muslims believe wives should always obey their husbands, 52 per cent believed homosexuality should be made illegal and only 34 per cent were prepared to contact the police if somebody they knew was involved with people who supported terrorism in Syria.

Hence the alarmed response of former British Equality and Human Rights Commission chief Trevor Philips who described Muslims as a “nation within a nation”, adding that British Muslims “basically do not want to participate in the way that other people do” with different views on gender, sexuality, Jews and terrorism.

Philips, who commented on what he called the “life and death struggle for the soul of British Islam”, observed how on specific issues like family, sexuality, gender, violence and terrorism “the centre of gravity of British Muslim opinion is some distance away from the centre of gravity of everybody else’s opinion.”

Back in the US the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, Donald Trump, who so famously called for a ban on Muslims entering America, appeared to stage a partial climbdown when it comes to Sadiq Khan, describing his election as “very, very good”, adding that he would be welcomed on any trip across the Atlantic.

Khan responded by saying, “Donald Trump’s ignorant view of Islam risks alienating mainstream Muslims around the world and plays into the hands of extremists. Trump and those around him think that Western liberal values are incompatible with mainstream Islam. London has proved him wrong.”

A few months earlier he commented in a newspaper article, “Islamophobia is on the rise. The number of Islamophobic incidents recorded by the Metropolitan police increased by 70 per cent over the past year alone. Every time there is a terrorist

he graduated with a law degree and then became a solicitor specialising in lawsuits against the Metropolitan police. He became a local Labour councillor in 1994, eventually winning election as the MP for the London borough of Tooting in 2005. He has held two ministerial jobs, first as Minister of State for Communities, when he replaced Parmjit Dhanda, and a year later as Minister of State for Transport.

Following his election as mayor, he is obliged to give up his role as an MP. The by-election for Tooting will take place next month.

He paints himself as a family man — he’s married to fellow solicitor, Saadiya Ahmed, and the couple has two daughters, Anisah and Ammarah (who incidentally don’t wear headscarves). He’s run the London marathon and enjoys watching football. In many ways a man of the people.

‘I want all Londoners to have the same opportunities that our city gave me: a home they can afford, a high-skilled job with decent pay, an affordable and modern transport system and a safe, clean and healthy environment.’

incident involving evil fanatics who abuse the name of Islam ordinary, law-abiding Muslims pay a heavy price.”

He went on to pledge, “As Mayor of London, I’ll make tackling hate crimes – including Islamophobia, anti-semitism and homophobia — a top priority for the Metropolitan police and ensure they get the resources to make a real difference.”

Khan is the fifth of eight children born to bus driver Amanullah and Sehrun Khan, a seamstress. One set of grandparents migrated to Karachi from India, while other close family members have ties to Faislabad and Islamabad in Pakistani Punjab.

Khan himself grew up in the southwest London area of Earlsfield, where he went to school, before going on to the University of North London where

The political reality for Khan is that he now replaces one of the most popular British politicians of all time in Boris Johnson who commands the kind of across-the-board grassroots support that most lawmakers can only dream about.

The outgoing white Mayor of London is now spearheading the campaign for Britain to leave the European Union and many believe the referendum result will indicate whether he will be able to make a push to take over as leader of the Conservative Party or even become prime minister.

If Khan can have half as much resonance as Johnson did and continues to have with Londoners, he’ll be deemed a success and well-placed to project himself as the first Muslim prime minister of the UK. ■

Samita’s World

by SAMITA RATHOR



RTI in limbo in J&K

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

A people's initiative like the Right to Information (RTI) Act is fast losing its way in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) because the state government does not seem to be serious about making the State Information Commission (SIC) fully functional. The public, especially those who have resorted to using the RTI, are disappointed at the government's lackadaisical approach.

In April 2011, Ghulam Rasool Sufi (better known as G.R. Sufi) became the first Chief Information Commissioner of J&K. Sufi completed his five-year term in February this year and retired on February 29. But the government has shown no inclination to fill the vacant post.

Much before this, the three-member SIC was reduced to two members after one member completed his term in October 2015. Now, there is just one member and the resultant lack of quorum is evident. This has resulted in government departments not taking the SIC seriously.

The Chairman, J&K Right to Information Movement (J&K RTIM), Dr. Shaikh Ghulam Rasool, says effective steps need to be taken to make the RTI Act truly meaningful for the people of the state.

"Technically, the SIC has ceased to exist since the superannuation of the Chief Information Commissioner. The non-serious approach of the people at the helm towards the functioning of the Commission can be gauged by the fact that a solitary member is managing the whole show. The government needs to pull up its socks and take the requisite steps quickly," said Dr. Shaikh.

He added that it is not imperative to appoint a

retired bureaucrat to the post. A media person, academic or civil society activist with knowledge of the law can function effectively as Chief Information Commissioner.

"The SIC is not a rehabilitation centre for retired bureaucrats. The state government should move beyond this and take pathbreaking steps in the appointment. First, it should show sincerity and seriousness. Making the SIC fully functional would send a positive signal to RTI users and activists in the state," said Dr. Shaikh.



People crowd around an RTI On Wheels van, an innovative way of spreading awareness

RTI users and activists have been demanding that the J&K government follow other states in making the RTI Act people-friendly in the real sense. They say that procedural wrangles need to be removed so that RTI users have easy access to the information they seek.

The Chairman of J&K RTIM said that many landmark judgments were given after Sufi took over as Chief Information Commissioner. At the same time, he pointed out, that some of the demands

projected by RTI users and activists were disregarded by Sufi and his team.

"The SIC passed a landmark judgment under which Jammu & Kashmir Bank Limited was brought under the purview of the RTI Act. The Commission also passed a judgment bringing the private schools of the state under the purview of the Act. However, the Commission failed to come up to the expectations of people, especially RTI users and activists, on some counts," said Dr. Shaikh.

He pointed out the SIC's failure to implement Section (6) of the J&K RTI Act which makes it clear that the information seeker does not have to state why he is seeking information from any department or agency. Dr. Shaikh said the Commission had failed to take steps to ensure RTI users are not harassed or assaulted.

"It is the duty of the SIC to ensure that RTI users are protected but this has not happened in Jammu & Kashmir so far. For five years or so the SIC has failed to implement its own rules. The Commission did not deem it fit to carry out consultations or deliberation with the stake-holders for framing the rules," said Dr. Shaikh.

The J&K RTI Chairman said amendments to the RTI Act are needed so that it becomes easy for people to get information from departments or agencies. He said RTI

users should not have to submit printouts, which is cumbersome.

"The information seeker is informed on the phone about the sitting of the Commission and no notice whatsoever is sent to him. In case a notice is sent, it is by ordinary post and not by Speed Post or registered post. Hopefully, these things will be looked into by the new Chief Information Commissioner as and when he or she takes over," said Dr. Shaikh. ■

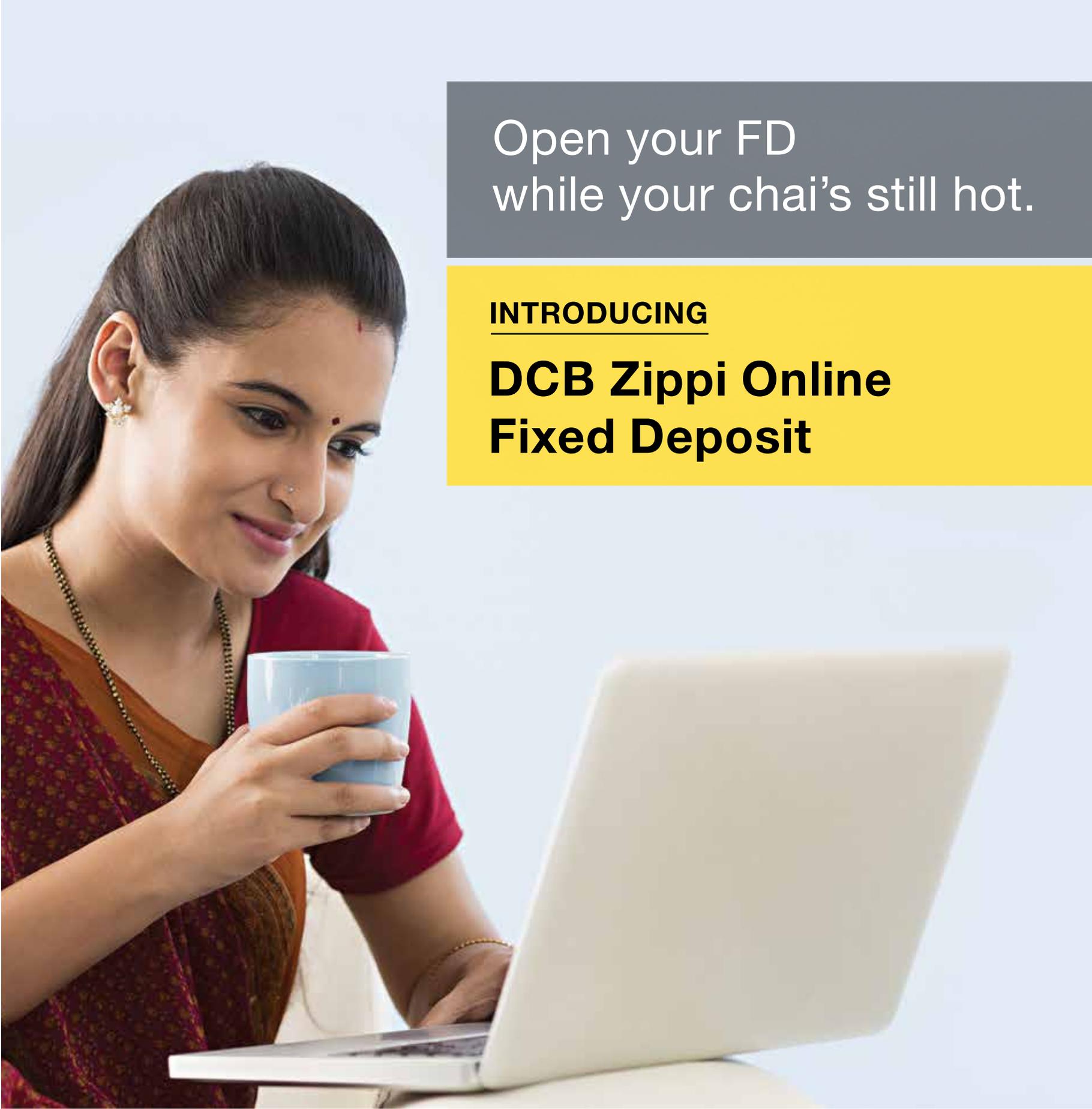
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HERITAGE SHOWDOWN IN KOLKATA

Saibal Chatterjee
Kolkata

IN the lanes and bylanes of the busy shopping district of Gariahat in South Kolkata, an intense battle is being waged.

On one side are inheritors of old residential properties built between the early 20th century and the immediate post-Independence years. On the other side are builders and real estate promoters for whom these unique buildings mean nothing. For them it is the land on which these heritage structures stand that is a goldmine.

Signs of 'destruction' are everywhere. Not too many of the decaying structures have survived. Most have been replaced with boxy multistoried buildings to accommodate the city's upwardly mobile. The neighbourhoods or *paras* have in the process been robbed of their inimitable character.

The new multistoried buildings tower over the old ones. They look large and threatening. The old buildings with their fading beauty appear small and vulnerable.

Many of the heritage homes that have disappeared or have been altered to serve the needs of increasingly consumerist times were once occupied by men and women who made the Calcutta of yore India's intellectual and cultural capital.

The few buildings that have escaped the hammer in South Kolkata's residential neighbourhoods are, of course, nowhere like the grand palaces in the city's north. And that is precisely what makes their part European, part Bengali architecture distinctive.

These crumbling structures are marked by refined understatement – a living testimony to an eventful era when the city was enthusiastically courting modernity after being stripped of its status as "the second city of the Empire".

Novelist and singer Amit Chaudhuri has initiated a campaign to bring the fate of these historically and architecturally significant homes and their precincts to the notice of those that run the city and seem to be bent upon ruining it.

"Lots of people are already on board," says Chaudhuri. "They are beginning to see value in these houses, value that goes beyond personal and individual reasons and extends to their place in the city's architectural diversity and history of modernity."

Chaudhuri, like the others who are part of the

newly-launched Calcutta Architectural Legacies (CAL) campaign, are responding to the cavalier manner in which beautiful old facades are being mindlessly wiped off the face of South Kolkata's neighbourhoods in the name of development.

ERASING LEGACY

Kolkata's *paras* (localities) are central to the city's social life. They are the fulcrums around which neighbourhoods develop their identity and cultural dynamics. "There is something inherent in these precincts and houses that is of value," says Chaudhuri.

Many striking homes built in the colonial era in South Calcutta, with their high ceilings, red-oxide stone floors, semi-circular verandahs, intricate cornices, ornate wrought-iron grilles, French-style slatted windows and open terraces, are falling to pickaxes, crowbars and heavy hammers unleashed on them by realtors.



Amit Chaudhuri in a restored heritage building



Professor Taraknath Sen's family: Saumendranath Sen with his wife,

A combination of legal tangles, economic distress, lack of awareness of the value of the beautiful old structures and lax municipal regulation have led to owners of many of these ancestral properties parting with their amazing bequest and leaving the magnificent, architecturally diverse structures (some of them built nearly a century ago) at the mercy of profit-seeking builders who have no respect for either history or architectural nuances.

The situation has worsened since the turn of the millennium. With land prices skyrocketing and the younger generations of Kolkata residents moving out in search of better lives elsewhere, the builders have moved in and promptly demolished some unique structures that defined the character of upscale South Calcutta.

Most of these houses were built between the 1920s and the 1960s. One of the few surviving old buildings in this part of Kolkata — 18/56, Dover Lane — was the home of Taraknath Sen, the legendary English literature professor at Presidency College.

His grandson, Dhritishankar Sen, now lives here with his father, Saumendranath Sen, holding on proudly to his enviable heirloom. Dhritishankar, who, too, teaches English, is part of the CAL campaign.

save old homes, localities

PICTURES BY PRASANTA BISWAS



Sreelekha and son Dhritishankar

Chaudhuri says: “Not every city is fortunate to have an architectural inheritance worth fighting for. Those that do, and have succeeded in hanging on to it, have without exception benefitted — London, Edinburgh, New York City, Istanbul, Berlin, Marrakech, various Latin American cities... architecturally vibrant neighbourhoods in all cities are sites of creative innovation and regeneration. They are not only vital to abetting tourism — they foster cultural transformation.”

Chaudhuri’s initiative has elicited support from many quarters, including leading conservation architects. But it is obvious that Kolkata’s conservationists and heritage enthusiasts have a full-on battle on their hands. Yet, they know that winning this war would be worth the struggle.

Chaudhuri dismisses the suggestion from some quarters that conservation is anti-development. “Our campaign does not say do not do development,” he says. “But do not destroy old neighbourhoods in the name of progress. These localities bear witness to a unique cultural efflorescence and should be preserved at all cost.”

“If it can be done in Mumbai, why not in Kolkata? If Kolkata fails to preserve its past, it can only mean that the city has lost all sense of its history and civil society,” he adds.

“In Istanbul, London and New York neighbourhoods have been developed without destroying their intrinsic character. They have not been turned into Dallas or Gurgaon,” he points out.

“People will have to look at their habitats with a sense of distance. Only then will they understand that the spaces they live in have emerged from a particular kind of culture and history and therefore need to be conserved,” he asserts.

PAST AND PRESENT

In the absence of support from the government and the municipal authorities, the campaign faces many challenges. Says leading conservation architect Manish Chakraborti: “It is important to conserve in order to develop, not conserve simply to romanticise. Let us not spend another 50 years trying to set things right. Let us embed conservation in the development framework of the city so that the initiative to save the city’s architectural environment becomes truly effective.”

He adds: “Segregated use planning is not for Kolkata. The city’s buildings and localities are appropriate for mixed functions. They call for creative reuse. Here, business planning and conservation planning must go hand in hand.”

Among the many heritage projects that

Chakraborti has executed is the conservation and adaptive reuse of Tagore Hall, the residence of Rabindranath Tagore’s son, Rathindranath, and one of the last extant bungalows on Gurusaday Road, a short drive from Gariahat.

Says G.M. Kapur, convener, West Bengal and Calcutta regional Chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH): “Unless incentives are given to the owners of these old houses, they will not step up and support the campaign whole-heartedly. They will ask: what do we get out of it? And that would be a fair question.”

Under the current dispensation, Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) isn’t exactly showing the way forward. On the last day of February, its heritage conservation committee relegated the nearly century-old Roxy Cinema in Esplanade from Grade II to Grade III on the heritage buildings list on the specious grounds that the Art Deco structure off Chowringhee Road has no historical significance and architectural value.

The historic Chaplin theatre, which was not very far from Roxy, was razed in 2013 despite vehement protests from many quarters. This was the site of Elphinstone Picture Palace, India’s first permanent cinema hall. It was built in 1907 by Parsi theatre and film entrepreneur Jamshedji Framji Madan, who until then ran tent cinemas on the Maidan. It was renamed twice – first Minerva, and then Chaplin.

Current KMC rules lay down that for a Grade III structure, “a plaque depicting the history of the building should be provided (and) where the structure has no architectural importance, demolition may be allowed”. So does Chaplin’s fate await Roxy?

Kolkata Mayor Sovan Chatterjee says that he plans to use the plot on which Roxy stands to extend the KMC headquarters. “This would enable us,” he adds, “to deliver better services to the people and decongest the headquarters.”

His statement has, of course, riled those fighting to protect the city’s remarkably diverse architectural history. “The profligate disregard for Kolkata’s historic built environment continues,” Chaudhuri says. “Kolkata is in the unique position of having its heritage looked out for by a committee whose brief seems to be to destroy extant heritage buildings.”

“The move to downgrade Roxy Cinema definitely needs to be stopped,” says Bonani Kakkar of the NGO, People United for Better Living in Calcutta (PUBLIC), who, like INTACH’s Kapur, has won several such conservation battles since her organisation came into existence in 1990.

Chakraborti, who was a member of the KMC’s heritage conservation committee until recently, says legal intervention may now be the only option for those who do not want to see Roxy vanish from Kolkata’s map.

The widespread consternation was perhaps best summed up by Professor Tapati Mukherjee, president, Rabindra Bhavan, Visva Bharati University, at one of the three sessions that CAL organised as part of a two-day event, titled Triptych, on February 26 and 27.

She said: “What right do we have to destroy these buildings when we cannot build such houses again?” Prof. Mukherjee continues to live in the two-storied family home that her grandfather built in Hindustan Park in the 1930s.

The building next door, built in the same colonial

style and in roughly the same period, however, failed to withstand the winds of change and disappeared.

Two of the Triptych sessions were held on the ground floor of Parna Kutir, 32 Hindustan Park, a wonderful but decaying building inherited by Alok Basu. It still stands its ground in the face of the frenetic landscape-altering construction activity going on in its vicinity.

CITIZENS' ACTION

Kolkata has numerous Art Deco buildings like Roxy, and these include Metro Cinema in Esplanade and Purna Talkies in Bhowanipore, another locality of the city that has seen many heritage properties disappear in the recent past.

Occasionally, and only occasionally, citizens have succeeded in stopping the government of the day from riding roughshod over the city's timeless landmarks. In the 1980s, the then Left Front government had planned to paint the copula of Ochterlony Monument (Shahid Minar) red.

At another point, the same government had also decided to demolish the Town Hall, known for its impressive Doric architecture. Both these ill-advised plans had to be aborted in the face of strong protests from eminent residents of the city, including filmmaker Satyajit Ray and writer and collector R.P. Gupta.

More recently, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) government wanted to fill up Lal Dighi (the Great Tank) to make way for another version of Writers' Buildings, the state secretariat that dates back to 1777. An understandable uproar stymied the move.

Most of the buildings in North and Central Kolkata — grand old palaces built by the Bengali aristocracy in the former zone, and imposing colonial structures erected by the British rulers in the business district — are safe because they figure on KMC's heritage list. This list has about 1,000 buildings.

But the latest citizens' campaign is focused primarily on protecting the standard residential buildings that the Bengali middle class built in South Calcutta in the early decades of the 20th century.

These buildings are unlike anything else in the country because their architecture evolved organically, blending a variety of European influences with typically Bengali elements. These structures lend South Kolkata a character of its very own.

Last year, in an essay in *The Guardian*, Chaudhuri, who teaches contemporary literature in the University of East Anglia but spends months in the city of his birth, spelled out why South Calcutta's architecture was peerless.

"It's neither Renaissance (hardly any Corinthian pillars as you might spot in North Calcutta homes) nor neo-Gothic (as Bombay's colonial buildings are) nor Indo-Saracenic, which expresses a Utopian idea of what a mish-mash of Renaissance, Hindu and Mughul features might be. It's a style that is, to use Amartya Sen's word, 'eccentric' and beautiful, and entirely the Bengali middle class," he wrote.

French development economist Esther Duflo, who teaches at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), advocates showcasing to the world precisely this "madness of Kolkata".

Duflo, who has been coming to Kolkata frequently in the past two decades, believes investment to preserve precincts in North, Central and South



Architect Manish Chakraborti in St James' Church, which he has restored

Kolkata can be financially rewarding.

"Just after the end of Communism, a big project was taken up in Prague to restore old trams, building facades and bridges. It has paid dividends and is today a top-draw tourist destination. Kolkata has the potential to become a Prague," she has said.

In a letter addressed to West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee in May last year, Chaudhuri called for urgent action to "protect not just heritage but both the cultural individuality and the multifariousness of the city as represented by its architecture".

Chaudhuri wrote: "Calcutta neighbourhoods should be showcased to the world in the same way that Prague and other great cities showcase their architecture. The first reason for this is the vivid way in which the history of a unique Bengali modernity is represented by Calcutta's buildings from the last century to the 1950s."

The appeal to the CM was signed, among others, by economists Pranab Bardhan and Kaushik Basu, historian and MP Sugata Bose, artists Jogen Chowdhury and Chittravanu Majumdar, filmmaker Aparna Sen and photographer Dayanita Singh.

It pointed out: "Calcutta is one of the great cities of modernity, and Asia's first cosmopolitan metropolis. Like other great modern cities, its cultural inheritance is contained not only in its literature, cinema, art, and music, or in its political and intellectual history, but palpably in its lived spaces and its architectural ethos."

It added: "This ethos is remarkably distinctive, and unique to Calcutta; it includes not only the *rajbari* mansions of north Calcutta and the grand colonial institutional buildings of central Calcutta, but the houses in which people have lived,



Bonani Kakkar at Bishop's House

and still live, in various neighbourhoods in the city — Bakulbagan, Hindustan Park, Kidderpore, Paddapukur Road, Bhowanipore, Sarat Bose Road, and Ganguly Bagan, to name just a few. These and other areas should really be declared heritage precincts."

Chaudhuri held up conservation architect Partha Ranjan Das's proposal to introduce transfer of development rights as "one of the most practical solutions towards protection".

Under these rights, owners of buildings would be allowed to sell the equivalent of land value to "developers", who can then use those rights to extend new properties being built elsewhere.

"In this way, the great buildings and neighbourhoods will continue to survive. Moreover,

bring civic pride and a sense of what Kolkata is as a city back into the public discourse.

LOST AND FOUND

Many other concerned Kolkata residents, including INTACH's Kapur and environmental activist Kakkar have thrown their weight behind the campaign.

"This is a very, very good initiative. You have to begin somewhere," says Kakkar. "Under the present government and legal structure, there cannot be an instant groundswell of support, but there is reason to be upbeat that people are coming together to save Kolkata's built environment."

Kapur, a mechanical engineer and IIM-Kolkata postgraduate who has been with INTACH since its inception in the mid-1980s, laments the many remarkable Raj-era buildings that have been lost and believes that the latest initiative hasn't come a day too soon.

He says: "The Bengal Club as it originally stood was demolished to make way for Chatterjee International, Dalhousie Institute was torn down to build the Telephone Bhavan and Calcutta University's Senate Hall was replaced by the Centenary Building. The new buildings are eyesores designed by architects devoid of creativity."

While Chaudhuri has for many years now been actively highlighting the plight of architecturally noteworthy structures built by middle-class Bengalis, he and his ilk were galvanised into more concerted action when a Bauhaus building at 3/1 Sunny Park, across the street from where he lives, was torn down to build a multistoried apartment block on a 72-cottah plot a couple of years ago.

The building, constructed in the 1940s, belonged to Rabindranath Tagore's nephew, Josnanath Ghoshal. Its architectural style, marked by straight, clean lines that came into vogue in Germany in the 1920s, was unusual for the time in Calcutta. It could not be saved despite a PIL filed by Chaudhuri and artist Swaroop Mukherji.

Kakkar feels that the people of North Kolkata are more attached to their buildings. "These buildings are a part of their family heritage and a source of pride, so they work to preserve them," she says.

Supporting Chaudhuri's initiative to save entire precincts instead of just individual buildings, she says: "The feel of a locality is very important. Who wants to live in a sterile environment marked by rows of buildings, all looking the same?"

A little bit of chaos, the energy of street life and the bustle of humanity enhance the character of a neighbourhood, Kakkar adds.

Chakraborti has a worry. "Kolkata produces great individuals, but it does not create great institutions. That is a problem. Every good idea has to be institutionalised or it will die with the individual from whose mind it springs. That has been the story of many initiatives in this city," he says.

But it certainly isn't all downhill for the crumbling edifices of a city that has seen better days. Much of the Kolkata riverfront is now back in harness and foreign tourists are shelling out dollars for a ride down the Hooghly, says Kapur.

Three or four of the Calcutta Walks are doing very well and minting money, says Chakraborti.

So, notwithstanding the stumbling blocks, a turnaround might be around the corner for Kolkata. ■



Kolkata's residential heritage buildings have distinctive architecture

transfer of development rights costs the government nothing, and, in fact, will earn it considerable revenue. We urge the government to see this not as a marginal issue, but as one that's central to the city's history and to its future, and to act without delay," Chaudhuri wrote in his appeal to the state chief minister.

A letter of support for the appeal came from Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. He wrote: "We do owe to the future generations a preserved and un mutilated heritage of Calcutta's eccentric but exciting old buildings. I hope we succeed in bequeathing to people in the future the opportunity of enjoying Calcutta's enthralling architectural inheritance."

Chakraborti, while being acutely aware of all the

challenges that the campaign faces and the difficulties of implementing transfer of development rights, believes "what Amit (Chaudhuri) is doing is necessary".

Chaudhuri, Chakraborti says, is the city's first writer to raise questions about its architectural inheritance, residential localities, public spaces and street life. "These had never been addressed in Bengali literature," the architect says. "Only dance, music and art are regarded as culture here. Architectural spaces were never in the realm of cultural discourse."

"Bengali filmmakers have used the city's spaces, but they have never overtly celebrated them and explored how they occupy our mindspace," says Chakraborti. What Chaudhuri has done, he says, is

‘THE MFI SECTOR HAS TURNED 360 DEGREES’

Ratna Vishwanathan on how regulation has been good for business

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE microfinance industry has gone from virtual collapse after being accused of greed in Andhra Pradesh to a formal role in the financial architecture of the country. It has been a significant transition with microfinance institutions (MFIs) realising the benefits of self-regulation and oversight by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Business has been growing rapidly and keeping pace with it has been a change in perception of the roles that microfinance institutions can play. Bandhan has graduated into being a full-fledged bank and others have been given small finance bank licences. Ujjivan and Equitas have had successful IPOs.

Microfinance Institutions Network (MFIN) is the first Self-Regulatory Organisation (SRO) in the financial sector, recognised by the RBI, which keeps a close tab on how MFIs function.

Civil Society spoke to Ratna Vishwanathan, CEO of MFIN, for an inside view of how the sector has bounced back and what the expectations are for the future.

It is quite some time since the RBI set norms for the MFIs. How is the MFI sector doing now?

In 2009, the Andhra Pradesh government came in with a draconian law that almost killed the MFI business. At that time the MFIs were unregulated and clustered in Andhra Pradesh. Seven years later, the MFI sector has turned 360 degrees.

From 2010 the RBI stepped in with very strict regulatory guidelines. Whenever there is a crisis the regulation that comes in is far more stringent than if you have incremental regulation. But there is more trust in the sector because you are in a regulatory framework.

What has this meant in terms of the business MFIs are doing?

The MFI industry has bounced back in a very big way. In 2015, we recorded 61 per cent growth. This year, too, we are expecting 60-61 per cent growth. Last year Bandhan, which was the largest MFI, took away one-fourth of the business. We were at ₹42,000 crore and Bandhan, when it became a bank, took away ₹26,000 crore.

But by the end of December 2015, we were back to ₹42,000 crore. By the end of March we expect to be ₹50,000 crore plus.

We thought it would take us two or three years to recover. But it took us just a year. So growth is happening very fast. Some large MFIs have received



Ratna Vishwanathan: 'The strength of MFIs is in their feet-on-street model'

in-principle approval to become small payment banks. When that happens they will probably take away 50 per cent of the business. But, with the trends over the past three years, we still expect to go back to ₹50,000 crore.

So you do expect sizeable growth?

Yes. But there is a downside. There is enormous investor confidence and a lot of private equity going into the sector. From the perspective of the MFI all this is very good. The flipside, which we are looking at, is over-exposure, client risk, indebtedness and the fact that you are pushing more money onto a smaller number of people.

Post-regulation, the MFI sector is now formally part of the financial architecture of the country. A lot of changes have also been made: we have payment banks, the Jan Dhan Yojana, business correspondents, direct benefit transfer (DBT) and so on. What difference has this new financial architecture made to MFIs?

See, who is an MFI client? A typical MFI client comes from a low-income household and can't give you security or collateral of any sort. The definition for an urban client is an income of ₹1.6 lakh per annum and for a rural client it is ₹1 lakh per annum, as per the RBI. This is the space in which MFIs are lending.

In a country of 1.2 billion people we are covering around 28 million people. Around 50 to 55 per cent of the population is unbanked. You do have the Jan Dhan Yojana, zero accounts, small business accounts etc. They are forming a window for DBT.

Unlettered clients don't want to really engage with brick and mortar structures. Banks, too, don't want to engage with them. They don't have the bandwidth. You

have seven people sitting in a branch and then 250 MFI clients come in. You can't service them.

That's where business correspondents play a role. That is also where microfinance plays a role because their strength is in their 'feet-on-street' model. So for MFI entities at ₹500 crore and less, you get a 12 per cent dispensation and for MFIs over ₹500 crore plus you get a 10 per cent dispensation from the RBI, which helps you cover the cost of the 'feet-on-street' model.

Banks can't do it. It's too expensive for them. The strength of microfinance lies in outreach and that is why the MFI will never cease to have relevance.

In a place like India you have different segments with different financial needs. There is no one model. Every segment requires a different entity so there is space for all.

Does the new financial architecture not have any impact on the MFI sector?

It does. Currently, out of the 10 small finance bank licences that have been given, eight are to NBFC/MFIs who are all MFIN members. Their clients are mainly microfinance clients. They will take time to transit into full-fledged small finance banks. During this process of transition, a number of these clients will continue to be their clients because nothing stops you from doing unsecured business. It's just to hedge against risk that banks bring down their portfolio of unsecured business, which is what the small finance banks will also do over a period of time. There will be an overlap factor.

The worry for the MFI sector would be that whereas they would play like banks and will not at the moment be bound by the regulatory framework that binds NBFCs/MFIs, there will be a certain overlap in how you deal with clients.

These are areas that MFIN is looking at and trying to work on actively. It's not only the small finance banks. Today, banks like HDFC, Yes, Axis etc are directly doing business in the microfinance space and they find it very expensive.

Both the two new banks, IDFC and Bandhan, want to reach small lenders.

This was the base from where Bandhan grew. It was the largest MFI. So even today their clients are still MFI clients. Yes, there will be overlap. There will be learning. You don't have small finance bank models anywhere you can compare yourself with.

I think it will take two or three years before anyone even has a sense of where this differentiated bank is going.

Then you have the payment banks. Now, for MFIs the payment banks are like natural partners because MFIs can't do savings and remittances or take deposits. So if you actually partner with payment banks, and this is in the realm of hypothesis, they would then be able to offer their clients the whole range of products.

For the MFIs that are trying to make this transition to being small finance banks what does this do to the way they are valued?

I think the answer to that lies in the resounding success of the two IPOs the two largest MFIs just underwent — Ujjivan and Equitas. Why would anybody invest so much money in an entity which is not a tried and tested model? The fact remains that they come from an MFI base, which is a very solid base. So the chances of your investment going downhill are not high.

Also, the fact that they were picked up by the RBI to be offered licences implies that they were well-governed entities.

Today, RBI regulations, an SRO and the public gaze have made the sector transparent, more structured and better regulated. There are constant inspections both from the RBI and MFIN. We have put in place stringent structures to ensure compliance with regulation. Our code of conduct is an executable one. If you renege, you pay a penalty.

Are they paying penalties?

Yes. We just got our first penalty cheque. The SRO is new. You don't have a functional SRO in the financial sector anywhere in the world today, particularly

in this kind of space. We are fully funded by industry. We have put in place structures, regulations and so on. I think industry is brilliant in the way it is accepting regulation and the kind of framework that the SRO imposes. There is constant talk of conflict of interest: would guys who pay subscription for your existence allow you to regulate them? Well, they are.

Having been a regulator most of my life I feel that if you are well-governed and well-regulated it gives you the gravitas to do much better advocacy than if you went around being sub-standard and then asked for dispensations.

Are MFIs offering to deliver government schemes?

We used to be the instrument of delivery for the Swavalamban scheme, the previous National Pension Scheme. We are talking to the Ministry of Finance for the new Atal Pension Yojana.

The banks are the aggregators since the underlying assumption is that you must have a bank account. This leaves the MFIs out since we are not a bank. We are trying to work out a solution whereby we will act on behalf of the banks and bring accounts to them and get paid for it because we really can't act as aggregators for the bank.

In fact, the Swavalamban scheme worked very well because of the MFIs. When you have three crore clients and you are going door-to-door, obviously the outreach you have is very effective for delivering government schemes.

Delivery of pensions and other entitlements is a huge issue with people. The view from the grassroots is that people now have so many cards they are confused and don't know what to do with them.

Yes, most of them laminate those cards and don't know what to do with them.

There is nobody telling people how to use those cards. I am sure that there must

be a lot of schemes from the government side — you have bank *sakhis* and so on — but I don't think the depth of outreach is that much.

I think client literacy is an area that needs more focus. There is always the propensity for cross-selling products. People need to know what is good for them. Going forward, MFIN will be concentrating on client literacy.

Are MFIs doing this?

All MFIs are doing something or the other for client literacy. But there needs to be a certain amount of standardisation and a base level of literacy. The smaller the organisation the less resources it will have for this. The bigger ones have very robust dissemination programmes with both visual and audio media especially around grievance redressal. Hence the need for standardisation.

Will MFIs will be providing financial literacy?

No, not just financial literacy. It's all interlinked: financial, social and gender, particularly in the segments we are dealing with.

MFIN does training and capacity-building programmes. The five things the SRO is mandated to do are surveillance, compliance regulation, dispute resolution, grievance redressal, data collection — which we are very good at. The last is capacity building and, going forward, that is what we are concentrating on. We have already made a standardised framework to redress grievances.

Is the MFI sector also expanding into more geographical areas?

Well, one of the issues is over-penetration of smaller geographies. If a geography is doing well and you have a mature client there rather than starting and doing the capacity building yourself, you just jump into the fray. That is one area of concern. Since there is nothing to stop that concentration we are thinking of working with both the banks and agencies like SIDBI to address this issue.

But this is an issue that happens in every business, except that the vulnerabilities in the MFI sector are much higher which is why it's an area of concern. There are MFIs working in the Northeast, in Jammu and Kashmir, and in the red corridor. But the tendency is to cluster together. Tamil Nadu has the highest penetration. In the past, the concentration of MFIs was in southern India but it has more or less evened out now. ■



Women continue to be the backbone of the MFI sector

CyberChef's got warm, homely meals

Kavita Charanji
Gurgaon

IT's the aroma of home-cooked food that you miss the most when you have a new job in a new city. Eating out all over the place at odd hours expands your waistline and shrinks your wallet.

But CyberChef, an online marketplace that also has an app, offers healthy meals cooked by a network of ladies or home chefs. The menu tempts you every day with a range of regional cuisines.

Launched a year ago, CyberChef has already become popular and trusted. In Gurgaon, the food business has been burgeoning because the city is home to a large number of young professionals who have moved here from all over the country.

"We do regional food because that is the way to stand out from our immediate competitors. There is something for everyone who comes to us. Moreover, we are the only ones who still procure food directly from a home chef rather than run a kitchen," says Neha Puri, 24, founder and CEO.

So whether it's *appam* and stew or an *adai dosa* from the South, prawn *malai* curry from Bengal, a Rajasthani *dal baati churma*, or a quirky *keema ghotala vada pav*, the customer logging into CyberChef is assured of a home-cooked meal at a reasonable price.

Puri started CyberChef with her brother, Anuj. Having made it work in Gurgaon, they recently expanded to Mumbai.

The seeds of her idea for a start-up germinated in January 2014. The Mumbai-born Puri came to Delhi after postgraduation in marketing and strategy from Warwick Business School in the UK. She says her lifeline in the UK were the delectable home-cooked meals turned out by a friendly Pakistani lady. That set her thinking.

"I had a bit of her in me when I returned to India. The idea of a start-up in the food business really appealed to me. The market was growing phenomenally and anyone and everyone was entering the food industry," recalls Puri, who operates from Gurgaon where she lives.

Starting with a modest investment of ₹3.5 lakh from their savings, Neha and Anuj were able to muster another ₹55 lakh from family and friends. Soon, CyberChef was off the ground. While Neha handles the Gurgaon operations, Anuj, who studied finance and accounting at Warwick Business School, looks after the Mumbai end. The enterprise has a seven-member core team in Gurgaon and a similar team in Mumbai.

In Gurgaon, CyberChef has 25 active home chefs and a bank of 56 home chefs who can be called upon. The chefs are bonded by their passion for cooking. "They knew how to cook but the problem was that they had never been able to get their food to customers because they lacked marketing skills or could never really support the logistics," says Puri.

Home chef Anjali Adya is a doctor who stopped practising 12 years ago. She wanted to be a full-time mother to her two boys. Baking became her passion. And then CyberChef happened. "I saw their brochure and applied. I got a call for samples and made it to their chef panel," recalls Adya.

"Meeting with Neha gave me confidence and clarity. CyberChef was all about innovation and flexibility and that's exactly what I was looking for."



Anjali Adya, a chef with CyberChef

Adya does desserts — cakes, jams, tarts, soufflés — and continental food. Since her passionate journey with baking started, she has done many workshops with various chefs and academies. "My recipes have the essence of all. My work has consumed me and made me a proud wife and mother," she says.

Sheetal Chopra, also a home chef, has done a short-term course in baking from the renowned Pusa Institute. She loves following her mother's recipes and keeping tabs on Sanjeev Kapoor's new dishes. "Although I had an advertising

and teaching background, I couldn't go out and work because of family commitments. But my link with CyberChef enabled me to turn my hobby into my profession," says Chopra, who specialises in Indian, Chinese and Mexican food and turns out delicious dry cakes.

She says that the selection process of CyberChef was demanding. "I was accepted on board only after Neha and the tasting team had sampled my food and seen my kitchen," says Chopra, who rakes in ₹15,000-20,000 a month.

Chefs are an integral part of the venture but so is the minute planning and operational aspect. The food cooked by the chefs has to be collected every day, sent to a distribution centre and, as the orders come in, despatched to customers.

"We work on an inventory or liability basis with our chefs. For example, if I give the chef an order of 10 boxes of prawn curry, I take 10 boxes from their home. If I am able to sell 10, that demonstrates my marketing capability. If I can't that is a liability for me and I have to figure out how to use the leftovers optimally," says Puri.

She is supported by her team in Gurgaon. Maria George, a hospitality and marketing professional, also doubles as a chef sometimes.

She says the team constantly has to analyse what really sells on its website, plan menus, improve products and market them well.

"Our focus right now is on Gurgaon which is an experimental city since consumers here are keen to sample different cuisines and are open to ideas. So we need to see how to expand the business and explore new avenues of growth," says George.

One route is to hold interactive events with corporates and building societies so that CyberChef stays top of the mind. Pune is the next market for the enterprise which also plans verticals like *thalis* on wheels, food trucks and later, expansion into Quick Service Restaurants (QSR). The Puris are on the lookout for corporate tie-ups to finance their growth plans.

Diversification will enable CyberChef to take on more seasoned competitors like Holachef, Bite Club, Inner Chef and iTiffin. Ultimately, it's the home chefs who will turn the tide for the venture. ■



Neha Puri, founder and CEO of CyberChef

Contact: www.cyberchef.in Phone: 0124-6512433.

INSIGHTS

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The teacher's learning curve



DILEEP RANJEKAR

BACK TO SCHOOL

SITTING in a largish room of a Block Development Office in Khargone district of Madhya Pradesh at 3 pm in 41 degrees Celsius heat was not quite a pleasant experience. However, neither the high temperature nor the irritating sound of the fan really mattered as the conversations unfolded over the next two hours. There was intense debate on several suggestions for teacher development and other such initiatives to contribute to improving the quality of education in the block. The group included teachers and government academic support functionaries of the block, such as the Block Resource Coordinator and Cluster Resource Persons. My colleagues from the Azim Premji Foundation were facilitating the meeting. This was one of the preliminary meetings under the 'Voluntary Teacher Forum' (VTF) to be initiated at the block level.

What was remarkable was that each member was participating voluntarily. It was the result of our team members' efforts at the ground level and their trust that the Azim Premji Foundation had something valuable to proffer.

Such events are happening across the 45-odd districts where we are currently present. All this leads to the concept of the Teacher Learning Centre (TLC), that becomes a fountainhead for increasingly more teachers voluntarily participating in conversations, discussion fora, seminars, workshops, large get-together events for both teachers and children (referred to as 'Teacher Melas' or 'Bal Melas', respectively) and many more activities.

For those curious about the kind of work the Foundation does on the ground, when I explain the VTF or TLC the first question they ask is, "Why should the teachers or other functionaries participate in such events/activities?" While everyone likes the concept, there is scepticism about how it would work without a government order in a sustained manner. The reality is that thousands of teachers, teacher educators, head teachers and education functionaries are currently associated with the voluntary forums that have been created near their homes and the number is likely to grow significantly.

It is not easy at all to carry this through or make it happen. It needs enormous mobilisation by our team. And there are several issues/principles

involved in creating traction with people in a manner such that it creates the urge in them to visit the space beyond school hours.

Here, I am going to deal with only two critical underlying principles.

The first principle is: 'An indefatigable belief in basic human goodness'. Whether you relate it to Theory Y propagated by Douglas McGregor in the early 1950s or any similar theory, it simply believes in the positive energy among human beings. It believes that all people want to do something good,

to do their work but because they are unable to do it due to several constraints – including their own ability to contribute. And therefore, if enabling conditions are created or if the constraints are eliminated or significantly reduced, the professionals would intrinsically want to perform better. Illustratively, teachers are unable to realise their full potential because of the poor quality of teacher education that they have received or other disabling factors that temporarily inhibit their performance and productivity.



Teachers are unable to realise their full potential because of the poor quality of teacher education that they have received or other disabling factors that temporarily inhibit their performance and productivity.

constructive and positive in life. It believes that professionals want to excel and do a good job in carrying out their responsibilities. It believes that teachers want to teach well and ensure that their students learn well. It believes that education functionaries want to contribute meaningfully so that the quality of school education improves. It believes that the current unsatisfactory quality of school education is not because people don't want

The second principle is: 'Understanding the process of human development'. Corporate organisations are typically known to invest significantly large amounts in training their employees. However, even my colleagues in corporates would agree that classroom training as a methodology of human development is a much failed concept. In the first 10 years of our

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Campaign for safety

BHARAT DOGRA

THESE is probably no word in the dictionary that causes as much distress, shock and apprehension as the word accident. Of course, fatal accidents cause the most distress but often the injuries caused by an accident are so serious, painful and disabling that victims consider their situation to be worse than even a fatal case. Even accidents listed as less serious or minor can be very disruptive for their victims.

Analyses of various accidents based only on the number of fatalities seriously understate the problem. In fact, some of the most distressful stories of accidents are not those of fatalities but of very painful and disabling injuries.

An accident is, by definition, sudden and unexpected. In minutes or even seconds a life full of joy and achievement is changed to one of endless stress, distress and pain. It is a traumatic experience. The problem increases in poorer societies and in those with privatised healthcare systems as the difficulties of patients and their families increase when they cannot afford treatment and hospitalisation costs. In such cases, the threat of permanent disability also increases. If the victim happens to be a child and if the injury is a very painful one then the distress of the victim, the parents and other close associates is beyond description.

Despite all this, consciousness about the importance and potential of accident prevention is very low. This is the sad reality in India where more time and resources are spent on various kinds of superstitions to keep bad luck at bay rather than on rational efforts to prevent accidents and improve safety.

Whatever public consciousness exists in India about accident prevention is confined mainly to traffic accidents. Although data for some countries suggest that the number of occupational accidents and domestic accidents may be higher, public

consciousness about well-thought-out efforts to prevent these accidents is very poor. Even greater public awareness of road accidents has failed to check the highly irresponsible attitude that many people have towards road safety. In fact, several factors combine to make India's roads very dangerous.

There is thus a clear need for a strong public campaign to reduce all kinds of accidents. Such a campaign has the potential to prevent millions of deaths, disabilities and other serious injuries within the next decade, apart from curbing massive economic loss. Apart from its main contribution of reducing human distress majorly, even in purely

economic terms this can be a very cost-effective campaign as economic losses prevented by an effective campaign outweigh the costs incurred in such a campaign.

While prevention of accidents should be the main focus, the campaign should also aim to improve significantly the availability of timely and proper medical care to accident victims. This also has immense possibilities for saving human lives.

For the sake of this campaign accidents can be classified mainly into five categories: transport and traffic accidents, domestic accidents, occupational accidents, accidents relating to crowds and special gatherings including stampedes, and miscellaneous accidents. Perhaps we can have a separate category for educational institutions and for high-hazard and catastrophic accidents but this is a matter of detail.

The classification followed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) is different as accidents are grouped according to type of accident such as falls, drowning, fires and burns, road accidents, electric shocks and so on. But for a public campaign or a government programme resulting from it, the classification proposed above may be more useful.

Such a national campaign should focus on prevention. It should inform people how to reduce accidents and mobilise various people's initiatives for prevention of accidents. The government must frame a comprehensive policy for reduction of all kinds of accidents. The national campaign should prepare policy drafts to help and motivate the government to move quickly and effectively in this direction. One of the specific proposals can be the creation of a National Accident Prevention Authority with state chapters and branches at district level.

The national campaign should build linkages with other like-minded campaigns. In addition, efforts can be made to have links with campaigns in various countries with the spirit of sharing achievements and problems as well as learning experiences. The media can play a useful role in the success of such a campaign. ■

TOTAL NUMBER OF ACCIDENTAL DEATHS IN INDIA

Type of Accident	2013	2014
Air Crash	45	15
Ship Accident	-	7
Collapse of Structure	2832	1821
Drowning	30041	29903
Electrocution	10218	9606
Accidental Explosion	449	1194
Falls	12803	15399
Factory/Machine accident	955	797
Accidental Fire	22177	19513
Firearm	1203	633
Mines or Quarry Disaster	387	210
Traffic Accident	166506	169107
Stampede	400	178
Other Unnatural Cause	45917	55482
Unknown Cause	20113	12963
Total	314046	316828

Source: National Crime Research Bureau (NCRB) 2014

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Foundation's experience we derived some crucial learnings:

- The probability of people development is higher if they voluntarily initiate the process. In other words, people need to take charge of their own development.
- Classroom training does not yield significant results — especially in changing practices at work. The development effort is a combination of theory and practice where one creates a virtuous loop of learning-practising-sharing-learning.
- Mere one-time interface with the given set of people is not very impactful — especially if the objective is to cause changes in the work practices. We need to engage with people in a sustained manner over a longer period.
- One type of effort or method does not work for all individuals. Different methods need to be deployed

for different people. A multi-modal approach is a must — as opposed to 'one size fits all'.

Everything in our country is on a humongous scale and our education system is no exception. The need to contribute to teacher development is at the core of improving the quality of our education system. Currently, the institutions established by the government at the State, District, Block and Cluster level are grossly inadequate to reach out to the eight million teachers engaged in 1.5 million schools — leave aside taking care of their individual capacity development needs. There is no alternative to creating 'voluntary spaces' for teachers to take charge of their own development. Spaces that are convenient, comfortable and conducive to teacher development. Spaces that are closer to a cluster of homes where many teachers live. Spaces that are well-equipped with learning resources such as a library, a laboratory, digital learning resources and enabled by appropriate hardware and Internet

connections. Spaces that are facilitated by resource people who have a wide social, educational and subject matter perspective, who encourage meaningful discussions related to children and their development in the most meaningful manner.

The voluntary forums must identify from among the existing competent teachers those who are motivated to contribute to the development of their peers and create a much larger resource pool of teacher educators — to address the enormous dearth of such educators across the country.

If teachers develop a deeper understanding of the connection between child development and society, of the importance of the integrated nature of the so-called subjects and of the processes through which children learn more effectively they would obviously teach better. They would evaluate their own current practices and make a conscious effort to modify them. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation.

Goodbye to POSCO



KANCHI KOHLI

FINE PRINT

IN 2005, I began following the POSCO (Pohang Steel Company) story closely. The legislation for setting up Special Economic Zones (SEZs) had been enacted the year before, and POSCO's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the government of Odisha was much in the news. It was lauded as the largest foreign direct investment in India and seen as a pet initiative not just of Odisha but also of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Much has transpired since then. Two of the several components listed in the MoU have been mired in legal tangles and faced stiff resistance on the ground. At least three committees have intervened to examine lacunae in the Environment Impact Assessments (EIAs). The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has once sent back the environment clearance of the steel plant to the environment ministry for review and at another time restricted illegal tree felling in the area.

The first NGT order also directed that the impact assessment and project design be based on land optimised for a 4 MTPA project, rather than 12 MTPA as proposed in the MoU. While the environmental approvals sought were based on EIAs for a 4 MTPA plant, the company had been acquiring land in the area envisaging the construction of a plant with four times the capacity. It was not surprising given that the state government had assured that it would facilitate all approvals and keep the project area free of encumbrances. A close watch from the PMO's office also perhaps gave the company the necessary confidence.

What did not go as per calculations for POSCO were two, amongst several other, events. First, the POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS) emerged as one of the strongest organised social movements in recent history. Even though the community in the project area was divided, the villages that were the backbone of PPS stood strong despite pressures, arrests and restrictions on basic amenities.

The second event was the procurement of the iron ore lease, both for use in the steel plant and for export. Studies of the economics of the plant carried out during 2008-10 had begun indicating that steel production was never the primary objective of

POSCO's investments in India. What they were eyeing was the mineral-rich Khandadhar area in Sundargarh district of Odisha. For this, POSCO had to contest against public sector companies such as Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd (KIOCL) who were looking to seek mining leases in the same area. They competed both within and outside court for allocation of the mining lease.

For years, the company's quest for iron ore close to 400 km from the site of the steel plant and port has not been realised. With the change of government at the centre in 2014, the once favourable office of the prime minister was no longer an ally. Moreover, the route for preferential leasing was replaced by an auctioning process

condoning the delay in filing the appeal.

Even as speculation continued and no formal announcement was in place, the counsel for POSCO mentioned before the NGT that the company was unlikely to utilise its environmental approval, which is under challenge and is due to expire in 2017. This was perhaps the first formal admission of the company's inability to carry forward the project. Mind you, there is still no announcement of exit. Given this, and as the company requested, the NGT has disposed of the appeal challenging the environment clearance before it since 2014. The appellants have the liberty to approach the tribunal if the EC is revived or reissued.

As has been the case for the past few years now,

groups like PPSS and other rights-based activists working with the affected people once again demanded a clear indication of whether the project would continue. People who had lost out on their betel leaf cultivation livelihoods have begun reoccupying the land once lost to POSCO. This is not without the company filing cases around trespass and encroachment. There is no talk of compensating the years of livelihood loss, whether the company exits or keeps its plans in abeyance. Some villagers and activists associated with the resistance continue to serve jail terms.

On 28 April the in-principle approval to set up an SEZ granted to POSCO was also cancelled, based on an assessment that progress on the project is not satisfactory. News about the company seeking the intervention of the current PMO is now old and

there is speculation that POSCO is unlikely to secure the mining lease even if it opts for the auction route. People living around the mine who have organised themselves as the Khandadhar Suraksha Sangram Samiti (KSSS) are looking to resist operations irrespective of whether it is POSCO or not.

Businesses and governments might well be drawing lessons from POSCO's 11 years in India. But the rest of us need to as well. This is not only a story of a successful protest; nor is it just a tale of a sharply fought and well-researched litigation battle. From the regulatory point of view, POSCO's experience has lessons on everything that should not be done while seeking environmental approvals. This includes breaking up project components, presenting shoddy impact assessments, acquiring more land than is required for the first phase, and resorting to non-disclosure, among other things.

But once we are out of the legalese and the paperwork, this contemporary narrative has at heart real lives of real people who have lost their homes and livelihoods for 11 years or led a life of forced resistance for the same period. Even if the company formally announces withdrawal, who is going to be accountable for those lost years? ■

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What did not go as per calculations for POSCO was the emergence of a strong people's movement.

through a revised mines and minerals regulatory law promulgated in early 2015.

By now POSCO was without a final forest clearance issued by the state government and its environment clearance faced a second challenge before the NGT after it had expired in 2012 and been extended in 2014 following a review process within the then Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). The litigation on the latter had been dragging on from the very start when news started emerging that the company had begun withdrawing its operations from India. Almost no substantive hearings of merit took place, except those related to

Rain on the roof



S. VISHWANATH

WATER WISE

IMAGINE a city located at around 900 metres above sea level. Imagine also that there are no perennial rivers nearby and imagine that the city has a population of 10 million and growing rapidly. That, in short, is the city of Bengaluru, the capital of Karnataka.

For a city famed for its moderate climate, in its infancy, water supply to citizens was not a problem. The population was small, the demands less and a myriad 'tanks' (man-made lakes for irrigation) were sufficient for water supply — usually drawn through wells. However, as early as 1874, problems started cropping up. The tanks were fouled with sewage, the rains were sometimes insufficient to fill them and there was water scarcity. The then Dewans, advisers to the Maharaja of Mysore, were farsighted and one of them, Sir Sheshadri Iyer, commissioned the construction of an expanded earthen reservoir at Hessarghatta on the Arkavathy river. In 1896, the scheme started to supply water to Bengaluru.

This was followed by a second reservoir on the Arkavathy at Thippagondanahalli, commissioned in 1934. The water-pumping from this reservoir was incrementally enhanced until full-capacity utilisation was achieved at 135 million litres per day.

In the meantime, the first specialised water and sanitation utility in India, the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), was set up in 1964. It promptly went about its task of enhancing water supply to Bengaluru and commissioned the first of the water supply schemes from the Cauvery river from a place called Thorekadinahalli. In 1974, Cauvery water first reached the city. This was a phenomenal engineering task in which water was lifted and pumped in three stages over a distance of 95 km and over a height of 300 metres. The Cauvery project will deliver 1,310 million litres per day to the city but that is the ceiling for now of the amount that can be drawn. But population and economic growth keep demanding more water.

Groundwater has therefore been the supplement for the city and it is guesstimated that there could be about 400,000 bore-wells in the city, pumping up anywhere between 400 million litres to 600 million litres daily. Bore-wells have been drilled to depths of 1,200 feet and farther.

RAINWATER HARVESTING

Since the city has hit a plateau for water availability, it has looked at ways of water management. Demand management and leak reduction, wastewater reuse and recycling, and rainwater harvesting have been identified as three possible ways to manage the disparity between demand and supply.



Harvesting rainwater isn't difficult or costly

In the early days rainwater harvesting was collecting stormwater in tanks. A good example was the Sankey tank, built in 1882 to supplement the water requirements of the city. However, once water started coming from far-off sources, the tanks within the city were neglected. Many of them were filled up and converted to other uses such as the bus stand, a hockey stadium, a football stadium and so on.

As early as 1984 Prof. D.K. Subramanian of the Indian Institute of Science talked about the need to build large decentralised reservoirs and store rainwater for supply to the immediate geography. Dr B.P. Radhakrishna, a doyen among geologists and the head of the Geological Society of India, also spoke about the need for rainwater harvesting and for recharge into the aquifers of Bengaluru.

In 2007 the Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) made rainwater harvesting compulsory for buildings to be built on plots above a certain size. But this was not followed seriously.

In 2009 the BWSSB came out with its rules for rainwater harvesting, making it compulsory for all new houses located on plots of more than 1,200 square feet to have a rainwater harvesting structure. For older buildings it was made compulsory for plots of 2,400 square feet and above. The rules specified that, for every square metre of roof area, a 20-litre storage or recharge structure should be created and for every square metre of paved area 10 litres of storage or recharge structure should be created at the minimum. It was also specified that

the recharge structure should be of a minimum depth of 10 feet.

With the assistance of various groups and with land provided by the BBMP, a rainwater harvesting theme park was created on one and a half acres of land in Jayanagar 5th block, 42nd Cross by the BWSSB. Called the SIR M. Visveswarayya Rainwater Harvesting Theme Park, the place showcases all forms of rainwater harvesting including rooftop, stormwater and land-based systems. At the park, guidance is also provided to individual building owners on how to design and construct a rainwater harvesting structure.

SUCCESS STORIES

Balasubramanian's house is located in the leafy suburbs of Bengaluru. He had a well dug when the house was under construction. Over the years, the well ran dry. By collecting the rainwater from his roof and directing it through a filter made of charcoal, gravel and sand into the well he has not only recharged the aquifer but also improved the quality of the well water. Now his open well supplies him water throughout the year.

Dr B.R. Hegde is a retired agricultural scientist from the University of Agricultural Sciences in Bengaluru. He made a separate sump for rainwater next to the main sump meant for water supply from the utility. A portion of the rooftop rainwater was diverted into this new rainwater sump tank. This now provides him with much of the non-potable water requirements for his garden.

Bengaluru has relatively well distributed rainfall of an average of 920 mm spread over 60 rainy days and occurring over eight months of the year. The 34-acre Rainbow Drive is located in Sarjapur Road on the outskirts of the city. It has no connection to the water utility and must depend on groundwater for all its water requirements. Its residents have come together and built over 250 recharge wells to pick rainwater and stormwater and send it to the aquifer. They have been able to overcome flooding which used to occur quite frequently and have also benefitted the bore-well considerably.

The residents of Classic Orchards on Bannerghatta Road desilted a huge well in their community and removed 100 truck-loads of silt. They have channelled their storm-water to the well. During a downpour, millions of litres of water flow into the well. They also have rainwater harvesting for their clubhouse.

Though the laws made rainwater harvesting compulsory quite a few years ago, it has yet to become popular with people. When supplied with subsidised piped water, citizens neglect to make their own contribution to the sustainability of water resources for the city. The institutions too have not driven rainwater harvesting and its implementation enough.

Given the severity of the drought this year all over India, and given the fact that the almost single-point dependency on the Cauvery river is an invitation to problems, it is time rainwater harvesting and the saving of lakes in Bengaluru become a people's movement. ■

Next in Goa visit this museum

Subodh Kerkar has created a hub for contemporary art, history and much more

Civil Society News
Candolim

FROM the outside, it is a high and yet somewhat boxy structure in an industrial estate, but inside is a provocative diversion from the sun, sand, beer and curry holiday world that Goa has come to be known for.

Bright indigo figurines point the way to the Museum of Goa on a very short drive from the commercially busy Candolim and Calangute. There is a lot more indigo in the frontage as you arrive. From there on unfolds a passionate effort to showcase contemporary art. It is a world far from the beaches and shacks and loud parties.

The museum is the brainchild of Subodh Kerkar, a sculptor and installation artist. His studio used to be located here till he sold a house in Calangute and put the money into constructing the museum, which at 1,500 square metres lays claim to being the largest private museum in India.

"It is my mission to take art to the masses," says Kerkar as he settles into his sofa in his second floor office. It is not a planned interview, but he is easy to find as one climbs through the museum discovering what it has along the way.

He is also happy to talk. So, the chance sighting of a leaflet at the Fortune Hotel leads to both museum and founder. "Contemporary art is mainly for the elite these days. I would like to break that cultural barrier," Kerkar explains. "I don't want to be known as an art dealer. This museum is a kind of hybrid between an institution and gallery. We do sell our works, but our objective is much greater."

Contemporary art is what is created at one point of time. It is the "expression of an era". So, Kerkar's museum is open to the whole range — realistic, super-realistic, installation, sculpture, multimedia, video, documentary.

"In India we have a lot of good contemporary artists," says Kerkar. "The only thing is that they do



Subodh Kerkar with his creation Pepper Boat in a gallery featuring his father's paintings



One of the indigo figurines leading the way to the museum

not have an audience. They do not reach the masses."

There are at least 50 or 60 artists doing good work in Goa. They have trained in Goa and then at higher levels in Baroda and Mumbai. But they go unnoticed.

In India there is only the National Gallery of Modern Art where contemporary work post the 1940s can be found. "No other city in India has such a museum, which is a shame," he says.

In Europe, on the other hand, the average child is exposed to art because there are lots of galleries and museums with free access for students. Governments, wealthy individuals and companies put their money in such public facilities. He recalls visiting South Korea and finding a world art museum created by Samsung.

"I have therefore taken it upon myself to put Goa on the art map of the world," says Kerkar. "The Museum of Goa is for artists from all over the country and for artists from around the world. Art is universal and does not believe in Goan and Maharashtrian and Delhiwallah."

But it is in Goa that Kerkar hopes to be able to make an impact by changing the way people perceive the state. He would like Goa to be known for its history, architecture, biodiversity, cuisine and so on.

History he is particularly interested in and says Goa was once one of the big landing destinations in the world for ships along with Lisbon and London. There is also a lot of local history in villages waiting to be discovered. On a stray request he began doing heritage walks and now that is an

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Kerkar's museum will cut across forms to include music, theatre, design, video art and films.

activity linked to the Museum of Goa too.

"Anywhere in the world, whether you are a great connoisseur or not, you go to a museum. When you are in Paris you have to go to the Louvre, the Picasso museum, the Rodin museum.... But you come to Goa and you have absolutely bullshit art displayed by the government at the airport. It is so horrible that it is a slap in the face of all practising artists here."

"Delhi airport is also bad. In Mumbai's new airport standards have been maintained because Rajiv Sethi was given the responsibility," he says.

The Museum of Goa opened just six months ago and so it is still early days. But there is a lot planned and the museum will go beyond being a repository to serving as a hub for activities and ideas. It will cut across forms to include music, theatre, design, video art and films. There is a small indoor auditorium.

The building has been designed by the well-known architect, Dean D'Cruz. It cost about Rs 3 crore to put up the structure, the money coming from the house in Calangute that Kerkar sold.

Kerkar's personal journey is interesting. He is a qualified physician who had his own practice and small nursing home while continuing to paint and then became a sculptor and installation artist. He finally gave up practising medicine and devoted himself entirely to being an artist.

His first and only teacher was his father, Chandrakant Shankar Kerkar, who was a realistic painter of outstanding calibre. But he couldn't earn



from his art and so remained a government schoolteacher all his life. One of the displays at the museum is of Chandrakant Shankar Kerkar's works.

As a young boy, Subodh learned from his father who kept getting transferred from one village school to another. He never saw painting as a profession. Nor did Subodh really, so he went on to become a doctor to earn a living.

"My father was my first teacher and in fact my only teacher till the age of 16. I was a village boy. My father was a village schoolteacher. With each transfer I changed schools. I studied in the Marathi medium till Class 7 or 8 and then in Class 9 and Class 10 the medium was English. So it was from my father that I learned."

Chandrakant Shankar Kerkar learned to paint from S.L. Haldankar who was a celebrated painter of the 40s renowned for his classical water colours and portraits.

"I took a long time to come out of my father's influence and his realistic mode," says Kerkar. "But over time I got exposed to the world's museums of contemporary art and then the museums became my teachers. From being a realistic painter, I moved on to conceptual art, installations and so on."

Kerkar's father's paintings are brilliant scenes from the Goa he knew. For art to thrive it needs to be interwoven with lifestyles and social customs, be reflected in skills and find expression in architecture and technologies. That harmonious everyday balance has been shaken at the grassroots by colonial rule and the pattern of development that got entrenched thereafter. Can contemporary art be meaningful in an everyday way again? Or has too much been lost?

"I think it can. In the life of a nation 150 or 200 years is not much. I am an optimist," says Kerkar. ■

www.museumofgoa.com

Magic and revelry at the Rann

Susheela Nair
Ahmedabad

DAWN was breaking when we walked on the crusty Great Rann of Kutch and the crumbling underfoot added to the magical experience of watching the sunrise. The Great Rann stretches for miles, from Kutch district in Gujarat to Sindh province in Pakistan. That morning we seemed to have the entire Rann to ourselves. But there was a nip in the air and we shivered.

On full moon nights in winter the Rann glitters with encrusted salt. It is a surreal sight and tourists arrive in droves to watch the glorious sunset. The Rann springs to life with vendors, traditional musicians and camels ferrying guests from the entry.

During the monsoon the Rann changes colour. Its landscape is flooded first by seawater and then by fresh riverwater. We were indeed fortunate to be there to see this geographical phenomenon. The ocean recedes once the monsoon is over and the Rann is blanketed by crystals of salt.

In the dry season, the Rann becomes a vast expanse of hard, dried mud. The salt in the soil makes the low-lying marsh almost barren. Standing in the salty desert, I remembered Amitabh Bachchan, Gujarat's tourism ambassador, strutting around the white desert and intoning the catchy tagline, 'Kutch nahin dekha, toh kuch nahin dekha,' in his trademark baritone.

We returned to our luxury tents at Dhordo village. The Tent City springs up only during the winter or during the Rann Utsav, a three-month carnival that showcases Kutchi culture and handicrafts. This tiny village appeared on the tourist map thanks to the vision of Gulbeg Miyan. A chance meeting with Narendra Modi 30 years ago gave him the opportunity to put forward his idea of hosting a festival in the village. It would help villagers earn an income and promote their native arts.

His son, now the village sarpanch, has taken it upon himself to promote the Rann Utsav. The indigenous art and crafts sold at the festival is bringing progress to this remote village.

The Tent City is aesthetically pleasing. It is dotted with colourful tents, street lamps with straw bins as lampshades and traditional *bhunga* structures (spherical mud huts with conical thatched roofs). The tents resemble the traditional dwellings of villagers near the Great Rann of Kutch and are perfectly designed for hot, arid summers and freezing cold winters. All the luxury tents have air-conditioning and an attached bathroom with running water.

Some highlights of the Tent City are the rows of food and handicraft stalls which spring up during



Tourists enjoy a camel ride in the salt laden terrain of the Rann of Kutch

SUSHEELA NAIR



Women artisans from nearby villages sell a range of artistic stuff

the Rann Utsav. It's a veritable shoppers' haven with an ensemble of exquisite hand embroidered and block-printed fabrics, embroidered leather footwear, wood carvings, copper cow bells, paintings and textiles which glitter with exquisite embroidery and mirror work.

The next morning we headed to Kala Dungar, the highest point in Kutch. The journey to Kala Dungar is as scenic as the peak itself. The observation deck at Kala Dungar offers an amazing, panoramic view. The White Desert from up there looks like a huge river of milk. On a clear day, you will also spot a bridge, known as the India Bridge, beyond which lies Pakistan.

We visited the ancient Dattatreya Temple at noon but, unfortunately, missed a most unusual sight. Apparently, a group of hungry jackals makes its way to a raised platform near the temple, where the temple priest offers a *prasad* made of rice, *dal* and jaggery. The practice of feeding the jackals goes back 400 years.

According to legend, when Dattatreya walked on the earth, he stopped at the Black Hills and found a band of starving jackals. Being a god, he offered them his body to eat and as they ate, his body continually regenerated itself. Because of this, for the past four centuries, the priest at the temple has been preparing a meal of *prasad* that is fed to the

jackals after the *aarti*.

From Dattatreya Temple we headed to the neighbouring hamlet of Nirona to see how artisans work and sell their exquisite crafts like wood carvings, metal wind bells and flutes, wooden toys, metal-craft, shell-work variety of weaving, patchwork and other ethnic styles of embroidery, and pottery. When a group of women saw us, they squatted on the street to peddle beaded chains, dazzling earrings, embroidered bags, puppets and

colourful flutes.

What impressed me most was the local Rogan Art. It is more than 400 years old and has made its way to the White House in the form of a gift to President Barack Obama from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Exclusive to this village in Kutch, these paintings have a lot of Persian influence. A Khatri Muslim family based in Nirona started this art. While returning from the Kutch region, I wondered if Kutchi women artisans infused and embellished energetic colours in their handicrafts and clothes to compensate for the lack of colour in their stark and arid landscape. ■

FACT FILE

How to reach: Bhuj is the nearest town (80 km) and has a few flights from Mumbai. A better option is to fly to Ahmedabad and take a train or travel by road to Bhuj.

Best time to visit: October to February.

What to eat: Savour the delicious Kutchi food. *Khichdi*, *kadhi* sweetened with jaggery, *bajra na rotla* with a variety of vegetables, *chatni* (paste of garlic and chilli powder) *khaman dhokla* and *subji* form the staple. Try the Kutchi *dabeli*, which is a spicy potato preparation spread between two layers of *pav* or burger bread and garnished with pomegranate, peanuts and so on and served with a variety of chutneys made from tamarind, dates, garlic and chilli.

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Bant Singh addresses a public meeting

‘Bant is a Dalit icon’

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHEN Bant Singh's daughter was brutally raped in 2000, he was just another Mazhabi Sikh in the caste-racked countryside of Punjab. But he fought back, registering a case against the attackers and enduring a beating that left him minus his arms and one leg. Bant's immense courage made him a hero and an inspiration.

A member of the CPI(ML), he is from Burj Jhabhar village in Mansa district and his story is a powerful one. Mazhabis are Dalits and aren't supposed to raise their voices. But Bant insisted on having the upper caste attackers punished. The beating he endured didn't stop him.

An enigmatic rustic singer, Bant's voice rings out fearlessly. His story has been told in the past (see *Civil Society* August 2006). But a detailed account has long been overdue. Nirupama Dutt fills this gap with her book, *The Ballad of Bant Singh: A Qissa of Courage*.

Dutt travelled to Bant's village, lived with his family, and tried to see his life through his eyes. She succeeds in capturing many important details. She also traces the history of Dalit oppression in Punjab and thereby gives the reader a more complete picture of the social milieu in which Dalits in Punjab live.

Dutt is a well-known poet, journalist and translator who lives in Chandigarh. She writes in Punjabi and English. Her published works include *Ik Nadi Sanwali Jahi*, *Lal Singh Dil: Poet of the Revolution*, *Stories of the Soil*, amongst others.

When did you read about Bant Singh and what

struck you about his story?

Bant Singh's story was all over the media and it was amazing. I was in Chandigarh when he sang at a rally after the amputation and a Left-wing dramatist dedicated a play to him. However, the lines that had the most impact on me were by Annie Zaidi in her book, *Known Turf*. She wrote: "What came as a complete shock was the fact that caste was such a major issue in Punjab especially when I covered the case of Bant Singh, the Dalit activist. It was only then that I realised how poverty caused so much religious divide in the state."

Annie further recalled her meeting with Bant at the hospital in Chandigarh, wondering what she could say to a man whose limbs had just been amputated.

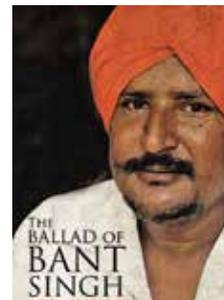
The account was moving but I never thought that I would do his biography. The idea came from a publisher. However, I was not really sure that I would be able to add more than what

had already been said about him. I did not know him personally and the personal has always been important in my writing.

How did Bant Singh react to the idea of a book?

Bant is an incredible man and takes it all in his stride. I called him rather uncertainly, saying that I wanted to meet him and that it was suggested I do a book on him. So I asked over the phone when I could meet him. His reply was, "Come when you will. I will be there to meet you fresh as a flower in a mustard field." The earthy voice came through loud and clear on the telephone. Something happened and my fears were dispelled.

Those days I was struggling to translate the biography and poetry of Punjab's contemporary



The Ballad of Bant Singh: A Qissa of Courage. By Nirupama Dutt. Speaking Tiger ₹295

poet, Lal Singh Dil. He had died and I felt that I had to translate his work into English as a tribute to a dear friend, a confidant.

But meetings with Bant, his comrades and his family started, and, after many journeys together, the book began taking shape. Bant opened his world to me, never losing patience, and told me the smallest of details. He would introduce me to others,

saying, "She is writing about my life and all that happened in it."

Was there any aspect he wanted to emphasise or speak about specifically?

No. Bant just let me know everything — visit his favourite places, meet people he was close to, but he never interfered in any way. I was free to write what I wanted. We had struck a note of trust.

While reporting this story did you encounter any hostility?

I had never reported the story directly when it happened. Later, while working on the book, I did a few pieces on him in magazines and a newspaper. The latter brought me a hate mail. A few others tried to discourage me but I never encountered hostility. Bant was already an acknowledged hero when I met him.

Has awareness of the injustice done to Bant and his family made an impact in his village?

Yes, the impact is not just in his village but in the region. Bant has emerged as a Dalit icon. The reason he became intolerable to the upper castes at the grassroots was that he was challenging power structures at village level. He had worked effectively for the release of several bonded labourers as the leader of the Mazdoor Morcha of the CPI(ML) and he sang the revolutionary songs of Sant Ram Udas so well that in a way he carried forward Udas's tradition.

Has Bant's struggle helped to popularise Left politics in Punjab?

Left parties are no longer popular in Punjab even though there are several over-ground and underground Left outfits doing niche work. However, Bant's struggle has brought the Dalit struggle to the foreground. He is today the face and the spokesperson of the Dalit movement in the state.

Will you be translating your book? Is there a specific audience you would like to reach?

The book is being translated into Punjabi, Hindi and Marathi but not by me. I am very happy that is happening because the story belongs to the Indian people who do not know English. Bant is unlettered but my moment of joy will be when his children read out the book to him in Punjabi. I have called it a ballad or a *qissa* of courage in the tradition of the ballads of Punjab and this one brings not a note of tragedy but one of hope and struggle. ■

The perils of research

Amit Dasgupta
Mumbai

THIS is undoubtedly a brilliant book that will be discussed for a long time. It is the product of an exploratory joint research carried out by the International Conflict Research Institute, based in the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland, and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Canadian organisation which funds research projects in developing countries. The primary objective behind the project was to ascertain research challenges while studying societies affected by violence and conflict, and whether applied research could offer alternatives — perhaps even solutions — for peace and well-being.

Conflicts, as the editors explain in their introduction, can be violent and militarised or they can assume less visible — but no less devastating — forms of expression. As conflicts multiply, interact and escalate, the domestic knowledge infrastructure of societies is frequently targeted directly and indirectly.

Schools and universities may be drawn into the conflict. Curricula can become politicised, libraries destroyed, books burnt, and even students, teachers, researchers and staff targeted. Journalists, public intellectuals and critics are often systematically undermined and silenced. The result is a knowledge-depleted society, precisely at a time when knowledge is critical to finding a solution to the enraging conflict, creating blind spots.

Violently divided societies are a reality. More important, extreme forms of violence spill across territorial boundaries like a parasite. The book not only engages militarised violence, such as in Darfur, Northern Ireland, and elsewhere but also the sex trade in South Asia and HIV/AIDS in post-apartheid South Africa. This helps the reader in understanding the heterogeneity of violence that divides societies.

While research can help in better understanding the underlying causes behind the violence and thus in policy formulation to contain and finally resolve the conflict, it can — even if it is methodologically sound and scientifically valid — exacerbate tensions if its conclusions are seen as threatening the interests of one or more groups.

It is important, therefore, to understand the political and societal contexts within which research is conducted and that research can, most certainly, be misappropriated to influence policy and justify violence. We are aware, for instance, of how anthropological literature was used to justify apartheid and Nazism, or psychological research employed in intelligence testing using culturally inappropriate measures, or the use of archaeological and historical research to exert moral or legal claims to contested territory. Can it be possible, the authors ask, for a lingua franca to be developed among the



research fraternity that is conscious of the dangers that research faces and the opportunities it offers for misuse?

Consequently, 'shared understandings' were developed of some basic terms and vocabulary. In the process, the authors discovered that while it is possible to develop a broad conceptual road map, a number of sub-literatures apply to each sub-field requiring fine-tuning the lingua franca, much like knowing a language but also being cognisant of dialects and nuances.

Through the book, different contributors bring out the challenges that researchers face despite being committed to 'good' research. For instance, Brendan Whitty raises the important question of 'accountability'. The term means different things to different people but the more complex issue is that there are multiple, often competing, entities to whom the researcher is accountable. He takes the examples of Nepal, Kenya and Argentina. Nepal and Kenya are nations where violence ebbs and flows

in the lives of its inhabitants, while Argentina's people have lived long in fear of shadows that the military dictatorships have cast. In other words, the conflict contexts are widely differing and implicate the researcher in disparate ways.

Colin Knox takes up the case of Northern Ireland, where it was assumed the signing of the Good Friday agreement in 1998 would bring violence to an end. It did not. De-weaponisation did not mean violence would vanish. Indeed, violence continued albeit in an altered form, often referred to as 'recreational violence', as a consequence of inter-group rivalry among the Northern Irish youth. In other words, violently divided societies are not restricted to militarised war zones.

Kevin Kelly, on the other hand, takes up the case of HIV/AIDS in southern Africa to demonstrate the impact research has on a pressing global epidemiological problem. He discovers how staunch support is generated for measures to prevent HIV/AIDS even without any reliable empirical evidence! Indeed, the urgency for supporting policy measures became so acute that solid research evidence was often ignored or overlooked.

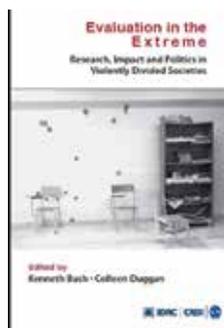
The book concludes that there are a number of lessons that need to be learnt. First, unless there is good, solid research to back conclusions, the tendency would be to rely on anecdotes, impressions and, worse, particularistic interests and biases. Second, context must be integrated into research methodology. Third, there are ethical implications and it is important to know the ethical tipping point of evaluators in conflict zones.

This is a timely book because of the all-pervading nature of violence and the fact that, in some form or other, we live in violently divided societies. The chapter on HIV/AIDS demonstrates how violence need not be restricted to militarised conflict but extends to cases of extreme inequality and misery. No society appears to be immune to this.

At the same time, people tend to take stands on subjects, whether they be the LGBT community or Muslims, religious freedom or the government in question. How do we make the transition to pure objectivity when we don the cap of researchers?

But it is also true that governments can connive to distort data or to selectively use evidence to champion their agenda and, in the process, marginalise or oppress people. This has been part of global history and continues even today. When and how is 'solid evidence' put up to confront dictatorial actions of government and make policy reversals?

No immediate answers are likely in the near future nor, indeed, should there be. These are questions not only of science and objectivity but also of ethics and well-being. ■



Evaluation in the Extreme. Edited by Kenneth Bush & Colleen Duggan. SAGE ₹895

Jack in a pack

THE Bismi hypermarket in Thrissur, Kerala, is probably the first to stock and sell packaged sliced raw jackfruit and sliced jackfruit seeds. "This is the jackfruit season. Yet consumer response has been very good," says Basil Joseph, store manager.

Unripe jackfruit and its seeds are dunked into different curries like *chakka aviyil*, *chakka thoran* and *chakka managa curry* -- a happy blend of jackfruit and raw mango -- and *chakka puzhukku*, a dish eaten with fish curry which was becoming less popular.

It is the People's Service Society Palakkad (PSSP) that has recently started producing minimally processed raw jackfruit and jack seeds for the market. The jackfruit, after being sliced, is frozen and sent in cold storage to Thrissur. Both products -- processed raw jackfruit and sliced jack seeds -- are available in 500 gm packs. Raw jackfruit is priced at ₹72 and jack seed at ₹120.

Now, with the availability of these in a ready-to-cook form, it is very easy to make these preparations. Raw jackfruit is priced at ₹72 and jack seed at ₹120.

Jackfruit campaigner James Joseph says it has now been proven that the glycemic index of raw jackfruit is far lower than those of rice and wheat. It is, therefore, a good food for diabetics.

Jackfruit is kept at room temperature in the hypermarket and its shelf life is just a few days. The question is how to make jackfruit last longer. "Through trial and error we have some-



how figured out how to store and transport jackfruit," says Basil Joseph. No research institution has worked on the minimal processing of jackfruit.

Jackfruit is available in Kerala for nearly 10 months of the year. It should be possible to increase its shelf life. A few Krushi Vijnana Kendras (KVKs) are trying to standardise minimal processing of jackfruit. ■

Contact: People's Service Society Palakkad:
Shaji Elanjimattom - 094471 80679 (also on WhatsApp)

Reported by: Shree Padre

Field helper

A grassroots innovator, Mahipal Chary has invented a cultivator-cum-weeder that is very useful for farmers. His machine resolves one of the most pressing problems that farmers face during the peak agricultural season -- shortage of helping

hands. If farmers don't find agricultural labour at the right time to do weeding, especially of cash crops in rainfed areas, their standing crops get adversely affected.

Chary, who has studied till Class 10, understood the farmers' plight. His cultivator-cum-weeder is very affordable. It can be used by farmers in fields which have some moisture. His machine is mounted with a 4 hp engine. Its

width is 22 inches. This size enables the farmer to use the cultivator-cum-weeder for crops whose row distance is more than 22 inches. An accelerator is provided in the left grip. There is a handle to maneuver the machine. A farmer can cultivate three to four acres per day with this machine. It consumes one litre of diesel per acre. On demand from farmers, Chary has made a version with a 5 hp engine which can be used for light ploughing in fruit gardens. The machine is priced between ₹32,000 and ₹35,000. Chary's cultivator-cum-weeder can also be coupled with an irrigation pump to draw water from a well, tank or pond.

Contact: Creative Minds-
Phone: 9855001578 or Mahipal Chary-
Phone: 9866922168.

Contributed by: Palle Srujana



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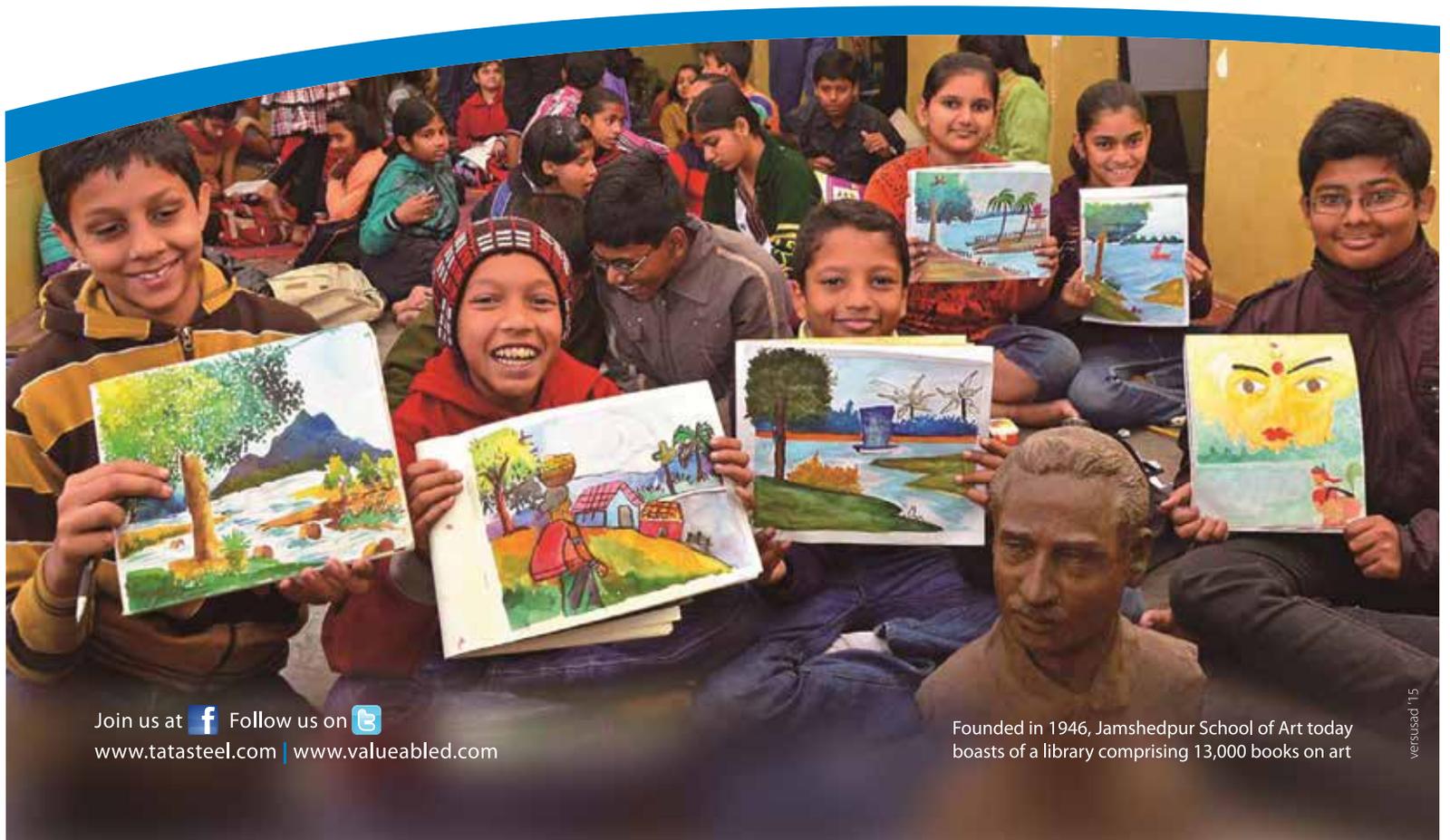


SHAPING THE FUTURE

Education - the key to a sustainable future

Education has always been the thrust area for Tata Steel. In 2014, Tata Steel ensured the following in Jharkhand:
Scholarships to more than 3,000 SC/ST students | More than 16,000 adults became functionally literate

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Founded in 1946, Jamshedpur School of Art today boasts of a library comprising 13,000 books on art