

Civil Society

BEYOND THE MAOISTS

FOREST LAW IS GOVT' S BEST WEAPON



'NGOS ARE CRUCIAL FOR UNIQUE ID'

Nandan Nilekani says the Unique ID number will be given to tribals, homeless and the disabled

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Tribal and forest communities have a grim view of their situation. But governments have laws like the Forest Rights Act which can defeat Maoism

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

The Maoist muddle

A government which worries about Maoist violence should perhaps consider with the same urgency going beyond the Maoists. It should address the question of how forest people can be included in the benefits of economic growth in ways that nurture their identities and give them real ownership. Forest areas require investment and development but not without being ecologically sound and sensitive to the Adivasi reality. This should be the challenge before people in government as well as business leaders.

We in *Civil Society* did a cover story called the 'Naxal Reality' several years ago. So, we have covered this ground before. We have also been regularly reporting on forest rights, land acquisition, SEZs and the growing number of conflicts involving industry.

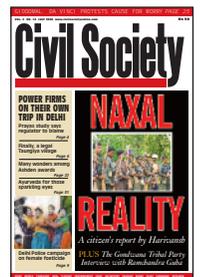
But in recent months Maoists have held the nation in thrall. TV shows, newspapers and magazines are full of their exploits. Passionate essays have appeared about the plight of the marginalised and how they have become easy recruits for extremists. The Union government we are told twice over is ready for both action and talks. And yet last month when people from forest communities journeyed all the way to Delhi to demand proper implementation of the Forest Rights Act, there was hardly anyone around to give them a hearing.

Adivasis have long lived with this insensitivity of the mainstream. But the passing of the Forest Rights Act in 2006 has given them expectations. The Act gives people rights over land they have traditionally used and also allows them access to forests on which they depend in so many ways.

However, serious problems remain in the implementation of the Act and a good legal initiative seems to be going waste. This is the time for the government to listen and engage at the grassroots. It is the time to put in place sensitive local administrators and modernise the forest department. It is also an opportunity to work with the private sector to create regulatory frameworks that make companies much more accountable than they have been thus far.

Taking on the Maoists will be a much more complex task than sending in helicopter gunships and commandos. It will require winning back the faith of people through a process that won't be easy to begin and will take a long time to deliver results.

Our cover story seeks to bring to you the voices of individuals who have been following the forest issue and have played a leadership role at the grassroots. It is our belief that the Forest Rights Act is a huge opportunity which should not be frittered away. But a new orientation is needed to initiate a process which is really inclusive. It will require much more than talks with Maoists who in most cases may be no better than brigands seeking power in some crude form and exploiting the Adivasis in much the same way as the mainstream has so far.



Publisher
Umesh Anand

Editor
Rita Anand

Editorial Consultant
Saibal Chatterjee

News Network
Shree Padre, Jehangir Rashid, Vivek S Ghatani, Rina Mukherji, Shreyasi Singh, Gautam Singh

Photographers
Gautam Singh
Lakshman Anand

Layout & Design
Virender Chauhan

Write to Civil Society at:
E-2144 Palam Vihar
Gurgaon, Haryana 122017
Ph: 9811787772
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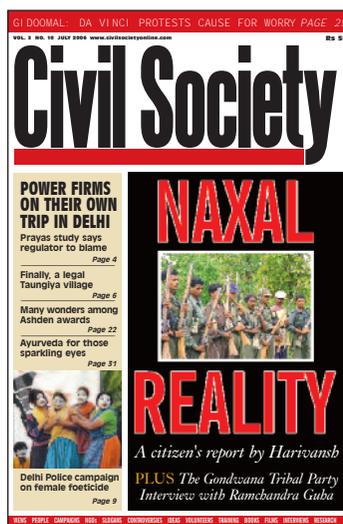
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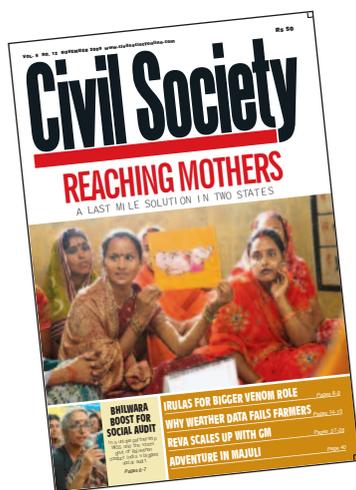
Civil Society
RIGHT PLACE FOR POLITICS

IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Social audit

It was interesting to read about the social audit conducted in Bhilwara district of Rajasthan. This is one method which can be spread to all villages and panchayats to ensure transparency. It is well known that corruption is highest in government schemes meant for the marginalised in rural areas. Through spread of social audits people will become more aware of what their entitlements are and it will be more difficult for lower

level functionaries to cheat them.

Ashish Sengupta

We should have more ministers like CP Joshi who go ahead and unearth corruption in their own constituencies. He did not shy away from facing the fact that siphoning of government money is common. Good governance depends on leadership from the top. If leaders are honest and insist work be done in a transparent, efficient manner, the bureaucracy will begin to change. All it needs is a few committed people to change the world.

Anand Sahay

There have been a lot of complaints about corruption in NREGA. A NREGA committee should be set up to examine these complaints and make sure the people get their entitlements. Unions are getting interested in enrolling NREGA workers and it is hoped they too will join hands with social activists to ensure that there is no corruption and inefficiency in the scheme.

Abhilasha

Irula

Your story on the Irula Cooperative Society shows the value of tradition-

al knowledge and skills. The Iruulas are at par with highly qualified scientists studying herpetology. In fact, they have more hands on experience. Such skills can be rightly used to start a venom industry in India. With the rich snake biodiversity we have, we can become world leaders in export of venom and serum.

Ramakrishnan D

You cannot put back snakes anywhere because they can bite people. Nobody wants a snake in their backyard. Okay, you can slip it into some farmers' field but even they don't like snakes. In the old days tigers had a bad image and were mercilessly killed. The same is happening to snakes.

Kanta Rai

Jackfruit

Shree Padre's cover story on jackfruit talks about a low rate of success. We have grafted as follows:

Plant a stone in a small polythene bag. When two inches tall, make the stone into a wedge by cutting both the sides and insert this wedge into a cleft made on the scion which is attached to a parent tree.

In other words the cleft should be from below upwards and the wedge should go into it.

Tie with a polythene strip and separate the scion after four weeks.

This gives 100 per cent success.

Dr Oswald D'Souza

Development news

With due respect to Professor Vilanilam's research, I would like to say that things are changing in the English language media and the electronic media. We see much more information and documentaries on development issues in newspapers, magazines and on TV than we used to ten years earlier. Finally, environment, health, education and urban development are being reported on. I think this trend will increase because such reportage is getting a positive response. Journalists get awarded for doing development stories.

Gayathri

Regional newspapers need to catch up with the English media on their coverage of development news. They don't fulfil their function of nation building. There is a strong need to build up media at grassroots level and give relevant information to farmers, forest communities, health workers, teachers and labour. Community radio could fulfil this role.

Ameeta Singh

BaLA grows: Lifts schools in

Civil Society News

New Delhi

A few thousand schools in India have undergone a quiet makeover in the past five years. Their exteriors have been repainted in cheerful colours, toilets improved and classrooms made more airy. Playgrounds have been redeveloped – in one case by using discarded tyres.

To make learning less daunting, the walls in these schools are covered with basic lessons in math, geography and general science. Doors are being used as protractors to teach angles. Window grills have taken the shapes of letters of the alphabets.

All this has been possible thanks to BaLA or Building as Learning Aid, an inspirational effort by Kabir Vajpeyi and his wife, Preeti, who are both architects and lead an outfit in Delhi called Vinyas.

BaLA is based on improving the physical parameters of the learning environment. If there are playgrounds and toilets, children tend to go to school. If the teaching comes off the walls and floors instead only being through books, more tends to get learnt.

BaLA is an effort to see the world as a child does. It relies on open spaces, greenery, surfaces on which to doodle and scribble, contraptions to learn from.

Kabir's involvement with education began with the Lok Jumbish programme in Rajasthan. He was among architects chosen to innovate with existing school buildings in rural areas. The challenge was to repair and renovate structures creatively with a budget of Rs 25,000.

After Lok Jumbish, Kabir and Preeti and the team they work with at Vinyas put together some 100 odd ideas which schools elsewhere in country could implement. This was BaLA and it became a book brought out with the help of the World Bank.

Civil Society first covered BaLA four years ago. In this interview we catch up Kabir and Preeti to find out how the BaLA model has spread.

It has been more than a decade since BaLA as a concept originated. What has been its acceptance and spread since then?

There has been acceptance of BaLA in Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and in Delhi in schools under the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC). In addition you will find varying interest levels in BaLA in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

It is difficult to say the actual number of schools in which BaLA ideas have been adopted, but there must be a few thousand across the country. Of course Rajasthan was where it all began under the Lok Jumbish programme though at that time it was just taking shape and it didn't go under the name of BaLA.

BaLA has served as an inspiration, prompting people to come up with their own ideas.



Preeti and Kabir Vajpeyi at an NDMC school

Innovation, flexibility and local ownership are exactly what we seek. Our model is not based on replication.

Recently, in October 2009, after a workshop in West Bengal, an anonymous participant sent an SMS to us – "I think BaLA is neither yours nor mine. It is perhaps OURS!" We later identified him to be a panchayat office functionary from Bankura.

As the idea has grown, new stakeholders have also joined in and taken something forward. Just see the range from inception till now – Lok

Jumbish, DFID, District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), UNICEF, the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Aga Khan Foundation and the World Bank.

How does the idea come to be adopted? What are the points of entry?

In Gujarat, the Education Secretary championed BaLA. He picked up a copy of our book at a Vigyan Bhawan event in January 2006 and read it

Gujarat, HP, Delhi



LAKSHMAN ANAND

was only when they were convinced that they invited us to do an orientation-cum-design workshop for all their 250 engineers in the state at a place called Mandvi.

It took a year, but sanction was given for Rs 2.5 lakhs per school for 100 schools in Gujarat. Now more than 700 schools are covered, across all districts and blocks.

In Himachal Pradesh, a copy of the BaLA book happened to be passed on to the young State Project Director of the SSA in the state. He was already thinking about making the schools in his state colourful by painting them. He went through the book overnight and called us the next morning, saying: "I want to do this in Himachal. How do we move forward? When can we meet?"

He held a workshop with us in Shimla. District officials, principals, engineers and architects were present. When questions were raised about where the money would come from, he declared that he already had a sanction from the Government of India of Rs 25,000 per school for 1,200 schools. In less than 50 days, he had got this money budgeted and sanctioned.

The workshop must have had an impact. Several districts in Himachal took up BaLA. Solan is one very good example with more than 100 schools adopting it.

In the New Delhi Municipal Corporation it was the Chairperson and Director Education who drove the implementation of BaLA. They got all their departments to buy into the idea. In March 2007, the Planning Commission provided Rs 2 lakhs per school for the 925 schools in Delhi.

What are the processes of working with government, of finding acceptance and so on?

Once the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in Delhi was clear about BaLA as a concept it had no hesitation in asking the states to take it on immediately – at their own initiative. It was the ministry which suggested that we do a book which would serve as an introduction for administrators, planners, headmasters, engineers and architects. The book finally came out in Hindi and English in 2005 with the support of the World Bank.

The MHRD distributed the book across states in various forums. We noticed a very senior bureaucrat, (who had been very cool to BaLA initially) quietly carrying about 15 copies of the book from the event at Vigyan Bhawan. He later told us that, barring two copies which he kept for his office use and personal collection, he distributed the rest.

Our involvement with Lok Jumbish proved to be important. The DPEP that later led to the SSA

were both born out of learning from Lok Jumbish.

We understood the process in its true spirit. Just as SSA is conceptualised as integrated and interdisciplinary work, we also looked at funding and the implementation in an interdisciplinary way.

It was a combination of planning, pedagogy, training of teachers, community mobilisation, gender sensitivity, Integrated Education for the Disabled (IED), civil works, research, monitoring and evaluation, project management, etc.

We believe the power of the idea, the prodding of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, the support of the MHRD and the book on BaLA along with coming up of the SSA across states with an integrated approach to elementary education – all helped in creating the right environment for initial acceptance.

How do you encourage innovation under BaLA?

Innovation is a need and not a by-product. Frankly, it is ancient wisdom that we have only now come to understand and appreciate. We have employed that wisdom in disseminating BaLA through the government system.

For centuries in our subcontinent, building design and construction practices had a process that allowed each stakeholder to play a creative role. This was true from the shilpi (architect) to the artisan. It not only reinforced the stake but also created ownership in the work. Thus, craftsmanship was ensured in the work at the most minute level.

If BaLA has to go to such a large number of schools, there is no single entity

that can control design, construction and supervision. But then BaLA is also about a certain quality and sensitivity. So, the best course of action is to provide a frame of the essential ingredients of BaLA within which each stakeholder has the scope to innovate.

BaLA is about being child-friendly, fun-oriented, using local resources and so on. Within this frame the administrator gets the freedom to innovate with management and monitoring systems. The engineer gets the freedom to improvise and adapt or develop a new idea. An artisan who is making a BaLA element with a new refined process of construction is given credit for that improvement. A teacher has the space to come up with a new use for a learning aid. All innovations get our support in further refining them. But there is tremendous ownership at all levels.

An engineer once told us, "We make buildings worth crores of rupees in our district, but somehow do not want to show them to anybody. Yet we want everyone to see a BaLA school even though we may have only improvised with the structure for a few thousand rupees."

This is ownership. Each school with BaLA is different – in terms of choice of ideas and how they are made or used. It is because of this that our initial list of BaLA ideas in 2001 has doubled. It is not a question of one school being better than another, but each being unique.

'Each school with BaLA is different. It is because of this that our initial list of BaLA ideas in 2001 has doubled.'

through on his flight back to Gandhinagar. He decided to develop 'Dream Schools' for Gujarat thereafter – by using BaLA ideas. But on realising that words like 'dream' don't work in the government, he changed the name to 'Model Schools'. He asked his SSA state office to get us on board.

The SSA office had learnt about us at a workshop we had held in Pune and were anyway moving towards us. They were very thorough. They applied whatever understanding of they had of BaLA in four schools in Kutch. They then took the feedback of the children and the community. It

World watches India's rural surgeons



Foreign doctors at a recent conference in Rajasthan

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE world is looking at the work done by the rural surgeons of India as a model in public health care which is both affordable and sustainable and not tied to corporate profits.

The annual conference of the Association of Rural Surgeons of India (ARSI) was held at Pipalia Kalan, in Rajasthan's Pali district, in the first week of November. It was their seventeenth conference and it attracted significant international participation from Africa, Bangladesh as well as Britain and America.

"The importance of this year's meeting is that the world increasingly recognises the Indian model of low-cost facilities with community participation as the way forward in meeting the huge demand for health care in the developing world," says Dr JK Banerjee, one of the early members of the rural surgeons' movement in India.

Dr Banerjee currently lives in retirement in Dehradun, but he is a legend in his own time. He was invited to Tanzania last year and the African interest in India was in evidence at this November's Pipalia Kalan meeting where 61 physicians from Nigeria and Tanzania were present.

As the world grapples with the cost of privatised health facilities and the pitfalls of insurance, rural surgeons here have shown that it is possible for doctors to stop being driven by money and return to the values of their profession instead.

Developing economies need doctors who practice among the poor and provide them affordable treatment. Rural surgeons restrict themselves to general surgery because this where the demand is greatest. They also set themselves up in remote places and train local people to work in their hospices.

When the Rural Medicare Centre (RMC) was set up two decades ago at Mehrauli in Delhi by Dr Banerjee, his wife and a few other physicians, it was just a tin shed. It has been the same story for many of India's 500 rural surgeons.

The rural surgeons charge very affordable fees. A surgery at the RMC costs Rs 1,200. In the beginning it used to cost Rs 200. The OPD fee even today is Rs 20. But they don't believe in doing

'The world increasingly recognises the Indian model of low-cost facilities with community participation as the way forward in meeting the huge demand for health care in the developing world,' says Dr JK Banerjee

charity. Theirs is an alternative business model for public health care based on earning less, cutting costs, innovating with surgical techniques and being accessible.

They are skilled physicians whose hospitals and clinics are mostly located in places where the health system does not reach. They could be delivering babies, fixing hernias, removing stones, setting bones, doing hysterectomies and much more with very meagre resources and technology.

However, rural surgeons get little recognition within India. The government does nothing to promote their approach to public health care. It doesn't make it easier for them to set up their small facilities.

The National Rural Health Mission, into which huge sums are being poured, similarly ignores them – though it would seem that they are a ready pool of talent to be drawn on for such a purpose.

Asked why this so, Dr Banerjee says: "Politicians and bureaucrats are in the grip of the mafia of high-tech driven doctors."

He says all the government's attention is focussed on high-cost, privatised health care, when what are required are facilities which can serve the majority cheaply. India has just 0.6 hospital beds per thousand when the World Health Organisation (WHO) norm is four beds per thousand. Even the beds that exist are concentrated in the cities and are mostly beyond the reach of average people.

Asked what the rural surgeons would like the government to do in India, Dr Banerjee says a policy environment is needed. Reaching the maximum number people at an affordable cost should be a national objective.

In the absence of such a priority rural surgeons continue to battle the system whether it is in getting finance or establishing facilities. Training has suffered. A certificate in rural surgery started with the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has petered out. Similarly, a course under the National Board is petering out.

"African doctors are very interested in learning from us," says Dr Samar Basu, a highly qualified gynaecologist. "They had a big presence at our Rajasthan meeting and want to come back to learn more."

Dr Basu was the head of the scientific committee of the recent conference where surgeons spoke on a variety of innovations developed in the course of their work in different challenging environments. There were presentations on inexpensive diagnosis of cervical cancer, an indigenously developed uterine manipulator for laproscopic hysterectomies, management of peritonitis in a rural setting and so on.

"What we have seen in India has amazed us," says Dr Tunji Adenuga of Nigeria in a letter to the Association of Rural Surgeons of India (ARSI). He and other Nigerian doctors want to come back to India and spend time at facilities being run by ASRI members.

The African doctors found the IGNOU course material so useful that they took back a large number of books and want to buy more.

"We have bought the modules for your CRS programme for local adaptation and we still need more for our members," says Dr Adenuga.

'Let RTI carry on, don't tinker with it'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

INDIA's Right to Information (RTI) law is acknowledged as one of the best in the world. Use of the law has been growing both in cities and in villages as people have found it effective for exposing corruption and winning entitlements. It is also one of India's few laws which have been drafted with the assistance of activists and then adopted by politicians across parties.

Attempts are made from time to time to tinker with the provisions of the law in an effort to make it less effective. These efforts mostly seem to emanate from sections of the bureaucracy which may be concerned about the authority of people in government being diminished by too much transparency.

Each time this happens, activists come out to protect the law from dilution. Once again, the National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information (NCPRI) has challenged a move to amend the RTI Act.

Civil Society spoke to Nikhil Dey, one of India's most experienced and committed RTI campaigners, about the proposed changes that the NCPRI has objected to.

What are the objections of RTI activists regarding changes in the RTI law?

The first is the exclusion of the deliberative process which is another way of saying that notings made in files will not be disclosed. They want to keep notings out of the purview of the Act. The second is the proposed exclusion of so-

called 'vexatious and frivolous' applications. For government officers to pick and choose which application is vexatious and frivolous is not a good thing. Both proposed amendments would destroy the Act.

It is also being considered to increase the time after which Cabinet notes will be made public. Already Cabinet decisions come under RTI only after they are taken. Now they want to increase the time so you won't get this information immediately.

Another issue is that the government wants NGOs with 'substantive funding' to come under RTI. What we are saying is that everyone working in the public domain should be transparent and open to scrutiny.

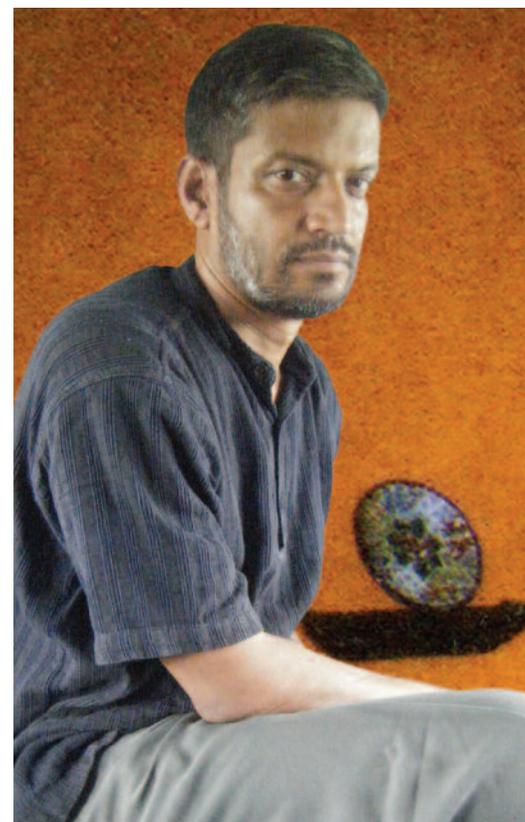
The question arises what is 'substantive' funding? Is it 50 per cent or 20? Even if you are not well endowed, and you get cheap land for your organisation, this would be 'substantive'.

With more and more privatisation there is more routing of funds. You should be transparent and open.

As per the Act, if any organisation is required to provide information to the government under any law, then that information should be available to the people.

We met Prithviraj Chauhan, Minister of State for Personnel. The government says the intention is to strengthen the RTI Act. We have said if you need safeguards, put them in the Rules. For 'vexatious and frivolous' applications you can rephrase the application.

If there are technical issues, the Rules can be changed. For instance, there is no provision for an acting Chief Information Commissioner (CIC).



Nikhil Dey

We feel there is positive energy for RTI and suspicion of changes. Let it carry on.

We have suggested a National Commission for RTI with representatives from civil society, which can deal with such problems and the minister reacted positively.

It has to be a participative process.

Why are changes being proposed in the RTI from time to time?

Clearly there is a lobby, may be bureaucrats, who are working at it. But there must be some political support. It won't be easy to change it, even politically. The CPI came to our protests. Both the Left and the Right will oppose it. The Congress was positive on this law and even agitated for it. RTI has a political constituency. It also has support within the bureaucracy, though such bureaucrats are in a minority. We have been assured that nothing will be done without proposed changes coming into the public domain and being opened up for public consultation.

If the proposals are positive, we can support it. We don't want to be an exclusive group. Consultation in a National Commission will set a trend for citizen's participation in legislation.

NGOs have been proposing various names for the post of CIC. How do you think the CIC should be appointed?

The process must be transparent. Actually we have been pushing for transparency in all commissions. Suggestions will come. Under RTI we have as an example the appointment of the ombudsman.

A panel of names is suggested. The names are put on the website, one month in advance and people can put in their views. It has become a provision. Giving a month provides an opening to finding out about the person, if he is corrupt etc. It can be brought to notice. Allow people to provide inputs and suggestions.



RTI is supported by a lot of positive energy as this campaign picture shows

Makeover for Delhi's historic

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

THE drainage system of Delhi – an elaborate network of big and small nullahs (drains) that runs over a distance of 350 km – was built seven centuries ago by the Tughlaks. Today, under the unrelenting onslaught of decades of unplanned urbanisation, these nullahs have been reduced to veritable garbage dumps all across the city, posing grave risks to public health and the environment.

With illegal colonies dumping their waste into them and the city administration turning a blind eye to the rapid degeneration of the drainage system, these stinking nullahs are full of sludge, sewage and silt. They breed mosquitoes and eventually pollute the river.

The nullahs are unable to perform the tasks that they were created for – carrying storm water into the Yamuna and serving as groundwater recharging bodies.

One of the most visible fallouts of the destruction of nullahs is the utter chaos that Delhi's congested roads are plunged into every time the city receives an hour or two of heavy rainfall.

But there are intimations of hope on the horizon. In an "urban regeneration and renewal" initiative promoted by Morphogenesis, an Indian architecture firm, plans have been drawn up to revive the long dormant nullahs of Delhi in the run-up to next year's Commonwealth Games and bring about sustainable change.

The Delhi Nullahs Project (www.delhinullahs.org), the brainchild of Mani Rastogi, managing director of Morphogenesis, aims to transform Delhi's age-old wastewater system into "a usable transportation and recreational network". According to Rastogi: "Restoring nullahs would be the basis for effective and sustainable upgrading of the capital's infrastructure... This model is applicable not only in Delhi but other cities across the country."

Indeed, the experiment of reviving traditional drains and turning them into spaces that can be used by the urban community for multiple purposes has proved hugely successful in cities like Seoul (South Korea), Fuzhou (China) and Valencia (Spain), among other places. "In Seoul," says Anupam Yog, Managing Director of international economic development consultancy firm Mirabilis Advisory, "an entire stretch of road was ripped away to facilitate the regeneration of a drain."

The drainage system revival plan entails cleaning the nullahs of garbage at source instead of letting all waste and sewage flow down across the city to ineffectual treatment plants. But that is only a part of the project. Morphogenesis envisages the creation of lush walkways and cycling paths along the nul-



Stretch of a nullah being covered up to make a parking lot for the Commonwealth Games



Anupam Yog

lahs in closed loops within localities and last-mile connectivity to mass transit routes.

Also on the anvil are plans to develop these green lungs as entertainment and recreational zones built around Delhi's numerous architectural monuments, and grow native plants around the nullahs to slow down the surface run-off and allow storm water to seep back into the soil to replenish the groundwater.

However, this mission, timely as it is, is predictably up against an unyielding system and a disinterested government. Anupam Yog, who is an integral part of the project, admits as much. "A lot more needs to be done before this can be called a full-fledged project. The impact has been pretty telling and public perception is changing. What is still missing is political will. That is why we are in an aggressive advocacy mode to secure the buy-in of private enterprises, the government and citizens. This project is emblematic of all the challenges and opportunities of urban regeneration," he says.

As Yog points out, over the last two decades sev-

eral attempts have been made, but in vain, to clean the Yamuna and regenerate Delhi's nullahs. "This time around, we are looking at a holistic solution rather than just a beautification project," he says.

As part of the Delhi Nullahs Project, Mirabilis Advisory has joined hands with India Habitat Centre to establish a public awareness platform, Urban Habitats Forum. In September last, the Forum hosted the 1st Habitat Summit to highlight the immense possibilities inherent in the revival plan for the nullahs of Delhi.

The idea is to create a citizen-led "Games legacy" that will make a long-term difference to the lives of the people of Delhi. At the Habitat Summit, Morphogenesis put up a three-dimensional installation depicting the significant facets of the Delhi drainage system restoration project and its numerous beneficial spin-offs. Says Yog: "In the Yamuna clean-up projects of the past, the focus was never on the nullahs, from where the problem of pollution really emanates. What is needed is a new and creative approach to the project."

The Commonwealth Games organisers, Yog fears, are not in a position to grasp the problem in its entirety. "This has to be seen as an opportunity to seek a long-term solution that uses traditional technology embedded in the city for centuries. We have

nullahs

LAKSHMAN ANAND



been using outmoded methods for too long," he says.

The Commonwealth Games organisers have covered the nullah behind Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium with concrete slabs to create a parking lot for VIPs. "This might be a temporary arrangement but the damage will be permanent," warns Yog. "The slabs can only hide the eyesores that the nullahs have become; they cannot clean up the mess. Instead the nullahs should be restored to their former state and projected as tourist attractions."

Madhukar Gupta, who was the vice-chairman of Delhi Development Authority (DDA) when a comprehensive study of the nullahs – 18 main ones plus 15,000 subsidiary drains – was first commissioned in 2004-2005, describes the degeneration of this system as "a complex, multi-dimensional issue".

Having kept close tabs on the problem for several years now, he believes that the Delhi Nullahs Project hasn't been conceived a day too soon. "Taking it forward is absolutely essential because of the multiple benefits that will accrue. I am not sure, though, that the entire project can be completed before the Commonwealth Games is upon us. Some stretches can certainly be done by then, but this will have to be a longer term project," says Gupta, who retired recently as Union home secretary.

'NGOs are crucial to Unique ID'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

AS work begins on providing Unique Identification numbers in India, there is huge interest in knowing how getting a number will solve the problem of sourcing data on individuals and speed up the process by which social and financial inclusion takes place.

Groups in the development sector hope that Unique Identification numbers will smoothen the processes through which people can claim their entitlements and access the organised economy. If this really does happen, the project will be truly revolutionary.

Nandan Nilekani, Chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), told *Civil Society* that groundwork for the project has begun, but much needs to be thought through.

The following are extracts from an early interview on how the UID will work and what to expect from it.

What exactly is Unique Identification? Will it be on a card or just a number? What details of a person will be encrypted? Are we looking at biometric details?

The Unique Identification number provides people with a mechanism to uniquely verify and confirm the identity of a person – to prove that "you are who you say you are." It will be a unique number linked to your basic demographic and biometric information, with which you will be able to prove your identity easily across public and private agencies in the country.

The UID will be a number, not a card. However, the various public and private agencies that partner with the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to issue UID numbers will have the option of printing the number on a card.

All the information collected on the resident will be encrypted. We are planning to collect the basic details of the individual – Name, Date of Birth, Gender, Father's and Mother's name, Address, Photograph and sufficient biometric information to verify identity, which could be in the form of fingerprints.

Do you see Unique IDs speeding up inclusion? If so, how will you bring the extremely poor, homeless and so on board?

We see UID numbers as a very inclusive effort – the Authority's approach is consciously pro-

poor, and focussed on enrolling the underprivileged across the country. We are designing our model so that the poor, who often lack identity documents, have other ways to verify their identity while enrolling a UID number, such as verification by their community. We will also make special outreach efforts to reach the UID number to the homeless, the disabled, tribals and other marginal communities.

And once clear identity is available to the poor, the government will be able to tailor programmes and schemes to reach the poor directly, for example by providing them benefits through UID-linked bank accounts.

Are there any specific government schemes that you are targeting?

We plan to partner with a variety of government programmes, who would then become 'registrars' who issue UID numbers on behalf of the Authority. This would likely include programmes such as the NREGA and public delivery systems such as the PDS.

Several ministries would be involved. Has any process been worked out to coordinate with them and ensure implementation?

We have had talks with the various Ministries and government departments we would like to partner with in issuing the UID number. After we reach agreements with them on partnering with us as registrars, we will work together on the various enrolment and verification processes, and the technology they would need to adopt for the UID number. In addition, the two committees – the Biometric Standards Committee and the Demographic Data Standards and Verification Procedure committee – will establish the various standards our registrars would adopt while issuing the UID number.

How would you like NGOs and people's movements to help?

The NGOs and people's groups will be indispensable to our efforts. I believe they are critical when it comes to, first, understanding people's concerns and challenges around identity and privacy, secondly, in reaching the UID number to vulnerable sections, such as the very poor, the tribals, women, and the homeless; and thirdly helping us implement effective, and empathetic enrolment and verification processes for the UID number.



Nandan Nilekani

Warmer Ladakh has more to eat

Rina Mukherji
Leh (Ladakh)

CLIMATE change is leaving Ladakhis rather confused. This cold desert perched on the roof of the world is now warmer. There is more rain. Ladakhis are seeing these changes as a mixed blessing.

Till some years ago Ladakh received merely 35 mm of rain. No farmer or household counted on rainfall for crops or for drinking water. Ladakhis relied on fresh water from the precipitation which precedes snowfall. Ladakh, a big region with a sparse population, depended only on this rainfall.

So all that could be grown here, traditionally, were barley, peas, turnips and potatoes.

Only two fruits were grown — apricots and the wild seabuckthorn.

But now apples that could never be grown above 9,000 feet are being grown at 12,000 feet. Wheat is being cultivated by farmers.

Every year when heavy snowfall blocked road links to Manali and Srinagar, Ladakhis used to pay huge amounts for vegetables like tomatoes, cabbage, cauliflower and squash. Now local farmers are growing these vegetables right next door.

Ladakhi homes cannot withstand rain over 50 mm. Unused to raindrops hammering down, their flat mud-plastered houses collapse and people become homeless.

Glaciers have been steadily retreating. Shortage of drinking water has emerged as a crucial problem. The lower rate of precipitation characterised by less snowfall has added to people's woes. Warmer temperatures have resulted in pests like codling moth attacking apples and apricots and

black beetles attacking other crops. In 2006, two blocks in Changthang faced a disastrous attack by locusts, resulting in massive losses to farmers. For nomadic and semi-nomadic shepherds who thrive in these parts, a change in precipitation patterns has shrunk pasture lands.

Animal and plant species are disappearing at a rapid rate. "It was a common sight to see snow leopards come down to our villages. In the last



Unused to raindrops hammering down, Ladakhi homes collapse.

few years, I cannot recall seeing a single such leopard here," says 92-year old landowner Phunchok Namgyal.

"Snow used to be at least two feet deep every winter until a decade ago. But now, it is hardly more than a coat and soon melts away," he says.

Luckily farmers in Ladakh have an alternative. Thanks to the efforts of ex-bureaucrat Chewang Norphel, artificial glaciers built on latitudes lower than natural glaciers to meet the needs of villagers for water. Built on the principle that water moving at a slower pace tends to freeze at low temperatures, Norphel has been building artificial glaciers in the vicinity of villages since 1987.

Norphel is a civil engineer. He has intimate

knowledge of Ladakhi terrain gained as a senior civil servant in the Rural Development Department. He built his first glacier in Phuktse Phu. This was followed by glaciers in Nang, Ummla, Shara, and Stakmo.

The Stakmo glacier has been built on the site of a natural glacier which had existed three decades ago. Stakmo is 90 metres in length and 30 metres in breadth with an average depth of 1.60 metres.

It was built at a cost of Rs 10 lakhs. Adjacent water reservoirs cost an additional Rs 11 lakhs. Unlike natural glaciers which start melting in June and July, the Stakmo and other artificial glaciers melt around April. This helps farmers take advantage of the short summer and spring to harvest two crops a year. Since the glacier is built so that it lies mostly in the natural shade of mountains, there is little chance of its two million cubic feet of ice ever drying up.

The extended wet period is helpful for growing wheat which was never grown here earlier.

Has the changed environment made Ladakhis change their traditional diet?

Nowang Cheldon, 40, is a farmer who is happy with the waters he has access to thanks to the Stakmo glacier. He had experimented successfully with wheat. But he abandoned it soon enough. "Wheat interferes with my traditional crop of barley. I cannot plant barley in time for the scheduled harvest," he says.

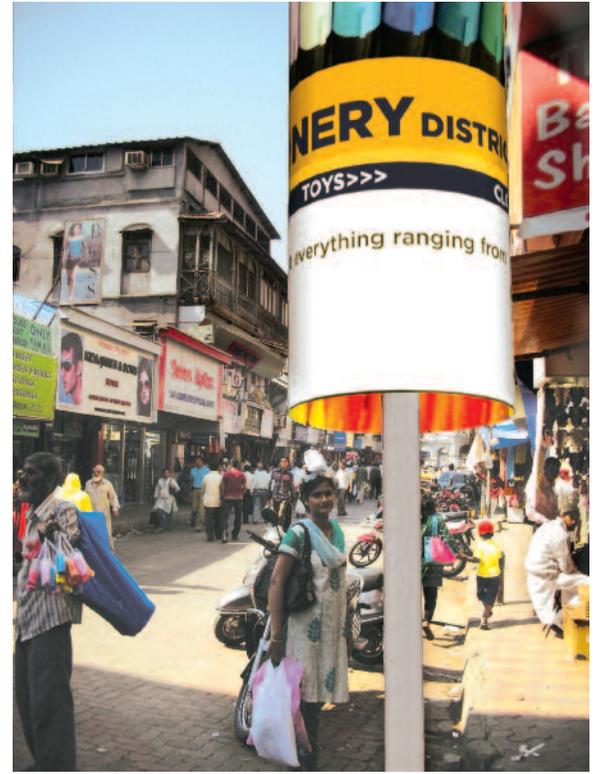
Talzan Tsering, 30, another farmer, has opted for barley in preference to wheat. Culture and habit are strong barriers to crop diversification.

So while the Ladakhi welcomes an additional crop of wheat and the luxury of eating capsicum, tomatoes and cauliflower, he must have his daily dose of coarse barley, potatoes and peas.

Samita's World

by Samita Rathor





Reinventing Crawford Market

Gautam Singh
Mumbai

CRAWFORD Market, like most locations in the 'town' part of Mumbai, looks good only when there is no one around. Throughout the day it is an inaccessible island cut off by waves of traffic and persistent hawkers peddling exotic fruit. But it is an impressive 140-year-old building, evoking memories of Mumbai's history, something that often gets lost in the noise.

The government has plans for redeveloping this heritage building housing a wholesale and retail market. These plans, predictably, are controversial for they involve razing 11 structures in the market and building two high-rises next to the heritage structure. Public opinion is opposed to this plan. The consensus is in favour of a restoration of the existing structure that utilises its tourist potential and yet fulfils its commercial role.

But like all redevelopment plans made by the government, the one for Crawford Market was drawn up without taking public opinion into account. Surely, one would think, the residents or stakeholders of an area should have a right in the making of a plan that is going to affect their lives? Bridging this lack of dialogue between the stakeholders and the government was one of the aims of the URBZ Mashup (see www.urbz.net), a four-day workshop held from 29 October to 1 November.

The workshop invited people from all walks of life to contribute their ideas in building a better city. This is the second one in Mumbai, with one held last year on Dharavi, and the fourth one worldwide, two workshops having been held in Tokyo.

About 35 architecture students, filmmakers, photographers and artists participated in this year's workshop that focused on Crawford Market, Chor Bazaar and Khotachiwadi. They used video, photo-

graphs, sound and music to create their vision of improving the living experience in these localities that face the threat of the government's redevelopment programmes. The finished ideas were exhibited and uploaded onto the URBZ website, which allows for interaction and further development.

In their interaction with the residents of Chor Bazaar and Crawford Market to find out from people what they thought would be good ideas for redeveloping their neighbourhoods, Apoorva Jalindre, one of the team members, found that the stakeholders "felt that they had no say". Vyasdev Yengkhom, an architect, was concerned that the residents "were open to manipulation as there was a lack of knowledge" about the redevelopment projects.

"Planners must provide what the people want. Cities are not about pushing out poor people. Development has to be people-centric," said Geeta Mehta, Associate Professor of Architecture and Urban Studies at Temple University and founding partner of URBZ. "The idea of URBZ is to bring information to the people and throw more opinions into the dialogue," says Mehta.

The Mumbai Municipal Corporation was invited to these workshops, but there was no representation.

"The architectural heritage of India is immense. It would be a terrible mistake to overlook cultural heritage; much wiser to move more slowly than to move roughshod to create a lucrative structure in the short term," said Professor Yehuda Safran, architecture critic and Adjunct Associate Professor

at Columbia University about the plans to redevelop Crawford Market. "A bazaar is a valid urban form which has evolved a complex structure over generations. You just can't throw it away and replace it with a mall," Mehta agrees.

"A new plan must incorporate the complexity of this structure, develop it in an organic way and be more user-friendly. It could be a hybrid between a mall and a bazaar. Instead, the creation of a mall in place of Crawford Market would increase congestion and building high-rises in place of Chor Bazaar would create vertical slums," she said.

Asmita Bandekar, one of the team members of the Crawford Market workshop, saw great possibilities by making simple changes in the existing structure to benefit users.

"The market is like a home to many people. More than 500 people sleep there at night. A place for recreation, areas that could be used for sleeping and providing clean

water could make a dramatic improvement at a minimum cost," she said.

The area outside the market could be developed like a plaza for people and could be a major tourist attraction with its magnificent facade, with a potential to be used as an open air theatre, were some of the suggestions from participants.

Other ideas were interesting too: a pocket guide with easily recognisable symbols for the chaotic mess that is Abdul Rehman Street and totem poles at the entrance to the shopping precinct with information about street directions, stock exchange rates and even cricket scores.

'A bazaar is a valid urban form which has evolved a complex structure over generations. You can't just throw it away.'

Positive people get back status

Vivek S Ghatani.
Darjeeling

IN 2004, Kavita Sewa was diagnosed as HIV positive. Her husband, a migrant worker, returned home after many years and passed on the illness to her. He died. But worse was to follow.

"As soon as the villagers came to know, untouchability and social stigma surrounded us. My two children were thrown out of school. They thought other children would get infected if my children touched them. We were even told to leave the village," says 37-year-old Sewa.

Fortunately the Shankar Foundation, started by HIV positive people a year earlier, stepped in. They informed villagers that HIV/AIDs cannot get transmitted through touch. They educated everybody.

"Both my children are now back in school. Like me many affected people have found a guardian in the Shankar Foundation," says a sobbing Sewa.

Hari Chettri, president of the foundation says they began work in 2005 to remove the stigma that positive people face in society.

"It was the ridiculous social stigma we faced that made us form this network," he says. "Shankar and I felt that normal people would not come forward to generate awareness about the disease. And social stigma needed to be stopped quickly."

Shankar Mani Rai, secretary of the NGO, explains that in Darjeeling district, HIV is transmitted through drug users. They share needles and then pass on the infection to their partners.

Tulsi Singh, 26, is married with one child. She contacted HIV through her husband, a drug user.

"I had no knowledge about the disease. My husband, a drug user, was sharing needles. He was diagnosed as positive in 2006. But he hid this fact from everybody since he feared social stigma. One day we came to know that he had got tuberculosis. When he was taken to hospital we were told he was HIV positive. Later he died without even taking medicines. After his death I met members of the Shankar Foundation who advised me to get tested," recalls Tulsi.

She says she did not heed their advice at first. "Seven months later when I tested I found I too had been affected. It was a sorrowful moment for me but I had to face the world. The foundation

helped me to face the illness and the world. I do not hide. Yes, I am an affected person. I create awareness about the illness and I am living my life without any social stigma."

A lot of people migrate to cities for work or travel abroad as labour from Darjeeling district. They develop physical relationships in outstation places.

Unknowingly they get infected and then transmit the illness to their spouse. "HIV/AIDs has been spreading randomly here mostly because of lack of knowledge and guidance," says Rai.

Shankar Foundation has identified 193 cases in Darjeeling, 56 in Kalimpong and 20 in Kurseong, the three subdivisions of the district. "There are also people who hide the fact that they have HIV/AIDs. We don't want cases to be hidden. We are also positive. So we go in front of them and give ourselves as examples. We tell them that there is medicine for this illness. We ask them to come forward and join us for the betterment of society," says Chettri.

The NGO counsels positive people and encourages them to come to their office in Darjeeling. It also dispenses primary medicine. Shankar Foundation receives government funding of Rs 10,000 per person once in three months for nutrition. But this amount is not sufficient for fulfilling the requirements of patients.

"We are short of funds though people from the Darjeeling region do help us. The funding we have is only sufficient to give patients the first line of medicines," says Chettri. "For the second line of treatment, the affected person needs money. After six years of taking the first line, the affected person has to start the second

line. But positive people who are below the poverty line do not have the money to buy those medicines. The NGOs do not have sufficient funding to take on that responsibility."

The NGO thinks that the government should help more. "If the government funds NGO networks like ours, the disease can be stopped from spreading," they said.

Currently, Shankar Foundation has around 138 members. "We are spreading awareness and counselling people. We do expect our membership to increase. But we are worried we may not be able to work further because of lack of funds. We appeal to people from all walks of life to help us in whatever manner they can," says Shankar Rai.

VIVEK GHATANI



Hari Chettri, president



Shankar Mani Rai, secretary



Tulsi Singh



Dr K Jacob Roy with patient

Dementia's

Gautam Singh
Mumbai

INDIA's population is growing grey. Prosperity and better health are likely to increase the percentage of the aged. According to the 2001 Census, India had 77 million elderly people. This number is expected to rise to 178 million by 2030.

But India is unprepared to tackle issues which affect the elderly. Take dementia. Currently, an estimated three million suffer from this illness. By the year 2040, this number will triple. Worldwide there is a new case of dementia every seven seconds.

Hill state

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

IT is believed that half the population of Uttarakhand migrates to other states in search of work. Delhi alone has 1.5 million people from Uttarakhand.

The Forest Research Institute (FRI) in Dehradun organised a two-day workshop in November to discuss how this massive outflow of people could be reduced. Participants at the workshop brainstormed on strategies to usher in industrial development and help environmental conservation.

Inaugurating the workshop, Ramesh



shadow

The term 'dementia' is used to describe symptoms that occur when the brain is affected by specific diseases and conditions, causing a steady decline in memory and mental abilities. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia.

Considering the enormity of the problem India is likely to face, awareness of this disease is poor and support services are absent. Mumbai has just one day-care centre for dementia patients and one old-age home. There is no study programme in Geriatrics or Gerontology. Hospitals have no special geriatric wards. Most general physicians lack basic

training to diagnose dementia.

The Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Society of India (ARDSI), an organisation involved in care-giving and creating awareness about dementia, meets in New Delhi from 7 to 8 December to devise a national dementia strategy. Civil Society spoke to Dr K Jacob Roy, chairman and founder of ARDSI.

India faces a huge task in tackling dementia in the coming years. How are we placed right now?

It is estimated that about 3.5 million Indians are dementia patients. Our population of elderly citizens is growing at a fast rate. Age is the most important factor contributing to cases of dementia. And this figure could be an underestimation since it is felt that several cases remain undiagnosed. There is gross ignorance at all levels, among the public and even the medical profession.

There is a lack of adequate services to promote early diagnosis. Facilities like day-care centres or for end-of-life care are missing. The response from the government has been slow. Even though they are aware, they don't see the urgency. There is no existing government programme or strategy to tackle this at the public health level. What is needed is a concerted effort and strategy to see dementia as a problem of the elderly and deal with it according to the specific needs that the situation demands.

Tell us about your association's forthcoming meeting?

Eminent people from psychiatry and neurology, from India's national institutes, social workers, experts from the legal profession, human rights activists, those involved in nursing and care-giving, and family members will be putting their minds together over these two days.

We also hope for significant participation from the government with representatives from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. All through 2009 we have been holding meetings in Bangalore, Mumbai, Coimbatore and Kolkata, to get valuable inputs from those involved and to be able to frame a set of guidelines. We hope to come out with a policy document on dementia in India with a strategy on early diagnosis and cost-effective short and long-term care.

How have countries abroad looked at this problem?

The United Kingdom has perhaps one of the best strategies. The chief architect of the UK strategy, Dr Sube Banerjee, is going to be present at the meet along with Florence Lustman, from France's Alzheimer's programme and experts from USA and Europe who will share their experiences and help us frame a strategy for India. The UK spends a phenomenal amount of money on dementia care. We will have to look at it differently in India.

And how is India's approach going to be different?

We have to strengthen family support for taking care of dementia patients. Institutional care is really not a solution for India. The family system here is very strong and can provide the best support. We will have to train families to take care of the patient and support them so that they can provide this care.

Memory clinics to spot and treat dementia, training of professionals to diagnose early signs of dementia, training in nursing care are all aspects which will have to be worked upon. The ARDSI has day care centres in many states and support for home-based care. We have been following this method of the family being the primary support for almost 15 years and feel sure that this is the best way for India.

How have different regions fared in dementia care?

We hope to get people from all regions involved. There shouldn't be any regional difference in occurrence. But there is greater awareness in the south than in the north. Kerala and Karnataka began looking at handling this much earlier.

Dr Roy, how did you get involved in this?

Almost 20 years ago, my father had dementia. I realised at that time that there was almost no awareness about dementia and absolutely no facilities to tackle specific problems associated with it. Being a doctor dealing with children's disabilities, gave me an insight into dealing with dementia patients. That prompted me to set up an urban dementia care programme in Cochin in the 1990's, and later, the ARDSI.

discusses eco-friendly growth

Pokhriyal Nishank, Chief Minister of Uttarakhand acknowledged that many talented people left for greener pastures. "We have invited entrepreneurs to set up industries in hill areas under the Special Industry Promotion Policy, 2008. This will enable hill districts to align with mainstream development," he said.

Experts at the workshop said industrial development was needed to arrest migration. Dr R Chidambaram, Principal Scientific Advisor, Central Government emphasised the need to conserve water and energy and promote rural development. "Pollution free projects like *gharats* (traditional water mills) must be promot-

ed for sustainable development," he said. SC Nautiyal, Additional Director, Department of Industry, said the state was promoting eco-friendly industries like tourism, horticulture, poultry, fashion designing and cottage industry.

Scientists from the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) proposed a road-map. The Union government was the co-organiser of the workshop. Dr GP Kothiyal, senior scientist, BARC, said, "Besides software and electronic industries, local foods could be promoted. The government must make strict pollution laws and implement them."

The Bio-medical Group of BARC looked into the infrastructure difficulties that hinder indus-

trial development. "Transport is the single biggest hurdle. Big industry can be successful in hill regions only if raw materials can reach and finished goods can be marketed easily. The government must make special plans to promote industries based on forests and herbal medicines," said Dr. Krishna Balaji Saini.

Scientists also warned about the baneful impacts of industrialisation. "Industrialisation has led to increase of heavy metals like mercury, arsenic and chromium in groundwater in industrial regions of West Bengal and Bihar resulting in skin diseases and ulcers," cautioned Dr. Sanjay Kumar of the Centre.

BRT Yatra

DELHI's roads and flyovers are swallowed by cars which edge out buses, cycles and auto-rickshaws. The BRT introduced democracy on Delhi's elitist roads. But the BRT received bad press. To put things straight, Hazards Centre organised a Jan Yatra to promote the much maligned BRT as a sustainable mode of transport.

Enlightened citizens assembled at the Moolchand flyover, the starting point of the yatra. Riding on auto-rickshaws, bicycles and buses there were 20 people from Khanpur JJ Colony, 40 auto-drivers from Bhartiya Tripahiya Chalak Sangh, 60 people from Wazirpur Industrial area, six homeless, three rag pickers and representatives from eight



organisations.

Dunu Roy, Director of Hazards Centre spoke at the end of the yatra. He extolled the virtues of the BRT. It is a well-illuminated, properly serviced and disabled-friendly means of transport which caters to 80 per cent of commuters, he said.

The BRT corridor has space for utilities, rickshaws, pedestrians and vendors. It reduces the risk of accidents. And it is not class conscious.

ABHINANDITA MATHUR



Big day at Deepalaya

CHILDREN's Day was extra special for Deepalaya schools. It celebrated the first Annual Day of its Social Entrepreneurs and got CBSE recognition for its Kalkaji branch. Deepalaya's social entrepreneurs are community leaders who educate children and adults in six slums. Set up in 1979, with just five children and two teachers, Deepalaya now has four schools. Celebrations took place at the Deepalaya school in Kalkaji. The children danced, sang and performed skits on stage.

More voices against AFSPA

NINE years ago when Irom Sharmila began a fast for repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Manipur, her gesture attracted little attention. AFSPA has yet to be repealed. But the movement against it has spread to other troubled states in the northeast and to Jammu and Kashmir. It is growing in strength, gaining support among activists and intellectuals.

In Kolkata, Mahasweta Devi, writer-activist for tribal rights, denounced AFSPA at a press conference organised by Drik India. She had visited Manipur with members of Drik but couldn't meet Irom Sharmila, since she was not given permission.

Recounting her impressions Mahasweta Devi said Manipuri culture has no place for gender discrimi-

nation. "It is as part of this culture that Irom Sharmila took up the cause against AFSPA. Let me tell you, it is not just the Assam Frontier Rifles and the Central Forces who have become trigger happy but even the Manipur Police. Why should thousands of civilians continue to suffer because of AFSPA. Repeal AFSPA, bring freedom."

In New Delhi the People's Alliance for the Repeal of AFSPA held a public meeting where organisations from the northeast and from Jammu and Kashmir spoke frankly about the stress and tension people faced living under AFSPA.

Speakers said that there has been a recent trend of putting the draconian provisions of repealed laws into general legislation thereby making the inhuman nature of these laws



DRIK INDIA

invisible.

Parveena Ahenger of Association of Parents of Disappeared People (APDP) from Kashmir appealed for removal of AFSPA and a thorough inquiry into its misuse. She said no effort was being made to build

confidence among the people.

Nisar Ali Mir of Jammu & Kashmir Trade Union Centre said the security forces are present in civilian areas everywhere. Ordinary people cannot go to those places or have to avoid them.

Dr Venuh of the Naga Peoples' Movement for Human Rights regretted that the Union government was dragging its feet on establishing long term peace with the Nagas. If problems are allowed to fester, they balloon and gather momentum.

Tapen Bose of the South Asian Forum for Human Rights said AFSPA reverses the normal principles of policing. It allows for maximum use of force instead of minimum.

He said AFSPA ruled regions do not face any military threat. But the government fears the politics of the people of these regions.

Peoples' climate change charter

THIS wasn't just another climate change meet in the run-up to Copenhagen. The Peoples' Coalition on Climate Change released a unique Community Charter on Climate Crises. It was drawn up after talking to Dalit farmers and tribal communities like the Dongria

Konds of Orissa, the Baigas of Chhattisgarh and the Chakesang Nagas from Nagaland. Twelve locations in six ecosystems were covered by the Deccan Development Society.

"We may not be educated in the way people in the city are, but we know enough to respect

nature, a lesson you cities are yet to learn," said Baba Bhai, an Adivasi from Madhya Pradesh. "We have caused least harm to the environment. Yet if something happens, we will suffer the most. We are leaders of this battle," said Vechiteu, from Nagaland.



ABHINANDITA MATHUR

Microsoft AD

GOING BEYOND MAOISTS

Redefine growth so that forest people become beneficiaries

Civil Society News
New Delhi

BHATARI Devi sits on the pavement at Jantar Mantar in Delhi clutching her baby. Angry slogans fill the air. "Kaagaz tumhara. Jangal hamara," shout the Adivasis who have blocked the road.

It is a protest Bhatari says she just had to attend. It took her three days to get to Delhi from her village, which is 28 km from Kota in Rajasthan. She walked, took a bus and then a train, she explains, her face a picture of desperation.

Bhatari has a farm on one acre. This year the rains failed so she couldn't grow anything. In years gone by, the forest helped her tide over a crisis. "We could always get something to eat – leaves and herbs and so on. Firewood to cook on also," she says. But the government replaced the forest with a jatropa plantation. Nobody from her village is allowed into the plantation. In any case, jatropa is only good for the oil extracted from its seeds. It yields neither food nor fodder.

What really rankles is that people around the forest were not consulted. It was as though her village didn't exist. "They didn't even tell us," she says bitterly. "Now, from the government's employment guarantee scheme we get Rs 50 or Rs 60 a day. We are paid a month later. Do you think we can get our forest back under the Forest Rights Act?" she asks hopefully.

As the government grapples with the Maoist insurgency in India's forested areas, Adivasis like Bhatari are evidence of growing alienation among ordinary people seeking their share of development.

Communities at the grassroots have a grim view of their situation. They have ceased to trust. For them:

- Industry is exploitative.
- Governance does not exist.



Adivasi women protesting in Delhi over poor implementation of the Forest Rights Act

'Committees on f

ASHOK Chaudhary and the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW) were in the forefront of the campaign which finally delivered the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forests Rights) Act 2006. After the law was passed, the Forum has wasted no time in informing tribal and forest communities about its provisions and mobilising them to seek its implementation by state governments. Chaudhary spoke to *Civil Society* on the plight of forest communities and implementation of the law on forest rights.

Why are forest communities alienated?

The main reason is lack of governance. Their basic needs, their democratic and constitutional rights are not protected or taken care of. Governments work for the benefit of companies and multinationals who don't care for the Adivasi way of life, their culture. Instead they destroy their livelihoods.

We should remember that this Maoism is of typical Indian variety. It has no connection with Mao Tse Tung's core ideological position, which was building people's power. The Maoists are taking advantage of the alienation of forest communities. But their politics is not based on tribal issues. They want to capture the State. Here, the Maoists and the government are similar. They raise Adivasi land alienation issues only when violence happens. Both sides don't follow democratic norms. The government discusses land alienation in the Maoist context. It doesn't want to

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



- The courts don't work.
- Politicians and big business are on the same side.
- The police and the forest department are oppressive.
- Villages have seen no development.

Bhatari was among 200 Adivasis who came to protest at Jantar Mantar. Two hundred may be a small number, but they reflect a much larger sense of desperation and unhappiness with the government. Their protest was organised by the Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD), a federation of forest-dwellers and tribal organisations from 11 states. The campaign held simultaneous protests in Gandhinagar, Udaipur, Bhopal, Raipur and Bhubaneswar.

The protests were sparked by the decision of the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs to fix a deadline of 31 December for filing of land claims by forest communities under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest-Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 – commonly referred to as the Forest Rights Act.

The Act, which was passed in December 2006, gives forest communities rights over land and forests they have traditionally occupied. The deadline is ostensibly meant to nudge state governments and speed up the passing of entitlements. But in the atmosphere of mistrust that prevails, the deadline is seen as a ploy to immobilise a good law.

Activists say that instead of helping forest people, the deadline will result in them being pushed out. How do people with no education and legal assistance put together proof of ownership instantly?

Activists are asking that the Forest Rights Act be implemented in its true spirit, that no deadlines be set for filing of land claims and that the gram sabha be strengthened. Industrial and development projects must be undertaken only with the consent of the gram sabha.

The Act is a forward-looking and inclusive piece of legislation. It is regarded as a landmark because it recognises, for the first time, the rights of tribal and other forest communities to their land and forests. Historically, tribals have lived in forests. However, under the colonial rule of the British forests were taken over for the extraction of timber. Tribals were evicted. They began to live in and around forests and were accused of being encroachers.

The Act was passed after a long struggle by forest rights activists to undo the 'historic injustice' done to forest communities. It was drafted by people's movements in much the same way as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and the Right to Information Act (RTI). Despite some dilution, it restores the access people have to forests.

But the success of the Forest Rights Act depends on its implementation. There are other laws too that protect the rights of tribals, but they are not implemented. For instance, under the Constitution, panchayats need to be consulted before projects are cleared. But the Special Economic Zone (SEZ)

forest rights

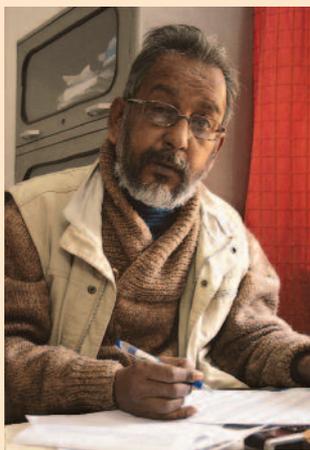
improve the living conditions of Adivasis by ensuring their rights as guaranteed by the Constitution and by international conventions.

Adivasis are being constantly displaced from their homes for the so-called national interest. In Sonbhadra district, people have been displaced three times in a short period of 40 years so that the 'temples' of modern India could be built. Lack of justice is the real reason behind the growth of Maoism in almost 30 per cent of the districts in India. The Forest Rights Act talks about removing the historical injustice done to Adivasis. But the states are not serious about implementing it.

Then, policymakers impose some kind of developmental agenda on Adivasis that are totally against their culture and needs. They are even deprived of their basic requirement of biomass for food and shelter. Attempts must be made to strengthen democratic institutions in these areas. We need more democracy, not bullets. The challenge is to strengthen the democratic process and institutions. Unless that is achieved, the fight against violence cannot be won.

Can the implementation of forest rights help?

Implementation of the Forest Rights Act of 2006 in its true letter and spir-



Ashok Chaudhary

it can ameliorate this alienation to a great extent. Here, the forest department is openly opposing this Act and the government is silent. There is no action by the government. The Forest Rights Act should be implemented fully. Forest Rights Committees should be established and joint forest management (JFM) be disbanded.

The attitude of state governments in Maoist areas such as West Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa and Chhattisgarh has been lopsided. For example, the West Bengal government is implementing the Forest Rights Act through gram sansads that are made up of several gram panchayats, and not through gram sabhas. In Chhattisgarh, the government is talking about giving lease deeds though these have no legal status. The Forest Rights Act talks about rights and not lease deeds. A lease is just a concession and can be taken back any time.

Can community forest management help?

Yes, full community management of forests along with land rights. Adequate land for agriculture should be given. It should be done through gram sabhas. Cooperative institutions must be strengthened. Forest communities must have rights to forest produce. If gram sabhas don't want mining in their area, it should not be undertaken.

‘Implementation should focus on community rights’

FORESTS and their people are of concern to the Kalpavriksh Environment Action Group. Its network has experts and activists from all walks of life. Serious work has been done like analyzing the way India does environment-impact assessments to documenting the status of forests and protected areas. Kalpavriksh has also helped people save trees and green spaces.

Ashish Kothari of Kalpavriksh told *Civil Society* that if Adivasis had got clear rights to land after Independence, Maoism would not have been able to grow roots.

What do you think the alienation of tribal communities and forest-dwellers is due to?

Several factors are responsible for this alienation. Taking over of commons by the State deprives them of spaces they depend on for their livelihood, survival, and culture.

Then there has been the handing over of such areas to companies for mining and industry. Tribals have also been displaced and dispossessed by conservation projects.

There has been utter disrespect of indigenous knowledge and practices and cultural diversity, including in education systems imposed from above.

Misguided attempts have been made at ‘integrating tribals into the mainstream’ even when they may have been better off being left alone.

Where there were genuine problems of illness, destitution and social inequities there have been botched attempts at providing them ‘development’ using ecologically and culturally inappropriate models such as chemical-intensive agriculture and hybrid cattle.

There has been an imposition of inappropriate models of governance. Electoral politics have replaced the diverse, locally adapted Adivasi systems. This has resulted in internal cultural and economic changes and led to weakening of conservation traditions and exploitative relations with forests.

If Adivasis had been granted clear tenurial rights and responsibilities across central India soon after Independence and also been helped to work out their own models of ‘development’ appropriate to local ecological and cultural contexts, the problem of ‘extremism’ seen today would have been far less or even absent.



Ashish Kothari

Do you think implementation of the Forest Rights Act of 2006 can ameliorate this alienation?

Yes, but only partially. It can help reverse State and corporate take-over of forest commons and provide some governance controls back to communities. It can become a catalyst for strengthening indigenous knowledge and cultures, with appropriate changes where these traditions may be iniquitous or ineffective in the face of modern situations.

However, implementation of this Act needs to focus more on the community rather than the individual. It also needs to be supplemented by measures for appropriate health, education, and livelihood opportunities, building on what Adivasis already have in their own traditions. Crucially, some of the law’s own provisions (the 2005 cut-off date or the lack of limits on rights for resource use) could lead to deforestation or forest degradation. This needs clear institutional mechanisms within and with communities to avoid such impacts. Other existing laws such as PESA, NREGA, the Biodiversity Act and so on can be used in conjunction with the Forest Rights Act for this.

But laws can only go so far. More fundamental changes are needed in governance and development models working towards pathways that are envisaged with Adivasis.

Apart from granting land rights should we be moving towards community forest management?

Indeed, this is crucial. Central to the Adivasi way of life has been strong community or collective mode of functioning. There is a legitimate fear that if the Act’s implementation focuses on individual land rights, as it has done so far, this may further fragment communities.

There are several provisions for community rights and responsibilities in the Act and its Rules and these need urgent attention. There are also thousands of sites in India where communities are already, de facto, protecting and regenerating forests (we’ve documented several). The Act could provide powerful backing to these against both external threats and forces of destabilisation within communities.

Shouldn’t forest villages also get roads, schools, health clinics and be linked to the rest of India?

Forest villages are getting schools

PUSHPA Topo of Jharkhand Jangle Bachao Andolan, fights for the rights of Adivasis and forest communities in the state. The group is part of the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW). As a woman activist she has an important role to play in implementing the Forest Rights Act and creating gender sensitivities. The Act does provide joint ownership of land titles, for both husband and wife. Topo points out that the number of women in forest rights committees has been growing.

Why are Adivasis alienated?

Until now, Adivasis have not got rights to their land. If they get those rights alienation will be removed. And the Forest Rights Act is the big instrument to get it.

Is Jharkhand implementing the Act?

It is being done piecemeal and in a half-hearted way. Most people in gram sabhas haven’t got claim forms. But the biggest problem is lack of information. Adivasis are unaware of the process and their rights. The government is not making any effort to tell them.

Are Adivasi women getting land?

The Act has provisions for joint ownership, both in the name of husband and wife. But only a few individuals have got that. We emphasise community ownership and only that can ensure women’s rights to land. But, a positive thing is happening in Jharkhand – one-third of the members of forest rights committees are women.

The Forest Rights Act has a provision to convert all forest villages into revenue villages. This will enable them to receive such benefits. Additionally, many such development facilities are now granted as a right in the Act. However, communities need to be enabled to consider and deal with the possible ecological impacts of such activities, especially in 'deep' forest areas where infrastructure can lead to fragmentation and negative impacts on the ecosystems and wildlife.

A lot of competing interests vie for control of forest resources. How can India's forests meet all these needs?

What is important is for the country to decide what its priorities are. The National Forest Policy 1988 put the ecological functions of forests as the highest priority but also stressed the need to secure benefits for forest-dwellers. That policy can be built on to bring in a new one that is appropriate in the modern context.

The two overarching objectives should be ecological security and livelihood security for forest-dwellers. All other uses of forests must be secondary.

A national land-use planning exercise should demarcate at least a third of India that is permanently off-limits to mining and industries and large-scale commercial exploitation. It should be reserved for ecological health (including wildlife, water, soils) livelihood and cultural survival. This would automatically meet climate change mitigation requirements which are not met through artificial plantations or cultivating *jatropha*. As for industry and infrastructure, its time we decided that there will be no more large-scale diversion of natural forests. Only such decisions will push us to search for alternative pathways of development that are sustainable.

What kind of forest management would you like to see?

We need fundamental changes in forest governance and management. From the stage of making working plans to deciding on forest budgets, forest-dwelling communities need to be involved, their knowledge coming on a par with modern forestry science. Gradually, all forests which have resident or user communities should shift to community-led or collaborative management, with appropriate checks against misuse of powers by both communities and the bureaucracy.

Whoever is in control needs to envision forests as places not only for human use, but also for the rightful survival of the rest of forest species that India is blessed with.

This could mean sacred, inviolate spaces singly or jointly protected by local people and government agencies, surrounded or abutted by stretches that are used for bona fide livelihood needs. Obviously this change cannot come overnight, and indeed in some places could lead to temporary setbacks due to vested interests or lack of local capacity. Yet in the long run this is the only thing that will conserve the country's forests, and secure the sustenance of forest-dwelling communities.

Are forest villages getting facilities?

The biggest problem that all villages face, including forest villages, is livelihood. Even NREGA is being implemented in a lopsided manner. However, in Singhbhum and Palamau districts, the process of converting forest villages into revenue villages has gone much ahead. Schools are being established. They are connected to the main highways through *kutchha* village roads. But, health facilities are almost absent.

What is the status of collection of non timber forest produce?

Most people depend solely on forest produce. As much as 70 per cent of earnings are from collection especially of mahua. The forest department used to harass us a lot. But we struggled on. Now, they have relented. The main problem for us is getting a remunerative and just price.

Jharkhand's forests are facing great pressure, by mining, climate fixers and industry. Our forests can meet only the needs and demands of forest dwellers and the environment and these two should take priority.

policy was finalised without any consultation, giving vast amounts of land to industry.

Similarly, there is the Provision of Panchayats, Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA), 1996, which bestows on tribals the authority to decide their own development agenda in keeping with their customs and traditions, but it is never used to protect their interests.

Far from getting their rights, Adivasis live with the constant threat of eviction. Mining, plantations, dams, SEZs, sundry factories are foisted on their lands and forests.

The problem is that state governments have embarked on models of top-down industrial development where land and forests are seen only as sites for economic gain. The ecological value of forests or the social cost of destroying forest-dependent communities are not factored in.

Archaic land acquisition laws are used to evict people from areas where they have traditionally lived. There is no resettlement or rehabilitation.



BD Sharma talking to the gathering

Impoverished and homeless they have nowhere to go. The natural trajectory of this development path is the rise of Maoism.

There is a direct correlation between investment and Maoism. In Orissa, investment increased six times since 2001. Maoists have spread their influence from three districts to 20. Since land required for industry is huge and invariably taken from tribal communities, it is important to have development strategies in which they get their share. When a good law like the Forest Rights Act is poorly implemented, the gap between government and people grows. The response to the 31 December deadline is an example of how alarm bells begin ringing.

"The climate of investment is causing the ministry to take this step. Adivasis are being evicted by the forest department to pave the way for industry," says Biju of the CSD.

HOPES DASHED

What is especially galling, says Jialal, an Adivasi from Chhattisgarh, is that their hopes were raised only to be dashed to the ground.

The forest rights law offers land titles but getting the titles is tough. The procedure has been clearly spelt out. Yet in reality the Adivasi is tripped up at every stage.

Briefly, the procedure is like this: a meeting of the gram sabha should be called so that everybody gets a chance to speak. A Forest Rights Committee of local villagers is then formed. Claims are filed and verified by this committee.

The gram sabha then passes a resolution. The endorsed claims go to committees at the district and state levels. Officers of revenue, forest, tribal and panchayati raj departments are in those committees.

But the Adivasis say it is difficult to get the claim forms. These forms are supposed to be given to the gram sabha. Invariably the sarpanch acquires them and doles them out only to his loved ones. Or the forms lie around in some panchayat office. Jawan Singh of Badwani district in Madhya Pradesh says villagers are paying Rs 7 or Rs 8 per form, when it should be given free. Since many Adivasis are illiterate, they can't fill up the forms. They end up relying on the sarpanch or forest department officials.

"God knows what our Baiga friends here went and put their thumb impressions on," says Jialal shaking his head sadly.

Another problem is that knowledge about the Forest Rights Act is poor both

among Adivasis and the local administration. "We illiterates who have found out have to explain to district collectors what the Act is about," said Jialal.

The forest rights committee is supposed to verify land claims. But Adivasis say it is the forest department which does this in a most arbitrary manner. Under the law claims of up to 10 acres can be filed. But the forest department may say only four acres are valid so the Adivasi could end up losing the rest.

Adivasis say that the forest department has given itself the authority to decide land claims and in the process it is taking away land. In sanctuaries and protected areas the forest rights law is becoming an excuse to evict forest-dwellers, they allege, though the law clearly says nobody can be evicted without verification and resettlement taking place.

"In Sirohi, the forest department, instead of the gram sabha, peruses the claims," said Shyam Menariya of Jungle Jameen Adhikar Bachao Andolan.

Activists regret that state governments have shown limited vision in implementing the Forest Rights Act. They use the law only for giving out entitlements to land. "But the law is meant to go way beyond that," explains Madhu Sarin, a long-time activist. "The law gives forest communities the right to conserve and protect forests and to collect forest produce on which their livelihood depends. However, no state government wants to talk about that."

Cash-strapped states like Madhya Pradesh rely on revenue from minor forest produce like neem, honey, tendu. Adivasis are roped in under joint forest management. They hardly make any money from collecting forest produce and handing it over to the government. No state government will acquiesce to community management of forests because it means loss of revenue.

PATIENCE RUNS OUT

Standing in the midst of the gathering at Jantar Mantar, well-known activist BD Sharma advises them to stop petitioning the government and just take what belongs rightfully to them. Even forest department employees depend on Adivasis to take them into the jungle. "They don't know their way. They don't recognise the foliage. Yet they say the jungle is theirs," says Sharma sarcastically. "Tell them by law the jungle belongs to you. If you don't want jat-ropha, dig it out. People are more important."

Campaigners are asking for the gram sabha to be strengthened. It is an open assembly of all adult members of the village. They know each other. "The gram sabha, it was said, would be free and independent. But no government wants that," said Sharma. "If the gram sabha is strong, people can question the sarpanch. No lie can be hidden."

A degree of political autonomy for Adivasi villages has been mooted by forest rights activists. Since most Adivasis still have a strong sense of community, it is better to allow them to administer themselves within the broad contours of the Indian Constitution.

PESA, for instance, already gives wide-ranging powers to gram sabhas in Adivasi areas. Gram sabhas have the right to make their own development plans and to be consulted in all projects which require land from their area. PESA gives them powers over natural resources.

Activists also say that norms should be set for community management of forests. Community management would help Adivasis earn and help conservation. They want the discredited joint forest management programme to be disbanded. The forest department could be a regulator.

The CSD fears eviction and takeover of common lands because of the government's forestry programme. But these trees can be grown with participation from villages and it can earn them an income.

Adivasi settlements are isolated from the rest of India and accessible only to Maoist propaganda. They have no schools, health facilities or even a road. The new forest law allows for development. Forest settlements can be built as the greenest villages of India.

A related discussion which should take place is on how much of the country's forests should be sacrificed for industrial projects? There is broad consensus that ecological security and the livelihood of forest-dependent communities should take priority. Natural forests need to be out of bounds for industry because they fulfil an invaluable ecological and social function.

Without the participation and inclusion of communities at the grassroots it is not possible to make development more meaningful and inclusive. While an expanding economy needs energy and infrastructure, why should people be displaced and forests ruined? Their quality of life too should improve.

The need quite simply is to build trust and have a model of governance that brings the weak up. But as easy as the solutions might seem, the tougher they get with time running out. With the government preparing to crack down on Maoists, chances are that ordinary folk will suffer and alienation will spread.

'Tribals are virtually a Stateless people'

It hasn't been easy for the CPI (Marxist Leninist) Liberation to find its feet in mainstream politics. The party was underground for many years because of State repression. It was not a strategy chosen by its leaders. The party came overground when it felt the time was right. It has been gaining support among people affected by the heavy footprint of new economic policies.

Dipankar Bhattacharya, general secretary of the CPI (ML), spoke to *Civil Society* about the party's experience of entering mainstream politics and why Adivasi groups feel alienated today.

Your party was underground for a long time. Why did you come overground ?

The CPI (ML) was not formed as an underground organisation. With the State coming down heavily on the fledgling organisation and waging a veritable war of extermination against all leaders and activists of the party, there was little choice but to move underground.

When the party was reorganised in July 1974, dark clouds had begun to envelop the entire framework of parliamentary democracy. Indeed, within a year Emergency became the official order. It was only natural that the reorganised CPI (ML) would have to work underground. Also, mass struggles were not central to the party's scheme of things in those days.

Following the rout of the Congress in 1977, the country witnessed a democratic resurgence and the party began to look for open avenues of work. In 1979, the party rectified its line, assigning top priority to the task of unleashing mass struggles and intervening in the political process primarily on the basis of mass assertion of the rural poor. Accordingly, large sections of CPI (ML) members and cadres began to participate in open activities even though the core of the party remained underground.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the party was faced with a new situation which prompted the party to come overground. The collapse of the Soviet Union had triggered a wave of capitalist triumph. Bourgeois ideologues and publicists once again began writing obituaries of Marxism and declaring communist parties irrelevant and obsolete.

To make matters worse, communist parties in the former Soviet Bloc and in many other parts of the world went on a suicidal spree, liquidating themselves, shedding communist tags and rewriting their programmes to surrender before capitalism. It therefore became imperative for the party to openly counter this ideological-political offensive of imperialism and demonstrate the role and relevance of communist parties.

In India, the early 1990s saw the convergence of three major trends. First, the adoption of free-market policies by the State; second, the rise of the BJP riding on aggressive communal mobilization; and third, major shifts in the socio-political landscape in North India in the wake of the Mandal wave.

The response of the CPI and CPI (M) to these developments was high-



Dipankar Bhattacharya

ly defensive. Nationally, the two parties began a new phase of collaboration with the Congress and in crucial Hindi-belt states like Bihar and UP they virtually reduced themselves to appendages of the likes of Lalu Prasad and Mulayam Singh. The CPI (ML) epitomised a bold radical alternative to this capitulate approach and the party came overground with the banner of the independent assertion of the revolutionary Left.

What has the experience in mainstream politics been like?

The experience certainly has not been very smooth. The attitude of the State remains as repressive as ever. On an everyday basis our comrades have to face an administration which is by and large hostile, while leading the masses in exercising and claiming their basic democratic rights and seeking minimum improvement in their real-life conditions.

Apart from State repression, there is also the question of feudal and mafia violence on the movement and the masses, often perpetrated with the active complicity and patronage of the State. The masses turn to the judiciary for relief and justice, but more often than not, what they get is injustice or denial of justice.

Operating overground does not lessen or smoothen this rough environment, but then the very challenge of radical politics is to face and transform this reality in favour of the people and people's democracy. We have taken up this challenge and we will persist with this course to the best of our ability.



Forest communities at a dharna in Delhi

Is it difficult trying to find your space in mainstream democracy?

As long as 'mainstream democracy' remains subordinated to corporate domination, it will remain difficult for the working people to find adequate political space. Mainstream democracy is nothing but a political reflection of the 'free' market we see in the economic domain. Both are about power, profit and privilege. For any real notion of justice, freedom and equality to take shape, it is necessary to redefine and reconstruct the mainstream, both in economy and politics.

How are you faring in elections?

For the last two decades we have maintained a vote share of two to three per cent in Bihar with five to seven seats in the State Assembly. In Jharkhand too our vote share is approaching the three per cent mark. In the Lok Sabha we had representation till 2004, but it has not been possible to win any seat in the last two general elections.

Is there ground you are gaining irrespective of elections? In which states would you say your party is forging ahead?

Elections are an unequal battle, and more often than not election results do not reflect our actual influence. Votes are only one among several parameters to measure our strength. In terms of our organised work among the masses and actual mobilisation and participation of the people in struggles, our influence is increasing in several states and on different fronts. To give a few examples, beyond our well-known strongholds in Bihar and Jharkhand, we are advancing in Orissa with our involvement in struggles over land. In Punjab we are supported by agricultural labourers and in Tamil Nadu our presence is on the trade union front.

What do you think tribal alienation from the mainstream is due to?

Tribal alienation from the so-called mainstream is due to the utter failure and refusal of the State to treat tribal communities with due human dignity and rights and address their basic needs and aspirations. The tribal question in India remains essentially sandwiched between the Forest Act and Wildlife Protection Act. Evicted from their land and traditional way of living and denied rights to modern means of livelihood, tribals are virtually treated as a stateless people.

When they question this insensitivity and injustice, they are branded as extremists and sought to be suppressed at gunpoint. The State policy towards various tribal communities is often also influenced by the RSS-BJP school of cultural homogenisation. All these strands of accumulated injustice can only deepen tribal alienation and fuel tribal anger.

How best can the State deal with it?

An honest confession of the State's abject failure can only be a first step and this can yield results only if it is backed up by some real corrective measures. Due recognition of tribal autonomy, restoration of their rights to land and forest produce, an embargo on any further displacement of tribal people in the name of mineral exploration and industrialisation, and deterrent measures to stop various exploitative practices like usury, bondage and physical/sexual oppression can lay the basis for a new deal for the tribal population. Most crucially, the State must shed its colonial and paternalistic attitude to tribal people and start treating them as equal citizens of modern India.

Business

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Maruti's e-Parivartan gets going

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

MARUTI Suzuki is not just the biggest car manufacturer in India, it is also setting new benchmarks for volunteering efforts by its employees and expects to be able to enlist their families and friends as well.

Called e-Parivartan, the 'e' standing for employee, Maruti Suzuki's volunteer programme, and part of its larger corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts, was launched last year to create a platform that would enable Maruti employees to engage in social and community work. Two hundred employees have already registered with the initiative.

The e-Parivartan programme identified NGOs across the national capital region where Maruti Suzuki employees could go and volunteer on Sunday mornings. The programme offers a bouquet of volunteering options - mentoring, teaching, community development, raising environmental awareness and organising health camps. Since its launch in November last year, the programme has enabled Maruti Suzuki employees to put in over 3,200 hours of active volunteering.

Maruti Suzuki says this has been possible because employees took ownership of the programme from the very start. Ranjit Singh, Senior Manager, Corporate Planning, and the primary driver of e-Parivartan, says the push to conceive the programme came from the employees. There were repeated requests, he says, from employees to be involved in social work. So the company's top management took it on to devise a programme best suited to Maruti Suzuki.

"We studied employee volunteer programmes in Australia, UK and the US. We gathered extensive learning before arriving at our e-Parivartan approach. Many companies have employee volunteering or CSR activities as part of their key result areas and performance-linked incentives but we wanted a genuine volunteer programme. Employees should feel this need from within. We don't want to push it. We want the programme to



SY Siddiqui, Managing Executive Officer, at a volunteering event in Gurgaon.

be stable, sustainable, flexible and expandable," Singh explains.

"Our employees identified NGOs and their centres. They went and spoke to them, made schedules, organised everything. We only did some hand-holding," he adds.

The e-Parivartan programme started with five volunteering centres of Literacy India, a Gurgaon-based NGO, and Manesar-based Shikhar. Both organisations work for the empowerment of underprivileged children. There are now 19 centres and several other non-profit organisations like Navjyoti India Foundation, Divya Chaya Trust and Deepashram have come on board.

A new centre of Udayan Care, which works for disadvantaged children by running foster homes and providing education and livelihood opportunities to children, was recently launched in Noida. Employees living there can now volunteer in a centre close by.

Employee buy-in was also sought while naming and designing the programme's look and feel. A "Name the Program" contest was conducted and received many entries. The logo, designed by a Delhi College of Arts Graduate, was voted for by the employees.

"I was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and his 'Be The Change' message. There should be change within and we should catalyse change outside," explains Anoop Gannerkote who came up with the name e-Parivartan.

Active volunteers of the programme are confident they can make this happen. "Already, some of our new employees want to be part of this programme within days of joining the company. We want to set a culture of volunteering here and that is developing. We will definitely spread the fire," said an enthusiastic Tanveer Anwar.

The benefits are also tangible. "It's an incredible feeling. We have all experienced the joy of sharing



our lives, our Sundays, with children at these centres. They wait for you to show up. They are so eager to learn. But I think we get so much more from them. Your presence is valued, you feel wanted," recounts Nidhi, another employee volunteer.

Singh says personal accounts like Nidhi's are celebrated within the company to encourage more volunteers. But he doesn't want to talk numbers or set targets, adding the programme is differentiated by quality, not quantity.

"There are very few employee volunteer programmes that enable blue collar workers and shop floor manpower to contribute. We have done that

and their involvement to the Manesar community is heartening. We also encourage families of employees to volunteer. In fact, some employees have celebrated their birthdays and anniversaries at NGO centres with their families."

The trademark Maruti Suzuki ambition and capacity for phenomenal growth is brake-proof. "By 2015, I am extremely confident of a profound CSR impact by Maruti. By then, I want volunteerism here to have three times the strength of the total number of our employees. How do we do that? Each employee of ours will encourage and inspire two other people from his circle of family and friends.

Our example, our efforts should be imbibed by people outside," says S Y Siddiqui, Managing Executive Officer, Administration – HR, Finance & IT.

Maruti Suzuki has over 7,000 employees and a committed battalion that trebles. Says Siddiqui, "In Maruti, we are used to setting benchmarks. In fact, the company was formed in the best essence of social responsibility – for employment generation, national capacity building and making India an auto capital hub. Although with e-Parivartan we are determinedly focussed on qualitative achievement and real impact, we can never feel overwhelmed by scale."

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Windows 7 free for NGOs

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

MICROSOFT launched Windows 7, its latest Operating Software system, worldwide on October 22 with full-throttle marketing hype. In an encouraging move, it made Windows 7 simultaneously available to Indian non-profits in association with the NASSCOM Foundation.

"We are committed to providing best-of-breed solutions to the NGO community. We made sure our latest product was available to them as and when it released. We want them to have access to the same software which the biggest companies the world over are using," says Vikas Goswami who leads Microsoft India's Corporate Social Responsibility division.

An updated version of the Vista operating system from Microsoft, Windows 7 was built around feedback from users and has been developed to work with touch screen controls among other features. A Windows 7 Home Basics costs Rs 5,899.

"Windows 7 is intuitive and has a very flat learning curve. It's extremely easy to use and we are certain it will lead to definite and possibly manifold increase in an NGO's efficiency and effectiveness," Goswami adds.

FCRA-registered NGOs can log on to BiGTech (www.bigtech.in), the key technology philanthropy programme of the NASSCOM Foundation to request for the software. BigTech, in partnership with TechSoup, is an online marketplace specifically developed to provide original software and hardware to Indian NGOs and social development organisations free of cost.

With its motto of "Do right while doing good", BiGTech encourages NGOs to use legal, genuine



A computer training centre in rural Gujarat run by the Aga Khan Foundation and Microsoft

software and services in its social work. Microsoft tied up with BigTech in 2007 to upscale its software donation initiatives in India.

Microsoft's community effort programmes are focused on increasing digital inclusion and bringing the benefits of technology to underserved people worldwide. Its global software donation programme is aimed at equipping small and mid-sized NGOs which are resource scarce and can often not afford to purchase licensed software. In India, it has donated software worth nearly Rs 7.5 crores.

"At Microsoft, we believe in the transformative power of technology - and that cost should not be a barrier to access. In India today, there is a need for utilising technology at the grassroots. Making our software available in association with TechSoup Global and NASSCOM Foundation is a step towards reaching out to communities underserved by technology," says Ravi Venkatesan, Chairman, Microsoft India.

Microsoft Windows 7 for Indian NGOs was made public on 4 November at the third annual

LAKSHMAN ANAND

National Consultation 2009, a three-day event organised by NASSCOM to discuss and develop practices for using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for development.

"We have already received several queries. In fact, we have orders coming in. SEED, a Delhi-based NGO is the first order we have booked for Windows 7," says Rufina Fernandes, CEO, NASSCOM Foundation.

"We have a special offer on for Windows 7 till January end. We generally have a ceiling on the number of licenses donated to a single NGO in one year. But, even if an NGO has availed its complete entitlement, they can book extra orders for Windows 7," adds Fernandes.

To further aid ease of access, Microsoft has brought out a user interface in Hindi for Windows 7. "Also, we have tried to ensure that news of the launch is not confined to big city business papers, but that it reaches the vernacular media too which a lot of NGOs are likely to be reading," explains Vikas Goswami.

BiGTech is a convenient tool for Indian and foreign technology companies and their CSR objectives. They can reach out to the NGO community in a transparent way by donating software and hardware.

Microsoft was BiGTech's first donor when it launched in August 2007. It now has five donors on board—Microsoft, Eagle Conferencing, Bytes of Learning, Busy Infotech and Quick Heal (anti-virus). BiGTech has over 350 registered NGOs in 138 districts across 26 states and has facilitated 3188 product donations to the tune of around Rs 43 crores.



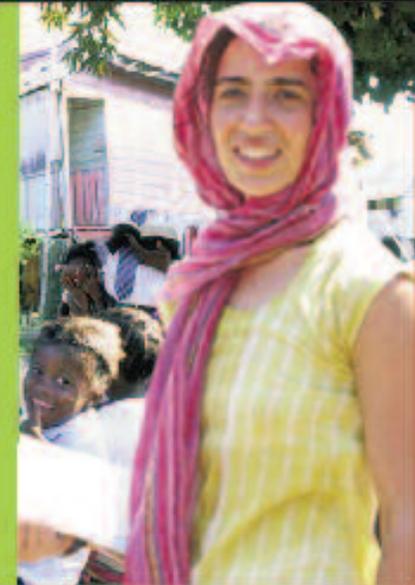
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More power to gram sabha

BHARAT DOGRA

THE Union Government, especially the Ministry for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj deserve all credit for declaring 2009-2010 the year of the Gram Sabha – the village assembly comprising all adult citizens of the village. There could not have been a better choice in the ministry's list of priorities.

The 73rd amendment to the Constitution aimed at strengthening local self-government and decentralisation in rural areas. To fulfill these objectives, elected panchayats are now in place all over the country barring a few exceptions like Jharkhand and Jammu and Kashmir. There are indications that in these two states, panchayat elections will take place in the near future. In Jammu and Kashmir, elections for panchayats are likely to be held at the end of this year or early next year. In Jharkhand the state government has been guilty of ignoring its constitutional obligations of holding panchayat elections. But after recent civil society initiatives which asked for early panchayat elections, it appears these elections will be held soon after a new government is sworn in after the Assembly elections.

As far as the constitutional obligation of creating panchayats throughout the country is concerned, except a few problems here and there, this duty has been fulfilled within a reasonable time-frame. However, the real test of meaningful rural self-government is to ensure the active participation of the entire village community, to take democracy to every house or hut in every village. It is here that our rural decentralisation and local self-government falters. The reason for this is that we did not pay attention to strengthening the gram sabha.

The end result is that in many villages the elected head, known as the pradhan or sarpanch, in collusion with an official usually the panchayat secre-



Gram sabha meeting in progress.

The gram sabha is supposed to play an important role in preparing village plans and deciding development priorities in the village.

tary has much more power than is healthy for rural democracy. In villages where there is a weak pradhan, who could be a proxy for powerful persons in the village, other people control him in collusion with the panchayat secretary. In this scenario, certain officials call the shots.

In villages where the pradhan is from a feudal or influential background, he easily becomes the most powerful person around and frequently behaves in an autocratic way. In such situations, it is quite like-

ly that a substantial share of development funds will be cornered and shared by a few powerful persons. Villagers have a right to ask, how do they benefit from this type of decentralisation or local self-government? This was not the panchayati raj they wanted. Neither is this the vision of those who initiated panchayati raj.

The missing link has been the active participation of the entire village community, particularly the weaker sections. There is legal provision in panchayati raj for regular meetings of the village community or the gram sabha to discuss all important issues. The gram sabha is supposed to play an important role in preparing village plans and deciding development priorities in the village. But in most vil-

lages this active and important role of the gram sabha has not been fulfilled in reality. In many villages, gram sabha meetings have been reduced to a mere formality. The pradhan gets together a few people whom he knows and passes that off as a gram sabha meeting.

In areas designated as scheduled areas where the tribal population is significant, there are even stronger provisions for the important role of the gram sabha. This has been specially provided by legislation on Panchayats as Extended to Scheduled Areas, known commonly as PESA legislation. This is an important law and a source of strength for Indian democracy.

PESA provisions make it very clear that India's democracy is committed to protecting its vulnerable groups particularly tribals. In particular PESA legislation is very important for protecting the land and livelihoods of tribals. To achieve this and other important aims of protecting the tribal community PESA assigns a very important role to the gram sabha. Unfortunately, some state governments have

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Sanganer being stamped out

KUMAR GAUTAM

BAGRU and Sanganer are suburbs of Jaipur well known for their block printing industry. Till two decades ago both were hubs of hand-block printing with natural dyes. In Sanganer, for many reasons, traditional hand-block printing is disappearing and being replaced by screen printing and digital printing.

Traditionally block-prints on textiles are created by stamping a wooden block carved with a design on dyed fabrics. The block stamps the design on the fabric. Carving the design on a wooden block is a skill. Only an accomplished artist can do it. The work demands undivided attention and clinical precision by the artist who sits in a certain posture for long hours to emboss intricate designs and beautiful patterns on wooden blocks.

However, block-making is not sufficiently remunerative nowadays. Mehmood Ali, 48, an award winning block maker from Bhatta colony of Jaipur has been carving beautiful designs on wooden blocks since 32 years. Unfortunately, what he earns today is paltry and doesn't provide him with a decent standard of living. It is easy to surmise why Mehmood Ali's children dropped out of school after Class 6 and why they didn't learn the art of block-making from their father. They chose to work as colour-mixers instead.

Ali Bhai said the next generation will not learn this skill. It may no longer be necessary since the advent of screen printing. Not that colour mixing requires more skill or is free from hazardous impact on health. In fact, the worker is worse off. By switching to colour mixing, he actually becomes de-skilled and more prone to skin diseases including cancer.

Mehmood Ali's troubles are just the tip of the iceberg. The current development paradigm with its emphasis on industrial development is contemptuous of handmade products. Ask Dhananjay of Ojjas, the craft shop in Jaipur on Sirsi road. "It is becoming difficult to compete against the onslaught of mechanised printing," he will tell you.

Hand-block printing is a craft which embodies the pride, labour, skill and expression of the human spirit. To print a sari with six or seven designs in four or five colours, a craftsman handles 30 to 35 blocks, stamping 2000 times with perfect precision.

There is a niche market for hand-block printed

products which is growing due to increasing awareness about health and consciousness about fair trade.

But small hand-block printing units cannot meet demand. The price of handmade products is higher than mechanised products. It requires more labour which pushes up prices. Secondly, it is hard to scale up handmade production. Most hand-block print-



Hand block printing embodies the pride, labour, skill and expression of the human spirit.

ing enterprises are small scale and it may not be possible for them to cater to big demand. In such a scenario, screen printers and digital printers out-compete the hand-block printing units.

If you turn at the *mandi* in Muhana in Sanganer, you will notice pillion riders on cycles holding huge iron-framed screens. This is the world of screen block printing. In screen block printing, two people across the table hold the screen, pour the processed colour and spread it on the designed screen. The colour passes through the porous screen and prints the design on the fabric. The process is much quicker and

more mechanical in contrast to hand-block printing where a craftsman appears to be creating poetry on cloth. For a lay person to distinguish hand-block textiles from screen printed ones may be difficult. Only a close scrutiny can reveal those inconsistencies and breaks at the edge of designs and patterns owing to human error.

Screen printing, on the other hand, will look more uniform. Screen printers are also mastering the art of creating the impression of hand-block printing. This sort of imitation is inhibiting the growth prospects of hand-block prints.

Yet the traditional Bagru hand-block printing industry continues to retain its market and clients. But the situation is deteriorating fast on the supply side. According to Deepak Titanwale, whose ancestors have been traditional Bagru printers for centuries, the water problem is becoming worse and this is affecting production. So far they felt no need for any support from the government. But now his father has applied for an artisan credit card because he needs money to dig a tube-well. Moreover, workers have begun to move away from Bagru printing since it requires a lot of labour and skill.

Titanwale's passion to keep the tradition alive is not shared by workers. Machines continue to attract them. Machine printing needs less labour and pays better. But traditional Bagru print in vegetable dye is less harmful for workers' health and the environment. It uses less water. In fact, waste water from Bagru printing is used for irrigation.

Artisans are the lifeline of the hand-block print industry but they continue to be poor, diseased, malnourished, illiterate, untrained and ill-paid. The biggest irony is that the hand-block printing industry seeks value for its artefacts but does not value its artisans. A large number of workers are migrants from Farukhabad. They are not gainfully employed throughout the year. The rainy season is a lean period since natural dyes tend to spread due to moisture in the air. The printed cloth takes a lot of time to dry as well. These factors impact the quality and scale of hand-block printing. Consequently, only a small number of workers work in this season with pigment colours.

Hardly any artisan is being helped by government schemes. Most artisans are unaware. Those who do, don't know how to claim such benefits.

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been trying to dilute PESA. They have not honoured the letter and spirit of PESA laws. In the process, the threat of land alienation and displacement for tribals has increased. It can be stated with confidence that if the letter and spirit of PESA is honoured, then chances of injustice to tribal communities can be reduced significantly.

Moreover, the strengthening of gram sabhas is needed not just for scheduled areas but for all areas. Some voluntary organisations have been working actively for strengthening gram sabhas. As a result

of their efforts and the initiative taken by some honest pradhans and other villagers, some successful examples of the active and purposeful functioning of gram sabhas are already available. These have helped to break the myth that it is not possible to hold meaningful discussions in a large gathering of villagers.

To the extent that some practical problems actually exist the simultaneous strengthening of ward sabhas can help solve these problems. As the population of a ward is much smaller than an entire village, it will be possible to hold more detailed discus-

sions at ward sabha meetings. Once many issues have been sorted out at ward sabha level, it will become much easier to hold gram sabha meetings. Solutions to practical problems are possible and the gram sabha can certainly play a very important role in strengthening grassroots democracy.

The government is to be congratulated for recognising the unrealised potential of the gram sabha. One only hopes that this initiative will be much more than a symbolic gesture and adequate support will be given to actual work to strengthen the gram sabha.

Your toxic life

RAVI AGARWAL

THE beautiful enamel paint on your freshly painted walls could be deadly. It could contain a load of lead, a heavy metal which significantly reduces the IQ of children exposed to it. Similarly the child's cot or toy, which is often chewed and licked by the infant, could be delivering a life time load of lead into her body. A simple milk bottle with a PVC plastic teether could contain DEHP, a chemical banned in many parts of the world. DEHP can seep from the teether into the child's blood and cause endocrine disruption and permanent damage to the growing body.

The mercury thermometer or CFL tube light which breaks and emits the shiny metal in a room could impact the nervous system. The cottons we use have probably been produced by causing pesticide contamination of our waterways and damaging the health of craftspeople and workers.

The list of products laced with toxic chemicals is a long one.

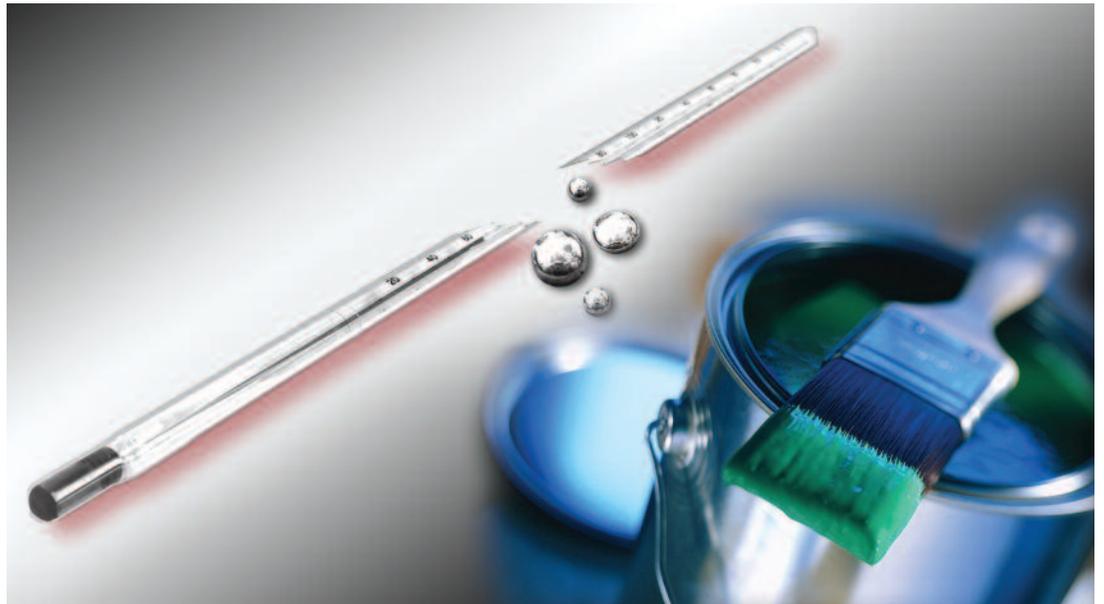
Over 80,000 chemicals are in use today. Around 1500 new ones are added each year. The health and environmental impact information about most of them is not in the public realm. Consumers either do not know what is in the products they use or are unaware of any detrimental impacts on health. Products of everyday use cause health and environmental impacts throughout their life cycle - during manufacturing, use and disposal as waste. This is only now being tackled in several countries through the mandating of the use of cleaner alternatives and making data disclosure by manufacturers to consumers compulsory. Consumer pressure has been a critical factor in this. It is time we too took notice.

LEAD IN PAINTS: Lead has been added to paints for over a century for improved brightness and durability. However, for over 70 years knowledge about its irreversible and permanent damage to children's brains has existed. Today no level of lead exposure is considered safe. Indian enamel paints contain high amounts of lead added by manufacturers. The paint flakes, peels, mixes in dust and is ingested by infants. It also contaminates products like toys and furniture before ending up in soil and water when disposed as waste.

Europe banned lead in paints in 1935 while the US did so in 1971. A recent study shows that while developed countries do not have leaded paints, several developing countries do, and often the companies which produce them are connected or the same.

Clearly this is a case of double standards. Lead has been recognised as a prime toxic by the World Health Organization. It impacts over 40 million children worldwide, over 97 per cent of whom live in developing countries. Substitutes for lead in paint have existed for a long time and have no price impact.

Though lead in petrol has been removed, lead in paints still remains and is being sold to gullible customers. With no public pressure, the Indian



Government has been silent and has only put in place an outdated voluntary standard of 1000 ppm when internationally the mandatory standard permits only 90 ppm of lead in products. Meanwhile the industry watches, even as the United Nations Environment Program has begun a partnership effort to eliminate lead from paints by 2020.

MERCURY AT HOME: Mercury and its compound methyl mercury is a known neurotoxic, so toxic that 1 gm of mercury can contaminate a 100 acre lake making the fish unfit to eat. Each thermometer we use at home contains about 0.6 gm of mercury. A large part of the global fish stock is said to be contaminated with mercury and enters our body as food. Schools use mercury in laboratories and hospitals use it in thermometers and blood pressure instruments. Even the Compact Florescent Tube (CFL) contains tiny amounts of mercury.

It was after the tragic Minamata disaster in Japan in the 1950s that the toxic impacts of mercury were realized. This 'wonder' metal has been used in measuring instruments, dental amalgam, lighting, industrial production and also in small scale gold mining. It has long distance transport mechanisms and has been found in Arctic ice even though it is not used anywhere there.

A mercury spill at home is deadly. Simultaneously existing as a liquid and vapour at room temperature, it quickly fills the air. If a thermometer breaks in a hospital in the US, the ward is evacuated or the school closed. It is now impossible to buy a mercury thermometer in the US or in Europe.

At home it is prudent to replace mercury with digital thermometers and to take precautions such as opening doors and windows if a CFL breaks. Some hospitals in India are doing the same thing. Though digital thermometers are more expensive here (partly owing to their low demand) they pay back in terms of longer usage and prevention of health impacts. Disposal of the

battery could still pose problems though.

A worrying use of mercury here is for *parads* or *shivlings*, widely used for religious purposes, which are freely available. It is claimed that holy water or milk touched by them, is very beneficial. Studies have found high levels of mercury in such milk, even though traditional medicinal practitioners see this as harmless. In a few temples in India such *shivlings* weigh several hundred kilos and contain alloyed mercury.

The production of mercury devices can also be very hazardous, as is their disposal. Often mercury is sucked manually into the glass leading to direct inhalation by workers, whilst broken mercury thermometers are handled by waste pickers and the mercury evaporates or spills onto the soil.

COTTON: Textile production, especially cotton, has a very high environmental impact. Cotton is one of the most pesticide intensive crops grown in India. During its processing and production many types of chemical and other pollutants are released which have contaminated major river ways and fresh water bodies. These include highly toxic and persistent pollutants which are not possible to clean up later. A highly fragmented, though economically very significant sector, it is a cause for environmental concerns and occupational hazards. Organic cotton is a way forward and is increasingly being produced, though it needs much better consumer support.

Recognising your power to help shape environmental sustainability is the key. Consumers demanding more information, labelling, safer products and better practices have forced significant new regulations, policies and industry accountability in many countries. 'No Data No Market' is the mantra of the European Union now. On the other hand if we do not ask, we will only get the worst. A sustainable future lies in our hands and our hands alone.

Ravi Agarwal is Director, Toxics Link, New Delhi

A feast of millets

KANCHI KOHLI

CITIES have forgotten the amazing foods and cuisines they used to once enjoy. To remind them the Millet Network of India (MINI) and Kheti Virasat Mission organised the first ever exhibition of millets at the Press Club in Chandigarh called Bebe di Rasoi (Grandmother's Kitchen).

A bunch of doughty Punjabi women farmers rustled up an awesome range of foods made from millets. The women have rejected chemical farming and opted for biodiverse natural farming. They call their effort, Trinjan.

The exhibition and the aroma of food roused plenty of curiosity. A 12-year-old girl peered at the exhibits and asked her mother, "What are millets?" There was no response, so she persisted till her mother decided to find out.

This is what Bebe di Rasoi had set out to achieve – get people intrigued about our forgotten foods and food cultures. The Millet Network of India had set itself a challenge, to reach out to city folks for whom the word millet had disappeared from their vocabulary and their dining table.

Millets comprise a variety of food grains like Jowar, Bajra, Mandua, Kangni, Sawan, Kodo or Kutki. They might be called by different names in different regions of the country, but they have at one time been integral to our farms, kitchens and even cultural rituals. Over the years, agricultural text books and policies have come to call them coarse grains or 'mote anaaj' (fat grains) in Hindi. Such tagging has given millets a cultural stigma.

But those who understand millets as a concept and not merely as a crop say that these grains are India's future. It is millets which will be the key to resolving India's agricultural crisis burdened by farmer suicides and soil degradation. They say this because over the years millets have time and again withstood challenges and provided people with food, water, fibre, health, nutrition, livelihood and ecological balance.

The mixed farming system had an inbuilt food security. It ensured food security for rural households as the failure of one crop was balanced by the survival of another. Every farmer who has practiced mixed farming will tell you that it allows different crops to complement each other's requirements of nutrient content in soils and gives us examples of how people's science operates on the ground. Vijay Jardhari from Beej Bachao Andolan, a pioneering

farmer's movement from Uttarakhand, says that in the 2009 drought, it is millets in their village that have coped the best.

It was this belief that got Kheti Virasat Mission, the Millet Network of India and the Press Club of Chandigarh to organise Bebe Di Rasoi. In the agricultural capital of India the concept and content of millet grains has disappeared under the burden of commercialised Green Revolution farming. Nothing short of a statement of intent was needed.

So, Bebe Di Rasoi was organised to conserve and revive the traditional and millet based food of Punjab. It had two critical inspirations. First, was



This is what Bebe di Rasoi had set out to achieve - get people intrigued about our forgotten foods and food cultures.



Women farmers from Punjab and Andhra Pradesh at the Press Club

the effort of women farmers from different villages from Punjab to move to biodiverse natural farming.

The second was the linkage to MINI, a network of organisations, scientists, consumers, academicians, policy planners who have taken on the agenda of pushing for millet based farming in India. The network is convened by the Deccan Development Society of Andhra Pradesh which comprises of Dalit women farmers who have exemplified the biodiversity capacity of their small harsh red soils. They till this land, feed nutrition to their families and through their outreach inspire many more women farmers.

That was the beauty of Bebe Di Rasoi – women from Punjab taking on the chemical farming agenda and drawing strength from the women farmers of



A platter of tasty millets dishes

Andhra Pradesh. They exchanged glances, food and, most importantly, strength.

The event attracted an intrigued urban crowd. The biggest confusion was: which food to choose? Should we opt for the Moth-Bajre ki kichdi with Kaur Tumiyan da achaar from Punjab? Or should we try millet rotis, khichdi, curry and savouries from Andhra? Should we save our greed for the delicious ragi ladoos or head towards the mal puas?

Even the Chief Minister of Punjab, Sardar Prakash Singh Badal could not resist. He was there to inaugurate the seminar on Food Sovereignty and Agricultural Crisis. He heard out PV Satheesh, convenor of MINI, Claude Alvares from the Organic Farming Association of India and Umendra Dutt from Kheti Virasat Mission. They spoke about the looming agricultural crisis and how millet based farming can help us find a way out. The Chief Minister said he eats millets for breakfast every morning and knows their importance. He assured the organisers that he will push for millets to be introduced in midday meals schemes in all schools of Punjab. Now that was surely a step forward.

The rural women from different districts held cookery classes on millet based recipes. Yet we have a long way to go. If one looks at the figures of the Ninth and 10th Five Year Plan allotment of grain share, rice is 42 per cent, wheat 35 per cent and coarse grains, 14 per cent. For years, neither the government's public distribution system (PDS) nor the markets had space for these highly nutritious grains. In fact, from 1966 to 2006, India lost 44 per cent of millet cultivation areas to other crops.

Today, the nutritional value of major millets like jowar, bajra and ragi are being recognised by consumers and health specialists. So, after years of neglect, millets are finding their place in agricultural research institutes and the agendas of large private companies, this time as nutraceuticals.

Kanchi Kohli is a member of Kalpavriksh environmental action group

Living

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Goa gets a film

Unusual story of a forest ranger wins local and global accolades

Saibal Chatterjee
Panjim (Goa)

LAXMIKANT Shetgaonkar, a Vasco da Gama-based theatre arts graduate who began his professional life as an acting instructor at the National School of Drama, hasn't had it easy. It took the young man four excruciating years and a lot of hard work to get his first feature film, the Konkani-language *Paltadacho Munis* (The Man Beyond the Bridge), off the ground. But today, it is taking him places.

It is easy to see why. Although made in a region and a language that do not have any filmmaking history, Shetgaonkar's cinematic essay is marked by a remarkable degree of narrative and technical finesse. It is underpinned by a keen sense of societal complexities, which is reflected in the ease and economy with which Shetgaonkar handles a difficult theme.

Loosely adapted from a story by well-known Konkani writer Mahabaleshwar Sail, *Paltadacho Munis* is about a simple-minded but steely forest ranger, Vinayak, who has recently lost his wife. He lives in the heart of the jungle. His only link with his village is a rudimentary rope bridge that hangs across a stream.

As Vinayak patrols a large protected expanse all in a day's work, he is constantly haunted by his loneliness. One night, he finds a madwoman cowering behind his house in the forest. He rescues her from her plight and an intense bonding gradually develops between the man and the nameless woman.

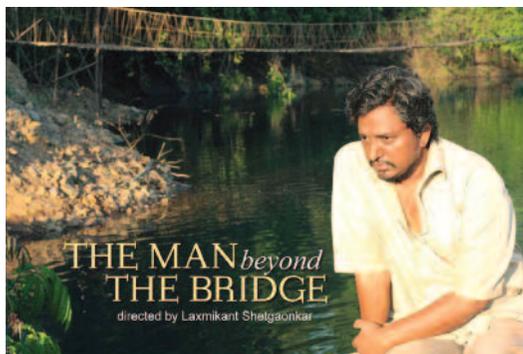
They communicate with gestures and nods, no words are exchanged between them. The woman becomes pregnant. The village community that lives on the edge of the forest is aghast. But Vinayak is determined to stand by the woman who is now his only real companion.

Shetgaonkar's film has a logic and rhythm independent of Sail's literary text. "I have only used the kernel of the story. In the story, the woman



Laxmikant Shetgaonkar

Although made in a region and a language that does not have any filmmaking history, Shetgaonkar's cinematic essay is marked by a remarkable degree of narrative and technical finesse



recovers and leaves Vinayak," the director points out. "In the film, the male protagonist, in a sense, moves from ordinary humanity to a state of divinity even as people around him are building a temple, looking for God in stone."

This parallel yet decisive track in *Paltadacho Munis* lifts the film above the mundane. The film addresses multiple issues – environment, faith, moral taboos – but does so without working itself up into a messy lather.

Though essentially an elemental love story, it critiques the machinations and follies of a superstitious society that equates insanity with evil and, egged on by a local politician, thinks nothing of causing grave ecological damage by building a temple on a hillock in the forest. Shetgaonkar weaves the political with the emotional so seamlessly that it comes across as something that is organically embedded in the narrative, not as a laboured afterthought.

"My documentaries and short films have all had a strong social and political context. I might have a clear point of view about things that are happening around me, but I try not to be judgmental. For a filmmaker, objectivity is of paramount importance," asserts Shetgaonkar.

At the 34th Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), where *Paltadacho Munis* had its world premiere in September, the film won the prestigious Fipresci (International Federation of Film Critics) Prize. Cameron Bailey, TIFF co-director who was instrumental in selecting *Paltadacho Munis* for the festival's official programme, lauded it for "drawing together a keen environmental sensitivity and a nuanced view of village dynamics".

In the second half of October, Shetgaonkar's little cinematic gem competed for the New Talent Award at the 6th Hong Kong Asian Film Festival. And, clearly, there is more on the way.

"I was looking for funds for the film since 2005. Somebody proposed that I do the film in Hindi but I was adamant. I had to make *Paltadacho Munis* in Konkani," says Shetgaonkar recalling the struggle that he had to endure until the Union government-mandated National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) stepped into the breach.

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"Goa does not have any cinema literacy, so it is tough to make a film in the state," says Shetgaonkar. "We can only hope that the situation will improve from this point on."

Now armed with a Rs 25 lakh reward handed out to him by the Digambar Kamat government in Goa, Shetgaonkar hopes to give *Paltadacho Munis* a decent release all across Goa and in parts of Karnataka that have a Konkani-speaking population. "We are planning the release for December," he reveals. But, more than anything else, he wants to see Konkani cinema flourish and go beyond the boundaries of the state.

"We've had five editions of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa, but we

'We are planning the release for December,' he reveals. But, more than anything else, he wants to see Konkani cinema flourish and go beyond the boundaries of the state.

would be hard pressed to find five Konkani films to screen here," he says, summing up the current state of Goan cinema.

Shetgaonkar participated in the Script Lab organised by NFDC during last year's IFFI in Goa, where he was mentored, among others, by Bosnian director-screenwriter Danis Tanovic, the maker of the Oscar-winning *No Man's Land*. Things fell into place quickly enough for the film to roll within weeks.

"I shot the film entirely on the Goa-Karnataka border," says Shetgaonkar. "The stream that you see and the bridge across it were artificially created specifically for the film."

One of the most striking aspects of *Paltadacho Munis* is its minimalist soundtrack. "The film did not require any music barring the theme composition," says Shetgaonkar. "The music of the forest was enough."

The role of the film's male protagonist has been played by the NSD-trained Chittaranjan Giri. "He is from Madhya Pradesh but he spoke all his Konkani lines himself for the cause of authenticity." Giri's nuanced performance is of the highest order, and so is Marathi actress Veena Jamkar's interpretation of a madwoman who must express her inner torment entirely with her eyes and face.

Shetgaonkar has made the most of the opening that he has got. He is clearly a filmmaker endowed with a vision and spirit that is entirely his own. So, not just Konkani cinema, but Indian cinema as a whole, will be looking up to him to break new ground in the years ahead.



Bhagalpur is in fashion

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

If you asked fashion gurus about Bhagalpur silk some years ago, they would have shrugged and said it's just another dying tradition from a seedy town somewhere in the badlands of Bihar.

Things have really changed, though. London and Paris, the fashion capitals of the world are admiring Bhagalpur silk. Garments made of Bhagalpur are scorching international ramps, attracting footfalls and buyers.

This turnaround is the achievement of a young fashion designer from Bihar, 30-year-old Samant

Chauhan, a graduate of Textile Design from Delhi's National Institute of Fashion Technology, (NIFT). Chauhan realised that Bhagalpur silk was more than just fabric.

"Bhagalpur silk is non-violent silk," he explains. "It is one of the few silks in which the silkworm is not killed. It is wild silk in which the cocoon is kept for ten to fifteen days till the worms start breaking out. The silk is then hand spun. The process is completely eco-friendly without the use of any dyes."

Chauhan says he is inspired by the innate ethos of Bhagalpur silk. He aptly calls it 'Ahimsa Silk' or peace silk. It is produced in small production

LAKSHMAN ANAND



units scattered in a 20 km radius of Bhagalpur. Over the years the town's handloom industry had lost its sheen with no patrons and little investment in technique and branding.

"At NIFT, I was surprised to find that very few people could identify Bhagalpur silk. Everyone knows what Bangalore silk and Mysore silk are. In Bhagalpur, the industry is controlled by people who invest their profits outside Bihar. It is not organised. The weavers don't have even basic infrastructure."

"For my college graduating project, I decided to work with Bhagalpur silk. I wanted to help keep one of the three main craft traditions of my state alive," says Chauhan, who comes from the Indian Railways township of Jamalpur.

The move paid off. His graduation collection in 2004 won several awards at the NIFT, Delhi show. He was also adjudged the Best Designer at a competition between winners of all NIFT

branches in Kolkata the same year.

Chauhan admits these early triumphs gave him the confidence to continue working with the naturally-coloured fabric. To make ends meet he worked in export houses for over a year. He entered his collection, a menswear line of jackets, long coats and men's bags in earthy

Samant has taken his 'Ahimsa Collection' to Paris and London. His collection was featured in London Fashion Week's Estethica

tones with no embellishments or embroidery, for the Asian Young Design Contest at the Singapore Fashion Week in October 2005. As the first runner up, Chauhan received a \$5,000 cash prize, and that became his seed fund to start his own label – Samant Chauhan.

With his western street wear from Bhagalpuri raw silk, Chauhan has emerged as a designer to watch out for. His clean lines, simple, classic designs and his promotion of a rarely used fabric in fashion circles have international buyers queuing up.

Samant has taken his 'Ahimsa Collection' to Paris and London. In February this year, his collection was featured in London Fashion Week's Estethica which boasts the best of ethical fashion in each season.

Chauhan credits Bhagalpur's silk weavers for his success. "It's such a unique fabric. No two garments can ever look exactly the same. Each is different in texture and colour. No two swatches ever look alike because it is all hand woven. The weaver is so skilled. The fabric itself is a masterpiece," he enthuses.

In fact, his design process now includes working with the weavers to get specific patterns. For his first collection, he spent several weeks in Bhagalpur, collaborating with weavers. Chauhan has successfully mixed Bhagalpur silk with linen, pashmina and wool to create interesting yarns. His collections have used oxidised, metal embroidery, simple pleating techniques and now ikat on Bhagalpur silk to widen its range.

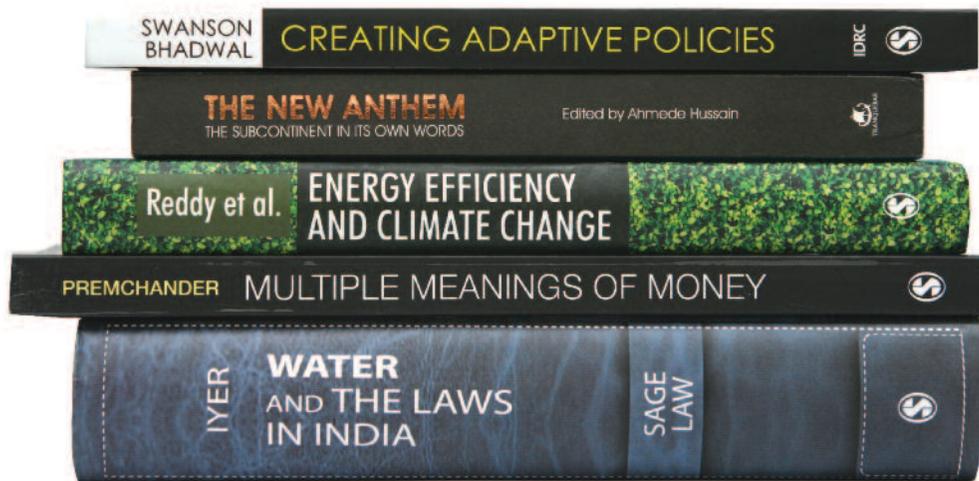
Chauhan sources the raw silk from NGO cooperatives and works with weavers to upgrade their skills. In 2005, he helped set up a block printing unit in Bhagalpur which currently employs 600 people.

He is also working on a project with the Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) to set up a 200 manual machine outfit in Bhagalpur. "Lack of power is a big problem facing the handloom industry in Bihar. Our production unit will generate employment, be electricity free and sustainable," he explains.

Chauhan has incorporated elements in his designs that use the residue of the hand weaving process. The leftover silk is much harder and extremely labour intensive to put in clothes. Chauhan says using it helps generate employment and minimise waste.

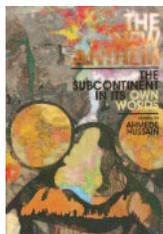
These efforts have helped him stand out. Yet Chauhan says frankly he did not even know what organic meant when he first entered the London Fashion Week in 2007. "People think I latched on to organic, ethical fashion as a clever positioning strategy. But that's not true. In fact, it restricts me a lot in high fashion. Many buyers don't want luxury to be associated with non-violence, handspun, organic. These are not immediate connotations of high fashion," Chauhan explains.

He is determined to stay the course. "I will continue working with Bhagalpuri silk because I believe awareness will come eventually. I cannot give up because then there is nothing distinguishing my work from others."



A QUICK SELECTION FROM THE MANY BOOKS THAT TURN UP FOR REVIEW

Random shelf help

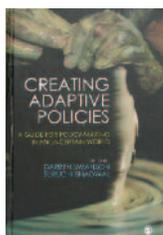


THE NEW ANTHEM
The subcontinent in its own words
Ahmede Hussain (Edited)
Rs 350
Tranquebar

Ahmede Hussain, a writer from Bangladesh, has put together an anthology which is timely. Writers from South Asia are being avidly read for their engrossing stories and fresh perspectives.

The book has stories from 22 major writers in South Asia. There is Amit Chaudhury, Raj Kamal Jha, Tabish Khare, Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Qaisra Shahraz and many others.

Read Amitava Kumar's, 'The Fragrance of Cuticura' which describes communal riots in Patna as seen through the eyes of a child whose father is in the police. Altaf Tyrewala in 'Voices in the Head' spins a story about an abortionist and his moral dilemma. Padma Vishwanathan's 'The Barber Lover' describes caste and gender bias in a village in southern India. Read also 'Chahar Bagh: the Mulberry Courtesan', a fascinating profile of a half Afghan, half Muscovite young woman and how she tracks down an ancient story.



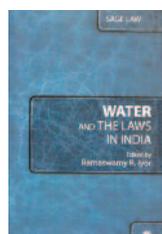
CREATING ADAPTIVE POLICIES
Darren Swanson, Suruchi Bhadwal

In a country as diverse as India, drawing up policies is tricky. There are myriad social customs along with issues concerning climate change, food security, healthcare, energy etc. Adaptive policies are necessary. The book provides indicators on how such policies should be drawn up. The authors simplify their ideas by introducing seven tools. Each chapter explains one aspect of

these tools. In India, governance is plagued by poor processes so such ideas could help.

Adaptive policies, according to the book, should help communities to organise and network socially, decentralise decision making to the lowest unit of governance, be variable and also be able to monitor. So for healthcare, variation is important, since small scale interventions work and in forestry, it is important to empower local groups.

The book has some useful case studies which illustrate how policies should be drawn up.



WATER AND THE LAWS IN INDIA
Ramaswamy R Iyer
Rs 995
Sage

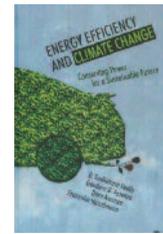
A fat tome but worth reading. The book packs in 20 papers on different aspects of water and the legal questions that arise. The papers are written by well known experts. They don't always agree with each other. In fact, at times, they contradict each other. This gives the reader a more holistic perspective.

The book is divided into two parts. The first is on water resource policy, management, conservation, conflict resolution and so on. The second is on water law.

India's water laws appear to be a somewhat tangled mess, divided between the Centre, the states and the Supreme Court. The reality is that the situation on the ground and the laws above don't harmonise. Sometimes Supreme Court orders can't be implemented because they are not in touch with reality. There is no sensible system for resolving conflicts over sharing of river waters. Writers differ on whether more action is needed from the Union or whether federal rights should be strengthened. There is also lack of peoples' involvement in water management by law.

Recommended reading would be Fali Nariman,

Radha D'Souza, Tony Puthucherril, Upendra Baxi, MS Vani, KC Sivaramakrishna and Himanshu Thakkar's papers. MS Vani also dissects groundwater laws in India - a subject which really needs to be sorted out for water security. Discussions on EIA are worth a read.



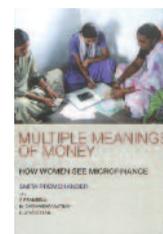
ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND CLIMATE CHANGE
CONSERVING POWER FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE
B Sudhakara Reddy, Gaudenz B Assenza, Dora Assenza, Franziska Hasselmann
Rs 750
Sage

Developing countries worry that the climate change debate could hinder their growth path by limiting their consumption of energy. The authors of this book argue that developing countries don't need to ape the profligate West. They can grow in a sustainable manner by being energy efficient.

Easier said than done. The authors acknowledge that promoting renewable energy has not worked. The first few chapters talk about the relationship between environment, economy and energy, the great climate change debate and how the emissions market and climate mitigation strategies can attract investors. Benefits and drawbacks of energy efficiency measures are explained.

The authors identify the barriers and drivers to promoting energy efficient technologies and the institutions responsible for these barriers. There is a chapter on international law.

The authors point out that it is the private sector which can innovate and promote energy efficient products and services. So far governments and multilateral institutions have been doing it with limited success. Entrepreneurs need to be supported by government within reasonable limits. Otherwise, dependency creeps in and the initiative fails.



MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF MONEY: HOW WOMEN SEE MICROFINANCE
Smita Premchander with V. Prameela, M. Chidambaramathan, L. Jeyaseelan
Rs 595
Sage

This book analyses what microfinance and money mean to women. In doing so, it focuses on the perspectives of individual women and those in groups. Based on case studies and participatory research methods, it explores women's money management strategies, group dynamics and learning processes. The book also analyses money as a social relationship, elaborating how relationships of trust are built and points out that it is critical women forge these bonds, and not merely remain beneficiaries or clients. A need for a fresh look at understanding the impact of microfinance programmes is highlighted because the authors found that conventional, assumed approach to such projects is often not in consonance with women's experiences on the ground. Professionals working in micro finance and gender issues, and policy makers, will find the book enriching.

Homely games for children

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

AS a mother of two children, book-lover and writer Geetanjali Krishna never downplays fun. It's a piece of advice she hopes other parents take seriously too. To help them do that, Geetanjali recently launched her first book, 'It's Playtime Folks', a compilation of 25 easy-to-organise games for children between three and 14 years at the Dastkar Nature Bazaar in New Delhi.

Illustrated in red, white and black by tattooist and graphic artist, Isa Es Asi, the book is attractive to read and has games that require few props but lots of imagination! In an age of stylised, high-tech computer games, Geetanjali hopes the book will bring back the innocence and charm of impromptu, made-on-the-go fun.

"Games are the best way to impart skills to children without them being conscious of the fact that they are learning," Geetanjali adds. That's a trick she has tried and perfected with her chil-

dren, Ashwin and Anusha, and their many friends. In fact, Geetanjali spent two months 'testing' all the games mentioned in the book.

"I have collected these games over many years. I love making children play. I would catch hold of my son's friends in the parks and get them to play. We had so much fun. But, many of them run away now when they see me. They know I must have a new game up my sleeve," laughs Geetanjali.

Many games featured have been inspired from real-life exigencies. Three games were plotted when Geetanjali and her family were stuck in a traffic jam on their way to Corbett National Park. These are



Geetanjali Krishna

'Peanuts', 'Yes Yes No No' and 'Twenty Questions'.

Geetanjali says she knew such a book had great potential for parents, educators and children. Instead of going to an established publisher, she collaborated with paper maker Mahima Mehra to launch Inkblots, a publishing unit for independent books. "It's Playtime Folks" is their first book.

Priced at Rs 350, it is made with 100 per cent recycled cotton waste paper and printed with soy based inks. It is also hand-bound to introduce children to the age-old craft of book making.

The response was enthusiastic at the Dastkar Nature Bazaar. "We didn't expect much. We told our printers we only wanted 50 books. But we ran out of stock in two days. Our printers have worked overnight to get more books ready. We have sold over 150 copies, and have received orders and queries from retailers across the country," Geetanjali exclaims.

A new voice in Kashmir

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

THE Kashmir Valley is always in the news. Every day newspapers publish stories about militancy, counter insurgency and politics. But there are many other worthy stories waiting to be told, stories about other issues which affect the lives of people. Afsana and Jehangir Rashid Malik, both journalists based in Srinagar, are betting on their new, monthly magazine Reality Bites to give them the space to do that.

"Mainstream publications are focussed on political developments and separatist politics. We want to do so much more, report on the development agenda, civil society activism and look at issues that have just not been covered. We also want to provide news people can use, information that helps people live better," explains Jehangir who is editor of the magazine.

"Journalists always say only bad news makes news. We want to change that. Because of the conflict in Kashmir, only negative news has come out of here. There have been positive developments too. Entrepreneurship is thriving here. Life has gone on. And we want to capture that sentiment," adds Afsana, the publisher.

Afsana and Jehangir are both award-winning mainstream journalists, and have worked with the region's best known publications –



Afsana, publisher, Jehangir, editor, with Bilal Bahadur, photographer, Hilal Ahmad, news agency owner and Kaisar Ahmad, layout designer

Kashmir Times, Daily E'talat, Daily Khidmat – reporting on politics, gender issues and human rights violations.

Afsana has also authored *Waiting for Justice: Widows and Half Widows*, a book that describes the plight of women whose husbands have disappeared or been killed in custody over the past two decades due to counter insurgency operations in Kashmir. Afsana has also received fellowships from Action Aid India and UN Population Fund for her gutsy reporting on conflict and gender issues. Jehangir has been awarded the Sanjoy Ghose Humanitarian Award for story writing and was also granted a fellow-

ship by Action Aid India.

Undoubtedly, Reality Bites takes advantage of this rich experience but Afsana and Jehangir are determined to offer a fresh perspective.

Modelled like a general news magazine, Reality Bites has a varied editorial mix. Its 40 pages are devoted to news, interviews with senior officers, experts and administrators, and there are sections on travel, agriculture, technology, sports, health, youth affairs and personal care.

Reality Bites published its first issue in July 2009. It started with a print run of 500 copies. Priced at Rs 30, it is available through subscriptions and has already managed a decent distribution network with a presence on news stands across the state. Its online issue is popular but selling advertising space continues to be a challenge. Afsana and Jehangir have pooled in their personal savings to run the magazine. But, even then, financial reward is not their dominant driving force.

"We hope the magazine creates a space for itself. I am not worried about circulation. There are people interested in reading beyond politics. There is interest in sports, cinemas, civil society organisations. That space is there. It needs to be catered to," says Jehangir.

www.realitybitesmagazine.com



Sai prefers social themes

SAIBAL CHATTERJEE

FILM lovers know Sai Paranjpye, 71, primarily as the maker of early 1980s rib-tickers like *Chashme Buddoor* and *Katha*. Her reputation rests just as much on films like *Papeeha*, a genteel love story involving a young anthropologist and a forest officer, and *Saaz*, about a pair of singer-sisters who drift apart as professional rivalry drives a wedge between them.

Neither is that all. Besides a few films for children and young adults, Paranjpye has in a long, eventful career crafted sensitive, award-winning films like *Sparsh*, set in a school for the visually impaired, and *Disha*, which dealt with the plight of migrant workers in a big city.

Indeed, cinema with a social conscience holds a special appeal for Paranjpye. In today's profit-driven movie industry, she is a bit of an anachronism, which is why she hasn't made a feature film since 2001's *Bhago Bhoot*. "I am uncomfortable working with stars. Hence it is tough to find backers for my kind of cinema," she says.

So it is no surprise that Paranjpye has always tapped alternative avenues of filmmaking. She has now put her exceptional storytelling skills to bolster the nationwide campaign to spread awareness about AIDS, especially among groups that are particularly vulnerable.

She has just completed two World Bank-supported short films, *Suee* (The Needle) and *Horrn Pukare* (The Call of the Horn), to draw attention to the stigmatisation and discrimination faced by AIDS victims as a result of public misconceptions about the disease.

The two films emerged from a script that Paranjpye had written for a full-length episodic feature titled 'Kiss-se'. "It did not materialise," she says. "The budget was Rs 6 crore and it was difficult to raise that kind of money for a starless film of this nature."

The original concept, the veteran writer-director points out, "had humour, drama and a social message couched in an entertaining format". Paranjpye says: "The idea was shelved simply because we did not get the money."

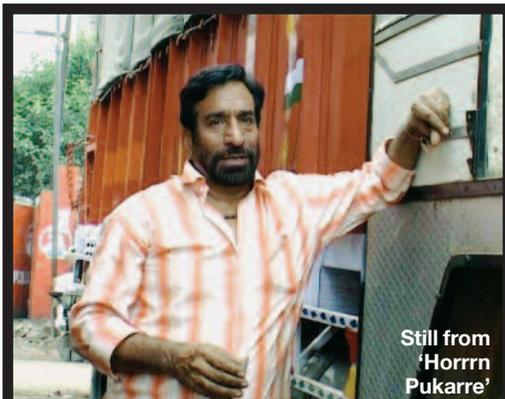
The World Bank usually funds films that are of five minutes' duration. "I couldn't have covered all the dimensions of the problem in just five minutes. So I offered to organise the remainder of the production funding myself," reveals Paranjpye.

Suee and *Horrn Pukare* have, therefore, been made with the backing of multiple agencies – the South Asia Region Development Marketplace (SARDM) Partnership spearheaded by the World Bank, the government of Norway, the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), UNAIDS and UNICEF.

Suee, 29 minutes long, focuses on the danger that hovers over injecting drug users in urban areas. The film narrates the story of an educated middle-class boy who becomes a drug addict and, as a result of indiscriminate use of unsterilized needles, falls prey to the HIV virus. Gangrene sets



Sai Paranjpye at work



The 24-minute Horrnn Pukare transmits the message of safe sex to India's 35 lakh truck drivers who are exposed to the risk of AIDS



in and he is in danger of losing a leg.

The 24-minute *Horrnn Pukare*, on the other hand, transmits the message of safe sex to India's 35 lakh truck drivers who are exposed to the risk of AIDS. The film zeroes in on one particular fictional lorry driver who is HIV positive and celebrates his spirit of resilience while throwing light on the various dimensions of the problem that men of his ilk are up against every single day of their lives on the road.

Significantly, both the films end on a positive note. In *Suee*, the young man escapes amputation thanks to the timely intervention of a seasoned surgeon. Not only is he successfully rehabilitated, he makes a name for himself as a peer counsellor.

Horrnn Pukare opens with the male protagonist receiving news that his son back in his village has been expelled from school because his father is HIV positive. But by the time the film ends, we learn that the boy has been readmitted following a public protest mobilised against the school by the truck driver's wife.

The films have received a positive response from NGOs and corporate houses. Paranjpye is hopeful that they will receive "wide circulation". She adds: "Besides several major corporate entities like Johnson & Johnson, the Indian Air Force has acquired the films. Doordarshan is also likely to telecast them."

Master copies of the two films are being handed out to corporates and others who want to screen them. "We are charging Rs 10,000 per film to cover our costs. One can organise any number of shows once the film has been bought. This distribution model is working rather well," says Paranjpye.

For film enquiries contact: Siddhesh Nair at 'sidy91@gmail.com' or Nageshwar on 09833475444

Civil Society

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Parwanoo Belmud Dindigul Chengalpattu Kannur Saligao
Thrissur Mhpasa.....

Breathe right, be bright

SAMITA RATHOR

WHEN the Breath wanders, the mind is unsteady, but when the Breath is still, so is the mind still." - Hatha Yoga Pradipika

Breathing is the greatest of life's pleasures. Breath is life. It is one of our most crucial functions. It is a natural instinct. We all know how to breathe. It is something that occurs automatically and spontaneously. We are breathing even when we are not aware of it.

One of the five principles of yoga is pranayama. Through pranayama we learn to control our breath. Pranayama brings more oxygen to the blood and brain and manages the vital life energy through modulation and breath control.

Yoga works primarily with this energy in the body through the science of pranayama and breath control. Yoga teaches us how, through breath-control, we can still the mind and attain higher states of awareness. The higher teachings of yoga take one beyond techniques and show the yogi or yoga practitioner how to direct his concentration in such a way as not only to harmonise humans with divine consciousness, but to merge his consciousness in the Infinite.

The word pranayama is derived from two Sanskrit words – 'prana' is breath or vital energy in the body and ayama means control. Therefore, pranayama means the control of the flow of the vital energy which is the life force. One can control the rhythms of pranic energy with pranayama and attain a healthy body and mind.

According to yoga legend Sri Krishnamacharya, in the right practice of yoga, pranayama goes in har-

mony with the asanas. The coming together of these two yogic principles is measured as the chief type of purification and self-discipline, covering both mind and body. Krishnamacharya particularly stressed the importance of combining breath work (pranayama) with the postures (asanas) of yoga and meditation (dhyana) to reach the desired goal.

Sri Krishnamacharya said: "Breath is central to yoga because it is central to life and yoga is about life."

FACTS ABOUT PRANAYAMA

- Breathing is the only means of supplying our bodies and its various organs with oxygen which is vital for our survival. Learn the importance of proper breathing through a competent yoga teacher.
- The pranayama practice gives importance to puraka, rechaka, and kumbhaka of breath.
- Puraka or inhalation stimulates the system and fills the lungs with fresh air.
- Retention or kumbhaka raises the internal temperature and plays an important part in increasing the absorption of oxygen.
- Exhalation or rechaka causes the diaphragm to return to the original position and the air full of toxins and impurities is forced out by the contraction of inter-costal muscles.
- Rechaka, Puraka and Kumbhaka massage the abdominal muscles and tone up the working of

various organs of the body. Due to the proper functions of these organs, vital energy flows to all the systems. The success of pranayama depends on proper ratios being maintained between inhalation, exhalation and retention.

- Prana is the centre of all yoga exercises and practices. It is the energy, the self-energizing force that embraces the body.
- Pranayama is a very potent and powerful form of breathing. Always make sure you do it under the supervision of a competent teacher and not by reading a book and watching television. It is very individual as each of us has different breathing capacities. So doing pranayama in a group can be extremely dangerous. If done scientifically, with proper guidance, one learns soon and experiences its wonderful and even inconceivable benefits.
- Pranayama can be done in various seated postures. Those who cannot sit with their legs crossed can sit on a chair.
- Make sure the environment is clean, fresh and well ventilated.

Swami Chidananda Saraswati describes prana as a subtle invisible force. "It is the life-force that pervades the body. It is the factor that connects the body and the mind because it is connected on one side with the body and on the other side with the mind. It is the connecting link between the body and the mind. The body and the mind have no direct connection. They are connected through prana only and this prana is different from the breathing you have in your physical body".

samitarathor@gmail.com

MAGIC WEAVE

Artisans Alliance is a cooperative of weavers in Jawaja, Rajasthan. They make carpets and durries in wool and cotton. The designs and colours are very attractive and prices reasonable. Artisans Alliance started in 1985. At that time the weavers were making saris which nobody would buy. They were living in abject poverty, says Ramlal who is a member of the cooperative. The weavers were trained by IIM and NID, Ahmedabad, provided the designs. Now the weavers are better off. They displayed their products at the Dastkar Nature Bazaar in Delhi.



Contact: Ramlal, c/o Tikam Restaurant, Opp Central Academy School, Ajmer Road, Beawar-305901 Ph: 9829369761, 01462-262133

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