

Civil Society

AAM AADMI PART 2

RAISING THE BAR IN POLITICS



A 16-HOUR CHIEF MINISTER



THE THINGS NITISH KUMAR DOES RIGHT

Through efficiency and dedication he has restored law and order and built a new, upbeat

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RAISING THE BAR IN POLITICS

The UPA government is a mix of experience and youth. Each ministry has an agenda to achieve inclusive growth. Is politics and governance finally meeting aspirations?

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Civil Society

READ U S. WE READ YO U.

Activism is welcome

YOUNG, educated and mission-driven people are making their presence felt in politics. Some of them are ministers in the new government. The bar in public life it seems is going up. There couldn't be better news because a democracy should be able to rely on its politicians. The higher their standards the better the quality of governance and stronger the system.

The recent Lok Sabha election was won on the promise of inclusion. But finding solutions to the problems of land, housing, water, health, schools, transport etc won't be easy. Where should a government begin? How should it spend? How can it build trust?

For far too long now governments have been in the grip of narrow interests. Industry, for instance, has had a disproportionate influence over policies and the processes by which they are implemented. If it is not industry, it could be plain populism or just corruption that destroys good governance.

Getting government out of these equations requires tact and insight. But the way forward is really through contemporary solutions from those new leaders who have come into politics with a different vision. There can be no substitute for activism be it within parties or the government itself.

If you have any doubt that this is possible see what Nitish Kumar has been doing in Bihar – a state long given up as being beyond reform. In just three and a half years he has put government servants to work, restored law and order and is seriously reviving health care and education. The result is that Nitish Kumar has been able to for the first time fight and win an election in Bihar solely on performance.

Or take Sikkim, another state with a long history of corruption. The Sikkim Democratic Front under Pawan Chamling has been brought back four times because of what it seems to provide by way of development. If you want to know why the SDF is so popular, meet PD Rai, the well informed, highly educated MP from Gangtok.

This election's verdict is for action. The mandate given to the Congress is to govern for the benefit of everyone. It is a vote in favour of modernity and sincerity. On the other hand empty slogans and divisiveness have been punished. Not only has the BJP been decimated, but so have Lalu and Paswan, Mayawati and the grey-haired babus of the CPI(M). Voters it is clear have had little respect for bluff.

For all the talk of growth figures and global competitiveness, the fact is that the last UPA government was judged on NREGA, RTI, forest rights and the loan waiver to farmers. How could it have been any different in a poor economy?

Remember these were all issues that were raised in Sonia Gandhi's NAC, which finally proved to be the best antenna of the government. Perhaps Aam Aadmi Part 2 can begin from where the NAC left off, which is the willingness to listen.

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E-2144 Palam Vihar Gurgaon, Haryana 122017
Ph: 9811787772
Printed and published by Umesh Anand from A 53 D, First Floor, Panchsheel Vihar,

Malviya Nagar, New Delhi-17
Printed at Kaizen Offset, Phase-2, Okhla Industrial Area, New Delhi-20.

Postal Registration No.
DL(S)-01/3255/2009-11.
Registered to post without pre-payment U(SE)-10/2009-11 at New Delhi PSO
Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers of India under No.: ?DELENG/2003/11607

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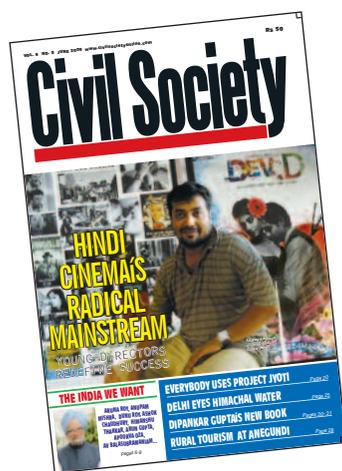
IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR

MY BEST COMPANION... ME!



LETTERS



Hindi cinema

Your cover story rightly depicted today's successful Hindi film makers as mainstream and revolutionary. Their cinema is rooted in reality, yet it is entertaining and thoughtful. It is hard to combine all three, but they succeed. Technically, too, their films compare with the best in the world. The music is awesome. We are truly proud of Indian cinema.

Dinesh Chari

An unknown person once said,

Sudhir Mishra is a mystic genius to me. I am deeply impressed by his work *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi*.

Vaibhavi

UPA's agenda

Manmohan Singh has proved to the world that ordinary people are not fools. They give credit to people who work.

Vikrant Arora

Even though the political system in India is highly corrupt, the average voter still makes decisions based on performance and not money power.

Ramky

I think the first priority of the UPA government is to respond to the difficult situation in our neighbourhood.

Shekar

After a long time India has got a stable government and a mature leadership. This is the most promising government in India's history. Credit should go to Sonia Gandhi. She has turned out to be the best politician India has had, principled, practical and courageous. No wonder the Congress party wants the Gandhis to be their leaders.

Gayatri

If the UPA concentrates on inclusion and growth it could very well wipe

out poverty and put India on a new trajectory.

Sumit

Bollu dog

With reference to Shree Padre's story on Bollu the dog labourer, I would like to say that dogs are very useful to humans. They guard people and protect them. Dogs can be trained to do many good things and this story is one fine example.

Sharmila

This is one of the most heart warming stories I have read. Great stuff!

Samita

Delhi's water

Himanshu Thakkar has rightly pointed out in his analysis, 'Delhi wants Himachal water,' that instead of repairing leakages the Delhi government wants to spend a lot of money on making a dam. If you look at the way urbanisation is taking place in the Delhi-Gurgaon-Manesar area up to Jaipur, you will realise that one dam won't make much difference. The demand for water will be so huge that no government will be able to meet it. It will have to take steps like conservation, reuse, rain water harvesting etc.

Amita Jacob

The Delhi government could clean up the Yamuna and store water during the rainy season from the river itself. It could make a few very large tanks, like in Udaipur. I am sure this would cost much less than building a dam far away.

Colonel R Taneja

Why doesn't the Delhi government build a nice big dam across the dirty Yamuna. It can acquire colonies like Maharani Bagh under the Land Acquisition Act. The 'project affected families' can then be resettled elsewhere, or given some paltry compensation. If they are unhappy, they can join Narmada Bachao Andolan. After all the dam is for the public good.

Colin Fernandes

Maternal mortality

We need strong public action to save women and babies from dying. There should be a vigorous campaign in districts where infant and maternal mortality is high to create awareness of government schemes, nutrition, medical advice, where to go for medical attention, and home remedies. Messages can be sent out on TV, community radio, wall paintings and theatre troupes. Medical infrastructure has to be strengthened too.

Asha Rani

'Financial inclusion is the key'

Civil Society News

New Delhi

INDIA's banking system still does not reach a majority of the country's population. The poor do not have bank accounts and continue to depend on moneylenders. Microfinance institutions have made headway with communities and self-help groups of women, but in the absence of policy and a national strategy vast numbers remain left out. Given the demand, the money disbursed through microfinance is insignificant. Much more needs to be done to provide access to the banking system if poverty is to be addressed and the majority are to benefit from economic growth.

"Inclusion is not possible without financial inclusion," says Vijay Mahajan, founder of Basix, an organisation which provides financial and technical assistance for 'new generation livelihoods' at the grassroots. Since 1996, Basix, which works in 15 states, has extended assistance to over a million and a half customers, 90 per cent of whom come from poor, rural households. About 10 per cent of its clients are urban slum-dwellers.

Mahajan, one of the most respected voices in the microfinance sector, spoke to *Civil Society* on the roadblocks facing the sector.

Despite considerable success, microfinance still does not reach a vast majority of marginalised people. What is holding the microfinance sector back? There still isn't a full understanding that the banking system is not reaching the vast majority of the poor. The political class understands this. But talk to the RBI and the banking sector and they will tell you how much has been achieved, the number of Kissan Credit Cards disbursed and so on. The number of farmers left out is more than double of those who have been reached. And the left out ones are probably the small, marginal farmers.

We have to accept that even after 40 years of bank nationalisation directed credit touches only a small fraction of the people. RBI is not willing to accept that the old-style methods will not work. Politicians are much more aware that the system is not working for the poor but then short-term solutions are suggested like loan-waivers, opening of more branches and so on – all of which are supply driven.

We have to create market solutions. Microfinance does reach 15 million households today and covers 30 to 35 million households connected with SHGs. But since the last 15 years, just Rs 20,000 crores or less has been disbursed.

Maybe we need an institutional design that includes the private sector and NGOs. So far NGOs have been seen only as the last mile low-cost solution and not as part of a viable alternative.



Vijay Mahajan, in green kurta, with his grassroots clients

There is this meta belief in society that if you address the needs of the poor, you must do so as charity. If you do it in a sustainable way, the motive is questioned. This attitude militates against a good policy for microfinance.

Do we need a new financial architecture?

We do. We need a new financial sector which is unique to developing countries – like China, Brazil, Indonesia and so on.

The problem is that the lower part of the banking sector and the upper part are both regulated by the same laws. These regulations are driven by the asset size of the institution. So, attention goes to the top end. Although through microfinance we benefit and serve many more people, monetarily we are undervalued and so we get neglected.

The smaller the ticket size, the higher the transaction costs. For a ticket size of Rs 1,000 or so, costs can be as high as 30 to 40 per cent. Technology like mobile phones, smart cards, do not cut transaction costs dramatically. Therefore the lower end of the financial sector will always have to be configured around high transaction costs. This has implications for financial architecture.

We need a system in which transactions below a certain amount will not be regulated as normal banking products and services are. I am not saying create chaos. Let there be an integrated microfinance sector and a regulator for it.

At present you call microfinance institutions which lend at 25 per cent exploiters and shut them down. The poor then turn to moneylenders who charge them 60 per cent.

South Africa has a microfinance regulatory council. They said banking rules did not apply to transactions below 10,000 rand. A lot of organisations entered the market.

It has been the same thing in Brazil. Earlier, only one-third of Brazil's population used to be covered by the banking system. Today they are fully covered. MFIs need better regulation and we

need to be allowed to provide a composite set of financial services.

There is a microfinance bill in the works. Do you think it will address some of these issues?

The bill needs to be revised. It aims mainly to regulate NGOs but their role is miniscule. The NGO sector does not have capital. The NBFCs form the main part of the sector but they are not under the bill because they already come under the RBI. A new law will need to recognise that for transactions below Rs 50,000 you need a different paradigm.

Private equity has been invested in the microfinance sector. This is for-profit and not targeted at

the very poor. Do you think this trend needs to be curbed?

Private equity seeks three to five times returns in three to five years. Those who go for private equity know this. MFIs approach private equity players because there is no other source for capital in the Indian market apart from SIDBI, which has just Rs 100 crores for microfinance.

The RBI requires you to have 15 per cent of your exposure as capital. So there is no option but to go to private equity. The advantage of private equity coming in is that there will be more players. Finally, they will have to serve the lower end of the market. The parallel to look at is cell phones. Initially a cell phone was only for the high end of the market, but as expansion took place the base became bigger.

There has been talk of using technology to bring down transaction costs, of injecting more efficiency into financial delivery. Why has this not happened?

To benefit from technology, you need scale. RBI has not approved financial transactions via mobiles. A can only send to B. So it's a means of communication only. RBI is a venerable institution but it presides over very micro level regulations for the banking sector. Conservatism tends to stymie innovation. The EU has e-money guidelines. They give you a limit and for transactions below that limit, their guidelines don't apply. It creates an ecology for innovation.

Micro-finance is still used primarily for subsistence or for very tiny enterprises. Do you foresee this situation changing in the near term?

The economy of the poor is at subsistence level. It is only at a few places that it has climbed from subsistence to the market. Until such time as this happens, the poor will continue to live under a subsistence economy. Investments in rural infrastructure, human capital, integrated production (like Amul) will help change that but all this requires investments beyond microfinance.

Women MPs chart new path

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

INDIAN politics is today an interesting study in gender dynamics with several important positions being occupied by women. There are now 59 women in the Lok Sabha. Perhaps they will dent the male domination of Parliament and pave the way for more women to get elected.

Of the 59 MPs, 29 are making their debut in politics and are mostly young, urbane and well-educated. As newcomers they are full of optimism and are all set to champion the women's reservation bill.

"I am confident the presence of a larger number of women politicians will have a genuine impact on the ground," says Meenakshi Natarajan, newly-elected 36-year-old Member of Parliament from Mandsaur, Madhya Pradesh.

As a Congress student leader with no political lineage, Natarajan has emerged as one of the young icons of the 2009 elections, fighting a tough battle against the veteran Laxmi Narayan Pandey of the BJP. She even returned her unspent campaign money to the party.

Natarajan says India has already witnessed the benefits of reserving seats for women. She cites the 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1992 that reserved 33 per cent of seats for women in local self-governance units like the Gram Panchayat, Block Panchayat and District Panchayat. With access to opportunity, she says, women have the ability to make their mark in politics.

"Soniaji is my role model. But I am moved by women at the panchayat level who have gone beyond themselves to contribute to their community and make a difference," she says.

"In Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh, the former zila parishad chief, Lakshmi Devi Kharadi, who is now an MLA from that constituency, is an inspiration to me. She fought long and hard for the adivasis and taught herself how to read and write".

The Women's Reservation Bill has been pending for over a decade as parties like the Samajwadi, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Janata Dal (United) have been demanding a quota within a quota for women belonging to backward, minority and scheduled caste.

Staunch opposition to the reservation bill continues. Many suggestions have been made to water down the provisions and limit the reservation to 20 per cent of the seats.

"We have to get started. We need to get moving. I am very keen on 33 per cent. But rather than cribbing and not getting anywhere, we need to look for solutions. We have to be practical and rational. If 20 per cent it is, let it be," says 40-year-



Supriya Sule

"We need to get moving. I am very keen on 33 per cent. But rather than cribbing and not getting anywhere, we need to look for solutions. We have to be practical and rational. If 20 per cent it is, let it be," says Supriya Sule, first-time MP from Baramati.

old Supriya Sule, daughter of Sharad Pawar and a first-time Lok Sabha MP from Baramati, in Maharashtra, her family stronghold.

Along with 28-year-old Minister of State for Rural Development Agatha Sangma, Sule, a science graduate from Mumbai University, is the savvy, new face of the NCP.

She admits that the way Parliament is stacked, unanimity for the bill is a choice of principle, not need.

"This is a fresh, new beginning. We want the bill to be passed unanimously because of the mes-



Agatha Sangma



Meenakshi Natarajan

sage it will send out. It will showcase the country's commitment to empowering women," says Sule.

"And, we need to back that up with strong efforts to fight for the girl child, to stop female foeticide, to put an end to dowry," she says, elaborating on the role that women can play in the legislature.

Women activists say the influx of politicians like Natarajan, Sule and Sangma is a good sign, but India still lags behind the world average of 18.4 per cent of all parliamentary seats occupied by women, according to findings of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

"Women's agenda and perspective is missing from our political process," says Dr Ranjana Kumari, Director of the Centre for Social Research, a New Delhi-based non-profit that has been working to increase women's participation in politics for over three decades.

Dr Kumari is confident the new MPs will usher in change. "Women politicians have grown into their roles over the years. There has been a dramatic improvement in their performance. Earlier they would speak – and were expected to only speak – on women's issues. But they have moved beyond that, talking finance, foreign affairs and defence. Also, every society needs to project role models. We haven't had a real role model for women after Indira Gandhi."

Delhi govt in beggar fix

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Delhi government's social welfare department wants to rid the city of its sizeable population of beggars. On 2 March, last year, it was directed by the Delhi High Court in the 'Begging in Public' case to produce a plan to put an end to public begging. On 4 May, the court notified the department again.

With the court on its back and the Commonwealth Games looming, the department is in an obvious hurry. The problem is: What should be done?

Every street has its share of beggars. There are the elderly, the handicapped, single women and able bodied men. But it is children who beg who cause the most concern. Their lives can be salvaged from the debris of a shattered childhood.

The social welfare department has been talking to peoples' groups. They held a meeting with representatives of the Shahri Adhikar Manch, a network of 14 groups working for the rights of the homeless, Butterflies, an NGO which runs shelters for street children and the Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) which lobbies for the rights of the urban poor. The social welfare department set up two working groups - one on children called the Delhi Commission for Child Rights and the other on adult beggars.

The department has mooted the idea of foster homes for homeless children. The NGOs say they have no objection but such a scheme has to be done with great care following CARA (Central Adoption Resource Agency) guidelines. Anyway, they point out, an adoption scheme will hardly take all children off the street.

The fact is that nearly 80 per cent of children who beg are not alone. "They come to the city with their families and stay with their families. Only a small number are single or orphaned," explains Zaved Nafis Rahman, coordinator with Butterflies. So the focus of any scheme to rid the city of begging has to be on the homeless family.

Preliminary research by Butterflies suggests that most child beggars are between nine and 14 years old (64 per cent). Around 24 per cent are between five and eight and a little more than three per cent are infants.

Most children are initiated into begging by their families. It could be due to dire poverty. Or the parent could be an alcoholic, or on drugs, or physically handicapped. Children admitted to being severely punished if they were sent out to beg and didn't bring money home. Children hooked on drugs found begging an easy way of financing

their addiction.

A smaller percentage of children said there were organised gangs who forced children to beg but refused to divulge details, perhaps out of fear. NGOs say such gangs should be identified, punished and the children released from their clutches.

But all children cannot be branded beggars.

Children who sell goods at traffic lights can't be called beggars, says Zaved. They are child vendors. Children from nomadic communities who dance and do acrobatics on the streets can't be called beggars either, strictly speaking.

The Juvenile Justice Act is supposed to be applied for child beggars. This law is humane, participatory and emphasises care and protection, says Zaved. Under the Act, Juvenile Police Units are being set up in police stations. Each unit is to be equipped with two social workers and police personnel trained in child cases. Butterflies has been sharing its considerable expertise. The idea is to make the units so child-friendly than any child can approach them for help. The child's situation is to be placed before a Child Welfare Committee.

The first priority for the Child Welfare Committee is to rehabilitate the child in the family. For that the problems of the family have to be addressed. Is the family forcing the child to beg? If so, family members should be counselled by Family Service Centres, especially set up for the purpose. If the family cannot support the child, it could be sponsored.

A family rehabilitation scheme which would include housing at minimal cost, adult employment, education for children and microfinance to get started can be introduced. There could also be a community scheme to send families back to their villages with provisions for rehabilitation.

Children on substance abuse can be sent for de-addiction. Children who have nowhere to go could be sent to high quality residential schools.

"You can't put the child in an institution and the family somewhere else," points out Zaved. "It is cruel. They have to be rehabilitated together."

For adult beggars the scene is different. They are picked up by the police under the draconian Bombay

Prevention of Begging Act that makes begging in public places a punishable offence. Under this law, a poor person who just looks destitute can be arrested.

The police, points out Dhananjay Tingal of the Shahri Adhikar Manch, have been picking up poor homeless people indiscriminately. Recently, 150 people were taken away outside Hanuman Mandir in central Delhi and their children left behind. "Now who is going to take care of the children?" asks Zaved.

The people picked up are produced before the Beggars Court and sent to Beggars Homes which are in bad shape. Shahri Adhikar Manch provided legal aid and got 110 released.

Continued on next page



LAKSHMAN ANAND

The fact is that nearly 80 per cent of children who beg are not alone. "They come to the city with their families and stay with their families. Only a small number are single or orphaned," explains Zaved Nafis Rahman of Butterflies.

Gentle god of theatre

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

THEATRE doyen Habib Tanvir, who passed away on 8 June, wasn't just another playwright, actor and director. He embodied an entire artistic and cultural credo. The general public last saw him in a Subhash Ghai film. According to Ghai, *Black & White*, about a young man who arrives in old Delhi's Chandni Chowk on a secret terror mission, wouldn't have been complete without "Habibsaab" playing a wise old pacifist. "I needed an actor with a specific ethos and timbre," says Ghai.

Tanvir's character in the film was essentially an extension of his real-life persona - a genteel and liberated yet steely soul who stood for a way of life steeped in humanity and grace. As a pioneering Indian theatre stalwart, he always brought those very values to bear upon his work and his public demeanour. That is why Habib Tanvir is irreplaceable.

Tanvir created an impressive body of work knitted with his own roots. Everything the soft-spoken but jovial Habibsaab did had an understated quality but nothing he mounted on stage was ever anything less than far-reaching in its repercussions. The curtains may have come down on his life, but it is unlikely that death will be the final act - his legacy will continue to light the way for many generations.

He blended contrasting influences - Brechtian practices with India's folk forms, William Shakespeare with classic Sanskrit plays, and the urban with the rural. He wrote and staged timeless plays like 1954's *Agra Bazaar*, based on the life and times of 18th century Urdu poet Nazir Akbarabadi; 1975's *Charandas Chor*, that perennial favourite of Indian theatre goers and drama troupes; the marvellously innovative *Kaamdev Ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; *Mitti Ki Gaadi*, his unique interpretation of Shudraka's Sanskrit play, *Mrichchakatikam*; and *Moteram Ka Satyagraha*, inspired by a Munshi Premchand story.

Born in Raipur in 1923, Tanvir graduated from Nagpur's Morris College before heading for Aligarh Muslim University. In the mid 1940s, he began his professional life as a producer and actor with All India Radio in Bombay. He then joined the left-leaning Progressive Writers Group and the Indian People's Theatre Association.

Tanvir shifted to Delhi in 1954, the year of *Agra Bazaar*, his first major play. He used non-actors from a city neighbourhood and Jamia Millia Islamia students to stage the play in an open marketplace. This marked the beginning of his radical experimentations with form and style.

Tanvir then went for training to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. He also travelled around Europe watching a wide variety of plays. In 1956, the year Bertolt Brecht died, he spent several weeks in Germany. There he saw plays by the legendary German. The experience left a deep imprint - revealing to him the importance of harnessing one's own milieu to create a universal theatrical idiom.

On his return, he set up Naya Theatre in Bhopal along with his wife and lifelong professional partner Monica Misra, who predeceased him by four years. Naya Theatre has turned 50 this year, but neither of its two founders is alive to guide the movement into its sixth decade. The energy it has unleashed and nurtured has gathered self-sustaining critical mass.

Tanvir eschewed slavish imitation of Western theatre and crafted a distinctively Indian theatre, inspired in the main by time-tested folk traditions and dramatic devices. In his plays, folk effects constituted the heart of the dramatic work. They weren't mere embellishments.

He used Chhattisgarh's Naacha folk style and Pandavani narrative conventions in many of his celebrated plays, seamlessly melding song and dance with dialogues and theatrical effects. Virtually all through his career, Tanvir

brought together city-bred actors and rustic folk performers. He initially made his actors speak Hindi, but then began to produce plays in the Chhattisgarhi language.

Tanvir occasionally took time off to act in films like Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*, Sudhir Mishra's *Yeh Woh Manzil To Nahin* (a political drama that saw him teaming up with two other theatre stalwarts, Manohar Singh and Brij Mohan Shah) and Ketan Mehta's *The Rising - The Ballad of Mangal Pandey*.

In the 1990s, Tanvir wrote and staged the controversial *Ponga Pandit*, which lampooned communalisation of politics. Extreme right wing forces took umbrage, even disrupted some performances but nothing could stop Tanvir from asserting his freedom. As always, he went out on a limb to defend what he believed in.



LAKSHMAN ANAND

OBITUARY

Habib Tanvir
(1923-2009)

Continued from previous page

There is talk of drafting new legislation to replace the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, but a new law should be drafted in consultation with the NGOs.

The social department has proposed Open Home Shelters, where the destitute could be trained in productive work. However, NGOs point out the existing plan makes these similar to Beggar Homes, almost like prisons. Beggars while away time and then go back to their corner on the street. "There is no point in having Open Home Shelters which are like Beggar Homes. There should be free flow of people without strict rules and regulations," says Dhananjay.

Some Beggar Homes could be farmed out to NGOs who would run them like shelters for the homeless along with livelihood schemes. But

such schemes don't take off since they are not always linked to the market. "NGOs have to partner with professional institutions for training in skills and livelihood," says Gerry Pinto, consultant with Butterflies.

Schemes developed for the destitute can be implemented by municipal corporations, Schools of Social Work and even resident welfare associations. NGOs are offering support but they point out the government should do the job. The social welfare department has a generous budget and well-paid staff.

"The social welfare department, labour department, the police all have a role to play in rehabilitating the child," says Zaved. "We can demonstrate how a scheme can work. We have given vocational training on the streets. We have also integrated children with their families."

But, cautions Dhananjay, before launching new schemes, give homeless people their entitlements from existing schemes. "Poor people don't have any proof of identity. They cannot access rations, pensions, BPL schemes. Children who beg can't go to government schools. First give people their rights and see how far they can go."

People who flee disasters, like the floods in Bihar last year, lose all their papers. So, BPL families, who could benefit from existing schemes, cannot access them, points out Raj Bhushan of HLRN.

The most critical component of rehabilitation initiatives should be low-cost housing. Slums are demolished adding to the homeless population. Once you are on the footpath, nobody wants to hire you, says Dhananjay. Housing at cheap rates is required urgently to turn the tide.

Cyclone Aila pulls down hills

VIVEK S GHATANI

Vivek S Ghatani
Darjeeling

MAY 26 was the darkest day for people living in the Darjeeling hills. Cyclone Aila struck with fury. Around 27 people died and hundreds were left homeless. Landslides ripped homes, electricity connections snapped and roads were left in tatters. Two dams being built by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), Stages III and IV of the Teesta Low Dam Project (TLDP) suffered huge damage.

People fear the worst is not over. Four monsoon months will bring some 2500 mm of rain and trigger landslides once again.

"This is precisely the scenario we have been shouting hoarse about," said Praful Rao of Save the Hills, an NGO campaigning against the landslide menace. "Landslides take place in densely populated urban areas and the cause is largely anthropogenic. I have talked to many people from Darjeeling and Kurseong and we agree that landslides are caused by improper drainage."

At 6:45 am on 26 May, Pooja Gurung was cleaning a mat at her home in Haridashatta when she heard a small thud and felt herself being pushed against the door by the hills sliding down.

"I immediately cried out for help but I cannot remember anything further. I was probably unconscious by then. It seems some people came and rescued me from under the debris," said the 29-year-old lady.

Among those who came to her aid were her neighbours. Finding Pooja alive, they started digging a drain near her two-storied concrete house so that the water that had accumulated could be drained out. "Eight of our relatives including my brothers came from Soom tea garden, 20 km away to help us," said Pooja.

Soon a group of about 20 people started clearing the debris from Pooja's house. They rescued six of her family members including her mother, Tilamya, and four relatives. Seven people from two families who are Pooja's tenants were also rescued.

"They saved our lives," said Pooja. The group of 20 did not stop at that. They tried to retrieve household items and save the structure.

By then it was around 11:30 am and the rain was beating down. "Then we heard another rumbling noise. It was another major landslide. In fact, there were three continuous landslides within the next 45 minutes," said Pooja.

When things settled down, an eerie silence followed. Six of the rescuers were nowhere in sight. They had died under the debris.

"Kumar *mama* (uncle) and Kawal *daju* (elder brother) were pulled out dead yesterday. Another *daju*, Nitesh, and Uncles Dilip Pradhan, Kharka Rai and Binod Pakhrin just disappeared. We looked for them but we could not find them," said Pooja. Later, the body of Kharka Rai was found.

In fact, Binod Pakhrin, an army man serving with 1/11 Gorkha Rifles, had come to visit his wife. Hearing that his neighbour was in trouble,



Buildings were devastated



House crumbles under landslide

he came to help the Gurungs, said KB Hingmang, who resides in the same neighbourhood. Now he is dead.

The swelling waters of the Teesta caused immense damage to stages III and IV of the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation's Teesta Low Dam Project (TLDP).

The TLDP IV at Kalijhora was worst hit by Cyclone Aila. NHPC officials said permanent construction like the powerhouse, the dam, and some heavy machinery was destroyed. At Reang, where Stage III is located, temporary construction bore the brunt of the rising river.

SK Modhak, project manager of Hindustan Construction Company, which is executing civil construction works at Stage IV, said his area of operation had suffered a direct loss of Rs 20 crore and an indirect loss of Rs 35 crore after the Teesta submerged a large portion of the site.

Modhak said the project, which was to have been commissioned by December 2010, has now been pushed back by at least six months. The construction was designed to handle 5,000 cusecs, but the volume of water rose to as high as 10,000 cusecs during Cyclone Aila.

The gushing waters swept away Bailey Bridge and caused extensive damage to the slopes on

both banks of the river at Stage IV. "The water that has entered the dam and power house will have to be pumped out," said Modhak.

Residents are also blaming the shoddy manner in which optical fibre cables (OFC) have been laid in the hills by telecom companies. Loose soil was left all around, they say, adding to the landslide menace.

One such stretch is the Jorebunglow-Peshok-Teesta road, where cable-laying work was started last winter. This road always withstood landslides. It is the shortest link between Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Gangtok. But it has been hit by landslides between Jorebunglow and 3rd Mile, and is closed since many days.

After digging up the road and laying the OFCs, the telecom companies simply covered the dug up portions with loose earth. "Water should not have been allowed to seep in at any cost," said Subin Pradhan, a civic architect. "Digging is not a crime, but not covering up holes and craters properly is."

"Laying of OFCs should be done much before the onset of the monsoon," said Praful Rao.

Telecom companies laying optical fibres do not execute road restoration themselves. They pay agencies, in this case the PWD, to do the job.

Gandhi Road in Darjeeling, where optical fibres are being laid, belongs to the municipality. Navin Gram Sewa Samiti, a welfare organisation in the neighbourhood, had approached the municipal authorities to do a proper cover-up job. But, a month later, there is no sign of any restoration.

Rao, however, cautioned that the people were not against upgradation of telecommunication facilities, but given the fragility of the topography, the companies must be extra careful.

The landslide hazard is a lesson for residents here who make illegal structures, or do not follow safety rules while constructing homes.

Kashmir keeps AIDS under check

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

ONE illness which has not made inroads into Kashmir is HIV/AIDS. Public health experts put forth various reasons. But the most significant explanation is the decline of foreign tourists to Kashmir all through the years of militancy.

The problem of AIDS peaked from 1988 to 2000. "Here in the Kashmir Valley the illness was kept at bay by militancy which was at its height during the same specified time period. We did not receive many tourists in those years and so the risk was at its lowest level," says Prof Mushtaq Ahmad Sidiqee, Head of Department, Immunology, at the Valley's lone tertiary health centre, Sheri Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), Soura.

At present there are 200 HIV positive cases in the Kashmir Valley. Patients affected by the illness come on their own to various centres for treatment and counselling. In 2008, five patients with AIDS passed away. What is heartening, however, is that Kashmiris are supportive and do not ostracise people living with HIV/AIDS.

"Every section of society is chipping in and trying their best to make Kashmir an AIDS free society," said Prof Sidiqee. He appeared satisfied about the progress made so far. Awareness about the illness has spread, he said, but people should not be complacent.

"A major misconception needs to be removed," he explained. "Most people believe that sex is the only source of HIV transmission. There are other sources which people are not aware of. It is here that we need to pull up our socks."

Over the years, surveillance has increased. This has given people the confidence to come forward and get checked for HIV. The youth, especially, believe that there is no harm in getting tested.

"In many cases, the virus gets transmitted

through a needle if used by an HIV positive person. This eventuality cannot be ruled out in a place like Kashmir where a single needle is used by more than one person especially in the countryside," said Mohammad Shameem, a postgraduate student.

Security forces account for more than half the HIV positive cases in the Kashmir Valley and the major source of transmission among them is sex. Health authorities advocate the introduction of mandatory health programmes for them.

"Security forces come under the high risk group as they account for more than 50 per cent of HIV patients in Kashmir. Except for the Army, we at the Institute undertake tests for security forces personnel. It is imperative that more be done with regard to security personnel otherwise the situation can become alarming for them," said Prof Sidiqee. He said mandatory health programmes can be designed through consultation.

Out of 200 HIV positive cases, 70 are undergoing treatment while there is follow-up action with regard to the rest. Some are children as young as four and some are in their sixties.

"AIDS is a socio-medical disease and should not be treated as an ordinary disease," cautions Prof Sidiqee. He said that there was a clear connection between sex, drugs and waywardness and society needs to do something about that.

The risk of AIDS is high among drug addicts. The main reason is multiple use of a single needle. "Addicts are also prone to having sex with multiple partners and thereby can carry HIV from multiple sources," explains Prof Sidiqee.

As per World Health Organization (WHO) guide-

lines, health authorities should carry out testing of blood samples when a person is admitted to a hospital or any other health centre (both primary and tertiary).

"But here in Kashmir we are yet to start this whole process. Some serious thinking needs to be done. Testing can provide information about the status of the patient and whether he or she can donate blood or not," said Prof Sidiqee.

He said it would also be useful if an HIV positive person carried a card which said that his or her blood contains the virus. This would be useful in a medical emergency.

"We are working in close cooperation with the State Aids Control Society. Once a case is detected, it is reported to the society. Twenty counselling centres have been set up for AIDS patients. An antiretroviral treatment (ART) centre is fully functional here at

SKIMS. There is a very low rate of non-compliance. HIV positive patients fully cooperate with us," said Prof Sidiqee. The institute has the services of professional counsellors who reach out to the spouses and children of persons diagnosed as positive.

Prof Sidiqee also hailed Kashmiri society for showing concern towards positive people. "People tend to accept the reality with the passage of time. The social fabric is different in Kashmir. We live under a well-knit society. People try to cope with the situation. They accept the HIV positive people, unlike other societies where patients are thrown out and treated as socially unacceptable entities," he said.

Patients come on their own to various centres for treatment and counselling. Kashmiris are supportive and do not ostracise people.

Samita's World

by Samita Rathor



Officials say yes to forest rights

Rakesh Agrawal

Dehradun

TRIBALS, forest dwellers and activists from 16 states gathered in Dehradun to attend the annual convention of the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW) held from 10 to 12 June.

The focus of the meeting was on the implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers' (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act in its true letter and spirit.

At the end of the meeting a Dehradun Resolution was drafted. It called for the establishment of community governance over forest resources. The resolution urged forest people in the world to unite, realise their legitimate right to live in forests, and to resist the commercialisation of forests. The resolution called for 'climate justice'.

Local bureaucrats who attended the convention were supportive of the forest dwellers. On the very first day, three government officials, the District Magistrate (DM), Dehradun, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), Uttarakhand, and the District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO), Dehradun,

addressed the gathering and promised help in implementing the forest rights law. "We are with you to achieve your legitimate rights. Personally I would feel fortunate to assist in this endeavour," said RBS Rawat, the PCCF.

Around 500 representatives of constituent groups of the NFFPFW from 16 states felt reassured. "Policy makers should realise that forests will remain intact only when people living in and around them are secured. We got the forest rights law not as alms, but because of a long struggle waged by us. A bigger struggle is needed to force implementation," said Munni Lal, convenor, NFFPFW.

There was a lot of resentment expressed against the Forest Department. "Officials have destroyed our lives and livelihoods by killing most of our livestock. This is no longer tolerable," said Nur Alam, a Van Gujjar leader. Adivasis living in the Shivalik Hills and rearing animals complained about



RITA ANAND

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being harassed, beaten and their dwellings destroyed under the garb of conserving wildlife.

Many people, including those living in and around forests are not aware of the Forest Rights Act. "Awareness about the law must be spread. We women are doing this job in Jharkhand," said Suryamani from Ranchi.

Bureaucrats, too, do not know about the provisions of the FRA. "Most government officials whom I call stakeholders are ignorant about this Act, so you must make them aware. I will try to convene a meeting so that officials in five districts of Dehradun have an idea about this law and go head towards implementing it," said Amit Negi, District Magistrate, Dehradun. The DSWO also promised that there would not be any problems in implementation in Dehradun district. It will become an example for other districts, he said.

There are eight states where the state government has passed orders to implement the Act, but implementation has been beset with problems. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, where the Mayawati Government has issued clear orders the Forest Right Committees (FRCs) included the better-off and left out the tribal communities. "The rich will get all benefits and adivasis living in and around Dudhwa National Park will get nothing," said Ram Chandra Rana, member of Uttar Pradesh's state monitoring committee.

"Policymakers will reduce the FRA into a tool to give small leases to you. You must not let this happen," warned well-known researcher and activist Madhu Sarin.

A few shortcomings of the Act were also discussed. It was felt that women's rights were ambiguous. "Forests cannot be protected without the active involvement of women, so their rights must be ensured," said Bharati Roychaudhary an activist.

The Dehradun Resolution, addressed to 'the whole world' asserts the right of forest people to live within forests and manage them. "We are the forests, and the forests are us, and our existence is mutually dependent," declares the passionately written resolution. It blames the current climate crisis on unsustainable lifestyles.

Gujarat's collapsing canals



HIMANSHU UPADHYAYA

The condition of a canal in the Narmada network: durable construction and maintenance are both lacking

Himanshu Upadhyaya
New Delhi

THE people of Saurashtra will have to face a prolonged shortage of water because of a 35-metre-long breach in the Maliya Canal which serves Rajkot, Jamnagar and Kutch districts.

This breach is one of several that have taken place in the Narmada canal network. But the interesting thing about it is that it has occurred when there are no rains which could cause local waterlogging, drainage blockage or flooding.

Repairing this breach and restoring the water supply could take up to two weeks. This means that 400 villages and the three major towns of Rajkot, Jamnagar and Bhuj are in for a tough time.

The authorities have creative explanations for the breach such as agricultural waste blocking a siphon and rat holes weakening the structure. But the real reason seems to be the poor quality of construction.

Digant Ojha, editor of *Jalseva*, a Gujarati language magazine on water issues, says, "This is the seventh time that the canal has breached in the past year, clearly exposing corruption and fraud. The reasons that the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam (SSNNL) officials are citing, such as rat holes are ridiculous. We are going to institute a public inquiry into the matter."

Experts believe that the decision to add 'drinking water' benefits at a later stage without much planning on how to address command area ecological concerns and drainage has led to authorities neglecting much needed pre-monsoon maintenance work.

Earlier, irrigation canals would be shut down for extensive maintenance work so that there would be no surprises.

Now, however, there is no maintenance. The authorities merely conduct an inspection twice a year – one before the monsoon and once after, as stated by N V Patel, chairman SSNNL.

A canal not only requires durable construction, but it must also be put through servicing so that the structure does not begin to give way because of neglect.

In Gujarat it appears both poor construction quality and inadequate maintenance are a cause for concern.

Senior officials of SSNNL are in a state of denial, issuing identical statements giving a clean chit to contractors.

It is exactly what they did earlier. In response to an RTI application filed by a Baroda-based activist, Rohit Prajapati, after a major canal breach in June last year, SSNNL authorities cited reasons such as farmers stealing water using diesel pumps and rats gnawing away the cement lining of the canals.

The state government had constituted a technical committee to examine the entire 458 km stretch along the main canal, identify vulnerable spots and make recommendations.

The committee is believed to have submitted its report in two parts: in October 2008 and the final part in March 2009. But the report has not yet been made public by the authorities.

It is also believed that the Narmada canals have got heavily silted and hence carry water significantly below their carrying capacity. A senior SSNNL official commented that the Maliya branch canal has the capacity to carry 1,100 cusecs of water, but just 350 cusecs was enough to cause it to overflow!

It's time to take stock of what went wrong and seriously address command area ecological concerns and drainage issues.

Breach history

20th July, 1998: A canal under construction breached near Anwed village, Sanand taluka of Ahmedabad.

3rd September, 2002: The cement lining of the main canal was getting damaged at eight spots. SSNNL officials denied acknowledging it as 'worrying', and stated that there wasn't any breach.

30th July, 2003: The main canal got breached at two places about 203 km from the dam site at Vishwamitra village near Baiyal in Dehgam taluka. SSNNL officials maintain that these were just 'rain cuts' and not 'breaches'.

4th August, 2004: The first monsoon flood in river Heran led to a major breach in the main canal near Borda and Mota Uni villages of Pavi Jetpur taluka. The floodwaters were supposed to flow under the canal to the western side through a tunnel, which became blocked with silt. As a result, the floodwaters crashed through the Main Canal, submerging villages Borda, Mota Uni, Rajbodeli, Moradongri, Chundheli, and Panej, causing crores of rupees of destruction in terms of houses and standing crops.

10th August, 2004: A breach near Kadi resulted in water gushing into 10 villages in Viramgam and Dholaka talukas of Ahmedabad district forcing evacuation of 2,000 villagers.

August, 2005: Several breaches in canals as excessive rainfall exposed the poor drainage planning. A breach near the Baroli resettlement site in Naswadi taluka of Baroda district, when four of the five siphons provided for underground inlets were blocked and hence the river turned to its left, cutting through a large chunk of land.

17th September, 2005: Even as Chief Minister Narendra Modi boasted of having interlinked the Narmada and Saraswati river, the canal got breached between Nani Kadi and Narsinghpur in Mehsana district near the Y shaped junction from where canal goes towards Kutch.

11th June, 2008: A major breach occurred in the main canal near Sujatpura village near Mehsana inundating seven villages.

23rd July, 2008: Cracks appeared in a canal near Kajipura village of Viramgam taluka.

18th Sept. 2008: The Saurashtra branch canal got breached at a number of places near Lakhtar in Surendranagar district following heavy rains and drainage congestion. Drinking water supply to 98 villages in Rapar taluka, Kutch district was badly hit.

4th November, 2008: A canal developed an off season breach near Nimeta village, in Baroda district due to poor drainage planning of an ongoing urban renewal project.

4th December, 2008: A major five-metre breach occurred near Halvad village on Saurashtra branch canal, affecting water supply in four districts.

Himanshu Upadhyaya works with Environics Trust, New Delhi.



DHARMARAJAN IYER

Pictures with touch and sound

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

ABOUT five years ago, Partho Bhowmick, a photographer and IT professional, was strolling down a pavement in Mumbai. An old photo magazine caught his eye. He noted that it had an article by Evgan Bavgar, a photographer in Paris, who is blind.

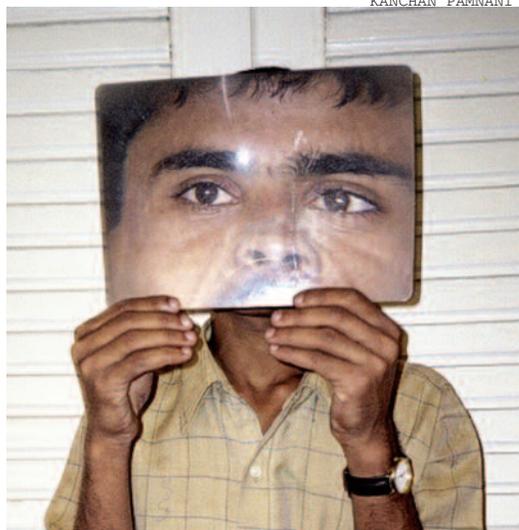
"The article introduced me to Bavgar's life and philosophy," says Bhowmick who began connecting with Bavgar over the Internet. He was introduced to the Global Consortium of Blind Artists, a group of photographers, painters, film-makers and sculptors who are visually disabled.

"There seemed to be a lot of sight in blindness. It made me realize that those who are born blind have a certain sense of vision. This can get translated into a new visual language."

Bhowmick's interaction with the blind fired his imagination. He wanted to start a Blind with Camera project for the visually impaired. Since photography is a visual art, his project was received with skepticism.

Finally, in 2006, Radha Subramaniam, honorary secretary of the Victoria Memorial School for the Blind, Mumbai, agreed to let him organize a workshop for her students.

Bhowmick held two sessions to introduce pho-



KANCHAN PAMNANI



NIKHIL MUNDE

tography to students. Curiosity aroused, the students started enrolling. The workshop was held every weekend. It lasted for 52 weeks. Anybody could join, anytime.

At first, just three students walked in. Then a fourth joined until the number grew to nine. "Four were students of the school. Five were working people connected to the institution, or were visiting to learn computers or foreign languages," says Bhowmick.

"I started with three cameras of my own which

would be rotated among students. When the number of students increased, I resolved to buy another camera. That was when my wife suggested I try for some sponsorship."

A phone call to Kodak followed. Within 72 hours Bhowmick was given 22 cameras and 50 rolls for his workshop. Soon after, he received another 15 cameras from Kodak. Bhowmick could now devote all his attention to the technical details of the project.

He did not teach any rules of photography. "I didn't want my students to feel circumscribed. Besides, since I was normal, I was afraid that their work would reflect the sighted person's point of view." Bhowmick was keen to enhance the visual thinking of his students. His low-key method worked. It resulted in some very rare images.

Raju Singh, one of his students, was born with normal sight and had used an SLR camera earlier. His low vision and early memories of a sighted world made him shoot a series of abstract images which compel the sighted to see objects very differently. With a little help from Bhowmick, Raju managed a multiple exposure of Victoria Terminus to create a dream-like image.

Mahesh, another student, was also born with normal sight but is completely blind today. Mahesh was guided by the sound and feel of the subject he wanted to shoot. He shot unusual images of nature.

For Rahul Shirsat, visually impaired from birth, the mind and heart ruled. Asked to photograph visually impaired children playing in a room, he used his heart "to capture the silence" and his mind "to capture the noise."

Sujit Chaurasia, another student, took the help of friends to shoot. "I followed the direction of the water and clapping sounds made by my friends to take this picture," he says, indicating a beautiful photograph of a sprinkler watering a lawn, as hands clap on.

Kanchan Pamnani, a solicitor, had handled a camera. Her eyesight had deteriorated in stages. She blended her training at the workshop with her earlier familiarity with the camera and produced some larger than life images.

"Seeing involves touching and hearing an object," explains Bhowmick. "But a sighted person forgets that. When a sighted person sees an object, he also feels it with his mind's hand. When a blind person touches a cup, he sees it with his mind's eye. The visual is also tactile for him. The reunion of the mental and physical processes may be sometimes guided by touch, at other times by sound, and perhaps a mix of both. Hence, the dominance and mix of the senses comes out in these photographs."

A look at the photographs, and it is obvious that the 'mind's' eye can see much more than those with normal vision can. This is nicely illustrated by Mahesh Umrria who was born with normal eyesight but is blind today.

By feeling the warmth of the summer sun on his head and by touching the lower branches of a tree, Mahesh has captured the intricate pattern of a tree and sunlight on a footpath. He has captioned the picture as a 'reflection of my last days to see the light.'

In a year's time, the project had progressed well enough for an exhibition. Kodak once again helped with printing and presentation.

Saving the Ganga at village level

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Rajendra Singh

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Jal Biradari, a national network of water activists inspired by Rajendra Singh of the Tarun Bharat Sangh, has resolved to work for the protection of the Ganga through gram panchayats, which will address local issues of soil erosion, pollution and overuse.

The first such meeting of a gram panchayat was held at Gahmar, which is in the Gazhipur district of Uttar Pradesh. Gahmar is midway between Gomukh, which the source of the Ganga and

Gangasagar, where the river flows into the sea.

The Jal Biradari met at Gahmar on 2 June to celebrate Gangotsav. Hereafter it will celebrate this day annually as River Day Utsav for the protection of all the rivers in the country.

"After the government of India declared the Ganga as a national river, we felt that it was necessary for the people to take over the responsibility of restoration and conservation," Rajendra Singh told *Civil Society*.

Singh felt it would be useful to revive the National Advisory Council (NAC) which had been set up under Sonia Gandhi after the UPA first

came to power in 2004. He felt that there was much to be learnt from activist groups and their experience.

For instance, it was impractical to try and link rivers across the country. Such a proposal showed a lack of knowledge about the ecology of rivers. If the government broadened the scope of its consultation it could avoid such blunders.

Singh points out that the burden of sewage, industrial waste and other forms of pollution that so contaminate the waters of the Ganga, all need local solutions. For instance, sewage should be cleansed and reused. There are many eco-friendly ways of doing this and at the same time benefiting agriculture. Similarly, industrial units that let out harmful effluents should be held accountable by local people.

If the government wants to be effective in protecting natural assets such as the Ganga it would do well to seek the involvement of local people.

"Our mission is to link people to the Ganga and bring back the earlier respect and affection that was given to the river," said Singh.

Gahmar will serve as a role model for other villages. The regions that have been identified are:

- 1Himalayan Region (Gomukh to Haridwar).
- 1Tarai Region (Haridwar to Hardoi).
- 1Central Ganga Plain.
- 1Ganga Flood Plain
- 1Farakka
- 1Howrah -Kolkata
- 1Gangasagar

A Ganga Janadesh or a people's mandate for resolving the Ganga's problems was finalised at the Gahmar meeting. Each region will work towards identifying the local factors that affect the Ganga. It will look for solutions keeping in mind the geography and culture of the region.

What should go into right to food?

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WITH the UPA government likely to table the Right to Food Bill in this session of Parliament, activists are looking forward to sharing their expertise in drafting the new law. Campaigners for the Right to Food held a meeting at their secretariat in New Delhi to zero in on their recommendations.

The campaign has been a sustained one, helped along by orders from the Supreme Court. Eight years of activism have yielded the landmark National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, a boost to the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and the spread of midday meals in schools.

Key Right to Food Campaigners include economist Jean Dreze, Supreme Court appointed Commissioners Biraj Patnaik and Harsh

Mander, lawyer Colin Gonsalvez and advisors from NGOs like Kavita Srivastava and Anuradha Talwar.

The issues being discussed right now are the 'non-negotiables' which campaigners hope will form the backbone of the law on right to food. These are:

- 1Universal coverage under the Act. But certain groups like government employees and taxpayers will be excluded.
- 1Positive discrimination must be practised. So food cards will be issued in the name of the women in the household.
- 1Food safety is a priority. Genetically modified foods and chemical laden foods will be excluded.
- 1There will be no conflict of interest. The health of children will be a priority wherever commercial partnerships are formed.
- 1Procurement of grain will be guaranteed.

1There will be decentralisation and community control of grains and the public distribution system.

1There will be flexibility in identifying BPL and other categories. Single mothers, the disabled, the elderly and primitive tribes will be assured access to food.

1A mechanism for redressal will have to be carefully drafted after examining the failings of the current system. Speedy and efficient redress is the key to effective implementation.

Campaigners were not in favour of giving cash for food. They felt it would lead to leakage and the cash might not be used for food. Similarly, a coupon system would lead to pilferage, black-marketing and fake coupons.

Participants discussed the time-frame needed to implement the Act, penalties in case of non-compliance and extending it to Internally Displaced Persons and refugees.

AAM AADMI PART 2

AS PEOPLE WATCH THE BAR

Will the UPA govt
able to live up to
ambitious agenda?

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government is back in power at the Centre. It has a new look. There are many young ministers and a large number of independent-minded older ones. Everyone is on board with an election promise of a strong social agenda.

Health, education, land rights, affordable housing, rural development, environment, social justice – these are the new government's key areas of concern. As expectations soar, the question being asked is if this is for real. Has the bar truly gone up in politics?

When the UPA came to power for the first time in 2004, the National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by Sonia Gandhi became the hub of a wider consultation. The priorities that emerged from that dialogue and filtered into government gave it an activist edge.

Five years later, those are the very initiatives that have helped bring the government back to power. The Congress' victory has been possible because of rural employment guarantee, right to information, tribal rights, changes in land acquisition and the loan waiver to farmers.

NAC connectivity helped the Congress see governance differently. There could be no reforms without inclusion. What is unfolding now as the recently appointed ministers take office is the next stage of that awareness.

The Congress' principal ally, the Trinamool Congress, has built its entire identity and won handsomely in West Bengal by speaking for the poor. It has opposed special economic zones (SEZs) and the transferring of fertile agricultural land to corporations. It has championed fishermen's rights along the coast. The Trinamool has taken up the cause of street hawkers and the unorganised sector and questioned the need for big retail chains.

The government's eagerness to provide a visible generational change is already in evidence. But it will have to maintain a delicate balance between social concerns and the interests of industry. Too much of either may prove to be crippling.

To keep the economy growing the government will have to bring in investments and keep the spirit of the private sector high. But it will also have to lay down clear rules for companies. Regulating the private sector will be as important as providing it opportunities to do business and make profits.

In the past, business interests have been able to influence policy to serve their own interests. The SEZs, for instance, were pushed through with no significant public debate. Similarly there has been an attempt to dilute environment impact assessment conditions.

The minister for environment and forests, Jairam Ramesh, has already told the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) that there will be no watering down of environmental clearance norms. Instead he wants greater transparency and professionalism in assessing the impact of projects along



the lines of the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) in the US.

Ramesh wasted no time in getting to Corbett Park on the question of saving tigers. But here he wasn't in the company of wildlife enthusiasts. Instead, he was seen talking to Van Gujjars and endorsing their native knowledge of forests and wildlife. The Van Gujjars have all along been facing eviction and harassment by forest department officials and it is hoped that community policing of wildlife will become a reality and a norm. (*See Civil Society December 2008*).

Ministries that will be crucial to the Congress keeping its election promises have gone to new and idealistic ministers. They are mostly young and some of them are trusted party people who have worked their way up from the ranks.

So it is that rural development has been given to CP Joshi, 58, a former professor of psychology, whose work with panchayats in Rajasthan has hugely benefited the Congress in that state. He is assisted by Pradeep Jain, a trusted young Congress leader from Uttar Pradesh, and Agatha Sangma, who is just 28.

GOES UP IN POLITICS



Sangma belongs to the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), an ally of the Congress. Some months ago *Civil Society* was at Sangma's Delhi home to which young MPs across party lines had been invited to endorse a Charter of the People, a 20-point development plan for India which the Parliamentarians' Group on Millennium Development Goals had drawn up with a non-profit, the Centre for Legislative Research and Advocacy.

Included in the charter were food security, education for all, gender empowerment, maternal and child health and other MDGs. The parliamentarians' group, headed by Supriya Sule, was putting forward a bipartisan approach to development – something which the Prime Minister has been promoting.

Apparent from the meeting was the churning that is taking place in politics. A new generation of politicians is emerging with a completely

different set of priorities.

The current Manmohan Singh ministry seems to capture this trend. Mukul Wasnik, a Dalit and former Youth Congress President, has been entrusted with social justice. Kumari Selja has been put in charge of tourism together with housing and poverty alleviation. Krishna Tirath, once again a Dalit, has women and child welfare.

"This vote has been for credibility, stability and delivery," says Dinesh Trivedi, 58, Trinamool Congress leader and the new Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare. He belongs to the older set but reflects the current thinking. Known to be close to the Congress, Trivedi has been articulating the Trinamool Congress' inclusive politics.

"The message from the electorate is unambiguous – they do not want anybody who holds the system to ransom," says Trivedi. "They want action, not mere words. They want an India that is shining for every single citizen, not just for the privileged and the powerful."

On his part, the Prime Minister has recommended a 100-day action checklist for all his ministers, laying special emphasis on health and education, the two areas that suffered during the previous UPA term as a result of the whimsical ways of the then ministers-in-charge, Anbumani Ramadoss and Arjun Singh respectively.

The new watchwords for the government are "equity, innovation and public accountability", and Singh has opted to begin the process within the PMO itself. Responding to the feedback that he has been receiving about the UPA's first term in office, he has asked his officials to expedite delivery on promises, completion of government initiatives, and schemes to bolster public accountability. He has told the PMO's top brass to crease out the processes and procedures of governance so that his office can play its role as facilitator and coordinator with greater efficacy and set an example for the ministries.

Trivedi, who is Kutch-born but elected from Barrackpore in West Bengal, asserts that the UPA has returned to power on the back of the credibility that the Manmohan Singh government enjoys among the electorate and it would, therefore, be important not to fritter away the mandate. Talking about health and family welfare, he says: "The ministry has to be proactive. We have to constantly think out of the box and go in for private-public partnership wherever possible without surrendering control of the health care system. We must completely depoliticise delivery of health schemes."

The President, Pratibha Patil, captured the essence of the new approach to inclusive governance in her address to the joint session of Parliament on June 4. The President's speech is carefully crafted to reflect the priorities of the Union government.

She placed firm emphasis on taking development to the grassroots and on setting up a responsive and hands-on political system. She indicated clearly that the UPA government, enthused by the emphatic electoral mandate that it has received, was out to expand the scope and size of its flagship programmes targeted at the common man.

She also pointed out that the government would in the next five years allot more funds for key ministries like rural development, health and family welfare, human resource development and social justice and empowerment. It is not without reason, therefore, that these ministries have been placed in the hands of trusted Congress leaders with a proven track record – Joshi, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Kapil Sibal and Wasnik.

It is almost certain now that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), which assures a minimum of 100 days of work for the rural poor, will finally be extended beyond its

The new watchwords are "equity, innovation and public accountability" and the PM has opted to begin the process within the PMO.



Mamata Banerjee with Sonia Gandhi. The Trinamool has fought the election on issues of land rights, fishermen's demands.

current target group – unskilled manual labour – to embrace lower middle class skilled workers. Moreover, a move is afoot to do away with the 'one-person-per-family' restriction that is currently in force with regard to employment guarantee under NREGA.

In her address, the President referred to several other major schemes that have been drawn up to better the lot of the weaker sections, the National Rural Health Mission and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan being among them. She indicated that the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana would be expanded to cover all BPL families in the next five years. Also under consideration of Parliament is the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill.

The President also said that the National Literacy Mission would be recast as the National Mission for Female Literacy with the aim of making every woman in the country literate by 2014. The current literacy level among women is 54 per cent against 75 per cent among the male population and the UPA government is aware that none of its flagship social development programmes will take full effect until 100 per cent female literacy is attained.

"It was a speech that set the agenda for the government," says Wasnik, 50, Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment. "It identified the government's priority areas with absolute clarity and called for rigorous implementation of its social development programmes. The direction and focus have been set and all-out efforts will be made to improve the lot of disadvantaged sections – the backward classes, the rural poor, the elderly, and physically challenged and everybody else who needs help."

Wasnik adds: "The President's address stressed that, as part of the reforms process, all recommendations going to the Cabinet will henceforth be assessed in the light of how they will strengthen and enhance the government's avowed goals of equity and inclusion."

While asserting that the government focus has always been on uplift of disadvantaged people, Wasnik, who represents Vidarbha's Ramtek constituency, said: "We will review all the programmes that are already in place and ensure that their effectiveness is enhanced." His ministry will give priority to securing constitutional status for the National Commission for Backward Castes and ensuring that the fruits of development percolate down to the lowest rungs of society.

That seems to be a common goal across all ministries. By all accounts, the government means business. When ministry formation took an inordinately long time after the swearing-in was over, eyebrows were raised in certain quarters. But when the names of the remaining ministers were finally announced and the portfolios distributed, it became obvious that much thought had gone into the exercise and that the delay wasn't without good reason.

Unlike in the past, ministerial responsibilities weren't doled out as political favours but decided upon strictly on the basis of merit and suitability of the incumbents. Therefore, virtually every major minister in the UPA government is a perfect fit for the job assigned. Just as important, even the junior ministers, who traditionally have found themselves being ignored in the matter of work allocation by their seniors of Cabinet rank,

have been given clear-cut roles to perform.

In a letter sent to each of the 30-odd Cabinet ministers, the Prime Minister has suggested: "I hope you will give your junior colleagues adequate responsibilities in your ministry. This would not only give them a sense of involvement and ownership, but also groom them for bigger roles in the future."

A host of ministers of state, both first-timers as well as those with some past ministerial experience, have benefited from the PM's diktat. Sachin Pilot (communications), Agatha Sangma (rural development), Jitin Prasada (petroleum), Jyotiraditya Scindia (commerce and industry) and Ajay Maken (home) have been pitchforked into positions of significant authority. They are expected to bring an air of freshness to the work of the government, which, observers believe, will be reflected in policy-making in the months ahead.

Take the case of Panabaka Lakshmi, 51-year-old MP Andhra Pradesh. In the previous UPA government, she was a Minister of State for Health under Ramadoss. She spent the entire five-year tenure with no work except inaugurating hospitals and nursing homes. But this time around, as MoS for Textiles under the DMK's Dayanidhi Maran, she has been assured a more active role in the ministry that has been allotted to her.

Similarly, both Trivedi and D. Gandhiselvan, the two Ministers of State for Health, have been given important responsibilities by Ghulam Nabi Azad. The health ministry is in the spotlight and there is a sense of urgency. While



Dinesh Trivedi
Minister of State

"People want action, not mere words. They want an India that is shining for every single citizen, not just for the privileged and the powerful."

Azad will initially be concentrating on cleaning up the mess in AIIMS. Trivedi and Gandhiselvan will be in charge of the important task of bolstering the rural health network.

Performance is clearly the key and most ministers have been remarkably quick off the blocks. The fact that first-time Union ministers like CP Joshi and Krishna Tirath, have been allocated crucial social sector portfolios is a pointer to the fact that this government is earnest about adopting a completely new approach to delivering the fruits of development to long-ignored sections of the nation.

Joshi, a four-time MLA who as state unit chief guided the Congress to a stunning victory in the 2008 Rajasthan Assembly elections, brings to the job of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, an active interest in social sector issues, an attribute that has been on show since the day he took charge. He has already set his priorities – ensuring security for NREGA volunteers involved in social audit and implementation of the scheme, providing additional financial assistance to rural artisans under the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana and allotment of more dwelling units to the rural homeless under the Indira Awaas Yojana, besides making all data about BPL households in the country available on the ministry's website.

Joshi has been quoted as saying, "In 60 years, we have come this far but we still have a long way to go. A section of our people are still deprived of their dues..." In step with the Congress general secretary and leader of the party's youth brigade, Rahul Gandhi, he says: "There are two Indias. We have to work towards making them one."

In a meeting with representatives of various state governments that he held within a couple of weeks of assuming office, Joshi exhorted the state governments to ensure that funds provided by the Centre for rural development projects are utilised properly and that time-bound action plans are put in place. Joshi, as the Prime Minister would have expected, has made his presence felt in one of the UPA government's most crucial ministries.

Likewise, Tirath, one of the seven Congress MPs who helped the party make a clean sweep in Delhi, has settled in as Minister of State with Independent Charge for Women and Child Development without much ado. The fact that she was the chairperson of the parliamentary committee on empowerment of women during her last term as an MP will no doubt help.

Tirath, mother of three girls, said: "We have to plug all loopholes in the law as well as promote public awareness against female foeticide."

Tirath is a low-profile politician, unlike her predecessor in the ministry, Renuka Chaudhury, who courted the media with frequent appearances on television and did not seem to come to grips with her portfolio. Tirath can be trusted to approach her mission away from the glare of publicity.

Besides suggesting the setting up of a full-fledged National Mission for Empowerment of Women, Tirath has announced that she will accord top priority to the implementation of the recently ratified Integrated Child Protection Scheme, while initiating a thorough review of the National Policy for Children, which was formulated 35 years ago.

The UPA government's focus is clearly on ringing out the old and ushering

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Mukul Wasnik
Minister of State
for Social Justice

"All-out efforts will be made to improve the lot of disadvantaged sections – backward classes, rural poor, elderly, physically challenged."

Gangtok MP has hill agenda

Civil Society News

New Delhi

ACROSS the country in the last Lok Sabha elections, people have voted for politicians who can make a difference – individuals who have solutions and little baggage. Educated, pragmatic, but also politically wired seem to be the preferences of voters. Maverick Independents have lost their deposits, but clean and purposeful candidates with a party behind them have won handsomely.

In Gangtok, PD Rai of the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) is one such MP. Rai, 54, has degrees from IIM and IIT. He has been a successful businessman. Long years ago he gave up a job in banking to go back to Sikkim and work in the social sector. He has been particularly interested in financial inclusion and how microfinance can help the poor come up.

Articulate and incisive, Rai raises the threshold of engagement with

LAKSHMAN ANAND



PD Rai

Sikkim and its concerns. He brings with him to Delhi a modern vision for the state and the ways in which it needs to be tied into the reform and liberalisation taking place in the national economy.

When it comes to value added farm products, tourism, specialty medicine, higher education, Sikkim would like a place at the table. The northeast as a whole needs to be better understood, he says. And hill states across India deserve a different development paradigm.

About the controversy surrounding Sikkim's dams, Rai says if the dams are not to be built then the state must be compensated for preserving the environment. When the hydro projects are completed, Sikkim stands to make Rs 1,500 crores a year from the sale of electricity. "The country needs the electricity. We need the money for our development. We have limited options," he says.

Rai's involvement in politics began in 1994. He has been one of the early architects of the development strategies of the SDF, which has come back to power four times in the State Assembly under Chief Minister Pavan Chamling.

"It is pro-incumbency in Sikkim," says Rai jokingly over tea in his room at Sikkim House in Delhi where he has been camping with his wife.

But the fact is that the SDF goes back to the people with performance. The state's literacy rate is 82 per cent, infant mortality has come down to 30 per 1,000. Innovative financing strategies have created opportunities in horticulture and floriculture even as tourism has kept Sikkim's economy buoyant.

Nevertheless, much remains to be done, says Rai. Literacy may be high but the quality of education is cause for concern. The young go to school, but are they employable in a modern economy? An education system that is in step with the market is needed.

Agriculture, too, needs attention. Holdings are small and terraced and provide limited opportunities. The result is that people move out to either the urban parts of Sikkim or other Indian cities. It is important to

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- With states for training in-service teachers under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme
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Public Private Partnerships

- Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) for educating and training youths to build up their employability
- Security Skills Council of India (SSCI) to train and build up reserves for continuous inflow of trained security personnel to industries
- Rainmaker for building up trained human resources among people engaged in the profession of Law for Legal Process Outsourcing
- Confederation of Manufacturers Associations of India (CMAI) for low-cost mobile handsets to reach the rural poor and disadvantaged through Mobile Telephony
- Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) for developing Community Radios for improving professional lifestyles of the disadvantaged and marginal worker groups
- Accenture for launching programmes in BPO for creating tertiary sector job opportunities for youths and training them on-the-job
- Retail Association of India (rai) for training and educating youths willing to join retail chain management and industry

International Collaborations

- For German Language with Max Muller Bhavan and Goethe Institute of Germany
- For Japanese Language programmes with Embassy of Japan
- For Persian Language programmes with Embassy of Iran
- For Spanish Language programmes with Instituto Cervantes
- For Dual Degree and PhD programmes with Queensland University, Australia
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- The Foundation of Educational Partnership, United Kingdom
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A 16-HOUR CHIEF MINISTER

*The things Nitish
Kumar does right*

Harivansh
Patna

BIHAR is a state which has defied good governance. But in just three and half years Nitish Kumar as chief minister has proved that diligence in administration can bring about wonders. If little has been heard of him during this time it is because he has been working quietly. Turning a state around is no easy task. And getting Bihar on track is doubly difficult.

The results of the recent parliamentary election results, however, have left no doubt about the impact that his government has had. Now Nitish is really big news. His Janata Dal (U) won 22 seats while another 10 seats went to his alliance partner, the Bharatiya Janata Party.

So what is it that Nitish has done so right? How has he succeeded in demolishing the caste bastions of Lalu Prasad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan and simultaneously outdoing the Left and the Congress?

Nitish spends long hours in his secretariat. He is known as the "16-hour chief minister". Till the election results came out you couldn't be sure whether the description was being used out of derision or admiration. Paswan, for instance, made it plain that he saw little hope for Nitish, saying a "glorified clerk" couldn't be expected to run Bihar. The people of the state clearly think otherwise because Paswan has been wiped out.

One of Nitish's priorities has been to restore order and discipline in the state government. The only way of doing this was by setting an example. Since he himself works long hours and doesn't hold up files, officers and his ministerial colleagues have to be pretty sure that they do likewise. He has also chosen good officers to fill important posts in Patna and empowered them to bring the administration in the districts back to life as well. Government staff, long accustomed to snubbing authority, found they couldn't bully the new chief minister. They had to come to work on time, accept computerisation and so on.

As chief minister, Lalu Yadav, and later his wife Rabri Devi, rarely came to office. Durbars were held at home and decisions were taken whimsically, with little consultation. They saw themselves as royalty who would rule by fiat and favour. The result of over 15 years of this behaviour was that the government lost its systems. The depth of its decision-making diminished.

Nitish's next step has been to restore the morale of the police. Patna used to be called the "abduction capital" of India. Criminal gangs with political



A hands-on chief minister, Nitish Kumar, (left, speaking to the Prime Minister) took personal interest in the relief measures after the Kosi floods.

connections ruled and there was no question of the police exercising any control over their nefarious activities. Films such as *Gangajal* and *Apaharan* by Prakash Jha have been made on crime in Bihar. As the number of criminals kept growing they became bolder and would openly humiliate police officers.

Nitish made it a priority to enforce the law and ensure that criminals are punished. Under Rabri Devi in 2003, there were 10,500 arrests made and in 2004 there were 9,867. Once Nitish came to power, in 2007 alone there were 137,946 arrests and in the following year 136,942. This was a huge jump but the arrests would have meant little if they weren't followed up by trials and punishment.

So, in January 2006, special courts were appointed for speedy trials. From then till today sentences have been served on 34,416 criminals. Life sentences were handed out in 6,000 cases and death sentences in 90.

Now it doesn't seem such a good idea to take to crime in Bihar any more. Average people cannot believe that they are free of the terror that was once unleashed upon them by names that they had come to widely feared like Pappu Yadav, Shahabuddin, Anand Mohan, Suraj Bhan and Munna Shukla.

Nitish has shown that in a low-key but determined manner it is possible to restore the writ of the State and revive the justice system. His ability to transform Patna into a safer place to live in has left a huge impression. It had become a city where children couldn't go to school safely. And mothers worried about their jewellery being snatched when they went to drop their children off in the mornings. Such was the decline that children had to



One of Nitish's priorities has been to restore order and discipline in the state govt. The only way of doing this was by setting an example. Since he works long hours and doesn't hold up files, officers and his ministerial colleagues have to be pretty sure that they do likewise.

hold demonstrations to demand the right to attend school safely.

With proper policing, the number of abductions fell from 411 in 2004 to just 89 in 2007 and 66 in 2008. Till March this year there were a mere 16 abductions. While earlier people used to hurry home as soon as it got dark, now women find it safe to stay out till 11 at night, restaurants are open and life has returned to Patna.

A significant fallout of this normalcy is that real estate prices have begun to rise. People were selling off their properties for whatever they could get and moving out of Bihar. It had become common for properties in Patna, Devgarh, Bhagalpur and other cities to be forcibly occupied and possessed by criminal elements. Bengalis were especially targeted.

The improvement in law and order is evident in the conduct of the Lok

Sabha polls in Bihar. This time there were just seven deaths and 17 injuries in election related violence, a huge drop from 15 deaths and 76 injuries in 2004 and 76 deaths and 147 injuries in 1999. And of the seven deaths this time, some were in Naxalite attacks.

It was also interesting to see how home guards carrying only sticks supervised the booths. How much Bihar has changed! Such a peaceful election has been possible only because of the efforts of the state government in reducing crime in the past three years.

Going by caste calculations alone, Nitish Kumar should never have found such support in the elections. The fact is that this is the first election in a very long time that has been fought beyond the considerations of caste.

Nitish in fact went out of his way to make it a referendum on the performance of his government. In meeting after meeting during the campaign he would ask voters to choose between the past three years under him and the 15 years that preceded his government.

He made no personal attacks, didn't call rivals names and refrained from making exaggerated claims.

By asking voters to judge his government on the basis of how it had changed their lives, the chief minister raised the threshold of the debate during the elections. He appeared far taller than Lalu or Paswan. In comparison to them he looked progressive and seemed to have a vision for Bihar.

The two key tasks before Nitish Kumar have been to restore the authority and credibility of the police force in Bihar and to cleanse the administration of corruption. He has set a personal example by not allowing family members and close supporters to use his name. So unlike his predecessors he does not have a coterie that runs the government from behind to its own advantage. There are strict rules for all ministers and party people. For instance, when an MLA of his party went out for a drink in Patna and refused to pay the bill, the hotel complained to the chief minister's office. Nitish instructed the police to take action and it ended in the politician's arrest.

To help the police to feel good about itself, Nitish appointed DN Gautam as the director-general well aware of the fact that he had not been acceptable to earlier chief ministers because of his honesty and refusal to oblige politicians.

Similarly, the chief minister has asked for government officers indulging in corruption to be prosecuted so as to send out a clear message that he only has use for those who are honest and perform. To drive home the point, there is a move for a law which will make it possible for the state government to acquire the disproportionate assets of government servants.

But keeping the administration on the straight and narrow path is just part of the story. Much more important are the positive measures that make people feel that life is looking up.

So, when the government takes an active interest in hospitals and tries to revive the public health care system, a new optimism is created. After all state hospitals had all but been given up as being worthless and defunct. It is the same with the medical teaching institutions across the state.

The public distribution system and disaster management are some of the other intractable areas where it had generally come to be accepted that there would be widespread corruption and the government would look the other way.

Instead, Nitish Kumar has chosen to plunge in and look for solutions. Often he has been mired in disputes with the Centre over flood relief measures or the number of extremely poor people deserving of food at a cheap price through the public distribution system. But it hasn't gone unnoticed that under him the state government is refreshingly in search of solutions.

The chief minister distinguished himself by his hands-on approach to flood relief after the Kosi changed course. He went into great detail over the measures that were being taken. Traditionally, floods in Bihar has been an opportunity for politicians to siphon off money. But this time around there was supervision right from the top and it mattered.

Nitish Kumar has shown that governments work best and deliver results when they are activist in their orientation. Turning Bihar around requires not just stamina but inspiration and a willingness to be seen as aspiring, somewhat crazily, to the impossible.

Harivansh is Chief Editor, Prabhat Khabar.

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
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Mphasis, Titan have the ability

Subir Roy
Bangalore

MELWIN D'Costa, 35, and Narayanaswamy, 27, work for Mphasis, an information technology and business process outsourcing company started 10 years ago in Bangalore. They have put in 18 and 15 months respectively. Both are as cheerful and articulate as bright young people in this most modern of Indian industries invariably are. But what sets them apart is that they have disabilities.

D'Costa is tall and moves around in crutches. He was hale and hearty till he was 18 when a viral attack affected his spinal cord and left his lower limbs paralysed. He studied in a polytechnic for the physically disabled where he got a diploma in computer science and thereafter taught the same discipline before joining Mphasis. Narayanaswamy has to move in a wheelchair, having been afflicted by polio when he was two years old. He is an M Com. from Bangalore University.

Both work in the back office operations of the London office of a Zurich headquartered insurance company. Via email they get data in the nature of proposals and quotations for insurance cover from prospective customers. They enter and process the data according to parameters laid down and then issue the documents, that is, the insurance policies.

The two are able to work for Mphasis because they went through a three-month special training programme designed to fill the gap between what is required of a white collar worker in an office and what a differently abled person can offer initially. The training, usually for those with school leaving expertise, is imparted by a two-year-old Bangalore based NGO - Diversity and Equal Opportunity Centre, (DEOC). Its prime mover is Rama Chari who has nearly two decades of experience in working with the disabled.

The training takes place at the premises provided by another NGO, the Association of People with



Employees on the process floor

Disability. It also has links with the vocational rehabilitation centre of the Karnataka government which registers and trains the disabled.

DEOC has put together a curriculum in English which seeks to equip the differently abled with analytical and computer skills and helps them with personality development. This training curriculum has been so successful that DEOC has now started a sort of training the trainer programme whereby the curriculum is passed on to other NGOs who can then initiate their own training programmes.

Mphasis is among the most successful in being an equal opportunity employer which has a programme to induct people with disabilities among

its staff. It has 300 such employees who make up one percent of the 30,000 employees spread across India. This ratio is high by Indian business standards though there is a lot to do - there are around 70 million disabled in India who make up over six percent of its current population.

Much of the initiative for this comes from Meenu Bhambhani, the organisation's manager of community initiative (she heads its corporate social responsibility operations). An alumnus of the University of Illinois at Chicago, she has held various positions in government, been a consultant with the World Bank and is a substantial contributor to the literature on the disabled in India.

Bhambhani points out that becoming an equal opportunity employer has been a great learning process for Mphasis. Along with developing a commitment, it has gone about interacting with NGO partners in a systematic corporate manner. NGOs have been informed that they will be judged on certain criteria like how inclusive they are, how many disabled are benefited, how they are addressing the gender bias. The training which has made it possible for D'Costa and Narayanaswamy to work for Mphasis is a joint initiative between the firm and DEOC.

The extent of the learning process for the firm is outlined by Elango R, chief human resources officer of Mphasis. He explains that this is not about charity as the exercise offers a business plus for the company - it opens up a channel of hiring for an industry which is short on skills. Besides, employee satisfaction and productivity is about the highest among the disabled. Attrition among disabled employees (for an industry which is plagued by it) is nominal as loyalty and gratitude are high. If you take care of their career opportunities, they stay.

Not all the initiative by a person like Bhambhani, herself an orthopedic disabled, can succeed without a management buy-in which then results in corporate policies that enable the

necessary investments and initiation of systems that allow the programme to deliver. The disabled initially come in with lower productivity and take longer to fit in. "Hence we have created a separate cost centre so that costs (related to inducting in the disabled) become a part of corporate costs. Managers who are able to use disabled staff get utilisation credit and relaxation at the business level because a disabled person may not be immediately billable," says Elango.

Then he candidly admits, "We did not know how to treat the disabled. Meenu taught us. After she came into the organisation we did a lot of sensitisation of our managers. Initially I was worried that she would be an activist. But now I can say we wouldn't have got here without her." Emphasising that it is all part of hard core business, Ilango recalls that until Bhambhani physically came in (she had been located by a search firm as the company needed a replacement of its outgoing head of CSR) he was not aware that she herself was disabled.

This is Ilango's second stint with MphasiS and he points out that there is also something in the organisations DNA, right from its beginning, which has made it keep experimenting, looking for new ways of doing things and a disregard for holy cows. He traces this cultural aspect of the organisation to its founder Jerry Rao who has now exited and is continuing with his habit of doing new things by promoting low cost housing, even while buying into the booming wine business in India.

How much of an exception is MphasiS? Xerxes Desai, former managing director of Titan, the

watch and jewellery maker, who is adviser to CII's Karnataka disability networking forum, recalls that right from when Titan began 22 years ago, it took a strong interest in employing the disabled. It then achieved the same kind of disabled to total work force ratio that MphasiS now has.

In recent years he has been going over how industry can be persuaded to do more and a unique outcome is the recent bulky CII study, 'A Values Route to Business Success: The why and how of employing persons with disability.'

The whole idea was to set out how to do the job, what to do and where is the literature that can guide you. The cardinal point that comes through in the book, which is really a manual and a guide with case studies, is don't identify jobs for people with disabilities, open up regular jobs for them so that they can perform them as well or better than the others.

On the pluses of providing an opportunity to the disabled to work alongside others with equal productivity and dignity, he mentions the case of a young girl who is a star student, good in both sports and academics of the school that Titan runs in Hosur where it has its main factory. Her father is a Titan employee with disability!

The book sets a fairly tough agenda which can be intimidating. So Desai's advice to businesses is that there is no need to get it all right at the beginning, you can go step by step.

On the crucial question as to how far Indian business has progressed in this regard, what Desai has to say is both revealing and disappointing. In

the last 20 years, there has been very little movement in industry towards creating work opportunities for the disabled. There has been some action in public sector units and government agencies, though the latter has often ended up with tokenism. He adds that industry figures (of disabled in employment) are miserable, though there are individual small firms that do a lot.

But something is happening. MNCs are making a difference and now seem to be taking the leadership. He attributes this not so much to corporate trends as the fact that in their societies doing these things is socially mandatory. Some of this seems to have rubbed off on Indian companies with international exposure, making them quite active in this regard.

Perhaps more than all this, there has been an explosion of activity in the NGO sector. The CII study is written by leaders of individual NGOs, many of whom are disabled themselves, whose credentials are obvious. They have brought to the task both professional rigour and passion.

My whole experience of researching this story has an amusing sidelight involving these NGO leaders. When Bhambhani and Chari were briefing me about MphasiS, I airily asked them if they had seen a recent CII study on how business can employ those with disabilities, a copy of which Xerxes Desai had sent me. They looked at each other and told me they, the two of them, had written parts of it! I had obviously not yet opened the book and leafed through it, or I would have found this out. I felt both chastened and very reassured.

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Tribal village to fishery hub

Vivek S Ghatani
Mirik (Darjeeling)

EVERY morning Nar Bahadur Limbu would walk around his village and talk passionately about how Bunkulung, their tiny tribal settlement, could become a fisheries hub if only people took to fishing.

His village had many things in its favour. It had a warm climate, ample unused land and water from nearby streams. All this, Nar Bahadur thought, made it an ideal spot for fisheries. Instead of eking out a living by farming on small plots, his people could earn an additional lucrative income from selling fish.

Bunkulung, is 46 km from Siliguri in Darjeeling district. Economically backward and isolated, the village is home to Limbu tribals of the Gorkha community. The name Bunkulung is a combination of the Limbu and Lepcha languages.

The villagers did cultivate a local fish for their needs. They agreed fishing was a good idea, but where was the money or expertise to set up Bunkulung as a serious centre of pisciculture?

Nar Bahadur did not give up. Apart from being a farmer, he is educated, speaks some English and knows a few social organisations, here and there. One day, he got a chance to meet officials from West Bengal's Fisheries Department at a seminar on environment in Siliguri.

"It was in 2001," he recalls. "I described my village to them, its climate, water and how villagers were cultivating local fish with whatever knowledge they had."

The officials got very interested. They wanted to see Bunkulung. "I quickly arranged for their visit," says Nar Bahadur. "There was no transport to our village from Manju tea estate since we only had a *kacha* road. The officials were so enthusiastic they opted to walk some 15 km. They came, surveyed my village and after going back, called me up. They said a project to develop my village as a model fishery village had been sanctioned. They told me to visit their office in Siliguri."

Limbu was overcome by excitement. But there were roadblocks. The village, famous for hill fruits, fell under the jurisdiction of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), an autonomous body that functions under the West Bengal government. For Nar Bahadur and his fellow villagers, the main hurdle was to get a No-Objection Certificate (NOC) from the DGHC.

"We were lucky to get the NOC," says Nar Bahadur. "Subash Ghisingh was the chairman of the DGHC and he was from Manju tea estate. I had a good rapport with him. I went to meet him at the DGHC headquarters in Darjeeling. But he declined to give us the certificate. When he visited the Bunkulung area later, I approached him again. He took note of my request. Finally, I convinced the DGHC about the benefits of the project. It took us one full year to get the NOC. Once we got it, I submitted it to the Fisheries Department. When the project eventually got under way, it was a dream come true."



Nar Bahadur Limbu, 'Best Fisherman' of Bunkulung

The Fisheries Department built 11 ponds on lands belonging to the villagers. The average size of the ponds is 30 by 50 feet. The department spent Rs1.65 lakh on each pond and around Rs 80,000 on fencing. Another five ponds were constructed later taking the total to 16. The only thing the villagers had to do was to bring water to the pond.

"We brought water from the Marma Khola (a local stream) ourselves by constructing drains or a polythene pipe from the stream to each pond. It took us six months. After the ponds and water pipes were in place, a Fishermen Development Committee was formed," explains Nar Bahadur.

The Minister of Fisheries, Kiranmoy Nanda, inaugurated the ponds. Nar Bahadur is secretary of the Fishermen Development Committee. Bunkulung was declared a Model Fishery village, the first of its kind in the Darjeeling hills. The experiment has shown that the hills are suitable for such a business.

The Fisheries Department gave 2,000 fingerlings to the villagers. The villagers got around 5,000 kg of fish after six months. Since the pond is made of cement, villagers suspected it would leach poisonous chemicals that would harm the fingerlings.

"So before putting in the fingerlings, we applied lime to the ponds," says Nar Bahadur. "By mid 2002 we were producing around 4,000 kg of fish."

The villagers cultivate the Indian Mrigal Carp, American Rohu and Grass carp. People come from Siliguri, Kurseong, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and even neighbouring Sikkim to buy fish during the season which starts from July and ends in November.

Since so many buyers turn up on their own, Nar Bahadur said the villagers don't need to take the fish to bigger markets in Siliguri.

Villagers have increased their earning by Rs10,

000 to Rs 20,000. Says Sher Bahadur Limbu, a fisherman: "We sell the fish at around Rs 70 per kg. We would like the business to expand. I am using the extra money for my children's education."

The Fisheries Department built a primary school. The DGHC made a road from Manju tea estate to Bunkulung and constructed a picnic spot and a children's park. Tourists began to flow into Bunkulung and the Model Fishery Village became an added attraction. The villagers offer homestay facilities to tourists.

The Fisheries Department continues to help the village. "Once every three months the department conducts a training programme. There is a lot to learn," says Nar Bahadur.

The problem that the fishermen face is scarcity of water during the dry season. "The stream goes dry. We need a reservoir but we don't have the money. The Fisheries Department is aware of our problem," says Nar Bahadur. In 2005, the Fisheries Department gave him the Best Fisherman award.

Nar Bahadur is not sanguine that his mission has been accomplished. He now goes to Bijanbari near Darjeeling, Mirik near Kurseong, Kalimpong and other places to motivate villagers. Sometimes he organises seminars and talks about pisciculture on radio stations.

What drives him? Nar Bahadur says he got his inspiration from Maharashtra. "I worked in a private company from 1986 to 1989. I saw people doing pisciculture. They used to cultivate tonnes of fish and earn a good living. I thought why can't my people do this? So I returned to my village, leaving my job in 1990. I started doing research on pisciculture. I am glad that my hard work has paid off. By the way, our fish is tastier than the ones cultivated in the plains," he says with pride.

Insights

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Messing around with EIA

KANCHI KOHLI

IN May 2009 yet another expose linked to India's Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure was unfolded through the print media. This was related to the 'secret report' of the Finance Ministry's 'Expert Group to Examine the Scheme of Statutory Clearances for Industrial and Infrastructure Projects in India', which was carved out of the Prime Minister's promise at the 54th meeting of the National Development Council in December 2007.

The Terms of Reference (ToR) of the expert group included a close look into the existing systems of environment, forests and wildlife clearances and suggest measures of speeding them up. The group was chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Economic Affairs. The expert group also comprised of representatives of industry associations like CII, FICCI and Assocham, as well as Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services and Infrastructure Development and Finance Corporation.

With a pre-determined agenda and a composition of members designed to achieve it, the expert group recommended the "rationalisation of existing procedures and guidelines with a view to reduce the time taken in according the clearances and remove operational bottlenecks for entrepreneurs and project proponents." It is not farfetched to say it is this report that has a critical link with the latest set of amendments to the EIA notification proposed by the MoEF on January 19, 2009.

The 2006 changes had done nothing to address the existing lacunae in the regulatory procedure. On the contrary, it had worsened the quality of EIA reports, public hearings and issues of transparency. And now it is another set of proposed amendments, the tenor, nature and text of which are visibly chipping away at the edge from some more existing clauses.

Some of the concerns with reference to these amendments are:

1 Exemption for modernisation and expansion of projects and self-certification by project authorities: The amendments propose to exempt modernization and expansion of projects based on self-certification by project authorities that there is no increase in pollution load. There are several indus-



Protest to save tribal forests from Vedanta

tries operating in critically polluted areas or are in violation of their environment clearance conditions, concerns which need to be considered before the expansion of a project is permitted. More importantly, allowing self-certification by a project authority who is interested in seeking environment clearance for expansion is itself contradictory, and defeats the very purpose and need for independent assessment. The latest instance is the 24th April, 2009, public hearing for the expansion of Vedanta's aluminum refinery in Lanjigarh, Orissa where local communities have raised serious concerns about the existing pollution being caused by the company. If this amendment comes through, then the company can easily evade such public outcry.

1 Decisions of SEIAA to be determined by majority: According to the EIA notification 2006, the task of clearance of B category projects has been handed over to the State Environment Impact Assessment

Authorities (SEIAAs) which are yet to be set up in all states. This was done with the understanding that members of this esteemed body will be of sound expertise and know-how on environmental impacts. The decision was to be arrived at by consensus. The proposed amendments bring in an element of 'majority' to this decision. This is nothing less than being discriminatory against one or two members of the SEIAA who might have a contradictory but critical difference of opinion with the others on the authority. The change will allow for the marginalization of that opinion in the light of a majority viewpoint.

1 Exemption of scoping and TOR of B category projects: It is close to three years since the EIA notification, 2006, has been in place and SEIAAs in all states are yet to be established and/or functional. While this process might be taking its due course,

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Growth numbers mislead

AMIT KAPOOR



INDIA has for long been considered a goldmine of potential due to its ability to integrate despite its diversity posing threats to its foundation for growth and development.

However, India remains a long way from the dream that its potential can convert it to, as its regional development agenda is either ignored or developed without a comprehensive understanding of its capabilities and resources.

India's growth and performance story is not restricted to eight per cent rates of growth as sustainability and targets are not matched and its society has become an amalgamation of unequal opportunities and indicators. The competency of a nation is a function of the performance of its regions and states. The development of the nation, as a whole, needs to be accepted as an amalgamation of its divergent competencies.

The per capita incomes of Indian states are a good indicator of their competency levels and a relative measure can be drawn from their comparison with the average levels prevalent in the economy. States like Punjab, Delhi, Goa, Maharashtra have a per capita income of Rs 50,028, Rs 72,822, Rs 94,697, Rs 48,285 respectively.

On the other hand, states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have a shocking per capita income of Rs 11,298 and Rs 16,893. The national average, on the contrary, is close to Rs 45,000.

States in India are suffering from huge differences in their actual potential and the potential realized. India as a nation cannot prosper until and unless all its states follow a unified dream of growth and prosperity. Literacy rates, education levels, government support and investment opportunities differ for each state. The differences do not arise from the resources and capability of the states but due to indifference in the pol-

icy and decision-making of the economies of these states. In lieu of a comprehensive environment for growth based on capacities, the competencies of the regions are ignored and policies are made based on stereotypical notions of industrialization and growth models.

Every state requires an in depth study of its growth opportunities and the sources from where a competitive advantage can be derived. Indian states are suffering from concentrated economic activity emanating from a few, while the rest are struggling. Haryana has the highest CAGR in the Indian states while Uttar Pradesh and Manipur grow at less than 6.5 per cent. The growth rates look good but become alarming when we look at the figures in conjunction with the low base.

Similarly, despite a good rate of literacy, Kerala has not been able to develop its growth rates much and the per capita income of the state is at Rs 39,315. Industrial development cannot be undertaken amidst unfavourable economic conditions. Human resource and infrastructure are important for the development of the right competitive forces in the states. However, India in the wake of its recent growth has forgotten its diverse base and the umpteen opportunities that could be exploited by each of these states. Rather than ignoring the potential of these states or using a generalised model of growth, Indian states need to recognise their diversity and accept themselves as 28 different avenues for the growth of the

nation as a whole.

Jammu and Kashmir and the seven sisters in the northeast remain alienated parts of the Indian subcontinent. The problem is traced to civil unrest and aggression from internal and external forces that hinder the progress of the nation and prevent the forces of growth and prosperity from leading the economies of these states. However, the problem is far too deep to be understood only as a Naxal or Maoist issue.

The unrest in these states is a manifestation of the inequality in opportunity and attention that plague these states and keep them separate from the prospects that drive the rest of the nation. Illiteracy and government apathy have rendered these states in their present condition where social unrest has become an avenue for people to show their agitation at being ignored in the race for competitiveness. States resources were misused or unused and the capability of the state to contribute to its growth were largely ignored or ill developed. The stagnation in the competencies of the people and the economies of these states created a cycle of low growth rates and poverty.

The impact and source of the economic performance of a region forms a circular cause and effect relationship. Where people are more progressive and the performance of the region is enhanced, the prosperity of the region is reflected in the people and society at large.

Disparity is a boon and a bane for any nation but the consequences are determined by the policies

that could exploit or ignore the differential potential of the nation. Mindless industrialisation cannot be the key to sustainable growth. Competitiveness, productivity, the performance of a state is a far deeper concept than just allowing industries to form and employment to increase.

The BPO industry in India is a blatant example of an industry and employ-

ment that plunged the economy towards mediocrity in the name of growth. Similarly, the IT industry became over hyped. It became the most generalised form of growth. All states tried to emulate the success of Bangalore and Silicon Valley irrespective of the feasibility of the IT industry.

India is an amalgamation of resources and competencies. Investments from the government and industry need to be seen through the lens of regional capabilities. Each state in India is a separate avenue for an industry. India has 28 platforms on which to build a nation unified in its pursuit of development and welfare.

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Indian states need to recognise their diversity and accept themselves as different avenues of national growth.

People must own laws

SUMANT BATRA

THE onset of economic liberalization and globalisation has highlighted the void that exists in the country between archaic laws and the new paradigms that society aspires to. The legislature has often been criticized for failure to upgrade laws to make them relevant to the times. However, of more serious concern is the manner in which new laws continue to be enacted even today.

It is often found that the government has a tendency to bring in laws to provide for pressing situations. These laws may neither be adequately thought through within the government nor appropriately deliberated upon outside with stakeholders and experts. Most legislative proposals are brought before the Parliament as Government Bills. Very few Private Member Bills have been introduced. In such a situation there is a lack of ownership of these laws by citizens and stakeholders leading to implementation challenges. It is an inevitable requirement of the Constitution of India that every law passed by Parliament truly reflects the "representation of the peoples' will". The framers of the Constitution of India thus accorded the power to enact laws to the legislature as it quintessentially reflects the will of the people as members elected by the people constitute the legislature. Although the legislators sent to Parliament in the first few elections stood up to the occasion and made commendable contributions to the Parliamentary process, there has been a gradual decline in the level of debate on Bills due to frequent disruption of the work of Parliament for political reasons and lack of interest in subject matters of legislation. This has resulted in a number of laws being passed without much or any consideration and discussion.

The introduction of the new economic policy with the participation of eminent economists and industrial giants began a shift in paradigm. It started the beginning of private sector participation in both the market and policy-framing processes. The process has received impetus in key economic ministries where experts and stakeholders in the private sector are consulted extensively as was done by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs while putting together the new Companies Bill. The wider consultation process needs to be extended to all ministries and bodies involved in policy making to serve the pressing needs of a fast modernizing society and rapidly growing economy, for preserving human rights, halting the erosion of natural resources, protecting forests, environment and invaluable wildlife, and for building a truly world class legal system befitting a society where the rule of law is supreme and prevalent in theory and practice.

There is a need for broadening and deepening the process of consultation. It is necessary to

involve communities and stakeholders in general so that there is wider ownership of new laws. At the same time drafting laws will benefit from drawing on experts in the private sector. With a new breed of laws, complex and sophisticated,



Voluntary compliance by the people can be enhanced by offering citizens greater opportunities to be involved in the lawmaking process.

being the need of the hour, it is not feasible to rely only on government officers to draft laws but accord a greater say to private sector experts and engage them in not just policy-making but also drafting of legislation.

Policy-makers can benefit from the skills and practical experience of experts in developing legislation that can meet the expectation of stakeholders, market participants and others impacted by them. This will also enhance the ownership of end legislative products surely increasing if not ensuring the chances of their success.

Any comparative scrutiny will reflect how the more prosperous and thriving economies are

incorporating mechanisms for consultation. The European Union has inculcated the principle of 'participation' through the European Commission treaty which confers a right of mandatory consultation in drafting legislation in the field of social policy. The process endows a greater power to social partners by granting them the right to draft legislations if an agreement can be reached between the Commission and the partners. In the United States, the many private lawmakers – ranging from familiar organizations like the American Law Institute and the New York Stock Exchange to less well known ones, like the International Chamber of Commerce and associations of banks – are here envisioned as part of a federalist scheme that operates at a molecular level rather than at the level of the state.

It is however important to ensure that private sector predominance does not turn the law-making onus into a lobbyist arena. Such practices are undesirable and untoward. There is imminent danger of converting the process into a large scale auctioneering process with the interests of the opulent being secured at the expense of the smaller players.

A huge responsibility rests on corporations to display an integrity-driven temperament by staying clear of trivial private motives. There is also the risk of minority groups trying to gain special access to lawmakers through contributions and favours. This can breach the fundamental need of

engaging with law-makers.

To upkeep this fragile balance of opinions, to curtail the expansion of avarice-ridden businessmen and check the abuse of the process, the government and regulatory bodies can provide a stringent system of checks and balances. The private sector must conscientiously work towards the prosperity of society at large, rather than seek narrow competitive gains.

The Indian people have a history of abiding by the law of the land. This voluntary compliance by the people can be enhanced by offering citizens greater opportunities to be involved in the law-making process at many points. The political system of democratic elections and representative law-making bodies demands greater public access to the process so that the people of India have a stake in the law as well as confidence in the stability of personal and property rights. It is crucial that at no point policy-makers and legislative bodies, both at the centre and state levels, overlook this key aspiration and need of the citizens as any defect in the process will only mar the principles of democracy.

Sumant Batra is managing partner of Kesar Dass B. & Associates, a New Delhi based corporate and commercial law firm. He is an international consultant to the IMF, World Bank and OECD.

Living

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Childhood in cinders

A Delhi filmmaker unravels the stark story of Varanasi's Dom boys

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

It is a world apart where human existence seems to be at its most macabre. Life is a trap here, death a harbinger of liberation. As bodies burn on the pyres of Varanasi's Manikarnika cremation ground - Hindus from far and wide bring their loved ones to this sacred site in the hope of easing their way to heaven - the palpable and the immaterial, the transient and the eternal, the blessed and the damned intermingle inexorably in the smoky, surreal haze that hangs over this patch of land by the Ganga.

It is on this stark, phantasmagoric spectacle with a bunch of seven Dom boys who live and work at the cremation ground that Delhi filmmaker Rajesh S Jala focusses his camera. What emerges is a devastatingly unflinching and haunting feature-length documentary, *Children of the Pyre*. The film presents a disturbing yet irresistibly watchable account of childhood reduced to cinders.

Their life depends on the dead. These boys, some as young as nine, others barely into their teens, make a living by either cremating bodies or snatching the shrouds that drape the corpses that are brought in here. The boys often sleep surrounded by the crackling pyres - they cannot afford to miss a single cremation because the quantity (probably even the quality) of their next meal hinges on the number of shrouds that they can grab. They smoke marijuana in order to escape the nightmares that haunt them in their slumber. Ravi, 15, the youngest cremation worker of Manikarnika, says on camera: "Sometimes in our sleep, we dream of corpses, their legs spread apart, burning. It's scary."

Such sights are an intrinsic part of Ravi's workaday reality, and not just confined to a disturbing dreamscape that he can keep at bay during his waking hours. Jala's camera does not look away from the horror of it all - *Children of the Pyre* is



Rajesh S Jala

When the stench of death impinges relentlessly upon life, innocence is inevitably undermined and a degree of desensitisation sets in.

replete with images that are not for the faint-hearted. The shocking footage (bodies ablaze, limbs burning, heads cracking), the filmmaker points out, was necessary to underscore the real gravity of the situation. In one chilling sequence, two of the boys perform a mock funeral ritual on a half-burnt, semi-naked, unclaimed body. The boys, singed and strengthened by the heat of the pyre, think nothing of turning death into a casual, diversionary joke. But for the filmmaker, with his urbanised sensibility, the act conveys a searing truth: when the stench of death impinges relentlessly upon life, innocence is inevitably undermined and a degree of desensitisation sets in.

According to Jala, around 30 Dom children are in this 'business of death' in Manikarnika. Life has conditioned them to look upon death as an opportunity. As Yogi, 11, says, "I want more people to die so that I can get more shrouds." But the air of nonchalance is obviously a façade. The youngest of the lot, Sunil, 9, says: "I feel like abandoning this place, but I've come here out of utter helplessness. I try to convince God but he does not get convinced. What can I do?"

Ravi has been cremating bodies since the age of five, while the rest of the boys featured in *Children of the Pyre* - Yogi, Manish, Sunil, Ashish, Kapil and Gagan - are veterans at making off with the shrouds, selling them to local shopkeepers

(sometimes for as little two rupees), who then clean the pieces of cloth and put them up for sale again, earning anything between Rs 25 and Rs 30.

Jala stumbled upon the story of these hapless boys quite by accident. "It was more than two years ago that I planned to make a film on Varanasi. But this wasn't what I had in mind initially. But when I went to Varanasi and stood watching these boys at the Manikarnika Ghat, I was struck by their indomitable spirit, their incredible ability to rise above their painful lives.

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I had found the theme for my film," says Jala. "I lived on and off with the children, observing, following and filming them in the most harrowing place I have ever seen," adds the filmmaker whose own life has been no mean journey.

Uprooted from Kashmir in the wake of the outbreak of insurgency in the late 1980s, Jala previously made *Floating Lamp of the Shadow Valley*, a documentary about a nine-year-old Dal Lake boat boy, Arif, who supports his mother (who gave birth to him after she was abducted in the early 1990s by a militant at age 12) and four younger siblings, dodging multiple challenges in life - hunger, poverty, the constant threat of violence in a strife-torn Valley and the numbing winters. Jala's empathy with the dispossessed and disadvantaged and his aversion for violence in any form, physical, social or emotional, are a natural corollary to his own experiences.

Children of the Pyre has already won the Best Documentary prize in three major international festivals in Montreal, Sao Paulo and Los Angeles, besides garnering applause in Munich, Thessaloniki, Leipzig, Pusan, Amsterdam and, closer home, in Goa. It was at its screening at the International Film Festival of India in Goa last year that *Children of the Pyre* impressed Michael J Werner, co-chairman of Fortissimo Films, enough for him to acquire its world rights. The Amsterdam-based Fortissimo Films, one of the world's leading movie sales agents, has offices in New York, London, Paris and Hong Kong, and *Children of the Pyre* is the first-ever Indian documentary that the company has acquired.

But there is more to the film than its international triumphs, the latest of which was a well-attended screening in June at New York's Museum of Modern Art. Jala has tied up with the global charity organisation, Plan International, to initiate a rehabilitation plan for the Dom children featured in the film. "Initially, I wanted to take up the cases of 25-30 of these boys, but Plan International wants to expand the rehabilitation plan to embrace a comprehensive long-term project for the entire community, which is made up of about 700 families," reveals Jala. The global awareness that the film has created has helped.

Yet, he does not want to be seen as an activist. "I am first and foremost a filmmaker, but if I see an opportunity to be of help to a segment of our society, I would be only too happy to intervene," he says. Jala has known these boys for two years and has formed a lasting bond with them. "The younger boys want to go to school, while the older ones would need vocational training so that they can set themselves up gainfully," he adds.

Plan International's field officers are already in the Dom quarters of Varanasi firming up the project, and Jala hopes that the rehabilitation plan would be set in motion by August. "I will be an integral part of the monitoring system. I would love to see how the planned change is being brought about in the lives of these boys and their families and probably even film the process," he says.

Jala spent around Rs 40 lakh - raised primarily through friends and well-wishers - on the making of *Children of the Pyre*. He seems destined to make infinitely more than that in kind - for himself and the boys who made the film possible.

French heritage on

Susheela Nair
Puducherry

VYSIAL Street is a popular Franco-Tamil architectural streetscape beyond the Grand Canal in the Tamil Quarter of Puducherry. Strolling down the street, one could feel the community's palpable sense of pride after they bagged the Award of Merit 2008 from UNESCO for cultural heritage conservation in February this year.

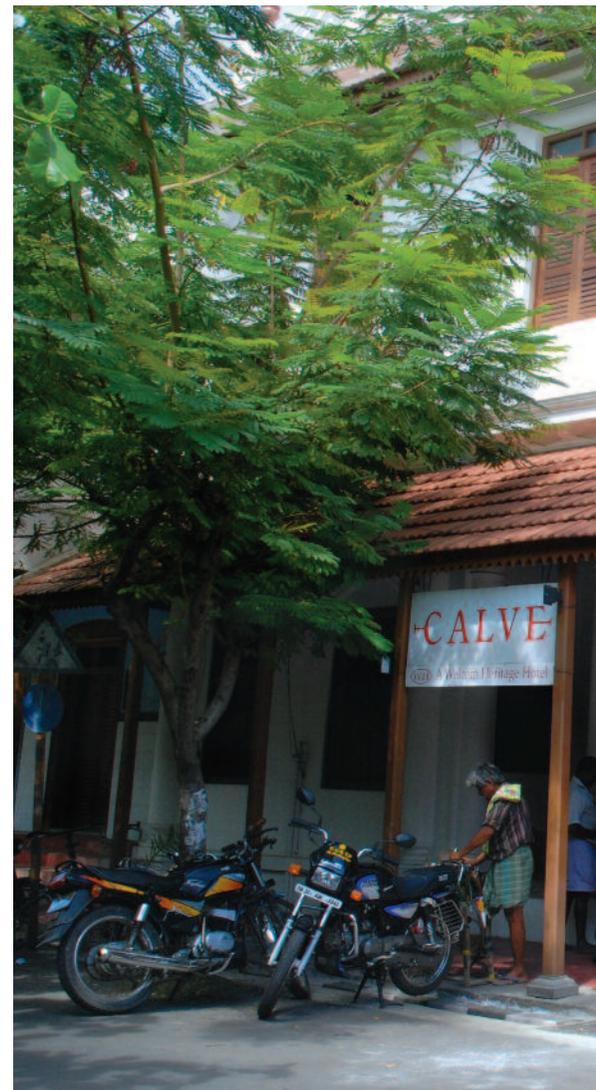
The street underwent a facelift. Under the Vysial Street Restoration Project the facade of several heritage buildings was restored and some houses redesigned to fit in with the streetscape. Municipal services were improved. "The restoration was made possible with the concerted efforts of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, (INTACH), government departments such as the local administration, town planning, and public works apart from private individuals and organisations," says Ashok Panda, coordinator of INTACH.

Vysial Street, is dominated by the Telugu-speaking Chettiers who gave the street the French name of Rue Calve Subbraya Chetty. The entire street-stretch looks homogenous because of its connecting elements and houses adjoining each other. Being a part of this street is a matter of pride for the Soussilabai Government Girls Higher Secondary School, which is a fusion of French and Indian architecture.

The stained glass ornamentation on the entrance doors and several other decorative patterns have been restored. The owners of about 20 houses on Rue Calve were beneficiaries of the European Commission-funded Model Street Restoration Project by INTACH, which meticulously brought back old facades. Vysial Street has another claim to fame. When Aurobindo came here, he stayed at Shankara Chetty House, the residence of Shankara Chetty, a prominent businessman in Puducherry.

The Tamil inspired houses on this heritage street sport continuous wall-to-wall construction, very distinct in character from the French streetscapes. Their exterior facades have a *thalavaram* (street verandah with a lean-to-roof over wooden posts). This is a social extension of the house providing shelter for the pedestrians along with a *thinnai* (semi-public verandah space) with masonry benches for visitors and pilgrims. These streets are called 'talking streets' because of their intimate scale and interactive nature. There is the *mutram* (colonnaded courtyard) into which the rooms open. Its inimitable French ambience is perceptible in the protruding, wrought-iron balcony, high ceiling, louvered windows and arched doorways.

One significant landmark in Vysial Street is Calve, a WelcomHeritage Hotel housed in a 150-year-old, Chettinad mansion, restored with passion. It used to be the residence of a Chettiar



Calve, a WelcomHeritage hotel on Vysial Street

family. It was leased out to a bank for years. When V JayaPrakash, an enterprising entrepreneur inherited the house, he transformed the mansion into a hotel. While JayaPrakash still resides in Puducherry and takes care of the hotel's operations, in March 2008, the ITC WelcomeHeritage group took up the marketing of this heritage home.

This bungalow is a fusion of French architectural style and Tamil heritage living. Built 150 years ago when Puducherry was under French rule, the bungalow was meticulously recreated. It is a fine example of intelligent conservation and an evocation of the past. All efforts have been made to retain the balance between the contemporary and the traditional. Right from the hand-made Attangudi floor tiles, to the old recycled wooden furniture, the eggshell and lime mix plaster on the walls and the stained glass in bold arches, an effort has been made to retain the character of the building. Using the traditional skills of local carpenters and masons, the old mansion has been restored to suit the needs of a hotel. The walls, for instance, have

Vysial street



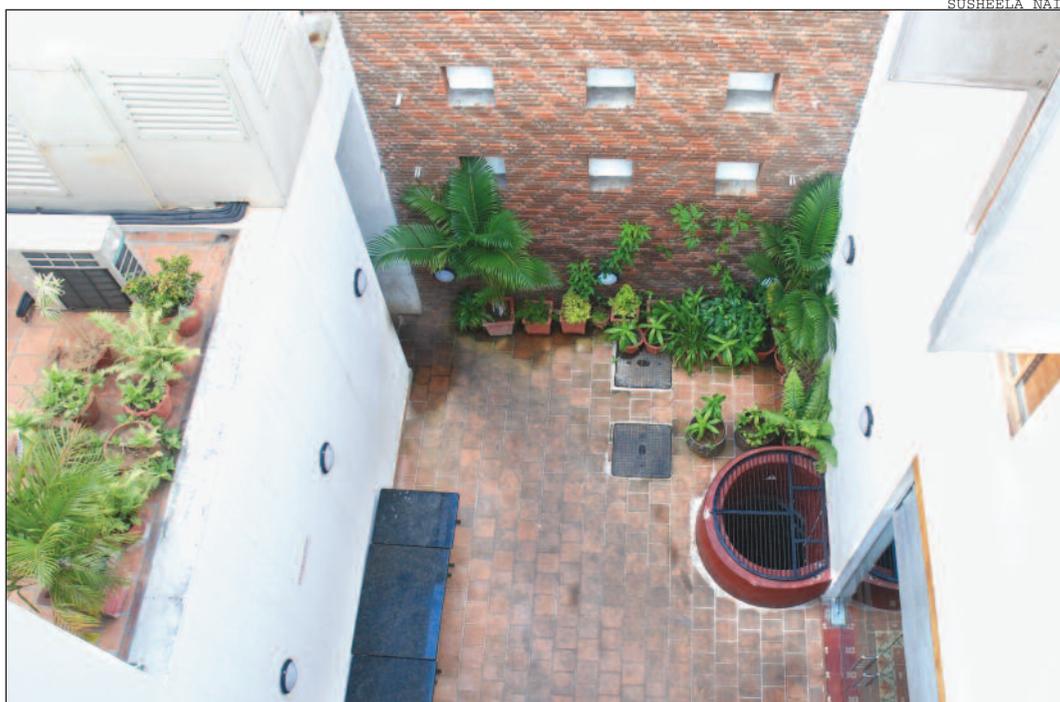
SUSHEELA NAIR

been treated with a traditional lime-stucco plaster using marble dust and lime from burnt shells, combined with white cement and colour oxides, polished by hand with smooth round pebbles.

The language of Franco-Tamil architecture is perceptible from the outside. One feels as though one is walking into the home of someone who is just waiting to welcome you. Electrical meters are camouflaged behind a wooden cupboard in a passage which leads to the *mutram*, the pillared inner courtyard. The verandah that lines the courtyard has arches supported by broad columns. The mansion is punctuated with Franco-Tamil elements. The intricately carved patterns on wooden doors, louvered windows, traditional furniture with tables with floral tile inlay, an old grandfather clock, antique telephones and other artifacts transport the visitor into the past. An idol of Lord Ganesha welcomes guests at the entrance.

The house has 11 enormous rooms which includes suites, executive and a duplex. Each Grand Calve Chamber consists of a bedroom, a living room, a gleaming copper bathtub and a curved wrought-iron balcony offering a view of the streetscape. The Chettinad room comprises a

The Tamil inspired houses on this heritage street sport continuous wall-to-wall construction, very distinct in character from the French streetscapes. Their exterior facades have a street verandah.



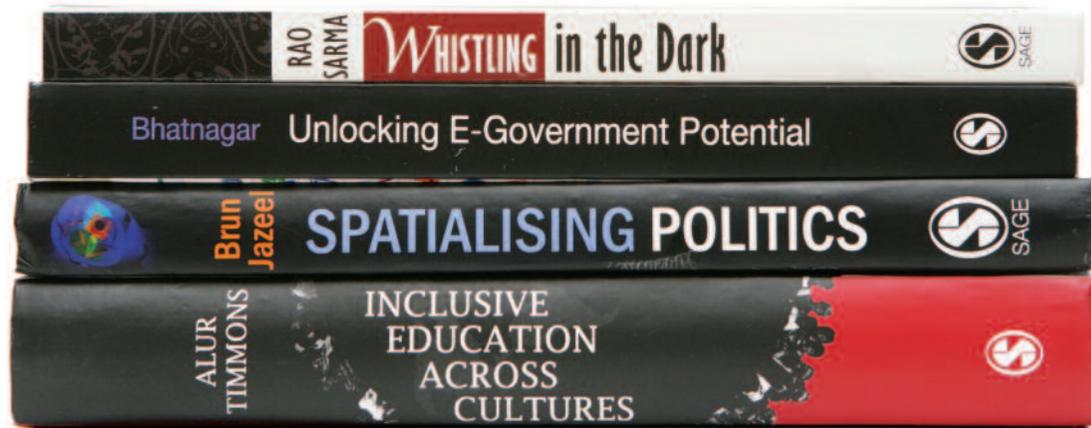
SUSHEELA NAIR

A courtyard in the hotel's backyard

living room with an attached bathroom, while the duplex suite has an exquisitely designed wooden stairway leading to an upper-level bedroom. While the rooms have classic furniture, wood-lined ceilings, old-fashioned ceramic-backed switches and antique telephones, the bathrooms are minimalist with generous built-in bathtubs.

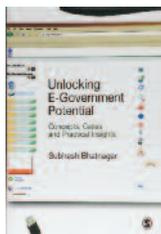
All the rooms have contemporary comforts like Wi-Fi, air-cons, lockers and television sets. A traditionally furnished lobby on the ground floor and a lounge on the first floor serve as spaces where one can enjoy heritage at leisure. Calve does ample justice to the French inspired style of architecture and Tamil heritage living juxtaposed with Creole cuisine. The restaurant, Salle a Manger, has a specialty dish called the Veerampattinam Meen Kozhambu. The Avarikkai Salad featuring country beans, diced eggs, onions and coconut milk is worth a try. With its extensive and meticulous restoration, the mansion continues to mirror its rich heritage.

For details contact: Tel: WelcomHeritage at 011- 46035500
Email: holidays@welcomheritagehotels.com



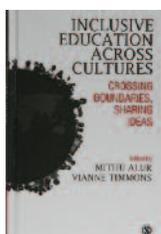
A QUICK SELECTION FROM THE MANY BOOKS THAT TURN UP FOR REVIEW

Random shelf help



UNLOCKING E-GOVERNMENT POTENTIAL CONCEPTS, CASES AND PRACTICAL INSIGHTS
Subhash Bhatnagar
Rs 450
Sage

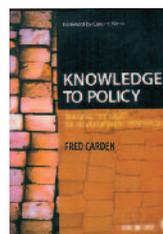
Governments have been giving priority in recent years to ICT applications which can increase transparency, accountability and efficiency in the delivery of services to citizens. This book is a practical guide on implementing e-government initiatives. It explains the projects that can be taken up and what the concept and applications should be at local, state and national levels. The book examines whether e-government helps rein in corruption. There is a chapter on making e-government work for the poor. Several successful case studies like the Bhoomi project in Karnataka, CARD and e-Seva in Andhra Pradesh are examined. There are case studies on business applications in e-government. Also included are how to design and implement portals and analyse the impact of an e-government project.



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION ACROSS CULTURES CROSSING BOUNDARIES, SHARING IDEAS
Edited: Mithu Alur, Vianne Timmons
Rs 795
Sage

Quality education means inclusive education where each child can learn with ease, regardless of disability, social and economic status or gender. In this book, different activists and researchers present their vision of inclusive education. The work done on the ground is described through cases studies. There is information on policy formulation and advocacy. The book is divided into five sections which explain theoretical aspects of inclusion, how we can integrate inclusion into schools, (including scaling up) what different countries have done, advocacy and practical

resources. The papers are enlightening and present a road map. Mithu Alur is a well-known activist. She is founder chairperson of ADAPT (formerly the Spastics Society of India) and she shares her rich experiences in the book. Vianne Timmons, president and vice-chancellor of Regina University, Canada, is similarly insightful and knowledgeable.



KNOWLEDGE POLICY MAKING THE MOST OF DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH
Fred Carden
Rs 395
Sage

The author examines the connect between research and public policy. Research, especially as part of public domain empowers people to question the government, leads to debates among people and presents government with more choice. Carden analysis 23 research projects funded by Canada's International Development Centre (IDRC) from Asia, Africa and Latin America. These range from poverty monitoring to health, education and ICT for development. Also included is sound advice on how to influence policy, manage research and politics etc. The book is an easy read.



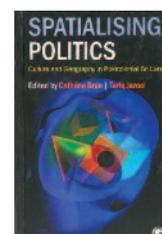
PICTURE POSTCARD POVERTY
Kalanand Mani and Frederick Noronha
Goa 1556
Rs 150

This book, published on the occasion of 25 years of Peaceful Society, talks about the real Goa, not the one about tourists and sunny beaches. The writers point out that Goa is plagued with problems. Take health. Rising numbers are afflicted with tuberculosis, leprosy, malaria, liver cirrhosis. One-third of women suffer from anaemia and one-fourth are malnourished. Thirty per cent of babies have low birth weight. Health infrastructure is crumbling.

The number of dropouts is increasing. The

authors zero in on environmental problems like mining, depleting stocks of fish and the huge scarcity of water caused by the mining mafia and tourism. Even caste is embedded in Goa's society, and there are social evils like domestic violence. Forest dwellers have lost home and hearth to the sarkari craze for wildlife sanctuaries.

One sign of hope is the emergence of concerned citizens. There are also serious attempts to make panchayats work so that resources and development can be managed by the people.



SPATIALISING POLITICS CULTURE AND GEOGRAPHY IN POSTCOLONIAL SRI LANKA
Edited: Cathrine Brun and Tariq Jazeel
Rs 695
Sage

A series of essays examine the interface and impact of geography and culture. The conflict in Sri Lanka has, in many ways, been defined by the way space has been used. The contours of the state were shaped in the colonial period and Sri Lanka continued to hang on to archaic divisions instead of rethinking the state along modern lines.

The essays are thoughtful. In *Imagined Spaces of Empire*, the author traces the advent of foreign goods into Ceylon and their impact on consciousness. The advent of coffee and how it changed spaces on the island resulting in plantations, Tamil labour, loss of forests and the onset of illness is written about. *Cartographic Violence* examines proposals to reshape Sri Lanka's administrative divisions. Tariq Jazeel's take on identity, nationalism and geography through an analysis of a literary work is interesting.

The failure of NGOs to broker peace or better understanding is analysed. How people living in war-torn areas reshape their surroundings, the LTTE's spatial vision of a dictatorial state are also analysed. The distance between Tamil and Sinhala is not unbridgeable - the people themselves have created spaces - but it is the majority community which has to step forth.

The secret life of gays

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Dibyajyoti Sarma and Prof R Raj Rao.



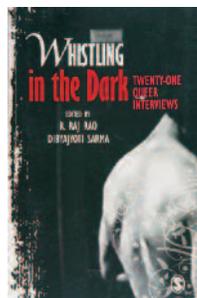
Gay and lesbian protest in New Delhi.

MEN who are gay lead lives that are often kept under wraps even from close family members. This is a nether world inhabited by gays alone. Since society rejects homosexuality and deems it a crime, men who are gay take recourse to living in the shadows. Very few have the courage to confront their sexuality.

Now a book, *Whistling in the Dark* exposes these hidden lives. Through 21 searing interviews, raw and unedited, the book tells all about the undercover life men who are gay are forced to live.

The editors of the book, R Raj Rao, professor, Department of English, Pune University and Dibyajyoti Sarma, a researcher on gay issues, have done a remarkable job. The narratives maintain a certain dignity throughout. Each is a story. The entire gamut of issues is covered, from gay activism and gay culture to police atrocities and health issues.

Prof. R Raj Rao and Dibyajyoti Sarma spoke to *Civil Society* about their book.



WHISTLING IN THE DARK

Twenty-One Queer Interviews

Edited by: R. Raj Rao, Dibyajyoti Sarma

Rs 379

Sage

Your book has 21 brutally frank interviews, which tell us about the intimate, private lives of men who are gay. What was the intention?

The intention was to acquaint readers, both gay and straight, with an aspect of the lives of the respondents that they would otherwise tend to censor. People do not see what makes them uncomfortable. Our book aims at jolting readers out of their complacency and exposing them to a slice of life.

The men who are interviewed come from all sections of society. Was this a conscious decision?

You will find the answer to this in our Introduction. Sexual orientation, as a category, must not be subsumed under class. The interviews reflect this utopian vision. As you rightly point out there are interviews with university professors and intellectuals on the one hand, and working men on the other. If we interviewed only the educated English-speaking elite, we would be status quoist.

These lives appear to be very individualistic, unfettered by set norms. There are no boundaries of caste, class or religion. Would you say that the gay community is a society in its own right? Does it have its own rules?

No, the gay community isn't as yet a society in its own right, with its own rules. But, that is where we should be headed for. This, of course, is easier said than done. The interviews attempt to find an answer as to how we might achieve this in the future.

Most gays continue to live in the shadows, on the margins of society. What effect does this have on the psyche?

It is no doubt very damaging on the psyche. Having said that we must look for ways to alter the status quo. We believe that books like ours have the capacity to change the mindset of people and sensitise them towards issues about which they know very little. This is the starting point of the enterprise. To say that things will remain the way they are, no matter what we do, as some gay men say, is to be cynical. People who live on the margins of society cannot afford to be cynical.

Both law and mainstream society go against gays. Laws can be changed. But how will that change the status of gays in society?

Because of the prevalence of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code many gays tend to think themselves as outlaws. Scrapping archaic laws can reverse the damage to the psyche that you spoke of earlier. This will enable people to look at themselves with self-respect and pride. It has happened in other countries, so there's no reason why it shouldn't happen here.

Some men who are gay are married. Doesn't patriarchy in mainstream society give men an advantage? Is this the reason why the gay movement in India is still little weak?

If society becomes a little more gay-friendly than it is at present, it is possible that many gay men who get married today will decide against it in the future. Gay men are less patriarchal than their heterosexual counterparts. May be some of them want to have the best of both worlds, but there are scores of others who get married only because the pressure from their families, and ultimately from society, is too intense for them to resist. If this were not so, we are certain that they would opt out of marriage.

There is only one interview with a lesbian. Why? Was it difficult to get women to talk?

Lesbians have their own issues that are best left to them to brainstorm. For example, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that puts the emphasis on penetrative sex may not apply to them. As gay men, we did not want to appropriate the voice of lesbians. Ana Garcia-Arroyo, the only lesbian in the book happens to be a rigorous academic who has closely worked with us while writing her doctoral dissertation. We are thoroughly well versed with her ideology. That is why we decided to interview her for the book.

Relax mind and body

SAMITA RATHOR

"An anxious mind cannot exist in a relaxed body."

NOT being able to relax is a hurdle to any spiritual progression. But when the body is relaxed, the mind automatically relaxes. And when the mind is relaxed it is ready for meditation, a stepping stone for spiritual progression.

Self-relaxation teaches you how to relax your muscles and relive your anxiety through a simple two-step technique. First, you deliberately apply tension, and then you stop the tension and turn your attention to noticing how each part of your body slowly goes into a state of deep relaxation as the tension flows away.

With this simple knowledge you can learn to relax and alleviate physical tension that accompanies mental anxiety and retards spiritual growth.

Once you are comfortably supported in a quiet place, follow the instructions below:

- Tighten your feet by curling your toes downward. Hold ... and then relax.
- Tighten your calf muscles by pulling your toes toward you (flex carefully to avoid cramps). Hold ... and then relax.
- Squeeze the muscles in your thighs all the way down to your knees. You will probably have to tighten your hips along with your thighs since the thigh muscles attach at the pelvis. Hold ... and then relax. Feel your thigh muscles smoothening out and relaxing completely.
- Tighten your buttocks by pulling them together. Hold ... and then relax. Imagine the muscles in

your hips going loose and limp.

- Tighten your lower back by arching it up. You should omit this exercise if you have lower back pain. Hold ... and then relax.
- Tighten your stomach muscles by sucking your stomach in. Hold ... and then release. Imagine a wave of relaxation spreading through your abdomen.
- Tighten the muscles of your chest by taking in a deep breath. Hold for up to 10 seconds ... and then release slowly. Imagine any excess tension in your chest flowing away with the exhalation.

- Tighten the muscles around your shoulder blades by pushing your shoulder blades back as if you were going to touch them together. Hold the tension in your shoulder blades ... and then relax. Since this area is often especially tense, you might want to repeat the tense-relax sequence twice.
- Tighten your shoulders by raising them up as if you were going to touch your ears. Hold ... and then relax.
- Tighten your triceps - the muscles on the undersides of your upper arms - by extending your arms straight out and locking your elbows. Hold ... and then relax.
- Tighten your biceps by drawing your forearms up toward your shoulders and 'making a muscle' with both arms. Hold... and then relax.

- Clench your fists. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds and then release for 15 to 20 seconds. Use these same time intervals for all other muscle groups.
- Take a few deep breaths and tune in to the weight of your head sinking into whatever surface it is resting on.
- Tighten the muscles in the back of your neck by pulling your head way back as if you were going to touch your head to your back (be gentle with this muscle group to avoid injury). Focus only on tensing the muscles in your neck. Hold ... and then relax. Since this area is often especially tight, it's good to do the tense-relax cycle twice.
- Tighten your jaws by opening your mouth so widely that you stretch the muscles around the hinges of your jaw. Hold ... and then relax. Let your lips part and allow your jaw to hang loose.
- Tense the muscles around your eyes by clenching your eyelids tightly shut. Hold... and then relax. Imagine sensations of deep relaxation spreading all around them.
- Tense the muscles in your forehead by raising your eyebrows as far as you can. Hold ... and then relax. Imagine your forehead muscles becoming smooth and limp as they relax.
- Lie on your back. Hands and feet apart. Take three deep abdominal breaths, exhaling slowly each time. As you exhale, imagine that tension throughout your body beginning to flow away. These techniques need to be followed under the guidance of a teacher.

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PRODUCTS

CONGO-SHONGO

CONGO-SHONGO, an online retail initiative is being launched by iCONGO (Indian Confederation of NGOs) in partnership with KANKEI, an Internet marketing and BPO operation. A network of shops in malls and other urban markets will also be set up.

The retail website and shops will market and sell products made by NGOs. They will showcase merchandise produced by marginalized artisans, crafts people, the differently abled, positive people and communities. The idea is to create progressive market supply chains through a Business 2 Consumer (B2C) and Business 2 Business (B2B) model.

CONGO-SHONGO will tap into markets in the US, Europe and India. It will link NGOs to companies keen to buy wholesale products for gifting. It will bring the producer face to face with the consumer.

The products to be stocked include greeting cards, traditional toys, curios, jewellery, fashion accessories, books, music videos and CDs, art, home décor items designer ware and so on.

The slogan of CONGO-SHONGO is, 'Where Quality is a Cause.' All products will be carefully screened to ensure



they meet set standards. This is to guarantee consumer loyalty and satisfaction.

There will be products made by companies to support causes like the Ridley turtle, the tiger and other endangered species. Causes may be printed on T-shirts, caps, bookmarks, coffee mug, key chains, wrist-bands and so on.

Contact:
jeroninio@icongo.in
Website:
www.shopsofngos.com

The millennium village

RITA ANAND

GURGAON'S wealthy residents are dying to vote. That's what they say. In the recent general elections, the state notched a healthy turnout of 64 per cent. But some citizens from posh condominiums who stood in queues to dutifully cast their vote found their names had been knocked off the electoral list. Mad as hell, they complained to the Election Commission, the media, the administration and anyone else who cared to listen.

But in a democracy there is always a second chance. Residents are now waiting in anticipation to vote again, this time for a truly historic election. Elections are going to be held for Gurgaon's first brand new Municipal Corporation.

When? Actually, I'm not sure. It could be in October. The thing is the Municipal Corporation was announced last June. According to the rules the election for councillors should be held within six months but that hasn't happened since the administration here works in slow motion.

The feeling among residents is 'let's get it right the first time, let's learn from the mistakes of other cities'. There is a lot at stake.

The city is running out of water. It does not have proper sewage lines. Electricity is scarce. Nobody seems to care for public spaces and you can see garbage strewn all over. You can't find decent public transport.

It was the rich and middle class who migrated from Delhi to the suburb of Gurgaon. Instead of planning a new city and integrating it with the sleepy small town that Gurgaon was, agricultural land was sold to real estate barons. Builders made colonies and apartment blocks each according to his own vision of the city. Big glassy buildings popped up for BPOs, multinationals, software companies. All this in a region which is a six mile drive from the Thar desert. The flow of water from the Aravalli hills has been obstructed.

Gurgaon is what Rajat Ray, Dean, Sushant School of Art and Architecture calls a 'patch' city, an assemblage of buildings and colonies. Each skyscraper is an independent style statement. The city is disconnected with the old Gurgaon and its villages. It is disconnected even with itself. People live in gated communities and travel by car. There are no walkways or proper pavements. It is a city without a centre or a sense of history or even a clear periphery.

Residents demands
The Gurgaon Unified Residents Movement (GURM), launched by citizens for better gover-

nance is asking for full implementation of the 74th Amendment to the Indian Constitution and the Moily Report. Both give extensive powers to urban local bodies.

GURM is saying that all 18 powers under the 74th Amendment, from urban planning to services and infrastructure, must be vested in the Municipal Corporation.

GURM wants an independent Municipal Corporation, not like the one in Faridabad where for every minor decision an official has to scuttle to Chandigarh, the joint capital of Haryana and Punjab.

They also want a Gurgaon Development Authority, on the lines of the Delhi Metro Rail

Since the estimated population is believed to be in the range of 1.4 million there would be 30 wards, therefore 30 councillors. Residents point out that the State Election Commission had advised the administration to carry out delimitation along with a population survey and voter enrolment to save time. This has not been done. Now the survey and voter enrolment are to be done separately and the slow pace of work is bugging residents.

The population of Gurgaon has always been a contentious issue. A continuous flow of the rich and middle class from Delhi has boosted numbers. But the voters' list does not reflect this trend. Now the state election list is to be drawn up and better-off

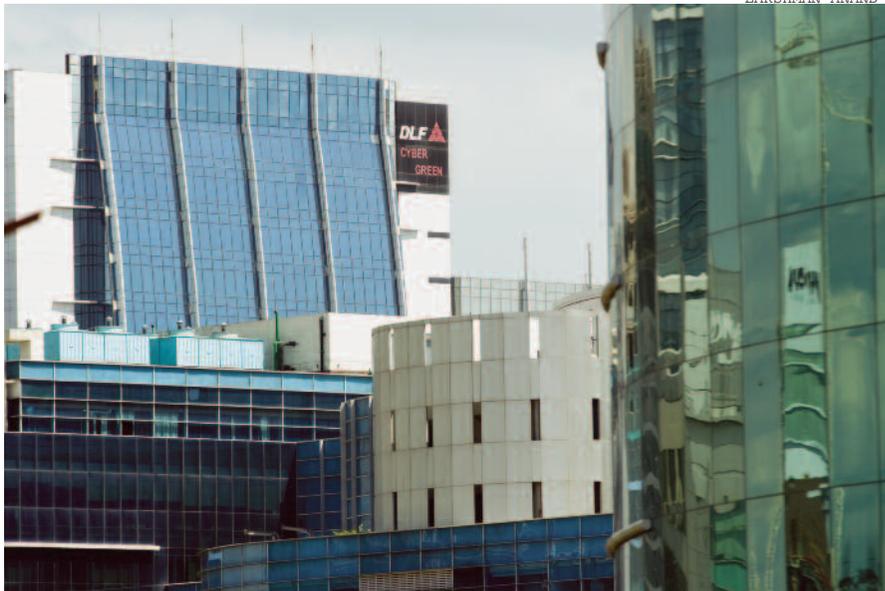
residents are clear they want their numbers to count.

In short, residents want urban local bodies to be empowered and to run the city with their money.

Rich and second class Will Gurgaon, the Millennium City, get what it wants? It seems unlikely. It is the villages which will decide the fate of rich, urban Gurgaon. Nearly 78 per cent of votes come from there. Politicians and the bureaucracy give more importance to the village than to the city.

Middle class residents complain bitterly that the administration always cold shoulders them. "We are just second class citizens," shrugs RS Rathee, President of the DLF Qutab

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Enclave RWA who speaks for the GURM.

Corporation (DMRC) or the Noida Development Authority, headed by a technocrat. This Gurgaon Development Authority should plan all new areas to be urbanised. On the anvil is development for 337 square km in Manesar. It should be planned by the new agency. Then these plans can be given for implementation to the Municipal Corporation. The jurisdiction of the corporation should stretch across all 167 square km of the current built up city.

Multiplicity of agencies is the bane of city administrations. GURM wants the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) and random agencies currently operating to be wound up. HUDA is sitting on a stockpile of some Rs 9,000 crores it has collected as 'external development charges'. It should pass on this money to the new Municipal Corporation.

Residents are angry that only 20 per cent of revenue collected from Gurgaon is spent on the city and the balance sent off to Chandigarh. According to some estimates Gurgaon city has a higher per capita income than Delhi.

Wards are being delimited. Each ward would cover a population of 25,000 to 30,000 people.

Gurgaon city and its villages share an uneasy relationship. "They have never accepted us," admits Rathee. Already a fight is looming over sharing of canal water for agriculture versus the needs of city residents, now that groundwater has been depleted.

The new corporation may well be dominated by a rural outlook unless educated residents stand for municipal elections in a big way and win. A few residents may well do so but they will still be outnumbered in the municipal corporation.

So handing over planning to a Gurgaon Development Authority headed by an expert is a good idea. Long-term solutions lie in rapidly transforming villages by spreading quality education and bringing rural youth into urban jobs.

Not least among the challenges of urbanisation is the kind of magnet an urban centre becomes. Gurgaon hasn't even begun dealing with the needs of a growing force of migrant labour.

Villages need to have a stake in urbanisation. The state government has done well to integrate Gurgaon's villages with the city by abolishing panchayats. It will now have to empower urban local bodies to fill that space creatively.





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It's part of our vision to become the global steel benchmark in value creation and corporate citizenship.

