

Civil Society

REACHING MOTHERS

A LAST MILE SOLUTION IN TWO STATES



BHILWARA BOOST FOR SOCIAL AUDIT

In a unique partnership
MKSS and the state
govt of Rajasthan
conduct India' s
biggest social audit

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IRULAS FOR BIGGER VENOM ROLE

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WHY WEATHER DATA FAILS FARMERS

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Promise and delivery

DEVELOPMENT schemes fail for want of delivery. How does one connect with people? How is that troublesome last mile to be negotiated? We were introduced sometime ago to the work of PATH, an NGO, in the area of mother and infant health. PATH has been helping the National Rural Health Mission by educating families and creating a demand for health services. It is an approach which requires going deep within communities and reversing old biases. Our decision to make it this month's cover, Reaching Mothers, is based on our belief that government needs to work much more closely with voluntary organisations if it wants to come closer to realising its development goals. To communicate, convince and build trust is a delicate task. Official agencies mostly don't have what it takes. They need the innovative spirit of voluntary organisations to find solutions and make connections on the ground. And they need to do this in real time.

The social audit undertaken in Bilwara in Rajasthan, which is our opening news story, is also a great example of how people's groups can be involved to make governance more meaningful. CP Joshi has used the MKSS to assess how the national rural employment guarantee scheme has been working in his own constituency. But more importantly, the social audit in Bilwara shows how government has to go beyond itself to assess its own performance and create faith in its intentions and ability to deliver.

The Bhilwara social audit, as our interview with Aruna Roy shows, is the culmination of many efforts over a long and difficult journey which began with rejection. But clearly governments have begun to understand the benefits of transparency and accountability. The Congress government in Andhra Pradesh first saw the merit in the accountability campaign by the people's movement in Rajasthan and institutionalised the social audit. It came back with a thumping majority. By contrast, the BJP government in Rajasthan did little to support public disclosure and saw itself routed. Now the Congress government in Rajasthan and the Union rural development ministry are supporting the mechanism of a social audit.

The challenge before governments is to accept that development work calls for public spiritedness and transparency. That is where voluntary organisations have a role to play. After that, it is important to create infrastructure and systems and send a message out from the top so that officials who want to make a difference feel emboldened to come forward. As in the case of PATH's work with infants and mothers or the MKSS role in Rajasthan, governments have to commit themselves to keeping the first forays alive.

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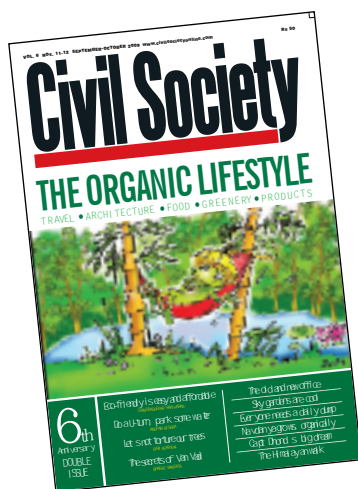
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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Going green

It is a good thing that the middle class is getting more interested in buying organic products. For many years small producers have struggled to sell their produce. I think global debates on climate change have affected the middle class.

S Srinivasan

Going green should be a way of life and not just a fashion statement as many people think.

partha10@ibc.org.in

Organic produce is affected by the

government's policies for the agro industry. The policy focuses on encouraging big farmers and big industry. In reality, most farmers are small and marginal. So are producers of organic food. We need a policy that will examine the problems of small agro-producers and encourage cooperatives.

Rajesh Bhatt

I like the article on FRLHT's herbal gardens. This method of planting green herbs for one's health is very innovative. I am a small farmer with a herbal garden of more than 160 species. I would like to join FRLHT and be their messenger in Pen District of Raigad and Thane city. I am keen to promote herbal plants.

girishkhambete@gmail.com

I have visited Navdanya's store at Hauz Khas. It is very good. I had been a regular customer for quite some time. Glad to know that organic stores are getting recognised.

vthakur@indiatimes.com

I appreciate the pieces on green architecture. The problem is most architects don't know how to build a sustainable home. Those who do, charge a huge amount. Banks can

help by giving loans at lower rates of interest to those who build green. Their loan services should be extended to include advice on building homes like materials, architects, methods and so on.

Vinita D'Souza

Contractors, masons and other construction workers should be trained on how to build green homes and office blocks. Right now there is a paucity of knowledge. Schools of architecture should include courses which the informal sector can seek admission to.

Suresh Gupta

Naxalites

In my view Maoists are not anti-social elements or terrorists. These poor tribals are exploited by powerful and selfish people who grab their land and make them into cheap labour.

I am very sorry for the way action is being taken by the government to suppress the Naxalites by hook or by crook without going into the ground realities. I think the poor tribal people are not willing to live in the forest where there is no certainty of life. If they survive, they have to live under an open sky amidst rain and sun. It must be their compulsion to

choose the extreme alternate. I have great sympathy with them. The media is merely collecting data and showing pictures and making money. I believe in the coverage of *Civil Society* and I hope you will bring out a special issue on the Maoist problem in India.

Dr. Dashrath Kharel

Eco-tourism

I enjoyed reading the stories on tourism in your annual. Gautam Singh's piece was very interesting and the pictures were amazing. The story made me feel like catching the first plane to Captain Dhond's resort.

Akanksha

Congratulations to Susheela Nair for her excellent pieces on tourism. The aim of tourism should be to spread wealth to rural areas. I would like to know more about places to visit in rural India.

Shikha Dwivedi

ERRATA: Pictures for the story, 'Have a farm holiday' carried in our September-October Annual issue were taken by photographer, Prasanta Biswas. The pictures were wrongly credited to Rina Mukherji. The error is regretted. Editor

Bhilwara boost for social audit

SAURABH YADAV

Saurabh Yadav
Bhilwara (Rajasthan)

WHAT does Bhilwara have that the rest of rural India needs? A Member of Parliament (MP) who changes with the times. CP Joshi, Union minister for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, and the MP from Bhilwara, initiated the biggest social audit in India in his own constituency to find out if money meant for providing work under the National Rural Employment Act (NREGA) had been spent as it was meant to.

He got the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), a network of farmers and workers, and the Rozgar Evam Soochna Ka Adhikar Abhiyan (Campaign for Right to Work and Information) to partner the state's newly formed Directorate of Social Audit.

From October 1 for 12 days 135 teams of social auditors went to 1,000 villages in 381 panchayats to find out how NREGA was being implemented. Apart from uncovering corruption, the social audit was a massive exercise in training people in the auditing process.

Around 2,000 participants turned up at the venue in Bhilwara. One thousand people from 256 blocks were chosen by the state administration. They will be part of social audits in future. Another 1,000 RTI and NREGA activists came from Sikkim, Mizoram, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Around 135 teams were formed. One hundred and twenty-three took off on a padyatra covering three panchayats each and arrived at the public hearing in their respective blocks on October 10.

Eleven teams were chosen by CP Joshi through a lottery to conduct a social audit in 11 panchayats. These were Govardhanpura, Para, Tasvariya, Tirodi, Sangwa, Baran, Khachrol, Devariya, Lakhola, Dabla Kachra and Budliyas.

As the enthusiastic auditors set out, Aruna Roy, MKSS founder, had words of encouragement. "When we first conducted the social audit in Dungarpur district, we did it against all odds. At one point 500 villagers tried to abuse, insult and silence us. We were given two hours notice to leave the *dharamshala* we were staying at but we were never worried, and we prevailed in the end," she said.

Nikhil Dey, activist with the Campaign for Right to Work and Information, laid down some ground rules "The eyes of Rajasthan are upon Bhilwara. Do not accept hospitality from the sarpanch and do not eat the special food sent for you. Eat at the houses of villagers and in the worst case, buy food



Auditors hard at work poring over panchayat records

and ask someone to cook it for the group." This ensured minimal contact with the sarpanch and more balanced information as conversations at meal times proved revealing.

For 12 days, 136 teams of social auditors went to 1,000 villages in 381 panchayats to find out how NREGA was being implemented.

From October 4 to 9 the teams did the following:

- Physically verified the worksite and its status
- Checked muster rolls and compared entries on job cards
- Checked the vouchers, bills and accounts
- Spoke to as many people as possible to collect grievances
- Checked the quality of work
- Verified through measurement and estimates of engineers whether the materials stated on paper were actually used
- Checked whether manual labour or machines were put on the job

Statements of witnesses were also taken and

some of the complainants were present in person at the public hearings conducted after the social audit was completed.

Most of the teams uncovered fake entries in muster rolls, job cards kept by mates and payments of less than Rs 100 a day given to workers. At Dabla Kachra, a team revealed payments of just Rs 2 for a day's work.

Embezzlement of over Rs 1 crore was unearthed. The most dramatic event was when Dashrat Singh, the sarpanch of Badliyas panchayat returned Rs 1,31,000 he had pocketed from NREGA funds meant for a road. He swore in writing that he would never make the mistake of siphoning money meant for NREGA.

A total of 16 First Information Reports (FIRs) were filed till October 13. The sarpanch, gram sachiv and employment assistant at Tasvariya, the technical assistant and programme officer at Hurda and the computer programmer, accountant and programme officer at Asind were separately named in the FIRs.

A panchayat secretary was dismissed by the District Collector of Bhilwara based on a Sub-Divisional Magistrate's (SDM) report. The SDM report was based on the social audit teams findings.

In the Suvana block, Rs 18,37,000 which was due to workers was finally paid.

Best practices in NREGA implementation came from Vijayapura Panchayat in Rajasamand district. Its board with all details of NREGA and work allotted has become a model for the other panchayats.

Overnight, similar worksite boards with details of NREGA came up. In one village, the audit team found a long-lost board and carried it back to the worksite. Panchayat office walls were hurriedly

'Transparency is everything'

It is well known that government schemes and programmes meant for the poor fail due to corruption. As aspirations rise, the challenge before politicians is to deliver development. It is people as the beneficiaries of government schemes and programmes who can say where the system is working and where it is not. The social audit makes this possible.

When the MKSS first did a social audit, it was dismissed as a kangaroo court. From then till today, much has happened and the social audit is being seen as a tool for good governance. Its political benefits are also being understood.

State governments in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan are leading the way in using the social audit to bring transparency and accountability into government delivery systems.

Aruna Roy spoke to *Civil Society* after the recent social audit exercise in Bhilwara in Rajasthan.

What is the significance of the social audit just conducted in Bhilwara?

The social audit has been mandated by the law and supported by the Government of India, and the state government of Rajasthan along with the participation of civil society. A Directorate of Social Audit has been established in Rajasthan. Fifteen hundred people have been trained. Out of them, 700 will directly work with the government. The others will be called upon as and when there is an audit.

Those who work with the government may be on a salary or on a daily-wage basis and will conduct social audits on an ongoing basis. You can only do the social audit with government, people and civil society organisations. Then you get to the truth and you need government to act on it.

What has been your experience of working with state governments as happened in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh?

What is social audit? It is basically implementing accountability and transparency in government programmes. Those who believe in transparency and accountability have come forward to initiate the social audit.

The Andhra government did social auditing on the basis of work done in Rajasthan by the MKSS campaign. The Rajasthan government wanted to ensure transparency and accountability and check the arbitrary use of power. There was resistance, but CP Joshi, Union Minister for Rural Development, whose constituency is Bhilwara, categorically said there would be no compromise on the implementation of the social audit. The Rajasthan state minister for rural development said not only panchayats but the entire machinery should be open to social audit. The state minis-



Aruna Roy (right) with Nikhil Dey (left)

ter for health said he would appreciate a social audit on the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM).

This is a huge change from the last government.

When we did a social audit in Jhalawar, which was the former Chief Minister's constituency, we got no support. Now the present Chief Minister has said that he is supportive of transparency and accountability in government. These signals go down and make it possible for ministries to function accordingly.

What are the successes of the Andhra model?

The Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, the late YSR Reddy, protected and supported the social audit. He gave a red signal to the political system that

there would be no interference. So, honest government servants could work with the system. They did not shy away from the fact that corruption existed. Where people were willing to return the money, it was taken. Ministers were affected but there was no compromise.

Before the last elections, it was said that the Congress would not come back to power in Andhra because of strict NREGA implementation. But, in fact, it won because people had faith in the policy of transparency and accountability and felt empowered.

The Andhra government institutionalised the social audit and has given us a process we can follow.

What advice would you give governments so that the social audit is implemented in the right spirit?

The transparency process in NREGA must be strictly followed. No institution should be allowed to intervene. An independent mechanism should be set up for a social audit. The director of the Directorate for Social Audit in Rajasthan is known for his integrity. There is faith that he will carry out his tasks. It is important to appoint the right people.

The government will have to constantly liaise and coordinate with people's organisations which have knowledge and skills. The collaboration should be on an equal basis.

Andhra has created an ombudsman. A grievance redressal system is required. If grievances are dealt with on an ongoing basis, such large-scale social audits will not be required. CAG has shown keen interest and wants its efforts to be supplemented by social audits in every state. They are seeking interaction with us.

Social audit should be done in a campaign mode. But exactly what is campaign mode should be defined under NREGA.

painted with the details of money spent and names of those who had received it.

NREGA has provisions to ensure transparency. Schedule 17 (1) of the Act mandates a regular social audit of programmes. Six per cent of the budget under the scheme can be used for administrative expenses. So detailed records are supposed to be maintained with extra staff employed to handle the new workload.

The local media played an important role in the social audit, especially Dainik Bhaskar, Rajasthan Patrika and Navjyoti. Bhanwar Meghwanshi from the MKSS believes that around 250,000 readers of these newspapers will become aware of the social

audit process and its findings. This awareness was an important goal of the social audit.

Abhishek Dwivedi, a government auditor from UP, applied for sick leave when he was denied permission to come to the social audit by the UP government. He has learnt a lot, he says. Dwivedi plans to do physical audits of worksites instead of just perusing papers submitted to him. "I can't be penalised if I do something extra to make my audit more effective," he reasons.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India sent a five-member task force to study the social audit process. The recommendations of this task force would be interesting to note as

they could have implications for future audits.

Amitabh Mukhopadhyay, from the public accounts committee of CAG, explains, "It is not as if the auditing of accounts of the panchayats for the financial year, 2008 to 2009 is incomplete. But like in any government audit, only the books and accounts are audited. So, projects can remain on paper and be different from what is stated in the books."

Clearly, CAG sees the need to go beyond the books and find out from the people what is happening on the ground. The social audit process will be an important way of finding out if claims made on paper are true in reality.

Irulas want big role in venom industry

Tribal cooperative says it can make serum of world standards

Civil Society News
Chennai

MUTHU, 30, pulls out a slithering snake from a mud pot. A group of tourists look on in awe. "This is a very poisonous snake," he says to his audience. "It is called Russell's viper." The snake hisses menacingly. The tourists look on nervously. Muthu carries on nonchalantly rattling off details of the snake. "Now watch while I extract venom," he says. Gripping the snake's neck, he holds it over a glass receptacle and the venom dribbles down.

Not many can look a snake in the eye but then Muthu is an Irula tribal, a community famous for its knowledge of snakes and forests. He works for the Irula Snake Catchers' Industrial Cooperative Society located inside Romulus Whitaker's crocodile farm at Vadanemmel, Tamil Nadu, an hour's drive from Chennai.

The snake-catchers' cooperative runs a snakepit here. You pay an entry fee of Rs 10 and the Irulas will introduce you to a range of poisonous snakes sitting peacefully inside mud pots covered with white cloth, neatly arranged in rows.

But the snake-catchers' cooperative does more than amuse or educate tourists. Venom is scientifically extracted from snakes, processed into powder and sold to big pharmaceutical companies to make serum which can counter the poisons of snake bite.

The cooperative has been doing this for years. Founded in 1978 by Whitaker and Revathi Mukherji, a social activist, to help the Irulas climb out of dire poverty, the cooperative started with just 26 members, a staff of three and Rs 6,000 made from selling snake venom. It now has 344 members and Rs 1.35 crores in annual income.

The second generation of Irulas are going to college and opting for white-collar jobs.

"We have grown without any government subsidy or even a bank loan. We are a model cooperative," says S Dravida Mani, secretary of the cooperative, sitting in his small office just next to the snake pit.

The snake catchers' cooperative has bigger ambitions. It wants to expand nationally or become a 'multi-cooperative.' The cooperative wants to manufacture the serum itself instead of merely being a supplier of venom. It wants to become a pharma-

ceutical company.

"We are looking for an investment of Rs 10 crores," says Mani. "We can start a snake venom industry and produce serum which meets WHO standards. We would like to export it globally."

The potency of the serum used to counter snake bite varies widely depending on where it is sourced, explains Mani. The risk of the serum failing is very real. Serum made from Andhra snakes has higher potency since the temperature is higher in that state. The snake catchers' cooperative with its bank of knowledgeable Irulas is best poised to produce serum of one standard quality. It can get into biotech research on snake venom also.

"Our headquarters will continue to be in Chennai. We will depute and train tribals in other states," says Mani. "We have applied to the state

LAKSHMAN ANAND



S Dravida Mani (second from left) with Muthu (right) and lab

LAKSHMAN ANAND



The Irula Snake Catchers' Cooperative wants to manufacture the serum itself instead of merely being a supplier of venom.

government. Now we have to seek approval from the Union government."

Other states have tried and failed. Mani says their strategy is all wrong.

For example, the Maharashtra government focuses on 'rescuing snakes' and then drives them off to a distant institute to be poked around. Actually, after extracting venom the snakes should be released back into their habitat since they perform an important ecological function - they eat rats. Removing all snakes could lead to deadly episodes of plague, warns Mani.

Rajasthan and Punjab have tried starting snake venom extraction units. The forest department

issued licences but the whole venture failed.

"First of all tribal communities need to be involved," says Mani. "The snakes should be treated humanely. We do that. After they are captured, brought here and venom extracted, we release them back into their habitat after 21 days."

Mani recalls the early days of the cooperative. The Irulas were poor and illiterate. A nomadic community, they lived off the forest and survived by selling snakeskin and lizard skin. The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 outlawed snake-catching, making it an offence punishable with imprisonment or a fine. The Irulas migrated to Chennai from the forests and began working as labourers.



technician S Rajendran

Mani joined Whitaker as a volunteer in the Chennai Snake Park. He remembers going from village to village telling Irulas about the cooperative, urging them to join. "They are a shy and peaceful community," says Mani.

Getting the Irulas permission from the government to catch snakes was not easy. The cooperative's first application was turned down. It was only after eminent conservationists and wildlife experts like ornithologist Salim Ali intervened that permission was granted in 1982.

Now both Irula men and women trap snakes. The cooperative concentrates on four poisonous species: the Indian cobra, Russell's viper, Common krait and Saw scaled viper. An Irula gets paid Rs 2000 for trapping a cobra or a Russell's viper, Rs 700 for a Common krait and Rs 250 for a Saw scaled viper. The Irulas are also paid for catching rats as snake feed.

Common krait snake venom and Saw scaled viper venom are sold for Rs 1.75 lakh per gram. The cooperative earns Rs 5 to Rs 6 lakhs annually from the entry fee to its snake pit.

Apart from trapping charges, the cooperative pays each Irula member 50 per cent bonus, 50 per cent incentive, dividends for shares, medical allowance, an interest-free housing loan, an educational loan for children and an insurance cover of Rs 10 lakhs if a member dies of snakebite. If a member is bitten by a snake, treatment costs are covered.

Before venturing into the forests each Irula is given a free bottle of serum. He or she is equipped with a licence, equipment and gear for trapping.

S Rajendran, an Irula who works as a lab technician, earns Rs 17,000 a month. He started his career as a snake-catcher in the Governor's House in Chennai and then joined the cooperative. Though he is illiterate he knows exactly how to make the venom into powder and preserve it at the right temperature. He says his son is studying to be a computer engineer. According to Mani, nearly 70 per cent of families send their children to school. Some return to the cooperative and are absorbed as cashiers, supervisors and technicians. Muthu earns Rs 13,000 every month.

Dealing with layers of government has not been easy. The cooperative is registered with the department of industry and commerce. Much of Mani's work is with the forest department, getting licences and various permits, submitting monthly and weekly reports.

So Mani and his staff spend time in government offices, chasing the licence-permit raj at the grassroots. But it doesn't bother them at all. "We have no ego," says Mani, "We have a job to do."

After spending his entire career serving the Irulas, Mani is to retire shortly. The Irulas are not looking forward to that, for sure. "He is my hero," says Muthu with a sad smile.

LabourNet partners Haryana govt

Civil Society News
New Delhi

MIGRATION to urban areas has meant a surge in the number of people employed in the unorganised sector, particularly at construction sites. Keeping track of these workers and helping them with workplace rights, health care and so on is difficult. A tie-up between the Haryana government and LabourNet, a social enterprise, now makes it possible.

LabourNet's services in Haryana are now available in Gurgaon, Faridabad and Manesar. It has experience in serving the unorganised sector in Hyderabad and Bangalore.

LabourNet seeks to boost employment and other opportunities for the informal sector. It is a subsidiary of Maya (Movement for Alternatives and Youth Awareness), an NGO based in Bangalore. The state government of Haryana is providing 66 per cent of funds for the initiative. The rest is being invested by Maya. This is the first time Maya has entered into a formal partnership with a state government.

According to Gayathri Vasudevan, CEO of LabourNet, it was Haryana's labour department which sought assistance. The state has a Workers' Welfare Board to implement the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996. The board was registering workers but finding it very hard to track them after they were registered.

The partnership was announced in June by the Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda. Work started in August.

LabourNet is registering workers and delivering services including welfare. It has set up four Worker Facilitation Centres. Each is a one-stop shop to provide key services and link workers to the market. Every worker after registration is provided an identity card, accident insurance and a bank account. For the insurance cover, LabourNet has tied up with Oriental Insurance. Punjab National Bank is providing bank accounts.

LabourNet has included a health plan as part of the package. "A network of clinics and hospitals has been identified to reduce the costs of drugs, diagnostics and OPD services," says Vasudevan. Early child care and crèche services at construction sites are also part of the plan.

The Worker Facilitation Centres link workers to the market and provide skill training. A whole range of workers, from masons, electricians and painters to cleaners for office buildings are available at the centres.

LabourNet divides a city into a grid. The database of workers is being done accordingly. In this way, it is easier to do physical verification. Vasudevan believes that it will be possible to track 80 per cent of the database. She says the Haryana labour department has been helpful in setting up the worker facilitation centres.

Contact: Shobha : 9910403229



Released militants driven to despair

Shunned by society they point out that the govt doesn't give a damn for them

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

KASHMIR's released militants are at the end of their tether. Mistreated by the government and shunned by society, they have threatened to take up arms once more if official apathy continues any longer.

Operating under the banner of the Peoples' Rights Movement (PRM), these militants accuse the state government of renegeing on its promise to fully rehabilitate them. "Day in and day out, the government states that it will help us lead a normal life. But little is being done. We are disappointed, dejected and feel alienated from the rest of the society," says Mohammad Ishaq, spokesman for PRM.

Alleging that human rights violations are continuing unabated, Ishaq says that released militants are still being arrested and harassed in custody. That, he adds, gives the lie to the government's claim that normalcy has returned to Kashmir. "We had hoped we would receive support in restarting our lives. Instead, many of the released militants are being repeatedly arrested by the forces. They are feeling extremely insecure," adds Ishaq.

"When we were released from detention, we

were scattered around the state and felt the need to come together to fight for our rights. So in 2000 we decided to form the Peoples' Rights Movement," the PRM spokesman says. "But we haven't been able to achieve much."

Advocate Pervez Imroz, patron of the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), says that torture is routinely used by the security forces operating in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. "Kashmir has been in turmoil for over two decades and the masses have suffered a lot over the years. Kashmir accounts for the highest number of torture victims in Asia," says Imroz.

Ghulam Mohammad Bhat, a resident of

'We had hoped we would receive support in restarting our lives. Instead, many of the released militants are being repeatedly arrested by the forces,' said Ishaq.

Rafiabad in Baramulla district, was arrested in 1995. He says that a soldier thrust the barrel of his self-loading rifle in his throat when he was in detention. He was also forced to drink pepper water, he alleges.

"In 1995, I was picked up after an identification parade in our area. What followed was horrific. I was shifted to the Watergam camp and subjected to inhuman torture. This continued for 15 days before I was taken to the Joint Interrogation Centre at Baramulla," he says. The interrogators, he recalls, never allowed him to sit and he could not even offer namaz.

"Even after our release, we have to regularly report to our respective police stations. It is very humiliating. We have no source of income. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and his colleagues in the government should do something about us," says Ghulam Mohammad.

Mufti Abdul Ahad, a resident of Tarzoo-Sopore in Baramulla district, says that many youth have been tortured to death in custody. "We want to help but cannot do anything because we too live under the shadow of fear," he adds.

"I have been witness to many custodial killings. I could not do anything as I feared that I too would be eliminated. We braved extreme hardships during the years of detention. Yet, there is nobody who speaks up for us. We keep hoping against hope for justice," says Ahad.

The released militants are also disappointed with humanitarian agencies working across the globe. They believe that these organisations are working under the 'influence' of the government of India. "It is sad that Amnesty International and other human rights organisations have failed in meeting the expectations of the released militants," says the PRM spokesman.

The PRM has of late merged with the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), a constituent of JKCCS. They take part in the sit-in of the APDP held on the 28th of every month. The other faction of APDP headed by Parveena Ahangar carries out the monthly sit-in on the 10th of every month.

Explaining PRM's merger with APDP, Ishaq says: "APDP is in constant touch with international human rights groups. We hope that this move would help us further the cause of released militants." He is, however, quick to add that PRM would part ways with APDP if this expectation isn't fulfilled.

Given the apathetic attitude of the government, we might be compelled to take to guns once again. New Delhi would be solely responsible for the consequences," says the PRM spokesman.

Advocate Imroz says that the 'oppressive' measures adopted by the security forces in Kashmir are crimes against humanity, calling for action against the culprits. "Forty thousand militants were arrested during militancy. Many people living near security camps were taken into custody never to return. There is no record of such arrests. There is a need for a comprehensive study so that the exact number of such people can be ascertained," says Imroz.

He calls upon Indian civil society activists to take up the issue of custodial torture. "This would ensure an end to torture on people in general and arrested militants in particular," he adds.

Kolkata cleans up a little

Subir Roy
Kolkata

KOLKATA is no stranger to official sloth and citizens' initiatives. Both continue because the city's services remain decrepit and citizens never seem to give up protesting. The most recent example of this is an initiative by a group of citizens, led by Mudar Patherya, named Project Uday, to rid the city's most prominent locations of their garbage eyesores, even if temporarily.

In Kolkata, location-wise, you cannot get more prominent than Dalhousie Square, dominated on one side by the seat of the state government, Writers' Buildings, and resplendent on all sides with heritage buildings bearing testimony to the architectural glory of the British Raj. And there in one corner of Dalhousie Square where a park lived once upon a time, lay piled up garbage and the shells of two abandoned cars to boot.

The cars need explaining. The city is in fact dotted with similar relics, usually near police stations. There is an accident, the driver runs away, abandoning the vehicle. The police file a case but have nowhere to park the abandoned vehicle. So these damaged cars are usually left lying in the vicinity of the police station, essentially property under litigation, but waiting to be pilfered, if not in whole then in substance.

So there were these two shells lying on top of the garbage, with everything pilferable within them long gone. And the garbage beneath and around had compacted over time and settled with the rain to have risen a couple of feet. The triangular plot originally had railings but two sides were gone, victim to the concreting of the nearby tram tracks which had during construction required a dumping yard.

Patherya and friends, who had seen the heap for long, one day decided to get going. Having done this sort of thing in the past under different banners, they lined up three contractors' trucks which carry garbage for the municipal corporation to do duty for them. They even got hold of a breakdown van with crane. The rest of the resources – enthusiastic citizens, even a few school children despite it still being Puja holidays and shovels were easier to muster.

Just before the appointed Sunday came, the organisers thought it best to keep the police informed – the car shells were still state property – and met with a surprise. Instead of indifference or worse, the police said: We like to help. So the early morning scene was fairly impressive – breakdown van, empty garbage trucks, citizens, a police wireless van, a few policemen and a group of young men wearing grey jackets bearing the legend on the back 'green police volunteer' and the Kolkata Municipal Corporation logo.

The event was over in a couple of hours when two truckloads of garbage and one truck with two awkward looking car shells on top set out for the journey to the city's garbage dumping grounds. The battle



The offending garbage dump in Dalhousie Square

was not fully won, not all the garbage was gone, but it was less.

Seeing the success, having tasted blood, Patherya and friends decided to strike again one Sunday later. This time they chose another prominent target, the hallowed *maidan* (green lung) in the heart of town. There, at the crossing of Chowringhee Road and Park Street stood a water body that had known better days. It was surrounded by wild tall

Just before the appointed Sunday came, the organisers thought it best to keep the police informed - the car shells were still state property - and met with a surprise. Instead of indifference or worse, the police said: We want to help.

underbrush, bearing nauseating evidence of being used as a public toilet and of course tonnes and tonnes of garbage.

This time, since the *maidan* is in the charge of the army, they informed the forces who reacted like the policemen did. We want to help, they said and promised 500 NCC volunteers who normally come to parade on the *maidan* on Sunday but would this time cut wild undergrowth and tidy up things. Only arrange some refreshments for the youngsters, requested the army officers in charge of the cadets.

Came the appointed day and it was a repeat of the earlier event. After the action two sides of the water body looked distinctly cleaner and a small

portion in the front, next to one of the exits of the Metro Rail Park Street station, looked like a poorly shaven head, the mop gone but two mounds, in the nature of ugly boils, standing testimony to the volunteers' efforts to cut the undergrowth and pile up the garbage for trucks to take away.

When the organisers totted up the pluses and minuses after the two events the stories were similar: overall success creating tremendous desire to do more such events, with a shortcoming or two. At the first Dalhousie Square event, even the media photographers complained there were few school students in uniform which would have made it easy for them to situate the pictures and at the *maidan* event, the army officers complained that the refreshments were too little and not all cadets got their bit.

The organisers are, if anything, over excited. It works, they want to shout from the rooftops. Officialdom, much feared for its apathy, is in fact quite

responsive in parts. So, newer and more ambitious events are being planned. There is no illusion that even if Project Uday succeeds and grows it will not clear the city of all its garbage in prominent places. But there is hope that it will be an invaluable learning experience, which will help identify what works and what does not.

One lesson is already going home. One cleanup will not be enough. What will change the face of the city will be vigilant groups of citizens, alert at spotting any garbage accumulating in once cleared places, networked among themselves and with the authorities to get corrective action going before things slide back too much.

How millets fight hunger

Rina Mukherji
Hyderabad

AT a time when climate change and erratic rains threaten food production all over the world, the Deccan Development Society (DDS) has built up food security for the poor in one of the most backward regions of Andhra Pradesh.

The solution has been simple: DDS and its women's sanghams comprising 5000 members have eschewed crops like rice and wheat and rely instead on a wide variety of millets that can withstand repeated drought in a rain-deficient region.

Keen to make a difference in the lives of the poorest, the DDS was formed by a group of Hyderabad-based professionals to work in Pastapur village in the Zaheerabad region of Medak district. Work commenced in 1984, with marginalised Dalit women being organised into sanghams.

Initially, the sanghams addressed the need for ready cash. Since the Dalits, men and women, were all engaged as farm labour, the sangham first worked to build up personal savings. As Kupranagar resident Chandamma says, "We started by depositing Rs 5 with the sangham every eight days out of the Rs 2 we earned daily as farm labour." The moment each person had saved Rs 50 with the sangham, she was allowed to borrow Rs 200. "We often needed the money to meet household expenses since life was tough," she explains.

The main problem the Dalit families faced was lack of cultivable land. The *inaami* lands they held as compensation for services rendered to feudal potentates as barbers, shepherds and so on, were in the uplands. Gaothans or lands given due to Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan movement or under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's *Garibi Hatao* programme were no better. These were



Chandamma in a field full of millets. The Deccan Development Society has built food security.

The system has four different ration cards to facilitate distribution of food during the off-season when there is no work in the farms leaving the poor distressed and starving.

rocky wastelands, full of stones and low in fertility. Besides, the lands were far from the villages where the Dalits lived.

"The inputs required to make them cultivable and fertile were too expensive for the marginal and underprivileged," explains DDS co-ordinator Chiranjeevi Srinivas. Cheap rice available at Rs 2 a kg under the state government's highly subsidised public distribution system (PDS) had weaned away even the slightly more willing from farming their own land.

Rice and wheat can hardly withstand inclement weather and hence are difficult to grow here on a regular basis. However, a variety of millets grow, ranging from the fast-growing *garib jonna* (a *jowar* variety which can be harvested in just three months) to pearl millet, foxtail millet, little millet and several others. In terms of nutritional value, these coarse grains are in no way inferior to rice and wheat, as determined by the National

Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Bangalore. Besides, each of these is raised using farmyard manure and natural ingredients that can prevent pests. More significantly, these hardy crops do not fall prey to pests that attack the vulnerable hybrid rice and wheat varieties that were promoted during the Green Revolution. The DDS volunteers, hence, decided to fall back on millets.

Although there was scepticism, some ominous events helped the DDS grow in membership and stature. There were three years of drought in a row which caused a depletion of seeds and much hardship to even rich farmers.

A number of rich farmers had switched to cash crops like sugarcane. When they needed to cultivate foodgrains, there were no seeds to fall back on. That was when the seed bank came in handy. "The Reddys and Patels came over for seeds here," explains Laxamma proudly. "They realised how important seed banks are for food crops."

Food crops could provide succour to the peasants. But the rocky farms in the uplands needed a lot of inputs. Here, the money saved through the sanghams came in handy.

Working as a group, the sangham hired tractors to till the soil and made the rocky wastelands cultivable. The funds were also used to collectively construct bunds and check-dams to irrigate the farms with whatever water was available. Individuals could borrow money from the sangham for inputs to cultivate their lands. However, the Rs 4,200 loan was to be returned only partly in cash. The rest was to be returned in kind, in the form of cultivated grain. The cultivated grain returned in exchange of money helped the sang-

INDIA

hams build up a huge millet bank. This enabled the sangham women to set up a parallel PDS. The alternative PDS caters to the local needs of every village and is run on the basis of local knowledge.

The system has four different ration cards to facilitate distribution during the off-season, when there is no work in the farms, leaving the poor distressed and starving. The black-bordered cards or black cards are meant for the destitute and beggars in the village. People holding these cards are entitled to a maximum of 20 kg of millets. The holders of red cards are the landless, who hover around the danger zone of starvation. These are entitled to grains up to 15 kg per head, at the rate of Rs 4 a kg. The next category are the yellow card holders, who own between one or two acres. Such people are entitled to 10 kg of grains per head at the rate of Rs 4 a kg.

Those who own five acres or more hold green cards. This category is entitled to a maximum of

10 kg of grains per head, at Rs 4 a kg. The rich, of course, are not given any cards and are in the white category. But they can buy sorghum at the prevailing rates.

When the DDS women took to cultivating millets in a big way, they realised the need to build up a market for their produce. It was also important for local peasants to realise the potential and importance of millets native to the region. With this end in view, the women mooted the idea of an annual millet festival. A millet festival is now held every year at Pastapur with a mobile van displaying the various varieties and going around towns and cities in the vicinity.

The next step was to sensitise city people. Millets and greens are the staple food of rural Andhra Pradesh. Urbanisation and modernisation have led to most middle and upper class families forgetting their roots and nutritious traditional recipes. Teaming up with some urban NGOs, DDS

RINA MUKHERJI



Lush field in Pastapur

held workshops and cooking sessions for urban women on traditional millet delicacies and got them to think in terms of cheap, healthy nutrition.

Alongside, DDS published a cookery book that listed out the many millet recipes rural women continued to make such as millet khichdi, linseed and niger seed chutney, millet kheer and so on. The traditional knowledge of the women of Pastapur and the adjoining villages of Narsapur, Algole, Krishnapur, Machnoor, Kamalpalle, Humnapur, Basantpur, and Bidakanne were used to compile the book.

As DDS director, and one of the co-founders of the DDS who has continued working in Pastapur for the last two decades, P V Satheesh emphasises, "This book is the product of the collective knowledge offered to us by numerous women from dozens of villages in the Medak district of Andhra Pradesh. It is their book which we have written down."

The book is also a wealth of information on each of the grains and their medicinal value.

The women took the initiative to set up Café Ethnic, a restaurant in Zaheerabad town, which serves only millet-based delicacies. The DDS sanghams also run an organic shop, close to Café Ethnic, where locally-produced grain condiments grown in the farms of sangham women are available at reasonable prices.

Down the years, running the sanghams has been a learning experience for the DDS, too.

"Every region has its own biodiversity. Falling back on traditional knowledge, we decided to prepare a biodiversity charter and concentrate on our seed banks," explains Satheesh.

Today, the DDS seed bank is an institution that is drawing the admiration of botanists nationwide. Set up and maintained by local Dalit women, it stores a wide variety of food grains, oilseeds, and produce indigenous to the region. The small patch outside the bank has strains of millets grown in other third world countries – such as Mali and Peru, which Laxmamma and Chandamma, the two women in charge of the seed bank, have visited with some other women from Pastapur.

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Farmers need smarter weatherman

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

It's been a long summer for Ram Naresh Singh Parihar, District President of the Bhartiya Kisan Union in Jhansi. The Bundelkhand Jhansi region has been severely drought-affected over the last few years, and this monsoon's errant rainfall was the last nail in the proverbial coffin. Crops have failed, farmer suicides are on the rise, and there have been disturbing reports of people having to sell their wives for petty cash.

Agriculturists, Parihar says, have always revered the weather. But a deep fear has taken root now. "The weather has become very erratic. This year farmers were caught completely unawares. When the monsoons were failing in June and July, they irrigated their lands, only to get furious downpours later," he says.

In Bundelkhand, the recent summer harvest yielded only six to seven quintals per hectare, against the average yield of 22 quintals. Farmers also spent Rs 750 per bigha for renting pumps and buying diesel to irrigate their land. Most have holdings that are just one or two hectares. Each hectare is made up of 750 bighas. The maths adds up to a tidy sum which is usually borrowed from moneylenders at crippling rates.

The weather has been in the news for all the wrong reasons across India this year. Typically, a 10 per cent shortage over 20 per cent of the country qualifies as a drought, according to the Indian Meteorological Department's (IMD) definition. In 2009, the country witnessed 23 per cent rainfall deficit over 60 per cent of the country.

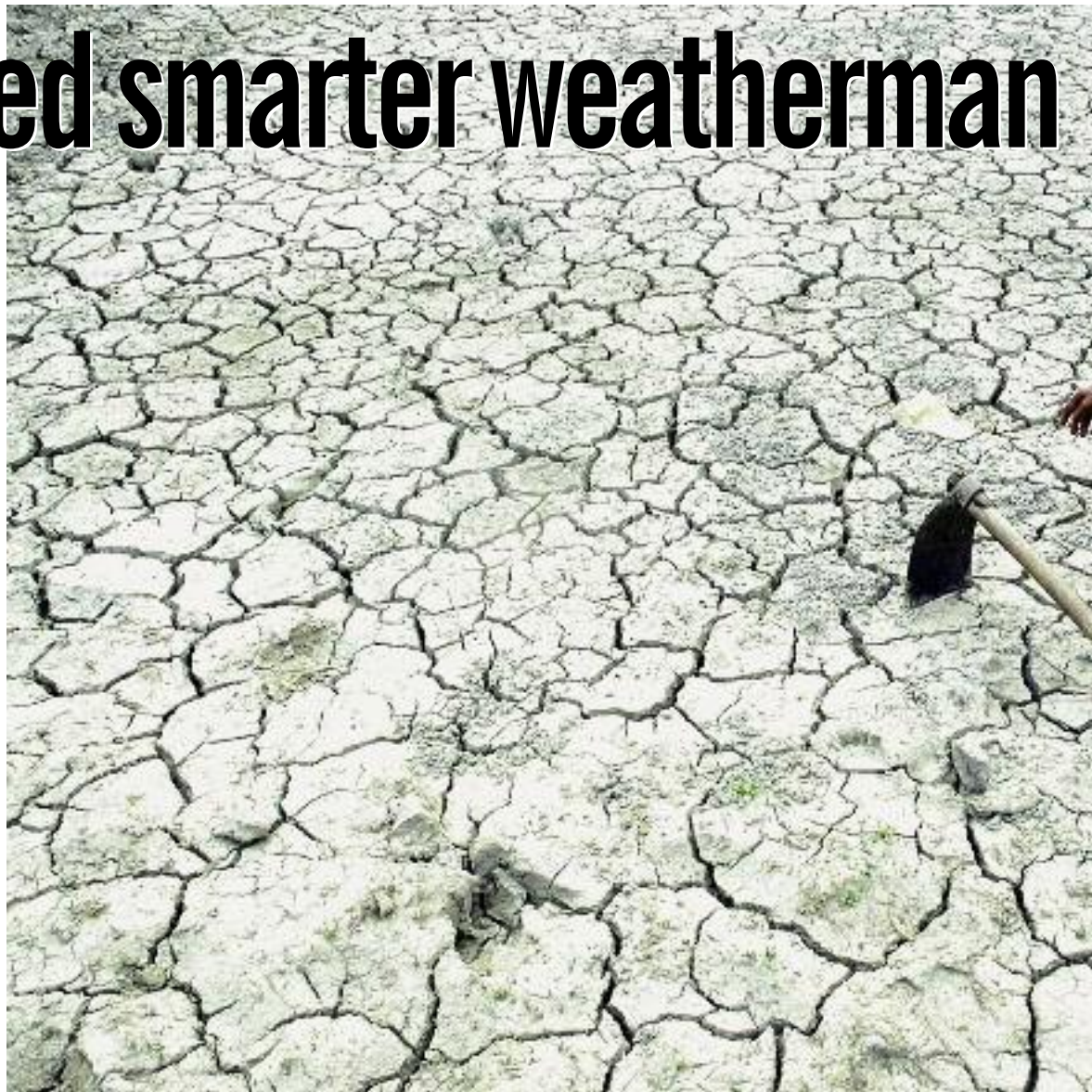
Agricultural output has been hit. The Finance Ministry recently warned the decline will shave up to one per cent off India's growth rate in this fiscal's last two quarters. The stock markets might shudder at that, but it's our farmers who have taken the worst blow.

"India has no preparedness, no long-term plan and no cohesive policy decisions on drought. We only put in mechanisms to manage the drought once it happens," explains D R Sikka, former Director of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, and now a member of several committees on climate change at Ministry of Earth Sciences, ISRO and IMD.

"There was evidence in March and April that suggested a 60 per cent chance of drought. But, there was a lack of coordinated effort between ministries to put that in the correct perspective, to educate the farmers, to forewarn them. In fact, till July 15, the Agriculture Ministry kept saying everything will be all right," he adds.

Farmers in India sow, fertilise and harvest based on traditional knowledge of climate patterns. But, with climate change and global warming, are farmers working with wisdom that is outdated?

"There are signals that suggest climate patterns might change. We are still in the realm of uncer-



tainty though. Definite answers, decipherable patterns will take decades to emerge. But one thing is certain. Incidents of extreme weather are increasing," Sikka explains.

In Delhi, for example, three spells added to 70 per cent of the season's total rainfall this year. Statistically, it made up for the monsoon deficiency but it did little to help agriculture in which amount, intensity and regularity of occurrence together define a "good spell".

Frequency of drought has also increased, Sikka says. The drought in 2009 was the third most intense in recorded instrumental history since 1871.

'Farmers need weather information at the taluka level. But the IMD does not go deeper than the district level. They have no observation infrastructure to verify their forecasts at that micro level'.

Sadly, Parihar and his fellow farmers have little awareness of these trends. "I don't believe we are in the 21st century. We have so much technology but farmers are still suffering. Can nobody help prepare us against such vagaries? We should be provided weather information. We have tried asking the district administration. But no one listens," says Parihar.

India's government weather set-up is extensive with large institutions like the Indian Meteorological Department, the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting, and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology. But this collective wisdom has been unable to nurture agriculture. Accurate and timely weather forecast remains elusive.

Scientists say the problems are multi-fold. First, weather in low latitude tropical areas like India is more difficult to predict because most weather models have been built for Western countries of the mid latitude area. Paucity of data - both historical and current observations - in the South Asian region is another critical factor for faulty predictions. "Farmers need weather information at the taluka level. But the IMD does not go deeper than the district level. They have no observation infrastructure to verify their forecasts at that micro level. So, even if the farmers manage to watch the state broadcaster, the information often can't help them. It's very general in nature," says Gr Capt OP Sharma, a retired Air Force mete-



up to two weeks can be critical to a farmer, to optimise his sowing, his flowering," explains Ajay Kankure of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi.

The Ministry of Earth Sciences is in the middle of a Rs 2,400 crore modernisation drive to ensure that. By the end of the 11th Five Year Plan in 2012, IMD has been entrusted with the challenge of establishing an ambitious and worthy meteorological set-up. On the agenda are 3,600 automatic rain gauges, 1150 automatic weather stations, 55 Doppler radars, 15 wind profilers, 50 sets of aeronautical instrumentation for airports, and up gra-

dition of radio sounds and pilot observatories.

"Till two years back, we had no automatic rain gauges, no automatic weather stations and only five Doppler radars. We don't have a single wind profiler even today," exclaims Sikka.

Encouragingly, big business is moving in with ambitious plans to supplement government efforts. In June 2009, Nokia commercially launched its Life Tools Agriculture Services to provide updates on seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, market prices, and weather (temperature, rainfall, wind conditions) via their mobile phones. Currently, Nokia offers the service across 18 states and 11 languages. Subscribers can choose from two monthly plans of Rs 30 and Rs 60 respectively.

"We want to drive livelihood and life improvement tools. Our aim is to provide farmers information at the granular level, at a radius of 100 kilometers from him. Response has been very encouraging. Around 600 million Indians are dependent on agriculture. We see immense opportunity here," says Natesh BV, Head, Emerging Markets Services, Nokia.

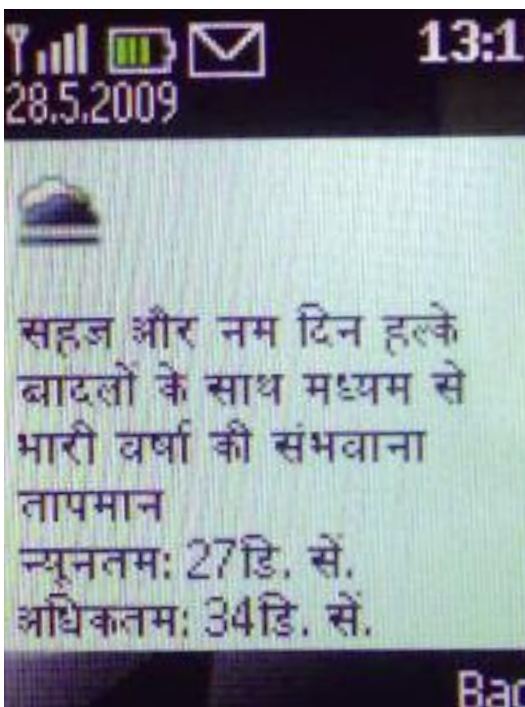
Thomson Reuters has also entered the agro weather space. Its Reuters Market Light has sold over 110,000 three-month subscriptions of their crop advisory mobile-based information service since launching in October 2007. The service has also been selected by the UNDP as a business initiative with the potential to contribute to the Millennium Development Goals.

But, is it better to err on the side of caution at that forecast? Ask Parihar about an SMS-based service and he scoffs. "How many farmers can read anyways even if they can afford mobiles?"

Natesh is quick to put those doubts to rest though. "Currently over 70 per cent of our population and 26 per cent of our GDP comes from the rural segment. The purchasing power in rural India is on a steady rise. By 2012, India is likely to have 200 million rural telecom connections and rural users will account for over 60 per cent of the total telecom subscriber base at a penetration rate of 25 per cent. Also, we use rich icons and strong graphics to make it simple to understand."

For farmers groping in darkness, that outlook is bound to offer some hope.

DROUGHT TRACK	
1841-1900	10 droughts
1901-1930	6 droughts
1930-1960	2 droughts
1961-2009	13 droughts



Weather data in Hindi on mobile phone

orologist who now works with Skymet, a Delhi-based private weather forecasting company.

Agricultural scientists confirm there is a credibility gap. "Weather is a probabilistic science. And, farmers have been disillusioned with the quality of information. To help them, the information has to prove utility at a very advanced level. Short-term forecast of a couple of days to



What a clean toilet can do

PRASANTA BISWAS



The govt schools have water and sanitation committees consisting of boys and girls

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

CLEAN toilets with running water are keeping girls in school and bridging the gender divide at six government-aided schools in Bishnupur I in West Bengal's South 24-Parganas district. The schools here have spotless toilets thanks to the efforts of Nishtha, an NGO, and Water for People, an international funding group.

Ever since improved toilets with incinerators were installed, no child has dropped out of school. Earlier, around eight per cent of girls would leave school between Class 5 and Class 7.

"The improved toilets and running water are a major incentive for them to attend regularly and not be absent," says Mrinal Kumar Das, proudly. He is an assistant teacher at the Kaastekumari High School. "In fact, in a Muslim minority area, where girls are generally married off at puberty, the improved toilets and hygiene awareness camps have brought in a revolution of sorts. Our students are now keen to study further after finishing school."

Not only the girls, but female teachers and staff are grateful to Nishtha for providing the toilets. The NGO works in the area of water and sanitation.

Jaya Karmakar, a teacher at the Kaastekumari High School, says she joined the school 30 years ago. It takes her three hours of commuting each way to get here from Belegkata in north Kolkata. In the past, once she reached school, using the toilet would be a nightmare since there was no running water. There was no tube-well either. A

PRASANTA BISWAS



Teachers of the Kaastekumari High School

peon would fetch water from a well across the road and store it in the school's premises. This water was all that students and teachers had access to through the day.

Roma Mandal, an employee who travels all the way from Amtala which is one and a half hours away, says: "It was terrible during my periods. Using the toilet after having traveled all that distance to school was a nightmare."

"Boys and girls would just excuse themselves from class and go behind some bushes outside to relieve themselves," explains Hasanuzzaman, also an assistant teacher.

The students at the Gabheria Chhatrabandhu Vidyapith in the same block did have running water in the toilet. But the school had just one toilet for 1,864 students. For the girls, using the toilet during their periods was tough. There were no facilities for garbage disposal either.

Not surprisingly, girl students would be frequently absent. Once they reached puberty, many would just give up and drop out of middle school.

At the Gabheria Chhatrabandhu Vidyapith ever since the improved toilets, drinking water taps and wash rooms were set up, water and sanitation (Watsan) committees, comprising boys and girls, have set new precedents in self-

Car pool is heaven

Abhinandita Mathur
New Delhi

POLLUTION and traffic snarls are perennial problems in Delhi. Each day, 700 to 1,000 new cars get on to the city's roads. Is there a way out? Rajat Jain, 22, thinks there is. A resident of Naraina, West Delhi, the young man has set up a website to promote car pools in the city.

He spent his college days commuting to Vasant Kunj. "That experience drained me out. I would be stuck in traffic for hours," he says. A similarly harried friend told him car pools are common in the developed world. That set Jain thinking and Delhipool was born.

Launched in September, the website seeks to provide a world class carpooling service. It is designed to work as an info-conduit between car owners and other commuters headed in the same direction.

Bright and easy in its design, the website is user friendly.

"Too much text intimidates people. After spending hours in traffic, the last thing one needs is gyan. So I've used visuals to make car pooling look easy and doable," he explains.

Currently, Delhipool is a one-man team. Jain is working hard to reach out to the public. He is networking with radio channels, the print media and a multiplex company. He is also set to collaborate with a popular coffee shop chain in the city to communicate directly with commuters. "People who hang out at Café Coffee Day are our key target. They are young and want to bring about change, but don't know where to start," he says.

As a schoolboy Jain would often assist his father, a well-established businessman. Work took him to several government offices where he would end up paying bribes. "I wanted to change things. I signed up for a course in journalism. But I was disillusioned," he explains. "In the electronic media, I was making no impact. I needed to do something rather than just report about random things for TRPs."

Along with promoting carpooling, he also plans to set up a cab service to make the web-



site self-sustaining. "There is a demand from students for cabs to get to college. A car pool cab service could be a useful alternative. People who use cabs often travel alone. This system would help reduce commercial vehicles on the road and improve public transport."

Delhi's public opinion may take time to change. Families who have more cars parked outside than members at the dining table may never want to share a ride. But Jain, who has three cars parked outside his home, has other ideas.

After all it is more fun to share the camaraderie of a car pool than travel alone on the city's mean streets.

Contact: www.delhipool.com

governance and teamwork. Each committee has 10 members and is annually appointed. It maintains the toilets by collecting a fee of Re 1 per student per month. This is used to buy phenyl, soap, sanitary napkins, toilet brushes and buckets to keep the toilets clean and hygienic. The committee also talks to students about hygiene and cleanliness once a week during their environmental studies class.

Although the Vidyapith is in the rural outskirts of Baruiapur town, its premises are immaculately clean. Every schoolgirl now flushes the toilet after use, washes her hands after using the toilet, and uses the single washroom connected with an improvised incinerator to dispose off her sanitary napkins. Depending on need, the used napkins are burnt in the incinerator once or twice a week to maintain hygiene and prevent any accumulation of unhealthy garbage. The toilet for the boys is also clean.

Although the Kaastekumari High School cannot compare with the Gabberia Chhatrabandhu Vidyapith in terms of overall cleanliness, the toilets are well-maintained and clean.

"Since this school is in the interior, awareness levels among students were very poor when we first started work," explains Jharna Bari, a Nishtha instructor. "There would be bits of paper, pencil scrapings and peel strewn all over the classrooms. Once the children were trained at environment camps on our premises and came into contact with students from other schools, there was a sea-change in their attitude."

Today, students in this school never relieve themselves outside. Working shoulder to shoulder with the boys has given girls a fair measure of confidence. The boys too have started treating the girls with greater respect. "Boys realise that girls can be equally efficient and earnest about making a difference," says Sunil Kumar Ghosh, assistant teacher at Gabberia Chhatrabandhu Vidyapith.

In West Bengal 1.04 crore children enroll in primary school but just 14.05 lakhs make it to secondary level. More than half dropout at middle and secondary levels as per statistics compiled by the Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Government of West Bengal in July 2007. If the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan is to make any headway the needs of schoolgirls on the verge of puberty must be kept in mind.



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Anti-dam protests get louder

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

ACTIVISTS, villagers and NGO groups in Uttarakhand are warning the state government that it will pay a heavy price politically if it builds dams and hydro-electric projects. They point to the results of the general elections as proof. The BJP had lost all five seats and peoples' groups are saying its all because of their voter awareness campaign against the state government's dam building spree.

These groups are keeping up the pressure, organising dharnas, rallies and workshops. In September, a block level workshop was held in Joshimath to oppose the dams.

"The dams will destroy our forests and our autonomous institutions. We'll not let this happen," said Gangotri Devi, Sarpanch, Van Panchayat, Arori village, Chamoli district.

Suresh Bhai of Raksha Sutra Andolan, a network of peoples' movements, echoed her concerns. "The work is on for 558 hydro-electricity power projects. Most of them are tunnel based. They will convert our rivers into underground water streams. Along these tunnels about 5,000 villages are located where 2.2 million people live. They will all lose their livelihoods."

The protestors then held a *dharna* in Dehradun, on 24 September.

"The BJP ignored these issues and lost all five Lok Sabha seats," said Laxman Singh Negi, secretary, Jandesh, an NGO based in Joshimath who was the main organiser of the campaign. "If the new government continues to promote this hill state as an *Urja Pradesh*, and thereby make thousands homeless and jobless, we'll see to it that



After a lull, anti-dam agitations begin, again this government learns a lesson."

The activists say the key reason the BJP lost the elections was their Voter Awareness Programme (VAP).

This campaign was led by 20 NGOs and anti-dam groups along with intellectuals, writers and activists before the 15th Lok Sabha elections. The programme aimed at creating awareness about the impact of dam building and convincing people to come out and vote. On 26 March, a peoples' manifesto was launched asking all candidates to state their position on dams and hydro-electric projects.

"Apart from motivating people to vote, the campaign wanted to inform candidates about the problems people are facing regarding land, water and forests," said Prem Pancholi, coordinator, VAP.

The campaign began on 15 April in 22 villages of Dunda block, Uttarkashi district. "We told people about the ill effects of dam projects, like the massive Tehri Project and the on-going Maneri Bhai Hydro Project Phase-II," said Sangeeta Bisht of Tarun Paryavaran Vigyan Sansthan, the NGO behind the campaign in this area.

"We didn't know that due to the dams we would lose everything we had earned. We decided to be careful while voting this time," said Shakuntala Nautiyal, 24, Dharkot village, Uttarkashi district.

The campaign also taught people how to use the EVMs and distributed campaign material containing pamphlets, manifestos and stories of villages like Chaerin which had been wiped out by a hydro-electric project.

The VAP then moved to Nainital Lok Sabha Constituency campaigning with pamphlets, posters, street plays and foot-marches. Village level meetings were held.

"People were really shocked to know that the mega dam Pancheshwar in the Kumaon region on

the Indo-Nepal border would wreck their lives. They prepared a demand charter and sent it to all Lok Sabha candidates," said Sunita Shahi of Prayas, a Bhowali based NGO that was conducting the campaign here.

In the Pauri constituency, the campaign went to 122 villages in three Assembly constituencies. Here, the main issue highlighted was the loss of peoples' livelihoods by the Vishnuprayag Hydroelectricity Project and Rishi Ganga I & II Project.

"People asked questions and submitted their charter of demands to the candidates," said Awatar Singh Negi of Mount Valley Development Association, the key NGO in Ghansali, Tehri district, that was behind this phase of the campaign. "Let them build a dam in Delhi or Doon and get all the power they need. We're happy with this kerosene lamp as it doesn't uproot us and we get a stomach full of food," said Bina Uniyal, 32, Khidiyar village, Pauri district.

Similarly, the VAP campaigners went to Almora constituency.

VAP campaigners say the impact of their efforts were clearly visible when the results were declared. The ruling BJP even lost the only seat from the plains district, Haridwar. Harish Prasad Rawat who won from Haridwar, has been very active in getting the Forest Right Act, 2006, implemented. He has been working hard to stop the harassment of Van Gujjars, a nomadic animal rearing community living in Rajaji National Park, spread out in Haridwar, Dehradun and Saharanpur districts.

After winning, some candidates like Vijay Bahuguna from Tehri and Pradip Tamta from Almora have been voicing peoples' concerns. Tamta has written to Sonia Gandhi to take action against the mindless and illegal limestone mining in Almora and Bageshwar districts.

BACKBEAT

By Balraj



microsoft AD

SURE START SAVES

Bigger demand for govt health services and schemes

Madhu Gurung
Lucknow/Pune

It is a hot, sunny day. Saroj Kumari, a plump, dusky 30-year-old woman, is dressed in a bright red sari with a red dot on her forehead and vermilion sprinkled in the parting of her hair. Her friend, Prabhavati, matches her sartorial style. But she is slimmer, wiry and more watchful.

On most days the two friends set out together at 10 in the morning to visit expectant mothers, mapping their pregnancies in Haiderpur Navbasta, a predominantly Muslim village 90 km from Lucknow, the state capital of Uttar Pradesh (UP).

Saroj and Prabhavati are Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA). They are called Asha Bahu or Asha Didi in their village. They have given up covering their heads and being faceless housewives and instead work as community health mobilisers for the government's National Rural Health Mission (NRHM).

The two ASHAs have been trained by PATH, an international NGO, under its Sure Start programme. Launched in 2005, PATH'S five-year initiative helps poorer communities access quality maternal and newborn health services in rural UP and in slum settlements in urban Maharashtra.

Their first stop is Fatima's dilapidated mud hut. Fatima is a gawky, polio-afflicted teenager. She is nine months pregnant. Her reticent husband, Abid Hussain, also afflicted by polio, uses crutches. The couple is expecting their first child. Abid does exquisite hand embroidery which is sold in Lucknow.

Nusrat Begum is Fatima's enlightened mother-in-law. She says she had seven children and had she been more informed she would have ensured Abid got his polio drops as a baby.

"When my first baby was born, my Ammi (mother-in-law) insisted on giving him goat's milk as she did not consider my yellow breast milk good for the child," says Nusrat Begum. "I gave in to such superstition. Now I know better. My milk would have been best. One baby died because the cord was cut by a dirty sickle. I don't want Fatima to suffer like I did."

Nusrat Begum and Fatima understand the different stages of pregnancy, breastfeeding, care of the newborn, nutrition and vaccination and the importance of registering at the local government hospital so that the mother's pregnancy can be monitored by a doctor, leading to a safe institutional delivery.

They also know that the government has a scheme called the Janani Suraksha Yojana that gives money to mothers as an incentive if they opt to have their babies in a hospital, instead of at home.

Fatima and Nusrat Begum are well-informed because they attend Mothers' Group Meetings at the village's anganwadi centre, organised by Saroj and Prabhavati.

"Our aim is to demystify health, make communities aware of medical cover provided by the government, empower them to access it and ensure the sys-



Women gather at the anganwadi centre in Haiderpur Navbasta in UP to learn, bond and share

MOMS AND BABIES

COVER PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



tem works in an accountable manner," says Shilpa Nair, State Manager, PATH, who oversees the programme in UP.

The programme covers 24.5 million people in UP and Maharashtra. In UP, Sure Start reaches out to 12,000 villages in the seven districts of Barabanki, Rae Bareilly, Hardoi, Bahraich, Balrampur, Basti and Gorakhpur.

In Maharashtra, the programme works in Navi Mumbai, Greater Mumbai, Nagpur, Malegaon, Sholapur, Nanded and Pune, reaching a population of 1.6 million people.

Sure Start works in step with the NRHM. The awareness it has created has led to communities making the health of mothers and babies a priority. It has given people the confidence to access health care on their own and find solutions to local problems.

Sure Start has also innovated practices which can be replicated. In Maharashtra, the programme has produced an urban model for health services, including insurance and outreach, which can be integrated into the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM).

INDIA DOWN UNDER

The UNICEF State of World's Children Report estimates that 78,000 mothers die every year in India due to childbirth and delivery related complications. A million babies die within the first month of their birth, making India account for one-fourth of the world's maternal and newborn deaths.

In 2005, the Union government launched the NRHM to deliver health services to every village, especially the poor (see box).

Coincidentally, at that time the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation decided to fund PATH's Sure Start programme in India. PATH works with communities to help them resolve their problems. In India it took up maternal and neonatal health as a priority project.

Sure Start began to connect with the NRHM, innovating and strengthening it. It undertook a huge exercise of looking for partners who could implement and carry on with its work. PATH had a clear exit policy – it would be around for five years – so it focused on training and building the capacities of its partners. Sure Start now works with 15 lead partners in UP and Maharashtra and a collective of 80 other partners.

THE BEGINNING

Sure Start confronted cold realities from the beginning. Women were sent to hospital only if they developed complications. They often lost their lives and their babies trying to reach hospital. Men seldom participated, except to step in when the woman's life was in peril and money had to be spent to take her to hospital. In UP, most women delivered their babies at home with the help of the village midwife.

Villagers were more concerned about work, safe water, migration and two meals a day. The health of mothers and babies was not a priority.

Sure Start mobilised the community, tapping into structures created by the



Dr Lakshmi Singh
Gynaecologist
at the Community
Health Centre

'Better facilities for doctors serving in rural India would go a long way in becoming an incentive to serve backward communities.'



The two ASHAs: Prabhavati (left) and Saroj making a point with hands raised

NRHM. The lynchpin of the NRHM is the ASHA, who is the interface between the community and the public health system. Sure Start has mentored 7,540 ASHAs in UP. Saroj and Prabhavati were trained by Project Supervisors – each supervisor is responsible for mentoring 20 ASHAs.

Saroj says their project supervisor, Vidya Didi, taught them how to hold meetings by having a theme, review what the women learnt and switch to a new subject for the next meeting. They learnt how to counsel expectant mothers and their families and to deal with government officials and maintain records in their registers.

Saroj and Prabhavati's first task was to transform themselves. When they started work, the community treated them merely as daughters-in-law or sisters. "Initially people would scoff at us and say: 'Don't you ladies have any work? Is that why you turn up here with your bag?' Now we are stopped on the road by men who tell us how their wives' pregnancies are progressing. The women approach us for everything. Our mobiles ring constantly. At night if a woman is in labour, we are the first to be called. People trust us."

At Haiderpur Navbasta, the Mothers' Group Meeting organised by the two ASHAs, takes place at the anganwadi centre. It is crowded with women in colorful saris. Their glass bangles clink as they greet each other. They come here to share and bond. Young children hang from window sills, parroting songs the women sing.

A game of snakes and ladders is about to begin. Four pregnant women settle down to play. Others crowd around. They giggle when one of the players 'gets bitten by the snake' and has to slide down. "Oh, she didn't take her tetanus shots," her friends say laughingly. The game conveys the message.

Saroj and Prabhavati use flashcards, dolls, music and songs to teach mothers and their mothers-in-law how to take care of their health during pregnancy and how to handle a newborn baby. Each meeting is recorded by the ASHAs in their logbooks.



What is the National Rural Health Mission?

LAUNCHED by the Union government in 2005 for a period of seven years, the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) is an ambitious plan to reach quality health services to the poor in rural areas. Nutrition, sanitation, hygiene and safe drinking water are part of the plan. One of its key objectives is to bring down rates of infant and maternal mortality and provide the poor, especially women and children, access to integrated comprehensive primary health care.

NRHM has created a decentralised structure to involve the village community. Some of its features are:

- Panchayati Raj Institutions will be trained to own, control and manage public health services.
- Every village will have Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) who will link each household to health services. The ASHA will be chosen by the panchayat and act as an interface between the community and the public health system.
- Each village will have a health plan through the Village Health Committee of the panchayat.
- The Total Sanitation Campaign will cover all villages and provide individual toilets.
- Health infrastructure like pri

The men too are involved. The ASHAs call on the husband of the pregnant woman, handing him a letter from the unborn child.

"Most fathers laugh when I tell them it is from their unborn child," says Prabhavati. "Some ask me to read it aloud. We give two letters – the first asks the prospective father to take good care of mommy, to make sure she gets adequate care, rest and nutrition. The second letter is delivered towards the last trimester. In it, the unborn child requests the father to ensure a safe delivery for mommy and the baby. The men always react positively."

Haroonisa is the sarpanch of this panchayat, but it is her husband, Ali Hasan, a tall man with a white unkempt mane, who handles all her work. He has been gifted a designation by the village community — panchayat pati or 'husband of the sarpanch'. The panchayat has a Village Health Sanitation Committee (VHSC) as laid down under NRHM norms.

Hasan says some years ago they urgently needed to get their daughter-in-law to a hospital for her delivery. The taxi driver demanded a huge sum of Rs 1,600. He adds, "Since that day I decided no woman will need to wait for transport in our village. I bought a second-hand Sumo. My son drives it and my mobile number is painted on the wall along with the phone numbers of the doctor, the Community Health Centre and even the district hospital in Bahraich. People pay for petrol and nothing else." This emergency transport plan has been replicated in all seven districts.

"People's involvement can change everything," says Shilpa. "Villagers have worked to improve primary health care, building relations with doctors. They demand improved care and services from district authorities with increased confidence."

The men too are involved. The ASHAs call on the husband of the pregnant woman, handing him a letter from the unborn child.

SPREADING THE MESSAGE

The road to Rae Bareilly is paved and without potholes. Even the narrow lanes leading to Mahakhera village in Lalgunj Block of Rae Bareilly district are smooth. "If the pradhan takes care of the village, the baby and mother will be protected," says Ram Baksh Singh, sonorously. He heads the village VHSC. "Earlier when we went to government hospitals, we were ignored. Now since almost everyone is going to hospitals for deliveries, we are constantly in touch with doctors. They know that we are more aware, so they are respectful and helpful," he says.

Five minutes away from the Panchayat Ghar is the ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) Centre. Meena Kumari has been working as the ANM for 15 years after she trained to perform deliveries at home. The ANM centre is a large, bare room pasted over with posters of different government schemes. She sits behind a table, registers women, and does vaccinations.

Medical check-ups are done in a smaller room but it appears unused. She says business is down. "This year there has been only one delivery at home so far. Till a year ago, I would be assisting 15 to 20 deliveries. Women now prefer to go to the Community Health Centre four kilometres away."

The Community Health Centre is a pink and white building. A health *mela* is going on under a big shamiana. Dr Laxmi Singh here has been a gynaecologist for 19 years. She says she has probably delivered 5,000 babies. She has spent most of her career in rural areas with her radiologist husband.

Over the years Dr Singh has witnessed an increase in institutional deliveries. "In a day I deliver between 10 to 15 babies. A year ago we would have roughly less than 100 babies born in the hospital in a month. This has now



A game of snakes and ladders educates women about their health



A health camp in Navi Mumbai

gone up to 200 to 260 babies a month."

"Hospital infrastructure in this area has improved. Equipment and facilities are available," she says. "The problem is electricity. One week we have power in the morning. The next week we get it in the evening. So we switch our schedules to match the power supply. As generators don't get charged we also don't get water."

For the newborn baby, Sure Start has launched a mass campaign called *Pehla Ek Ghanta* (The First One Hour). The first hour of the baby's birth is the most crucial for its survival. Billboards and rickshaws have been outfitted with messages telling women about birth preparedness, recognition of danger signs, cord care, thermal care of the newborn and the importance of immediate and exclusive breastfeeding.

THE URBAN PLAN

In Maharashtra since 2007, Sure Start has been working in seven cities with slum communities. In Nanded, the programme works in Nalagutta chawl and Kudwai Nagar.

Sure Start reaches around 50,000 people. The project is similar to the one in UP. Except here Community Health Workers play the same role as ASHAs in villages.

In Kudwai Nagar, a predominately Muslim slum, burkha-clad women sit on plastic chairs around a table in a small room in a chawl. Mumtaz Khala, with her bright orange hair looks like a resplendent rose seated amidst sombre, black-veiled women. A widow since 25 years, she is now a Community Health Worker.

A year ago, with Latifunnisha, Mumtaz went from home to home convincing people to take community health insurance. "People were hesitant as they assumed that insurance works on the basis of interest which is against our religion," says Mumtaz. "It took a while for them to accept it. We told them by contributing just Rs 250, their medical expenses up to Rs 10,000 would be covered."

Sridhar Pandit, Project Coordinator at Sure Start, said the people of Kudwai Nagar are very poor and cannot pay for quality health care. For just Rs 250, a family consisting of a mother, father, two children and grandparents get medically covered. The municipal corporation adds Rs 200 for each family. Around 200 families have enrolled.

The insurance is for one year and covers general diseases. But its focus is mainly on maternity care. "Of the 200 families who enrolled, 72 expectant



Mahakhera village bought a weighing machine



mothers benefited as it led to early registration at Antenatal Clinics and a higher number of institutional births. This year the enrolment is still open and 300 families have already joined," said Pandit.

Jitendra Sawkar, Regional Partnership Manager with Sure Start, says one major challenge of community health insurance is that it is based on cross-subsidisation – it covers the young, the old, the rich and the poor. In slums this is difficult as the percentage of morbidity is high and the pool of resources is less. In the second round, the endeavour was to increase the number of people taking the insurance so that more families would benefit.

One expectant mother whose life was saved thanks to the insurance cover is Fatima. She is 25, but looks older and is acutely anaemic.

Her husband, Babar, is a truck driver. He paid for the insurance relenting to constant pressure from Mumtaz Khala. Fatima was pregnant with their third child. In her eighth month, she started feeling unwell. Three sonography tests showed the child had a 'boil' on his head. Restless one night, Fatima made an early morning emergency call to Latifunnisha.

"It was Eid, but one look at Fatima and I left everything. I called up Pandit Sir," recalls Latifunnisha. "The entire Sure Start staff was there. The doctor told us Fatima was sinking into coma. She would have to undergo an emergency caesarian section. He said he could save either the mother or the baby. We all asked him to save the mother. The baby was born but died the next day. He had fluid in the brain."

Fatima smiles wanly. "They saved my life. My husband was not there. I can't imagine what would have happened and where the money would have come from if we did not have the insurance." A year since her operation, Fatima has developed a swelling in her neck. She hopes her husband will take the insurance again this year.

A short distance away, the municipal corporation has established an Urban Health Post. In just three hours, between 9 am and 12 pm, Dr Suresh Singh Bisen sees 200 patients. The place is teeming with people seeking treatment. Dr Bisen says migration is a challenge. People rarely follow their treatment. There has, however, been an increase in registration, vaccination and institutional deliveries, he says.

His boss, Dr SB More, has been working in Nanded for 27 years. He admits

that while there has been positive change, the health posts are, "90 per cent short of manpower and are under tremendous pressure to deliver health care."

"The entire attention on public health is focused on rural India," points out Dr Kranti, who works for PATH as their maternal and neonatal health expert. "There is little precedence on how urban health has to be addressed. What will be the answers when not just mega cities but smaller ones get affected by migration? There are no tested solutions. The Union government's National Urban Health Mission is still in draft form."

Sure Start had no tailor-made solutions. Instead they looked at all these concerns and tried to find solutions for them.

MUMBAI ON A HILL

In Mumbai's N Ward, Sure Start works in four slums. The population of each is roughly 50,000. According to estimates, around 54 per cent of people live in slums, struggling to make ends meet without basic amenities.

Vikhroli Parksite is an archetypal Mumbai slum. Sprawled across an entire hillside, it is crammed with matchbox homes perched precariously one over the other. Every roof seems to be covered with blue waterproof sheets, as protection from the city's heavy rainfall. Right on top of this hill, flies the flag of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, a political party opposed to migrants. The stench of rotting garbage heralds your entry into the slum.

The Community Resource Centre (CRC) is located on top of this hill in a square room that serves as a one point stop for anyone seeking information on maternal and neonatal health.

It is manned by young men and women who work as volunteers.

Ashok Parikh, a marketing officer with a local company, serves from 5 pm to 9 pm after he returns home from work. "People living here are migrants who come in the hope of bettering their lives. They marry, have children and continue working with the thought that there is nothing back home. They have no support system, just themselves. Most are ignorant of government schemes. Here at the centre we help them access their entitlements."

Sarika Mahar Jagan, a 23-year-old mother of two, lives near the centre. The air is foul inside her windowless room. But she has a huge grey fridge, a 29-inch television, and an enormous Godrej almirah. An entire wall is covered with shelves, laden with copper and brass utensils. The gods watch benevolently from an altar on the wall.

Sarika's home is a very tiny room. But in it stay her in-laws, her husband and her two children. When she got pregnant for the second time, Sarika and her husband registered at the CRC for her delivery. She took all the medicines prescribed and had a normal delivery. "During my first pregnancy I did not take iron tablets or the tetanus shots. My son's birth weight was just 1.6 kg. This time my child was a healthy 2.6 kg, and I feel much stronger."

Sanjay says the CRC has been able to forge relationships. In a callous city where everyone is alone without any support, people have come together to live as a community. "When a mother goes to deliver her second child, she leaves the elder one with her neighbour."

Suraj works as a Volunteer Facilitator and has trained 150 volunteers on how to impart information on maternal and neonatal health.

"To access government schemes like the Janani Suraksha Yojana and Matritva Anudan Yojana, the couple has to produce official documents like a

ration card, PAN card, proof of residence, caste certificate," he says. "Instead of making them run around, we provide forms and teach people how to fill them. We also maintain everyone's record in our computer so we have a database. This cuts out middlemen who take a lot of money to prepare such papers."

The volunteers have formed an action group to ensure that all mothers get their incentives from government hospitals. They organise blood donation at local hospitals and have a roster of 85 blood donors who are on call during an emergency.

During Ganapati puja, volunteers prepared a huge flex hoarding, and exhibited their pamphlets. "We got instant feedback. Auto-drivers volunteered to take women to hospitals for their delivery free of charge. We have their mobile numbers and we call them when we are in need," says Sanjay. He says the way houses are built in Vikroli Parksite, evacuation during emergencies is a major problem.

Close to the Vikhroli Parksite is an Urban Health Post (UHP) started by the government around 1985, after WHO projected a big increase in slums. WHO advised the creation of Antenatal Clinics (ANC). But competing health prior-

In just three hours, between 9 am and 12 pm, Dr Suresh Singh Bisen sees 200 patients. The place is teeming with people seeking treatment.



A training session for field workers in Maharashtra

ities eclipsed the original mandate.

Working with the government, Sure Start has been able to get the ANCs revived in the UHPs as part of India's commitment to fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals.

The government realised that trained personnel, institutional deliveries and decentralised health services were needed.

Most urban ANMs did not know how to handle medical apparatus, nor were they equipped to handle maternal health. Currently 600 ANMs are being trained in anticipation of the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM). The UHP accessed by Vikhroli Parksite is now well equipped. Every Wednesday from 9 am till 12pm, expectant mothers can access it.

Sure Start also came up with the idea of working with health practitioners that the slum community went to. Volunteers, community facilitators and mobilisers provided Sure Start with crucial feedback on health practitioners. They were trained to use a tool called Appreciative Inquiry.

Health practitioners have been trained in all seven cities. Twenty six general practitioners were sensitised on maternal and neonatal health. "Appreciative Inquiry is for doctors and the community. It covers quality of care and services. It is meant to standardise health care for all," says Dr Shanti Panvadiya, founding member of Society for Nutrition Education and Health Action (SNEHA), a partner of PATH which is implementing work at Vikhroli Parksite.

MOMS AND IMPACT

In Pune, a four-hour drive from Mumbai, another innovative initiative is underway. Here, Sure Start reaches a population of 500,000 in 19 slums.

At Wadarwadi, in a rectangular room, sit a lively group of women who call

themselves MOMS – Monitoring of MNH (Maternal and Neonatal Health) Status. Currently there are 50 MOMS Committees in Pune. The women listen in rapt attention to Kalpana Tai. She talks about HIV/AIDS with great authority. Every sentence ends with the word *barabar*, which means, 'have you understood' in Marathi.

Men and women form the MOMS Committee. Improved maternal care is explained to expectant mothers. The men handle logistics, like ensuring blood transfusion and transportation.

Smita Mhaske works for the MOMS Committee and is associated with Deep Griha, a local partner of Sure Start. She recounts how a traumatised pregnant woman, whose medical reports indicated she was HIV positive, approached her. The woman was sure she and her unborn baby would die. Smita counselled her and took her to Sassoon hospital where, with care and medication, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl. "Because of Sure Start, I was well informed. It makes me feel worthy. The child was tested when she was six months old, and the tests have shown up as negative," says Smita.

"The MOMS Committee is like a pressure group and a platform for the community and health providers," says Dr Benazir Patil, State Manager, PATH, who looks after the Maharashtra initiatives.

Dr Benazir believes that Sure Start provides the government with a road map on how to implement the NUHM. The programme has mobilised the community, established outreach services and trained health workers. It has also been flexible in creating various models to suit each community.

Some of its impacts have been measured.

"In 2007 in Navi Mumbai, only 37 per cent of women undertook ANC. This has gone up to 50 per cent. Institutional deliveries in Maharashtra have risen from 78 to 92 per cent," says Dr Rashmi Pachauri Rajan, deputy director, Sure Start.

"In UP, institutional deliveries have gone up from 24.3 per cent to 51 per cent. Nearly 80 per cent of women take tetanus shots and 79 per cent receive iron tablets. In both states over a million dollars has been paid by the government to mothers through the Janani Suraksha Yojana and Matritva Anudan Yojana."

The impact is due to rising awareness among communities. They know about government schemes like the Janani Suraksha Yojana and how to access government health programmes meant for them. A lot of this awareness is due to Sure Start.

"One of our lead partners in UP, PANI, has got funding to replicate our processes in other districts of the state. Sure Start could be replicated throughout the country," says Dr Rajan. It is not necessary to reinvent the wheel.



Ram Baksh Singh in his Sumo. His wife Haroonisa, the sarpanch, is at the back

Men and women form the MOMS Committee. Improved maternal care is explained to expectant mothers. The men handle logistics, like ensuring blood transfusion and transportation.

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
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Reva scales up with GM

India can be global hub for small electric cars

Civil Society News
New Delhi

LAKSHMAN ANAND

COLLABORATION between General Motors and the Reva Electric Car Co. will for the first time make battery-operated cars widely available in India.

The Reva is admired as India's only original car. Drive it down a street and people turn to look. Its innovative technology and maintenance-free performance are talked about. As a green automobile, ownership in itself is a statement.

Yet close to a decade after it was launched, the Reva accounts for a mere fraction of the vehicles on Indian roads. Even in car-crazy Delhi only 200 are on the road. Altogether, 3,000 Revas have been sold in India and abroad.

Under the tie-up with GM, the Spark will go electric using Reva technology. The Reva will continue to be produced as a separate car. Both cars will be available at all GM dealerships. The arrangement will most likely end the Reva's isolation in the automobile industry.

Another version of the Reva, redesigned by Dilip Chhabria and with a new battery that will ensure more mileage, will on offer abroad.

For GM too this is a boost. Long known for producing guzzlers, it needs Reva's cutting-edge technologies at a time when the world wants smaller and cleaner cars.

So, will this swapping of genes shape the Indian market for green automobiles? Will Reva find new success by relying on GM's muscle and will GM thrive on Reva's nimble inventiveness?

Civil Society Spoke to Reva's founder, **Chetan Maini**, on the implications of the deal.

Are electric vehicles at a tipping point in India?

I do believe more and more people are looking at electric vehicles these days. Electric cars are the highest growing area in the market today. I think for the first time in 15 years things have fallen into place. The governments are aware of climate change and are more active about combating it, the consumers are more inclined to make greener choices and the high oil prices of last year have made many people consider



switching to electric vehicles.

The global trend in the automotive sector is towards small (and) electric cars.

India can become the global hub for small electric cars.

What led Reva to tie up with General Motors?

We are extremely happy with the General Motors (GM) tie-up. We decided on the partnership as we felt the need to change the way we drive and decrease the automotive industry's long dependence on petroleum. Our decision to collaborate with GM will make electric cars more affordable; reduce time to market and increase reach throughout the vast network of GM's dealership. It will enhance REVA's core competency in research and development. Our partnership with GM will help us sell our cars in every part of the country and will help create a lot of awareness, which is required for electric cars. We believe our partnership has the potential to become a trend-setter for the global automobile industry.

Our collaboration with GM allows us to distribute REVA cars through their dealerships. In the first phase starting from the first quarter of 2010, REVA cars will be sold and serviced through 30 GM dealerships across the country. This arrangement will be expanded progressively to cover all of GM's 175 dealerships.

Were there any other suitors? Why GM?

Our aim is to make India a global hub for the development and manufacture of electric vehicles and related technologies. We have worked on this

partnership for over 10 months doing feasibility studies and already have a working prototype. We intend to make this collaboration symbiotic with both partners providing their strengths to it like GM's ability to develop platforms and our capabilities in developing electric drive trains and control systems. GM has the expertise and we have the technology that can complement each other and hence we went ahead with this collaboration. We believe this is a win-win situation for us. There will be applications in completely different market segments and other vehicle types that Reva would also look at in the future.

So now there will be two cars out of your stable, the GM Spark and the Reva. What is your strategy for brand-positioning?

We launched our new car REVA NXR at the recently concluded Frankfurt Motor Show. With that you will find a paradigm shift in design with style inputs from Dilip Chhabria, allowing for flexibility and scope for design agility for the future. The design integrates structure and material in a way that it makes it highly tactile, both visually and kinaesthetically. It breaks away from the norm and sets new design standards. REVA NXR represents a futuristic design and comes with many user-friendly technologies. It will appeal to those who not only are environmentally conscious but also style conscious. REVA NXR will make green stylish! We believe it will usher in "cool commuting" for the urban commuters.

Our understanding is that the REVA NXR and GM Spark electric will appeal to different customer seg-

ments as they are styled very differently. We strongly feel that the consumer of electric cars should have options to choose which will help increased penetration of electric cars in the market.

What are the possibilities of Reva being swallowed up because of the GM tie-up?

Today we are trying to make a difference in the country by reducing carbon emissions and creating emission-free mobility. It's in this bigger picture that we believe that REVA adds a lot of value to this collaboration. We will see our technologies develop more and will see widespread usage of our technology and enable the end-user to have cost-effective solutions.

Our business model primarily revolves around the manufacture of REVA branded cars with core EV technology which we will continue to do from the new green manufacturing plant that is coming up. Within the small car segment, we are taking the EV concept forward by licensing our technology to auto giants that will give consumers more choices for electric vehicles.

What has been the response to the Reva in Delhi after you received incentives from the state government and opened a new showroom?

As of now the response has been encouraging. It was launched in June 2008 and we have been able to reach out to the right kind of consumers who are environmental friendly and are willing to adapt to new technologies. But still, as we mentioned, it is a new technology we will need some time to change the mindset of people.

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Dhriiti has cure for unemployment

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

NIDHI Arora, Anirban Gupta and Arindam Dasgupta were poised for long and successful corporate careers. They had post-graduate degrees in management from prestigious colleges. But hefty pay packages and international postings left them cold.

Instead, in 2004, they co-founded Dhriiti, a non-profit in Delhi that works to build the spirit of entrepreneurship among the next generation of Indians. Dhriiti believes unleashing entrepreneurial zeal is the real long-term solution to India's two biggest challenges – unemployment and under-employment.

Over the last five years, Dhriiti has trained more than 1,500 young people between the ages of 16 and 22. They have helped launch 93 enterprises that have, in turn, created 235 direct jobs and provided incremental income to another 1,500 people.

These statistics, of course, are encouraging. But, the founder team's diagnosis says unemployment and under-employment require more intensive treatment.

"Unemployment is a disease and we have an integrated, balanced approach to managing it. We deploy both preventive care and curative care mechanisms. In preventive care, we attempt to make entrepreneurs of tomorrow while our curative programme deals with requirements needed to improve the immediate situation," explains Anirban Gupta, co-founder.

The curative care focuses on creating small, rural enterprises that are mainly skill-based. Dhriiti calls it Micro Enterprise Development and Management (MEDM). In Assam, one of its key regions of focus in addition to Delhi and Jharkhand, Dhriiti has done this by setting up arecanut leaf plate manufacturing units.

The programme was started in February 2005. Now there are 45 production units that have made more than 1.2 million plates. Around 350 people have got indirect employment and farmers have made over Rs 2 lakhs.

Dhriiti believes arecanut leaf plate manufacturing can be a Rs100 crore industry for the northeast by 2015. It is also developing clusters of bamboo mat weavers as a feeder industry to the bamboo plywood industry in Assam's Barpeta and Baska districts.

But it is their commitment to 'discovering' entrepreneurs that Dhriiti believes sets them apart from other entrepreneurship development programmes.

"We finish where most other programmes begin. We help identify and embolden individuals that have it in them to create value, to be active citizens. Entrepreneurs can be discovered. Our training helps us do this. We have a unique methodology that is based on self-discovery. Attitude, knowledge and skills are critical components of our training," explains Nidhi Arora, director and co-founder of Dhriiti.

Dhriiti's Entrepreneurship Development Cell



Arindam Dasgupta, Nidhi Arora and Anirban Gupta



Amit now runs a coaching institute

(EDC) formulates, conducts and manages the training programmes, all of which are designed in-house. The training is conducted over 40 hours and has four key modules – Knowing Self, Building Skills for Entrepreneurial Traits, Management Skills and Creating Just Enterprises.

Twenty-three year old Amit Kataria runs Rose Coaching Institute in Gurgaon's Choma village, and vouches for Dhriiti's intense training. "Their trainer was the first person to believe in me. I had no self-confidence. The training opened the world to me. They urged me to do something that would benefit me and the community around me," says Amit, who is paralysed from waist below.

In November 2006, Amit underwent Dhriiti's *Ek Naya Aasman* training workshop for young people. During the course of the six-month programme, he began work on his coaching institute to provide neighbourhood children access to valuable computer know-how.

In less than three years, his institute has already taught more than 450 people, from primary school students to college graduates. Around 80 students of his computer class have bagged jobs in private and public sector companies. Amit himself was recently awarded the YES Business Plan Award.

In Delhi, apart from *Ek Naya Aasman*, Dhriiti's EDC has launched initiatives like the

Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow (EoT) programme that provides entrepreneurship education to college and university students and the Budding Entrepreneurs (BE) training to orient school students.

They have worked with 852 students across Delhi's leading educational institutions like the Shri Ram College for Commerce, Miranda House, Ramjas College, Gargi College and Mount Carmel School.

"We are often accused of not being a real development sector organisation because we work with these rich, urban students. Our response always is that we work with all disadvantaged groups, not just the economically disadvantaged. These students are the best brains of the country. They can create immense value but often don't realise their true potential. They can generate Rs 50 lakhs a month for the country. Should they then be satisfied with making Rs 50,000 a month?" asks Nidhi.

Dhriiti is innovative in its effort to reach this target audience. Every year it organises "Take One", a weeklong travelling film festival that screens films on entrepreneurship. Panel discussions and performances follow.

Anirban says: "In fact, the best time to begin entrepreneurship education is in Class 2. Attitude building is most critical, and also the toughest to achieve. We need to start early. But, it's difficult to convince people. Till now, we have never been able to raise funds for our school programme."

On its own, Dhriiti does not extend funds or start-up capital. It links people to banks and puts them in touch with partners like the Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust (BYST) for organised funding.

"People often begin enterprises with their own savings. We want our entrepreneurs to understand feasibility, calculated risk and viability. We advise them to Dream Big But Start Small," Nidhi says. That's certainly a message Dhriiti itself seems to have internalised perfectly.

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Here's elephant poo for you

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

It's unusual for a business which uses animal dung as raw material to grow by over 150 per cent in its second year. But, Haathi Chaap, an eco-friendly paper products company in Delhi, is used to doing things differently.

Haathi Chaap, (elephant's imprint) uses paper made from elephant dung or elephant poo for its line of eye-catching stationery products. The company's tagline assures you that all its products are 'made from the finest dung available in India.'

Haathi Chaap's notebooks, coasters, bookmarks, photo frames, small clocks, carrybags and children's games are all emblazoned with a cute logo - the elephant's bum, round and plump. Products are selling without a rupee spent on clever advertising campaigns and smart marketing strategies.

"We are surprised by consumer demand," says Mahima Mehra, co-founder of the company. "We never thought people in India would want to buy paper made from animal excretion. In fact, we did not even think of selling in India initially." Mehra has been a handmade paper manufacturer and exporter for over 15 years, and her poo paper products were first marketed in Europe.

In December 2007, Haathi Chaap placed its products for sale in the India market at the popular Dastkar Nature Bazaar in Delhi. They decided to participate on an impulse because 'haathi' was the festival's theme that year. "We took very small quantities of some 20 products. And, in three days we were running out of stock," says Mahima.

Over the last two years, Haathi Chaap's growth figures are as robust as an elephant's appetite. The company grew by 75 per cent in 2007-2008 and upwards of 150 per cent in 2008-2009. They now retail from more than 10 eco-friendly stores in Delhi, Mumbai, Goa, Chennai, Pune and Bengaluru. Mahima confesses retailing is an art she's not blessed with, and there are no immediate plans for stand-alone outlets. But a loyal customer base has prodded her to launch a mail order service.

This waft of success was not the first thing her nose picked up when she encountered elephant poo. Some five years ago, Mahima was trekking up Jaipur's famous Amer Fort when she glanced down at the elephant dung lining the ramparts. Mahima was struck by how much the fibre sticking out looked like the cotton rag fibre they used to make paper. Her paper manufacturer, Vijendra Singh Shekhawat, who was with her, was intrigued too, and together they worked with the waste for around a year till they got samples which could be used commercially.

Every step taken to get there is piled with anec-



Many experiments were done on elephant poo



Factory which makes paper from elephant dung

dotes - from curious stares while collecting the dump to cajoling the region's Rajput paper makers to touch it! "Some of those experiments are too disgusting to be retold," laughs Mahima.

Haathi Chaap now has a manufacturing unit on the outskirts of Jaipur run by a family of four siblings and their parents. Dung from around 200 elephants at Amer Fort is brought here for a nine-step treatment process to produce what Mahima assures is "smell-free" paper. The unit has a capacity of 25 reams a month. Each ream has 500 sheets. On an average, though, it produces 15 reams every month.

Production is based on demand. Haathi Chaap likes its staggered, naturally-growing demand base

because it helps them be energy efficient and economical. The company knows it is competing with regular products and the label has been careful to keep prices real. Products are priced between Rs 10 and Rs 500.

"We want to mainstream the paper but we will always retain the ethos of our paper making ethics. We are eco-sustainable. We don't add any chemicals and the paper is bleach-free. In fact, when we wash the dung, we do it near a farmland so the nutrient-filled water can fertilise it," explains Mahima.

Consumer interest has them scouting around for other animal waste. In Udaipur, Haathi Chaap has worked with Lokhit Pashu-Palak Sansthan, a local NGO, to develop camel dung paper. The paper debuted at the Pushkar Festival recently, and will be on the shelves of stores by the middle of December. Mahima is keen to work with vegetable waste in *mandis*. Rhino poo also has great potential, she says.

With her easy contentment, Mahima is quite an unusual entrepreneur. But she is far-sighted, and has seen how much value waste can really generate. "We are quite happy doing this privately. But, we can work with the government to have small clusters of production units near our national reserves. It will create employment, generate tourism and recycle waste," Mahima says.

Mahima Mehra +91.9811312616,
visit www.haathichaap.com

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Adani builds, MoEF bends

KANCHI KOHLI & MANSHI ASHER

THE first 100 days of Jairam Ramesh's term as Minister of State have seen the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in the news like never before. Conveying a no-nonsense image the minister has made commitments of strict action and assurances of transparency. For instance, in a response in the Rajya Sabha, on 4 August, the Minister had warned that action

would be taken if mining activity began in the Niyamgiri Hills of Orissa for which the company had only been granted an in-principle forest clearance. The minister subsequently said the practice of granting in-principle forest clearances to projects would be abolished.

As per the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, any project that requires the diversion or use of forest

land for purposes that are non-forest in nature, needs to take permission from the MoEF. The current practice requires the project developer (government or private) to approach the concerned State Forest Department for such purposes. After ascertaining the facts on the ground, forest officials have to send their recommendations to the MoEF for scrutiny. If the purpose for diversion is



Dredging activity at the Mundra Port and SEZ Ltd

agreeable then the MoEF grants an in-principle approval which allows the project authorities to carry out preliminary activities specified in the letter under strict conditions. It is only after these conditions are fulfilled and district level forest officials send a compliance report to the MoEF that a final clearance is granted.

What this implies is that a project proponent cannot start full fledged construction work on their project till the final approval is given. Albeit, the existence of this provision would have been effective if there was adherence to environmental laws and strong machinery on the ground to ensure compliance. In the stark absence of both, and with the presence of practices to work around legal systems to initiate construction at will, the noble intentions behind the 'in-approval' procedure stand lost as of today.

A case in point are the operations of the Mundra Port and SEZ Ltd's (MPSEZL) project in Kutch, Gujarat, which has spread itself over more than 100 square kilometres with its multiple infrastructure development activities - rail, roads, waterfront development and the works. It is almost 50 per cent complete. A lesser known but critical fact in the case is that 2008.41 hectares (1840 ha + 168.41 ha) in this project is forest land for which there exists only an 'in-principle approval' from the MoEF which was granted on 27 February, this year. So, as per MoEF's interpretation, the company could not have started any work on this project.

The history of clearance for this 2008.41 hectares of forest land, which reveals several lapses, goes back to 2004 when the company (then called Adani Chemicals) was granted an in-principle approval for diversion of this land for a saltworks project. The clearance granted clearly laid down the condition that any change in land use from saltworks would require a fresh application to the MoEF under the Forest Conservation Act 1980. The Adani group did not operate any saltworks project. It was only in September 2007 that the company made an application to the MoEF for a change in land use from saltworks to other SEZ-related activities. They also subsequently made an application for transfer of forest clearance to MPSEZL. In fact local sources report that the company had started work on the SEZ way back in 2005.

When the case came up before the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the MoEF (a commit-

tee which recommends or rejects forest clearances) in March 2008 questions were raised in this regard. FAC stated that the earlier impact assessment studies were no longer valid and that a fresh proposal for the SEZ would have to be made. But in a volte face the same FAC committee granted an in-principle approval to the change in land use application in April 2008. This subsequently came under the scanner of the Central

The clearance granted clearly laid down the condition that any change in land use from saltworks would require a fresh application to the MoEF under the Forest Conservation Act.

Empowered Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Court pursuant to the orders of the court which required the CEC to scrutinise the FAC decisions till an ongoing case was resolved. The CEC in its report of July 2008 strongly questioned the reversal in the FAC's decision and recommended that the application of the company and in-principle clearance be rejected. Based on this the Supreme Court in October 2008 ordered the state government and company to make a fresh proposal for the forest clearance. A fresh application was made and yet again an in-principle approval was granted in February, this time for the MPSEZL.

This forest clearance is integrally linked with the waterfront development activities of the MPSEZL under which they plan to set up four ports, a desalination plant and other related activities. The environment clearance through another mandatory procedure under the Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006, was granted on 27 January. Ironically this environment clearance letter mentions nothing about the forest land required which is a standard practice and clause for projects where forest land diversion is required. The construction on this project is on a

fast-track at the project site with dredging, road construction and so on.

A closer look at the facts reveal that it is on official as well as on the company's own records that the forest land diversion is needed for its waterfront development activities. On 13 August, 2008, JK Vyas, Director, (Environment), Government of Gujarat had written to A Senthilvel at MoEF, New Delhi, indicating this amongst other issues with the waterfront activities. MPSEZL also acknowledges this link in a letter to the Gujarat Pollution Control Board dated 24 December, 2008.

In the back and forth between the two in-principle forest clearances, work on a large part of the railway, road and the West Port (one of the four ports in the waterfront development plan), all around the 2008 hectares has neared completion. As per the Guidelines on the Forest Conservation Act, MPSEZL should not have even started any construction on the non-forest land. Section 4.4 of these official guidelines say that sometimes state governments or project authorities might start work on non-forest land in anticipation of an approval. So, "though the provisions of the Act may not have technically been violated by starting of work on non-forest lands, expenditure incurred on works on non-forest lands may prove to be in fructuous if diversion of forest land involved is not approved."

Ultimately the question is that if the forest land is yet to be diverted for the waterfront activities on record, how is it that MPSEZL has begun construction on its West Port and is dredging kilometres into the sea without the final approval? And how did the local administration overlook this lapse?

The Mundra case does illustrate that the 'in-principle' clearance to diversion of forest lands provides ample grey area for "adjustments" to the benefit of the project proponents, who treat "in-principle" as "final". But even as the MoEF seeks to discontinue its practice of in-principle clearances, it is not clear as to how they seek to deal with violators for whom it does not matter whether the clearances are preliminary or final. When facts are hidden, the public is misled and the concerned regulatory authority has failed to monitor, it is an indication that the problem is deeper - that of no accountability towards the environment and its governance system.

Kanchi Kohli is a member of Kalpavriksh environmental action group and Manshi Asher is an independent researcher-activist working on social and environmental justice issues

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READ US. WE READ YOU.

India's worthless canals

HIMANSHU THAKKAR & SWARUP BHATTACHARYA

IN 15 years from 1991-92 to 2006-07, there has been absolutely no addition to net irrigated areas by canals from Major and Medium Irrigation Projects as per official data from the Union Ministry of Agriculture based on actual field data from states. From April 1991 to March 2007, the country spent over Rs 142,000 crores on major and medium irrigation projects with the objective of increasing canal irrigated areas.

We have received this information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. It is also available on the official website from the Union Ministry of Agriculture. These shocking figures show that indeed this is a trend not a snapshot between the two years. The official data shows that this whole expenditure of over Rs 142 000 crore has not led to the addition of a single ha in the net irrigated area by canals in India for the whole of this 15-year period. In fact, the areas irrigated by such projects have reduced by a massive 2.44 million ha during this period.

This should be cause of very serious concern and the Ministry of Water Resources (MWR), the states and the Planning Commission will have to answer some difficult questions. But the MWR, Planning Commission and all the other official agencies have not realised the folly of continued investment of majority of our water resources investments for big irrigation projects. About two-thirds of all Five Year Plan budgets under water resources development continues to be used for major and medium irrigation projects, including during the ongoing 11th Five Year Plan.

In this period, the MWR has been claiming (for example in the working group report on water resources for the 11th Plan and additional information thereafter) that the country has created additional irrigation potential of 10.5 million ha and utilisation of irrigation potential of additional 7.82 million ha. But the official data on the ground shows how false these claims are. The MWR has been using such claims to push more allocations for investment in medium and major irrigation projects. The MWR has proposed, for example, that in the 11th Plan, an allocation of Rs 165 900 crores should be made for the ongoing major and medium irrigation projects. The available facts show that this is likely to be a total waste of public money.

The net irrigated area by canals all over the country was 17.79 million ha in 1991-92. In all the following years, till 2006-07, the latest year for which data is available, the net irrigated area by canals has not only been lower than 17.79 m ha,

but has been more or less consistently falling. The Net Irrigated Area by all sources increased from 48.02 m ha in 1990-91 to 60.86 m ha by 2006-07.

Similarly Gross Irrigated area (if two irrigated crops are taken in a year on a given area, that area is counted twice in estimation of gross irrigated area, but once in estimation of net irrigated area) for total from all sources has increased from 65.5 m ha in 1991-92 to 85.5 m ha in 2006-07. This increase in all India net and gross irrigated areas has been



possible due to the increase in groundwater irrigated area from 24.69 m ha in 1990-91 to 35.91 m ha in 2006-07. In fact, the increase in groundwater irrigated area has helped the MWR suppress the reality of the non performance of big dams.

Figures of gross and net irrigated areas from canals for four major states (Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Jammu and Kashmir) for the period under discussion for which necessary data is available also show that even gross irrigated area by canals has shown a consistent decreasing trend, though we do not have nation wide figures for gross irrigated areas by canals for these years.

In majority of the years during 1991-2007 (with the possible exception of 2002 and 2004), the rainfall has been normal or above normal. So it cannot be claimed that this trend is due to low rainfall.

Some of the reasons for this situation include: Siltation of reservoirs and canals, lack of maintenance of the irrigation infrastructure, water intensive crops in the head reaches, non building of canals, over development (beyond the carrying capacity) of projects in a basin, water logging and salinisation, diversion of water for non irrigation uses and increased exploitation of groundwater. In some cases, the additional area added by new projects is not reflected in the figures as the area irri-

gated by older projects, due to reasons mentioned above, is reducing. Indeed the World Bank's 2005 report *India's Water Economy: Bracing for a Turbulent Future* showed that annual financial requirement for maintenance of India's irrigation infrastructure (which is the largest in the world) is Rs 17,000 crores, but less than 10 per cent of that amount is available and most of it does not result in physical maintenance of the infrastructure.

In some over developed basins, the new projects are like zero sum games, since they would be taking away water for some of the downstream areas. Optimistic hydrological projections, which are almost universal in big irrigation projects, mean that projects there, in any case, won't have sufficient water in the basin to provide the projected benefits. Climate change is likely to make this situation worse.

These findings have grave implications. First, they very clearly imply that the thousands of crores the country is spending each year on big irrigation projects is not leading to any additional net irrigated area. Secondly, the real increase in irrigated area is all coming from groundwater irrigation and groundwater is the lifeline of irrigated agriculture.

Lastly, this raises many accountability issues: Who is responsible for deciding on these wrong priorities and what are the consequences which will follow? This trend indicates that instead of spending money on new major and medium irrigation projects, the country would benefit more (at lesser costs and impacts) if we spend money on proper repair and maintenance of the existing infrastructure, taking measures to reduce siltation of reservoirs and at the same time concentrate on rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and regulation and on rainfed areas. On the groundwater front, we need to make preservation of existing groundwater recharge systems and augmentation of the same our top priority.

Even as the Planning Commission starts the mid-term review of the 11th Five Year Plan, this is a golden opportunity to make radical changes in our water resources development plans. If we miss this opportunity, the combined impacts of the wrong priorities we have pursued so far and global warming will result in us having neither the water required for the people or the economy, nor the cash to maintain and sustain existing benefits.

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Time to tackle e-waste

RAVI AGARWAL

LAKSHMAN ANAND

EVERY single gadget we use will sooner or later end up in a trash can. Computers, mobile phones, DVD players, TV sets, will all be junk. From a computer penetration density of less than 10 per 1000 population in 2005, India will exceed 60 per 1000 in 2010. Mobile phones will touch 300 million and TV sets over 140 million. Even today, despite its low density in electronics, India produces over 400,000 tonnes of electronic waste each year and this is rising three times faster than the municipal waste stream.

Studies have shown that Mumbai and Delhi top the list in e-waste generation. Delhi generates over 12,000 tonnes annually while Mumbai produces around 19,000 tonnes. Kolkata and Chennai are catching up with about 9,000 and 10,000 tonnes. Waste from other cities often lands up in Delhi, the traditional hub of recycling with connections to towns nearby.

Globally, between 20 to 50 million tonnes of electronic scrap is generated annually.

This e-waste is one of the most hazardous waste streams worldwide. Electronics contain over 50 hazardous chemicals or heavy metals. A cathode ray tube (screen) could have over 1.5 kilos of lead. Inside the box there can be mercury, arsenic, cadmium, beryllium, while the plastic casing can contain brominated flame retardants (BFR). These chemicals, when released, can cause severe health impacts, some of which can be intergenerational, passing from mother to child. When recycled or dumped, these compounds are let off into the air or water or landfills. In the US more than 40 per cent of the lead in landfills comes from e-waste.

On the other hand, the reasons for recycling such waste are simple – dumped electronics contain gold, palladium, copper, all precious metals which can be recovered for use. However, the process of proper recovery is hi-tech, complicated and requires vast amounts of investment.

Globally, e-waste is illegally traded. Waste from the US finds its way to Nigeria and South Africa. Waste is 're-routed' through the Middle East and dumped in India. Waste from Japan finds its way into China through Hong Kong. Everywhere, poor communities rummage through it and are exposed to its hazards. Recognising this danger, over 70 countries including China, Malaysia and Indonesia have banned the import of e-waste. However, India has not taken any action and, in fact, recently allowed such imports.

The logic of such waste trade is simple. Waste follows the path of least economic resistance. Cheap labour and lax environment regulations

Most developed countries and some developing countries including China have legislated e-waste. It is the need of the hour.

encourage dumping since it is lucrative for the exporter and importer at the cost of worker health and the environment. This was the rationale behind the United Nation's Basel Convention, which is a legally binding international treaty to regulate the transboundary movement of hazardous wastes globally. India ratified the treaty in 1995, but it has a poor record of implementation.

NGOs tracking such imports found that e-waste comes into India mislabeled as 'mixed metal scrap.' The shipping papers make it look as if the waste is coming from the Middle East and not Europe or the US. In 2005, the UK government acknowledged the illegal movement of over 23,000 tonnes of e-waste from its shores. Subsequently, this year, it acknowledged illegal shipments to Ghana. Much of the waste is from the US since it is not a party to the Basel Convention. In 2003, huge quantities of e-waste were found dumped in coastal villages in

China, where it wreaked havoc. Another route taken is through the trade of 'second hand goods.'

The e-waste trade also brings in issues of data privacy. UK consumers who junked their old computers were shocked to find personal details like their bank accounts and e-mails appearing from recycling shops in Nigeria through their hard disks. Proper disposal is in the interests of the consumer.

Unfortunately, the Indian Government has been slow to react. It did publish voluntary guidelines on e-waste in 2007. But, being voluntary in nature, the guidelines did not lead to much implementation. One of the key challenges in e-waste is its collection. Proper collection can help divert waste to those facilities which are geared to deal with it. Since such waste is generated from households and businesses, across cities and towns, it needs an extensive collection mechanism.

One feasible way is through the implementation of a two-step system. First, collected waste can be taken to a dismantling centre where

it is disassembled manually. This is essentially a labour intensive operation which is followed even in countries like Switzerland. It helps create segregated waste streams like plastics, metals, tubes etc which are diverted to specialised processors. Such a regulated 'channel' however needs regulation and the help of industry through an extended producer responsibility (EPR) regime. It can protect existing livelihoods, shifting them to less hazardous operations, and also create jobs.

Currently, a jointly prepared draft legislation which contains the elements of EPR and livelihood protection has been drawn up by NGOs and Industry Associations like MAIT, ELCINA, etc. The draft has been presented for consideration to the Indian Government. It is pertinent to mention that most developed countries and some developing countries including China have legislated e-waste. It is the need of the hour in India.

Several recyclers have set up operations in India. These are mostly in the early stages of investments, though many have started trading in e-waste, often collecting and exporting to their counterparts overseas. Others have tried to organise recovery operations, though they do not meet the required standards as yet. Through these interests there is a growing demand to allow imports of e-waste, rather than set up collection systems here. In fact, in July, one recycler was granted permission to import 8000 tonnes of e-waste annually from the US and UK, even though it is illegal for

Continued on next page

UP's amazing women farmers

BHARAT DOGRA

ANY discussion on agriculture is always about male farmers. But go to any farm and you will see women doing a range of important agricultural operations. Women are particularly visible on small and marginal farms. The overwhelming majority of farmers in India belong to this category. Yet the needs and perspectives of women farmers seldom get attention.

The Gorakhpur Environment Action Group (GEAG), a leading voluntary organisation in eastern Uttar Pradesh (UP) is correcting this imbalance by making women farmers the focal point of all their agricultural development work. GEAG emphasises improved scientific use of local resources, reduced dependence on costly inputs like chemical fertilisers and pesticides, protection of the environment particularly soil health and encouraging innovation.

With the help of self-help groups, women have reduced or removed their dependence on money-lenders. They have improved their farming techniques, leased in extra land, purchased more dairy animals or taken up other activities to boost their income. GEAG's training is showing results.

The empowerment of women farmers has been helped by a state campaign called *Aaroh* in which GEAG has been a leading partner. This campaign emphasised the important role and equal rights of women farmers, including the need to have land records in the joint name of husband and wife.

Dhaneshwari Devi is a middle-aged woman from a landless, backward caste family in Avadhpur village of Sardarnagar block in Gorakhpur district. The established notion of a woman from a weaker section is that she would be very hesitant to speak to a stranger. Surprisingly, she completely defies this description and, sitting among a group of villagers, takes the lead in answering most questions.

Whatever little land her family cultivates has to be obtained on a sharecropping basis. Yet, Dhaneshwari gives no indication of being vulnerable or helpless. Rather she shows all the signs of being strong enough to help the entire village if the need arises. What she lacks by way of resources or assets, she makes up by sheer grit and determination. And the confidence shows.

The space outside where we are sitting is a brick and cement structure with a chair, two benches and a clock. "This used to be made of thatch till some time ago," Dhaneshwari says with pride, "and the clock which you see on the wall is a prize I received

for my work among women in the village."

She answers calls on her mobile phone. A few Lucknow numbers have been scribbled on an envelope by her. "I dial these helpline numbers when we have serious complaints about the improper functioning of the rural employment guarantee scheme. And then they have to take some action." She also proudly brings out sheets of documents



Dhaneshwari Devi

obtained by relentlessly pursuing right to information applications right up to the State Information Commission in Lucknow. The information she has gleaned indicates that corruption has taken place in afforestation work.

Earlier she played an important role in forming self-help groups in her village. But now she has widened the scope of her work to other villages. Dhaneshwari is the secretary of a greater federation of village self-help groups. As secretary, she is responsible and ready for bigger challenges and has participated actively in several demonstrations outside her village. Dhaneshwari is also pioneering vermi-composting work in this area. She was elected ward member and served her area well.

Another woman leader is Prabhavati of Dudhai village. It was truly a pleasure to visit the garden

and farm cultivated by her and her husband Suryabhan. They own only 1.5 acres but use this patch very intensively. There was paddy, millets, groundnut, oilseeds, lentils, a variety of vegetables and fruits like guava, papaya, mango, blackberries and mulberry. There were also trees and shrubs with pest repellent properties, trees of timber value, several medicinal herbs, spices like ginger, turmeric and clove and bamboo. Satyendra Tripathi, a coordinator of GEAG, said that Prabhavati is able to grow 52 crops in a year.

It was instructive to see how gender equality has been established in this family. To some extent gender roles had even been reversed smoothly. Prabhavati played a leading role in answering our questions and taking us around the garden. She was more articulate. Suryabhan did not resent this and worked with a very cooperative spirit. While Prabhadevi was busy answering our questions he quietly slipped away and served us guavas with salt.

Prabhavati is now a member of the core group of GEAG. She is also a master-trainer and has travelled far and wide to Delhi, Lucknow and Wardha. Her small farm has been visited by senior officials.

The extent to which the agricultural practices promoted by GEAG can benefit small and marginal farmers is evident from the results achieved on the farm of Ramrati in Sarpatha village, Block Compereganj. Ramrati and her husband Rambahal grow 32 crops a year, apart from fruit trees.

On a farm of just one acre owned by her family (sometimes she leases in half an acre) she has been able to earn about Rs 33,633, apart from feeding a nutritious, organic diet to an 11-member family.

Ramrati said there is hardly anything she doesn't grow. Before coming into GEAG, she had concentrated on rice and wheat. But now she grows an astounding variety of crops – sugarcane, banana, turai, potato, cauliflower, cabbage, spinach, carrot, radish, (up to 2.5 feet long). She has four animal-sand all cultivation is done using organic manure and home-made pest repellents.

Ramrati is not just a model farmer. She is the treasurer of her local federation, a member of the greater federation, coordinator of a farming school and the secretary of an SHG called Ashtbhuji. She also trains other farmers in mixed farming.

Women farmers like Ramrati and Prabhavati are strengthening the role of women in farming.

Continued from previous page

India, as a signatory to the Basel Convention, to trade with the US in hazardous waste.

Ultimately, however, electronic products have to be made less hazardous. Many of the toxic materials being used in electronics are replaceable with safer alternatives. In the European Union, since 2006, a law called the RoHS (Removal of Hazardous Substances Act) mandates this for six substances and the list is set to grow. China and Japan too have

similar laws. With most component level electronics being mass manufactured in China, and south-east Asia and mainly assembled elsewhere in the world, such a law is also slowly making materials in global markets less toxic. Large brands like Dell and HP are already shifting to cleaner materials. Likewise, some companies like Nokia have started intensive consumer level collection systems in India. However, most of this waste is exported overseas and till now there is little industry investment

towards creating acceptable recycling infrastructure in India. There has been more talk than action!

Alongside, consumer awareness in India is low. Consumer pressure for green products is driving manufacturers and green product design worldwide. No longer are people satisfied to see only the 'recycle' symbol on their devices. They are also getting concerned about how and where these are recycled.

Ravi Agarwal is Director, Toxics Link, New Delhi

Living

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

National awards rain on PSBT



Merajur Rahman Baruah's Shifting Prophecy

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

THE Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) is a bit of a miracle. In an era where mainstream broadcast outlets hold sway, the organisation has taken less than a decade to emerge as an influential player on the Indian independent documentary filmmaking scene. It has created an effective and viable alternative platform to promote diversity of modes of expressions, highlight the concerns of a complex nation and empower independent documentary makers, especially those that are young.

Indeed, PSBT's relevance in the current scenario cannot be overestimated. In recent years, the Indian media industry has developed in leaps and bounds and its commercial returns have multiplied dramatically. But in the mad scramble for eyeballs and profits, the stories of real people that are crying out to be told have dropped out of the frame. PSBT has done much to rectify the situation thanks to the weekly slot that it has for its films on Doordarshan. So every year, it delivers 52 socially and politically relevant films to the national broadcaster.

Veteran filmmaker and Dadasaheb Phalke Award



Vani Subramanian's Ayodhya Gatha

winner Shyam Benegal, a member of the PSBT board of trustees, had said a few years ago: "PSBT in less than five years achieved for the documentary film in India what other organisations have not been able to do in fifty." He wasn't exaggerating.

The slew of national and international awards and accolades that PSBT has won over the years bears testimony to its rapidly growing impact. As many as four PSBT films, each conceptually and stylistically distinct from the other three, have made it to the winners' list of the latest National Awards. PSBT's highest point came when at the National Film Awards for 2003 it walked away with half a dozen prizes.

PSBT is the result of a unique partnership between a private initiative and the state-controlled national broadcaster. Its board of trustees, apart from Benegal, includes two other Dadasaheb Phalke Award winners – Mrinal Sen and Adoor Gopalakrishnan.

In Adoor's words, "PSBT is the realisation of a bold and imaginative promise to the people of India... a promise from the community of image

makers to the public, to create content that reflects the wealth of experiences, traditions and cultures that we are heir to..."

In eight years, the trust has lived up to its promise, having commissioned upwards of 400 films, of which 360 are already in circulation. Through the national broadcaster, its films reach 600 million viewers. That apart, these films have travelled to more than 350 major film festivals, winning over 70 awards.

But much more than the numbers, what sets PSBT apart is the sheer range of themes and concerns that the films in its steadily expanding catalogue addresses. More than 300 of PSBT's films are now in the US Library of Congress,

which distributes them internationally.

The four National Award-winning PSBT films of the year – Vipin Vijay's *Poomaram* (A Flowering Tree), Merajur Rahman Baruah's *Shifting Prophecy*, Suvendu Chatterjee and Joshy Joseph's *Making the Face* and Vani Subramanian's *Ayodhya Gatha* –



Vipin Vijay's A Flowering Tree

Continued on next page

Kurseong in a new light

Vivek S Ghatani
Kurseong

LOCATED on the route to Darjeeling from Siliguri, the little town of Kurseong is often bypassed by tourists. It is Darjeeling which receives all the attention. But now Kurseong is emerging as an eco-tourist destination in its own right.

A group of 334 youngsters under the banner of the Himalayan Ecotourist Welfare Society is working hard to draw attention to Kurseong's beauties. These are: a scenic lake, a dense forest, tea gardens, a quaint village named Chimney and an interesting museum. All you have to do is board the cute toy train and get off at Kurseong station instead of being lured away by Darjeeling.

"We want to promote our villages and natural forests for eco-tourism," says Subhash Bomzon, secretary of the society. "We will not destroy our natural resources."

Ceded to the British by the King of Sikkim in 1835, as a small village, Kurseong gained prominence in 1880, when the Darjeeling-Himalayan Railway was extended to it on 23rd August that year. Subsequently, it was made headquarters of the sub-division.

Kurseong is a clean, well kept town at an altitude of 4,860 ft. It is 33 km from Darjeeling. The toy train or the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway runs on level with the street here – one can even shop from the train window. As the train leaves the town, mist envelopes the landscape. When the clouds lift you get your first view of the mighty Mt Kanchenjunga. If you stand at Eagle's Craig you get a breathtaking view of the plains below.

White orchids grow in plenty in Kurseong. After all, its local name is Kharsang which in Lepcha means 'Land of the White Orchid'. It is an ideal



Bird's eye view of pretty Kurseong

place for those who can't tolerate high altitudes. You can walk through the tea gardens and talk to tea workers as they go about their work. There is a sericulture farm and an All India Radio Station on the Pankhabari Road, the shortest route to Darjeeling.

With its temperate climate, it is the seat of several educational institutions. Among the most reputed are the old St Mary's School founded in 1881, St Helen's School for girls, Victoria Boy's School and Himali Boarding School.

"Even before the toy train came to Darjeeling, it was the tea gardens which were the mainstay of the local economy. Today the gardens are in decline and the plight of tea workers is pathetic. We have declared this place a heritage ecotourism park since it has many historical remnants of the colonial era," says Bomzon.

One pleasant walk is to the Nagari Spur from where you can get a magnificent view of forests and tea gardens. Another is a ride to a place called Chimney. This village is named after a huge chimney which was constructed by the British. The chimney is now a tourist attraction. You can get plenty of freshly grown vegetables in Kurseong. Members of the society are promoting home stays

for tourists. About 25 home stays have been identified in villages like Chimney, Bagora, Latpanchar and Sittong. In fact Sittong is covered with forest and has the Namthing Lake which is maintained by the forest department. The lake is home to the endangered Himalayan Salamander locally known as *gora*. Situated at an altitude of 4250 ft above sea level, this scintillating lake is the natural habitat for rare species. Namthing Lake is the second place where you can see the Himalayan Salamander in the wild. The other place is Jorpokhri.

"The home stays are owned by local people. The charges are minimal. It is inclusive of food. We have also organised local entertainment by forming cultural troupes. We also provide horses at Chimney," said Bomzon.

The members have trained guides who walk the tourists through natural forests.

"We tell the tourist the importance of this forest for the local environment. We also offer three trekking routes which give an exotic view of the forest, its flora and fauna," says Bomzon.

Tourists have started turning up. The youngsters feel they can develop their ideas further.

Help Tourism, an agency based in Siliguri, has been helping the society since two years. "We are working closely with the forest department. Though there is no monetary support from them, we gain technical support. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway authorities are helping us immensely," says Bomzon.

Some of the places Bomzon offers to take tourists to are the Namthing Lake, Mirik Lake, the trek along the forest of Chimney, Bagora, Latpanchar and Sittong, a view of the British chimney and Netaji Museum. "Our ecotourism package benefits local people. We have members who are all local unemployed youth. But we need to publicise our efforts," sighs Bomzon.

Continued from previous page

reflect both the diversity and the nature of the films that PSBT backs.

"Our aim," says PSBT managing trustee Rajiv Mehrotra, "is to cast the net as wide as possible and expand the pool of Indian documentary filmmakers." Risk-taking is something that he and his team encourage. "We let young filmmakers push the boundaries," he says. "The result might often be less than satisfactory, but we do not mind that at all. We always tell filmmakers to go ahead and try out new things without being afraid of failure."

But when a PSBT-backed documentary project does achieve success, it represents acknowledgement as much for the spirit of independence as for the parameters of excellence that the organisation actively pursues.

Poomaram, made by Kozhikode-based Vipin Vijay, who learnt the ropes at the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata, is a perfect case in point. Inspired by Judy Grahn's *Metaformic Theory* as espoused in *Blood, Bread and Roses: How*

Menstruation Created the World, the film explores the link between menstrual rituals and human culture. The National Awards jury lauded *Poomaram* "for its creative use of visual craft".

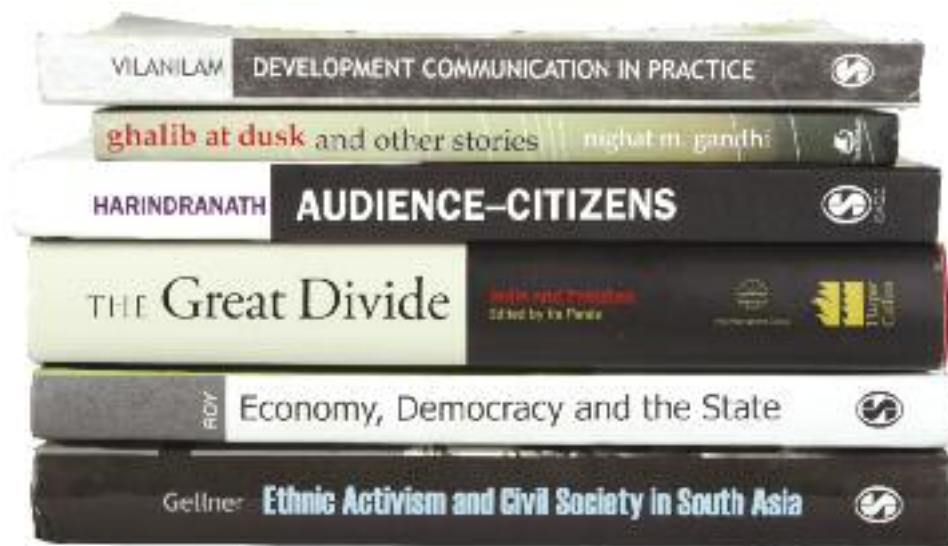
The winner of this year's National Award for Best Film on Social Issues, *Shifting Prophecy*, focuses on the struggle of rural Muslim women in Tamil Nadu to break free from patriarchal and religious shackles. The Best Film on Family Welfare, *Making the Face*, takes viewers to another end of the country. The film, which is, according to the jury's citation, "a multi-layered exploration of the issue of alternative sexuality in the politically troubled state of Manipur", narrates the story of a transsexual makeup artist.

Ayodhya Gatha, winner of the best narration/voiceover National Award for the director Vani Subramanian herself, probes the minds of common people in the Uttar Pradesh town where Indian politics took a tumble over a decade and a half ago when Hindu fundamentalists demolished the Babri Masjid. The battle of the bigots left a trail of bitterness that Ayodhya is still struggling to come

to terms with and Subramanian treads through this landscape with deep understanding and sensitivity, a hallmark of all the better PSBT films.

The catalogue of PSBT reality and documentary films is an eclectic mix of themes, visions, forms and regional perceptions. While it has established names like the Manipuri veteran Aribam Syam Sharma, Oriya auteur and film academic Nirad Mohapatra, and multiple Green Oscar-winning conservation and wildlife filmmaker Mike Pandey, besides a host of leading Indian documentary makers like Reena Mohan, Madhushree Dutta, Ranjan Palit, Arvind Sinha and Vasudha Joshi, its library is dominated by younger, lesser-known filmmakers.

It is pretty obvious that PSBT is not so much about the high-profile personalities that it has on board as about the difference that it is beginning to make in the sphere of Indian documentary filmmaking. It has to a great extent reclaimed access to the medium for its rightful owner – the public. There might be a long way to go yet, but the movement from here on can only be forward.



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

Random shelf help



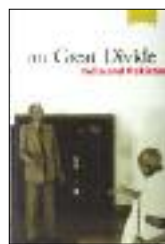
ETHNIC ACTIVISM AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTH ASIA

David N Gellner (Edited)

Rs 750

Sage

These are six well-researched articles on ethnic activism in South Asia. A fairly wide range has been examined. Included are Dalit activism, Dalit Christian activism and Nepali Dalit activism. Hindu nationalism and the strategy used to mobilise the youth in Udaipur is the subject of one paper. Another is about Hindu nationalists and their work among tribals in Chhattisgarh - clearly showing that development issues taken up by anyone results in a support base. There is a chapter on activism by the Tamil diaspora and several on activism in Nepal. A close look at Thangmi activism reveals how this ethnic group in the Darjeeling region courted its counterpart in Nepal to get itself recognised as a scheduled tribe community in India. At a time when South Asia is bubbling over with ethnic aspirations, this is an important collection of contemporary insights into the politics of identity behind activism in South Asia.



THE GREAT DIVIDE INDIA AND PAKISTAN

Edited: Ira Pande

Rs 495

Harper Collins

This is an excellent collection of essays from writers and journalists on both sides of the border. The first two sections are political. Writers examine the ideological foundations of the two States and the different paths they took.

By and large, Indian writers accept that Pakistan's hostility is here to stay. Pakistan needs hostility

with India to keep its crumbling country together. How do we deal with it? Ashok Malik, in an interesting essay, writes about the changing character of Pakistani hostility and its evolution from the unfinished business of partition to plain and simple envy. In an insightful essay, Ashutosh Varshney suggests Pakistan turn its anti-Indian attitude into treating India as an adversary, not as an enemy. It can compete with India culturally, socially and economically instead of politically.

Mukul Kesavan in *Bad Manners* dissects Indian and Pakistani perceptions of secularism. Pervez Hoodbhoy's essay, *Towards Theocracy?* traces the Saudi-ization of Pakistan and its deadly consequences. Sonia Jabbar writes about a disturbing meeting with a terrorist in Kashmir. The third and fourth parts of the book explore cultural links and here the pace is easy. Read Salima Hashmi's *Art on Edge* and the rise of women artists in Pakistan. There is Shiv Vishwanath's evocative tribute to Manto and Rehan Ansari's profile of a cricket commentator. Alok Rai writes on Urdu and Ira Pande does a good piece on food. The book has classic pictures from Kulwant Roy's unseen collection. There are pictures from General Dubey's *Razmak Collection*. He spent seven years in Waziristan.



GHALIB AT DUSK

Nighat M Gandhi

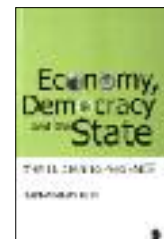
Rs 200

Tranquebar

Most South Asian writers tend to situate their stories in their own countries. But Nighat M Gandhi is unusual. She grew up in Bangladesh and Pakistan and moved to India after her marriage. Her stories are imbued with the flavour of Allahabad, Ahmedabad and Karachi. She brings alive the sights and sounds of each region she writes about. Gandhi

captures the reader with her stories of ordinary people. Her stories can keep you awake.

Read *Fishing at Haleji*, about Maqsood Ali, a deeply conservative man confronted with his daughter's illness. *In Lieu of Gold*, is about Sultan, a rag collector who lives in Orangi slum, his green fingers and his touching tribute to his wife. *Trains* is set in Allahabad and is about the frustrations of a bad marriage. In *Desire By Any Other Name* a handicapped man seeks sexual love from a prostitute. Perhaps the author's deep insights into human character have something to do with her being a mental health counsellor.



ECONOMY DEMOCRACY AND THE STATE THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE

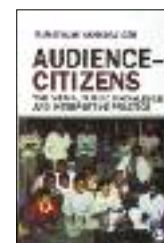
Ramashray Roy

Rs 650

Sage

The author, a political scientist, examines the changing patterns of economic growth and how these influenced government policies. Development of agriculture and industry have always been political issues and successive governments have formulated policies keeping voters from these segments in mind.

The author traces the historical evolution of the Indian state, why economics became so central to policy, strategies of social transformation with economic growth as a lever, adoption of the centrally planned economic growth model, its different stages and results. There is an assessment of how far governments have succeeded in fulfilling the aspirations of people. The author has devoted a big chapter to agriculture, its surprising neglect and what we could do about reviving the countryside. The book is theoretical and relevant for students of politics and economics.



AUDIENCE CITIZENS THE MEDIA, PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE AND INTERPRETIVE PRACTICE

Ramaswami Harindranath

Rs 495

Sage

The media's reach has expanded hugely. Most people either watch TV, buy a newspaper, surf the Internet, see a film or may be just listen to the radio. How do ordinary people react to media in a developing and democratic society? How far does media influence public behaviour and thought? These questions are of interest to sociologists, educators and the media.

The theme of the book is therefore very contemporary. As the author points out social and cultural factors affect the way people react to media. He offers a conceptual framework for analysing audiences, consumption patterns and citizenship. The author uses the documentary, a genre that is rising in popularity, for analysing the reaction of audiences. He also analyses audiences and film-makers in India and Britain.

Unfortunately, the book is confusing and full of academic jargon. It is exasperating to read. You need a lot of patience.

'People want development news'



DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION IN PRACTICE

India and the Millennium Development Goals

JV Vilanilam

Rs 450

Sage

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE perception that newspapers don't report much on development news has been a long-standing grouse with academics and activists. Things are changing slowly. The English-language media reports more on such topics than they did some years ago. The surprising thing is that newspapers in Kerala, India's most literate state, devote very little space to development, according to research done by Professor John V Vilanilam, former Vice-Chancellor and head, department of communication and journalism, University of Kerala.

In his book, 'Development Communication in Practice', Professor Vilanilam has analysed seven newspapers, including two in English, for seven months. His findings revealed under-representation of development news. Newspapers gave priority to global news, politics and government news. Education received good coverage but the focus was on exam results, question papers that leaked, entrance exams and so on. Unlike the English newspapers the Malayalam papers were very local.

The book has extensive chapters explaining different aspects of development communication. In an interview to *Civil Society*, Professor Vilanilam says the media's excuse that it has to cater to the market are not valid.

In your opinion, why do newspapers in Kerala, India's most literate state, report so little on development?

Theoretically, the assumption that literacy is related to development is certainly welcome. But in practice we see in Kerala and other states in India where the literacy rate is high, newspapers do not devote large space to development issues. There are economic rather than political reasons for this. More attention ought to be paid to socio-economic, political and cultural development of the areas where newspapers and other media function since I believe that the media should help in the dissemination of vital information on issues relating to the overall development of the area. Media can certainly act as catalysts, especially in Kerala.

But why don't they do it? The media owners and organisers' assumption seems to be that media users may not be interested in 'dry' development issues! There are vital issues of development which affect the daily lives of ordinary people that

can be discussed and presented in an attractive manner so that people can be enthused to participate in development activities. Development is a never-ending sociological process.

More space in the print media and more time in the electronic media can be devoted to issues such as land reforms, road safety, health problems, education, scientific attitude among the people, public health, environmental cleanliness, climate change, water shortage, corruption in public life. These and other issues affect the lives of the affluent and the deprived sections. It seems quite unreasonable and unscientific on the part of media proprietors to assume that the public is interested only in crime, violence, sex, and such other soft news.

What are the aspects of development that you feel are of particular relevance to Kerala and need to be covered better?

Kerala society faces deep problems despite its high literacy rate, the radical democratic politics of the Left, the educational progress of women and economic support from Keralites working in the Persian Gulf region and elsewhere in the world.



'In Kerala and other states where the literacy rate is high, newspapers do not devote large space to development issues.'

Some of these problems are fundamental: low industrialisation, high unemployment, lifestyle diseases including alcoholism, a high rate of suicide particularly among young women and a callous attitude to women and girls based on gender discrimination.

There are other problems such as land reforms, particularly for the backward sections of society, public safety in places of tourist interest, road safety and negligence of safety norms in water transport and even in the use of public comfort stations!

But unemployment among the educated is causing a high rate of criminalisation including even cyber crimes. Left politicians have welcomed some of the economic policies initiated by the present Union government, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), but its implementation must be monitored by the media for the sake of the people. It is a fact that Kerala lags behind in employment, industrialisation and public safety, despite its plus points.

Would you say governance has suffered because the media does not reflect the problems of society?

The connection between defects in governance and the media's indifference to social problems

has not been established yet. This is because poor governance is caused by factors such as the lack of administrative reforms. Governance can improve only when elected representatives take up social problems more vigorously and ensure fast implementation of rules and regulations passed by the legislature without narrow party interests.

Some in the media do not ignore social problems, but essential reforms in administrative systems and practices established during the colonial period are left mostly untouched. The feeling that government is of the people and whatever is beneficial to the people will have to be effectively put into practice by the administrators in a new civil-democratic spirit has not spread among the people. The media too do not follow up measures promised by the politicians, with sustained interest. The result? Many socio-economic problems highlighted one day are totally ignored the next day. Persistent follow-up is not the hallmark of modern Indian media!

Is there a need for another business model for newspapers so that they reflect real issues and draw on its relevance to boost circulation and earn revenue?

The media in India and Kerala work more or less on the same model now. Both work on global models of economic success. The bottom line in any sound business system is profit. However, institutions connected with education and the media should be motivated more by service to society than private profit because almost half the people are untouched by education and even basic literacy in this age.

People in the interiors still live in circumstances that prevailed in colonial times—poverty, ill-health, malnutrition, ignorance, superstition.

Yes, the media can boost circulation and earn more even when they turn their attention to the nation's sociological handicaps.

Why do you think the media in Kerala are disinterested in national issues and more concerned with local and global news?

The media in Kerala are not entirely devoid of interest in national issues, but their priority is local as it should be. The media should serve the local people with news and information relevant and vital to the people of the locality. Localisation of news to make it more relevant is a practice followed by media organisers everywhere.

However, as a developing country, we should not ignore vital issues affecting the core issues of national development such as administrative reforms, agricultural development and food production, the Dalits, women and children, employment and labour welfare, energy, environment, land reforms, housing, water, sanitation etc. Attention on these issues will promote local activities too. This will help local media to help local people to think nationally and globally and act locally!

Adventure in Majuli

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

LEAVING behind the sleepy town of Jorhat in Upper Assam, we headed for Nimati Ghat from where we boarded the ferry bound for Majuli Island, the largest riverine island in the world. The ferry goes up and down thrice a day from the mainland. Less than 25 km from the district headquarters of Jorhat, the three-hour ferry ride to Majuli along the Brahmaputra was adventurous carrying aboard people, animals and vehicles.

Bound by the Brahmaputra to the south and the Subansiri and Kherketia to the north, the 886 sq km island in the middle of the Brahmaputra and the Subansiri rivers is remote and isolated. Majuli has rare migratory birds such as the pelican, Siberian crane and the stately adjutant stork. Pond herons, kingfishers and egrets are plentiful in its numerous water bodies.

Majuli Island has religious and historical significance. In the 16th century Shankardeva, the Assamese saint, reformer and philosopher often called the 'father' of Assamese culture, took refuge in Majuli and spent some months at Beloguri in West Majuli. He propagated a new form of Vaishnavism, a form of Hinduism distinctive in its primary worship of Lord Vishnu.

The vibrant culture of Majuli is impressive. About 22 satras (monasteries) dot the island. Sauntering through the winding lanes of the villages gave us an insight into the fascinating tribal lifestyle and the rich culture and traditions associated with Vaishnavism. Though Assam has other Vaishnavite Hindu monasteries, Majuli is the nerve centre of Vaishnavite culture, with its satras serving as centres for education and the preservation of Assamese arts. These satras, which house priceless artefacts and writings, have existed since the institution of the *satra* was invented by Shankardeva.

At Kamalabari on the southern tip of Majuli, a vehicle ferried us to some of the Vaishnavite satras that Majuli is acclaimed for. We sped past harvested paddy fields, clusters of soaring bamboo, water meadows, banana plantations and fish ponds filled with hyacinth. We began our island sojourn with a visit to the *namghar*, a large prayer hall overlooking a simple shrine at the Kamalabari *satra*. Villagers assemble here to sing, pray, read, discuss and decide on matters pertaining to the village. Accommodating 40 to 500 disciples each, these ancient buildings pulsate with dance, drama and kirtan. In the *satra* hierarchy, the *satradhikari* is supreme, followed by the *deka adhikari*, or heir apparent. Even today, so sacred is the institution to the local Assamese that they take pride in pledging a son to the *satra*.

The disciples in older times were trained in mask making, boat building and other traditional arts. Each *satra* was known for a particular speciality. For example, Natun Samugri *satra* was well known for mask making, Kamalabari *satra* for its



Life revolves around Majuli's riverine culture

SUSHEELA NAIR



Children perform in masks

fine boats, Aunati for jewellery and handicrafts and Dakhinpat for dance festivals. Majuli boasted of 65 monasteries at one time. Now there are only 22. The two main settlements that have satras are Kamalabari 'the centre of learning' and Garmur 'the centre of ancient weaponry' located five km north of the island. At Aunati *Satra*, we were shown around a small museum with an enviable collection of relics, old Assamese utensils, jewellery and handicrafts. There was an intricate ivory chess of mounted elephant figures and a mat woven from slivers of ivory.

We stopped by a Mishing settlement comprising of elevated huts perched on wooden poles. The Mishing, a tribe from Arunachal Pradesh who migrated to Majuli centuries ago, comprise 40 per cent of the population here. We looked into their enormous dormitories that did not have partitions among members of the same family. We were treated to the customary cup of 'apong' (rice beer). Some Mishing women were engaged in weaving colourful sarong wraps while children hovered around them. The Mishing too live in an

SUSHEELA NAIR



SUSHEELA NAIR

Kamalabari *satra*

amphibious culture roaming the numerous river channels of the island in their boats. Fishing and weaving are the primary occupations here.

An interesting aspect of Majuli is that villagers fashion symmetrical

clay pots using their hands instead of the potter's wheel. Exotic pottery products are made with beaten clay and burnt in driftwood fired kilns using techniques dating back to the Harappan era. Another unique feature is Majuli's rich and diverse agricultural tradition. As many as 100 varieties of rice are grown, all without chemical fertilisers or pesticides.

The major problems plaguing Majuli are continuous soil erosion and flooding which has caused large scale devastation. The island has shrunk from its original size of 1200 sq km to 875 sq km.

GETTING THERE:

The nearest airport and railhead is which is connected by road to Guwahati. Take a local bus from Jorhat to Nimati Ghat

By ferry: Ferries leave for Majuli thrice a day. As the ferry schedule changes regularly, check the timings with the tourist office in Jorhat before you set off.

Transport: Taxis are available but best to walk around.

Where to stay: Small hotels in Garmur and Kamalabari besides the various satras, the Circuit House, and Inspection Bungalow. Both Kamalabari and Garmur have dhabas serving Indian meals.

For a healthy baby

Dr G G GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



THE child's weight has to be taken care of from the day of conception. That means the growth of the child is determined from the first day of the formation of the zygote in the womb. The activities, thoughts and diet of the mother also influence the growth of the foetus. Ayurveda devotes a lot of thought on the need to fulfill the desires of the pregnant mother and the importance of diet. A pregnant mother should eat food that will increase the growth of tissues, which are of 'Madhurapradhana' (sweet products). If she follows the

advice of masanumasika Ahara and Oushada (month-wise regime of food and medicine) she can expect a healthy progeny.

The science of eugenics is an original contribution of Ayurveda. The birth of an underweight baby happens when the mother fails to follow the principles of eugenics. The Balya, that is childhood up to 16 yrs, can be further divided into three phases: Knerapa – up to one year or the only milk feeding period, Knerannada, that is from one to two years, the milk and solids feeding period, and Annada, from two to 16 years or the solid feeding period.

During the initial stage the various organs of the body are not well developed. There is tenderness and the baby can't tolerate stress. There is incomplete strength as kapha dosha dominates the body. Each Samskara (rites and care of the child) makes the growing child acquire a new milestone with the disappearance of earlier ones which is called as gunantharadhana in Dharmasindhusara.

Annaprasana saaskara explains how gradually semi-solid foods should be introduced to a milk feeding infant in order to habituate the baby to solid food. As in this phase the digestive capacity (agni) of the child goes on changing, the introduction of solid food is critical. It should be done between six and 12 months. If the method of weaning is not done properly, it may lead to nutritional disorders like underweight.

It's important to remember that a healthy diet for an infant is not the same as for an adult. Many of the 'healthier alternatives' that adults are advised to eat aren't suitable for toddlers and very young children. Modification of food is necessary in order to give a balanced diet to the child.

Children should take a nourishing diet which promotes growth and development. Food for the child should be warm, pleasant, clean, fresh,

well-cooked and easily digestible. Wholesome diet for child should consist of all six tastes with sufficient drava (liquidity) and snigdha (unctuousness) so that it can nourish the bodily tissues and give quick energy to the child. Timely food has to be given and the child should not be fed in the absence of desire for food.

The quantity of food should be such that it fills one-third of the stomach. Water should be given in between meals to occupy another one-third of the stomach. The remaining one-third should be left empty to give enough space for proper digestion. To increase the digestive capacity, the child has to be given a small quantity of food at short intervals.

Food should be given according to Prakriti. For thin babies, water should be given after meals. For normal babies water should be given during meals and for obese babies it should be given before meals.

Seasonal food also plays an important role in maintaining a balanced diet. Fresh fruits, vegetables and grains are most advisable. Dry fruits like grapes, almond, cashew nut, dates, walnuts, pistas, etc should be given along with warm milk. Animal food like milk and milk products, eggs, meat soup etc also give immense energy.

Parents have to present the food in such a way that the child likes it. Keep in mind that children like colour and decorative items. Most importantly, food should be tasty and rich in nutrition. Avoid the following: too spicy, too cold or hot food. Also the excessive use of food with one taste should be avoided. Junk food like pizza, pastas, burgers, cold drinks, chaats, bakery products, chips etc should not be given. Also, not to be given are cocoa chocolates and excessively dry food.

Things to be remembered: The child should be protected from blowing winds, hot scorching sun and lightening. Hygiene should be maintained. Utensils, bed, bed-sheets, blankets and other cloths should be neatly washed before used by the child. The child should be allowed to sleep as much as needed.

Along with food, external oil massage of the whole body is very important for weight gain. Some good medicated oils that are available in traditional Ayurveda Pharmacies are the following: Balathailam, Ksheera balathailam, Balaswagandhadi Thailam, Lakshadi Thailam, Shashtika Thailam.

These thailams can be used for daily body and head massage of the baby. Massage with appropri-

ate oil increases blood circulation and muscle growth. It also induces general growth. For severely low weight babies regular use of Shashtika shali pinda sweda is advisable. This can be done by an expert Ayurveda therapist. Once in six months, three times in the span of 18 months, a 14 day course of Shashtikanna lepanam with Bala Root (Sida retuse) is highly beneficial for low birth weight babies. This is a unique method prescribed by Ayurveda which is very effective and non-invasive.

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Austerity starts in the mind

SAMITA RATHOR

THE word 'austerity' is being defined in a variety of ways by many people. In its most recent avatar, austerity has been linked to money matters or related to the economy. But the true meaning of austerity goes beyond materialism.

A more authentic description of the word can be traced to a few thousand years.

According to Yoga the Sanskrit word 'tapas' is synonymous with spiritual discipline. The word 'tapas' is often translated as 'austerity.'

Austerity is something we do ourselves to redirect the flow of our energies positively. Tapas is the act of purifying spiritual disciplines, sadhana, penance, and sacrifice. It is the third niyama, practices, in the Ashtanga yoga principles. This can be traced to more than 2000 years ago in the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, the codified Yoga ethics.

Tapaha swadhyaya ishwarapranidhanani kriya yogah (Yoga Sutra, Chapter II-1)

Patanjali gives a definition of Yoga: Tapaha is from 'tapas', meaning 'heat' or 'fire', indicating the inner fire of transformation kindled by ascetic practices. It denotes religious austerity.

Yoga guru, Sri TKV Desikachar says this particular sutra means: "The practice of yoga must reduce both physical and mental impurities. It must develop our capacity for self-examination and help us to understand that, in the final analysis, we are not the masters of everything we do."

According to the Bhagwad Gita: "Speech that is not offensive, that is truthful, pleasant, beneficial and is used for the regular reading of the scrip-

tures is called the austerity of word. The serenity of mind, gentleness, silence, self-restraint and the purity of mind are called the austerity of thought."

Austerity can be practiced to set high standards of spiritual discipline in order to avoid tempta-

SOUL VALUE

tions. Discipline has its rewards in the form of happiness, equanimity and peace of mind.

Peace of mind comes in an attractive package: love, light and joy in copious measures. Discipline is and has to be the achievement of a spiritual aspirant always. Discipline is your constant opening, constant receptivity to a higher power. Through discipline you have to feel that you are invoking a higher form of energy.

EASY WAYS OF BUILDING AUSTERITY

- Show the way and lead a simple, natural life. The more we accumulate the more complex our lives become. Keep it clean and simple.
- Don't panic if there is disease in your body. Develop the powers of endurance and resistance. Strengthen your body, mind and nerves. Take plenty of open-air exercise, substantial nutritious food, a medicated oil bath and plenty of rest. Have mental and physical recreation. Lead a well-regulated life. Be moderate in food, drink and indulgence.
- The majority of diseases originate from over-eating, sexual excess and outbursts of anger and

hatred. If your mind is kept cool and calm at all times, you will have wonderful health, strength and vitality. Energy is depleted by fits of anger. The cells and tissues get filled with morbid, poisonous materials, when one loses his temper and entertains deep hatred.

- Stretch out in the sun. Expose your body to the rays of the sun for a short time daily. This is heliotherapy or sun-treatment. Sun is the source of energy and power. You will derive energy and power from the sun.
- Soak 5-10 almonds at night. Remove the skin and take the almonds with some palm sugar early morning. You can make a refreshing beverage by grinding these almonds with a little black pepper and palm sugar. This is a fine, cooling and strength-giving tonic.
- Relaxation is necessary. Take simple, wholesome, easily digestible, bland and non-irritating food. Give up hot, pungent curries, chutneys and chillies. Rest the stomach by taking recourse to partial fasts. If you can fast for a whole day, it is all the better. Fasting eliminates poisons and overhauls the system thoroughly.
- Resort to Nature Cure and Yogic Chikitsa. Practice pranayama regularly, asanas, concentration and meditation.

"As the intense fire of the furnace refines gold to brilliancy, so does the burning suffering of austerity purify the soul to resplendence."

—Tirukkural

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