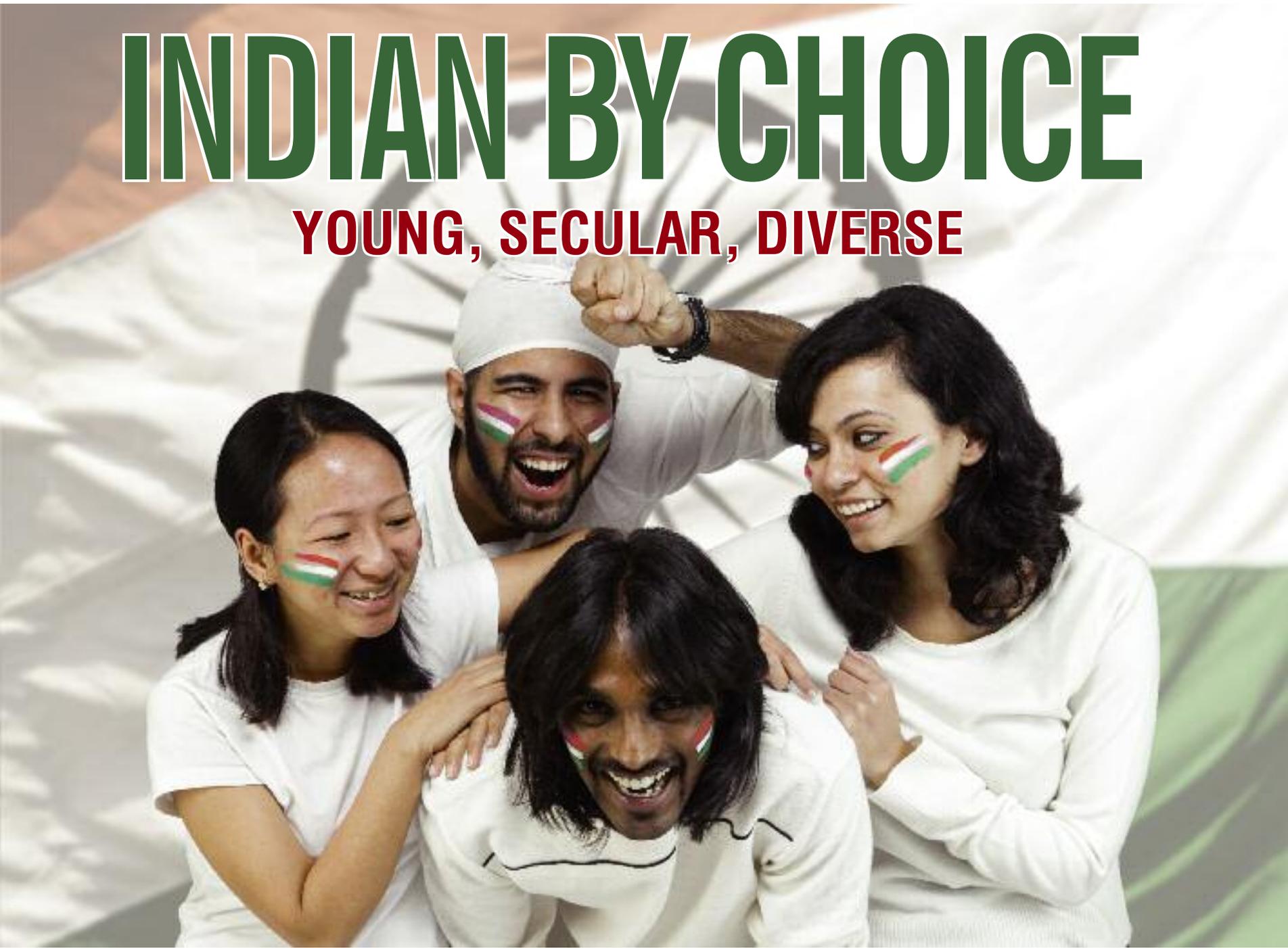


Civil Society

INDIAN BY CHOICE

YOUNG, SECULAR, DIVERSE



WORTH TRUST'S ABLE WORK FORCE

Each and every employee in their factory is differently abled

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MUMBAI WON'T FORGET

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INFOSYS DOES SOME PUBLIC SERVICE

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JUBILANT AD

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INDIAN BY CHOICE

The idea of India is a bigger draw than ever. More Indians find their country attractive. What are they drawn to? It is democracy, diversity, secularism, the rule of law.

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Cover photograph: LAKSHMAN ANAND; Young Indians: Deepshika, Subir Singh, Andrew Devdas, Ishanti Ghosh

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Younger and wiser

THE four young people you see on the cover of our magazine represent the melting pot of aspirations and identities that is the future India. They are the people who buy into the idea of an India that goes way beyond the worn out divisions of religion, region and caste. They silently protest by lighting candles when terrorists strike and vote for a better future when elections are held. Our cover story, coinciding as it does with Republic Day, is dedicated to such people who hold the country together by simply being Indians by choice.

Five years of running this magazine and travelling across the country have given us a hugely optimistic view of India. It has nothing to do with growth figures and the number of millionaires and billionaires that economic reforms are supposed to have created. On the contrary it is based on what we see ordinary folk do when they perceive that the interests of the nation are being challenged or their own rights are being trampled upon. The sincerity and commitment of the average Indian citizen is inadequately understood and certainly under reported in the media.

People's movements have highlighted issues pertaining to land, water, compensation and livelihoods. These movements have been long and slow and at times not very successful because of the odds they face. But they have existed and by being persistently assertive have finally begun to influence governance. The sum total of these trends finds expression in our cities. It is here – among the blue jeans, the women out at work, the new service sector jobs, the growing divorces – that the search for equality and a better life has been creating a generation of Indians who are younger and wiser.

Repeated acts of terrorism in the recent past have been aimed at creating disarray and confusion. But the opposite has happened as people have come together to express their support for one India. These public demonstrations may at times seem confused and rudderless, but that has more to do with the lack of leadership that we see around us and less with the spirit that wants a country that is cohesive, peaceful and better run.

Politicians and administrators have a history of treating people lightly. The debate over police reforms continues after all these years with the redoubtable Soli Sorabjee now turning up with a PIL in the Supreme Court on why policemen in Mumbai were ill-equipped. The court has already issued directives on a report submitted by a committee headed by Sorabjee but has had no effect. What is it that the Supreme Court can now possibly discover that governments don't already know? Clearly, the problem is a political one.

It is much the same with issues such as health care, public transport, housing, cleaning up of rivers and so on. As backlogs build and the quality of life suffers time is running out. Increasingly, people are asking politicians for results and performance. They aren't swayed by old slogans. A younger, more assertive India that has already tasted liberalisation has less and less patience for the old rogues of the system – be they in government, the corporate sector or for that matter the media.

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IN THE LIGHT

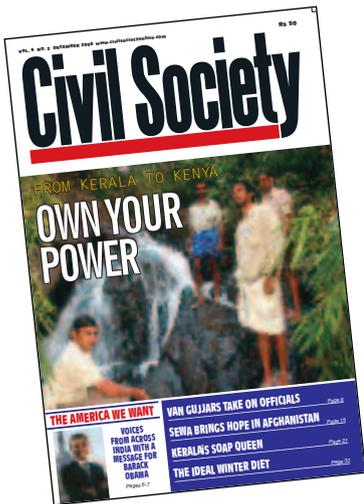
by SAMITA RATHOR

THE DETERMINED WILL FIND
A WAY OR CREATE ONE!



SAMITA

LETTERS



Taming Kosi

Civil Society is always a joy to read and more so for a school. Each and every article is worth pondering over. It lives up to its tagline 'Read us. We read you.' The cover story on Kosi is not only an eye opener but also implores you to do a rethink.

So far, whenever one reads about the Kosi deluge, there is just one line of thought. *Civil Society* has explored the matter more realistically. Its time we all did a paradigm shift. So far we have been flogging a dead horse and beating about the bush over deforestation and overgrazing.

How apt it is to say that the river is

the driver of a water based economy and that it has a memory. Kosi is doing what it is supposed to do. It is not failing at all, rather we are failing it. So far we have been looking at the river from the point of view of water only and not of silt.

We hope that engineers now realise what disservice they are doing by trying to contain mountain rivers which are supposed to gurgle down unabated and create new land forms. We are trying to tame them and then face their retaliation.

And what a grave folly it was to imagine an India in which all river systems will be joined. It's appreciable that the British realised a century and half ago that embankments are no solution to floods. If we followed the natural calendar of rivers, we would save precious lives and property.

Seema Malik
Principal, Delhi Public School,
Ludhiana

Own your power

Your cover story, 'Own Your Power' was most enlightening. Governments should encourage the setting up of such hydel projects so that no village is left in the dark. It is very encouraging to see Indian activists going global also.

Lakshmi Murthy

To encourage the development of water mills in remote and hilly areas,

the ministry of renewable energy is providing subsidy for new water mills and upgradation of existing ones. The subsidy is applicable for two categories. First, water mills with mechanical output and secondly, water mills with electrical output of a maximum of 5 KW, or both mechanical and electrical output of maximum 5 KW.

Ramesh Nair

I want to get this to everyone in this field. AHEC, IIT, Rourkee, is providing the full range of technical services for small hydro projects including survey and investigation, DPR preparation, project design etc. Onsite testing facility has also been created on campus. For testing facilities please see our website: www.ahec.org.in

AHEC, Rourkee

Barack Obama

India has been saying for decades that Pakistan is the epicentre of terrorism. But the US government has been supporting Pakistan. It never appreciated India's views although they knew all about Pakistan's nefarious activities. After 9/11 the situation changed slightly, but not significantly. The US thought Pakistan is helping to curb terrorism. Actually Pakistan was blackmailing the US and swindling US aid for increasing its military power to be used against India. Let us hope and pray that Barack Obama will help the world get rid of terrorism by taking the

right steps against Pakistan.

Mukesh Agarwal

Barack Obama has spoken of a special envoy to resolve the Kashmir issue. For a decade the Kashmir issue ceased to bother Washington. By resurrecting it, Barack Obama is not doing anyone a favour. He has been elected by Americans to solve their problems. Let his country remain his primary focus.

Acharya

It will be interesting to watch how Barack Obama deals with the economic crisis and the scourge of terrorism. As far as India is concerned it does not matter who is in power: Republicans or Democrats.

Ranajan

I don't agree with Dinesh Mohan's views. I think Barack Obama will be like all US Presidents. Rule Books are not given to the new President. He inherits them.

Samuel

SEWA

I feel proud about India's work in Afghanistan. Many thanks to Aunohita Mojumdar for informing us. Such work truly helps to build a nation. The international community should see India's example. It is by investing in people that a country becomes strong and independent.

Ashish Kumar

Mumbai moves on but it won't forget

Shreyasi Singh
Mumbai

It was just two weeks after the 26 November Mumbai terror siege. The Taj, barricaded from all sides, was still being visited by people who grieved for the victims of the attack and the desecration of a valuable heritage building.

But less than 20 yards away at the end of the road life went on. A wedding reception was in progress at the fancy Radio Club, another well-known Mumbai landmark. Glittering fairy lights, lovely white flowers and flowing wine were all in place.

"We need to move on. But, we don't need to forget," is pretty much the message in Mumbai. Jobs need to carry on. School exams and college presentations will not stop. Profits need to be made. Losses have to be cut.

But even as the wheels of the city start moving again there is a new resolve to hold governments and politicians accountable for lapses that result in the loss of innocent lives.

Shonali Gaekwad is a costume stylist born and brought up in Mumbai. She's never really been politically conscious. But the attacks put an end to that. On 3 December, Shonali was among the 100,000 people who converged at the Gateway of India in a solidarity march.

"I just had to react. Enough is enough. I carried a placard that said 'US Politicians Are From Yale, Ours Are From Jail'. Hundreds of people came up to me to say they completely agreed. But do our politicians care? What has happened to the Rs 940 crore spent on police upgradation? It's a miracle our police dealt with the terrorists. Without training

and equipment, they literally fought with one hand tied behind their backs. This has to change now. Mumbai deserves good governance and good leadership."

Students and professionals like Shonali have effectively used the digital media and social networking sites like Facebook and Orkut to mobilise public anger. In fact, it's Web 2.0 that has essayed the facilitator's role. Marches and petitions have all gathered steam and numbers online.

Like smallchange.in, a petition put out on the Internet by musician Vishal Dadlani against live coverage of anti-terrorist operations by the broadcast media. The petition, which now has nearly 25,000 signatories, has been submitted in the Bombay High Court.

"I have been an Indian and a resident of Bombay for all of my 35 years. This is the first time I have done something for my country. I won't leave this unfinished. Each one of us needs to make that one small change. We need to take accountability for our actions. We have to be more humane, more concerned, more aware. Don't bribe that one cop. Don't break that one rule. If you are angry with something, fix it. Don't just rant and rave. Fury works only if we can achieve something. Don't just react. Act."

Many are doing exactly that. The tragedy has united the city as never before and there is a definite sense of redeeming oneself by standing up and being counted. Hundreds of people have turned up at the city's hospitals to take care of the injured, or to help out their families. People want to do more than just donate money or blood.

Across the city, billboards, posters and message boards express this new consciousness. Expensive



Candlelight protest outside the Taj

advertising space at Nariman Point, Worli and Bandra now has on display messages like, 'Enough of Tolerance? Speak Up', 'Spirit of Mumbai...For How Long?', 'Somebody Needs To Protect This City. Let's Start With You. Become the Eyes and Ears of Mumbai'.

In this aftermath, Mumbai has also shed its tainted image of being a city where religious harmony often gets endangered. This time, Hindus and Muslims are resolutely together.

Can this momentum continue? And will it lead to change on the ground? Author, journalist, theatre personality and convener of AGNI, Gerson da Cunha, says it can. But political clout is the only way to get there.

"Mumbai has six parliamentary constituencies. Often, seats are won by narrow margins. Milind Deora won South Mumbai by only 10,000 votes in 2004. All we need to do is create our own vote bank of 50,000 people across these six constituencies to swing results. Vote is the only language politicians understand. And, we don't need 10 million people to achieve this transformation," da Cunha explains.

His analysis demystifies sweeping political change. He blames what he calls the "criminal negligence" of the middle class for the mess Bombay finds itself in today. The middle class has failed the political system by not seeking accountability and audit. "I have lived in Bombay all my life. Yes, this civic awakening is unprecedented but it was also overdue."



Middle class anger against politicians



Supriya Sule, Rajya Sabha MP from the Nationalist Congress Party, admits politicians must take moral responsibility for the situation. And she is confident her colleagues are willing to listen. "People have to be organised and come up with solutions. There is seriousness. Everybody wants change. The political class will listen provided there is a concrete plan which is implementable. I owe all I have to Mumbai. I also want our city to be more modern and more secure. I want the old spirit of Mumbai back - the spirit that is based on choice, not compulsion."

Many in Mumbai agree. They know the time to sit it out is gone. They need to get involved in the political process to make a difference. It isn't enough to point out the system has failed. It is futile to apportion blame or guilt.

"The world is watching us. They have recognised India's economic strength over the last few years. They are now looking at us to see whether we value life and liberty. We can't let go of this opportunity.

Many in Mumbai know the time to sit it out is gone. They feel the need to get involved in the political process to make a difference. It isn't enough to point out the system has failed. It is futile to apportion blame or guilt.

reforms.

But for many Mumbai will never be the same. The damage done is irreparable, they say. Madhumita Srivastava, is a designer and an art teacher in Mumbai. She was a student at the Parson's School of Design in New York during 9/11. "People used to say New York was a city that never slept and never stopped. But after 9/11, New York came to an abrupt stop. There was a palpable sense of vulnerability. I feel exactly that now. Mumbai has changed forever."

The passion has to convert into forceful deliberate action. Human memory and human nature is short-lived. Citizens need to act now, and captains of Indian industry should come forward to fill our leadership vacuum," says Shiv Puri, a financial services entrepreneur who was trapped at the Taj Hotel with his wife on 26 November. He is not willing to let the memory fade, and has been an active member of the group that worked with the India Law Society to file a PIL for police

A saviour from Siliguri

Vivek S Ghatani
Darjeeling

THERE was dread in every Indian heart when terrorists attacked Mumbai and took innocent people as hostage at the Taj and Oberoi hotels on 27 and 28 November.

Devi Chettri's eyes were glued to her television screen for those two days. She was afraid of what might happen to her husband, Amrit Chettri, a commando in the National Security Guards (NSG) who was on mission at the Oberoi and then at the Taj during those fateful days.

On November 29 morning, Amrit finally called her up to say he was fine and there was nothing to worry about. "It was a huge relief for me and my daughter

Neha. There was also a feeling of honour within my heart because he was there to save hundreds of lives," she said sitting at her home in Giddhapahar, three km from Kurseong town in Darjeeling district.

"I am fine and safe. The mission is over and you should stop worrying about me is what Amrit told me the next morning before he switched off his mobile," said Devi.

She first came to know about the terror attacks in Mumbai on 27 November. She also got to know her husband was one of the commandos on duty. "On Thursday morning I gave a missed call to his mobile immediately after I came to know. He called me back saying that he was on mission at the Oberoi and not to call him anymore. Since then I was glued to the TV all day and night till his call came," Devi recalled.

Till Thursday, 2 am, Amrit was at the Oberoi. When the mission was completed at the Oberoi, he with other commandos joined the mission at the Taj.

Devi's mother-in-law too could not take her eyes off the TV screen for two days. "I am proud that my son got the opportunity to serve the country."

Amrit Chettri joined the Jammu and Kashmir Rifles nine years ago. Around a year and a half ago he was recruited in the NSG. This was the first time he was on a mission as a commando.

"It was a good experience and I feel that I was lucky to serve the country. What happened in Mumbai was terrible but we were successful in killing them. That has brought a good feeling for me," said 28-year-old Amrit speaking from New Delhi to *Civil Society*.



India fails infant health again

Civil Society News
New Delhi

It seems India just can't save its little babies. Globally 9.7 million babies under five die and 2.1 million are in India alone. Around 27 million births occur in India every year, but 1.7 million infants die before one year and 1.08 million within one month.

An India Report on the State of Infant Feeding was released on 9 December by Mani Shankar Aiyar, Union Minister for Panchayati Raj, in Delhi. The report, initiated by the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi), was researched by the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) and the Public Health Resource Network.

In 2005 too all eight South Asian countries took part in a similar exercise. India then ranked sixth and scored 68 out of 150 points. This time the report covers 51 countries and India scores only 69 out of 150.

The India Report reveals that just 24 per cent of newborn babies are breastfed within one hour of birth. Only 46 per cent are exclusively breastfed for six months. This figure goes down from 70 per cent in the first month to 27 per cent in the sixth month. Around 56 per cent of infants between six to nine months are given complementary foods.

Major killers of babies are diarrhoea and pneumonia. It is well known that breastfeeding within one hour can reduce newborn infections by six times. "Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months can reduce diarrhoea and pneumonia by 3 and 2.5 times," said Dr Arun Gupta, regional coordinator of BPNI.

Some trends are worrisome. The baby should be breastfed within one hour of birth. But in states where institutional deliveries have gone up, early breastfeeding has gone down. Hospitals need to be more sensitive to breastfeeding. Yet a Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative which would train medical staff in lactation management has not taken off. "At least 20 per cent of hospitals should become baby friendly," said Dr Gupta.

To encourage exclusive breastfeeding for six months, women especially in the informal sector, need support at workplaces and from the community. Maternity leave, crèches at job

sites, breaks to breastfeed are needed. "This is considered a labour issue when it is a child and maternal rights issue," said Dr Vandana Prasad of Public Health Resource Network in her presentation.

The report also addressed two controversial concerns: breastfeeding for HIV affected women and infant feeding during a natural calamity or disaster. It rooted for counselling and support to HIV affected women in whichever method of feeding they chose. For calamities, it was felt that it was important for babies and mothers to be together and for breastfeeding to be encouraged rather than take recourse to artificial baby foods which are dumped in plentiful supply.

An important suggestion made by Aiyar was to involve Panchayati Raj Institutions in saving babies. He pointed out that India now has 3.2 million elected representatives at village level. Of these 1.2 million are women, possible the largest such force in the world.

"Rural men have given this space to women. Nearly five million contest the election. There is also the opposition who contest. Are we using this vibrant society?" asked the minister.

He conceded that responsibility for infant health can't be left to the bureaucracy. It has to be placed in people's hands. The minister suggested panchayats be mobilised. Women elected representatives can spread the message of breastfeeding and child health. Schemes for babies can be monitored by elected representatives and the gram sabha. He cited the success of the government's Total Sanitation programme and the Nirmal Gram scheme. Awards could be given to healthy baby villages too.

Most babies die in the first month and first year. An important suggestion by health researchers is to reorient the ICDS to cater exclusively to babies from zero to three years of age. The government's first priority has to be that the baby survives the first year. Children who are three plus, should be in kindergarten, in the primary school.

The government has set up a National Nutrition Council of which Mani Shankar Aiyar is a member.

"Panchayati Raj Institutions could play a major role in preventive services, monitoring and providing technical inputs to the council on nutrition," said Dr Gupta.

Women representatives can spread the message of child health. Schemes for babies can be monitored by elected representatives and the gram sabha.

Brickbats



Where is your boss? Women confront a NACO official

Civil Society News
New Delhi

OF the people now getting HIV in India an estimated 40 per cent are women. Of them an increasing number are women in monogamous relationships. With such figures to go by you would imagine that the health authorities in Delhi would have all the time in the world for a national meeting of the Positive Women's Network (PWN). After all, what better way could there be to finding solutions to their problems than listening to the women firsthand.

But that is not what happened on World AIDS Day when members of the PWN came to a convention in Delhi from all over the country. The director-general of the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), K Sujatha Rao, was specially invited to the meeting, but finally did not turn up because she was busy and had too many meetings to attend. She sent a deputy, who also did not have more than a few minutes to spare as he too had to rush off for a meeting, apparently with the Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi.

Incensed by this the women climbed on to the stage at the Nehru Yuvak Kendra auditorium in Chanakyapuri. They demanded to know why the

for 'very busy' NACO boss

LAKSHMAN ANAND



DG of NACO had not turned up. After all, if she did not have time for HIV positive women, then what did she have time for? Clutching his welcome bouquet, the deputy kept repeating that the DG was an extremely busy person. The proceedings of the women's convention would be examined in detail, he promised, and hastily beat a retreat.

What really angered the women was that many of them had taken train journeys of two and three days to get to Delhi from the northeast and deep south. "If we could take all this trouble to get here to highlight the problems we are facing and seek solutions from the government, surely the head of NACO could have made it a point to be present," they pointed out. The dates of the convention and special invitation had been sent well in advance.

"It is not easy for these women to travel this distance," pointed out Geetha Venugopal, an activist with the NGO, Engender Health. "First of all they are

What really angered the women was that many of them had taken train journeys of two and three days to get to Delhi from the northeast and deep south.

HIV positive. Then there are floods, the terrorist attacks in Mumbai and of course the cold in Delhi that many are just not accustomed to. They contended with all this to be here only to be told that NACO, which is primarily responsible for addressing their issues, has no time for time."

The PWN has a quilt stitched from pieces contributed by its members who are living or have

died. It now wants that quilt put up at the offices of NACO as a reminder of what women with HIV are going through.

Kim, thin and frail, is from Manipur. She said that she was distressed that there was no one senior from the government to hear women like herself. But she was nevertheless happy to be at the convention and among other HIV positive women who have shown that it is possible to look ahead.

The PWN is 10 years old. It is meant to serve as a platform where women coping with a debilitating dis-

ease and the social stigma that it brings with it find inspiration and camaraderie. The women come from all over the country. The recent Delhi convention may have witnessed angry outbursts against NACO, but the emphasis was on healing vibes - singing, laughter and expressions of the will to carry on.

There are important issues pertaining to the legal and social rights of these women that need to be addressed. The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) III already makes a case for "greater involvement" of people living with HIV and AIDS in the decision-making, planning and implementation processes of government bodies, NGOs, and donor organisations. "There has, for sure, been a shift towards a people-centric approach, but government and donors need to do more to bring women in the focus as women continue to remain at greater risk," says Christy Abraham of Action Aid.

"In the battle against AIDS there is a need to look at the day to day challenges a woman faces. It is not just a health issue. Literacy and skill building must go hand in hand to address the problem. It not only ensures livelihood but also an opportunity to lead a life with dignity," added Shantha of PWN.

From a picture of despair, the women have emerged as examples of courage in combating obstacles including stigma and discrimination, access to treatment and above all unequal gender relations. Kaushalya, president of the PWN, greets guests with a smile that hides years of struggle and exudes resplendent courage and hope for the future.

As she recounts her journey that began in late 90's there is conviction in her voice: "When I started there were not many supporters but there was a need to unite women living with HIV from across the country. It wasn't easy but we did come a long way."

Kaushalya's is no longer a lone voice. "Women must take centre stage. Only when women are involved in HIV intervention programmes can the needs of women and girls be effectively addressed," she says.

For 27-year-old Lilly from Manipur, life came to a standstill when her husband died of AIDS, passing on the virus to her. Ousted from her husband's home, she found support in her mother and a few well meaning friends. She is now an active member of the PWN.

"My two children were not allowed to come with me when I was forced out by my in-laws. I was filled with self-doubt and despair. On my friend's suggestion I started getting involved with NGOs working on the issue which helped me find a new voice," says Lilly.

Challenges before Uma from Chennai were no different. She got to know about her HIV status during her first pregnancy. Her in-laws knowingly concealed their son's status from Uma and her family. Her two sons were also born positive.

"My in-laws denied us any share in the property. I had to support my kids. That's when I joined an income generation programme that provided me skills in making bags, folders, photo frames. I don't have to depend on anyone now and I can live a life of dignity," Uma says.

"There needs to be greater involvement of women. We came here to reach out to the authorities," says Kaushalya.

Worth Trust's able work force

Rina Mukherji
Katpadi (Tamil Nadu)

THE factories look humdrum. There is the din of machines, the clink of tools and the clash of metal. Assembly lines have diligent workers poring over electronic meters for state electricity boards. Some are manufacturing nice garbage carts for municipalities. Others concentrate on high precision hydraulic equipment for the auto sector.

Look around. These are not ordinary factories. Every worker here is differently abled. Some are speech impaired or hearing impaired. Others have missing limbs or are quadriplegics bound to a wheelchair. Disability is not a handicap for them. Note Raju Gopal, an experienced foreman. His artificial limb doesn't hamper him from guiding operations at the boiler unit, or commuting in his two-wheeler.

The factories belong to the Worth Trust in Katpadi, Vellore. It employs people with disability. Most organisations which help the differently abled have a rather charitable air. The Worth Trust is different. It trains the differently abled for employment and strives to be a commercially competitive outfit. The Trust produces components for the automobile, plastics, sanitary-ware, furniture and packing industries. Jobs being done include making boiler equipment for Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, plastic components for microwave ovens and sanitary ware for Parryware. Worth Trust also manufactures mobility aids and prosthetic equipment for the disabled.

Salaries here are at par with industry standards. The profits earned are ploughed into education and training centres for rehabilitating the disabled. The trust runs outreach programmes to identify and help the disabled in villages. It distributes assistive devices free of cost. Unlike organisations who canvas for donations on their websites, the Worth Trust only asks visitors to recommend disabled persons whom it could employ at its workshops and units. For its amazing work, the Worth Trust was honoured with the Shell Helen Keller Memorial Award in 2004 by the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled Persons.

The Worth Trust began as a light engineering workshop with machines imported from Sweden. It was started in 1963 by Dr Paul Brand of the Swedish Red Cross in Katpadi to rehabilitate victims of leprosy who were shunned by society. At that time it produced hydraulic equipment for the auto sector nearby. A year later, C Antony Samy joined after doing his Master's degree in engineering from the US. Antony Samy's vision and guidance shaped the trust which he served for more than forty years.

In 1974, the Swedish Red Cross withdrew and handed over the Worth Trust to a group of socially conscious industrialists in South India. Guided by Antony Samy, the trust started technical training

centres at its premises in Katpadi, in 1976. Centres were also established in Pondicherry and Tiruchirapalli. These technical training centres train disabled youth to become turners, welders and skilled electronics workers. Youth learn on the job and are provided free hostel accommodation, an internship stipend and uniforms. "We only charge Rs 350 per month for food," says Lt Colonel T G Venkatesh, Vice-President, Administration, Training and Finance. Of late, computer training has been introduced.

Non-formal training is for those who have not completed schooling or who are not inclined to study further. For those who have completed secondary school formal training is imparted along the



Jobs being done include making boiler equipment

lines of the Industrial Training Institute (ITI) certificate course, since the Trust runs a National Council of Vocational Training (NCVT) centre on its premises at Katpadi.

Many young people have benefited. S Jayakumar who is speech and hearing impaired joined the assembly line to repair electrical meters after doing the non-formal training course. K Gomati of Vajjapet village, affected by polio, and S Sumati from Kudiyallam village in Vellore district work in the same department after getting their ITI certificates. Senthil Kumar, a polio-affected quadriplegic, joined the division after completing junior college from Don Bosco. He has two ITI qualifications in electronics and computers. Polio-affected V Venkatesan and Manikantam who is speech and hearing impaired, work in the plastics division after having done the two years of non-formal on the job training.

There are opportunities for upward mobility too. Devadayavu, who supervises the training unit, joined the trust's workshop in 1973 after undergoing non-formal training. He then did two years of formal training to earn his ITI certificate in 1975-1977. After gaining some work experience in Coimbatore, he came back to the Worth Trust and has been working here ever since.

"A lot of persons trained by the trust move on and

Photographs by: PATTABI RAMAN



People who work here are differently abled

Salaries here are at par with industry standards. The profits earned are ploughed into education and training centres. The trust runs outreach programmes to identify and help the disabled in villages.

join factories elsewhere. Since we are not big enough to absorb everyone, we always encourage them if they succeed in securing employment outside," says Colonel K Radhakrishnan, managing director of the trust.

Worth Trust's high success rate in rehabilitating people with disability is because it identifies those who need help very early. It has a Mobile Outreach programme in Katpadi, Pondicherry and Trichy. The trust's vans visit adjoining villages at regular intervals and identify children in need of assistance. A transitional school for children with speech and hearing impairment is run in Katpadi. Children are given free boarding, lodging and education from the kindergarten to fourth grade. They go through babbling, group therapy and loop induction to help them speak. "Sign language is discouraged so that their residual speech can get fully developed on the strength of sound awareness," says Jayabharati, principal of the school.

The outreach programme for polio victims has been discontinued since the government's polio eradication drive has been successful. The school for polio victims has also been shut down. Since the past one year, the trust has moved on to caring for the mentally retarded, and those affected by cerebral palsy and Down's Syndrome. Around 47 children visit the centre. Another 25 are covered by the out-



Innovation has been the Trust's hallmark, especially for mobility aids

reach programmes. Speech therapists, counselors and special educators identify the strengths of each child and train them in appropriate life skills. The children are helped to become independent. Mentally retarded children are trained to string beads and make useful hand-made items that are sold to earn them a living.

The response to the trust has been overwhelming. Some like Mohammed Hashim, who suffers from cerebral palsy, come to the Worth Trust through referrals from the Christian Medical College, Vellore, after having undergone initial occupational therapy. Parents prefer to approach the trust. Nine-year-old Gracy's parents brought her all the way to Katpadi from the Yelagiri Hills since she was diagnosed as suffering from Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder.

The Worth Trust has as its logo the symbol of the open wrench on either side of a flower with a missing petal signifying the disabled. It looks like two helping hands to integrate the disabled into society. This is the credo the trust has been living up to.

Significantly the Worth Trust has achieved global standards in manufacture. Its plastics unit has ISO 9002 certification. For manufacture of hydraulic

equipment, the trust has an ISO 9001-2000 and a TS 16949 certification as required by vendors in the automobile industry. Its Braille unit, set up in collaboration with the Perkins School for the Blind, US, is one of the few units in the world that produce basic components for Braille typewriters.

Innovation has been the Trust's hallmark, especially for mobility aids. Its motorised arm with rechargeable batteries, developed in collaboration with the Christian Medical College, Vellore and the Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai, is the latest



Children get quality education

in a series of such aids, which include portable muscle stimulators, custom-made folding wheelchairs with special wheels for mountainous terrain and collapsible walkers.

The Worth Trust runs the District Disability Rehabilitation Centre (DDRC) in Vellore as part of the government's disability rehabilitation programme. In Trichy, the programme is run in collaboration with Sharon, an NGO. Under this programme, the Trust provides single window clearance for all relief and rehabilitation to the disabled. Any disabled person can walk in and avail of subsidies, get a disability certificates, a wheelchair or any other equipment.

The Worth Trust has reached out to nearly 10,000 disabled persons and successfully rehabilitated them. The International Labour Organization (ILO) taps into the trust's technical advice for skill up-gradation programmes for persons with disabilities from Uganda, Ethiopia and Malawi. Antony Samy, former managing director, not only served as Chief Technical Adviser to ILO and the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), but was also responsible for the UNDP's largest project for the rehabilitation of people with disabilities in Kenya.



'Disability is not on national agenda'

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

NEARLY 10,000 disabled people and their families, friends and colleagues from across the country congregated at India Gate in Delhi to hold a Solidarity Vigil to mark World Disability Day on December 3. India has more than 70 million disabled people. But even their large numbers have done little to ensure they are treated as equal citizens.

Civil Society spoke to Javed Abidi, who heads the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP), the Delhi-based NGO that has agitated for many landmark legislations and policy decisions for the disabled.

The NCPEDP organises the Helen Keller awards each year on World Disability Day to honour individuals and companies who are working for equal opportunities for people with disabilities. Instituted in 1999, the awards acknowledge disabled people who have become role models for the community.

But this year the awards have given Javed Abidi little to cheer about. Excerpts from an interview:

The Helen Keller awards are a great moment to celebrate spirit and achievement. Yet all your messages are heavy with angry. Why?

Well, there's a lot to be angry about, isn't there? It's been a year since the historic UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability was ratified by India. Over a year has gone by since the 11th Five Year Plan which had some very important mandates on the disability sector was passed. But absolutely nothing has been done by the government to implement them. How long will it take the government to actually sit up and listen? Do the mandarins of Yojana Bhawan who prepare the Plan even read it? Does the Prime Minister read it at any of the two stages it takes the plan to be passed? And, if they have read what they have passed, why is it that not even 50 per cent of what's promised on paper should have happened? The 11th Plan enshrined three aspects. First, each ministry must have a clear cut plan on disability. Second, each ministry must allocate three per cent of its resources on disability issues, and finally, the government will set up a Department for Disability. More than a year after this was passed, nothing has happened. Disability is just not on the national agenda.

Has the story been any different with the corporate sector?

Absolutely not. There has been greater disappointment there in fact. After much pleading and plodding, CII passed a non-mandatory Corporate Code on Disability which it does not enforce. FICCI and ASSOCHAM have not even worked towards that. In their case, we can't even blame lack of awareness and sensitivity. Our industry captains travel the world. Don't they see ramps and buildings designed to give access to the disabled? Can they not learn from large European or American multinationals that need to follow stringent codes on disability? You will never see a McDonalds in the US that does not have a ramp. We have lost a huge opportunity with the same companies in India. They flout rules here because of our indifferent enforcement and insensitive attitude.

What do you think needs to be done to make compa-

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Javed Abidi

Winners of the NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Awards 2008

Disabled people who have become ambassadors of employment for the disabled

- Hari Raghavan, Solutions Specialist, Banking, IBM, Mumbai
- Atul Ranjan Sahay, Senior Manager, TATA Steel, Jamshedpur
- Shivani Gupta, Director, AccessAbility, New Delhi
- Amutha Shanthi S, Managing Trustee, Thiyagam Women Trust, Madurai

Non-disabled role models who support increased employment opportunities for the disabled

- Shilpi Kapoor, Founder Director, BarrierBreak Technologies, Mumbai
- Dr Radhike Khanna, Vice Principal, SPJ Sadhana Schools, Mumbai

Organisations that demonstrate a belief in equal rights

- Godrej & Boyce Mfg Co Ltd
- IBM India Pvt Ltd
- ITC Welcome Group
- MphasiS
- Noida Deaf Society
- PepsiCo India Holdings Pvt Ltd

nies more inclusive?

We are working towards affirmative action in the private sector to reach our goal of five per cent disabled in the workforce. We don't want quotas. But, we have to ensure the do-gooder talk is not a sham. The Disability Act 1995 guarantees incentives to both public and private sector employers if their workforce is composed of at least five per cent disabled people. But we are nowhere even close to half of that!

If landmark legislations have failed to make our government more sensitive, what needs to be done on the ground?

That's another uphill battle. We have tried to meet ministers and bureaucrats to bring this failure to their notice. But meeting them is so difficult. We call. Zero response. We write. Zero impact. Our society's basics are wrong. In a decent society, why should it require this sort of effort to make people listen to legitimate issues? Thankfully, we are in a democracy, and we can take to the streets to agitate. That is the only methodology that ever works. People say I am a confrontationist. But what choice are we left with? For every small movement in the disability sector, we have had to protest, agitate and sit out on *dharnas* to make the powers listen. Just having laws is never enough. We have to ensure strict enforcement of law. Legislation needs to be firm and strict. Implementation is key and only keen political will can ensure it.

How have the disabled who have entered the mainstream performed?

Excellent. Many employers have found great value in employing the disabled. Disabled employees, they say, are more committed, more loyal and more hard-working while being equally talented and skilled. In the ITES industry, for example, which is beset by huge attrition, this commitment is great for the company. In fact, to give credit where it's due, the IT industry has tried hard to employ the disabled in larger numbers. Maybe it is because their leadership is often young, educated abroad and in step with modern technology.

What needs to be done to make our workplaces more inclusive?

Each of us has a work environment that impacts our performance. You cannot perform if you are not equipped sufficiently. The disabled need the same conducive work atmosphere that you and I need. Yes, a major issue for them is access. Our offices need to be designed to facilitate easy movement and access. Access is the only extra effort you need to make.

The Helen Keller awards were instituted in 1999 after a shocking survey that showed dismal levels of employment in the public and private sectors. Are you hopeful of better results if the same study was to be carried out today?

In fact, we are planning to conduct this survey next year. I am hopeful that there will be positive change. Companies with 0.2 per cent disabled employees would have moved to having 0.7 per cent or 0.8 per cent. Encouragingly, there are a few companies that have three per cent or more disabled people in their workforce. This is why we give out awards to large organisations. Companies like ITC and IBM can do a lot to raise awareness.



NREGS brings back check-dams

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

YETHADKA, a tiny hamlet in Kerala adjoining Karnataka, is often called, 'a museum of kattas'. Now it is becoming a showpiece of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) with farmers making kattas under the scheme. For the first time in history, women are learning to become katta makers, a job traditionally reserved for men.

Kattas are traditional check-dams built across rivulets. These structures are used by farmers to conserve water for irrigating arecanut, the main cash crop of Kasaragod. Kattas also help recharge groundwater.

Yethadka is part of Kumbdaje panchayat. Although katta construction has disappeared elsewhere, this panchayat still constructs 88 kattas. Eighteen are big ones which need an average of 350 man days to make. The rest are small and require 100 to 150 man days. All are community structures. Each katta benefits five to 10 families.

The katta has one big drawback. It is a temporary structure which is laborious to build. Every year, before the monsoon, it has to be dismantled. In winter, it needs to be rebuilt. Unfortunately, cement vented crossed bars or VCBs constructed by the government have not been a solution. Each VCB costs between Rs 5 lakhs and Rs 10 lakh rupees and isn't able to hold the water. But the layman's kattas built with locally available material never leak.

All kattas have to be constructed in a specific time frame. So within 30 days the panchayat needs at least 8,000 man days of work. Of late, katta construction became an enormously difficult task for farmers since there was a shortage of labour.

The farming community under the leadership of the Farm Information Exchange Club, Yethadka, and the Kumbdaje Panchayat, decided to make use of NREGS to solve their problem. On 15 November, they celebrated 'Katta Day' by holding an interaction with Madhusudhanan Nair, assistant district coordinator, NREGS, about using the scheme for katta construction. Nair answered their questions and explained procedures. He said that if farmers and the panchayat took an interest, they could make good use of NREGS to solve the katta crisis.

The farmers acted quickly. They took the engineers to different kattas and got estimates made. The farmers organised labour and job cards. But skilled male workers were earning more than NREGS rates. The scheme, therefore, attracted mostly women.

This posed many practical problems. First of all in the entire history of katta-making, women had never taken part. Carrying stones, arranging them neatly to form a stable wall, preparing the compacted soil, heaping the soil to check water seepage, are jobs considered fit only for men. It also requires skill to make the kattas safe so as to withstand the hydraulic pressure of millions of litres of water.

Nair clarified that for works that require skilled labourers there is a provision. But this factor should be incorporated at the estimate stage itself. At this crucial juncture, the panchayat engineer resigned. Therefore, Nair suggested that estimates could be



Women are among the people who get employment under NREGS

made by other engineers, even private ones.

Now after clearing all roadblocks, construction is in full swing. Eighteen big kattas and 37 small ones will be constructed this year. And it is women who form the majority of workers at all places. Prabhavathi, 50, has to walk two kilometers to reach the katta site at Nerappady. "I'm holding a spade for the first time, but it's okay," she giggled. "At the end of the day, I'm damn tired. Since we are in a team, we forget the fatigue."

The truth is most of these women had never done earth work for such long hours. Most of them were rolling beedis. Now they have to walk lengthy distances and bring their food in a tiffin carrier. The salary will be paid only after a fortnight. But they need money to buy their weekly rations. The farmers are paying them money in advance to ensure that their requirements for food are met.

"The pace is slow, but we will finish the work soon," says N Madhava Bhat, who has taken on the responsibility of getting Berkadavu katta constructed. This katta, 30 metres wide and 3.5 metres high, requires 500 man days. Out of this, 300 days are for construction and two-thirds for collecting the construction material.

"NREGS has come as a blessing to all of us," says C Udayashankar Bhat, a beneficiary of the Berkadavu katta. "Slowly these women are learning the work. At Nerappady katta they have done some skilled work like stamping the soil, filling sandbags with sand and so on. They will master most of the work, except for some highly skilled tasks. Though they take more time, the construction will be completed."

According to Nair this is the first time a community in Kumbdaje has organised itself to use the NREGS. "We are trying to plug drawbacks," he

explained. "For example, government approved rates for the materials were lower than prevailing market rates. We have decided to okay local rates. The panchayat can do a lot. They can inculcate confidence in farmers about the feasibility of using the scheme for such works."

But katta construction under NREGS is not new. In many panchayats of Kasaragod taluk, a few kattas were constructed under NREGS last year. At Enmakaje panchayat, three sandbag kattas were made exclusively by inexperienced women. Erugallu Rama Bhat, 70, a beneficiary farmer gave them technical guidance.

Recalls Shailaja Nadumane, vice-president, Kumbdaje panchayat: "By the time all the procedures were followed, it was pretty late for katta construction last year. Yet, we constructed a katta at Kaleyathodi where, for the first time in local history, women took part."

"We have to do a little bit of give and take to benefit," said K Sham Bhat, a farmer who provided leadership for using the NREGS. "The crisis is such that even if you are ready to pay slightly higher wages, labour is not available. Poor NREGS workers, the food they bring in tiffin carriers may not be enough to keep them going for this hard work. We provide them utensils and material to cook food on site. Favours like paying cash in advance and promising to reimburse losses if the daily wages they finally get falls short, are in our mutual interest."

Kattas are the economic lifeline of this panchayat. Take, for example, the Berkadavu katta that will cost around Rs 1.32 lakhs this year. It irrigates around 125 acres of areca gardens. Even at a modest estimate, this area will yield Rs 1 crore of farm produce.

Madhusudhanan Nair's role is really laudable. He was enthusiastic, friendly and cleared all doubts with patience. "We would like to bring the katta culture into full swing next season by projecting the Kumbdaje example," he says.



Madhusudhanan Nair



Rehab centre for UP orphans

Anjali Singh
Babraich (UP)

HE sits quietly on a hospital bed where he is being treated for kidney stones. His eyes betray the pain he bravely tries to hide. This boy, no more than four or five years old, was found during rescue and relief operations, aided by UNICEF, in the flood hit district of Babraich. He was bleeding from the rectum and lying lifeless on an embankment where he had dragged himself to beg for food.

Another two-year-old baby girl lost her parents when the roof of their hut caved in. Although she survived, her future is uncertain. Most people who came forward to adopt her did so for the hefty compensation she has been given by the government from crisis relief funds. For now, the district administration has taken the baby under their wings. The SDM is acting as her guardian. But for how long is the question.

Similarly, a brother and sister have nowhere to call home. Their father was washed away in the floods and their homes and possessions lost. The distraught mother tried to make ends meet. But the prospect of bringing up two children on her own discouraged her to such an extent that she drowned herself in the village pond.

These unnamed orphans from poverty struck Babraich, bear testimony to the sad plight of children who lose their families in devastating floods or natural calamities which hit remote districts of Uttar Pradesh almost every year.

Finally, some help is at hand. UNICEF and local NGOs are collaborating with the district administration and those running disaster management

programmes to set up rehabilitation units for such orphans.

"Initially the idea was to set up temporary shelters to counsel the kids. But then after discussions with local NGOs and village community representatives we decided to set up a permanent rehabilitation centre," says Rajiv Ghosal, project specialist, Child Protection, UNICEF, Lucknow. "The panchayats, village pradhans, local NGOs and the guardians of such children will be involved in supporting the rehab centre."

Ghosal believes the rehab centre will also help address issues like child labour and trafficking for which Babraich is infamous. "We may not be able to provide infrastructural support but plans are to provide teachers and psychological counsellors for the centre," he said.

The government too is supporting the programme. "Land has been identified for the centre. Things will get started with 27 orphans," said Sudhir Kumar Srivastava, DM of Babraich. He is also the chairperson of the Disaster Management Programme in the three districts of Babraich, Nanpara and Mehsi. "The tragedy is that villagers refuse to leave their makeshift homes until their

lives are at stake. Many times the parents manage to get their children to safety but lose their own lives in the bargain. The children become orphans and have nowhere to go. With the numbers of such children rising, it is important to address the problem along with rescue and relief operations."

"These kids go through tremendous trauma, physically and psychologically," said Virendra Pandey, DPO, Disaster Management Cell, Babraich. "Intervention is required through specially trained psychologists and childcare workers. For now the rehab centre will be housed in a dharamshala till a building is constructed."

The Panchsheel Development Trust, based in Babraich and working in over 70 villages have also come forward to help. Dhruv Kumar, executive trustee of the NGO says

they were keen to offer space for the rehab centre and motivate villagers to support it.

Efforts are on to link the rehab centre with a tracking system called homelink on the Internet. All data and information about the children in the rehab centre will be put on the Internet so it will become an effective tracking system for unaccompanied children, explained Tariq Majumdar, coordinator for homelink.

The government is supporting the programme. "Land has been identified for the centre. Things will get started with 27 orphans," said Sudhir Kumar Srivastava, DM of Babraich.

Forest people protest in Delhi

Rakesh Agrawal
New Delhi

IT has been two years since the new Forest Rights Act (FRA) was passed. Peoples' groups like the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW) fought hard for it. But governments are doing little to implement it.

The NFFPFW organised a massive rally on 17 December in Delhi to remind the Centre about the FRA. About 5000 forest people from 35 groups of the Forum peacefully marched to Parliament Street. They were stopped by the police, which had put up barricades. So a stage was propped up next to the barricades.

"We're here not to ask for any *khairat* (alms) from the government, but to claim our rights that we'll take at any cost," declared Ashok Choudhury, national leader of NFFPFW.

"For long we have lived like slaves. But now we'll uproot the corrupt and coercive Forest Department (FD) and establish community forest governance," said Pushpa Topo, a regional convener of NFFPFW who had come with the Jharkhand Jungle Bachao Andolan.

The Taungiyas were there in full force along with the Van Gujjars of Rajaji National Park, Dehradun,

and those who have been forcibly resettled in Haridwar. "We should get our rights to live in the forest and earn a living," said Noor Alam, a Van Gujjar.

Some sympathetic Members of Parliament (MPs) also addressed the rally. "We're with you and I'll personally go to your areas to assess the proper implementation of the FRA," said D Raja, General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (CPI).

The state government of Uttarakhand issued a government order on 18 November and directed the district magistrates of all 13 districts to start forming forest right committees for implementation of the Forest Rights Act.

Abani Roy of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) also announced his support. "I'll raise a question on the FRA's implementation in the Lok Sabha," he reassured participants.

An alliance is being formed with trade unions, Dalits and Adivasi groups. The New Trade Union Initiative of India (NTUI), a confederation of unions from the unorganised sector, was present with its members in the rally. "We know that the FRA will not be implemented easily, so we'll have to wage a struggle," said D Thangappan, NTUI spokesperson.

A Jan Sansad or a People's Parliament was organised at Jantar Mantar on 18 December.

It was decided to organise workshops to create awareness of the FRA among forest dependent people and to hold rallies in different state capitals.

Even after issuing the notification and publishing the FRA in the Gazette of India on 31 December 2007, some state governments have not taken note.

However, constant agitation is yielding results. The state government of Uttarakhand issued a government order on 18 November and directed the district magistrates of all 13 districts to start forming forest right committees for implementation of the Forest Rights Act. Thousands of Van Gujjars who were being evicted from Rajaji National Park will feel relieved.



Cooperative promotes coconut milk

Shree Padre
Trivandrum

If you want to enhance a curry or a pudding, add a dash of coconut milk. It improves flavour and is nutritious. Used mostly in southern cuisine, coconut milk has begun to invade the north. Biryanis and curries taste better with it.

The only problem is the messy business of extracting coconut milk. A cooperative in Kerala, the land of coconuts, manufactures ready to use coconut milk and is trying to create awareness of its product.

Dinesh Foods, a division of Dinesh Beedi Workers' Central Cooperative Society, a state sponsored venture, is the only producer of bottled natural coconut milk in Kerala. It makes fruit squashes, jams and pickles also. It has been producing coconut milk since 10 years. The cooperative at Kannur in north Kerala sells an average of 10,000 bottles per month. "The market for coconut milk is still at a nascent stage," says C Rajan, Chairman, Dinesh Foods. "This is mainly because consumers aren't aware of our product."

The cooperative sells its coconut milk in only one type of packing: 200 ml glass bottles. "The thick milk is extracted without adding water. A bottle's shelf life is one year. But once you open it, it has to be used within 48 hours or kept in a fridge," explains Rajan. The technology, from Regional Research Laboratories, Thiruvananthapuram, uses locally made machines for grating and expelling the milk.

Why not pack coconut milk in more convenient containers?

"Since ours is a cooperative body, we have our own limitations and restrictions. We can't go for faster decisions and implementation. In fact, coconut milk could be put in tetra packs. There is 50 per cent subsidy from the ministry of food industries. The challenge is in exploring a market for that kind of product," says Rajan.

A booming coconut milk industry could wipe away the tears of coconut farmers who are in distress due to problems like mite attack and price collapse.

Dinesh Foods' coconut milk can be used for vegetarian and non-vegetarian curries, stews, desserts like coconut pudding, coconut soufflé, coconut *laddu* and drinks like coconut milk shake. Any *payasam* or *kheer* (rice pudding) can be made within 20 minutes with it.

According to Rajan, three medium sized coconuts are required to get 200 ml of thick coconut milk. In cities like Kochi you would pay Rs 33 for coconuts and labour for grating and extracting the milk. Or you could buy a bottle of coconut milk from Dinesh Foods. One 200 ml bottle costs only Rs 29.

"It will take time for consumers to accept the product. Decades ago when industries started making spices and curry powders, nobody took to them immediately. But now, no urban housewife takes the trouble of making curry powders herself," explained Rajan.

The process involved is very simple. Grated coconut is steamed for about 15 minutes. Then the



Women pack coconut milk in bottles

milk is extracted by machines. The milk is poured into sterilised bottles and pasteurised to prevent contamination. Very little preservative is used to extend the shelf-life of the milk.

Dinesh Foods sells the coconut milk in Kerala and a few neighbouring states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Upper middle class housewives also buy it. Some famous hotels like the Leela Palace Kempinski, Bangalore, and Leela Kovalam, Kerala, are buying the product every month.

Last year, monthly sales were around 2,500 bottles (500 litres). This year sales have grown to 10,000 bottles. With their recent advertisement campaign in TV and magazines, Rajan hopes to sell 50,000 bottles in the next six months.

Dinesh Foods also suggests different ways in which coconut milk can be used. For example, *Vellappam* is a breakfast dish eaten in Kerala. It resembles a dosa. If you add coconut milk it tastes different. Dough for chapattis can also be made with coconut milk instead

Products by Dinesh Foods.

of water. The chapatti tastes sweeter and softer. "Parents like their curries a bit hot. But children prefer curries mild. An addition of coconut milk can lower the sting of chillies and bring down salt levels," explains Rajan.

Dinesh Foods has succeeded in building a market for fresh coconut milk during weddings for the marriage feast. It saves the cooks a lot of time. Mostly weddings take place on Sundays in Kannur city. Dinesh Foods supplies fresh coconut milk in steel cans if an order is placed in advance. Less preservative is added. This coconut milk has a shelf life of 48 hours.

The cooperative has been selling around 300 litres per month to the wedding segment. The coconut milk is priced at Rs 90 a litre. Initially, sales were around 50 to 100 litres per month. Several years ago, Dinesh Foods' representatives made a presentation at the Cookers Association meet. This boosted sales.

"There is a huge untapped potential for marketing coconut milk," says Rajan. "but we need a big promotion campaign. Stalls have to be opened at food festivals, horticulture and flower shows etc. Our resources for all this are pretty limited. The Coconut Development Board can do a lot," says Rajan.

Recently Dinesh Foods introduced a new product: Pradhaman kits, an instant *kheer* pack, for Rs 55. Tasty *payasam* can be made within 20 minutes with this packet. In the last Onam exhibition held at Kannur, Dinesh Foods sold 7,000 packets.

Dinesh Foods buys coconuts from auctions. It pays Rs 5.50 to Rs 6 per coconut. Every month the cooperative buys an average of 15,000 coconuts.

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Six decades ago it was a fractured India that became independent and there were question marks about its viability. Today, the idea of India is a bigger draw than ever. More Indians find their country attractive. What are they drawn to? It is democracy, diversity and secularism. Liberalisation and economic growth have contributed to a new confidence even as it has spawned certain challenges.

BEING INDIAN BY CHOICE

RITA AND UMESH ANAND

CANDLELIGHT protests. Human chains for peace. Black armbands at Id prayers. Being Indian is a preference being exercised across the country. From Mumbai to the northeast, from the south to the north, there is support for the idea of a peaceful and democratic India where people from different religions and ethnic identities can coexist and prosper. Our cities have long been melting pots of innumerable identities. Inter-community marriages have worked to create one fabric. The central services and the armed forces have provided their own glue. But after the recent attack on Mumbai, the urge to stand together has become demonstrably greater.

Is this the outpouring of a fickle middle class shocked by the devastation caused at the Taj and the Oberoi? Or is it something deeper and more serious – a genuine belief in the future of India? Our take is that it is the latter.

It is worth noting that secessionist movements are all but out of fashion. Throughout the northeast the demand is for greater integration, more inclusive development and better governance. Reporting for *Civil Society*, we lose count of the community groups that come to Delhi seeking justice either over unwanted dams or excesses of the armed forces. The call for *azadi* in Kashmir remains, but it is confused and at best partial.

Significant chunks of territory are under the control of so-called Naxalites. But the problem is really one of poor governance. If the State did its job and the justice system worked the situation would be vastly different. The cry in these areas is for inclusive development and the absence of it has spawned a militancy that is hardly different from banditry.

Such is the acceptance of the idea of a unified, modern India that a Raj Thackeray, setting out to be fearsome with his protests, actually looked foolish and out of sync with the times. Ridicule was freely heaped on his notion of a "Marathi Manoos" and if it were not for political machinations and the publicity that he received on TV channels his protests would have fizzled out much earlier.

Activist groups are a binding force in their own way. The laws on right to information and the rural employment guarantee are the work of groups that have used wide consultation to influence the government. It is much the same on a whole lot of other issues from pollution to the importance of breastfeeding of babies and water harvesting. More people dedicate themselves to nation building than ever before. Activists from the south work in the north and vice versa. In this mingling is the assertion of the Indian identity.

While a huge backlog remains in health, education, housing and the sharing of resources like water, it is also a fact that the gains made by industry after liberalisation have created pride in the Indian economy. The stories of Indian business houses going global and the wealth acquired by entrepreneurs have captured the imagination. You could add to this the success of IT companies and BPOs and that the international standing of Indian professionals such as doctors and managers.

But this has not stopped companies like Infosys, which represent unprecedented prosperity, from encouraging their employees to volunteer for social causes. Similarly, non-

residents return to pursue an Indian dream, but also dedicate themselves to solving problems of justice and equity.

Three years ago, we received a call from a certain Anu Jain who had picked up a copy of *Civil Society* at a store in Bangalore and wanted to know more about our magazine. Months later, when she was visiting Delhi, she actually took the trouble to come to our home office, to offer her help in promoting the magazine. Thereafter, she and her husband, Ashim, have been tireless ambassadors for us, bringing in subscriptions, spreading awareness about what we do --- all this for the love of India.

Anu and Ashim used to live in the US and relocated here because they believed India needed them and in some ill-defined, inchoate way they felt that they too needed India. It wasn't as though coming back was easy. But it also wasn't as if there was nothing to come back to either. After 60 years, a great deal remains undone. But it is also true that a secular and democratic India with a growing economy has a lot going for it.

The stories of change and social entrepreneurship that Anu and Ashim found in *Civil Society* further reinforced their belief that there are more people who invest in the future of a modern India than is commonly understood. They wanted to be among those Indians and continue to do so now, based in Bangalore and supporting good causes wherever they find them.

We all have our accounts of Indians who come back to take up jobs, build businesses, adopt causes or simply discover their roots. Amit Dasgupta, senior foreign service officer, has made this growing trend the subject of a remarkable graphic novel, *Indian By Choice*. It is the story of Mandy or Mandeep who comes to Delhi for a family wedding and in the four weeks that he spends here discovers an India that he finds irresistible. From the warmth of family to the cultural and ethnic diversity to the modern campuses to the wide variety of foods – Mandy goes from resistance to complete surrender. He returns to America happy to be Mandeep because that is who he really is.

For this month's issue of *Civil Society*, which coincides with Republic Day, we invited Amit Dasgupta to write a special essay on "Who is an Indian". It appears on the following pages. But equally importantly, his graphic novel captures the changing attitudes to a newly competitive India now more visible and better understood thanks to globalisation.

In the epilogue to his novel Dasgupta says that while some of the brightest Indians went abroad, got degrees from the best educational institutions and settled into other cultures, the fact is that they never found complete acceptance. For all the changes in their accents, lifestyles and preferences, they remained foreigners. Well into middle age they began to seek more than the higher standard of living that they were enjoying. They also worried about the next generation. And so it is that Mandy in the novel is sent to India in the hope that a family wedding and the love of his grand parents and cousins would help him find his Indianness, which he does.

Mandy's realisation is what many Indians are themselves experiencing as they light those candles and collect to be counted across cities. It is the affirmation of a plural India.



Who is an Indian?

AMIT DASGUPTA

PERHAPS this is as good a time as any to ask the question: What is India? Who is an Indian? The British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, in his seminal speech titled *Why I am not a Christian*, had argued that his identity could not possibly be that of a Christian because he simply did not subscribe to several of the tenets that were so integral to being a Christian. Identity, in Russell's case of not being a Christian was an identity by negation; in other words, identifying what I am not and then, if what remains is what I can identify with, that is who I am. Identity by assertion and affirmation, on the other hand, is when there is no doubt as to who I am or what one's identity is.

In some cases, this is fairly easy. For instance, you and I would have no difficulty in acknowledging our identity as a son, a brother, a husband or as a father; professional and occupational identity is, similarly, non-problematic, for instance, the identity as a doctor or a chartered accountant, a village teacher or a professional diplomat.

But in other cases, this can get quite complicated. On a purely ideational level, the philosophical quest of 'Who am I?' has been the essence of most treatises; Hindu philosophy, for instance, would argue that I and all that is around me is maya or illusion; Buddhists, on the other hand, would argue that we are surrounded by suffering and that the essence of a true striver is to break out of this cycle of continuous and constant human suffering. On a more ideological level, on the other hand, is the identity of a person that of being anti-American if he is against the policies of President Bush? Are we, similarly, anti-Chinese if we are swayed by the philosophical writings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

Various factors influence identity or who I am. Nationality, for instance, provides identity, though the lines are not as clearly drawn, especially after the introduction of dual nationality and the identification of immigrant populations with their 'mother' country. For years, the 'little Italy' in the United States referred to enclaves where the Italian immigrant could live in the US and yet live 'the Italian way'. It is the same story with the Indians in the UK and in North America, where they have made their own exclusive enclaves of sarees and curries.

But, at a quite different level, identity is shaped by values. The core of

Indianness does not, therefore, lie in the passport that we have but on what Indianness stands for and whether we subscribe to similar values. It needs recalling that Nazi Germany annihilated the Jews not because they were not German but despite being German they did not subscribe to the values that Hitler and the Third Reich advocated. Similarly, some Hindu fundamentalist groups in India have begun to argue that 'good' Indians are first and foremost Hindus and that the onus lies on the Muslims to 'prove' their loyalty and allegiance to India so as to qualify for being counted as Indians. I would argue that such a view strikes at the essence of what it is to be Indian, since it the plurality of India that embodies Indianness. In the words of the first Prime Minister of India, "Some kind of dream of unity has occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilization. That unity was not conceived as something imposed from outside, a standardization of externals or even of beliefs. It was something deeper and, within its fold, the widest tolerance of belief and custom was practised and every

Identity is shaped by values. The core of Indianness does not, therefore, lie in the passport that we have but on what Indianness stands for and whether we subscribe to similar values.

variety acknowledged and even encouraged." Any challenge to this concept of the unity of India strikes, in my view, at the core of what is India and thus, to what it is to be an Indian.

Multiple identities are, of course, common place. I can be a Bengali from Kolkata, a Xavierian, a liberal who subscribes to socialist values, a civil servant and an Indian. None of these multiple identities need to be in conflict. After the creation of the European Union, being German or Dutch did not conflict with being European. But identities can come in conflict. For instance, working mothers have to play the delicate dance of trying to manage their professions with the responsibilities that accrue as a mother and a wife; when identities clash, a choice needs to be made on which identity takes precedence. But usually, multiple identities do indeed co-exist. The Jewish community in the United States, for instance, are American citizens and at the same time, the single strongest lobbyist group for strong and continued support to the state of Israel. In other words, identity provides a sense of affiliation and thus, the obligation of loyalty.

Where religion determines identity and thus, affiliation and loyalty, it lends itself to pliant use by religious and fundamentalist groups in shaping behavioural and thought patterns. As a result, radicalized religious groups are able to paint other religious communities with a sweeping negative brush to serve their narrow sectarian interests. However intellectually crude this might sound, it has, regrettably, wide-spread support. We are all well aware how post 9/11, western thinking was singularly motivated with a suspicion of Muslims, so much so that people with certain names found themselves at a serious disadvantage.

Can we then choose our identity and who we wish to be? Or, is our identity determined externally and thrust upon us? In other words, am I what I am because I chose to be who I am or, am I who you would like me to be? It is an established fact that peer groups and the dominant members of peer groups are a strong influence on identity. In all such cases, indoctrination results in identity creation. In other words, I become what is expected of me. Interestingly, this is one of the objectives of the globalization process: the creation of the familiar. Following 9/11, the process has only intensified because of the fear of the unknown, the stranger and the unfamiliar.

Francis Fukuyama challenged Marxist thought with his path-breaking essay *The End of History* by arguing that the collapse of the Berlin Wall and thus, the end of the Cold War, represented the triumph of Western values and ideals. According to him, globalization, as we know and experience it, had come to embody the embrace of Western consumerism and culture in hitherto 'closed cultures'. The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union were, accordingly, seen as the victory of Western liberalism and thought. The next logical step would be the globalization of this process, so that the us-versus-them could finally be put to rest through the creation of a global us. We would all, in other words, become clones of western liberal thought.

Historical evidence does not point towards such a process of colonization succeeding; rather the opposite appears to be the logical consequence. In other words, accelerated globalization of the western image would only accelerate the process of alienation and create the outsider. The French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, saw societal norms and mores as determining patterns of acceptable social behaviour; deviants were, thus, anomalies and aberrations. In the writings of the Existentialists, like Sartre, Camus, Kafka, Kierkegaard and others, the outsider (or the deviant) is portrayed as an individual acutely suffering from a sense of total disconnect with his surroundings. In Camus' *L'Etranger*, Mersault, the protagonist, has just received news of his mother's death; he demonstrates no feelings whatsoever: "Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday. I can't be sure." On the eve of his execution, Mersault falls asleep; neither life nor death holds any meaning for him. In Kafka's *The Trial*, the hero is arrested and

executed without his ever knowing why. In Maxim Gorky's *Life of a Useless Man*, the protagonist strives, all his life, to be 'useful' to those around him without ever being successful; his only success is an act of committing suicide successfully; it is his ultimate success. When Marc Antony commits suicide in the Hollywood film *Cleopatra*, he refers to his suicide as 'the ultimate betrayal', me from myself.

For most of us 'sane' people, these are all 'outsiders' or anomalies and aberrations. Fortunately, they can be isolated and referred to as 'the they' and not as 'us'. But, imagine for one moment if the outsider is not an individual but far greater in number. Would it be possible then to rubbish the outsider as an aberration and a statistic? I put it to you that if globalization is reduced to producing clones in the western image, large sections of the human race will get increasingly, and intolerantly, alienated. The us-versus-them syndrome will not get eradicated; rather it will get further accentuated and irrevocably so. Indeed, the anti-Muslim rhetoric post-9/11 has only played this out over the last few years. Recall also that after the 9/11 attacks, the first man to be killed in the US in a revenge attack was a Sikh, as he was mistaken for being a radical Muslim.

The situation in India is unfortunately increasingly echoing western sympathies, though in a different garb. Fundamentalist Hindu groups have begun to isolate the non-Hindu community. In a country that took pride in its plural character, it is a sad reflection that Muslims are said to feel unsafe in India. This is similar to the agony felt by the Sikh community following the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. In the case of both the Sikh and Muslim community, the reaction has been

two fold. At one level, there has been the advocacy of a 'war against India' by militant religious groups but at another and highly influential level, there has been strong advocacy to shun violence and to seek a closer integration with Indian society. The highly respected Darool Uloom Deoband, for instance, recently introduced the path-breaking fatwa against terrorism condemning it as being un-Islamic. The popular Bollywood actor, Shah Rukh Khan, who is also a Muslim, spoke out on prime time TV on the need to follow the preachings of Allah rather than those of the mullah. These are all positive developments but they do raise the question: Is India's pluralism and hence, is Indianness at risk?

LAKSHMAN ANAND



“ India was in my blood and there was much in her that instinctively thrilled me. And yet I approached her almost an alien critic, full of dislike for the present as well as for many of the relics of the past that I saw. To some extent I came to her via the West, and looked at her as a friendly Westerner might have done. I was eager and anxious to change her outlook and appearance and give her the garb of modernity. And yet doubts arose within me. Did I know India? I who presumed to scrap much of her past heritage? There was a great deal that had to be scrapped, that must be scrapped; but surely India could not have been what she undoubtedly was, and could not have continued a cultured existence for thousands of years, if she had not possessed something very vital and enduring, something that was worthwhile. What was this something?

Jawaharlal Nehru

This brings me to my book *Indian by Choice*. The story is about Mandy, a second/third generation Indian-origin American, who disowns his Indian identity as Mandeep and adopts the American identity of Mandy. He chooses not to be Indian because he doesn't feel Indian. To be accepted by his peer groups and by/in American society, he needs to be Mandy. Brought up in Chicago, he is as American as they come – hot dogs, french fries, baseball and the love of all things American, especially blonde. He is, of course, no different from his clones who are in several other parts of the world— England and Australia, the Netherlands and Canada. They blend with their surroundings by assimilating the culture of their adopted home and denying their Indian roots and culture.

Mandy is required, under duress, to travel to India for a family wedding and despite his fears and his doubts, his distaste and abhorrence of all things Indian, he finds himself drawn into a world he does not quite expect. He learns to shed his stereotypical image of India. When it is time for him to return to Chicago, he finds that there is much about India that he simply did not know and a great deal that he would like to know more about. He increasingly reconciles with his suppressed identity and willingly makes the choice of not denying his Indian roots; he becomes an Indian by choice and finally acknowledges Mandeep.

Choosing to remain Mandy, I believe, is as difficult as deciding to become Mandeep, because India is not easy. There has, for instance, been hugely premature euphoria about India among Indians. The refrain that 'India is shining' or that 'India has arrived' is now fairly prevalent. This has spawned a number of books on India with more or less the same theme. The overall

functioning of the Indian economy is not a myth but then, as the Prime Minister of India has repeatedly cautioned, growth is only one side of the story. Deprivation and marginalization is acute and widespread in India. Similarly, it is also a fact that we are high on the corruption index and low on the index of social development. In as much as resurgent India impacts positively on identity by injecting a 'feel good' factor, stories of 'the other India' affect identity in a negative sense; to that extent, identity is co-related with image: How I am perceived is who I am.

Negative images are seen as part of Indianness and, thus, the making of the psyche of an Indian. Katharina and Sudhir Kakar in their book, *The Indians: Portrait of a People* and Pavan Varma in *Being Indian* have put together a menu of what all goes into the making of an Indian, none of which is particularly flattering. Basically, the 'image' of an Indian is essentially a negative one. We are hierarchy conscious, which means that we quickly figure out the pecking order and this determines our behaviour vis-a-vis 'the other'. We are a loud, talkative and argumentative people. We are touchy and sensitive about ourselves and our private lives but feel no qualms about probing the lives of others. We are religious and ritualistic and deeply obsessed with death. We like to relieve ourselves in public and defecate beside railway lines. We are hugely self-centred and individualistic and so long as no harm befalls us or ours, we are largely unmoved by tragedy. For us, life goes on because *sab kuch chalta hai* (everything goes); we learn to adjust.

So, is this what or who we really are? Is this what adds up to the making of an Indian and one which gives us our identity?

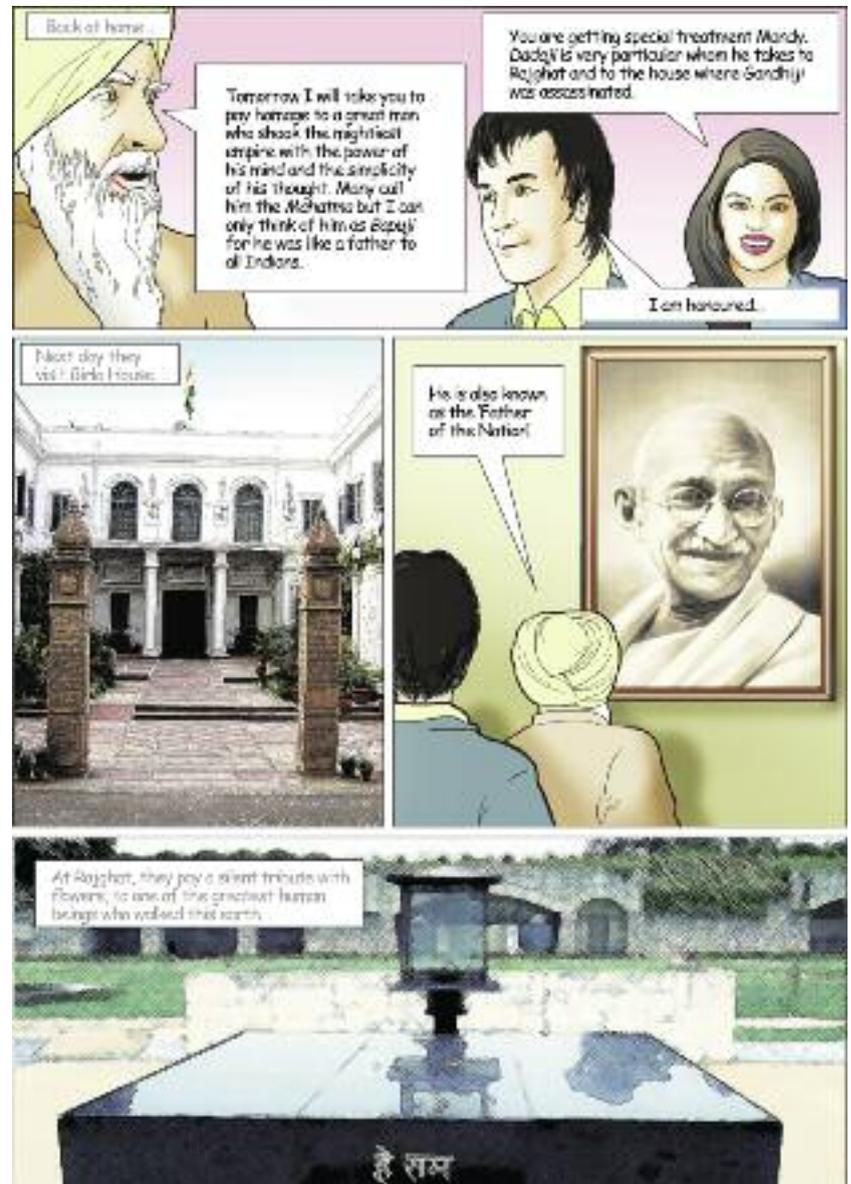
In a country of over one billion people and more than a multitude of culturally driven behavioural patterns, is it possible to generalize and determine what goes into the making of an Indian? Bengalis, for instance, are distinctly different from Marathis, or more importantly, from Oriyas despite physical contiguity. Each is driven by his own distinctive cultural ethos. More interestingly, Marwari communities who have lived for generations in Kolkata and speak the language with native-like fluency, nevertheless retain all the characteristics that keep them apart and distinct from being dubbed Bengali. The Kakars, however, argue that singular Indianness is possible because common features that are integral to the making of the Indian identity and personae can indeed be identified.

At one level, many of us can identify with the Kakar postulate. For instance, 'corrupt politician' is as much a truism as 'honest civil servant' or 'a policeman who upholds the law' is a falsehood. At the same time, I have never heard the charge of corruption levied against Jawaharlal Nehru or Sardar Patel or Maulana Azad or any of the founding fathers of independent India. Similarly, the recently martyred officers Hemant Karkare, Ashok Kamte, Vijay Salaskar, Sandip Unnikrishnan and many others were known not only for their extreme courage but for their integrity and honesty. While some might see them as aberrations ('the outsider'), I would suggest that they are increasingly becoming the norm.

Furthermore, singular characteristics falsely and simplistically suggest uniqueness in attributes. It may be recalled that Germans were, at one time, singularly identified for producing products that were akin to an international standard: the Mercedes Benz, for instance, was not simply a car; it was a standard that other cars aspired for. And yet, not long ago, it was the Mercedes Benz that was recalled globally for manufacturing defects. Similarly, to typify Indians as garrulous diminishes the talking abilities of Arabs, Latinos, Italians and several others. I would also add that referring to the strong family bonds that Indians are steadfastly proud of ignores the pride of place Italians and Hispanics, for instance, accord their family, especially the elders. In short, some of the characteristics that are mentioned as uniquely going into the making of the Indian identity tend largely to be catchy and simplistic and are, in fact, part of the identity of several other people. This does not, of course, mean that several Indians do not possess such characteristics but rather that the parts do not add up to the whole. Both Pavan Varma and the Kakars fall into the trap of falsely identifying generalities with singularity and thus, with identity.

In my view, Indianness as a defining attribute or characteristic of what provides for an Indian identity emerged only with the creation of a partitioned and independent India. The attributes prior to independence cannot be seen as defining Indianness because with partition, India – as a political and geographical entity – was sharply contrasted with Pakistan and with (the now) Bangladesh.

So what is the one single attribute that makes an Indian Indian? To my mind, it is the belief in a plural, secular and democratic entity quite simply because, unlike Pakistan, India was not created on theocratic principles. Religion did not create India; yet, it was religion that divided and partitioned India. India is home to almost all the great religions of the world, including religious communities like the Bah'ais and the Ahmedias – who are banned and shunned in Pakistan. The transition of Bangladesh from East Pakistan has also not witnessed religious freedom or tolerance; indeed, Bangladesh too is a nation with a clearly defined single religious identity. As regards democracy, it is a historically established fact that while India has steadfastly remained democratic since independence, in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh, non-democratic



governance appears to be the norm.

Thus, if we were to abandon and deny pluralism, secularism and democracy, we would reject the very idea of what it is to be an Indian. Being Indian and becoming Indian is the embracing of this value structure. Rejecting it is the rejection of Indianness.

At an erudite academic conference, I recently heard that the phrase 'unity in diversity' described as a cliché. I do not think it is, though I do believe that there are serious challenges to this concept. I would submit that these challenges of religious bigotry are aberrations and anomalies because to my mind, the core of Indianness lies in the belief of religious harmony and thus, of the unity in diversity.

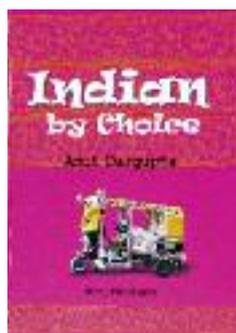
Put simply, India is, and has always been, a concept, an idea and an ideal. If we can shape ourselves and our thinking in her mould, we would become Indian. But what is a nation if not for her people. India too needs to be constructed so that she is what we make of her.

Joan Robinson, the economist, is reported to have once said that whatever one might think of India, the opposite is also true. I can only say that there is much to be corrected and set right in India. I would also like to say that this can be done if we decide to do it together. Gone are the days that we can say, it is not my job - it is yours! Or that this part of India is mine because I can identify with it; the rest is not my India.

For me, India's diversity is unique especially because of the scale and intensity of such diversity. North to South, East to West, she is neither static nor predictable. Change reflects her soaring spirit and is the essence of her eternal identity. Landscapes, customs, clothing, language, cuisine, even the Gods, differ from place to place. She is like the colours of the peacock's feather: brilliant and distinct and yet, no colour can be separated from the other for they are interwoven like magic. She is not the mosaic or the melting pot. She is the Divine Peacock. She is the Perennial Tree that gives shelter but with roots above and branches below. She is Mystery and Allure. She is home. She is the contemporary and the classical, the modern and the traditional. She is change and continuity. She is the eternal here and now. She is you. She is me. She is everybody. She is the journey to our soul.

It is for all this that I am an Indian.

(Amit Dasgupta is a serving Indian diplomat and the author of the book Indian by Choice, Wisdom Tree; 2009)



Indian by Choice Wisdom Tree
Rs 995

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

Infosys does some public service

The software giant offers to loan its people to NGOs

Subir Roy
Bangalore

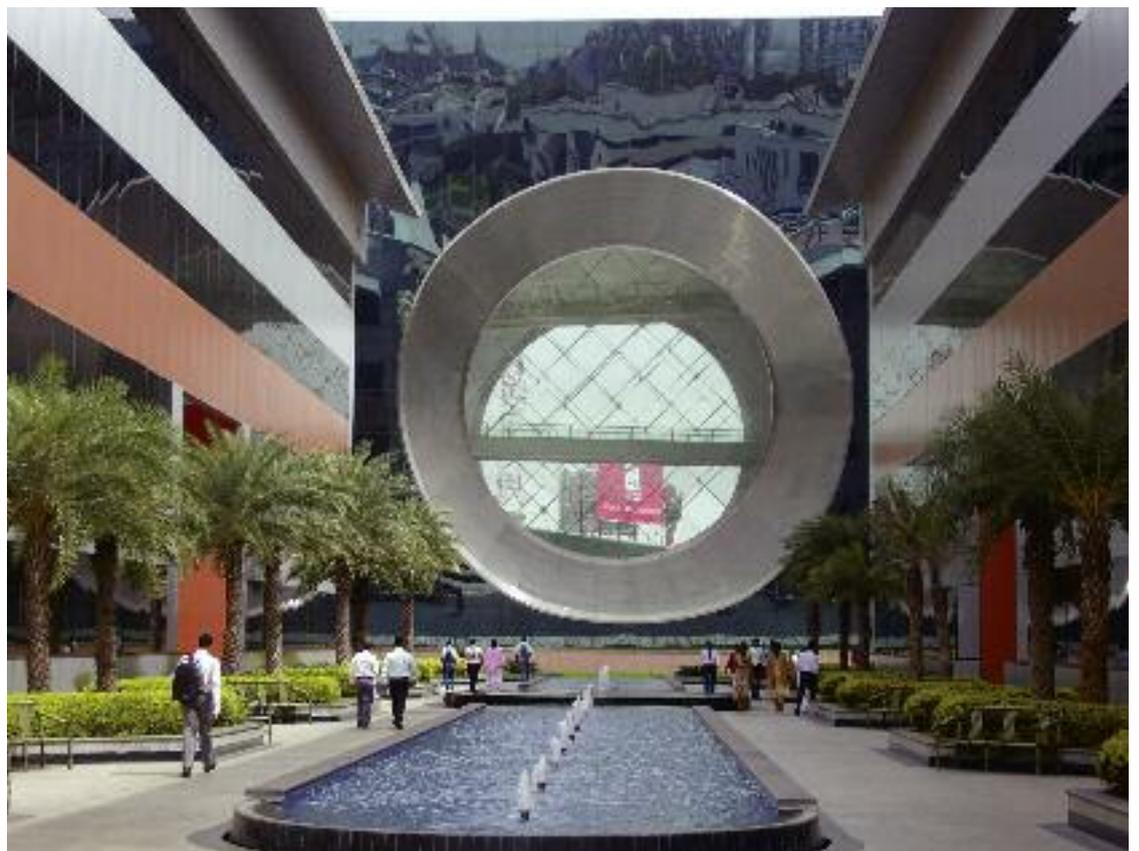
INFOSYS Technologies, the software leader which has very high standards of governance, interacts with a lot of non-government organisations. Over time it has found that most NGOs which are headed in the right direction are woefully short of competent people as they cannot afford to pay market salaries. Some NGOs do pay good salaries, even better than corporates, but they end up spending a lot on themselves. This defeats the purpose.

Simultaneously, a lot of people within Infosys have felt the desire to render some community service for a period. Out of this has been born a scheme whereby Infosys will do its bit to match the two felt needs. Applications to participate in the scheme are open to Infosysians who have put in at least two years, closed on 30 November. Of them 50 will be chosen and allowed to spend up to one year in community service, with Infosys paying half the individuals' compensation. After that they will come back to Infosys and the period will be counted as experience in the industry and Infosys. An employee can do two such stints in his career.

Mohandas Pai, HR director of Infosys, himself very active with NGOs (he is a trustee of Akshaya Patra which delivers midday meals to a million school children daily), explains that the scheme stands on two legs, "one leg is ours and one leg is the employee's." An employee keen on such service has to come forward and suggest either an organisation or an area in which he likes to work. Infosys has identified these areas as NGOs, R&D organisations, educational institutions, government, regulators and quasi-government organisations.

Infosys has a list of NGOs which can participate in the programme. To make it to the list, "an NGO can write to us and we will do a due diligence." To pass muster the NGO should be a non-profit, working for a social cause in a non-denominational manner.

On the non-profit bit an exception is made in the case of micro-finance organisations which work for profit but are focused on serving the disadvantaged. It is also not enough to be engaged in community service. Religious organisations and political parties often undertake a good deal of such



Infosys campus. Below: Mohandas Pai, HR director



To make it to the list, "an NGO can write to us and we will do a due diligence." To pass muster the NGO should be a non-profit, working for a social cause in a non-denominational manner.

work but since they work for causes which are not inclusive they have to be left out of the scheme.

To become part of the scheme a research organisation should be engaged in work for the common good. The fruits of the research should take society forward – maybe work on diseases like AIDS and tuberculosis, or on a low cost handset that will improve life and incomes at the bottom of the pyramid. The fruits of such research should be in the nature of public goods, maybe like open source software. Not every bit of the overall picture has been worked out, the only condition being that "the work should be in a non-competing area for Infosys."

Even here you cannot be very rigid. An applicant can choose to work for government and Infosys naturally does not have an 'approved' list of governments or departments. All of government is in the

Continued on next page

Desmania has a green Echo

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

DESMANIA, a mainstream, multi-disciplinary design firm, has launched a line of green products branded as Echo.

Made of recycled corrugated sheets, Desmania's Echo line includes lifestyle accessories and office equipment such as coasters that double up as snack bowls, strappy slippers and fancy rakhis. These are made by rolling up strips of corrugated paper with the joints stitched up, not glued by synthetic adhesives.

Anuj Prasad, who owns and runs Desmania, and Sandhya, his wife, see Echo as symbolising human as "H" amid environment as "ECO". Each Echo product is accompanied with a small, visiting-card size folder in recycled paper that gives every day tips to help save our environment. It is another effort to spread awareness and knowledge in an appealing format. "That is where design can play a crucial role, to make things more acceptable by deploying aesthetics that are appealing," Sandhya explains.

Echo's first consignment has been shipped to a lifestyle store in Goa. These were made by students of Delhi's Blind School. A Desmania designer spent many weeks with visually challenged students of the Blind School to equip them with the necessary skills. Although a longer-term arrangement did not work out with the Blind School, Anuj is convinced it was the right path to take.

He is determined to put in place a supply chain for Echo that is both green and sustainable. "We want to provide the raw material, design and marketing skills, and enlist self-help groups, train them, upgrade their skills, and given them a livelihood they can use at disposal. It's a win-win for everyone concerned. Consumers get access to a product that looks and feels different. Designers can push themselves in terms of new, alternative products. And NGO members gain in skill."

But this hasn't been easy, Anuj says the NGO sector needs to be more evolved and organised. He confesses to failing to strike up long-term arrangements to mass produce the Echo line and take it to market. Desmania is currently tying up an arrange-



Anuj and Sandhya with their eco-friendly Echo products

Made of recycled corrugated sheets, Desmania's Echo line includes lifestyle accessories and office equipment such as coasters that double up as snack bowls, strappy slippers and fancy rakhis. These are made by rolling up strips of corrugated paper.

ment with a women's self help group to take things forward.

Desmania is on the board of Arunam, a nodal marketing agency founded by The National Trust, and established to facilitate commercial ventures for the social sector. After all, inclusive development can only happen when such ventures are self-sustainable.

Anuj and Sandhya are confident of finding a responsive market for their Echo products. Indians are "green" by nature, and have a tradition for recycling unlike any other country in the world. "Which other place has the *kabadiwala* who is willing to take everything and recycle it to get out completely new products out of that?"

Desmania plans to retail from their own outlet which is scheduled to come up soon in Delhi. They are also talking to a variety of home decor stores to market these products.

Continued from previous page

public domain. An applicant can certainly want to take forward e-governance which intrinsically improves the lives of ordinary citizens through better delivery of public services. Theoretically, he could be working on a solution which could have been given to a vendor like Infosys to develop. But so what.

Infosys would be particularly happy if some of the applicants choose to work for a regulator like the capital market's SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India) or the insurance industry's IRDA (Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority).

It is faintly amusing to see Pai work through these logical reefs with a common sense driven straight-from-the-heart way. The contradictions are similar to those encountered in trying to define secularism. The government should not have a religion, which is the citizens' private affair, but then

the government regulates religious trusts for the public good and to prevent mahants from enriching themselves. This 'interference' in the practice of religion is seen as very secular.

All policy decisions in Infosys are taken in a collegial way so Pai is merely implementing such a decision but the scheme bears his personal stamp. Present him with a public problem and he will tackle it like a business challenge, driven in good measure by his almost impetuous, compulsive enthusiasm.

The need to be logical and not totally rule bound is again visible in the inclusion of educational institutions in the scheme. You are welcome to teach for a year, it should naturally be in a good institution but not all good institutions will qualify, like those allied to religious entities. This is because they may be top class but they may not be open to all with admission entirely on merit.

An applicant can also choose to work in a think

tank to develop inputs for policy, the only consideration being it should work in "an area of broad public interest, and not be sectarian or ideological." A bit of a tight rope will have to be walked here, going by the US scene for think tanks. A Brookings Institution is easy to support but what about an American Enterprise Institute? Where does a catholic, open minded approach end and a conservative mindset begin?

In a sense such a scheme could only have come out of Infosys, and maybe the Tatas. Philanthropy is part of the Infosys DNA. The spouses of founder chairman N R Narayana Murthy and S Gopalakrishnan, the current CEO, play key roles in the Infosys Foundation. Nandan Nilekani, joint chairman and former CEO, and his wife Rohini, support several foundations. The middle class professionals who built the successful company want to give back to society something for what they have received from it.





Insights

- Opinion
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- Ideas
- Angst

No fresh water for rivers

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

INDIANS are believed to have great cultural and religious value for rivers. Rivers have a prominent place in the scriptures, prayers and rituals of almost all religions, particularly Hinduism and Sikhism. People actually worship rivers but think nothing of throwing all kinds of filth into those revered waters. They seem to imagine that rivers have the power to purify all the filth they throw in. That assumption is grossly wrong, of course.

And so, the state of Indian rivers is one of the worst in the world. It is deteriorating further with every passing day.

Is that a paradox?

In a sense it is. Because governments, most politicians, bureaucrats and construction engineers believe that water flowing from rivers to the sea is

a waste. So it is true that the Indian state is equally responsible for the state of India's rivers. One can, in fact, identify many acts of commission and omission by governments in India that have led us to this situation. However, the fact that we the people allowed this state of affairs to happen, to continue and to reach the present situation, makes us equally responsible.

But first, what is the state of India's rivers?

Water quality management in India is performed under the provision of the Water Pollution Act of 1974. The basic objective of this Act is to maintain and restore the wholesomeness of rivers by prevention and control of pollution. However, the Act does not define the level of wholesomeness to be maintained or restored in our rivers. The Central

Pollution Control Board (CPCB) had declared in 1985 that no river in the plains area of India has water that can be used for drinking directly.

The situation thereafter has only deteriorated with increase in population, urbanisation, industrialisation, damming of rivers and increased consumptive use of water. Climate change impacts are making things worse. The latest report from the CPCB, namely, *Status of Water Quality in India 2007*, published in July 2008 shows, even with the limited data and non serious analysis that it gives, that indeed more stretches of rivers are falling into the same status.

More significantly, India has no policy that rivers must have freshwater. Read that sentence twice, it is quite important.

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Thus, when a dam, a hydropower project or any other diversion structure is built on a river, the project need not allow any water for the river, for its social or ecological uses in the downstream stretches.

The only state in India that has a clear policy on this is Himachal Pradesh. In Sept 2005, the Himachal Pradesh government issued a notification that said that all (existing, under construction and planned) hydro projects should release at least 15 per cent of the minimum observed flow in the river, at all times. This was far from adequate, since to preserve rivers for their social and environmental flows, much larger flows are required, but this was certainly a step in the right direction. That notification was challenged in the Himachal Pradesh High Court by a Government of India body, the NHPC Ltd and by the Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB). PSEB is from the downstream state, which won't suffer if no downstream flows are released. The challenge in the High Court, in fact said, among other things, that no law of India requires that rivers should have freshwater flows.

And guess who supported the challenge in the High Court?

The Government of India's Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF).

India's federal ministry is supposed to be the guardian of the environment, including rivers, one supposes. It should have a policy for the preservation of rivers, since rivers are also one of the largest repositories of biodiversity. But MoEF has no policy for rivers to have freshwater flows at all times. And when one of the states comes out with a policy for river flows, the ministry actually opposes it!

However, lately, while giving clearances for run of the river hydropower projects, the MoEF has started stipulating that a certain minimum flow must be allowed in the rivers at all times. But the stipulated flows are ad hoc and inconsistent, and at the most 10 per cent of the observed minimum flow in the river on which the project is proposed. This is completely unacceptable. Even more importantly,

Lately, while giving clearances for run of the river hydropower projects, the MoEF has started stipulating that a certain minimum flow must be allowed in the rivers at all times. But the stipulated flows are ad hoc.

there is no credible mechanism to ensure that indeed the stipulated flows are released at all times.

For example, in the case of the NHPC's recently commissioned 510 MW Teesta V hydropower project on the Teesta River in Sikkim, the stipulation was that the project will ensure release of one cubic meter per second at all times. When we asked MoEF through an RTI (right to information) application who is ensuring this flow, the answer was amusing: "A regular monitoring is being done by the project itself".

In fact the regional office of the MoEF visited the project just once a year, that to with full prior information to the project authorities! So the agency that stipulates the norm for freshwater flow has neither the capacity, nor the will, it seems, to ensure that its stipulations are implemented. What is then the use of such stipulations?

Even more recently, while giving clearance for a project involving pumping water from the Chambal River to provide drinking water to 926 villages and four towns of Karauli and Sawai Madhopur districts in Rajasthan, the Supreme Court stipulated that the flow of minimum of 4.78 cusecs (cubic feet per second) of water will be maintained at all times, downstream from the pumping point. This was the minimum observed flow in the river in the last 20 years. So now the river will possibly have no more than that amount for most of the non monsoon months, in most of the years, if that norm is adhered to. This time there is a monitoring committee involving the forest department.

The once in 20 years minimum observed flow

When a dam, a hydropower project or any other diversion structure is built on a river, the project need not allow any water for the river, for its social or ecological uses in the downstream stretches.

will be the norm now. And what impact this will have on the river, the downstream biodiversity and so on is not even assessed; it is assumed, without any study, that this once in 20 years flow should be sufficient for all those purposed downstream!

That takes us to the basic question. Why have freshwater flows in river at all? Is water flowing in the river waste, as pro big dam proponents have us believe? This article does not have space to elaborate on the usefulness of

freshwater flowing in rivers. Briefly, it is helpful for social, including cultural and religious needs, fisheries, groundwater recharge, biodiversity, pollution dilution, stopping salinity ingress, navigation and so on. In fact the first criterion for a healthy river is to have freshwater flowing in the river at all times.

Fortunately, in recent years, there is increasing awareness and agitation to ensure that we indeed have some healthy rivers. Such agitations can be seen for the Bhagirathi, Ganga, Yamuna, Damodar, Chalakudy, Alaknanda, Narmada, Brahmaputra, Arwari, among other rivers. While there have been some successes, unfortunately, these campaigns have not yet yielded effective results in terms of policy.

One of the main reasons for this is the total apathy of governments to this issue. Governments in India still consider freshwater flowing in the river as a resource to be completely exhausted. It took a letter from UPA Chairperson, Sonia Gandhi, no less, recently to make the Union Ministry of Water Resources initiate a study of the impacts of hydro projects on the Ganga River.

The government's pollution control architecture is a den for corruption, where there is no role for the local people, transparency or accountability. Under the circumstances, all its current initiatives, including the proposed National Ganga River Water Authority are going to remain ineffective and suspect since they do not touch the core problems.

So the increasing number of campaigns is good news. The bad news is that it is going to take us a lot of effort before we see change.

Himanshu Thakkar (ht.sandrp@gmail.com)

South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers & People (www.sandrp.in)

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Reporting the terrorist

DANIEL LAK

FIRST a little mea culpa. I have been a willing, indeed enthusiastic, instrument of terror. I have knowingly sought out and disseminated the messages of terror groups in the United States, Canada, Europe, India and beyond. Without the likes of me, those who commit spectacular atrocities in the name of a cause would probably do something else.

I am the media – a journalist, broadcaster and member of a global elite of communicators whose duty it is to first reflect events as they have taken place, and then reflect upon them.

Take as proof the attacks on New York City and Washington on September 11th, 2001. Never mind that diaries and emails left behind by the perpetrators talk of a great strike against America and its foreign policies. There was another, more significant reason for the choice of targets that fateful day.

Manhattan and Washington are centres of live television broadcasting like few others on the planet. Whoever planned the precise order of strikes on the World Trade Centre knew that many of us around the world would see that second plane slam into the north tower in real time, that we would feel the fear and terror unfiltered by the comforting, explanatory tones of a senior reporter or anchor.

It was the same in Mumbai between November 26 and 29, 2008.

Indian and world media participated in spreading that unadulterated horror that came from watching the attacks unfold, and strengthened the terrorism a hundred fold.

Today's practitioner of terror is a public relations man with murderous intent, a marketing department with guns, grenades and a belief that death means martyrdom.

Everything that we know about the people who carry out these attacks points to the same ugly, inescapable fact. Terrorism and media have a sick synergistic relationship that can never be de-linked.

In Britain in the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government tried to shake loose the ties that bind reporters and terrorists.

Clearly a democracy that practices freedom of the press could not ban coverage of bombings and attacks but Thatcher hit upon the interesting wheeze of stopping broadcasters from using the actual voice of apologists for Irish Republican Army violence.

Those who spoke for certain named organisations could be quoted, their words could be transmitted via television and radio, but only if they were spoken by actors. It was an attempt, according to Thatcher to deny to terrorists the 'oxygen of publicity.'

As a policy, it was a dismal failure though it remained in place for years. It diminished violence not one iota and created a strange marketplace for voiceover artists who sounded like Gerry Adams of the IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein – the most prominent voice to be banned.

That Adams is today a senior figure in the government of Northern Ireland has everything to do with

patient international mediation and British counter-intelligence, not misplaced prohibitions on press freedom

In the aftermath of the vicious Mumbai attacks, there are many pressures on government and civil society to examine this link between media and spreading the terror.

Some question international broadcasters like the BBC and their reluctance to apply the term 'terrorist' to the gunmen inside the Taj and Oberoi Hotels.

As a longtime BBC journalist, I remain proud of my



organisation for its stance on this matter. At the British broadcaster's World Service radio arm, we pioneered this notion with regard to Northern Ireland.

We saw 'terrorist' as a loaded term that pre-judged the guilt or innocence of a criminal suspect, and felt too that we were in dangerous waters with our global audience, some of whom expected us to be utterly neutral or at least to choose the least emotional, most objective approach to conveying information.

I applaud those who maintained this policy with regard to the Mumbai attacks. Yes, they were terrorist in nature, carried out with malign intent to spread terror. But as events, they spoke for themselves. The human tragedy and the blows to India's already beleaguered body politic were matters to be reported as such, not wrapped up in the faux-emotionalism of a fulminating television anchor.

By broadcasting live from the scene of tragedy, fear and horror that was Mumbai in late November, we were aiding and abetting terror far more than if we deny ourselves the option to use a single word to describe the perpetrators. That is a false debate that ignores the wider issue of our role in spreading the impact of such attacks beyond the immediate range of an AK 47 or a car bomb.

Consider the notion of 'targeting foreigners', an early talking point of the attacks.

We were told that gunmen asked for British and American passport holders to identify themselves and even Indian media outlets leapt on this to show that an international conspiracy must be to blame for Mumbai's agony.

The choice of targets for the attackers guaranteed

both foreign victims and international media attention. At the end of the day, far more Indians died than visitors from abroad.

The murder of Jews in Nariman House was a painful exception but this attack was not aimed at tourists or business executives from countries with troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The crosshairs of the men of terror were firmly on India and its wellbeing.

Another frightening, if understandable, aspect of media coverage of this tragic few days was the early blame flung towards Pakistan.

Time will tell just what came from across India's western border and what didn't but when politicians, police officers and unnamed intelligence sources started blustering about foreign hands and international conspiracies, they were doing so without the careful proof required by international diplomacy.

For the media to repeat these accusations as if they were utterly proven was also wrong and harmful to our duties as journalists to disseminate truth, rather than rumours, opinion and speculation.

All of those can be reported as such, but facts emerge only after they are tested and found of sound provenance. Even now, there is little coming from the Mumbai story that strikes me as copper-bottomed, confirmed or well-investigated.

I have spent far too many years reporting high impact events to sit in detailed judgment of colleagues who spent days immersed in human tragedy and fear. Some of the reporters I watched on television last month did heroic work. Others were up and down and a few hysterically overstepped the bounds between edgy journalism and sensationalism.

Mumbai 2008 was a fire that seared this country and its media and the flames continue to rage, much as the venerable Taj billowed smoke for days.

What emerges now is what must concern us.

The United States that climbed from the wreckage of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in September 2001 was a vengeful scofflaw, a shadow of the great country that saved the world from Nazism.

India, its media, and civil society now have that choice. Many around this country are working to ensure that the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks leads to better preparedness for terrorism and - crucially - address its root causes.

Others want war, a live television narrative of Indian bombers flying over collapsing buildings and humiliated enemies, no doubt accompanied by triumphalist reportage and outpourings of nationalism.

That would be a mistake and I believe that many thinking Indians agree.

Let's hope a bruised, humiliated and bloodied government chooses the wiser course of letting cool heads prevail, and that the news media supports this.

If for no other reason than the economic challenges of 2009 will be the worst the world has known.

Terrorism, in short, will soon be yesterday's news.

Right to education, plus and minus

SUMITA MEHTA

THE Union Cabinet has cleared the long-pending Right to Education (RTE) Bill, ensuring every Indian child between 6 and 14 free and compulsory education. Like the NREGA and the nuclear deal, this looks like another feather in the UPA government's cap and understandably former Finance Minister P Chidambaram felt it is an important promise to future generations. Crucially, the responsibility for actualising this dream rests squarely on the government's shoulders.

Currently the RTE targets 20 crore children in the 6-14 age group. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) estimates that an additional Rs 77,223 crore will be required in the 12th Plan to make this law work. This amount translates to about Rs 7,000 crore per annum or 0.15 percent of the GDP. Already, the 11th Plan allocation for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is projected around Rs 70,000 to Rs 80,000 crore.

Reducing the required allocation obviously impacts issues of quality, equity and a dilution in the kind and levels of teaching, in infrastructure and other provisions that enable this right to be actualised.

Does the current draft deliver on the 'equal' bit? Does it assure a child's right? True there are some positives. These include provisions for 25 per cent reservation in private schools for disadvantaged children from the neighbourhood at the entry level (the government will reimburse expenditure incurred by schools), no donation or capitation fee on admission, no interviewing the child or parents as part of the screening process.

The Bill also prohibits physical punishment, expulsion or detention of a child or deployment of teachers for non-educational purposes other than the Census, election duty and disaster relief. Running a school without recognition will attract penal action.

Looking good and delivering however are two different things. At CRY, (Child Rights and You), we question several aspects. The draft Bill aims to provide elementary schools in every neighbourhood within three years -- though the word 'school' encompasses a whole spectrum of structures. A set of minimum



LAKSHMAN ANAND

norms need to be worked out. The State should also be obliged to tide over any financial compulsions that may keep a child out of school.

Reservation will further exacerbate prevailing inequities by diluting the State's responsibility in ensuring the fundamental right of free, compulsory education of equitable quality to every child. Further it would legitimise and promote the privatisation of education, putting it in the hands of commercial and vested interests at a time when VHP inspired Vidyalayas and RSS funded Vidya Bharati's are emerging as the principle private players in small towns and cities.

It would also perpetuate class and caste distinctions because the 25 per cent under privileged children in a class would continue to feel inferior if 75 per cent of their classmates were from privileged backgrounds. And it would also create disturbing divides between the 25 per cent who will receive quality education and the rest who won't.

The exclusion of the 0-6 and the 14-18 age groups are in complete contradiction to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which describes a child as "every human being below 18 years." It leaves the onus of providing pre-school education of the 0-6 age group to the ICDS, which focuses on providing nutrition rather than education and does not cover the whole country. This could perpetuate child labour especially among marginalised and vulnerable sections of the community. Similarly, the exclusion of 14-18 year olds would mean that the State

would have no role in ensuring higher education for these children. Worse, it would leave scores of children in limbo because at that age they would not have passed Class 10 and would therefore not be eligible for even low paid jobs.

The draft fails to acknowledge and address the socio-economic issues that keep children out of school such as poverty that forces a child to work and gender and security concerns that prevent parents from sending their daughters to school. Today, only 53 per cent of all habitations have a primary school and upper pri-

mary schools are 3 km away in 22 per cent of habitation. Most importantly deeply entrenched mindsets need to be overcome- upper castes who don't permit lower castes to enter school premises and middle class attitudes including teachers who say cynically, "What will they do with education?"

The government looks at the reservation clause as a step towards encouraging public-private partnerships (PPP) and promoting social inclusion. But if the government's intent was to bring different social classes together, promote an egalitarian and integrated society and provide equitable education, it should have adopted the 'common school system' (CSS) recommended by the Kothari Commission in 1996 in which children from all strata of society in a locality receive free education in neighbourhood schools. Such a step would have improved the overall standard of education in government schools, as the influential upper strata of society would push for higher standards.

In fact, the benefits of CSS are immense. For children it would mean stress-free, assured admission in a quality school in their neighbourhood with adequate infrastructure, clean toilets and a safe environment. For parents it would mean assured admission to a quality school, no fees or other overheads, a voice in the running of the school and opportunities for their child, including the differently-abled, to realise their full potential. For teachers it would mean better training, minimum wages as per the Sixth Pay Commission and freedom from non-teaching duties.

India spends just 3.7 per cent of its GDP on education as compared to most other nations who spend 6 per cent or more on education. It's really not a lack of resources but a tendency towards neo-liberal policies like private-public partnerships that further stratify society. Ensuring equitable education is not just a matter of adequate finances. It impacts the social and power structure and that is the Pandora's box no one wants to open.

Sumita Mehta is Deputy General Manager Communications, CRY

The Bill leaves the onus of providing pre-school education of the 0-6 age group to the ICDS, which focuses on providing nutrition rather than education and does not cover the entire country.

Living

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

Be a tribal at Orange County



Each hut has access to a pool

Susheela Nair
Kabini

ORANGE County Resort, Kabini, exudes rustic charm. Everywhere you look there are lovely mud huts and crystal water. The resort is encircled on three sides by the Kabini, a tributary of the Kaveri River. It is close to the Nagarhole National Park near Mysore in Karnataka.

Designed by George Ramapuram, managing director of Trails India, the resort's architecture has been inspired by the local Kadu Kuruba tribal community. Its layout and design are like a traditional Kuruba tribal village (*hadi*).

But don't get belied by Orange County's spartan exterior. Its interiors are as plush and as contemporary as any world class hotel.

Winding pathways lined with mushroom-shaped lampshades lead to 30 palm-thatched cottages sprinkled across the 15-acre property. The resort offers two types of accommodation – jacuzzi huts with a private jacuzzi and pool huts with an open-to-sky pool within a courtyard. The earthy tones and natural materials in each mud and thatch hut blend with the landscape. Every room has large windows and French style doors that open into private balconies.

The interiors are minimalist. The recurrent tribal theme is perceptible in the bottle gourd lampshades, the use of wood, tribal-motif drapes, bedspreads and the uneven cement floors. All the furniture has been crafted by local carpenters at the site. The handcrafted beds, split-bamboo ceilings and the luxurious open air bath are intrinsic to each hut. Tribal art elements harmoniously blend with the decor and design. Somu, an artist from Kerala, has created elegant picture frames with ferns, dried leaves, seeds and natural materials collected from adjacent forests.

The coffee lounge and restaurant are in the main block overlooking the boat jetty. The garden furniture is crafted from coffee stumps. The restaurant is named Honeycomb. A village well, a mammoth wooden granary and a haystack give an added rustic feel. Waterhole, the bar, is evocative of rich wildlife and deep jungles. The reading room or the nature library, provides a breathtaking view of the Kabini reservoir. You can pamper yourself at Vaidyasala, the Ayurvedic spa, or soak in the sprawling swimming pool at the edge of the lake.

The resort implements a water conservation programme. It has its own sewage treatment plant (STP). The treated water is used to irrigate the gardens. The



The resort's architecture has been inspired by Kadu Kurumba tribal settlements

STP reduces the amount of water used by the hotel. An extensive drip irrigation system waters the plants. The use of foam flow faucets and dual flushing cisterns have minimised water consumption. A reverse osmosis plant installed in each cottage provides 100 per cent safe drinking water while reducing the negative impact of over 50,000 plastic bottles every year. Guests are discouraged from bringing plastic mineral water bottles to the resort. Another commendable water conservation programme is rainwater harvesting. Other eco measures include an ozonisation plant for the main swimming pool.

Orange County's solid waste management efforts are exceptional. Degradable and biodegradable waste are separated. Plastic, glass, metals and paper are sent for recycling. STP sludge is used as fertiliser. The use of CFL lamps, electronic key tags, the installation of governors on diesel generators has all helped in conservation of energy. Air conditioners are fitted only in bedrooms. To reduce fuel consumption during lower occupancy days, a diesel generator with lower capacity is used. A wind power generator offsets power consumption and supplies surplus power to the government's grid.

No tree has been cut during construction of the



Photographs by SUSHEELA NAIR

resort. An enormous ficus tree next to the pool has been there before the resort was made. The landscape is beautifully laid out with indigenous flowering shrubs and plants. It is difficult to find ordinary flora in the resort. All the trees and plants are named and this makes for an enjoyable and informative walk. Steps have also been taken to minimise formal landscaping.

Currently, local employment at the resort is 30 per cent. It will be stepped up to 50 per cent in the next three years. Cultural shows are carried out by locals,

providing them a supplementary means of income. Groceries and vegetables are purchased from the local market. The resort shows its concern for the community by organising structured community development programmes, grant of scholarships and construction of toilets in villages.

There are a multitude of nature-based activities for guests. These include wildlife safaris, nature trails, bamboo rafting, coracle rides, elephant safaris and culture tours to tribal settlements. You can drift down the Kabini River on a coracle or a motor boat. If you are lucky, you can spot pachyderms quenching their thirst at the edge of the reservoir. There are treks organised with indigenous

guides who will take you across the countryside as part of the resort's Nature Trail. This will enable you to stay connected to nature without causing any disturbance to the flora and fauna. As part of the village trail, you can cycle through quaint village roads to the Kuruba tribal settlement which is just 20 minutes away. During this visit you get to see, feel and experience facets of tribal living. Accompanying guides who are well trained and knowledgeable will provide an insight into local history and legend.

Contact details: Email: kabini@orangecounty.in, info@orangecounty.in
Tel: 080-4191 1000

Learn the Three Ps of photography



Susheela Nair
Bangalore

If you want to be a wildlife photographer talk to MN Jayakumar, Chief Conservator of Forests, Karnataka. Jayakumar, a celebrated photographer, has traveled the length and breadth of India's national parks and sanctuaries, capturing defining moments in wildlife. Travel in his footsteps. With his advice and blessings, you could go far.

"Wildlife photography helps unfold the uniqueness of our jungles," he says. "It is an attempt to conserve wildlife. The camera captures species that are not possible for all to see."

Jayakumar's pictures are awesome. An exhibition of his photographs, called 'Encounters in the Wild' held in Bangalore displayed wildlife in rare moments. You could see black bucks, leopards, lions and an eagle in full flight.



Slithering reptiles, wild tuskers, and a sambar doe and fawn at twilight were also there. To freeze frame the image of an Asiatic wild ass fleeing, full of speed, grace and vitality, is a challenge to anyone. There was a majestic tiger, shot in Kanha. One rare picture was of an Albino black buck. The highlight of his exhibition were a sequence of pictures of a tigress killing a sambar, presumably, the first ever record in still-photography.

Jayakumar's forte is capturing the avian species with his Canon digital camera. Painted storks in courtship, short-toed eagle landing, Brahminy starling pair in Ranthambore, grey-headed fishing eagle taking off, intermediate egret flaunting its snow-white feathers in breeding plumage were some of the brilliant photos on display.

"Wildlife photography has indeed taught me a lot," he said sharing his experiences. "The main lesson is what I call the 3 Ps of photography: patience, perse-

verance and persistence."

Shooting in Ranthambore's amazing heat, waiting for more than 10 days for just one shot is a challenge. "Animal behaviour is most unpredictable," points out Jayakumar. "It is hard work, laden with danger and excitement."

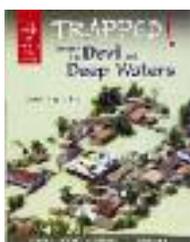
Jayakumar considers Mysore district the best place in India for wildlife photography. "Leopards are challenging for any wildlife photographer. Out of many frames you might get two or three good ones. Among birds, river tern is the most difficult to capture. With Nagerhole, Bandiput, Kabini, Kokkarebellur, Ranganathittu all within a radius of 89 km, Mysore district is a paradise for wildlife photographers."

Among his many accomplishments, Jayakumar has co-authored a coffee table book on the wildlife of Karnataka, titled 'Encounters in the Forest' with celebrated wildlife photographer, TNA Perumal. The book has won rave reviews.



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TRAPPED BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND DEEP WATERS
Dinesh Kumar Mishra
Peoples' Science Institute and SANDRP
Rs 595

If you read *Civil Society's* November cover story, 'Let the River Flow' you will find mention of Dinesh Kumar Mishra, who was part of a fact-finding team that visited flooded north Bihar. Mishra's contribution to understanding the flood problem goes much beyond his role in the fact-finding mission. He has been working in the area for a long, long time and has studied it deeply.

This book is an English version of one that he had done in Hindi. As is the case with most people working at the grassroots, Mishra's writing is rich in detail. His information has been garnered and validated over the years. Peoples' Science Institute and SANDRP, both organisations with high credibility, have done well to publish Mishra in English so that a larger audience can now have an understanding of the problem.

The challenge in north Bihar goes beyond the immediate concern over floods to the much larger question of what kind of relationship we should have with our river systems. The old approach of canals and embankments is a civil engineer's delight but has proved to be ruinous in ecological terms. This is so across the country and not only in the case of Bihar.

Mishra's learning and the message that he is putting out therefore have national significance. For a change in approach to sink in will take time and persuasion. It will involve a process of opinion building. The sooner this begins the better.



THAKUR: A LIFE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA
Rajiv Mehrotra
Price: Rs 250
Publisher: Penguin

Effortless to read, this work is about the life of the great mystic Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa who influenced India and the world by his pure devotion and *bhakti* towards the divine. He not

only drew a vibrant synergy between idol worshipping, practices, rituals and symbols of Hindu heritage but also the celebration of divinity in diverse forms. In the effort to understand religions he practiced all and constructed a beautiful bond between each.

The memoirs of Sri Ramakrishna go back to more than 170 years. Mehrotra gives the book a very present-day feel. His words have energy. Indeed, devotees must have felt this power in Sri Ramakrishna's presence.

"One should not think that my religion alone is the right path and other religions are false", Sri Ramakrishna said.

Sri Ramakrishna's life on earth has been analysed in eight chapters. The author has covered salient milestones of his life concisely making the book inspirational.

This heart warming biography illustrates the limitless influence and charisma of Sri Ramakrishna as well as the Order that was enthused by his spiritual quest. No wonder the book has done well and the first edition has sold out.



SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES IN INDIA
Rama V Baru (Edited)
Rs 550
Sage

More children are enrolled in school today, yet they learn little and often dropout. A major reason is poor health. This book analyses the relationship between health and education. Research papers examine the economic, social and epidemiological reasons that result in a child's poor health and poor report card. It also examines school health services, the midday meal scheme and innovative health education projects undertaken by NGOs.

The paper, 'Through the life cycle of children,' traces the factors which determine the health of children till the age of 11. Families and services from different states as well as urban and rural regions have been surveyed. Early marriage, low-weight babies, poor and anaemic mothers, the ICDS scheme, school system, teacher attitudes have been looked at closely and recommendations given.

Jean Dreze and Aparajita Goyal write on the many positive outcomes of midday meals, especially in enrolling girls. Delhi's midday meal scheme is analysed by Meera Samson, Claire Noronha and Anuradha De. The scheme itself gets pass marks, though the food is not sufficient and parents seem more worried about the lousy quality of education.

Rama Baru provides an incisive overview of school health services tracing its history and constraints and providing useful suggestions for improvement. Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra's health services score higher marks. PHCs need to be strengthened.

The chapter, 'An art of the possible' has innovative suggestions for teaching health education to children by linking specific health problems to the social and economic reality children face. Theory is connected with practical activities like puppet shows, real life case studies etc.

Three suggestions are important. First, reorient the ICDS so that it caters exclusively to the zero-to-three age group. Children who are three plus can be taken care of in primary schools and benefit from a nutritious midday meal. Second, involve Panchayati Raj Institutions in overseeing government health schemes. Thirdly, adopt teaching methods which link health to the child's real life situation.



GREENING THE SUPPLY CHAIN
Purba Halady Rao
Rs 325
Sage

Every business has forward and backward linkages often called the supply chain. In recent years, many big industries have become more environmentally conscious. But their supply chain leaves a lot to be desired.

Most businesses in the supply chain are small and medium industries (SMEs) and these are often the root cause of pollution. In some cases they take on the dirty work of bigger industry. In this book, Purba Halady Rao details how a company can help its supply chain to adopt green, sustainable practices.

To begin with, companies should have an environment policy and integrate all their suppliers,

business partners and consumers in their greening efforts. It is not enough to be a stand alone green company. Green Supply Chain Management is now a growing trend globally. Production and trade is about exchange and value, trust and friendship. Such perceptions lower costs and improve health and safety.

The book details every stage of interaction with the supply chain. The first stage is Inbound Logistics or sourcing raw materials, the second is achieving clean production, and the third is implementing Outbound Logistics or greening distribution. Reverse Logistics is also catching on, for example, a company in the Philippines prepares lead batteries for recycling at the production stage itself. Amway, Thailand, which sells personal and home care products takes its plastic bottles back from customers and gives a discount.

The book is peppered with many interesting examples like how Nestle greened its supply chain in Moga, Punjab, by getting milk suppliers to use solar energy and turn waste into manure. This is a nicely written book, easy to read with many ideas for those with a green heart.



PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Effectiveness of the Sardar Sarovar Project
Tata Institute of Social Sciences
Complimentary

This report is a cost benefit analysis of the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP). The study is perhaps timely since moves are afoot once again to raise the height of this monstrous dam from 121.92 metres to 138.68 metres.

The SSP has already cost us some Rs 45,673.86 crores. What has it delivered for this huge sum of money?

First, the SSP was to irrigate 17.92 lakh ha in Gujarat and 73,000 ha in Rajasthan. But hardly any benefits have been realised because the distribution system has not been built. In Gujarat, only 19 per cent of the canal network has been completed.

Secondly, the dam was to supply desperately needed drinking water to parched villages in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Instead, it is industry that has benefited. Here is a truly scandalous finding: Saurashtra receives 20 per cent of Narmada water and 80 per cent of it is diverted to power plants, industries and the municipal corporation, free of cost. The Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board (GWSSB) is paying Rs 48 crores for the water.

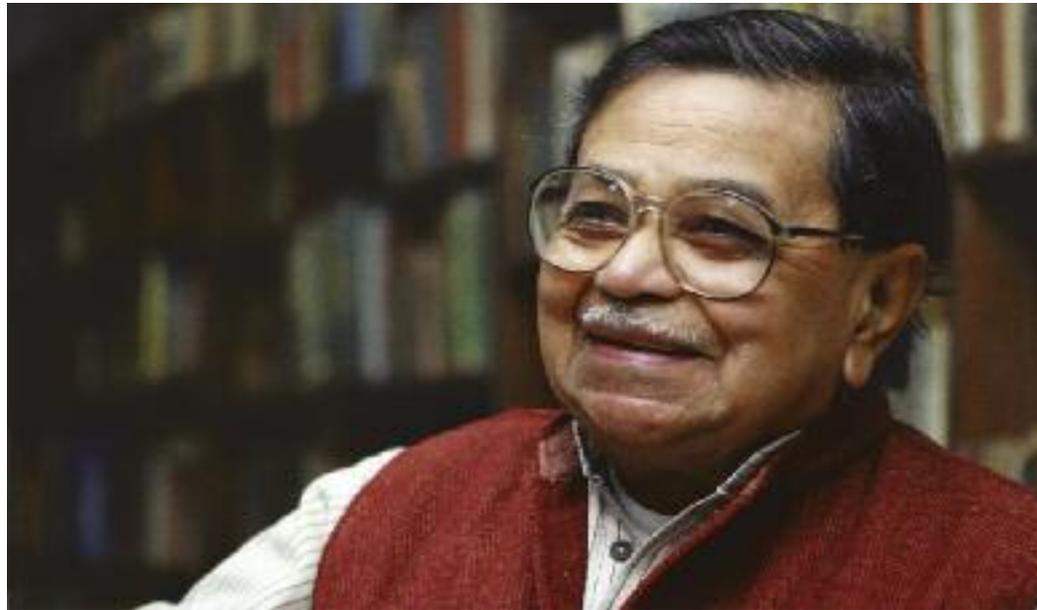
Raising the height of the dam to 121.92 m was supposed to produce an additional 3500-1700 MU of surplus but in reality it added only 550 MU.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. The SSP has displaced thousands of families, destroyed livelihoods and drowned some of the most fertile biodiversity lands in India. Rehabilitation has been another scandal with Project Affected Families either being dumped in unsuitable sites or forced to accept cash compensation, or not even recognised as being affected. Those people living on *tapus* and those likely to be submerged by the dam's rising backwaters are yet to be factored in.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), the longest non-violent protest in independent India's history has consistently argued that the dam is a tragic mistake. Successive governments did not listen. As the clock ticks by the adverse effects of the dam will finally sink in. Time is proving that the NBA was right all along.

The gutsy Charkha

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Shankar Ghose

It is a rambling basement in Gurgaon's neighbourhood of Palam Vihar in the fringes of Delhi. A train line is a stone's throw away and when the trains pass the roar is deafening. A few desks with computers, a meeting table and lots of bookcases indicate that this is a place where people who do some reading and writing come together. It is actually much more than just that.

Charkha Development Communication Networks is among the rarest of rare initiatives in media and communications. It was launched 14 years ago by Sanjoy Ghose, a social activist who devoted himself to finding strategies for dealing with rural poverty. Sanjoy was killed by the henchmen of labour contractors in Assam. Thereafter, Charkha dithered for a while before being anchored by Sanjoy's father, Shankar Ghose.

"How often does a father follow in his son's footsteps," says Ghose, who at 74 is a cheerful and effervescent person but still gets tears in his eyes when he talks about Sanjoy. Carrying his mission forward hasn't been easy. Sanjoy wanted the voices of the poor and marginalised to be heard. He believed that they needed to find space in mainstream media. Through these voices, a more complete picture of India would emerge and development strategies would acquire greater relevance. Information would become more meaningful.

But to try and make the media more inclusive in the nineties was a tall order. Big money and corporate interests had begun driving information like never before. This made Charkha especially relevant, but it also left it isolated. The mood setting in then was to celebrate the accumulation of wealth by any means. Stories of poverty and communities on the fringes were seen as the work of people who wanted to spoil the party.

So, getting editors who wanted to publish these stories was tough. Finding the talent to write and package them was equally difficult. It is often forgotten that for alternative media to compete it has to be nimble in ways that make

the mainstream stop and notice.

Ghose inherited from his visionary son a mission with these complex challenges. Charkha was no easy organisation to run though Ghose had been a senior executive in the corporate world and knew a thing or two about management. He had also headed the National Foundation of India (NFI) as chief executive.

Over the years the challenges have grown as media have come to be dominated even more by commercial considerations. Television and the Internet have made the game complex. Content is now openly for sale. Journalists all tend to belong to a certain class and educational background. They are required to be celebratory and market-oriented in all that they do.

Charkha however has marched on. It runs three feature services in English, Hindi and Urdu. It does workshops to help people who have no journalistic experience to report and edit. Young Kashmiri women, for instance, have attended such workshops. It runs a community radio station in Jharkhand and goes all the way down to the Andamans to work with tribals.

Charkha teaches communities to communicate within themselves. This is a means of empowerment. It highlights issues and problems. But it also preserves talent and traditions. But the task of making an impression on mainstream media remains largely unfulfilled. It is not for want of trying. The forces that drive the big media brush a Charkha aside often without realising that an opportunity is being missed. It is a mismatch of momentum and dimension. It is a problem which has more to do with the architecture of the media business than Charkha's frailties.

On 7 December Charkha held the customary celebration of its anniversary. Next year will be a particularly big bash. Charkha would have completed 15 years then and Sanjoy if he had been alive would have turned 50.

Is Charkha a worthwhile experiment? For the answer to that one will have to ask people in the fringes. But then who goes there in the first place?

The diabetes diet

Dr G GANGADHARAN



DIABETES mellitus is a chronic metabolic disorder in which the body fails to convert sugars, starches and other foods into energy.

Diabetes in Ayurveda is called Prameha. Prameha is defined as a disease characterised by passing of large quantity of turbid urine. It includes a variety of metabolic conditions associated with characteristic urinary anomaly.

Etiological factors: Lazy, inactive, obese persons and voracious eaters are prone to developing diabetes.

Diet and activities: Those factors which increase kapha can lead to prameha (diabetes). Thus sedentary habits, excessive sleep, inactivity, eating excess of meat of

animals, milk, curds, jaggery, sugar, cereals which are less than one year old and recently distilled alcohol increase kapha in the body, which may lead to prameha.

MANAGEMENT OF DIABETES WITH DIET: Diet places a significant role in controlling diabetes. The diabetic diet may be used alone or in combination with insulin doses or oral hypoglycemic drugs. The main aim of the diabetic diet is to maintain ideal body weight by providing adequate nutrition along with normal blood sugar levels.

Glucose is a sugar released from carbohydrates. So if we want to control blood sugar we have to limit the consumption of simple carbohydrates. Carbohydrate food is given as value per portion known as exchange. This helps to decide on the type of food to be eaten, the amount of food and the time at which food should be eaten. One can plan for more flexible meals as one gets more knowledge about diet for diabetics, may be like the counting carbohydrate meal plan or constant carbohydrate plan. But there is no common diet that works for every one. Nor is there any particular diet that works perfectly for a diabetic over a long period. While planning for the diabetic diet we should consider the following points:

- Take fiber rich food.
- Instead of three heavy meals we should take 4-5 small meals at mid intervals.
- Cut down bakery products and include well cooked whole cereals. Don't eat carbohydrates two hours before bed time.
- Consume fresh fruits and vegetables.

Diabetics should always take care of their diet and the food they eat because most of the food contains not only carbohydrates but also energy value. The fat and protein from food is converted into glucose and this glucose has an effect on blood sugar levels. Diabetic food should be high in nutrition but low in calories.

Suffering from diabetes does not rob you the opportunity of eating delicious and nutritious food. It's not like finding yourself in the middle of a very bad nightmare where you hurriedly seek the food you want but it is desperately running away from you. Truth is, you need not suffer this horrendous dream in real life. You could still eat foods that you are used to eating as long as they fall under the list of foods safe for diabetics. Following is a list of such foods.

DIABETIC FOOD LIST

● Complex high fiber carbohydrate: It has been found that taking food high in dietary fiber could help protect one's body against the harm brought by diabetes. Fiber functions by slowing down the absorption as well as diges-

tion of carbohydrates which helps to boost the responsiveness of tissues to insulin medication therefore normalising levels of blood sugar. Foods which come under this category are oats, legumes, lentils, cereals, dried beans, wholegrain products, peas, fruits and vegetables.

- Low glycemic index: This is safe since it does not create rapid peaks in terms of blood glucose levels.
- Omega 3: This is extremely important to prevent hardening of the arteries. Good examples of foods rich in Omega 3 are cold water fish including mackerel, tuna, salmon, herring, etc.
- Artificial sweeteners: Since diabetics are expected to shun foods rich in sugar then the only option left is to consume artificial sweeteners like aspartame and saccharin. These will give the same rich taste but minus the guilty feeling.
- Protein: Tofu, cheese, eggs, and peanut butter can be used as meat substitutes. Only a total number of six ounces of protein spread into two meals is your maximum requirement of protein in one day.
- Omega 6 fatty acid: Shields the body from the damage brought by diabetes neuropathy. Examples include: primrose oil.
- Starch: Also incorporate starch in your daily meal. Notwithstanding the fact that white bread is detrimental for diabetics, you must still ensure that you get your daily requirement of starch. Examples include pasta, vegetables, grains, breads and cereals.

Diabetes is just a matter of taking control over your illness. If your daily food intake is managed the right way, meaning you are merely consuming foods that are good for you then you can expect change in your body and condition. Sad to say, because of the abundance of food choices that people are provided these days, only a meagre amount of 20 percent of the total vitamins and nutrients requirements are furnished into the body. This is also the reason why more and more people are experiencing an overweight crisis in their life.



DOS AND DON'T

- For breakfast, take cholesterol-lowering oatmeal.
- Have nuts rich in mono unsaturated fat, such as pecans, walnuts, and almonds.
- Eat pasta, stews and leafy salads along with beans like kidney beans, chick peas, dry beans, navy beans and peas which can reduce "bad" cholesterol.
- Fat free milk, yogurt, and cheese to be taken.
- Eggs whites to be included.
- Increase intake of dry beans and peas.
- Have at least 20 to 25 grams of raw onion daily.
- Add wheat bran to your wheat flour (50 per cent wheat flour plus 50 per cent wheat bran). This

helps increase fiber in your diet.

- You can also add flaxseed and fenugreek seeds into the wheat flour.
- Increase fiber intake in the form of raw fruits, vegetables, whole cereals etc
- Intake of cinnamon, garlic, onion, bitter melon, guar gum is known to considerably reduce blood glucose level.
- Don't fry foods. Instead bake, boil, poach or sauté in a nonstick pan. Steam or microwave vegetables.
- Avoid high-fat red meat and opt for low-fat turkey, fish and organ meats.
- Limit the use of condiments such as ketchup, mustard and salad dressing. They are high in salt and can be high in sugar, too.
- Rinse processed foods in water and, wherever possible, choose fresh foods over canned foods.
- Limit your salt (sodium content).
- Read labels carefully. Soy sauce, brine and MSG, for example, contain a lot of sodium.
- Don't select ready to eat and junk food items.
- Don't smoke and stop alcohol consumption.
- Don't skip meals and medicine times.

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Collective energy can fight terror

SAMITA RATHOR

Om Asato Ma Sad Gamaya
Om Tamaso Ma Jyotir Gamaya
Om Mrityor-Ma -Amritam Gamaya
Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi

Lead me from the Unreal to the Real
From Darkness to Light
From Mortality to Immortality
Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

A Vedic prayer with powerful healing qualities

ONE evening in early November, my husband and I went to Leopolds in Colaba, Mumbai, for dinner. The restaurant is famous for its cuisine and huge waiting list. It is a backpackers haven. We were fortunate to get a table almost instantly. As we readied to order, for some unknown reason, my breath quickened and the only feeling I had was to get out of there. An offended waiter was taken aback by my strange change in plans. I made up my mind not to go to Colaba for a while. We got home that night...safe.

November 26, just a few weeks later, some unknown men with guns attacked not just Leopold's but several other locations and the innocent people of Mumbai. Over 200 citizens of this great city never got back home.

However grand a wall on the exterior, does it have a chance to stand strong without good quality bricks?

SOUL VALUE

The nation is the wall and we are the bricks. Each brick needs to take its own responsibility. One weak brick can cause a crack in the wall. We are creating our own cracks in the wall and then playing the blame game.

These attacks are not an attack on Mumbai but on the entire universe that gives us refuge. It's an attack on each of us individually. Our collective energy forms the universal energy. The universe gives us what we give to it. Give the universe respect and dignity it gives you back the same. Give it wrath, it will give you destruction.

Our so called degrees and education teach us everything except ethics. We lack moral education. We are so carried away by analysis without morality. "Acts of terrorism happen because of a lack of spiritual direction," says Professor Charles Taylor, Templeton Prize winner. When energy is not channelised in the right direction it gives rise to negativity.

Ethics is like an ocean without water. So deep rooted is this ocean of ignorance I wonder if we can get to the core.

So how can we begin to bring about a change?

Terror attacks in the country can only be tackled if we remain united by keeping our energies positive. At this juncture it is of utmost importance for us as individuals, as a nation, to unite and fight against terrorism. We need numbers and strength. Each one

of us needs to take a pledge to fight against corruption and terrorism. It is heart warming to see so many people, joining hands against terrorism. This is a true example of positive, universal collective energy. If our energy is strong, the outcome will be equally productive.

Compassion and unity is alive. That is very evident from the response of the people. They came in large numbers for the protest at the Gateway of India. It is a clear indication of how much people desire peace and security.

What we need is ethical, responsible and capable leaders to rule our country.

This is a planet that belongs to human beings who are part of a civil society. This is our motherland. Any act of incivility must be condemned and totally eradicated. It is not about religion, caste, creed or colour but about one and the same species living under threat.

I pray and sincerely empathise with those who gave up their lives, protected others, suffered deep loss and those still fighting for life.

A land is made of people and we people have always survived. This is a battle against terror and it is not just about our nation. A beginning by people, by voicing their innermost concerns about the nation has already been made.

The terrorists have started the beginning of their end.

samitarathor@gmail.com

GRASSY CRAFTS

Vetiver leaves have been used in handicrafts since hundreds of years in Thailand and Africa. However, the fine handicraft industry was started in Thailand as an initiative of the Queen of Thailand.

Paetai Kuyanate is a master craftsperson of vetiver leaf in Thailand. Paetai has trained more than 500 women from China, Equador, Venezuela and India. Handbags, sun hats, shopping bags, flower baskets, lamp shades, pillow and mattress covers are some products made from vetiver leaves.

Vetiver Network and Royal Projects Development Board, Thailand, have trained two Indian women, Zehra Tyabji, a graphic designer and Rashmi Ranade, a product designer from Women Weavers. "We will develop a range of utility items home items like runners, coasters, table mats and room screens from vetiver," say Zohra and Rashmi. At their Gudi Mudi project in Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh, they have trained over 30 women in the use of dried vetiver leaf in hand woven tablemats. The project is successful and the women have learned well. They are currently looking for buyers.



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What happened to Soleckshaw?

RITA ANAND

ONE afternoon I decided to go to Chandni Chowk, Delhi's historic market in the Walled City. I wanted to take a close look at the new solar rickshaw or the "Soleckshaw" as it is being called. It had been launched in October with much fanfare by the Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit, and the Union Minister for Science and Technology, Kapil Sibal. I had seen a picture of the Soleckshaw, dripping with marigolds, in newspapers. I wondered how it was doing.

Chandni Chowk traces its ancestry to the Great Mughul, Shah Jahan. It has one main arterial road with a jigsaw of lanes on both sides. Crowded and dirty, even its pavements have been swallowed by shops and pedestrians gingerly pick their way through.

According to news reports, the Soleckshaw has a 36 volt solar battery and can do 15 km per hour. Three people can sit on it, instead of two. It was invented by the state-owned Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

But I looked and looked and yet could not find the Soleckshaw.

It was 1:30 pm and peak time for the rickshaw pullers. They were busy seating children on their traditional rickshaws to cycle them back from school. There were little children all over the rickshaw. Officially, the rickshaw is banned from the main road. But rickshaw pullers ply up and down blithely.

I asked one of the rickshaw pullers. "Oh, that rickshaw," he said indifferently. "It can't squeeze into lanes. It can't carry 10 schoolchildren. It can't carry heavy goods. Must be around somewhere."

So the Soleckshaw wasn't such a grand success. But a second reason the Soleckshaw could be in hiding is because it is illegal. It doesn't have a licence. Every rickshaw needs one to ply. SA Azad, who works with the Cycle Rickshaw Majdoor Shakti Sangathan, found out through a right to information (RTI) application.

Azad said the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the licensing authority, would be well within its rights to seize the solar rickshaw, cut it into little bits and auction it. Or in MCD jargon, it could 'chak-nachur' the Soleckshaw.

Getting a licence for a rickshaw is not easy. Since 1997, the MCD has fixed a ceiling of 99,000 rickshaws and issued 89,429 licenses. The city has expanded. Its population has grown. Yet the MCD stubbornly refuses to revise its estimates. However, demand and supply always intersect so nearly one million rickshaws ply on the streets of Delhi, mostly illegally.

Rickshaw's vague status

You can make the rickshaw look sleeker. You can invent solar rickshaws. But what's the point? After being lauded as eco-friendly, the rickshaw is kicked around by the police, municipal officials and the courts.

Two years ago, traders in Chandni Chowk complained to the Delhi High Court that rickshaws were causing traffic jams. The court banned rickshaws from plying on the main arterial road. At that time Delhi's urban transport department approached the Central Road Research Institute (CRRI) to find out what form of transport should be allowed on Chandni Chowk. The CRRI set up a committee of experts. They said: replace the rickshaws with CNG buses.

But according to the National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP) of 2006, drawn up by the Urban Development Ministry, non-motorised transport like cycle rickshaws should be encouraged in crowded places. So it was the rickshaw which should have



Rickshaws and school children in Chandni Chowk

been recommended by the CRRI committee and the cars and buses which should have been banned. Who were these experts anyway? Azad says he doesn't know. His RTI application didn't yield clear answers, but they couldn't have had an expert on non-motorised transport.

The rickshaw is subjected to this kind of discrimination and exploitation because it has no legal protection. It continues to be governed by the archaic Hackney Carriage Act of 1960. Things have changed. There is new respect for non-polluting forms of transport. By now the MCD should have drawn up an imaginative rickshaw policy matching the objectives of the NUTP but it has not done so.

A policy it framed in June was hurriedly withdrawn much to the relief of the Cycle Rickshaw Majdoor Sangathan, which said it was horribly flawed. The MCD did not discuss things with the Sangathan. It doesn't recognise any rickshaw union, you see. Neither has the MCD ever talked to the Delhi government on the need for a rickshaw policy.

The rickshaw is an eco-friendly transport service. It carries around 2.5 million school children to school safely every day weaving its way through cars, buses and Chandni Chowk's narrow lanes. It takes ordinary citizens here and there for a little money.

Giving dignity to the rickshaw puller means first legalising his profession. Though rickshaw pullers are poor they are not beggars or criminal elements.

They are just earning a living. Cycling a rickshaw is the only profession where a poor man can earn some money quickly, without any investment except his own energy.

Rickshaw policy

What sort of policy should be in place? The Cycle Rickshaw Shakti Sangathan which is affiliated to the New Trade Union Initiative, would like more licences for rickshaws so that nobody has to ply a rickshaw illegally.

The MCD diktat says only one individual can own one rickshaw. Why is this restriction only for rickshaws and not for taxis, cars, scooters or even aeroplanes?

LAKSHMAN ANAND

When buses have depots why can't rickshaws have them too along with security, parking and living facilities? The Delhi government or the MCD could itself own the rickshaws and rent them out for the day. Or rickshaw pullers can form cooperatives and run rickshaws themselves.

The MCD refusal to recognise any rickshaw union violates the 'right to associate' which is enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Rickshaw unions should be recognised and the MCD should talk to them.

No welfare policy or social security exists for rickshaw pullers. Mostly, pullers are poor migrant labour between the ages of 18 and 35. They come from Uttar Pradesh or Bihar. They are

Dalits or belong to backward communities who hire rickshaws for the day from owners and earn Rs 100 per day at the most. Part of that money is paid as rent to the owner.

Since a limited number of licences are issued most rickshaws are 'illegal'. The MCD seizes them, dismantles them and sells them as scrap. From 2005 to 2007, the MCD earned Rs 2.68 crore from impounding rickshaws and selling them as scrap. For traffic violations a rickshaw puller pays Rs 500 which is what a rich car owner pays.

But not a paise of all this was spent on rickshaw pullers. Nobody knows where the money disappears and RTI applications have failed to unearth this mystery. Under the NUTP, money is allocated to city zones for promotion of non-motorised transport. So money is not an issue. It should be spent on social security for the rickshaw puller.

There should also be dedicated cycle stands around the city for cycle rickshaws. Only 406 rickshaw stands exist currently.

We need more democratic use of road space. Cars hog the road. Cycles and rickshaws are squeezed to one side. When national highways are planned no space is given to non-motorised forms of transport.

Delhi has the highest rate of road accidents in India. It also has a rising number of obese people. Encouraging people to jog, walk and cycle, especially short distance would make them healthier. It would lead to less road rage and more happiness.



Changing Lives.

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Infant Mortality

Maternal Mortality

Malnutrition

Reduction of Disease

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Sowing the seeds of Change. Continuously.

	05-06	06-07	07-08
Reduction in Morbidity(%)	37%	19%	13%
No. Of children improved to normal & Grade 1	755 (76%)	2069 (95%)	6917 (96%)
Reduction of Anemia among women members in Self Help Groups	1239	3299	8583

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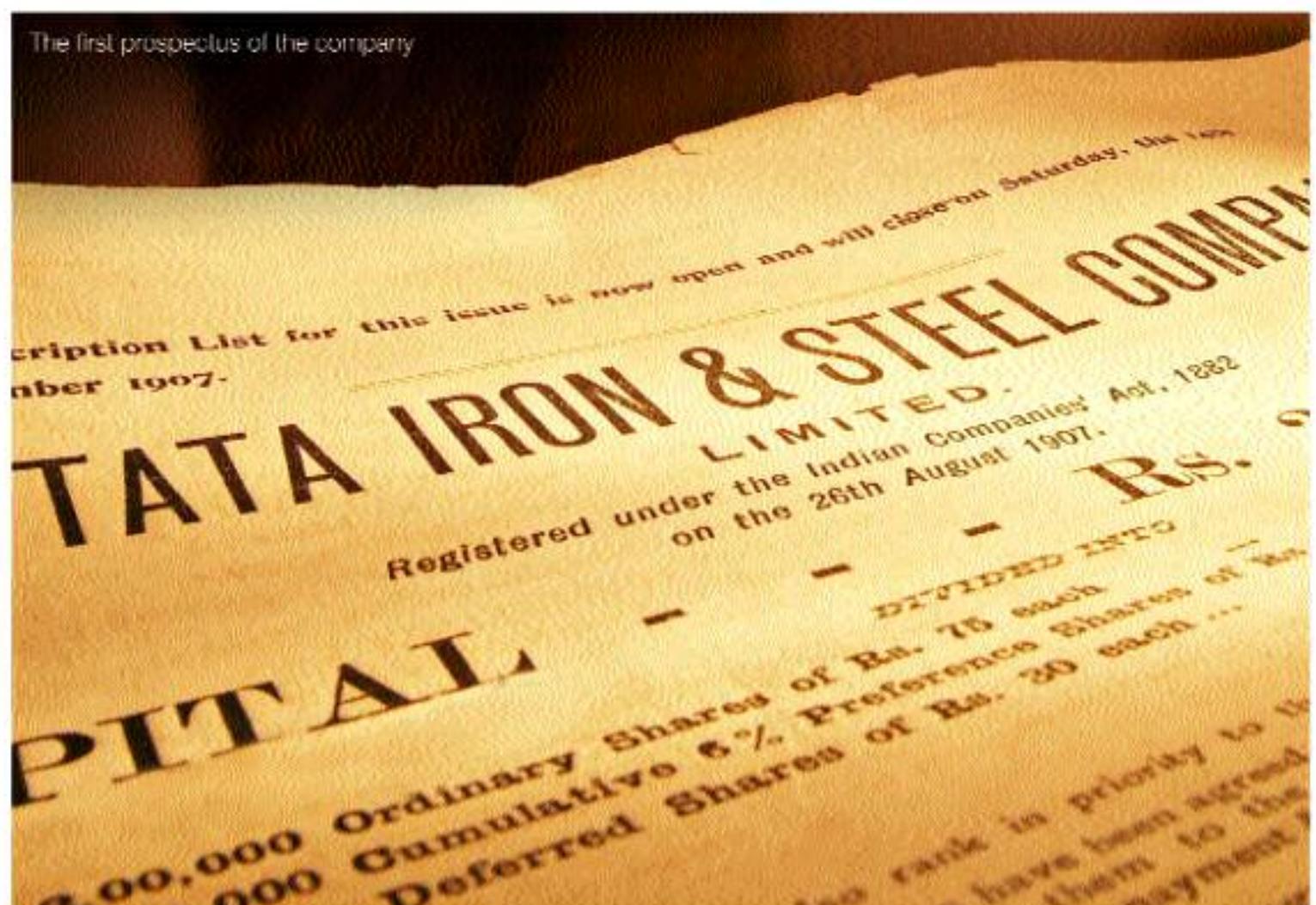
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The first prospectus of the company



TATA STEEL



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