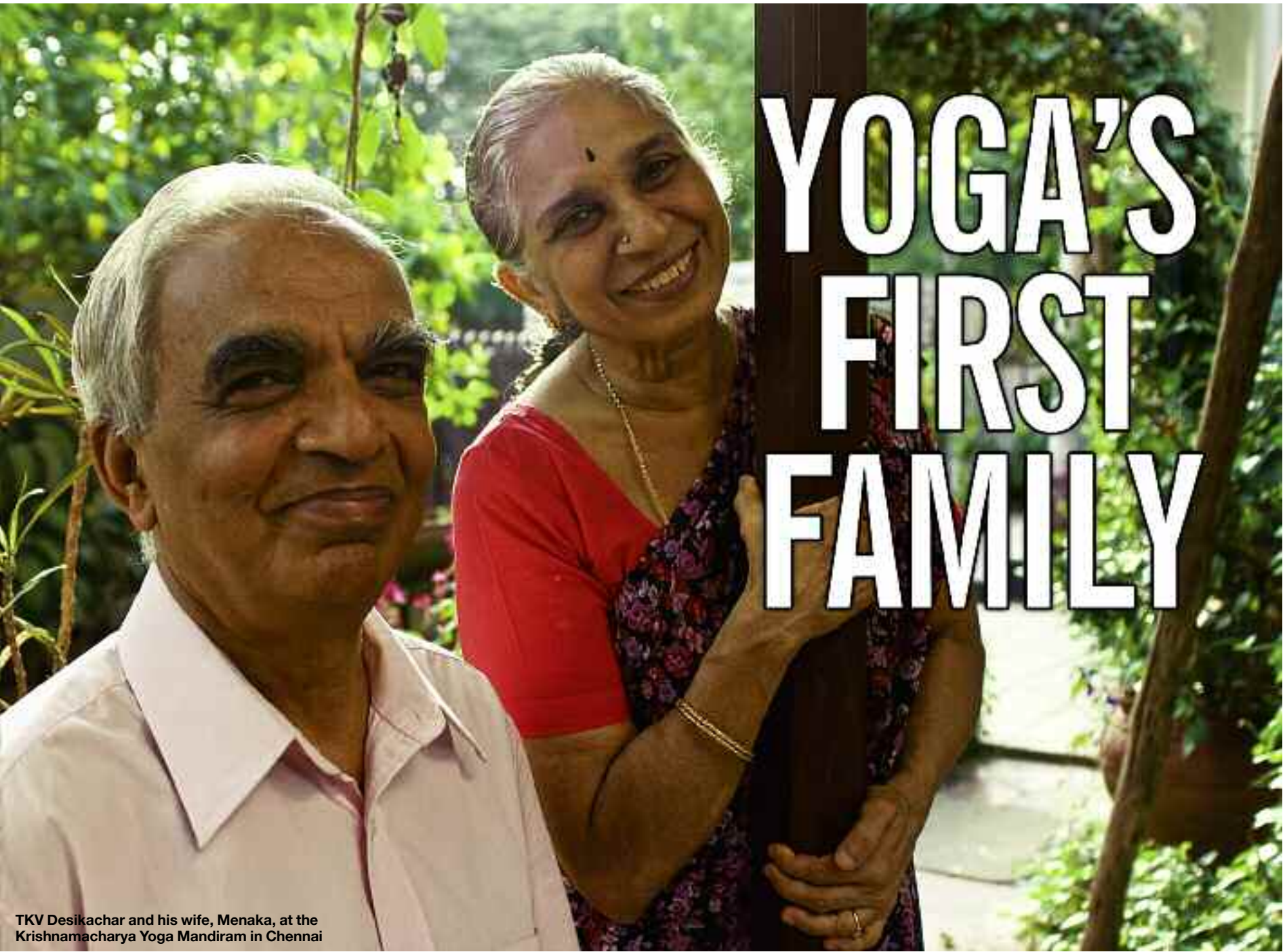


Civil Society



YOGA'S FIRST FAMILY

TKV Desikachar and his wife, Menaka, at the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram in Chennai



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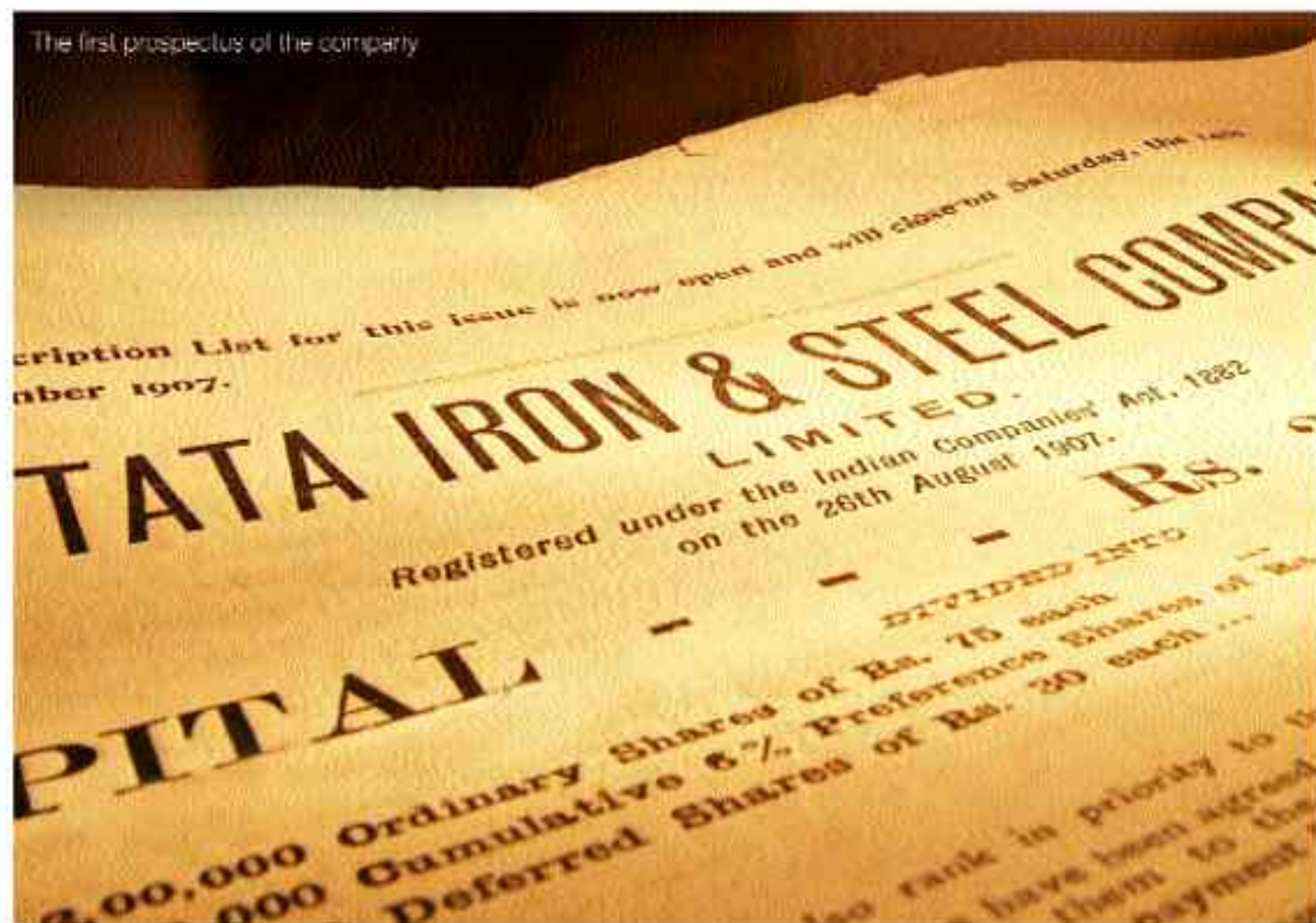
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COVER STORY

YOGA'S FIRST FAMILY

TKV Desikachar took over from his legendary father, T Krishnamacharya. Now he, his wife Menaka and their children teach yoga in its purest form at their Mandiram in Chennai

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Cover photograph by AKSHMAN ANAND

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Civil Society

READ U S. WE READ YO U.

Getting yoga right

Is yoga's popularity becoming its undoing? It probably is. The fact that more people are exercising today than in the past is a good thing. But the possibility that they could be getting wrong or incomplete instruction in a scientific discipline like yoga should also be a reason to feel concerned. Much like those Ayurvedic tonics that flood the shelves of pharmacies, yoga is acquiring a mass appeal, but the sad truth is that numbers and efficacy may not be related.

Desikachar's Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram in Chennai sets important standards for yoga at a time when its growing popularity gives it a new lease of life but tends to rob it of its essence. Desikachar learnt from his father. The Mandiram has the involvement of Desikachar's wife and children. Together they are truly the first family of yoga.

In Desikachar's approach is the message that traditional medicine is at its core customised and personalised through the bond between the teacher and student, physician and patient. It is an elliptical equation that relies on the reading of the pulse, judging of the body type and so on.

It is important to see yoga as a way of life. It draws on the state of mind, the food we eat and the material choices we make. The focus on numbers and the classroom approach gives yoga a new relevance. That is good, but the unfortunate part is that people have come to see yoga as a quick fix for urban health problems. It cannot be so.

Desikachar's other significant contribution is to emphasise the secular aspect of yoga. It is primarily a science that needs to be understood and practised as such. People who give yoga religious overtones do it as much of a disservice as those who seek to package it for hurried mass consumption.

The cover story has been reported by Samita Rathore who is a disciple of Desikachar and now a budding teacher of yoga. For us, however, Samita is an affectionate friend who is the creator of two cartoons that we print: In The Light and Samita's World. She also writes Soul Value, which appears on our back page.

Our story on the problems people from the northeast face in Delhi provides some indication of how incomplete is our understanding of the cultural diversity in the country. It should alarm us that these boys and girls from the northeast are not treated as Indians in the very heart of our capital region. If governance fails here, under the noses of the most powerful people in the country, where should we look to find it succeeding?

As a nation we are richer for the diversity that our cities represent. The faces from the northeast that we see in Delhi and Gurgaon should make us feel good. Just as Raj Thackeray's ugly sectarian violence in Maharashtra should make us hang our heads in shame.

Publisher

Umesh Anand

Editor

Rita Anand

Editorial Team

Riaz Quadir
Vidya Viswanathan
Rina Mukherji
Rakesh Agarwal
Shuktara Lal
Bidisha Srivastava

Contributors

Ram Gidoomal
Arun Maira
Milindo Chakrabarti

Consulting Education Editor

Abha Adams

Photographer

Lakshman Anand

Cartoonist

Samita Rathor

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Write to Civil Society at:

E-2144 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana 122017, Ph: 9811787772
civil_society@rediffmail.com
www.civilsocietyonline.com

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR

**Handing over**

Most NGOs in India are run by the individuals who found them for eternity. They don't like to hand over to a younger person. Reasons vary. Some founders think the place will collapse without them, some feel insecure (maybe the next guy will do a better job) while others think an NGO is a

No picture?

Having recently traversed the same road of handing over the leadership of arguably the largest NGO in Uttarakhand, the Shri Bhuvneshwari Mahila Ashram (SBMA), it was with great interest that I read your cover story in the February 2008 issue. I am curious to know why your article did not include a photograph of the current Additional Director, DK Ved, who is slotted to take over from Darshan Shankar?

Cyril R. Raphael,
Chief Advisor
Shri Bhuvneshwari Mahila
Ashram (SBMA)

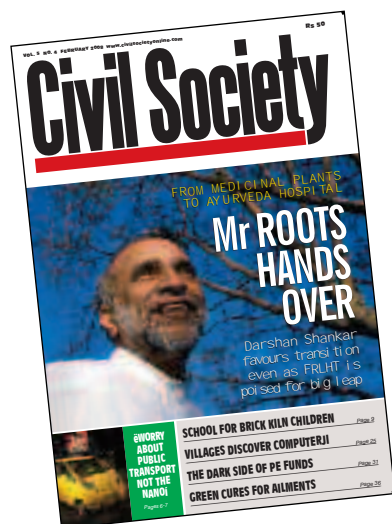
Editor: The picture of Mr DK Ved couldn't be carried in the last cover story for technical reasons but here it is by popular demand.



family business. The generation of leaders who started these NGOs is becoming old. There are younger people out there with vision who are probably more in tune with the times. They should be given a chance to lead. Darshan Shankar handing over is a great example that I hope others will take note and follow.

Dr KP Singh, Lucknow

I thank *Civil Society* for writing about

LETTERS

Ayurveda. This branch of medicine is the future and we should appreciate the work of FRLHT.

Vaibhavi

We are truly in consonance with your thoughts and we appreciate the manner in which you have translated the complexity of succession in the social sector in the Indian context so well. We have started a community web channel, www.chinh.in and we would like to collaborate on such issues.

Meenakshi Vinay Rai

Darshan Shankar has done a stupendous job in one lifetime. He has saved a great tradition of medicine from being relegated to the dustbin of history in the nick of time. He has revived Ayurveda, not as some exotic branch of cookbook medicine, but in a scientific, rational manner. From your article, I can see that FRLHT's work is thorough. Saving plants from extinction, documentation, validating Ayurvedic medicine, understanding its philosophy and the creation of the Ayurveda hospital, these are all connected.

Dr Lokesh Pande, Allahabad

Public transport

Your interview with Dinesh Mohan, 'Worry about public transport, not the Nano' is timely. It is true all our cities are jammed with cars. One reason is that traffic management is extremely poor. Lights at crossings don't always work and nobody follows traffic rules. This is also why we have a very high rate of accidents.

Amitabh Basu

In India buses have a bad image. They have rude drivers and uncouth conductors, the buses are ramshackle, women are sexually molested and men sit in all the ladies seats. The buses lurch and rattle. The moment a person earns money, he or she runs to buy a two wheeler. To attract passengers, bus services will need to improve. To attract the rich, they will have to be positively five-star. Is that ever possible?

Ameeta Sachdev

Pak activism

With reference to Riaz Quadir's article, 'Pak activism is reason for hope', I think big changes are going to take place in Pakistan in the coming years. The middle class is taking an interest in politics and there is the rise of civil society. True democracy will take root after a struggle. Meanwhile we should boost people to people contact and help Pakistan become a full fledged democratic society.

Anant Kasbekar

Kindly provide us with more stories from South Asia. Your world stories are very few. There is hardly anything from Pakistan.

Millie Jacob

River revival

Thanks, Shree Padre, for exploring the fascinating truth of a stream being brought back to life.

VH Dirar

“ For sustainable development you can't plan only for humans. We have to take care of cattle, goats and birds also. It's the cow dung that makes our lands fertile. Birds protect crops, help in forest regeneration and provide the best manure. ”

Lakshman Singh

President, Gramin Vikas Navyuvak Mandal,
Lapodiya

“ Before you set out to make a film, you should really have something to say and that something should be nuanced and deeply understood. And if you have that you will communicate despite poor language, bad camera work and lousy editing. ”

Rajiv Mehrotra

Director,
Public Service Broadcasting Trust,
New Delhi

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Policy move on UP groundwater

Janhit leads effort with govt

Civil Society News
New Delhi

UTTAR Pradesh, India's largest state, is blessed with rivers. But what's the use? Each and every river and canal is filled with poisonous muck which seeps into groundwater. The Janhit Foundation in Meerut has carried out several studies which show that Uttar Pradesh's groundwater is loaded with dangerous carcinogenic chemicals.

Towns and villages are becoming infamous for particular chemicals. Ballia is now recognised by its arsenic. Sonbhadra, Mau and Unnao are known for fluoride. Kanpur has its chromium, thanks to the tanneries. And Aligarh is now a famous spot for heavy metals.

This dirty water is killing people. Janhit's studies on groundwater

contamination and its impact on the human lives show the damaging effect dangerous chemicals have on the physical, neurological and mental health of people.

Janhit, which has been campaigning for a clean-up, convened a national seminar on groundwater pollution in Allahabad on February 9. The NGO is keen to put up a policy to the UP government which would curb groundwater contamination. Janhit was encouraged by the UP government's response to its proposal. Anil Rana, Janhit's director, had met the Cabinet Secretary and Principal Secretaries who appeared keen to support the initiative.

There were brainstorming sessions with technical experts from the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), India Water Partnership, Industrial Toxicological Research Centre (Lucknow) and other NGOs, universities and policy analysts.

Anil Rana spoke to *Civil Society*.

You have raised the issue of groundwater contamination with the Uttar Pradesh government. What is its response?

The issue of groundwater contamination is becoming serious and alarming at a rapid pace. Since people are dying and suffering from serious ailments like cancer, neurological disorders, gastrointestinal disorders and skin ailments and there is a threat to the ecology of the biggest state of the country. Hence, Janhit Foundation contacted the government of UP. During meetings with the Cabinet Secretary and a few Principal Secretaries of the UP government, I found that they are totally convinced about the deteriorating situation. The UP government has extended its full cooperation.

What were the conclusions of the seminar you convened in Allahabad?

The Allahabad seminar was a two-day affair on 'Groundwater Contamination in UP: Issues and Challenges'. Experts, scientists, civil society organisations and lawyers numbering 200 attended this seminar. The main conclusion was that there was a unanimous consensus on a people friendly groundwater policy for UP. It was stressed that we need to go to various parts of



Anil Rana

LAKSHMAN ANAND

UP, have a dialogue with the community and other stakeholders and that then only the process of making a policy draft should begin.

What is the extent/status of groundwater contamination in UP?

Groundwater contamination has hit people. Take Ballia where people are dying and suffering because of the presence of arsenic in the groundwater. A recent study conducted by a Jamia Milia scholar has confirmed the presence of a few heavy metals in the groundwater of Aligarh. Fluoride is rampant in Mau, Sonbhadra and Unnao districts. Janhit Foundation through its research studies confirmed the presence of POPs in the groundwater of western UP. The State Pollution Control Board does little to stop industries releasing untreated waste water.

Will you be preparing a state policy on groundwater pollution with the UP government?

Yes, Janhit Foundation will be preparing a people friendly groundwater policy draft for UP. We will consult legal experts and environmentalists who have been a part of the team which has prepared groundwater legislation for other states. We will also consult the community. This draft will be submitted to the government of UP which has promised to go through it and take it as a base to formulate policy.

Whom do you consider to be the main culprits for the state of groundwater pollution in UP?

See, there is no one particular culprit for this worsening situation. The State Pollution Control Board is not carrying forward its responsibilities thus, giving space to the polluters. The industries just focus on minting money, leaving aside the sensitive issue of groundwater contamination. Farmers also contaminate groundwater by using chemicals and pesticides.

Northeast

Madhu Gurung
New Delhi

EVERY year thousands of people, especially young girls, come to Delhi from the northeast of India to study, work or just make the city their home. Invariably they find themselves at the cruel end of a divide that is marked by personal affronts and attacks on their modesty.

The girls, far from home and struggling to cope with the pace of life in the big city, are seen as easy prey. The boys take small jobs as store hands and find that they are pushed around and not given the same benefits as other employees. And those who may just be in jobs that bring them to Delhi on postings find that their northeast identities are rarely ever understood.

In 2005 Lansinglu Rongmei, who is from Manipur and practises as a lawyer in Delhi, and her friends formed the Northeast Support Group to help young migrants. She has circulated her own mobile number (9818314146) because in moments of high stress the all-important thing is to get that call through.

In Delhi most helplines don't work and the police invariably do not manage to intervene to prevent an episode or provide counselling.

Till date Lansinglu's group has recorded some 50 cases of sexual assault, non-payment of salary and sexual harassment.

"Delhi is not safe for any woman, and over the years there has been an increase in incidents of molestation, sexual harassment, rental problems and non-payment of salaries for the people from the northeast, especially girls," she points out.

Says Lansinglu: "A major problem arises when a northeast girl tries to raise an alarm. As compared to her north Indian counterpart there is no support forthcoming from bystanders. The police too don't take her seriously and rarely file an FIR. That is where we come in and help them lodge complaints, give legal assistance and counselling."

Lansinglu who has been working as a lawyer for the past 10 years says, "People don't realise the day to day



helpline breaks new ground

Photographs by AKSHMAN ANAND



difficulty people from northeast face. There was a case of two young girls who were looking for a small flat to rent. They paid the landlord the first instalment and fixed the day when they would move in with their luggage. The day they arrived with the luggage, the landlord refused them entry into the house and even denied they had paid him any money."

Girls are harassed in different ways. "At call centres they are pushed for sexual favours and when they refuse, their salaries are not paid or cabs are not sent for them," says Lansinglu.

"Not just girls, boys too are harassed," she adds. "Some days ago, there was a case of a young northeast boy who worked at the Pizza Hut in the Priya cinema complex." He had not been paid for one and half months. As he had to go back home, he asked for his salary. He was told that he would be paid in instalments when other boys working there were paid on a monthly basis.

"We know of such cases, but so many of them go unreported because people from the northeast are simple and don't know whom to turn to for help,"

says Lansinglu.

"We have asked ourselves what could be the reason for the discrimination we face, but have come up with no concrete answers. Chances are that the locals feel threatened as people from the northeast are vying for jobs in retail call centres, beauty and fashion industry, hospitality and sales. Employers seek youngsters from the northeast because they do not indulge in politics, are honest, hardworking and always polite."

The northeast states face a huge problem of unemployment. There are high levels of political and administrative corruption and lack of institutions for higher education. Youngsters in these states realise they cannot live on government dole and they have to venture out in search of work and a new destiny.

Coping with change and facing the challenges to their identity is a part of that process of moving out.

At 20, Ayesha Gayatri Gurung, a First Year Miranda House student from Gangtok, Sikkim, says, "People in Delhi are very racist. They treat people from the northeast as backward, tribals, and 'fast'. I am called

Ayesha Chinky in my class. The general knowledge of people is so bad, they know very little about anything beyond Assam. Although I went to Mayo Girls, Ajmer, and my education is North Indian, this is one attitude we have to constantly fight against. When Shilpa Shetty went to 'Big Brother' everyone rooted for her and took up cudgels for her being racially discriminated. What about racial discrimination in our own country?"

Lanu Songla Lemtur, a young Naga student in her final year B Com Honours, recalls how in her first year she was often asked, "How long have you been in India?" Her indignant reply, "My whole life," left many incredulous.

Says Lanu, "I don't know if this attitude will change because some of the teachers initially used to say 'you are from *there* you will need to pay attention and work harder.' There is hostility that students from the northeast join colleges on quota, but that's not true. For every one northeast student who gets a quota seat, 10 others from the same

The girls, struggling to cope with the pace of life in the big city, are seen as easy prey. The boys take small jobs as store hands and find that they are pushed around.

region join on merit and this should be acknowledged. I made it into the first list of selected candidates on merit."

Lanu is all set to do her MBA and says that she does not let racial comments bother her. Her advice to any first year student is to be headstrong and not flighty so people cannot take advantage of you. "Not too many know of our culture and the equal status girls enjoy in our societies, so we must use that to our advantage."

It was an effort to find her "own identity and answer my question of where I belong" that led Leenor Foning from Kalimpong, a third year psychology student, to undertake a study on why people from the northeast are treated differently. Having lived all over the country, Leenor had more friends from the north than from the northeast. She found that when she joined the college hostel, the way the northeast girls looked set them apart as they usually grouped together.

Leenor's fledgling study covered 120 students from different colleges in Delhi of which 90 were from the northeast. "My study found that students from the northeast faced a lot of stress for coming into an environment which was different and unfriendly. Almost all the 90 students from the northeast feared for their safety," she says.

Lansinglu and her friends are conducting legal workshops to empower and educate the young from the northeast. "We can't keep harping on what is happening. We have to move on and bring change. People will have to change as it will become inevitable."

Sunny computer for dark villages

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

KOLKATA has been on an image-building spree with better power supply being one of its achievements. But what about villages in West Bengal? They continue to be in darkness and those that do have power connections have to contend with low voltage and fluctuating supply.

NGOs using information and communication technologies (ICTs) for development in the countryside, find their plans in tatters. They have had to scale down ambitious projects on computer literacy or access to information via the internet because of no electricity.

The West Bengal Renewable Energy Development Agency (WBREDA) has stepped in to change things.

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) gave a grant to Dr SP Gon Chowdhury, Director and Special Secretary (Power), Government of West Bengal, to develop a portable computer and a portable pump. A portable computer which can run on solar panels mounted on a van-rickshaw has been invented with the grant.

"The solar modules are so equipped on a platform that they can turn as need be, and are always facing the sun. In addition, there is a highly efficient inverter to convert the DC output of the device into AC as is required to run a computer," says Dr Gon Chowdhury.

With this device, points out Dr Gon Chowdhury, the rural masses can have access to information on a wide range of issues including educational entertainment. They can help themselves in matters concerning their daily lives, he says.

The invention proved useful for Change Initiatives, an organisation that has been working in the area of ICTs for development since the last few years with support from UNESCO. The NGO, which had been using two laptop computers to disseminate



The West Bengal Renewable Energy Department has stepped in. It has invented a portable computer which can run on solar panels mounted on a van-rickshaw.

information among villagers, was quick to put the device into operation and start a telecentre.

Developed at just Rs 1 lakh, the telecentre currently caters to four villages in a single district, Nadia, so far. The trial run, begun in November 2007 at Ghoragacha village in Nadia, has had an enthusiastic response. Running costs are being worked out.

The mobile telecentre is serving four villages -- Ghoragacha, Telegacha, Madandanga and Kantabelia, all located in Nadia district. The telecentre provides access to news media, along with information on a host of subjects ranging from education, human rights to literacy in Bengali. At every session -- which is interactive -- volunteers from the NGO invite questions from the villagers and attempt to answer in the simplest possible manner. Under the project, a few selected villagers will be trained to handle the computer and access information.

According to Jhoolan Ghosh of Change Initiatives, to make the venture more sustainable the organisation plans to use the computer for digital photography, for making printouts of forms and DTP services. It also plans to use the computer to promote the sale of products made by women's self-help groups (SHGs) in these villages.

The success of the pilot project has evinced a lot of interest, too. "The district magistrate of North 24-Parganas has asked WBREDA for four portable solar computers," says Dr Gon Chowdhury.

His initiative proves that backward villages don't need to lag behind without electricity. Their link to the rest of the world is possible with a little help from the sun.

After the flood in Bihar

Bharat Dogra
Patna

Amajority of flood-affected villagers in 11 rural hamlets of East Champaran district continue to suffer from hunger and malnutrition, do not have access to quilts or blankets and their damaged houses have not been repaired yet, according to the findings of a survey of these areas.

In the villages we toured when we spoke to over 200 people, between October and December no work was available under the employment guarantee scheme, the people said. Heavy machinery is being used in road construction and other development projects, depriving people of much needed work.

Many people said while they had lost cows, bullocks, buffaloes and goats in the flood waters, many more animals died in the post-flood days. The reason was shortage of fodder, fodder getting spoilt or becoming fungus-infected.

In Bela Bichla hamlet (Piprakothi block) of East Champaran district some men and women of the Musahar caste were working to raise their houses to a higher level so that they can be protected from the next floods. They were being given the legal wage of Rs 81 per day to improve their houses, courtesy the availability of ECHO (European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office) aid to Action Aid.

Activists of a leading partner of Action Aid, Samajik Shodh Evam Vikas Kendra (SSEVK), worked very hard to take relief materials to remote villages.

The rural employment guarantee scheme is most needed in such areas of high distress, but

There is a real need for experts, activists and people's representatives to work out an alternative flood-protection strategy.

during the last six months people of these villages got almost no work under the scheme. As Ramesh Pankaj, secretary of Muzaffarpur Vikas Mandal, an organisation founded by Jayaprakash Narayan, said: "Even at the time of floods, the people could have been provided work in neighbouring areas not affected by floods. If they had got work nearer their homes, they would not have been forced to migrate to distant areas in conditions of high distress and uncertainty."

Many farmers living near the river bank are

affected by sand deposited in their fields during the floods. They have not been able to cultivate the *rabi* (winter) crop and the fate of their fields is uncertain.

In other places like Chakiya Kalyanpur, Kesariya, Sangrampur and Kotwaan, flood water has continued to clog many fields and this has deprived farmers of the *rabi* crop after the complete devastation of the *kharif* crop.

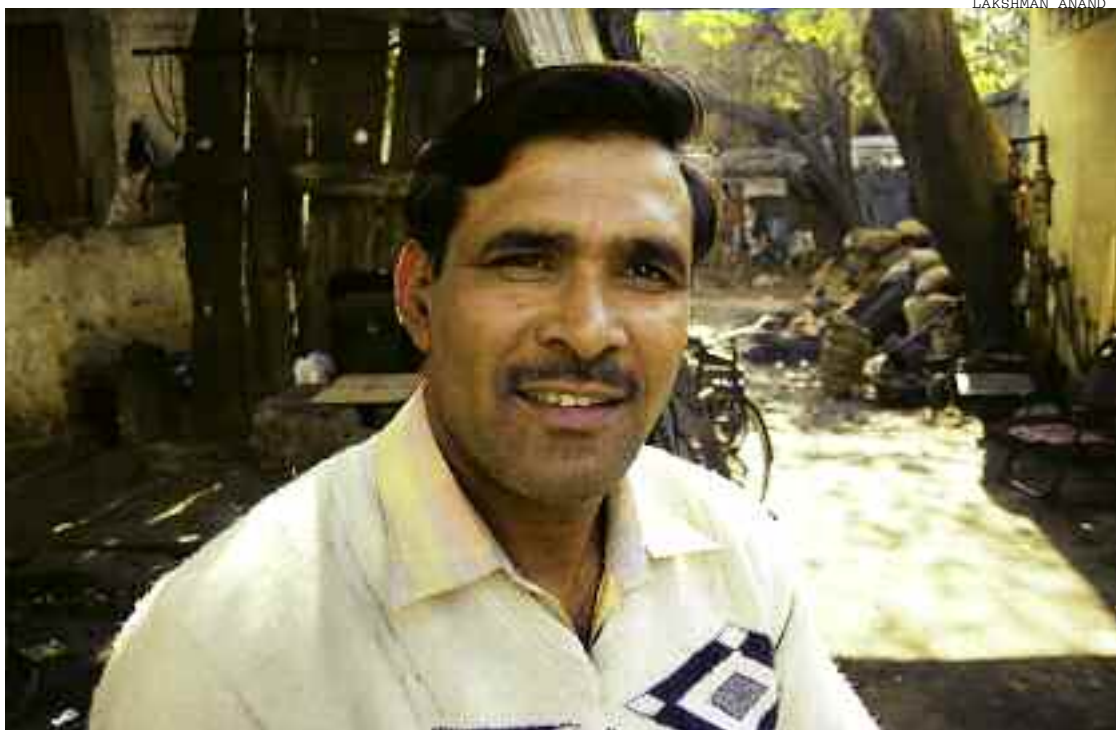
Several social activists and researchers have pointed out that in recent years damage from floods has increased in those areas where massive funds were spent on flood protection. They have questioned the futility of flood protection based on embankments, dams and barrages.

There is a real need for experts, activists and people's representatives to work out an alternative flood-protection strategy.

Flood protection for the next monsoon should include the following efforts:

- 1 Soil and water conservation work in the catchment areas including hilly catchments in Nepal.
- 1 Livelihood support to people in the region.
- 1 Work which protects people from floods such as desilting and deepening of ponds, lakes, erosion protection works and restoring the fertility of land.
- 1 Drainage of water should be improved. This includes improving natural drainage which has been obstructed by roads, railway lines, canals and embankments.

LAKSHMAN ANAND



SA Azad, who has championed the cause of victims of silicosis

Silicosis crusader may have national model

Civil Society News
New Delhi

ONE man's crusade has resulted in what should be a national model for providing justice to people who fall prey to occupational diseases.

In 2001, SA Azad, a school teacher, was shocked to discover that villagers of Lal Kuan, a derelict village in south-east Delhi, were dying of silicosis.

Silicosis is a death sentence. It is an incurable lung disease caused by breathing dust containing free crystalline silica. Over exposure to silica reduces the ability of the lungs to absorb oxygen.

The people of Lal Kuan got this disease from working in stone quarries located here. Subsequently, in 1992, the quarries were ordered closed by the Supreme Court in the famous MC Mehta vs Union of India case. The quarries relocated to Pali in Haryana.

The workers left behind lost their livelihood and health. Azad found men and women bone thin and desperately poor. Some were taking medicines for TB, instead of silicosis. Without nutrition, they were on death row.

Azad and his small NGO, Prasar (People's Rights and Social Research) embarked on a mission to get them justice. It looked impossible. Physicians didn't know what silicosis was and confused it with TB. Government officials found Azad's many right to information applications a real pain in the neck.

Azad persisted, taking his fight to the Supreme Court and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Finally, in October 25, 2005, the Delhi government agreed to rehabilitate the victims of silicosis and came up with a plan. Azad says it's a good one and he is keeping tabs.

"I have had a lot of quarrels with the Delhi government but these are just family fights," he says. "The truth is the Delhi government has a model rehabilitation package. Nationally, all states should implement a similar policy."

The Delhi government got a medical team from Maulana Azad Medical College to do a thorough

health survey. Out of 111 people, 44 had silicosis. It then built a hospital for occupational diseases at Tajpur near Lal Kuan. A mobile medical van visits the area. Nineteen *anganwadis* have been set up. The Antodaya and Annapurna food schemes, pensions, compensation and alternative livelihood schemes are being implemented at the behest of the chief minister, Sheila Dikshit.

A committee headed by the DC South and consisting of the TB department, labour department, social welfare department and Azad's NGO, Prasar, has been formed to ensure implementation.

"I never saw Lal Kuan as a local issue," says Azad. He is determined to get other states to prevent silicosis and implement plans like the Delhi government's for victims.

It isn't just people who work in stone quarries or mines who can get silicosis. Those who work in the stone cutting, glass, ceramic, gems, railroad and ship building industries are equally at risk.

"I never saw Lal Kuan as a local issue," says Azad. He is determined to get other state governments to prevent silicosis and implement plans like the Delhi government's for victims.

With this in mind he approached the Delhi High Court in 2005 which advised him to take his petition to the Supreme Court. So he filed a PIL. On 27 March, 2006, the Supreme Court issued notices to the state governments of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Pondicherry, Haryana, the Union Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry for

Law and Justice to formulate guidelines for the prevention of dust exposure in stone quarries and crushers all over India. "With these notices, silicosis became a national issue," says Azad.

In 2003, he had approached the NHRC but nothing had happened. Last January he retraced his steps. He was more aggressive this time. "I met five of their secretaries," he says. "Close down the NHRC, I told them. After so many years you did nothing. Justice delayed is justice denied."

The NHRC wrote to him saying it had formed a national task force to find out the status of silicosis from states, whether we have adequate laws and what should be done in the short term and long term. The NHRC said it would help create awareness, monitor states where silicosis was high, work out insurance, compensation and launch a national programme to eradicate silicosis.

The NHRC said it would see to it that all states implement Section 85 of the Factories Act. This law makes those employers in the unorganised sector who employ less than 10 workers liable for inspection and brings them under legislation. "These units are some of the worst offenders," says Azad.

If Section 85 is put into effect then all workers, regardless of how many they are in a mining unit, would be eligible to provident fund (PF) and ESI benefits. So far, the law said only if a company employed more than 20 people, workers would be eligible for ESI and PF. The NHRC also said that India should ratify the ILO convention on occupational health.

Responses received by the NHRC from the states to its notices were forwarded to Azad. Madhya Pradesh had the largest number of victims with silicosis (198). Some states have notified Section 85 of the Factories Act or included similar provisions in related legislation. Strangely, Goa, where mining is a major issue, has not done so.

Meanwhile, the Union Ministry for Labour and Employment got bombarded with notices from the Supreme Court, the NHRC and Azad.

In December 2007, the labour ministry, the NHRC and the Director-General, Factory Advice Service & Labour Institutes, Mumbai, organised a national workshop to find out the extent of silicosis in India, whether control and preventive measures were being taken and strategies to combat it.

The meeting was attended by senior IAS officers from different states. For the first time it was decided that thorough surveys of all states should be done to collect accurate data on the number of people employed in the mining, quarrying and related sectors including the unorganised sector.

Three committees were formed. One will collect data on unorganised workers. Where do they find employment? Is it in mines, gems, glass or ceramics? The second committee will ascertain the number of people working in mines. The third will find out how many find employment in registered industries like glass, stone crushing etc.

The work of conducting the surveys is the responsibility of the union labour ministry and the department of labour in the states. Azad has suggested that 60 per cent of members in the committees should be NGOs, health experts, researchers and 40 per cent should be government officials.

He also says that the onus of prevention should rest on employers and not on hapless workers. "There are engineering solutions and several dust prevention measures, all of which are well known," he says. "Masks and gloves should be the last prevention measure and not the first."

Azad's quest for justice has uncovered the miserable conditions of workers in the mining and quarrying industries. The picture that emerges is of an industry that has scant respect for human rights or the dignity of labour. It needs a strong State, an accessible justice system and redoubtable activists like Azad to set it right.

Chilling report on Nandigram

Manisha Sethi
New Delhi

WHAT Really Happened is a meticulous documentation of the manner in which large-scale violence was callously engineered by the CPI (M)'s goons and supervised by the state machinery at Nandigram. This report is based on the findings of the Independent Peoples' Tribunal held at Gokulnagar and Sonachura in Nandigram and at Kolkata towards the end of May 2006.

The Tribunal's jury consisted of a retired high court chief justice, a senior columnist, social activists and a psychiatrist. It recorded 194 testimonies, including 39 oral and 135 written depositions at Nandigram and 20 in Kolkata. Given the atmosphere of terror prevailing in the district, the courage of those who testified must be saluted.

The report of the Tribunal provides the background to the violence in Nandigram, unfolds the chain of events, focusing in particular on the manner in which the massacre was planned and orchestrated by the CPI (M) in collusion with a servile or helpless administration, and attempts to provide an exhaustive list of the dead, missing and injured.

The chapter, 'Chronology of Events' documents the climate of apprehension and anxiety that gripped Nandigram following the agitation in Singur. Local intelligence reports cited here speak of widespread discontent against the proposed move which resulted in spontaneous meetings and mobilisations, and then led to the formation of the Bhumi Uchched Pratirodh Committee (BUPC), a local group, to prevent land acquisition.

Prior to the violence of 14 March, anti-land acquisition activists were arrested, fired upon and even bombs were hurled at them. Meanwhile, contradictory signals kept emanating from the ruling party: there wouldn't be a hub if people didn't want it, there would be industrialisation at all costs; peace should be restored, agitators should be taught a lesson and so on. But it emerges quite clearly from the dateline of events that the administration completely abdicated its responsibility towards protecting the lives of ordinary people. It was alleged at the Tribunal that Lakshman Seth, MP, and his wife Tamalika Panda-Seth, Chairperson, Haldia Municipality, imposed an

economic blockade on Nandigram by suspending the ferry services to Haldia, where on an average 10,000 people from Nandigram go daily to sell fish, vegetables and milk products.

Several women came forward at the Tribunal to speak of the sexual violation they suffered at the hands of khaki clad, masked men in chappals. Dr Debapriya Mallick deposed that in medical camps in the Nandigram area he found women victims with injuries in the pelvic region, the back, the breasts and



A devastated house in Nandigram

the vaginal region. Apart from rape there was sadistic sexual assault. Rods/lathis/gunbarrels were inserted into the vagina. Undressing, molestation, assault on women, indecent exposure and filthy abuse was rampant. "Tell your women we are coming," was the ominous threat issued by the party goons.

A written deposition submitted to the Tribunal says: "One of the policemen twisted my left breast with all force. Another one came and forced a rod into my vagina and started twisting."

Forty five-year-old Angurbala Das of Adhikaripara, Gokulnagar narrated a tale of similar bestiality: "On 15 March between 1pm to 1:30 p.m. about 10 to 12 men in plain dress came to our house and started beating me and my eldest son severely. They turned a deaf ear to all our entreaties. I still have pain in my chest and abdomen and carry nail marks on my breasts. I turned unconscious. They then dragged Kabita Das (age 20) and Ganga Das (age 12) to the cowshed, beating and torturing them all the time. Kabita was raped by two cadres and Ganga was raped by one. Kabita has a daughter of eight months

whom she cannot breastfeed even now. Ganga was held forcibly by the throat during the rape. As a result she still has pain in the throat. Kabita has identified some of the miscreants who were her acquaintances; among them she identified Badal Garu and his son Khokan Garu, Sudarshan Garu (elder brother of Badal) and his son Kalipada Garu. Also Gopal Garu, Raju Garu, Dulal Garu, Ratan Garu, Sunil Bar, Rabin Das, Anukul Sheet. Kabita was raped by Anukul Sheet and Sunil Bar while Ganga was raped by Anukul. The daughter's arm was broken and has still not healed."

While several independent citizens' reports have established the culpability of party cadres (masquerading as police, and identified by the slippers they were wearing as against the shoes of the regulars), the Tribunal's Report is valuable for the painstaking documentation of the post-violence cover up by the administration in order to minimise the scale of real physical and sexual violence, and to protect the guilty, even when they were clearly identified and named. In a flagrant violation of all accepted legal and medical protocol, post-mortem reports of the deceased showed glaring discrepancies amounting to tampering and improper reporting. Dates of discharge were overwritten and

changed in most certificates; there was a refusal to undertake medical examinations of women who had alleged rape, and in other instances, attending physicians failed to record the cause and nature of injury when the dead and the injured were taken to the hospital. In fact the official response of the local medical authorities has been that there were no reported cases of rape.

The Tribunal's conclusions are unequivocal: "The actions of 14 March 2007 by the West Bengal government, particularly the District Administration, which engaged police forces along with armed ruling party hooligans against a peaceful, religious and lawful gathering of mostly women and children from Nandigram, can be described only as a state-sponsored massacre." It was driven by the wish to "teach a lesson" to those opposing the proposed SEZ project and to terrorise them into submission.

Nandigram: What Really Happened
Publisher: Daanish Books
Price: Rs 225



Chicks sick? Try fishing

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

AVIAN flu has rocked West Bengal's rural economy. Chickens are lying dead while people mourn the loss of their livelihood. But a group of fishermen who raised poultry on the outskirts of Kolkata are sanguine. They diversified and so they continue to earn a healthy income selling more fish and duck meat.

Moral of the story: it pays to hedge your bets.

The Paschim Baranagar Fishermen's Cooperative on the banks of the river Hooghly has shown how to overcome adversity and shirk off the burden of a decaying past.

Until the avian flu scare grounded poultry operations, the cooperative would buy 400 chicks every fortnight, and nurture them for 41 days for sale. With each broiler yielding around 2.5 kg of meat, it would mean sales of some 1,000 kg or more every month. The ducks would yield 30 to 40 eggs per day, totalling 1,200 eggs per month.

The ban on the sale of eggs and chicken imposed by the authorities to fight avian flu has been more than offset by the rising demand and profits from fish. Regular maintenance of their water body and the use of fingerlings has resulted in annual production increasing from 7,000 kg to 24,000 kg. In fact, the cooperative's secretary, Ranjit Das, and its chairman, Dasu Haldar, estimate fish production to cross 30,000 kg very soon.

Baranagar, in north Kolkata, is one of the oldest areas of the city. This is where the Dutch and the British anchored to set up trading posts on the Hooghly at Cossipore. It was a thriving centre for fishing and allied activities.

But silt, pollution and over-exploitation nearly choked its river banks. The dwindling fish catch on the Ganges forced fishermen to turn their attention to inland water bodies.

The Paschim Baranagar Fishermen's Cooperative, which was set up in 1978, took over a four hectare water body in Paschim Baranagar. They faced many problems in those days. Heavy rains during the monsoon caused the fish to overflow into a channel for sewage and then gush into the river. They did not have money to maintain the water body. Encroachment by nearby residents reduced the catch. Besides, land sharks and promoters were breathing down the fishermen's necks.

Although the state fisheries department would pay cursory visits and the Baranagar municipality helped in maintaining the water body somewhat,



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The ban on the sale of eggs and chicken imposed by the authorities to fight avian flu has been more than offset by the rising demand and profits from fish.
■

the fishermen faced a funds crunch. That is when they came to know of the Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor (KUSP). "Our friends at the municipality told us KUSP was raising money and making it available to community groups in the Kolkata metropolitan area," explains the cooperative's manager, Shailendra Nath Pramanik.

They were extended an approved fund of Rs 9.21 lakh and the 58-member fishermen's cooperative got a new lease of life. The cooperative invested in an embankment for the water body and raised the level of an existing brick structure on the municipal drain to prevent water overflowing during the monsoon months. It also repaired the bamboo embankment all along the periphery of the pond to put an end to constant erosion of the banks.

The fishermen bought six nets and started putting fingerlings into the pond to raise more fish to sell at a profit in the wholesale market. Since water levels drop in summer and that affects the fish catch, the money helped the cooperative build a pump house to bring water from the nearby river into their water body.

Soon the cooperative was in a position to diversify. It looked around for other things they could do to earn more money. With the funding from KUSP, fishermen's families got trained in poultry and rearing of rabbits. They also learnt to raise ornamental fish meant for personal aquariums.

The three-month training has stood the cooperative in good stead. There are 30 trained persons now to look after the basic tasks required to nurture chickens and ducks.

In a span of one year, the cooperative has bought 10 aquariums to nurture fingerlings for ornamental fish. The 600 square feet poultry shed houses some 300 chickens and 28 ducks.

The cooperative has invested in two paddleboats. Use of paddleboats serves two purposes. It ensures the water is not stagnant and that the fish in the water body are always on the move. This helps fish grow strong and healthy, as technical expert Gautam

Haldar explains. Secondly, in summer people from congested Kolkata come here to paddle boats for recreation. This inbound tourism is an additional source of income for the cooperative.

The cooperative's annual earnings have grown three fold to touch Rs 9 lakh. But more than anything else, it has helped provide a modest income to many women among the members' families here. For instance, in just four hours of work at the cooperative's premises, Nanda Mondol can earn a decent income by tending ducks, chickens and rabbits. In addition, her higher secondary education enables her to earn money by tutoring schoolchildren in her neighbourhood, apart from doing household chores.

Likewise, Karuna Dhara can earn some money at the cooperative while she takes time off her household duties. Since the duties are for four hours, everything works like clockwork. While the men hold the fort at night, the morning, afternoon and evening shifts are generally handled by women. Once again, diversification helps everyone.

Encouraged by the success they have achieved so far and the increase in income, the cooperative is hoping to generate 11,000 person days of employment by increasing production. Ornamental fish will, they hope, rise to 30,000 pieces, chicken to 3,750 kg, duck eggs to 20,000 and duck meat will increase by 200 kg. The cooperative is exploring the possibility of commercially growing marigold, hibiscus and other flowers.

As a commercial venture that seeks to change the lives of 58 member families, the Paschim Baranagar Fishermen's Cooperative has achieved a fair share of success. Its members have stood together and worked together and that in itself is a lesson for other squabbling cooperatives.

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READ US. WE READ YOU.

FOR many years Lapodiya village, on the Jaipur-Ajmer highway in Rajasthan, had a bad reputation. Its name meant a 'fool's village' and residents lived up to it. They fought with each other, ridiculed guests, made a mess of their farms and didn't send children to school. Naturally, the village was desperately poor.

Along came Lakshman Singh, a Class 7 dropout. His grandfather, Thakur Bagh Singh, was the village jagirdar. A caring man, he would call out to fellow villagers before he settled down to a meal. "Has anyone not eaten? You are welcome to join me."

"We are an important family in Lapodiya," says Lakshman Singh.

"I was so moved by the plight of my village that I gave up school to do something about it."

Some 30 years later Lapodiya's name shines bright. Villages see it as a font of knowledge. Its prosperity comes from water, green grass and trees. The reason for this wealth is an invention. Lakshman Singh thought of an ingenious system of water harvesting called chowka which revived Lapodiya's pasture land.

Against an average rainfall of 600 mm, Lapodiya gets only 323 mm. Yet, despite a decade of drought, nobody goes hungry or migrates to the city.

Since 1977, Lakshman Singh and his local group, the Gramin Vikas Navyuvak Mandal Lapodiya (GVML) have got this village of 200 families or 2,300 people, to perform *shramdan* (voluntary labour) for harvesting water.

INSPIRING VILLAGERS

Strangely the first thing this Class 7 school dropout did when he returned to his village was to open a school, hoping that would teach villagers discipline and manners. Soon Lakshman Singh realised where the main problem lay.

The village was bankrupt of water. It had an array of defunct tanks, washed out bunds and silted ponds. In summer, to get a vessel of water, you had to go down to the well, collect water in a glass and dribble it in.

Yet when Lakshman Singh suggested villagers take up water works they replied in unison: "Where is the money?" Undaunted, Lakshman Singh started repairing ponds all alone. Some villagers laughed at him. But a few joined in. His volunteer force grew. Soon the village realised they had a new weapon to overcome their lack of money—*shramdaan*.

Percolation ponds were made. Then, in the 1990s two talabs, Phool Sagar and Dev Sagar, were dug. An irrigation tank, the Ann Sagar, was also made. "See our strength. If all of us work for a day, it becomes 2,000 man days," Lakshman Singh told his former undisciplined force who now queued up to work.

The Christian Relief Services (CRS), an NGO came forward to offer food for work and this turned out to be an additional incentive.

Lapodiya has 6,000 bighas (1,500 acres) out of which only one-fourth is irrigated. Apart from talabs, there are open wells for irrigation. After the revival of talabs the open wells registered an increase of water. "If recharge is done from a distance, your talab won't dry up quickly. Our talabs get recharged from about 25 km all around," explains Lakshman Singh.

He understood the importance of ensuring water security all through the year. "How, for instance, could we put back the water we used for irrigation," wondered Lakshman Singh.

Recharging water on fields would affect crops. Doing it on the village pasture would be ideal. But that land was infested with thorny grass and *videshi babool* (*Prosopis juliflora*). Water from the pasture ran six km down into a nearby *nala* or drain.

How could he capture all that water and prevent it from going into the *nala*, thought Lakshman Singh. "Contour trenches and bunds recommended by government departments were not suited to us," he says.

The magic of Lapodiya's chowka

Shree Padre from Kerala goes to Rajasthan to discover how Lapodiya fights drought with a rare and intricate community water harvesting system

This was because the contour trenches took all the water downwards into the *nala*. The department's advice to plant trees did not make sense either. The scorching summer heat would kill all saplings.

THE CHOWKA SYSTEM

After many months of drawing designs and studying the pasture, Lakshman Singh came up with the idea of the chowka, a unique method of soil and water conservation.

Soil dug from the inner area of small rectangular plots is put into 'U' shaped enclosures arranged side by side facing upwards. The enclosures divert the water sideways to the *talab* instead of downwards to the *nala*. Careful measurements have to be done for the chowka's construction.

The chowka system checks soil erosion, helps groundwater recharge and regenerates more than 30 varieties of local grass. Care has to be taken to

After months of drawing designs and studying the pasture, Lakshman Singh came up with the idea of the chowka, a unique soil and water conservation method.

ensure that only nine inches of water is allowed to remain inside the chowka. The excess overflows. Different elevations inside the chowka give birth to separate species of grass. If more than nine inches water is retained the growth of some grass varieties gets retarded.

The chowka gets rid of rough unwanted grasses like *lapda*, a spiny grass that gets stuck in the throats of grazing animals and *khargos choonti* another unpalatable grass.

Kanharam, a villager from Sunadiya, listed many grass varieties which are grazing delights for animals like Dhaman, Karad, Raped, Bekariya, Gathilya, Lapala, Jerinya, Begariya, Savam, Kavari, Mukda, Bhoparan, Dudhiya, Gondala, Moka, Dabdi, Jadi and Doob.

"Though goats eat all varieties of grass there is an exclusive one they are fond of called Pasarakateli. Cattle never eat this grass. Camels also dislike it. Their favourite is Oontkatela. Cattle don't eat this variety either, though goats do. Goats are also fond

of Aakda," explained Kanharam.

You can find *dhob* grass (*Condon dactylon*) growing on Lapodiya's pasture land. It has medicinal qualities that need regular moisture to survive. "Except for *nala* banks, you won't find this grass elsewhere in the plains of Rajasthan," says Lakshman Singh.

If chowkas get filled with water three times a year, grasses grow well and don't dry up fast. The chowka ensures fodder for all grazing animals for four to five months. Once the kharif crop is harvested, farmers get fodder from their fields for one month. By this time, small grass varieties sprout on the pasture.

By December, villagers shift to tree fodder like *khejdi* (*Prosopis cineraria*) and *ronj* (*Acacia leucophloea*). Tree fodder feeds cattle till April. If the rains are good, the rabi crop provides another round of fodder. In June, nature provides fruits of *desi babool* (*Acacia nilotica*) for the animals. In this way, if the land and soil is taken care of, there is food through the year for these milch animals.

The GVNML has produced 'chowka kits' for easier understanding and has trained many villagers in pasture revival. At a daily wage rate of Rs 75 per day, the cost of making a chowka system on one hectare is about Rs 14,000. But if it is done with people's participation, the cost is very little.

CATTLE AND BIRDS

GVNML also started to improve breeds of cattle. The local cross breeds weren't high yielding. They identified the Gir cattle as being best suited for Lapodiya. Volunteers went to Gujarat, brought some bulls from there and started breeding experiments. Wherever you travel in and around Lapodiya you can now see herds of charming reddish black Gir cows.

On an average Lapodiya produces 1500 liters of milk a day. The village earns more through milk than through selling agricultural surplus. This year the village earned Rs 33.5 lakhs by selling milk alone.

"Earlier we didn't have grass. I used to buy fodder at the rate of Rs 100 for 40 kg. One cow requires Rs 50 worth of fodder daily. I have 25 cattle, big and small. We sell 10 to 15 kg of milk every day. Since the last two years, thanks to our chowkas, I am saving a lot of money. Earlier, I used to buy fodder worth one lakh rupees," said Rathan Gopalak, a dairy farmer from Balapur.

Nagara village, with 1,000 families, produces 3,750 litres of milk per day. That means the village earns Rs 50,000 every day.

Seventy-five per cent of the families here have marketable surplus of milk. Sehelsagar, Gulapur, Kurad, Dethani and Balapur are other success sto-

Photographs by SHREE PADRE

**Villagers building a chowka**

ries of pasture development and milk boom. Half the cattle population here is Gir. These cows produce on an average 6 kg of milk every day. Each cow is for Rs 8,000 whereas the local cross breed costs between Rs 500 and Rs 1,000.

"For sustainable development you can't plan only for the human population," says Lakshman Singh. "We have to take care of cattle, goats and birds also. It's the cow dung that makes our lands fertile. It inoculates micro-organisms into the soil. Birds protect crops, help in forest regeneration and provide best manure for the fields."

Lapodiya's Village Development Committee (VDC) decides all rules and regulations. Cutting trees is prohibited. The punishment for chopping a tree is to plant two. Nobody is permitted to hurl stones at birds. Those who do so are declared guilty and fined Rs 500. Villagers contribute to the grain banks. A raised cement platform called a *chuga khana* has been built for feeding birds.

Water is available for cattle, animals and birds. When the Phool Sagar tank dries up, water is pumped into a *khel*, which is a cement tank that holds water for livestock. Most open wells too have a *khel*.

Birds have their own '*pakshi awas*' near the pasture. A mini forest is being built by villagers here. "Once the trees grow up, the birds will take up the responsibility of afforestation from us," said a villager.

Devoothni gyaras, the 11th day after Diwali is considered very holy here. GVNML uses this occasion to strengthen a culture of conservation and respect for nature. Programmes include tree worship and water worship. All the villagers assemble at the village tank and offer prayers. They vow to protect the tree wealth of their village.

People walk across to five or ten neighbouring villages which organise functions like tree planting ceremonies. Desilting and repair of tanks is also taken up. In this way a culture of caring for people, animals, birds, soil, water, trees is built up.

In 15 years, Lakshman Singh has got 31 talabs in 20 villages inter-connected. Not only is water harvested, floods are also controlled. "Only after planning each village's groundwater recharge, talab rejuvenation etc, over a series of meetings could we achieve a consensus in each village. It is not fair to deprive them of the rainwater that falls on their borders. We take the excess only after implementing arrangements for adequate utilisation of water in each village."

**Lakshman Singh**

The GVNML has produced 'chowka kits' for easier understanding and has trained many villagers in pasture revival.

**Water brings pastures to life****DROUGHT PROOFING**

In 2006 rainfall in Lapodiya was just 288mm. Since the last two years, the Ann Sagar tank hasn't filled. When water is scarce villagers cultivate only 50 per cent of their lands using water from their open wells.

Ishwar Mali (70) has 20 bighas. Just five bighas is irrigated. He has six cows. He earns around Rs 50,000 from farming and Rs 35,000 by selling milk. "Around 15 to 17 years ago, people would migrate. Nowadays nobody leaves the village due to hunger," he says showing his crop of bajra on his fields.

"We have realised that it is possible for us to carry on with our lives without much distress even with 350 mm of rain. In the last two years we had a good kharif crop. Even if rabi isn't possible, nobody will starve here. We have some income from farming and an equal amount or more from milk production. Youngsters do migrate to the city but that is because we have more hands than required for farming. No cultivable land is left fallow in this village," said Jagveer Singh, Lakshman Singh's younger brother who helps him with GVNML's

activities.

Jagveer says the chowka system has spread to 82 villages. It is now popular in the neighboring districts of Dosa, Pali and Tong. GVNML is carrying out developmental activities in 350 villages in natural resource management, education, health, policy, advocacy and women's empowerment.

How did Lakshman Singh learn such sophisticated methods of natural resource management? He says he observed nature in its many manifestations for many years while living in the forests of Sariska, the Jim Corbett National Park, Kaziranga and Ranthambore

Today, 52-year-old Lakshman Singh is a contented man. "I'm really happy to see my village producing good food without poisons, to see smiling faces and healthy villagers around, to see people caring for each other and for our animals and birds too," he says.

Address : Grameen Vikas Navyuvak Mandal, Laporiya, (GVNML), Dudu Block, Jaipur District, Rajasthan.
Ph: 01428 - 218 142; 9413339726 (Jagveer Singh- GVNML)
Website: www.gvnml.org; E-mail : gvnml@gvnml.org



Auto drivers Ram Murari, Devendra, Deepak and Nagendra (standing). Sitaram and Mohan (sitting).

Star Club raises bar for Delhi's autos

Santosh Kumar
New Delhi

WHEN 43-year-old Sita Ram, an autorickshaw driver in Delhi says, "In life there is always hope," he means it. That is why he is one of the six founding members of the Autorickshaw Star Club, a project aimed at making the autorickshaw the pride of Delhi.

This novel club, launched by NyayaBhoomi, an NGO which works on the right to information (RTI), public transport and sanitation, initially seeks to bring about an attitudinal change among the autorickshaw drivers.

"We have been working with the autorickshaw drivers for over five years. In spite of our best efforts, we could not get the government interested in improving the service. Therefore, we decided to take it upon ourselves to do it. As a first step, we thought it necessary to build a relationship of trust and understanding between the drivers and their passengers. Autorickshaw Star Club does that wonderfully," says Rakesh Agarwal, project head and secretary, NyayaBhoomi.

For auto-driver Sita Ram, father of three, who lives in a village near New Friends Colony, honesty and integrity are prime considerations. In the absence of any welfare measures for auto drivers, he hopes joining NyayaBhoomi's Club will provide him much needed security.

While hoping to build mutual trust between passengers and drivers, the project also aims to raise awareness levels and the standard of living of driv-

ers and their families. It will provide them social and financial protection and security. Health insurance, life insurance, pension plans and bank accounts are on the cards.

NyayaBhoomi plans to raise funds for all this through advertisements on autorickshaws in partnership with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). The MCD's Standing Committee has reportedly passed the proposal and it is now under the consideration of a Select Committee. "This is likely to happen in about two months, notwithstanding political manoeuvrings by so-called unions and political leaders. Apart from insurance cover, we will devise pension schemes, bring about financial discipline through training and bank-account opening, and invest their share of advertisement revenue into future security and children's education rather than giving it away in cash," clarifies Agarwal.

However, the scheme to earn revenue by carrying advertisements on the back of autorickshaws has met a roadblock with one of several paper unions moving the court on the issue.

But Sita Ram is optimistic that it will be sorted out soon. Agarwal is quick to point out that there is no "real union" in Delhi. On paper, there are nearly 50 so-called unions, but absolutely each of their leaders act as a tout for transport department officials, or is involved in exploiting drivers one way or the other. There is resistance from these people, says Agarwal, because the Autorickshaw Star Club will prevent auto-drivers from being exploited by the corrupt and this would affect "the illegal earnings of these so-

called union leaders".

Despite these small hiccups, the Club is poised to grow in the near future. Deepak Jayaswal is certain the Club will soon have 1,000 autorickshaw drivers in its ranks, making it a force to contend with. For this 66-year-old father of four, who lives in Sonia Vihar, behaving well with his customers takes precedence. He never refuses commuters and is willing to travel to any destination from 7 am to 9 pm. His suggestion book is filled with comments about his excellent track record, he proudly states.

Though the promised insurance package is yet to fructify, Jayaswal hopes with the increase in numbers, the MCD scheme for ownership of autos will kick in. At present, he runs a hired auto and ends up paying Rs 300 a day as rent to the owner, which leaves him with only a measly Rs 150 or so as his daily earnings.

The first six auto drivers have spent Rs 4,000 towards expenses to join the Club. Passengers who fret and fume about being cheated by auto drivers stand to gain a lot from this venture. There will be no overcharging as each member's vehicle will have a fare chart displayed near the entrance. There will hardly be any chance for refusals as a direction board will be mounted in front of the vehicle that displays preference of routes. And above all, the Club members will be presentable in their well-designed uniforms, respectful and courteous.

Plus a reality check will be in order. Though in some other states auto drivers' unions have started their own *adalat* where grievances from passengers will be heard and justice meted out daily, Agarwal feels that such a model cannot be replicated in Delhi.

"Here people have no sense of belonging, and therefore, no social pressures. Instead, we will use the revenue from advertisements as a carrot and a stick. Any complaints from customers, after enquiry, will be forwarded to the enforcement branch of the Transport Department, and we will ensure that a *challan* is issued," says Agarwal.

Contact: Rakesh Agarwal, secretary, NyayaBhoomi, 120 Scindia House, Connaught Lane, New Delhi - 110 001
Tel: 09873 222 222,
rakesh@nyayabhoomi.org <mailto:rakesh@nyayabhoomi.org>

Realising India's Unlimited Potential

Enhancing Education



Quality education is the foundation stone for a promising tomorrow. Today, technology and digital literacy are fueling the emerging knowledge economy. For India's success we need to ensure that both are accessible to a majority of Indians. Microsoft is committed to bridging the digital divide and helping young India realize its full potential.

'Unlimited Potential' is Microsoft's global vision to accelerate and expand the power of computing to five billion people around the world. The Unlimited Potential initiative is centered on tools, industries and methodologies that are relevant, affordable and accessible to the large underserved populace. It relies on a strong partner foundation including governments, corporates, NGOs and communities. The three key areas of thrust for us are education, creation of job opportunities and fostering innovation.

Project Shiksha

Microsoft's Project Shiksha was launched with the clear objective of enhancing IT usage in classroom teaching. Designed especially for underserved communities, Project Shiksha is run in partnership with state governments for government schools. Project Shiksha has already trained over 1,80,000 teachers through ten IT academies. Therefore, impacting over 8 million school students. Further, an innovative Teachers Leadership Award (TLA) has been instituted in order to recognise and reward innovative work across government schools. Since its institution in 2004, several teachers from government schools have been selected after a nationwide contest and sent to the regional teachers' conference in AFAC & WW ITAS to share experiences and learning. With such initiatives in place, Microsoft is truly committed to helping provide high-quality education through dynamic, user-focused resources that increase access to learning and empower teachers to impart knowledge better.

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TKV Desikachar with his father's portrait in the background

Photographs by AKSHMAN ANAND

YOGA'S FIRST FAMILY

TKV Desikachar took over from his legendary father, T Krishnamacharya. Now he, his wife Menaka and their children teach yoga in its purest form at their Mandiram in Chennai

Samita Rathor
Chennai

EVERYBODY is teaching yoga these days: from swamis in flowing robes to sexy gym trainers. Everybody is doing yoga too: svelte models, overweight housewives, stressed out executives. You see swarms of people in parks and auditoriums chanting Om, reorganising arms and legs into *asanas* while a sonorous 'guru' doles out instructions.

"This is not yoga," TKV Desikachar, founder of the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram (KYM) in Chennai, will tell you. Desikachar practises and teaches yoga in its purest form, like his father, the legendary T Krishnamacharya. Yoga for them is a science that heals mind and body.

Today yoga has blossomed. The best hospitals in the world recommend it. People acknowledge its healing benefits. But yoga's popularity has also become its bane. Most practitioners do not understand its philosophy and teach it as mere group exercise. The science and philosophy of yoga has been lost sight of.

Desikachar has spread yoga in its true form in India, the US and Europe. Some of the world's best minds, like Jiddu Krishnamurti, sought a cure from his father and him. The finest yoga teachers began their yoga journey under their watchful guidance. Among them are BKS Iyengar, KP Jois and Indra Devi.

T Krishnamacharya died in 1989 at the age of 101. He is remembered for stopping his own heartbeat at the age of 76 before a panel of medical doctors. It was Krishnamacharya who salvaged yoga, on the verge of extinction, from sages in the village of Mansarovar, Mount Kailash region.

In 1976, his son, Desikachar started the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram (KYM) to carry forward his father's work and philosophy.

"When I came to understand the depth of my father's knowledge, I was very disappointed that his teachings were hardly known or even acknowledged," says Desikachar, frankly. "It was for this reason that I set up the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram in his name, as an offering or *guru dakshina*, for all the knowledge he passed on to me. The ancient texts tell us, *Gurum prakasayet dhiman* (It is the duty of a student to bring to light the

teachings of his master.)"

This is India's first family of yoga.

Desikachar's wife, Menaka, also a yoga teacher, is an expert in Vedic chanting. Daughter Mekhala teaches yoga and has recorded two CDs on Vedic chanting. Son Kausthub too is a yoga teacher, a therapist and a Vedic chanter. He is taking yoga to Generation Next.

KYM is the only yoga therapy institute of its kind in the world. Lodged in a simple white house with a gentle blue hue, it is located in the quiet lanes of Mylapore, Chennai's old, historic quarter.

Spaces round the house have enclosures with walls and windows made of large, dried, ochre coconut leaves. The ground inside is of natural earth and feels cool. Sounds of Vedic chanting waft through.

KYM teaches yoga as a holistic system of healing. It has a faculty of around 50 teachers with departments for Yoga Studies, Yoga Therapy and a Research and Publications division. Vedavani, a separate unit, teaches Vedic chanting and does research. The Mitra division does philanthropy by teaching yoga to the underprivileged.

Myths and realities

"There have always been many myths associated with the practice of yoga," says Desikachar. "There used to be a belief that the practice of yoga was open only to people from certain communities. Some people believed that yoga was a mystical practice that gave practitioners the ability to levitate or even to remain submerged beneath water for days. However, Patanjali presents yoga as a universal discipline. Its primary focus is on the mind and relationships."

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, written about 2,000 years ago, are considered the Bible of yoga. In it Patanjali, a humble physician, expounded yoga as a philosophy, a guide for living the 'right life' and achieving spiritual bliss.

Patanjali explained yoga in sutras. Sutra means a thread, strings of rules or aphorisms written in verse. His language is terse and symbolic. He wanted the sutras committed to memory. Altogether there are 195 aphorisms in the Yoga Sutras which encapsulate the principles of yoga and their relevance in life. Written in four chapters, the aphorisms are concise and deeply significant.

There is a popular saying that "what is not mentioned in the Yoga Sutras is either not yoga, or probably not important at all".

The Yoga Sutras are considered the last word on yoga. No learning of yoga can be complete without studying Patanjali's enigmatic and philosophical sutras. But you need a knowledgeable yoga teacher to demystify his book accurately.

The first chapter is called Samadhipadah, the second, Sadhanapadah, the third, Vibhutipadah and the fourth, Kaivalyapadah.

Patanjali's yoga is called Ashtanga Yoga which literally means 'eight limbed yoga'. The heart of his teachings are incorporated in the 'eight-fold' path. According to Patanjali, the path of internal purification for revealing the Universal Self consists of eight spiritual practices.

Desikachar explains these eight components of yoga:

1. **Yama:** our attitude towards our environment
2. **Niyama:** our attitude towards ourselves
3. **Asana:** the practice of body exercise
4. **Pranayama:** the practice of breathing exercise
5. **Pratyahara:** the restraint of our senses
6. **Dharana:** the ability to direct the mind
7. **Dhyana:** the ability to develop interaction with what we seek to understand
8. **Samadhi:** complete integration with the object to be understood

Krishnamacharya and Desikachar emphasise the application of the Yoga Sutras for healing patients/students and Desikachar gently puts yoga in the right perspective.

Yoga is secular

In the early 70's, Desikachar and Gerard Blitz, a Belgian Jew who became his student, started the Zinal Yoga Congress, an annual meeting that brought teachers from all traditions of yoga together. The objective was to bring unity in yoga. The primary organiser of the Zinal Congress is the European Yoga Union (EYU), also founded by Blitz.

In one such gathering Desikachar noticed two things that disturbed him. First, yoga teachers were teaching the same practices to everyone irrespective of age, abilities and interest. Secondly, teachers were mixing Hinduism and yoga, presenting them as one, implying that if people wanted to follow yoga they had to follow the Hindu religion.

Desikachar knew from his studies with his father that none of these practices followed the guidelines of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. For instance, Patanjali saw religious affiliation as a student's personal choice not the teacher's. If yoga is

The Yoga Sutras are a secular handbook devoid of dogmas, rites, rituals, caste or class biases. They tell us how to use meditation and yoga as a practical path to spirituality.



Studying a person's pulse



Desikachar helps a student to do an asana



A traditional massage



A group of Brazilians at KYM

tied with Hinduism, then it would have to exclude people who may not be comfortable with its religious content.

The Yoga Sutras are a secular handbook devoid of dogmas, rites, rituals, caste or class biases. They tell us how to use meditation and yoga as a practical path to spirituality. Patanjali's notion of 'Isvarah' is the consciousness within an individual.

The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali Chapter 1.2 says, *Yogascittavrttinirodhah*, which explains Desikachar, means: "Yoga is the ability to direct the mind exclusively towards an object and sustain focus in that direction without any distractions."

Yoga is individual

Desikachar says in KYM yoga is adapted to suit the needs of each individual so that anyone can practice and benefit from it. Teaching yoga is not just about teaching techniques to a group. Each individual is different. We are all unique and no two individuals will ever be the same physically, mentally and spiritually. So their needs and abilities cannot be similar.

"When people began to realise the multiple benefits of one-to-one classes, they were very receptive to the idea," he says.

In KYM every student is seen privately by a consultant and then taught by a teacher. The intention is to nurture a good relationship between the teacher and student. This is why teachers are not assigned randomly. A lot of consideration and thought goes into the choice of teacher for the student.

Yoga is about the mind

Desikachar believes that the success of yoga does not lie in the ability to perform postures but in how it positively changes the way we live our lives and manage our relationships.

So yoga is about building sound relationships with teacher, student, family, friends and our world. This is why yoga heals the mind first. It can tackle schizophrenia, depression and other mental health problems. But a lot depends on the student's own perseverance.

"The primary focus is to have empathy, not sympathy," explains Desikachar. "It takes a lot of time to establish a relationship based on trust, especially with those who are mentally ill. As yoga teachers we need to be extremely patient. Once the student believes that the teacher can be trusted and will not harm or exploit him or her in any way then the transformation begins to happen. This is why my father always said that yoga is about building relationships. With the right connection, so many wonderful things can happen."

Yoga is holistic

"Like everything, yoga must be presented intelligently. It should be spoken of carefully and offered with due regard for the aspirations, needs and cultural background of the individual. This must be achieved in stages. The appropriate application of yoga involves physical exercises, deep breathing, relaxation, meditation, lifestyle, food, studies and so forth," explains Desikachar.

Father and son

Though his father was an acclaimed yoga teacher, Desikachar studied to be a civil engineer, graduating from the University of Mysore. For a while he worked in North India. In those days yoga was not considered a profession. Indians were not proud of it. The West saw it as exotica. T Krishnamacharya never insisted that his son should follow in his footsteps. Despite his father's fame, the family lived a simple, middle-class life.

Krishnamacharya's own lineage can be traced to the Yogi Nathamuni, a ninth century South Indian saint who was renowned for his works in Sanskrit and Yoga - the *Nyayatattva* (an extensive work on the darshanas, nyaya, mimamsa and Vedanta) and *Yoga Rahasya* (an ancient and lost yogic text, reputed to have been recovered by T Krishnamacharya).

The Maharaja of Mysore, Krishna Rajendra Wodeyar, requested Krishnamacharya to set up a yoga programme at the Jaganmohan palace. He accepted, despite numerous offers elsewhere, mainly to be closer to his family. From here, he taught many students, including KP Jois and BKS Iyengar.

Breaking tradition, Krishnamacharya taught yoga to women for the first time. He simplified asanas, adapting them to each student. He would teach yoga to anyone, fat or thin, old or young. He would never push a student to do something he or she was unable to do.

Sometimes he even used props like ropes and wooden blocks to help his students practice. "Such adaptations were one of my father's most innovative efforts to make the practice of yoga accessible to everyone," says Desikachar. "In fact, when my father taught Indra Devi the standing forward bend (*uttanasana*), he would ask her to bend her knees as she bent down. It was only gradually that he helped her to bend down keeping her legs straight.

His principle in teaching yoga was: *Heyam dukkham anagatam*. (Yoga Sutra of

Patanjali Chapter II-16). This means painful effects that are likely to occur should be anticipated and avoided. This is also the motto KYM follows.

Recollects Menaka Desikachar: "I saw with my own eyes a young girl of about 15 years gasping for breath. She came to see my father-in-law. After a while she came out looking happy and breathing normally. I asked my father-in-law what he had done. He said simply that he had made an Ayurveda preparation for the girl which harmonised her breathing."

She relates another incident: "Sometime in 1968 a middle-aged man arrived in a car in front of my father-in-law's house. He had suffered a severe paralytic attack. It was so bad that he just lay in the back seat. I saw my father-in-law go inside the car and talk to this man. He taught him something. In a few days time this man began walking with the help of a stick. Soon he could walk without any support. Today he lives in America and is 80 year's old."

Desikachar quotes from the Sutras to explain: "Exceptional mental capabilities may be achieved by genetic inheritance, the use of herbs as prescribed in the Vedas, reciting incantations, rigorous austerities and through that state of mind which remains with its object without distractions."

Desikachar was Krishnamacharya's fourth child and second son. He might have continued as a civil engineer. But in 1961 while holidaying in Chennai, Desikachar witnessed the power of his father's work. This inspired him to change the focus of his work to yoga.

A foreign lady hugged his father and expressed her deep gratitude to him for helping her overcome insomnia.

"This was a lady who was very wealthy and had access to all the latest medical facilities. Nothing had cured her of the insomnia that had troubled her for years. However, my father without any medical background, without even knowledge of spoken English had cured her. This event was the turning point in my life. It was then that I decided that I must study yoga under my father," says Desikachar.

Since he was the sole breadwinner of the family for two years he continued working with a leading engineering firm in Chennai while studying with his father.

"I saw my father heal so many people. Sometimes he would prepare certain Ayurvedic medicines himself, often meditating in the sun before giving the medicine to the person. After he demonstrated his ability to stop his own heartbeat in 1964 at the age of 76, I never doubted him in the slightest," says Desikachar.

Apart from yoga, Desikachar has studied Vedanta philosophy, Vedic chanting, Ayurveda, Sanskrit, Mimamsa (ritual) and Nadi Pariksa (pulse-reading).

Krishnamacharya taught yoga to women for the first time. He simplified asanas, adapting them to each student. He would teach yoga to anyone, fat or thin, old or young. He would never push a student to do something he or she was unable to.

The KYM method

Under the KYM roof a long line of ailments are dealt with. These include psychological problems, gynecological illnesses, stress, muscular pain, swellings, lethargy, memory loss, constipation, insomnia, paralysis, stiffness in joints, hypothyroidism, diabetes, back pain, acidity, heart problems, arthritis, asthma and many others.

The uniqueness of teaching at KYM is in applying yoga to suit the needs of the individual. At a time when alternative medicine is gaining ground it is noteworthy that KYM receives close to 1,000 students a month.

The teaching methodology deals with the causes of ailments and not merely its symptoms. Students at KYM are not just numbers or cases. They are not treated as patients but as students. An assessment is made of each person in his or her entirety. The student and teacher then understand each other through an evolving personal relationship. A course is designed for the individual and adapted according to the progress made. The personal factor plays a vital role.

Therapy at KYM includes helping those afflicted by psychological and emotional suffering. Here, too, the course is designed for the individual and adapted according to the progress made under the guidance of a supervisor.

A teacher is chosen for each student by a panel of senior consultants and teachers. More intensive therapy requirements are assessed by the Yoga Chikitsa Department of the KYM. Its director, Dr N Chandrasekhar, is an allopathic medical practitioner and has been one of the senior yoga teachers of the Mandiram. Dr Latha Satish, a yoga teacher with KYM and a research scientist at the Department of Psychology, University of Madras, is succeeding S. Sridhranan, current managing trustee of KYM.

When a student/patient first visits KYM, a senior consultant assesses his or her needs. The consultants are under the direct guidance of Desikachar. All teaching is done on a one-on-one basis. Classes are scheduled at a mutually convenient time for teacher and student.

A personalised practice is required to be done every day. The teacher meets the student/patient at regular intervals to review progress and modify the practice as required.

Maresh, in his early 20's, has been visiting KYM regularly for the past year.



A class taking place



Menaka teaching a group of teachers

He was restless and could not stay still for even a second. If he remained stationary for too long he would fall off to sleep. He had difficulty obeying instructions.

A prolonged and regular regimen was constructed for Mahesh by his supervisor/teacher. It included asanas, pranayama, chanting, movements and most of all, personal interaction.

All these applications were designed keeping in mind Mahesh's physical, mental and breathing capabilities. His poor attention span improved to a noticeable extent.

In fact, he can now memorise and chant mantras which were an impossible task for him when he first came to KYM. He can now sit still with his eyes closed for a full five minutes. His supervisor says confidently: "Working with Mahesh is a great opportunity for me to serve. It is team work and effort that has helped Mahesh to improve. I keep hoping and praying that he improves even more."

Padmini had chronic asthma since she was eight. She tried allopathic treatment and steroids. But it didn't work. "I was unable to sing," she says, "I could not stand the sun and the rain as it would aggravate my condition. Even cooking was difficult."

She began visiting KYM in the early nineties. "That was the first step towards



A student performing an asana



Mahesh with Desikachar

my healing," she says. "My teachers, Desikachar and Menaka, who have been consistently inspiring me for over a decade, taught me the value and significance of regular practice."

"Sir encouraged me to learn chanting and that was the turning point of my life. He has helped me breathe again." Today Padmini is a yoga teacher at the KYM and at Vedavani where she teaches Vedic chanting. With a smile Padmini adds, "I am now able to take regular yoga and chanting classes. Not only that, I can cook too."

Padmini believes the Yoga Sutra, *Tapaha swadhyaya ishwarapranidhanani kriya yogah* (Yoga Sutra, Chapter II-1) has helped her heal further.

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

Sindhu, an eight-year-old, went into severe depression after her parents got divorced. She developed such severe trauma that she was unable to smile or laugh. Her teacher at KYM worked with her using various applications of yoga. Most of all the teacher gave Sindhu considerate emotional strength to understand her circumstances. Today, Sindhu is a happy child, laughing, playing and enjoying life.

Dr Latha Satish recounts the case of 30-year-old Mohan. Unable to cope with his job, he started suffering from severe anxiety. His mother was suffering from a psychiatric illness and Mohan felt he could be prone to it. So he was adding to his anxiety levels and thinking of things that had not happened.

Adequate time was spent with him to understand the core of his mental disharmony. A long pranayama practice to regulate his thought process was designed. With continued faith in his teacher and regular practice Mohan realised that all his anxiety was self-inflicted.

The spread of yoga in Europe

As a reputed centre for yoga and yoga studies, KYM has links to international yoga institutes like Viniyoga International Association, Paris, Viniyoga Review Belgium, Viniyoga America, Viniyoga Spain, Viniyoga Helvetia, Switzerland and Union Europeene Des Federation Nationales De Yoga, Paris. These institutes are affiliated to KYM.

It was through Desikachar's association with Jiddu Krishnamurti



Padmini, a teacher of yoga and Vedic chanting

that yoga began to gain respect in Europe.

In the early 1960's, Krishnamurti approached Krishnamacharya for some yoga lessons. Krishnamacharya asked him to study with Desikachar who at that time was in his late 20s. Krishnamurti was very happy with the training he received and in 1963 he invited Desikachar to come to Switzerland and participate in conferences he was involved with.

In 1963, when Desikachar went to Europe, he was introduced as Jiddu Krishnamurti's teacher. Many of Krishnamurti's followers were eager to learn from him.

In Europe Desikachar met Gerard Blitz. Born in 1912 Blitz, a Belgian Jew and a water polo player, had with his father founded Club Med, a French corporation with vacation resorts in exotic locations. Club Med was a precursor to the now popular all-inclusive resort concept.

Blitz, a student of Krishnamurti, now became Desikachar's student. Blitz founded the European Union of Nationally Federated Yoga Teachers. In each country in Europe, yoga schools are in a nationally federated union. The federation holds a large conference on yoga annually.

Through Krishnamurti, Desikachar came into contact with many legendary personalities, some of whom would become yoga students and teachers: Rukmini Devi Arundale (the celebrated dancer and founder of the Kalakshetra Academy) and Vanda Scaravalli.

Scaravelli, who died in Italy in 1999 at the age of 91, is best known for her influential book, *Awakening the Spine*. It has striking photos of her as an eighty-year-old performing challenging *asanas* with ease. Scaravelli learnt yoga from BKS Iyengar and Desikachar.

Desikachar follows the principle that Krishnamacharya always believed in and left behind, "Teach what is inside you, not as it applies to you, but as it applies to the other."

In India we continue to ignore pure yoga, a great inheritance from our forefathers. Yoga exists but mostly in its commercial avatar. In fact other nations have usurped the invaluable teachings of Patanjali without any effort.

The real gurus and traditional schools of yoga have preferred to lie low and keep a distance from moneyed adaptations. Institutes like KYM focus quietly on enhancing the real values of yoga.

They don't need to dazzle people with swamis in orange robes, or with aerobics and mindless philosophy because they teach and practice yoga in its true form.

web site www.kym.org. Phone 044 2493309 2, 24937998, 24620202. Email: admin@kym.org

Students at KYM are not treated as patients but as students. An assessment is made of each person in his or her entirety. The student and teacher have an evolving personal relationship



A student doing pranayam

Business

BEYOND PROFIT

Rethink money with us. What should the entrepreneur of the future be like? How can you get rich and still serve society? Do causes need bottom lines?

For disabled, see the opportunity

Massage skills give the blind a hands-on living

Civil Society News
New Delhi

It is tough finding employment for the disabled. Ask Absalom David of the Blind Relief Association in Delhi. A decade of trying to persuade employers has provided just about 300 jobs for people with defective vision. But on the other hand a little unconventional thinking can deliver just the right results. Once again, ask David.

A suggestion four years ago that blind people could earn from massage led to the setting up of a training facility in 2003 at the premises of the association where 187 men and women have been taught how to pummel and knead muscles and 100 of them are actually earning a living for themselves.

Shyam Kishore, 28 and visually impaired since an early age, now has clients across Delhi to whose homes he goes. Learning massage has made it possible for him to look after his two sisters and meet his own expenses. He has also teamed up with Asha, a fellow student, and what they earn together will perhaps be enough for them to set up home.

Sunita, a blind woman from Manipur, did her training in Delhi and went back to Imphal. She has set up a massage parlour of her own. She identified three blind boys and sent them to Delhi for training. She now employs them.

There are other such success stories, some of them difficult to track. But the massage skills of these people are prominently on display at the Diwali fair that the association holds each year. It is here that they meet up with clients who then call them to their homes.

When it comes to jobs for people coping with disabilities, industry, for all its stated intentions, mostly prefers to pass. The proposition of a blind worker on a machine invariably invites a flat no. Why should an establishment take the risk? Office or white collar employment on the other hand is limited. If employers are willing, the candidates don't have the academic qualifications or the skills. Rare is the organisation that has the imagination to create space for the physically challenged.

The number of disabled people in India is however huge and is put at between 40 million to 80 million. The number of blind and visually impaired people is also anyone's guess but without doubt it is significant. The disabled need to be absorbed into the workforce both quickly (to make up for past omissions) and systematically (to prepare for the future).

Blind people who make it through school and college tend to get ahead. They are absorbed in the workforce in one way or the other. But what of the vast numbers who can't clear exams, drop out and aren't given an opportunity to prove their usefulness in a seeing world?

After several years of doing the rounds to canvass for jobs, David turned up at the door of a medical physician in the hope that he could put together a programme in physiotherapy. The physician had been on the board of consultants of Vandana Luthra Curls and Curves (VLCC), a beauty and fitness company.

David was told that physiotherapy was perhaps not such a good idea because it had medical implications and involved a four-year course. Getting the right qualifications for people who had already been dropouts would be dicey. Chances were that they would be daunted by the course and give up.

But why not massage instead of physiotherapy? The physician had just been to Thailand where he had found blind people making a living out of massage. Surely

Photographs by AKSHMAN ANAND



Shyam Kishore

Shyam Kishore, 28 and visually impaired since an early age, has clients across Delhi to whose homes he goes. Learning massage has made it possible for him to look after his two sisters and meet his own expenses.

the blind in Delhi could be similarly taught massage, the physician suggested to David. He made the connection with VLCC, which readily agreed to help with training and certificates.

"The whole idea behind the massage is for blind people to get self-employment since getting employment is difficult," says David. "In Thailand blind people have been traditionally earning from massage. So, we had a brainstorming session with NGOs, people working for providing employment to the disabled, VLCC, doctors and people in the field and came to the conclusion that this would be a beneficial professional course."

"We did a tie-up with VLCC because they have been long in the business. The tie-up was that we would do the training and VLCC would give us specialised support and at the end of the training they would give a certificate to those who come up to the mark."

David explains that there are two kinds of massage: for relaxation and treatment. The blind school chose relaxation because it felt that visually impaired persons may not be initially suited to targeted treatment. "So our people use oils and at most a vibrator, which is a simple machine," he says.

Close on the heels of VLCC, herbal queen Shanz Hussain decided to chip in with training in beauty treatments. She offered one of her assistants as a trainer free of cost and provided a generous supply of ointments and creams.

Now the blind school has its own training centre. Rampal Singh, who spent 22 years at the Oberoi as a masseur, runs the course, which has some theory but emphasises the practical because of the heightened sense of touch and feel that the blind seem to develop in compensation for their lack of vision as it were.

Rampal Singh is assisted twice a week by a trainer from VLCC. A trainer from Shahnaz Hussain helps create a higher level of competencies : in facials and other beauty treatments.

The training centre has a classroom with rows of chairs where Rampal and the other trainers can lecture. But the real action takes place in two rooms alongside that have two beds each. One room is for the women and the other for the men. Here they learn massage skills in practice, mostly working on each other's limbs or by calling students and staff of the blind school on the premises for a session.

The course takes three months during which they are taught the contours of various muscles and pressure points.

Once the training is complete getting into business means an investment of Rs 5,000 or so which mostly goes towards a mobile phone and some creams and oils. Clients come through well-wishers or contacts made at the association's popular Diwali fair where a stall is set aside for giving tired shoppers a foot massage. Some of these customers then ask for a massage at home.

A blind person may charge as little as Rs 200 for a full hour's massage at your home, which is nothing in comparison to the thousands of rupees that clinics ask for.



A massage session taking place



Absalom David

Rampal Singh is assisted by a trainer from VLCC. A trainer from Shahnaz Hussain helps in facials and other beauty treatments.

Shyam Kishore wears a white coat and looks rather professional. He tells us that he was a high school dropout with little hope of making a living because of his disability. When he first heard of the massage course he joined and then dropped out preferring to try his hand at other things. But he was soon back and not only managed to complete the course but is seen as one of the star performers.

Shyam's clients are all over Delhi. He is available on mobile phone and travels to his clients by bus or autorickshaw. His charges vary depending on how far he has to go but at Rs 250 a session his service comes cheap in a city as expensive as Delhi is.

It is much the story for the others as well. For all of them the ultimate dream is to have a massage parlour like Sunita's in Imphal. And their problems are those of small entrepreneurs: where will the seed capital come from? Where does one find real estate in the expensive big city?

There is of course a yet bigger challenge for the disabled entrepreneur. It is in finding the social structures that will treat the disabled as able.

How about product labels for the blind

Civil Society News
New Delhi

TECHSHARE India, 2008, was held at the Habitat Centre in Delhi in February. It was meant to underline accessibility standards and the use of technologies for people with disabilities.

A cluster of stalls in the Habitat Centre courtyard had some products on display. There were screen readers and magnifiers, Braille slates and so on.



Chair and wheelchair lifts were on offer. There was an innovative company with packages for livening up classroom teaching.

But for a country with 40 to 80 million disabled people, many of them poor, this was an exhibition devoid of meaningful solutions.

The best review of the exhibition was done by a group of visually handicapped students from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), who went from stall to stall asking probing questions on products and often did not find satisfactory answers.

They were Alamelu BR, who is studying for an MPhil in English, Sudesh Kumar who is doing a Masters in history, Zubair Ahmed from international relations, Sweta Chugh, who is working for a PhD in South Asia and Annavaram who is working for his Masters in sociology.

Their collective verdict after spending much time going round the stalls was that Techshare India, 2008, had little that was relevant, at least for the visually challenged. "In other societies there are products that make daily living easier. For instance utensils that can be used safely or stoves that can be handled by the blind," said Annavaram.

Alamelu pointed out that people with no vision needed devices and systems that improve the quality of their existence. For instance, how does a blind person figure out the ingredients of a food product or the manufacturing or expiry dates? The blind need technologies that they can use, she observed.

A little innovation could perhaps make it possible to use barcodes to decipher expiry dates and ingredients. The important thing is to be innovative and seek out relevant solutions.

Readying youngsters for jobs

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

1 Rajbir Singh, a trainee and sales assistant at the Westside store in Lajpat Nagar's 3 C's shopping mall, is a picture of confidence as he moves around the shop floor. He has bagged the Star Performer of the Week award twice over.

1 Stop at Café Coffee Day at Lajpat Nagar and chances are that you will encounter Reema Dey as she bustles around efficiently, taking orders, serving and cleaning.

THESE are two youngsters who have jobs today thanks to Smile Foundation's Twin e-Learning project. Targeted at underprivileged youth, the six-month course has helped Rajbir and Reema get employment by sprucing up their English, providing them with basic computer education and soft skills such as inter-personal communication, team work and leadership skill development.

The first batch of students have been absorbed in organisations such as Café Coffee Day, Westside, Chroma Retail, Nokia stores, Fun Cinema and call centres. Other students work in local offices, stores and schools as assistants, computer operators, data entry operators.

"India has the capacity to generate over two million jobs in the service, retail and IT enabling sector in the next five years," says Santanu Mishra, trustee, Smile Foundation. "This, in turn, is an opportunity to provide employment and empowerment to the youth. Smile Twin e-Learning projects are an endeavour to train underprivileged youth with market-oriented education and skills so that they can earn their livelihoods with dignity."

The students are required to have passed Class 12. They pay between Rs 100 to Rs 500 a month, with exemptions for the needy.

Smile's modus operandi is to work with 31 grassroots groups for its 38 centres. These organisations work as implementing partners. The project also gets support from the UPS Foundation, U&N Foundation, Tech Mahindra Foundation, Busy Infotech, Asset India Foundation and International Management Institute.

The biggest coup for Smile Foundation is, of course, its tie-up with the IT giant, Microsoft, which has extended Rs 72 lakhs for Smile's Twin e-Learning projects. The grants will help to pay for the salaries of computer instructors in the 35 centres for two years. Microsoft also helps out with curriculum for computer training. A part of the fund is meant for project monitoring. Other curricula are developed in house and in collaboration with the International Management Institute.

A visit to two such e-learning centres in Delhi is an eye-opener. There is the New Opportunities for Women (NOW), an NGO run by Bharti Mehrotra and Seema Singh, great grand daughters of India's first president Dr Rajendra Prasad. Located at Ashram in Delhi, the NGO works in the areas of health, literacy and vocational training. It is with pride that Bharti talks of success stories such as Rajbir and Reema. "Most families run small businesses and are in LIG (Lower Income Group) housing and slums. Many cannot walk comfortably into shopping malls.

Rajbir was confident but could not converse in English and was, therefore, a bit withdrawn. The course helped him come out of his shell," she says. Likewise Abhilasha Sarin, another student, has bagged employment at ICICI's telecalling centre.

Currently NOW has 30 students for Smile's Twin e-Learning programme. Among them are Jayalakshmi and Yogesh Choudhury. The former, who has done her Class 12 from St Anthony's Girls Higher Secondary School in Chennai, dreams of becoming a nurse. The daughter of a gangman in the Indian Railways, she says, "This course will equip me to get the job of my choice." Likewise Yogesh Choudhary who passed out from the Molarband Senior Secondary School and is doing his first year at Agra University, firmly believes that developing English skills will give him a foothold in the job market. "English mein haath tang hai (I am weak in English)," he says.

It is indeed likely to be a long haul for many such students in the new batch, which began recently, as most of them can only understand and not speak English.

Take Manish Kumar Yadav who has joined the course at the Rural Education

Welfare Society (REWS) in Vasant Kunj. The son of a farmer in the village of Bodwan in Uttar Pradesh, he came to Delhi because of the absence of job opportunities in his village. Clearly still uncomfortable in English, he works part time in a courier company and would like to get a job in this area.

Nationally, so far 504 students have passed out from Smile Foundation's Twin e-learning programme. According to Smile's estimates, the 38 learning centres will expand to 50 by April 2008 and reach out to 50,000 beneficiaries in the next five years.

That's not bad going for a project which began operations only in mid-May last year. And there is a huge market out there for the Twin e-Learning course. Smile insiders quote a projection made by the National Association for Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) in Asia Times Online which estimates that India's IT and BPO workforce will increase from about 700,000 to 2.3



Targeted at underprivileged youth, the six-month course has helped Rajbir and Reema get employment by sprucing up their English, providing them with basic computer education and soft skills.

million by 2010. Likewise they point out that the Indian retail sector is likely to face a similar boom with increasing demand for e-skills.

'Social Venture Philanthropy' is how Smile Foundation describes its mandate. According to Mishra this unique and indigenous model translates into identifying grassroots level NGOs, then financing, handholding and supporting them till they become self sustainable. "The model has been borrowed from the successful business concept of venture capitalism. Taking a cue from the corporate sector, Smile's SVP model seeks consciously to broad-base investment in the belief that this will maximise reach and optimise social returns. Further, the focus under SVP has been on three business aspects: scalability, sustainability and accountability. SMILE strives to make development a reality by following the best approaches in the subjects it works with—education, child development, child rights, health care and so on."

Meanwhile as Smile goes full steam ahead with its Twin e-Learning project, there are some challenges at the e-learning centres that need to be met. These include the subsidy culture and over dependence on funding agencies on the part of NGOs, getting good trainers and teachers within the available budget and the need for more professional career guidance and counseling. However, there is a brighter side of the picture as a national level organisation has expressed interest in providing loans to students which are to be returned once they gain employment. This will go a long way in addressing these bottlenecks. In the process, more unemployed youth will gain better livelihoods and a more secure future.

Worldview

LATITUDE MATTERS

Kabul on the inside

Aunohita Mojumdar
Kabul

Is it safe to go to Kabul, friends, acquaintances and those keen to visit often ask. The question, though natural, often strikes me as odd. My usual response is to say it's safe unless one is unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Being a journalist in Afghanistan is an enormous privilege. Seeing a country being built brick by brick—the emergence of trends, cultures, economic development, institutions—is a unique experience.

Living in Kabul is not so easy. Electric supply can be as intermittent as two hours every fourth day in a freezing winter, a time when heating, hot water and lights are most essential. Temperatures in the cold season vary between minus 15 to minus 25 degrees.

Of course many parts of India also lack this basic necessity. But try running a capital city, and one which is attempting to rebuild a country, on sporadic bursts of power.

Most people who can afford to, and this includes almost all expatriates, rely on heavy generator sets to provide them electricity. This comes at a price: fumes, noise and frequent breakdowns.

In winter, our rooms are warmed with wood stoves and it is only after four-and-a-half years that I can claim to have somewhat mastered the art of lighting a successful wood fire. Previous winters having been spent opening and closing windows; first to clear the room of smoke and then to keep out the cold!

Though living conditions are no better than anywhere else in the third world, costs of living are higher than the developed world because goods and services are at a premium.

After six years of rebuilding, Afghanistan's urban centres still rely completely on imported goods including milk, butter and fruit. Even though there is an abundance of all three in the country, the difficulties of processing, packaging and distribution make it difficult to access locally produced goods.

So why stay on in this difficult country? Most foreigners asked this question are stumped for a rational answer, mentioning only the intensity of the country. The light, the colours, the warmth, the cold and most of all the emotions, all seem to be more intense, more powerful.

The normal is the unusual. Those expatriates who do 'normal' things are seen as being extraordinary. An Indian diplomat, Sandeep Kumar, stands out because he frequents Afghan gyms, paints and travels in taxis. Deborah Rodriguez, an American, became a bestselling author with her book on how she set up a beauty parlour, married an Afghan and coped with life here. Saska and Gay le Clerc are woman restaurateurs. Their jobs are not easy. Saska and Le Clerc have to import a lot of their basic food.

Imported goods are sold at very high prices to the expatriate community and the Afghan elite while poorer citizens get pushed to the margins. Take, for exam-



The normal is the unusual and it is those expatriates who do 'normal' things who are seen as being extraordinary.

ple, the price of housing. A substantive number of houses were completely or partially destroyed in years of bombing, mortar shelling and gunfire. The advent of a cash-rich expatriate community has resulted in enormously high rents that are unaffordable for most Afghans who get pushed to remote areas of the city.

It is not just the economy of Afghanistan that is the tale of two cities. Expatriates seem to live in a bubble of their own by choice and by circumstance. Most foreigners working for international organisations are bound by a clutch of security regulations: houses with high walls, barbed wire, bomb shelters, guards and sandbags outside. They travel mostly in armoured cars or large SUVs.

Expatriates are also prohibited from walking in the street, going to areas or locations that are not 'cleared' by their security apparatus in advance and usually prohibited from consorting with Afghans who are not 'cleared'.

Afghans are often treated as suspect unless proven otherwise as per this security regimen. Private security companies seal off roads and access to 'ordinary' locals, prevent local taxis from plying on many routes and cordon off half the road in front of the houses and offices of the rich and powerful.

The divide is accentuated in the social sphere. Most restaurants are predominantly frequented by either Afghans or expats and few see the presence of both, purely because 'expat' restaurants are way too expensive (a sandwich in an ordinary café costs usually \$7 to \$10). Even where they are affordable, many restaurants display signs outside saying 'no locals', 'no Afghans' or 'foreign passports only'.

The rationale is that they are forbidden from serving liquor to Afghans under the country's laws and get raided by the police if locals are found inside. The result is an apartheid-like situation that appears to have become acceptable.

However, it would be wrong to blame just the expatriate community for this divide. Afghan society does not lend itself easily to a great deal of tolerance in socialising, especially where the presence of women is concerned. In most parts of the country, women still need permission to leave the house. The degree of strictness varies with geography, ethnicity and individual family values.

Women continue to be seen as possessions and their role outside the family is ill-understood. The fact that more than 50 per cent of women in Afghanistan's largest jail are there for 'moral crimes' mostly for having run away from home, illustrates the opinion of those in authority towards women stepping outside the family structure.

War, displacement, extreme conservatism, exposure to TV's pop culture combined with progressive liberal values have created a confused value system.

As an Indian woman I usually straddle a schizophrenic identity. Indians are the most loved nationality in Afghanistan, being seen rightly or wrongly as selfless friends with no agenda. Being a woman counters most of that advantage.

To summarise life in Kabul: as a journalist, it is fascinating, living is difficult and being a woman can be depressing.

Everyone owns a shrinking planet. People count more than governments. Track change before it becomes news.

Pak's lonely quest for democracy

Irene Khan
London

ACROSS South Asia, with the exception of India and Bhutan, the army plays a prominent role in national life. In Sri Lanka, during over two decades of military campaigns against Tamil separatists, the army brass has acquired a powerful position. In Nepal, after a decade-long conflict with Marxist rebels, the army is formally taking a backseat as a political solution is forged between various parties under civilian leadership but remains a significant player in the transition. In Bangladesh, the army's role remains unclear, mired in speculation and suspicion, some projecting the army as a midwife to democracy: helping the Caretaker Government to deliver free and fair elections- while others claim that it is trying to doctor, rather than deliver, democracy. In Myanmar, on the other hand, there has never been any doubt about the military junta's determination to hold on to power, despite international condemnation and internal uprising, most recently by peace-loving monks.

In each of these countries, no matter what the ambition or intention of the army, the international community has been clear that it wants to see democracy, human rights and the rule of law prevail.

The sole exception in the region has been Pakistan. Pervez Musharraf who recently discarded his army general's uniform for civilian clothes, but continues to retain all the power and trappings of military dictatorship with the full approval of the United States and other Western governments, reinforced during his tour of European capitals in late January.

The US and its Western allies justify their different - and differential - treatment of Musharraf on the grounds that he is an indispensable ally in the fight against terrorism. But is the West really furthering the cause of counter-terrorism in Pakistan by supporting the Musharraf regime? Or are they playing a "Great Game" that will, like Great Games of the past, lead only to greater instability and human rights abuses?

Amnesty International delegates who visited Pakistan reported a deep sense of despair. "Pakistan is on the verge of disaster," said many of those they spoke to. Pakistanis - and the rest of the world - are still reeling from the shock of the brutal killing of Benazir Bhutto. It is a measure of the country's desperation that despite Benazir's unimpressive human rights record during her previous terms of office, in Pakistan she had come to be seen by many citizens, including human rights activists, as the country's best chance for positive change.

Many of those interviewed were convinced that parliamentary elections, scheduled for February 18, would be a sham with recourse against illegalities unlikely. Elections are supervised by judicial officers accountable to the Election Commission, which is working hand in glove with the executive, and ultimately to the chief justice, who has been hand-picked by President Musharraf.

Over the past year the courageous stand of the judges and lawyers had given hope to many in Pakistan of a new future in which human rights and the rule of law might prevail. Remarkably, Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry had departed from the Pakistani tradition of judicial compliance with the executive by challenging the government's position on a number of key issues.

The Supreme Court's decision to take up the legal challenge to Musharraf's candidacy as President while also retaining his post as Army Chief is well known. Less known, but extremely important from the perspective of human rights, was the judicial scrutiny of the government's role in enforced disappear-

ances of nationalist and terrorist suspects. During the Supreme Court hearings, Chief Justice Chaudhry claimed there was "irrefutable proof" that the missing people were in the custody of secret agencies and that those responsible would be prosecuted.

But the optimists had made a major miscalculation. In the warped Western strategy of the "War on Terror", Musharraf has a licence to act like no other general in the sub-continent. Human rights and the rule of law have no place in the "Great Game", and if the judiciary is not willing to play that game, it must be cut down.

As such, last November, Musharraf accused the judiciary of "working at cross purposes with the executive and legislature in the fight against terrorism and extremism". Acting in his capacity as Chief of Army Staff - but beyond any powers granted to him as such - General Musharraf declared himself Supreme Legislator, whose decrees and actions could not be challenged. He imposed a state of emergency and suspended the constitution, then proclaimed a Provisional Constitution Order (PCO) suspending fundamental rights, including safeguards relating to arrest and detention, security of the person, and freedom of expression, assembly, and association. He removed Iftikhar Chaudhry as Chief Justice for a second time and barred judges of the higher judiciary from office unless they took an oath to abide by the PCO.

His actions unleashed a wave of protest across the country, but he cracked down with impunity. Just weeks before Musharraf's action in Pakistan, the military junta in Myanmar had cracked down on protestors. The international reaction could not have been more different. Myanmar was put on the UN Security Council agenda, and the UN Secretary-General despatched his personal envoy to Yangon. US and EU governments reinforced their arms embargo and trade sanctions. On Pakistan, however, their silence was deafening. Such double standards weaken their impact on both countries.

After a new batch of more compliant judges confirmed his eligibility as President, General Musharraf stood down as Army Chief, lifted the state of emergency, installed a new caretaker government, and set a date for elections. This compliant judiciary approved legislation suspending fundamental rights and prohibiting judicial review of government actions.

As for the "War on Terror", a recent increase in military activity in the regions of Swat and Waziristan has led to concerns even among some of his staunchest allies in the US government that Musharraf has given more attention to attacking judges and

lawyers in recent months than to fighting terrorism.

As political unrest and extremist violence spread throughout Pakistan, the international community would do well to take a good, hard look at the foolhardiness of supporting military strongmen and corrupt politicians who undermine human rights and the rule of law in the name of national security.

In the long run, the only real option is to exert pressure on the Pakistani government to reinstate the independence of the judiciary so that human rights and the rule of law can be upheld.

Throughout South Asia, civil society has been a force for social and political change, and a bulwark against authoritarian rule. In Pakistan, the spark that was first lit by the lawyers and judges has now been taken up more broadly by others.

Activists, journalists, students, and political workers are continuing to protest, often at extreme risk, as the suicide bomb attack outside the High Court building in January showed. Will civil society there as elsewhere in the subcontinent help close the chapter on military rule?

Irene Khan is the Secretary General of Amnesty International. ips.



The international community has been clear that it wants to see democracy, human rights and the rule of law prevail. The sole exception in the region has been Pakistan.



Cracks in secular France

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

THIS week I received a note from my ex-wife requesting permission to allow the local Catholic Church to perform the first communion rites for my youngest daughter this summer. In fiercely secular France the Catholic Church protects itself from lawsuits by getting such written acquiescence from legal guardians (especially if they are not from the same denomination or religion) before accepting a minor

into the Church. After centuries of faith-based wars, Europe, especially France, has chosen to conduct the business of the state quite separately from the various religious denominations that exist within its territory.

It was Europe that suffered most from its religious history. Rome imported Semitic Christianity and modified it into a Papal political system which dominated European politics for more than a millennium. With the 'divine' power to subdue kings it strayed from the spiritual into the worldly realm of power, till a revolt brewed both within the Church (the reformation) and without (Henry VIII's revolt and the birth of the Anglican Church).

French Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, Diderot and Montesquieu regarded religion as divisive and intolerant. One important event during the French Revolution was the march to Rome in 1789 and the abduction of the Pope – an act repeated in 1809. Eventually, an arrangement between the Vatican and Napoleon, the 'Concordant', provided a separation of the State from the Church and peace on that count for the next century. By 1905 anti-clerical militancy reached its peak and the Third Republique declared its secularism in very stark terms.

The history of religion on the other side of the Atlantic has been quite different. The refugees of the religious wars and intolerance in Europe ended up in the US. Religion being the melding and continual reinterpretation of existing ideologies, the process of fragmentation continues there even to this day. To the sometimes comic disbelief of visitors, practically anyone can go and register a new church in the US. There are literally thousands of such registered churches in America. Hence the separation of the Church and the State in the US is a peculiar thing: proclaimed but not practised.

'In God we trust', seen across every dollar bill is the ultimate declaration of the marriage of two of America's principle religions: Christianity and Commerce. During my 20 years in the US it never ceased to surprise me how effortlessly the church-goer separates the Sunday sermon which undoubtedly preaches against all things worldly, from his week-long corporate existence driven by greed and commerce.

Such schizophrenic existence is as staple to America as apple pie and vanilla ice-cream – and possibly its miscomprehension by the world at large.

The installing of an 'American' president in France is suddenly shaking the secular structure of La France. As early as May 2003, Sarkozy, then a powerful Interior Minister with vaulting presidential ambitions and keen political foresight, was instrumental in creating the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) – an act that sought to corral the significant vote of the five million Muslims France is supposed to have. (This would be the equivalent to the historical wooing of the Muslim vote in India by the Congress). Shortly afterwards in 2004, he wrote, *'La République, les religions, l'espérance,'* (Republic, Religion, Hope) in which he clearly states, "I am convinced that religious spirit and practice can contribute to appeasing and regulating a free society ...One

would be wrong to limit the church's role to spirituality". Later, he adds, referring to the Church, "It was a mistake to turn our backs to our past and renege, in a way, on our obvious roots".

More recently he made public statements in the international arena that are bewildering to a majority of the French. In December 2007 in the Vatican he said: "France's roots are essentially Christian...A man who believes in God is a man filled with hope. And it is in the Republic's interest that there should be many men and women with hope. Gradual emptying of rural parishes, spiritual desertification of suburbs, vanishing of (religious sponsored) youth clubs or shortage of priests have not made the French happier. The school teacher will never replace the priest or the minister when it comes to passing down values or learning the differences between Good and Evil."

A month later while visiting Saudi Arabia, a country seldom lauded for its practise of human rights even by its closest friends in the West, he made this

startling speech: "I don't know of any country whose heritage, culture and civilisation are not based on religious roots. It is from religion...that we first learned the principles of universal morals, the universal idea of human dignity".

Praising Saudi Arabia for its strong religious base, Sarkozy referred to God "who does not enslave man, but liberates him, God who is the rampart against unbridled pride and the folly of men." It may have even choked his Saudi patrons to hear that "Regarding the condition of women and freedom of expression, Saudi Arabia has also taken action...".

What is one to make of this consummate politician and master strategist, praised even by his detractors for his boundless energy as much as for his guile, reversing France's recent history, creating what he calls 'rupture' from the past? There is a suspicion that he has an agenda - not merely of seducing the Christian or Muslim voters but of using religion for political purposes.

What is Sarkozy's religion is a question not only the French, who avoid any discussion on religion like the *peste*, but the rest of Europe and the US avoid asking. And why indeed should anyone ask, under normal circumstances that is. But when the President of the most fiercely secular State in the world goes around breaking the rules and pontificating about religion then the question is no longer impertinent. We do know that he was raised a Catholic (like Margaret Albright, ex-Secretary of State of the US), even though his bloodline from his mother's side is Jewish (Sarkozy's maternal grandfather was Aron Mallah, from one of the oldest Jewish families of Salonika, Greece). We all know how sticky it can become for anyone to use that taboo word for fear of being labelled anti-Semitic.

As such little more has been said about this. That is till very recently when *Le Figaro* broke the story of his being a "Sayan" on 22 October 2007 under the headline, *Les étranges accusations d'un cybercorbeau*. The story accuses

Sarkozy of being recruited as a spy for Israel as far back as 1983 by Mossad. There was some talk about the case being investigated by the judicial police but not much has been heard about it subsequently.

We have seen how in recent years powerful world leaders like George Bush and Tony Blair have brought God into their cabinets in open defiance of their nations stated positions on the separation of the Church and the State, to the dismay of the world. One has merely to read of the antics of General William Boykin (Bush's one time Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence) to know that the Taliban was evenly matched in their religious fanaticism when facing the Americans. Are we now going to see Europe regress from 'reason and enlightenment' back to the dark age of religious wars. Wake up France, wake up Europe, before that happens here.



What is one to make of this consummate politician and master strategist, praised even by his detractors for his energy as much as for his guile, reversing France's recent history.

Perspectives

CATCHING TRENDS

Have an idea? Perhaps a lost cause? Tell your story or just express an honest opinion in these pages.

Investment growth for whom?

KAVALJIT SINGH

ALTHOUGH India liberalised its investment regime in the early 1990s, it was only at the end of the 1990s that private equity (PE) investors showed interest in the Indian market. However, PE investments underwent rapid transformation in India in the mid-2000s, as clearly evident from the following facts:

1 Since 2002, PE inflows to India have witnessed a compounded annual growth rate of 67 per cent.

1 PE investments in India jumped from a mere \$2.2 billion in 2005 to \$17 billion in 2007.

1 In 2006, PE investments emerged as the single largest investment class driving M&A in India, overtaking both foreign and domestic strategic M&A investments.

1 India ranks first in Asia in terms of private equity M&As.

1 India tops the PE deals list among the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries. In 2007, India accounted for more than half of all PE inflows into BRIC countries.

At present, there are more than 100 PE firms already operating in India and some of the biggest names including Blackstone, the Carlyle Group, Warburg Pincus, KKR, Temasek Holdings, 3i and Citigroup have started their operations in the country. Lately, some big PE firms have also launched India focused funds which are mandated for investment in Indian companies only.

Interestingly, India is also witnessing the emergence of homegrown PE firms which are raising capital from both domestic and foreign institutional investors and invest in a variety of businesses within the country. Some of the prominent Indian private equity firms include ICICI Ventures, ChrysCapital, IDFC PE, UTI Ventures, Kotak and Sequoia Capital.

What is perplexing to note is that instead of incorporating their funds in India, both domestic and foreign PE firms are setting up offshore funds in tax havens, particularly Mauritius, ostensibly to avoid tax and regulatory oversight.

THE BIG QUESTION

Why so much PE investments in India?:

First, the Indian authorities have recently opened up a number of sectors to foreign investments which gives greater market access to foreign PE funds. For instance, foreign investment limits in the telecom sector have been enhanced from 49 per cent to 74 per cent. Besides, 100 per cent foreign investment has been allowed in a

wide range of infrastructure sectors such as the development of new airports, laying of natural gas pipelines, petroleum infrastructure, mining, and development of townships.

Secondly, a substantial number of Indian companies are unlisted in the stock markets which become an easy prey for PE firms. Only 22 percent of all PE deals were in public listed Indian companies in 2006. The rest happened outside the stock market. This also reveals that in order to generate higher returns, PE firms are deliberately avoiding public listed companies where the valuations have risen sharply due to booming stock markets.

Thirdly, due to increased competition from foreign companies, many Indian companies are ready to exit businesses which do not fit into their future strategy. This provides an excellent opportunity for PE firms to come in.

Fourthly, PE firms are facing tough competition and dwindling returns in their traditional markets (US and Europe) and therefore are looking for alternative investment markets. The opening up of Indian markets provides them attractive business opportunities due to higher economic growth, plenty of liquidity in stock markets, political stability, strong corporate performance and a burgeoning middle class.

In recent years, the returns on PE investments in India (along with China and other Asian emerging markets) have been much higher than traditional markets. The mind-blowing profits made by the US-based PE firm, Warburg Pincus, in an Indian mobile telephone service provider, Bharti Telecom, is a case in point. Warburg Pincus made an investment of \$300 million in Bharti Telecom during 1999-2001 but exited in 2005 with a total return of \$1.92 billion – almost seven times of its original investment. Such fabulous profit opportunities are dwindling in traditional markets.

Another key driver in PE investments is the emergence of Indian transnational corporations (TNCs) which are seeking closer tier-ups with PE firms in order to benefit from their expertise and networks. Besides, many global PE funds have a substantial number of Indians in their top management teams which, in some ways, also contribute to hard-selling the India growth story.

GROWTH DEALS DOMINATE BUT...

Unlike the American and European markets where buyouts are common, Indian

(Continued on page 29)



A substantial number of Indian companies are unlisted in the stock markets which become easy prey for PE firms. Only 22 percent of PE deals were in public listed Indian companies

Swades power in Arunachal

PRASHANT LOKHANDE

DECEMBER 21 was the shortest day of the year in Arunachal Pradesh. Night descends early here at 4:15 pm since this tiny state is located in the eastern most tip of India.

On that fateful day, as the sun dipped over Kaho, the remotest village near the India-China border, Jinu Meyor, a government employee tried to convince villagers assembled in a little wooden house about the possibility of generating electricity from a nearby small stream. Kerosene lanterns twinkled across the border. Meyor stood there feeling optimistic as well as apprehensive about



Kaho's little hydro-electric power station

April 24, 2005 was D-Day when all the anxiety undergone by scores of people associated with the project faded into oblivion as lights beamed from electric bulbs when dusk descended over the village at 4.30 pm. Villagers could not believe their eyes and had to pinch themselves.

being able to persuade his fellow villagers. This plan, to generate electricity from the stream, had been drawn up by executive engineer RK Joshi and myself as deputy commissioner.

Actually the villagers were sick and tired of such proposals put forward by government after government. They were not ready to part with the water of the stream and they saw it as a conspiracy to interfere in their village life. The small stream was their only source of water for drinking and irrigation. They were mostly small farmers. The villagers were not willing to cooperate but after consistent persuasion and some hard bargaining, that their water would not be disturbed, things turned around.

Although many of the villagers were heard muttering 'let us not waste our time', a handful of villagers were somewhat convinced that the government meant business this time and that they would be assured of water.

Nobody realised then that this was the beginning of a success story. Political will, developmental administration and engineering skills came together to implement an ambitious project. Perhaps people had seen the film, *Swades*, in which Shah Rukh Khan as an NRI comes back to build a small hydel plant.

In some ways the villagers were right in their apprehensions since constructing a hydro-electric project in such a remote area is truly a challenging task. Past efforts too were of no avail mainly because of the remoteness of the area in

such a hilly terrain. But this time the same remoteness acted as a catalyst for government agencies.

Once the concept got accepted the next worry was where to find adequate finances. We then decided to approach the MP from Arunachal Pradesh, Tapir Gao to grant Rs 1 lakh from the MPLAD scheme. He readily agreed.

On eliciting the big 'yes' from villagers and raising some funds the next task was to go ahead with the field work. It had to be planned meticulously as even a mismatch of a few centimetres could make the whole process un-ending. The morale of

the team had to be high to get things done in a place where even a nail is difficult to find.

The concept got the government go-ahead on January 18, 2005. The initial startup contribution money of Rs1 lakh too was assured.

There was hardly any time left before the rains, which normally begin in February. Roadblocks like shortage of funds, lack of adequate staff, remoteness of the site, adverse weather conditions and conditional acceptance of villagers started dragging down the momentum built only on one strength: *abhi nahin to kabhi nahin*.

Finally, work started amidst communication disruption and delayed delivery of equipment. But the biggest problem was of transporting men and equipment across the mighty river Lohit through a hanging foot suspension bridge 230 metres long. The bridge was a virtual pendulum, swinging from side to side. It was a truly mind-boggling experience.

By the end of February 2005 it was satisfying to note that the project was taking shape at ground level, and the crucial logistical work was done with unmatched precision. The morale of the team was at an all-time high as the necessary equipment was put in order at the foundation. As the concrete structure solidified, excited villagers started purchasing electrical goods and wiring their houses. The stage was all set for them to get connected with the rest of the country on a day-to-day basis.

April 24, 2005 was D-Day when all the anxiety undergone by scores of people associated with the project faded into oblivion as lights beamed from electric bulbs when dusk descended over the village at 4.30 pm. Villagers could not believe their eyes and had to pinch themselves. Their ordeal of dark nights was finally over.

Now they don't have to trek miles to get their rice husked. The smile on one of the old villager's wrinkled face and the glow of gratitude in his sunken eyes was a reward nobody could ever equate. The moment still lingers in the hearts of all who were associated with the implementation of the project.

The project, which has a capacity of 10 KW, was then handed over to the village community who themselves are running and maintaining it smoothly since the past two years. The project has also benefited the soldiers guarding our porous borders as almost all their outposts are now electrified. The administration has provided a DTH and TV thereby enabling the hitherto isolated villagers an open window to the outside modern world.

Arunachal Pradesh's finance minister Kalikho Pul, who has always supported innovative people-friendly schemes, was all praise for the team.

Keeping this project as the model, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh has developed a Border Village Illumination Programme at an estimated cost of Rs 240 crore. On February 1, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced the programme at Itanagar covering all the villages in the border areas.

Prashant Lokhande is currently Secretary to the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh. As deputy commissioner he implemented this hydro-electric project. He was awarded the Governor's Gold Medal this year for initiating people centric development projects on health, education, communication, PDS and disaster management in the state for the last two years. RK Joshi was conferred a commendation certificate.

Investment growth for whom?

(Continued from page 27)

markets have not yet witnessed substantial buyout deals. Most investments by PE funds in India are for minority stake in growing companies without taking over management control. Such deals account for over 80 per cent of all PE transactions in India. However, this trend is rapidly changing as a number of small to medium-sized buyout deals have been announced since 2006. The acquisition of 85 per cent of Flextronics Software Systems by KKR and the buyout of Gokuldas Exports Limited by Blackstone in 2007 represents this change. However, buyouts deals are likely to overshadow minority deals with the further liberalisation of the policy and regulatory regime in the coming years.

From the perspective of General Partner, growth deals are as lucrative as buyouts. Even if PE funds don't generate profits from growth deals in India, the General Partner can still earn substantial management fees.

BULLISH ON INFRASTRUCTURE

There has been a major shift in the sectoral distribution of PE investments in India over the years from traditional sectors (such as IT & ITeS) to infrastructure, real estate, banking and financial services, media and entertainment sectors.

Of late, a large number of PE funds, both foreign and domestic, are investing a huge amount of capital in India's infrastructure sector. In particular, PE funds are financing the development of new airports, power generation, telecom infrastructure, petroleum infrastructure, captive mining of coal and lignite, logistics, the development of ports, special economic zones (SEZs) and townships. In all such infrastructure sectors, 100 per cent foreign investment is allowed.

However, it is important to stress here that PE funds are not directly financing specific infrastructure projects in India, as the World Bank or private finance company would typically do. Rather, PE funds invest in a holding company, which in turn, invests directly in infrastructural projects. There are two main advantages with this financing process. First, it allows PE fund to invest in a portfolio of infrastructural projects as compared to a single project. This helps in the diversification of risk associated with infrastructural projects. Second, by investing in a holding company, PE funds can exit easily by selling its equity to another PE or strategic investor. Thus, PE funds can bypass certain existing capital controls and regulations on foreign investments (such as the three-year mandatory lock in investments in real estate) in India. Furthermore, it is much easier for a holding company to issue an IPO in a stock market as compared to specific infrastructure projects.

Typically, private investors are reluctant to fund infrastructure projects in India because of higher initial capital costs, relatively long gestation periods and returns spread over a longer period. Therefore the question is: why are PE investors funding infrastructure? Any altruistic motive? No. The motives are myriad but purely commercial.

First, infrastructure projects in India offer handsome returns in comparison

to other developing countries. The average internal rate of return (IRR) on infrastructure projects in India is about 20 per cent. Besides, the Indian authorities also provide special tax incentives in the form of government guarantees, interest subsidy, duty-free imports of capital goods, capital grants and tax holidays on the profits to private sector to invest in infrastructure projects. Therefore, the returns are in inverse proportion to the risks associated with infrastructure projects. Already many private equity players such as IDFC Private Equity have earned mega profits, upwards of 25 per cent, by investing in infrastructure projects in India.

Second, there is a huge demand-supply gap in India's infrastructure. The Planning Commission has estimated that India needs infrastructure investments totaling \$350 billion by the year 2012. Such a huge amount of investments cannot be raised by budgetary resources alone given the deteriorating fiscal position.

Third, Indian authorities are encouraging increased participation of the private sector in infrastructure projects to meet the demands of a growing economy. By and large, Indian authorities are relying on the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model to fund infrastructure projects in the country which suits the investment patterns of PE funds. Many big infrastructural projects (such as freight corridors on Delhi-Mumbai route and modernisation of the Mumbai and Delhi airports) are being implemented under the PPP model. The development of SEZs is another example of PPP arrangements. Despite popularity in recent years, PPP projects have remained highly controversial in India because of the lopsided nature of contracts in favour of private partners while all risks are borne by public institutions. The PE-supported Delhi-Noida toll bridge project (DND Flyway) is a case in point.

Lastly, India's experience has to be seen in the wider international context where private investors are becoming dominant players in infrastructure financing in response to declining official capital flows. Until 2030, global infrastructure investments needs are estimated at \$30 trillion for transport, energy, water and communication sectors. This reflects the potential that global infrastructure has in store for private investors including

PE firms. Besides, the returns on infrastructure financing are extremely handsome. To illustrate, the \$6 billion Millennium Fund managed by KKR has delivered annual returns of 55 per cent since its launching in 2000.

Despite PE investors pouring huge money, one should not miss out the wider developmental concerns associated with large infrastructure projects in India. In any large-scale infrastructure project, the impact on local communities could be devastating due to forced displacement and loss of traditional livelihoods. Not to talk about environmental degradation and wildlife habitat loss. The public policy issues run much deeper than the superficial debate whether in-principle India needs infrastructure or not. Rather the more appropriate questions should be: What infrastructure? Infrastructure for whom? Who benefits? Who pays?

Nowadays there is so much talk about 'inclusive growth' in policy circles but it would remain meaningless unless there is sensitivity on the distributional effects of investment flows.

In any large-scale infrastructure project, the impact on local communities could be devastating due to forced displacement and loss of livelihoods. Not to talk about environmental degradation and wildlife habitat loss. The public policy issues run deep.

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NREGS doesn't live up to promises

BHARAT DOGRA

IN recent years the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) has evoked interest and expectations. A poverty alleviation scheme, it entitles a worker in each rural family to receive 100 days employment at the prevailing legal wage rate from the government.

If the administration fails to provide employment for 100 days, then an unemployment allowance will be paid for the number of days when work was not given. The scheme thereby 'guarantees' employment to the rural poor.

From April this year NREGS will be extended to the entire country. How has this scheme worked so far and what are the expectations from it for the future?

There are widespread complaints that this programme, which has seemingly been given a lot of priority, is under-budgeted. In the first year when NREGS covered 200 districts, Rs 11,300 crores was allocated. Calculations by several experts have revealed that on an average Rs 100 crores is needed for each district every year. For instance, in Dungarpur district, Rajasthan, Rs 100 crores was used despite inadequate payment of wages and unemployment allowance.

On the basis of these calculations, Rs 20,000 crores should have been provided in the first year instead of Rs 11,300 crores. What is worse is that according to government data in the first ten months of the financial year, only Rs 6,715 crores was actually released.

In 2007-08 the coverage of NREGS was increased from 200 to 330 districts, but its budget was hiked from Rs 11,300 crores to only Rs 12,000 crores. As economist Jean Dreze pointed out, there was no increase in the budget for NREGS in real terms.

When Rs 12,000 crores is spread over 330 districts, it means that each district gets an annual allocation of Rs 36 crores instead of the Rs 100 crores that is needed.

At that time Jean Dreze had said, "The Union Budget 2007-8 was yet another signal that the primary concern of the government, as far as NREGS is concerned, is to keep the expenditure levels as low as possible, instead of making imaginative use of this unique opportunity to bring about economic, social and political change in rural areas."

Nikhil Dey, a senior activist of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), a people's organisation which played a leading role in the campaign for NREGS, said: "This reveals how non-seriously the government had pursued this important scheme. The Finance Ministry and the state governments were together discouraging it. The state administration generally considered NREGS a headache to implement."

Nikhil Dey has been involved with close monitoring of the scheme. He questions the government's statement that less money was allocated since last year demand for the scheme was less than expected. "There is no doubt that large-scale demand for the scheme certainly exists, but credible means of getting work have not been available to genuinely needy people," he says. "In villages in Rajasthan where the administration took prompt action, there was a huge turnout of workers. But in states like Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh there were many villages in which even job cards were not issued."

Sunilam, an opposition legislator (MLA) from Multai constituency of Madhya Pradesh who has raised NREGS-related questions and issues several times in the state legislative assembly said, 'I challenge anyone in the state government to show me even one village in which the people who demanded work got 100 days of work, as is the stipulated legal norm. Large-scale migration of workers has continued unabated even in the districts covered by NREGS. In some cases job cards of migratory workers have been cornered by sarpanches who pay them Rs 5 or 10 per day without organising any work at all and corner the remaining money themselves. Hence work is done only on paper.'

Sunil, an activist of Kisan Adivasi Sangathan in Madhya Pradesh explained: "On one hand, NREGS has failed to bring benefits. On the other hand, large-

scale mechanisation of crop-harvesting, threshing and earth-work implies that the employment available earlier to rural workers is fast diminishing."

Jai Singh, co-ordinator of the Dalit Dasta Virodhi Andolan (Movement Against the Oppression of Dalits) in Punjab, India's green revolution state endorses this view.

The failure of NREGS is particularly glaring in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. Over 50 per cent of the summer and winter crop season was lost here due to extremely adverse weather conditions.

In districts like Chitrakut and Banda, NREGS was implemented badly. To get benefits for the people under this scheme, a voluntary organisation, ABSSS, tried to help the Kol tribals of Itwa panchayat, Chitrakut, who are the poorest peo-

ple here. It assisted the Kols to apply in a systematic way for employment under the NREGS. But the tribals had to wait endlessly. Just a few days of work was given to a few Kols. This could not protect them from hunger so they started migrating as they used to earlier.

When this writer visited their hamlet, most of the young men had already left and the remaining people, particularly women, were in despair. They said even their job cards had been kept by the pradhan (or rather the husband of the woman pradhan).

As a leading social activist of Bundelkhand, Gaya Prasad Gopal says, "This should have been a high priority area for the proper implementation of NREGS, but

even here this much-publicised scheme could not deliver results."

In fact Nahri village of Banda district reported starvation deaths. When we visited its Dalit basti there were widespread complaints of lack of work and forced migration due to hunger. One starvation death was reported on 5 July, 2006 even after the introduction of NREGS. Rekha, a 50-year-old Dalit woman died from hunger. She and her husband had not got any work and they had debts of Rs 18,000 to pay.

In July 2006, as distress and resentment built up, in desperation the people of Nahri threatened to commit mass suicide if the administration didn't provide immediate relief to them.

It was only then that some officials rushed here and saw to it that poor families got job cards and concessional credit cards. But job cards alone cannot provide food. The scheme has to provide work and be implemented in its true spirit.

Rajni, a Dalit woman said, "Many youths here had no option but to go with a contractor who herded them into a truck like cattle."

There are also several complaints of workers who had toiled under NREGS not getting the legal wage or not being paid at all for a long time. Last year 100 workers of Umariya and Kanari villages complained to the collector of Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh that they had not got any payment for work they had done nine months ago for 10 to 12 days under NREGS.

Although better implementation of NREGS has been reported from a few areas like Dungarpur district of Rajasthan, on the whole the high hopes roused have not been fulfilled. Even in Dungarpur there were several instances where the legal wage not paid.

In a sense NREGS is becoming a source of despair. As Gaya Prasad Gopal says, "This programme should be rescued from under-budgeting, corruption and neglect before people lose all hope in it."

Aruna Roy, a leading activist of MKSS says, "The people's movement to strengthen this demand-driven scheme should become stronger and larger numbers should come forward to demand work as part of a wide mobilisation."

Nikhil Dey adds, "The diversity of work that can be taken up under NREGS should be widened so that adequate, useful work can be provided in various regions which may have different needs. Also, land reforms need to be promoted strongly so that land improvement and minor irrigation for new land allotments can be taken up under this scheme."



When Rs 12,000 crores is spread over 330 districts, it means each district gets Rs 36 crores instead of the Rs 100 crores that is needed.

Reviewer

THE FINE PRINT

Get behind the scenes. Books, films, theatre, street plays, posters, music, art shows. The one place to track creative people across the country.

'Before you make a film, have something to say'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

MORE documentary films are being made today in India than perhaps ever before. At least one news channel, NDTV 24/7, has a regular slot for the documentary. Many of the films have been winning awards. But does this mean the documentary as a genre has made a new beginning in India? How good are the recent films? How inspired is the film maker's command over story and technology? The documentary needs to be supported with both money and societal confirmation of its role in a democracy. Are such contemporary moorings in evidence?

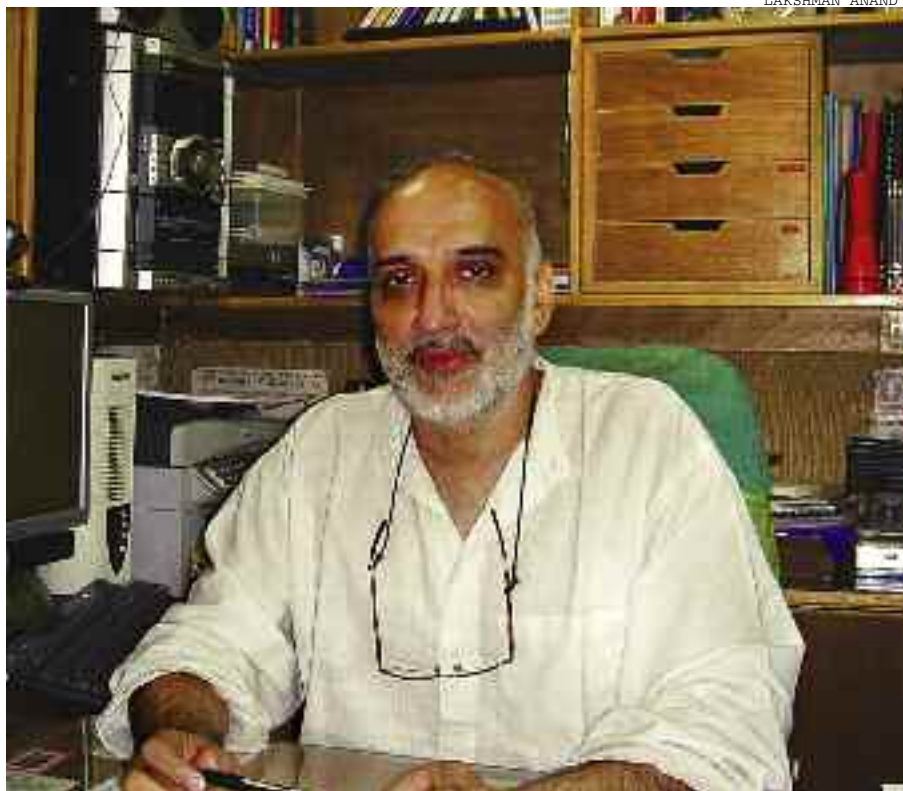
The Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) was launched five years ago to encourage documentary film makers. It has funded close to 250 film makers. Rajiv Mehrotra, PSBT's director, says that while this is reason to celebrate, it is also worrisome that most film makers don't know how to tell a story and are unwilling to experiment with the craft of film making. Perhaps most worrying in the context of the documentary is that film makers don't have depth and rely on predictable social messages about secularism and so on. Excerpts from an interview with **Rajiv Mehrotra**.

There is a sense that the documentary film has come into its own. A lot more documentaries are being made. You find documentaries on news channels. Can you provide a perspective to this?

There are, it appears, two key strands. One is extreme frustration, a sense of claustrophobia as it were, with commercially driven television. It is seen as serving only commercial interests and shutting out anything that does not serve consumerism. This has been juxtaposed, as it were, with the availability of low cost technologies, which have democratised the media. So, more and more people are being able to make documentary films.

Much like the Internet...

Yes. You know the time I went to film school, making a film required training, cameras, infrastructure, equipment. But that isn't so now. So, both these things



Rajiv Mehrotra

have created the demand push and supply push as it were. I think audiences are also looking for authenticity and passionate vision and people who are creating documentaries are doing so because they feel the need to express themselves in this way. So I think it is this synergy that has led to the revitalisation of the documentary genre.

At PSBT in the past five years we have supported some 350 films by 250 independent film makers, many of them first-time film makers. So, at one level there is a sense of excitement at having been able to facilitate a movement in a truly empowering context. PSBT was really born out of the frustration of not finding that empowering context in which to make a film. And what is that context? It is to be able to go and make a film that I really want to make. And to have someone fund it in a supportive and objective

manner. To mentor it without insisting that I make the film that the funder wanted to make, but instead to allow me to make the film that I wanted to make. And that is really what we are doing with the film makers that we work with.

But I have to say that there is both satisfaction and disappointment. The disappointment is that we are really not seeing the path-breaking, cutting edge documentaries with the level of intellectual rigour and pushing the boundaries of form that we would have liked to see. So we are seeing a lot of personal passion. We are seeing a lot of integrity, but I don't see them pushing the boundaries of creativity, new forms, new techniques, new narrative structures.

But what you are seeing in the case of documentaries is in keeping with the larger environment: what is happening in print media and cinema. I don't think we are achieving that kind of depth, sensitivity, that nuanced approach in any of our arts. Sometimes we reassure ourselves that Indian art and cinema are on the world stage. Actually I think they are nowhere if you look at the global map.

Has this got anything to do with the independent funding that other societies have a lot of?

Absolutely. But I'm not sure it is just funding. Of course at one level funding is

(Continued on page 33)

Subversive stories, artfully told

Shailey Hingorani
New Delhi

NINA Sabnani is an illustrator, animation director and artist based in Mumbai. She was, until September 2007, a senior designer at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, where she taught visual and animation communication for nearly 22 years. She recently shifted base to the Indian Institute of Technology, Powai, near Mumbai, where she is an Associate Professor. Sabnani is pursuing her Ph.D in story-telling models of India, with particular emphasis on the *Kaavad* tradition of Rajasthan. As part of the monthly discussion series organised by the Crafts Revival Trust and India International Centre (IIC), Sabnani delivered a lecture on February 5, on the *Kaavad* tradition in Rajasthan. *Civil Society* spoke to her about the art form and the interventions she thinks are required to save it from extinction.

What is the *Kaavad* tradition?

Kaavad is basically a story-telling tradition. The approach to story-telling is very contemporary. The *Kaavad* model is like a power-point, where the story-teller points to pictures painted on a wooden structure which resembles a shrine, and then tells a story. This shrine can be carried to places very easily. It has multiple panels which fold into one another. The shrine depicts, usually, mythological stories, like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The painting is done in bold colours of red, blue, golden yellow. Sometimes the story-teller uses the same images to tell a different story. Unlike the *pataus* of Bengal, the story-teller is different from the maker of the shrine. He buys the shrine from the maker and travels with it narrating different tales. The tales are not depicted in a chronological fashion and the themes are not topical.

What attracted you to this mode of story-telling and art?

This art form is unique in a number of ways, and it is this uniqueness which attracted me to it initially. The conception of time and space the practitioners of this art form work with is very interesting and very out of the ordinary. Time in their imagination is non-linear and they have no qualms in transcending prescribed boundaries of space and time. For example, in their depiction of the Ramayana, they could jump from the Ram *vanvaas*, to Kaushalya to Kumbhakaran to the Sita *aparaha* all in the same mobile shrine without any apparent linkages between these.

This form of story-telling is also very subversive in its incorporation of the images of people belonging to caste groups, who are different from the caste group that have traditionally practiced this art form. Images of farmers, weavers, cobblers are very commonplace in this tradition. I have a feeling that this has something to do with the Bhakti movement. This placing of oneself and others in the frame of reference is a great way of asking for recognition and they are able to do this quite successfully.

What are the problems that have been plaguing this art form?

The sector is quite unorganised and is facing near extinction for lack of resources and a sustainable market of consumers. The collaboration between the story-teller and the maker of the mobile shrine, which has been nurtured over centuries, is also reaching its breaking point. There seems to be a demand for the mobile shrine. However, no one is ready to pay the story-teller to take one through this piece of art. It is being reduced to an artifact, whose usage is restricted to being an item of display. The shrine is being forgotten as a visualisation of the story that the story-teller would narrate. The concomitant results of these developments is that practitioners are discouraging their children from continuing the practice of this art form. A *Kaavad* takes four days to make for

which the artist is paid Rs 100. Why should they want to stick to it when they can make Rs 300 a day working in the fields? The guardians of the art form have been moved to such a situation, where they have to put aside their moral duties of preserving the art to thinking about their immediate means of survival.

How can they be helped?

The film on the *Kaavad* tradition that I screened at IIC along with the talk that I delivered is part of an exercise to give both the practitioners and the people exposure to each other in the hope that this would help the former in multiple ways to preserve a dying art form. Exposure, I feel, is going to be the first step

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Nina Sabnani

The model of the mobile shrine is being used as a teaching aid to convey the message of safe sex in some parts of the country. Schools like Vasant Valley and Sriram have also asked for the English alphabet to be painted in this style.

towards getting them recognition and subsequently for them to earn their due. I would also encourage more and more shops to start keeping their products in the hope that this may increase their visibility in the market.

How can the *Kaavad* tradition be used in today's world?

There is some very good work happening on that front vis-à-vis the art form. The model of the mobile shrine is being used as a teaching aid to convey the message of safe sex in some parts of the country; Ghulam Sheikh has also done some very exciting work. Schools like Vasant Valley and the Sriram School have asked for the English alphabet to be painted in this style. The painting style is being used and applied on different wooden products like tables, chairs and other pieces of furniture as well. These practices have the potential to be conducive to the preservation of the art form and let the artists have access to a means of livelihood.

The story-tellers, however, are still to be incorporated. The demise of the role of the story-teller can very well be blamed on oral cultures becoming extinct and the advent of modern forms of communication, but one has to find ways of finding them a means of livelihood as well. I think appropriation of an art form should be to refresh it and not take away from it.

The pain of adolescent girls

Kavita Charanji
Dhaka

*Girls should not be heftly and immodest.
Girls should not stay out after evening.
Girls should not come back from birthday parties late at night.
Girls should not raise their voices.
Disgusting! Girls and girls!*
From the story: Akasher Rong by Abhijit Tarafdar



Fauzia Khan

THIS is one of several stories featured in Dhaka-based Fauzia Khan's recent documentary film, *Amakey Bolte Dao* (Let me speak). Research for the film took Fauzia to villages in Pirujpur and Gaibandha districts in Bangladesh. She came across 500 girls and was 'haunted' by their stories. The unconventional use of their stories to flesh out the hard reality of adolescent girls, particularly in villages, adds appeal to a sensitive subject. Other stories depict a gamut of issues such as rape, desire and misconceptions about childbirth.

Fauzia says while making the film she drew upon her own experience of an adolescence marked by poor information of physiological changes that were a natural part of growing up. Also, at puberty she chafed at the restrictions on her movements and her pursuit of athletics. In addition, she found a veil of secrecy when it came to discussions on female sexuality.

"My objective was to look into the scenario of reproductive health of adolescent girls in Bangladesh," she says. "In one village in Gaibandha, the poorest district, hundreds of adolescent girls (in the age group of 10-15 years) came to meet me. All of them were married and most had children and were in ill health. I couldn't sleep for two nights after this visit."

The case studies in the film reflect the stifling existence of adolescent girls and the tendency of society to view them as mere childbearing and domesticated machines. There is Rehana Aktar, a Class 10 student from Sarupkathi, Pirojpur. In her words, "I do not get the sort of independence I used to get in my childhood, as for instance, climbing a tree. Neither can I pursue my interest in my favourite pastime of angling."

Life is even worse for Ayesha, a housewife from Gaibandha. "Living with my in-laws is like being in a jail. I can't eat what I want and no importance is given to my opinion on major issues," she says.

Though somewhat more privileged, girls from urban areas have their own concerns. Take the case of Kaniz Tarzia, an O level student of Scholastica

School, Dhaka. Though she does dancing and modelling, she prefers the former. For her it is vital that she finds a husband who approves of her dancing. In villages, the girls say that their future lies in 'raising children', 'marrying an educated boy' and 'teaching girls'.

Fauzia's film, produced by the NGO, Steps Towards Development, has won plaudits. The film went to the Delhi Open Film Festival '06.

A former programme officer of Steps, Fauzia now freelances. "I do women-oriented films. Women have an inferior social status and do not get their due. My aim is to work for a more equitable relationship between men and women," she says. As a woman, she points out that she is on a strong wicket in delving into the

lives of other women.

Apart from research, script, editing and direction of *Amakey Bolte Dao*, Fauzia has also done the graphics and sound recording for the interviews. There is clearly a niche for such documentaries. As women activists testify, women have been subjugated in patriarchal societies and do not even have a voice in social, family or even personal affairs. Quite often, some mundane jobs are assigned to them. A filmmaker with vision and sensitivity can play a major role in rooting out this inequality between the sexes.

In her career, Fauzia has essayed the roles of editor, in addition to doing research and writing scripts. Among her notable works are documentaries of six women painters of Bangladesh. She has made a documentary on Baul singer Kangalini Sufia, called *The Love Beggar* and *The Budding Flower* which depicts the trials of adolescence. A third film, *Long Way to Go*, is about the realities that women face while performing their duties as members of reserved seats in the Union Parishad.

Some of Fauzia's documentary films are derived from her own life and are made independently. Take a forthcoming work on motherhood. The film is based on her own experience of abortion several years ago and her mother's subsequent gentle tending of her. "That unconditional relationship between mother and child inspired me. Mothers always give and never get back from society. Their contribution to family and society always goes unnoticed," maintains Fauzia.

Fauzia's second documentary is based on theatre actress Shimul Yusuf. Explaining her motivation for this film, she states, "I wanted to depict the traditional acting style of Bangla theatre through Shimul."

'Before you make a film...

(Continued from page 31)

extremely important. But perhaps it is also a reflection of our culture which tends to be much more inner-directed than reaching out to external expression. But looking at the documentary film I certainly do feel that while our own films get critical acclaim abroad, they do not tend to score on areas of craft or film form. They really tend to get noticed because of sensationalism (and I don't mean this in a negative sense) of the content or the story.

So it is the story that makes people stop or feel shocked.

But there again I don't feel we have mastered the art of documentary film storytelling. The simple story just told is not happening. On the one hand it is very encouraging. So many people are making films. So many points of view are being expressed, but the other dimension that desperately needs to be explored is that the voices of the disempowered and the disenfranchised do not find expression unless mediated by people of our class.

Is it then a question of a certain class not being able to reach a certain level of creativity?

It is more an education aspect of being able to manage and handle the technology. It calls for certain levels of sophistication. And yet you know I think the few attempts that have been made by very few people to go out and try to empower rural communities or children to produce content has sometimes had very, very startling and moving results.

They may not be elegantly produced, they may not have the vocabulary of cinema, but ultimately it is what you have to say that is truly important. Before you set out to make a film, you should really have something to say and that something should be nuanced and deeply understood. And if you have that you

will communicate despite poor language, bad camera work and lousy editing. The starting point is having enough to say.

So you don't have enough of the starting point. You don't have enough of the form either. And this is because, like it is in print, the people involved are circumscribed by their own experience.

Their own experience and for whatever reason and I really don't want to hypothesise about it, they are very, very reluctant to experiment. We keep saying to film makers go out and make an honest effort and if you have made an honest effort I promise you we will give you another film. But if you make a lazy, lousy film we never want to hear from you again. I'm afraid that happens a lot of the time.

There is also the obligation that film makers feel that in order to get funding or an award or whatever there must be a social message, something that must be good for society. But this in itself is not enough.

What is the role of the documentary?

The role of the documentary is the manner in which the film maker chooses to use it and find gratification. It is like art. In the early stages in India, during the setting up of the Films' Division there was this impression of the documentary being an agent of social change, empowering the development process etc. etc. That mindset hasn't left many of the institutions that have managed and funded democracy. Now with efforts such as ours and private funding, scarce as they are in relation to the larger picture, there is hope of a new approach. We have found some of our most exciting films have been made by first time film makers who haven't been through institutions and training etc.

They just go and make a film

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Grow a herbal garden

Civil Society News
Bangalore

Why not grow your own medicine instead of buying pills and potions from some chemist? Your terrace, verandah or that tiny patch in your backyard will do just fine. All you need is a bunch of the right plants and some sage advice. You can get both on the verdant campus of the Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) in the outskirts of Bangalore.

A leaf from history will tell you Indians have always used plants for ailments. Much of this knowledge is fast fading. The best way to revive it is to start using plants for health once again. It's easy and inexpensive. Also plants add colour to your home, improving décor. Long before Bangalore sank into urban chaos it was known as India's garden city and you could help revive the city's sullied green reputation.

FRLHT has an exotic ethno-medicinal garden, the Amruth Vana, with 800 species of tropical Indian medicinal plants. The garden has been pieced together with great care by Dr K Haridasan, one of India's leading botanists, assisted by Ganesh Babu. Haridasan is an expert on the northeast and there are plants here from places as far away as Arunachal Pradesh. Botanists from FRLHT trudge through mountains and inhospitable terrain to find such rare plants.

The Amruth Vana has 30 species for hair and skin care, 27 species that work as antidotes against poisonous bites, 40 species for primary health care, 56 species that are on the Red List and highly endangered.

"We would like to make this a national garden with medicinal plants from every region of India," says Dr Haridasan. There are aromatic plants and an aquatic garden with plants floating around. Dr Haridasan is now growing a Kerala sacred grove.

FRLHT has identified 7,500 plants that were always used to treat illnesses. Its Amruth Herbal Garden programme has selected 10 to 40 herbs in several packages that can be used for primary health needs- from coughs and cold to cuts and burns.

"Grow herbs so that when they grow up they will take care of you" is the mantra of the Amruth Herbal Garden. Says Pushpa, who oversees the programme: "We have been encouraging schools, colleges and self-help groups (SHGs) to grow herbal gardens for primary health care. We have done about 4,200 herbal gardens. Our group has been talking to local clubs to provide awareness of plants. We give training to teachers. Schools in Bangalore are finding the herbal garden an excellent method of teaching botany and environment



The Amruth Vana

"Grow herbs so that when they grow up they will take care of you" is the mantra of the Amruth Herbal Garden. Says Pushpa, who oversees the programme: "We have been encouraging schools, colleges and self-help groups (SHGs) to grow herbal gardens."

to their students."

There is even an FRLHT helpline for growing a herbal garden. The plants can be picked up directly from the Amruth nursery. You also get a special Users' Guide which informs you about how to identify, maintain and use the plants for different ailments. Self-help remedies are available and you can log on to FRLHT's website to discover your body constitution or 'prakruthi', consult a vaidya or ask a question.

Some plants like tulsi (*ocimum sanctum*) are already household names. Each

(Continued on page 36)

Cure sinus the natural way

GREEN CURES

Ask Dr GG



Dr GG Gangadharan is one of India's best known Ayurvedic physicians. Currently, he is deputy director of the Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) in Bangalore. In this column, Dr GG, as he is popularly known, answers queries from readers seeking effective alternative remedies.

I am a 51-year-old male and I have been suffering from sinusitis since several years. My problem gets acute during the cold, dry weather. The sinuses flare up and I get pain round the area near my eyes. I have been doing steam inhalation with eucalyptus drops every night after dinner. This provides only some temporary relief. Please advice.

Don't take a head bath everyday. Have a bath only in warm water. If you know Jalnethi kriya as practiced in yoga, please do that with lukewarm salt water. Please get some help from a local yoga practitioner for this. If you can get Nirgundi leaves (*Vitex negundo*) put that in one litre of water and boil it. Inhale this vapour through the nose covering your head with a bedsheet and keeping your eyes closed. Deeply inhale the vapour so that it spreads inside. Do this once or twice a day for seven days. Do not take curds and refrigerated food. Keep your hair always short. Don't take milk and milk products for sometime. You can take black tea with lemon. To improve immunity take Amrutharishtam (available in any Ayurvedic shop) 30 ml twice a day after food.

I am a 32-year-old housewife. I have developed sinusitis only recently. My problem is that my nose gets blocked and I have difficulty breathing. I was advised to take nasal drops to open up my nose. Now I find I have become addicted to it. Does Ayurveda have alternative, safe nose drops to open up my nose?

Please read the answer above. Plus take one teaspoon of Haridrakandam with hot water before breakfast and take 2 tablets of Saphamruthaloham twice a day after food. Make sure that you dry your hair completely after

your bath. Apply one pinch of Rasnadi Choornam on your head and rub it in for few seconds.

I am 28-year's old and I work in a call centre in Bangalore. Since I am indoors for several hours, I find my sinus problem has become aggravated. I am told the best method to treat this condition is through yoga by putting drops of water in one nostril and taking it out from the other. Is this easy to do and is it safe? Can you tell me where I should learn how to do this? Since you are in Bangalore, FRLHT has an expert yoga teacher who will be able to advise you on how to do Jalnethi scientifically. Please call the yoga teacher at Amruth Ayurveda Nursing Home at 65310761. He will help you.

My four-year-old son has developed a dry cough after he suffered from a viral infection this winter. I do not want to give him an allopathic cough mixture since it could have long term ill effects on his health. Please recommend a natural mixture that could help him.

It is possible that he may have Helmenthic infection. Give him something to remove that. Taking Ashta Choornam everyday with honey before breakfast for one month is useful. This will improve his appetite. Give him 1 or 2 gms of Sidhopaladi choornam mixed with honey 5-6 times a day. This will improve his condition. Do not give him fruits for a few days and give only hot water to drink. Stop curds till he gets rid of cough.

My eight-year-old daughter suffers from tonsillitis. Every few months her tonsils flare up and cause her trouble. We have been told to get her tonsils removed surgically. Can you recommend alternative treatment for her?

It is not a good idea to remove the tonsils. Tonsils are important for resistance of diseases. Actually it is the first soldier to fight infection. If you remove the tonsils the chances of infection are more. That is what our experience says. Try to improve her food habits with freshly prepared holistic vegetarian food made at home. Don't give her for sometime anything that is stale. Do make her gargle twice a day, morning and evening, with lukewarm water mixed with turmeric powder, ginger and salt. Take Septilin tablets (Himalaya drugs) 1 + 1 for 15 days. Also give her half teaspoon of Vyoshadhi vadakam mixed with honey twice a day. Give her a head bath only once a week and apply Vilwapatradi thailam on her head half an hour before bath. This should help her within fifteen days.

E-mail: vaidya.ganga@frlht.org

Grow a herbal garden

(Continued from page 35)

plant solves myriad health problems. For instance, aloe vera, is good for cuts, wounds, burns and eye problems. Piper longum alleviates cough, headache, hoarse throat, indigestion and stomach ache. *Tinospora cordifolia* is good for fever, acidity, liver and diabetes. *Vitex negundo* helps you tide over joint pains, earache and fever.

You will get advice on where to grow the plant, its features and the parts that can be used for medicine. Most plants don't need much space and can be grown nicely in attractive pots. The plants are shrubs, herbs and trees.

There are plant packages for skin, hair, child care, stress relievers, metabolism, digestion, cough and cold. A package of four species (10 plants) costs Rs 150. Or you can buy a complete package of 21 species (30 plants) for Rs 300, an advanced package of 14 species (20 plants) for Rs 225 or a basic package of 7 species (10 plants) for Rs 150.



The Amruth Herbal Garden has plant deals for institutions and for companies who would like to grow a more expansive garden. You get 350 plants or 40 species for Rs 3,500, an advanced package of 30 species (300 plants) for Rs 3000 and a basic package of 25 species (250 plants) for Rs 2,500.

FRLHT also helps women in rural areas to grow homestead herbal gardens. A little plant serves better than a dubious doctor. Time and money are saved. Women are encouraged to grow plants that can tackle cold, cough, diarrhea, menstrual problems and skin ailments. To add nutrition to their diet, papaya, guava,

pomegranate, drumstick and curry leaves are included in the homestead herbal garden package. Anaemia is a major illness among rural women. FRLHT identifies green leafy vegetables and medicines that can be made at home to tackle this debilitating condition.

Animals aren't left out either. FRLHT has identified 190 plants that can treat 20 animal ailments which cattle suffer from. Expert pashu vaidyas were consulted. It has made herbal medicines that treat mastitis, repeated breeding, breakage of horn, cuts and wounds. District milk unions of Dakshina Kannada, Kolar, Shimoga, Hassan and Tumkur are following these practices for their cows.

Address: FRLHT, 74/2 Jarakabande Kaval, Post Attur, Via Yelahanka, Bangalore-560064. E-mail: mpcn@frlht.org, Website: www.frlht.org, www.homeremedy.in, Phone: 28568000, 28568001, 28565760

ARTY TALES

The Kaavad tradition of Rajasthan is an old story-telling technique which is fast fading. The story-teller uses a Kaavad, a wooden structure or a shrine with panels which fold into each other, to illustrate his story. The Kaavad is a work of art painted in bold colours. The story-teller buys it from the artist and wanders to village and town to tell stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. There are Kaavads which relate the story of Jesus Christ and Mahavir as well. While the mobile Kaavad has become a piece of art, the story-teller has lost his audience.



You can save the tradition. Buy a shrine from Delhi. Invite a story-teller to light your family's imagination. The small Kaavad cost Rs 600 and the large ones are for Rs 1,500.

Contact: Craft Council of India, Gallery 1, Rajiv Gandhi Handicraft Bhavan, Baba Kharak Singh Marg, New Delhi. Ph:

Mantra to cleanse your mind

Samita Rathor
New Delhi

The Vedas state: 'Shruti (speech) is the essence of humanity.' All that people think and become has its roots in the expression of thoughts and actions through verbal communication and its derivative, writing. The Vedas maintain that everything comes into life form through speech. Ideas remain dormant until they are created through the power of speech.

There is not one person in this day and age who does not complain of a raucous mind and emotional challenges. One of the most significant, single suggestions of the ancient sages is the use of mantra chanting/japa or sacred words to focus the mind. Analysis and intellectual debate will not convince you of this. Chanting must be practiced for its benefits to be experienced.

Mantra is a Sanskrit word. "Man" which means 'manas' or mind comes from the first syllable of the word meaning 'to think'. 'Tra' comes from 'tra' which means 'to protect or free'. Mantras are therefore instruments of the mind to free us from negativity.

The mantra has to be pronounced in a particular way for it to be most effective. A devotional attitude and awareness of the meaning of the mantra are also important. The mantras are intended to deliver the mind from illusion and material inclinations.

The practice of mantra refines and purifies consciousness. This is done by chanting a particular verse or sentence repeatedly. Systematic rhythmic repetition is called Jap. Therefore chanting or Japa is the process of repeating a mantra. Special attention has to be paid to pronunciation since the sound waves created are the most subtle waves of the mind. In this process there is cleansing or purification.

Each mantra is constructed from a combination of sounds derived from letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. Sanskrit, one of the most ancient languages in the world, is also known as Devanagari or the language of gods. The beauty of this language is that it is made of root sounds which are vibrations arising from the object or action for which it is utilised. For example, in most languages a child naturally calls his mother using the word ma. Sanskrit words are actual sound manifestations we use for chanting. Mantras can be translated but the translations do not have the same power. The mantra has to be chanted in its pure form.

Sound is made up of vibration. A mantra is a mystical energy in the form of a sound structure. A mantra is rhythmically chanted to release its energy from

the sound. This creates specific thought patterns. The vibrations and sounds of the mantra are considered extremely important, and thus reverberations of the sound are supposed to awaken the prana or spiritual life force and even stimulate charkas or astral channels.

Mantras were not written like how songs are written. They always existed in the universe and cannot be created or destroyed. Mantras, being sacred sound vibrations, are composed of sacred syllables representative of and containing within great spiritual power, or energy. The mantras were perceived originally by the great seers or rishis from the ancient or celestial ether and translated into very definite syllables with rhythm and melody.

Some common examples of mantras are:

Aum Namah Shivaya Aum. I bow to Lord Shiva.
Aum Namo Narayanaya. Prostrations to Lord Vishnu.
Aum Namo Bhagavate Vasudevāya. Salutations to the Universal God Vishnu.

Regardless of what mantra you use, one of the most important principles is the practice of constant remembrance. By cultivating a steady awareness many benefits occur:

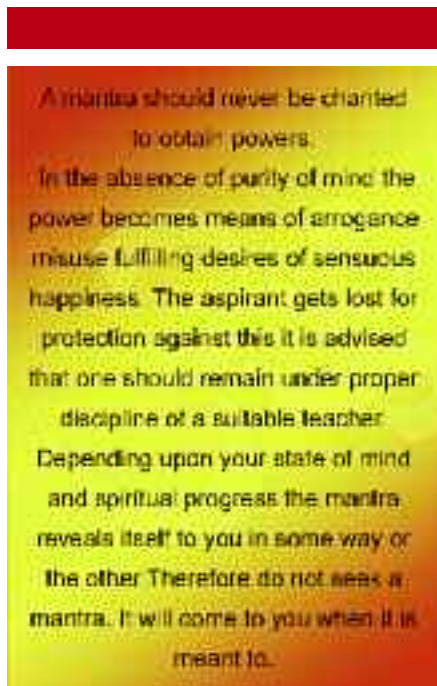
- 1 Mantra calms the mind.
- 1 Concentration and memory are enhanced by mantra chanting.
- 1 Mantra repetition evokes a feeling of over all well being.
- 1 Regular mantra sadhana or practice removes toxins which may manifest themselves in the form of fear, anger, jealousy, hatred in the mental and physical level and replace it with pure sattvic thoughts.
- 1 The prana is channelised and also increases by mantra chanting.
- 1 The vocal chords get massaged and are benefited to a large extent.
- 1 Mental strength and a feeling of devotion are triggered off by mantra chanting.
- 1 An evolvment or trigger of spiritual strength can be

experienced when a mantra is chanted with full devotion.

- 1 Deep rest and relaxation is given to all the cells in the body.
- 1 Toxins are removed from the body and the nervous system relaxes.

Reciting a mantra is an exact science. That is why we should be initiated into a mantra only by a true spiritual teacher, who has spent much time in the study and repetition of the mantra and gained mastery over it. The latent power of the mantra becomes manifest through its repetition. The subconscious layers of the mind are awakened. It leads to perfection in due course of time.

samitarathor@gmail.com



WHERE TO VOLUNTEER

CanSupport India

Kanak Durga Basti Vikas Kendra, Sector 12, R.K. Puram, Near DPS School, New Delhi?22
Tel: 26102851, 26102859, 26102869
E?mail: cansup_india@hotmail.com

Rahi

Rahi is a support centre for urban middle class women suffering from the trauma of incest. It provides information, individual support, group support and referrals. Through workshops and peer educators they help survivors and spread awareness.
Contact: H?49 A, Second floor, Kalkaji, New Delhi?3
Phone: 26227647

Association for India's Development (AID) – Delhi Chapter

AID works for the environment, children, women s issues, education, and health. They also undertake fund raising.
Contact: Anuj Grover B?121, MIG Flats, Phase?IV, Ashok Vihar Delhi? 110052 Phone: 9818248459
E?mail: anuj.grover@gmail.com

Youthreach

A volunteer team at Youthreach helps to match your skills and interests with the needs of the partner organisations. This exchange is monitored and

facilitated from beginning to end. The volunteer team. The team also partners other non-profit organisations that are working with children, women and the environment.
Contact: Preeti or Priyanjana at Community Centre, Saket, New Delhi? 110 017
Phone/Fax: (011) 2653 3520/25/30
Email : yrd@youthreachindia.org

Deepalaya
They work with economically, socially deprived, physically and mentally challenged children. They believe in helping children become self reliant and lead a healthy life.
Deepalaya works on education, health, skill training and income enhancement.
Contact: Deepalaya 46, Institutional Area, D Block Janakpuri, New Delhi? 110 058
Phone: 25548263, 25590347
Website: www.deepalaya.org

Mobile Crèches
Mobile Crèches pioneered intervention into the lives of migrant construction workers by introducing the mobile crèche where working parents can leave their children.
They work in the following areas: health, education, community outreach, networking and advocacy resource mobilisation and communication. You can volunteer by filling out a simple form only.
Contact: DIZ Area, Raja Bazaar, Sector IV New Delhi ?110001
Phone: 91?11?23347635 /

The Arpana Trust
Arpana is a charitable, religious and spiritual organisation headquartered in Karnal, Haryana. They work with rural communities in Himachal Pradesh and with slum dwellers in Delhi. Arpana is well known for its work on health. They have helped organise women into self-help groups. These SHGs make beautiful and intricate items which are marketed by Arpana.
For more details: Arpana Community Centre, NS?25, Munirka Marg Street F/9, Next to MTNL, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi?57.
Phone: (Office) 26151136 and (Resi) 26154964

HelpAge India
HelpAge India needs volunteers from doctors to lay people in all locations. Older people love to talk to younger people and need emotional support.
We require volunteers in Delhi and Chennai to survey older people staying alone in homes, who could use our Helpline for senior citizens.
If you wish to volunteer please email Pawan Solanki, manager at pawan.s@helpageindia.org or write to Vikas, volunteer coordinator, HelpAge India.

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WHERE TO DONATE

Indian Red Cross Society

The society provides relief, hospital maternity and child welfare, nursing and community services.
Contact: Red Cross Bhavan, Golf Links, Delhi?3 Phone: 24618915, 24617531

Child Relief and You (CRY)

CRY, a premier child rights organisation believes that every child is entitled to survival, protection, development and participation. You can sponsor a child education, healthcare, or a health worker and a teacher.
Website: www.cry.org

Community Aid and Sponsorship Program (CASP)

CASP enhances the capacities of children through participation and advocacy leading to sustainable development and empowerment. You can help by sponsoring underprivileged child/children from any work area where CASP implements its programmes. These include building old age homes, projects relating to AIDS education.
Website: www.caspindia.org

HelpAge India

HelpAge India is involved in the care of the poor and disadvantaged elderly in 55 locations across the country. They organise primary health care at village and slum level through 53 mobile medical vans, care of destitute elderly through Adopt a Grand programme with 222 voluntary agencies, Helplines and income generation for the elderly. Their recent programmes are in the tsunami affected regions and in Kashmir for the rehabilitation of the elderly affected by

the earthquake disaster. HelpAge serves more than a million elderly in India. If you wish to donate or adopt a granny, please donate online on our site
www.helpageindia.org or send an email to helpage@nde.vsnl.net.in
Address: HelpAge India, C?14 Qutub Institutional Area, New Delhi? 110016
Chief Executive: Mathew Cherian ?
mathew.cherian@helpageindia.org

Bharatiya Academy
The Eco Development Foundation and the Soni Foundation Trust have set up the Bharatiya Academy which runs a school for underprivileged children and children of defence employees serving on the border who are victims of violence and war. The school is located in Tashipur, Morkee, Hardwar district and has 115 children on its rolls. The school requires money for buildings and sponsors for the children. Temporary buildings have been made by the Bengal Sappers regiment. Teachers are also required.
Contact: Soni Foundation Trust, ?2655 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana?122017
E?mail: kcj@ecodev@rediffmail.com
Phone: 0124?2360422

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Contact: Soni Foundation Trust, ?2655 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana?122017
E?mail: kcj@ecodev@rediffmail.com
Phone: 0124?2360422

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