

Civil Society

SELF-HELP IN LANKA AND CHARITY IN INDIA

PLUS: Mihir Bhatt on tsunami rehab

Pages 4-7

Ram Gidoomal: The generous diaspora

Page 18

Look, good girls in Maruti's parking lot!

Page 9

Schoolboys invent wonder leg

Page 10

Is baby food ad law being junked?

Page 10

Arvind Kejriwal: Will the Delhi govt act?

Page 20



GRP's candidate Col Ratan Singh

HOW TO ENTER POLITICS & BE COUNTED

A MIDDLE CLASS PARTY IN GURGAON

COVER STORY



HOW TO LAUNCH A POLITICAL PARTY

Faced with collapsing civic amenities and cheated by builders, Gurgaon's middle class residents get into politics and show the way to being treated as a vote bank

12

Tsunami balm: Livelihood better than charity **4**

Mihir Bhatt: Tsunami recovery is an opportunity **7**



Cow dung is not the same thing as compost **8**

Look, good girls in Maruti's parking lot! **9**

Schoolboys invent a wonder leg **10**

Jute matches and a cycle for floods **11**



Review: Shots of resistance in Dhaka **25**

Essay: The militant who loved Rafi **26**

FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY LAKSHMAN

Civil Society

Why you should vote for a Col Ratan Singh

NOTHING is as quite as attractive as personal courage, the readiness to stand up and be counted. But if you plan to go to Siachen to find people with this quality, we suggest that you look nearer home in Gurgaon. In an inhospitable political terrain, middle class residents of this rapidly expanding city on the fringes of Delhi have launched their own party and fielded Col Ratan Singh as their candidate in the February 3 Assembly elections.

What are they asking for? Very basic things like roads, water, electricity and public transport. Why is one of India's most high profile urban areas devoid of such basic facilities? The answer lies in widespread corruption by Haryana's politicians and officials. The answer also lies in the middle class aversion to engaging with the political system and demanding a better quality of life. The founders of the Gurgaon Residents' Party or GRP, as it has been branded, want their votes to count and what better measure of their strength can there be than to get their own candidate elected from the Gurgaon Assembly seat. The GRP does not believe in the genteel, and now largely ineffective, *Bhagidari* system witnessed in Delhi. The Gurgaon residents want people's power. They want to keep their identity separate and force the government to perform.

There are any number of people in Gurgaon and elsewhere who believe that the GRP will come to nothing. The established political parties realise that the middle class vote is being galvanised, but can't decide as yet whether to take the GRP seriously. To you and me it would appear that getting elected is all about big money and muscle power. The GRP believes that it is and it needn't be if you do your homework right. The GRP represents between 75,000 and 100,000 new middle class voters in Gurgaon, people it helped get on to the electoral rolls recently. Together they could get Col Ratan Singh elected and even if they don't they can certainly make or wreck the political fortunes of others in the Assembly seat.

The GRP has also tried to set new standards for choosing a candidate and raising money to fight elections. Col Ratan Singh was chosen through civilised voting in an electoral college of 80 RWAs. Funds will come from collecting Rs 50 from each middle class person who supports the GRP and could add up to Rs 35 lakhs. This is much more than what is needed for canvassing or the Rs 10 lakhs that is officially permitted. The big money that plays a role in elections is invariably for purchasing a ticket or buying off rivals. The GRP candidate does not have to do such things.

The big question is whether one MLA will make a difference in a sea of corruption in Haryana. Will he be able to get a better deal for the residents? Is the idealism of the GRP genuine? Will a middle class candidate be more reliable than a serving politician or will he get bought up and compromise? There are no clear answers right now. But a beginning must be made. If you believe in accountable politics and governance and a better quality of life then these are good enough reasons to vote for a Col Ratan Singh.

The story of Gurgaon can be told in one line: politicians have sold it inch by inch to builders. There is no master plan for India's fastest growing urban area and not even a "mistress plan" as one senior architect jokingly told me. It has been plunder all the way. The GRP is the culmination of a long effort by the residents' welfare associations to establish accountability and have their voice heard. A year ago they were widely regarded as inconsequential and Civil Society was perhaps the only magazine, new and idealistic enough, to take their idealism seriously. The established media dismissed them with the odd feature and photograph. To support the GRP now is to take an important step on the long and potholed road to reforming Indian politics. If you don't want to take that step, learn to live with the potholes.

Umesh Anand

Printed and published by Umesh Anand on behalf of Rita Anand of A 53D, First Floor, Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi-17. Printed at Kaizen Offset, 19 DSIDC Scheme 3, Phase-2, Okhla Industrial Area, New Delhi-20.

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RNI No.: DELENG/03/11607

Tsunami balm: Livelihood be

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHILE aid continues to pour in from all corners, there is concern over how it is really benefitting the uprooted victims of the tsunami tragedy. People who have put a lot of heart into collecting money, food and clothing would like to see donations reaching the needy and improving their lot. But while immediate relief is important after a natural disaster, does it really help rebuild lives?

Civil Society spoke to Mihir Bhatt of the Disaster Mitigation Institute, Ahmedabad, about what long-term measures were needed on the coast. Bhatt, who has been in Tamil Nadu, said that relief has been quick but the task of rebuilding the coastline should begin urgently. Livelihoods must be restored and there is need to provide at least 100 days work to women. (See full interview on Page 7.)

A microfinance specialist, Shivendra Sharma who works for Planet Finance India recently completed a survey of areas in Tamil Nadu and along the west coast of Sri Lanka from Colombo upto Galle.

He found that in India the flood of charity is unending, but people are still out on the streets. The relief camps and the community kitchens are a poor substitute for normalcy. By comparison, in Sri Lanka, well-entrenched mechanisms of microfinance have already begun helping people rebuild their lives and businesses.

"You won't find people begging. If India needs to invest in disaster management and a tsunami warning apparatus, it should also quickly initiate suitable action in sustainable livelihood regeneration," says Sharma.

In Tamil Nadu, says Sharma, relief materials were available in such abundance in the affected areas that they were being dumped. Near Seruthur, self-help groups under the coordination of a local NGO had collected clothes and burnt them to avoid the danger fungi and bacteria in damp clothes causing infections.

According to Sharma, at the NGO Coordination Cell, set up at the district collectorate in Nagapattinam, very few NGOs of the 200 plus registered there were interested in regenerating livelihood opportunities for the affected people. "With nothing else to do and nowhere else to go people are queuing up along the access roads to the village, begging," he said.

This is in complete contrast to the team's experience in Sri Lanka, where the government machinery's response is much more professional. People accustomed to self-help through microfinance also want to get on with their lives.

Sharma recounts his visit to the district office of Sarvodaya, Sri Lanka's largest NGO. It provided an opportunity to meet and interview over 10 of their microfinance clients. Not one of them was seeking a complete writing off of the loans they had taken and were only hoping to receive a three to six months grace period or a reduction in the interest rates.

Most had already started looking at reviving their occupations even though they were living in relief camps and shelters. This was despite the fact that the destruction in Sri Lanka had been much more severe compared to the coastal areas in India.

Bhatt is of the view that the aftermath of the tragedy should be seen as an opportunity for addressing the serious and diverse problems of India's coastline.

There should be a consultative process involving local communities and NGOs who have worked in the coastal areas and the National Farmers' Commission.

The task of rebuilding houses, for instance, should be done by the people themselves because "they are their houses, they know what they need."

On microfinance, Bhatt raises a note of caution. Microfinance institutions cannot be built overnight. Problems of accountability in self-help groups need to be addressed so that there is no misuse of funds.

These are long-term strategies. Suddenly implementing them in the aftermath of a disaster is not possible.

Bhatt admits that "money accelerates recovery, more so when it is in the hands of the poor among victims. Therefore, microfinance has a great and central role to play in tsunami recovery, especially as key institutions in this field such as DHAN, Sadhan, Basixs, FWWB to name a few working in this coastal region."

However, the microfinance movement will have to soon re-examine what will work and meet the new challenges that are being faced.



People everywhere tried to do their bit to provide relief.

From Delhi's young students

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHEN Vimlendu K Jha picked up a newspaper and saw pictures of the tsunami tragedy, he knew he had to do something fast. A spirited campaigner for a clean Yamuna, Jha is executive director of 'We for Change' a volunteer programme which is a UNV/UNDP project. That morning he put the river aside and reflected on the awesome power of the sea.

Jha's work as a campaigner had put him in touch with students. He quickly sent out SMS messages and e-mails and phoned his young friends. By evening an SOS meeting was hurriedly held at UNV's office. A motley group of 25 students from Lady Sri Ram, IIT, Bhagat Singh and other colleges, turned up. A street campaign to raise money, they decided, was what they could do quickly.

"We thought we'd be able to raise Rs 50,000 or so," says young volunteer Dhruv, with a smile.

"Instead, we collected Rs 4 lakh in seven days."

They called themselves Waves of Hope and launched a fund-raising drive to catch the attention of passer-bys: songs, tambourines, a banner and vivid matkas to collect cash. They fanned out to markets in South Delhi, stopping people and asking them to contribute.

A surgeon from the UK and his nephew volunteered on the spot. People proffered advice, encouragement and cash. Some of the rich were stingy.

But there was a shoeshine boy who insisted on giving Rs 5. A beggar said, please wait a moment, I haven't collected anything and returned with a handful of coins.

"We walked into UTI Bank at Khan market and the bank employees gave us just Rs 10. At their door stood the guard. He gave us Rs 10 too, though we didn't ask him," says volunteer Purnima.

The highlight of the drive was when an American lady gave them 140 dollars. "She apologised saying

tter than charity

LAKSHMAN



Each one had an idea they thought would work

came waves of hope

it was a small amount. For us it was manna," says Purnima.

Ten members headed for Chennai. Indian Airlines gave them free tickets. The National Fish Workers Forum identified a village they could adopt in Cuddalore district. The group are eager to do their very best.

"We'd like to work especially for children. We could repair the school building, buy crayons, books and things for the kids. We'll ask them. Whatever they want, we are willing to do," says Jha who also wants to help fisher folk get boats and fishing nets.

Various professionals have tried to do their bit often unsure what the final outcome of their efforts would be.

Shivjeet Kullar, creative director of K Factor, an advertising agency, describes himself as a greedy capitalist with a conscience. His agency works on at least two or three social issues on an ongoing basis. When the tsunami tragedy happened, they started designing advertisements to get people to contribute.

"Eventually each of us can use our skills to do our best. Mine is communication," he says as he mulls over a slogan. K Factor's advertisement to raise funds is being used by the Times Foundation and has been published in The Times of India.

Kullar is not new to public service advertising. He ran a long-standing campaign for the girl child while he worked at Contract and has won international awards. "Public service advertising is very powerful when it tells the whole truth. It should be frank, tell people what they can do and describe the magnitude." It's the soulful truth that has to get through to the reader.

What troubles him is that the impact of advertising on people's minds is shortlived. Getting the middle class to give money for long-term rehabilitation is not easy and requires a new approach. The media hurries from one big story to another. The public too forgets. Capturing the sum and substance of rebuilding people's lives means selling success, not tragedy or calamity.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Say hello to Santosh. She almost died for you

Civil Society News
New Delhi

SANTOSH is just 20, nondescript and from a lower middle class home in east Delhi. Chances are that you would not have heard about her, but she has risked her life for you.

A member of Parivartan, a gutsy NGO trying to implement the right to information law in Delhi, Santosh was recently attacked by men armed with razors. They slit her throat and would have killed her had the razor gone just a little deeper.

Why should Santosh evoke such hostility? Parivartan's work has led to expose after expose of corruption in the Delhi administration under Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit. The NGO has used the right to information law in the state to help citizens demand information on civic works and the public distribution system. The disclosures have shown how public money is being siphoned off in connivance with officials. The price of such investigation is the danger to the lives of Parivartan activists. This is not the first time they have been attacked and on other occasions they have been harassed by the police and government officials.

The attempt to slit Santosh's throat is the most dastardly of this kind of bullying. There are serious concerns that there may be more attacks.

Santosh's work for Parivartan has involved taking poor women to the food department to file applications for information on food grain disbursement through ration shops. Invariably these poor women are not getting their rations and

Will the Delhi Government act now, says Arvind Kejriwal in his column 'The Right To Know': Page 20

it is more than evident now that grains and kerosene are being siphoned off.

Everyone, it appears, has a hand in the till. This is why, though Delhi's right to information law was passed by the Congress government, there is no eagerness to see it implemented. The harder Parivartan tries, the more hostility it faces at all levels in the government.

Now what good is a law if it is not put into use? Yet if you ask senior officers in the Delhi government, they have nothing to say except that Parivartan should not take to the streets. How else then do you ensure that justice is done? There are no answers.

After the attack on Santosh, Parivartan met the chief secretary of the Delhi government and Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit herself. Parivartan is asking that FIRs be lodged against 10 ration shop owners in different parts of Delhi, against whom strong documentary evidence of defalcation of rations has been submitted. In a similar number of cases, action should be taken against officials of the Food Department, against whom there is evidence of direct nexus with ration shop owners and dereliction of duty.

Will the Delhi government bestir itself and act? Watch this space.

Call CAF Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) an international NGO in New Delhi gets relief material and money to tsunami victims. You can finance fishing boats, nets and temporary shelters. CAF is working on housing, livelihood and rebuilding schools. You can collectively send money. And you can even volunteer. Contact Anup Tiwari at 011 24643891 E-mail: anup.tewari@cafindia.org abha.manchanda@cafindia.org, www.cafindia.org



A rock show in Mehrauli

Civil Society News
New Delhi

EVERY weekend, Delhi's young chill out at Turquoise Cottage, a restaurant in south Delhi. What attracts them is music, a blend of classic rock, chosen especially by Gaurav Soral, a music enthusiast and an owner of this joint.

When Soral saw the tsunami tragedy his thoughts turned to how he could help. So he has decided to organise a rock concert. On January 29, big bands Parikrama, Perestroika and others are likely to play at Mehrauli, on the fringes of south Delhi, to raise money for the tsunami tragedy people. "It's easy to cut a cheque but I want to get involved and be professional," says Soral. He decided to rope in NGOs. Soral spoke to Plan International and the money is being given to them.

Organising a rock concert hasn't been easy. For one, the government is making him run from pillar to post. "The whole thing is bound in red tape. There is no single window clearance. And the government slaps excise plus other duties." So his efforts to rush through have been stalled and the rock concert has got delayed.

Talks with an earlier NGO wound up because Soral wanted to serve liquor. He understands his clients and the way the middle class mind works. "Young executives are hardworking and sincere but they want to chill out too," he says. "The NGOs couldn't understand that by serving liquor I can raise the ticket prices and sales and give more money." Finally, Plan International saw his point of view. Tickets are being priced at Rs 500 including four free drinks. Bacardi and Seagram will pitch in.

'100 stoves from Bangalore'

Civil Society News
Bangalore

WHEN she heard of the devastation caused by the tsunami the first thought that entered Meena Ganesan's mind was, "What can I do?" The 27-year-old executive of a multinational bank was reluctant to contribute to a fund because she wasn't sure it would benefit the really needy people.

"I wanted to reach out to the people, make sure the relief material actually reached them. So I decided to go myself. As we were working through the week, it was only at the New Year weekend that three of my colleagues and I could plan our visit. We reached our destination on the morning of January 2. First we went to Pondicherry, where we met with the volunteers of the SOS Villages network who were at work there. We were carrying only some old clothes, blankets and baby food. But we were carrying money (Rs 25,000-30,000 donated by friends and colleagues), having decided that we would buy what was required from nearby towns.

Then we went to Muduliarpet village, where there were about 30-40 children whose parents had either died or were missing. We interacted with them and tried to distract them from their tragic loss. We bought sheets and biscuits for the families in the camp. We were told they required around 100 cooking stoves, but everything in the nearby towns had been sent to Cuddalore. Now we have ordered the stoves from Bangalore, which will be sent there soon.

The victims first thought of us as aliens, but then I spoke in Tamil and suddenly they were talking to us."



An ad film to raise money

Civil Society News
New Delhi



A halogen lamp atop spreads a gentle glow into Puneet Sharma's small office room. We watch the ad film he's made to raise money for people hurt by the tsunami tragedy. A blue gentle tranquil sea, waves caressing the beach and then the message of an intense and deep loss-the children, mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts and grandparents who got swallowed by the water leaving babies behind.

"We quickly got clips of the sea and put it together," he says.

Sharma's film team called Xebec has made some powerful clips, which have probably been viewed by every middle-class home. There's a telling one on Kargil-the soldier who doesn't know you but lays down his life for you.

There's another on the Ahmedabad riots. And a third on disability and what mainstream ideas like competition mean to special children. Eye catching visuals, a slow camera, sentences in stark black and white, make for a dreamlike and yet powerfully real effect.

"The thing is when you make an ad film like this you can let your creative imagination flow. You can make it as powerful as you want. There's no irate client hassling you to put in this or take out that," he says.

The freedom to do what you want and create a great ad film has its own rewards. It helps the cause you support and is worth paying for, from your own pocket.

"An ad can operate on sympathy, if you feel sympathetic, but to change perceptions over the long term is not easy," he says. Advertising has to be supplemented with different events, different moments and other media. Once TV tunes off, so do newspapers, magazines and even the humble radio.

And although the ad film-maker puts together his contribution with his own resources, it may not be easy to buy space on India's many channels. For that you might have to approach a corporate sponsor. But it's really worth it, says Sharma. Xebec Film Team makes it a point to spend some of their money for films on social causes every year.



Bunch of guys adopt a village

Civil Society News
Bangalore

"WE'RE just a bunch of guys who want to help deserving people, to make a difference in their lives, to upgrade their lives," says G. Krishnamurthy, who runs People Health, an organisation that is modelled along the lines of the National Health Service in Britain and the Health Maintenance Organisation in the US.

We were supposed to be at Mahabalipuram for New Year's Eve, but when the tsunami struck, we decided to go to Nagapattinam to see what was required. We took old clothes, medicines and vessels that had been both donated and bought.

We appealed to our friends in India and abroad to contribute to our relief effort. When we checked the account

en route, we found we had already collected about Rs 1 lakh!

Our intention was to see for ourselves what was required by the people. There are several requests from them, so we will be going there again.

We've already spoken to the Tatas for corrugated sheets for shelters and have made contacts for repairing boats and nets. We've managed to procure 6,000 pairs of slippers and are checking which villages need them the most.

Our aim is to adopt a village of about 150 families and work towards their permanent rehabilitation with a budget of about Rs 2.5 crore.

We want to use the village to show how the entire belt can be transformed. We are preparing a blueprint for a plan to upgrade the lives of the people here. We want to help them get back on their feet, but with their participation."

'Tsunami recovery is an opportunity'

Civil Society News
Ahmedabad

Mihir Bhatt is the honorary director of the Disaster Mitigation Institute (DMI) in Ahmedabad. Known for its successful work after the Gujarat earthquake, the DMI is one of the few institutions in the country with a core specialisation in handling disasters. Civil Society spoke to Bhatt after he made a tour of the tsunami-affected coastline for his views on relief measures and what is required to bring the affected areas back to normalcy.

Have immediate relief measures—temporary shelters, food and health—been adequately addressed?

The Disaster Mitigation Institute (DMI) has been in the tsunami-affected coastal areas of Tamil Nadu since December 27, in 10 locations, spread across four districts, as directed by the collectors and demanded by local panchayats. Food and casualties have been taken care of rather rapidly and effectively. There may be some hotspots where nutrition is low. The provision of temporary shelters has started well but will have to be watched over by NGOs and others.

We hear people are going back to their villages. What should be done so that they can rebuild their homes?

Since 1989, when DMI started its work, two decisions have always accelerated recovery. The two single most important provisions that the government and voluntary groups can jointly make are: urgent clarity on the layout and demarcation of coastal settlement plans and provision of at least 100 days of work to the women in the affected families over the next three years. The policy clarity will unleash the energies of victims and those who want to help them in rebuilding their lives and their living environment. The provision of work will stabilise victim families.

Where are new homes going to be built? Considering that Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules specify a distance of 500m and India has 250 million people living there, is it feasible to implement the CRZ?

The CRZ will not be a constraint if the governments of coastal states sit down with civil society and find out a way to turn the coast into an area for economic and ecological opportunities. There has been a growing mismatch between economic growth in coastal areas across India and ecological growth across a most biodiverse coastline. India must preserve and grow both. The coastal states must take tsunami recovery as an opportunity. The South India Fishermen's Federation (SIFF), M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF),

DHAN Foundation and the National Farmers' Commission have done a lot of work on community based coastal development and it can be easily put into a work plan. The DMI experience after the Orissa cyclone of 1999 shows that time spent on building consensus is more valuable than money spent on activities around this coastal issue.

What are the kind of homes which could possibly be built to provide some safety and durability?



Mihir Bhatt, honorary director of the Disaster Mitigation Institute (DMI).

Before we discuss what kind of homes should be built, we should discuss who should build homes. The homes should be built by the homeowners. These are their homes, they know what to build, where and why. They also know how. The government and civil society, local and international, may play a supportive role in this process. Let the housing market spring back to life in the affected areas in favour of the victims by making available finance, material, technology and designs. The Tamil Nadu government has this capacity and it can be easily put to use.

While sea walls and mangroves do provide protection, coastal ecology varies widely. What other measures would be required?

Coastal India is as amazingly diverse as are coastal communities in India, as we have found, in our work along the Gujarat coast, through the Coastal Development Planning Centre (CDPC). A unified and common-to-all plan may not work effectively. What work is some clear and thought-through guidelines which allow local panchayats and scientists to jointly

come up with, not one or 10, but thousands of solutions. **Are there other communities and people who are being left out? What should be done for them?**

Not by intentions, but due to the fact that our social and governance systems are such that groups and communities repeatedly get left out. Those who are left out are not left out by the relief processes alone. These groups are sadly left out in the normal development process as well. What is needed is to rapidly find ways to get them enrolled into the mainstream rehabilitation process. This is difficult, but possible. Donors can support such enrolling initiatives and activities and not just shelter and incomes.

Agricultural fields along the coast have been doused with salt water. Are farmers losing their livelihood?

Yes, agricultural land, plantations and orchards are affected throughout the coast. The National Farmers' Commission has built an initial perspective on this, which is very useful. The community level feedback suggests that the affected strip is rather narrow but crucial. It may not go more than one kilometre inland in most villages. It is damaged due to sea water flowing through canals and spreading sand, which in some locations is two or three centimetres thick. Groundwater has become saline. A farmer-to-farmer joint assessment will go a long way in sustainable recovery.

Are NGOs and the government doing enough for the welfare of orphaned children?

The government and NGOs have put orphans high on priority, early on, which is heartening. Gujarat's experience after the earthquake of 2001 and the riots of 2002 shows that community-based rehabilitation of orphans matched with regular state and community hand-holding (not monitoring) and long-term support, upto 18 years, may be a better approach. Orphanages are a good solution, when and where community-based rehabilitation is not possible.

Do you think there is a larger and systemic role for micro-finance in disaster management?

Money accelerates recovery, more so when it is in the hands of the poor among victims. Therefore, microfinance has a great and central role to play in tsunami recovery, especially as society has key institutions in this field -- DHAN, Sadhan, Basix, FWFB to name a few--working in this coastal region. However, the microfinance movement will have to soon do some reinvention in terms of what will work and what new challenges are faced. For example, building an SHG needs time as it is also a trust building activity. Rapid recovery may not have such time available. Or SHGs need financial discipline to sustain which in the flood of relief may not be easy to build.

WHERE
ARE WE
BEING
READ?

Civil Society is going places...

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Surrey, Srinagar, Manali, Pune, Peechi, Pondicherry...

DO YOUR OWN THING

Civil Society

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

At Lohri this year, girls get first place

Rathi A Menon
Fatehgarh Sahib

THE colours bespoke the occasion – the bright yellows, pinks, reds and greens on the rangoli at the entrance, on the fluttering dupattas of traditionally attired girls, and on the shamiana. They said, what is life without colour? And what is life without girls? The question had special relevance in Fatehgarh Sahib, notorious for the lowest sex ratio of 751 women for every 1,000 men. To wipe out this stigma, the district administration, with the help of social activists and anganwadi workers, came up with the idea of celebrating the first Lohri of newborn girls. In a state where Lohri has been traditionally a festival for sons, either praying for more or celebrating those already born, Fatehgarh Sahib now had a new song: 'Peeche hadh da mundeyon, kudian di pehli lohri aayi (Move back you boys, it is now the girls' first Lohri)'.

District commissioner S K Ahluwalia has aptly caught the pulse of the state, where celebration is a way of life. "I used to wonder why we celebrate the first Lohri of only our newborn sons, why not of our newborn daughters. In fact, there is no celebration at all when girls are born. This also could have led to the low sex ratio as many births of girls go unregistered," says Ahluwalia. From that point, he theorised that only through loud celebrations of a girl child's birth could any message on the meaning of her existence be conveyed. The process began last year through small events at the village level. "What is needed is a general awakening and that cannot be brought in by rules. It must be a continuous process."

In the lush green Aam Khas Bagh of Sirhind, the crowd, a really multifarious one, comprising women, girls from nearby schools and colleges, important citizen groups, missionary nuns and, of course, the media, was first treated to some scintillating music by Manpreet Akhtar, a noted singer of the state. Next, a public interest film on female foeticide, *Mujhe Mat Maro*, was screened, and finally, a play on the same theme was enacted by the local People's Theatre Group. It was so moving that some women were seen wiping tears from their eyes.

Then came some exhortations, first from the officials and then from social workers. Gurkanwal Kaur, the Punjab minister for social security, women and child development and former chief minister Beant Singh's daughter, talked to the crowd about mothers, mothers-in-law and daughters. "When I was born, my parents celebrated and I have not lagged behind in anything. So let the celebration not be restricted to this stage, but let it spread across the state as a wave. Not just the government, but everyone, especially women, should take it ahead."

The social workers harped on a message that bore much import in this religiously rich belt: "Everyone, including girls, comes with their own destiny written by God; so why should you become God and take the girls' destiny into your hands?" Minister Gurkanwal Kaur then honoured the babies, about 31 of them, all either asleep in their mothers' arms or gazing wide-eyed at the hustle-bustle around them. They were all given blankets, dresses, and the usual Lohri goodies in a gift pack. The first girl to receive the gifts had an unusual name, Heavenpreet Kaur.

Cow dung is not compost

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

EVERY organic food activist swears by *gobar* or cow dung. It is recommended as the best tonic for the soil, an ideal replacement for harmful chemical fertilisers. But old, dried *gobar* loses nutrients and does not replenish the earth, says Dr Priti Joshi, a microbiologist from the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Rural Industrialisation in Wardha who has studied scientific composting. "Cow dung is not compost," she explains. "It can contain harmful organisms. Cow dung has to be converted into final mature manure before applying it to the soil."

Dr Joshi has invented a potent version of *gobar* packed with nutrients. She has devised six ways of making compost with cow dung and passed on know-how to marginal farmers and rural entrepreneurs. Over 1000 composting units financed by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) have sprung up, fuelled by demand from farmers. The reinvented cow dung is now making inroads into Punjab and Haryana turning some farms into *gobar* revolution areas.

Dr Joshi was in Gurgaon to speak to farmers during a four-day workshop organised by the SNS Foundation, supported by the Anand group of companies. About 120 representatives from NGOs and farmers from Haryana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, turned up. SNS Foundation invited experts in marketing, certification and organic farming techniques to share knowledge.

SNS is helping farmers in Gurgaon, Solan and Nasik go organic. To create demand, a consumer awareness campaign on organic food is being planned in Gurgaon. SNS will be organising farmers so that they can opt for group certification of their products.

"Farmers in the north have this 'readymade' mentality. They want to farm sitting on a charpoy talking into a mobile phone," Dr Joshi told *Civil Society* in an interview.

Tell us about your work in Wardha.

I studied the role of micro-organisms in biodegradation of organic material and then moved to scientific composting. When the farmer wants to convert to organic farming, compost is very essential. It is not just a nutrient but a source of micro-organisms. This is important because our soil has lost micro-flora through overuse of chemicals and has to be replenished.

Gobar is not compost. It has to be converted into final mature manure before applying it to the soil. It should be rich in humus, micro-organisms and nutrients. We can use oil cake, cow urine, groundnut cake, rock phosphate and bio-fertilisers. Nutrients should be soluble in water for the plant to absorb. For the second crop you don't need to apply bio-fertilisers.

Do you require specific compost for specific crops?

No. You need specific combinations. Cow dung alone cannot supply all the nutrients. It is better to mix it with biomass and then compost. All the nutrients will be replenished. Cow dung is produced from fodder which is already half digested matter. If it is left in an open source a lot of nutrients are lost.

We are using fresh cow dung as a culture for composting because it contains micro-flora. One technique is to dissolve fresh cow dung and then spray it on crops. But if cow dung

is old and exposed then we use it as a source for organic material. We mix one layer of biomass and one layer of cow dung.

Have you tried this out in Wardha?

My work is all land to lab. We are working in five villages. Farmers are growing maize, soya bean, wheat, sorghum, bhindi, tomato, etc. The costs are only of the raw material. You just need a shed and a polythene sheet to cover the manure.

We are teaching farmers to make herbal pesticides using cow urine, combinations of neem and custard apple and so on. Farmers are appreciating it. It is very practical, they can start tomorrow. Ten years back organic farming was considered an urban fad. But now farmers realise there is no alternative.

LAKSHMAN



Dr Priti Joshi

How do you ensure quality control?

We have set up good standards for quality control. We have consulted ten noted national experts on compost. We published these standards but we have not got accreditation. Whatever standards have been made so far are for plant material and soil but not for compost.

How will you spread your methods to all farmers?

It's not possible for all farmers to make high quality compost in-house. So KVIC is giving loans to entrepreneurs to manufacture bio-manure as an industry. The amount ranges from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 10 lakh. They can sell compost at about Rs 3 per kg.

We sell for Rs 2000 per tonne to rural entrepreneurs who

want to trade it further.

In my home we have five acres with 100 trees, grasses and leaf litter. We have our own unit that produces two tonnes a month. I have employed two people. I earn Rs 6000 a month without much effort. Farmers arrive at my doorstep. And I'm living in an urban area.

I thought I would need to make small packs and persuade shopkeepers to sell the stuff. Quite the reverse. Our compost is booked in advance. But we want to teach farmers to make it on their fields. Once a farmer buys from us, he should not return. We go to his farm and show him how to do it. In this way we have helped set up ten units. We just give them the 'booster dose'.

Are farmers keen to make compost?

We have noticed nobody wants to take a risk. They'd rather buy prepared compost made by us. In fact, the composting industry is growing the most in Punjab. In Chandigarh we have 200 farmers on our list. You will be surprised to know that dealers in chemical fertilisers who own farms are making compost for sale.

In regions of Maharashtra where people rely on rain-fed irrigation, it is hard to produce compost, the year round. We need to sell prepared compost. Through KVIC we identified six zones - Delhi, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. We hold a four-day training programme for entrepreneurs. They get a certificate and can apply for a loan. About 1000 units have been set up. We wrote to them for an assessment. We also visited about 25 such units in Maharashtra. They are first-timers so they have technical problems like ants getting into the compost.

There is no subsidy?

There is subsidy only for production, not for sale. We don't need it. Perhaps if we go in for large-scale composting, subsidy may be necessary. But we'd prefer farmers and rural entrepreneurs to make the compost.

Look, good girls in Maruti's parking lot!

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

It takes a public-spirited woman Airbus pilot to make professional drivers out of village girls in male-dominated Gurgaon.

Every day, mint new cars have to be driven from Maruti Udyog's factory in Gurgaon to its two parking lots, 5 km away. The job is outsourced to Peregrine Security Systems, which hires 120 drivers to shift the cars. Till a month ago, only men served as drivers.

Then Sushma, a village girl in her early twenties, turned up, sponsored by Captain Indraani Singh, India's first woman Airbus pilot, whose NGO Literacy India works in the vicinity of the Maruti factory. This month Asha, Anita and Manju joined Sushma and the male bastion in Maruti's parking lot has gone to pieces.

"We employed more girls because Sushma proved to be really efficient," says Captain (ret'd) MS Chauhan of Peregrine Security Systems, somewhat nervous about his new image as a male feminist. On the first day Sushma joined she was told, since she was a girl, to move, well, maybe 10 cars. Instead, she drove 37, impeccably.

The male drivers were shocked. And livid. They used to shift only 26 cars every day.

"During my training I learnt that the job involved moving 36 cars. I drove 37. I told them, if a man can do it, so can a woman. And I made my point," says Sushma.

The men could not meet their target because they would while away time chatting and drinking tea. "Besides, they were always late for work," says Sushma. She fought off the first wave of male resentment: rude remarks, sniggers and cold snobbery by just doing her job well and raising efficiency standards.

Captain Indraani Singh is not new to the business of breaking into male bastions. As India's first woman Airbus pilot she remembers the first day she signed in for her first solo flight. "Indian Airlines did not discriminate. But all eyes were on me," she recalls. "I knew they thought, can she do it? I steeled myself and did it."

When Indraani began her career at the Hissar Flying Club she was the only girl and the men weren't kind. She learnt the best way of earning respect was by being better than anyone else. "You have to decide if you want to do it. Then be thick-skinned and focus on achieving."

When she gets off a flight she likes nothing better than heading for the primary school Literacy India runs at Chauma village. The NGO has now extended its activities to education and livelihood programmes in Gurgaon district as a whole.

Although the region is urbanising rapidly, villages retain a conservative outlook. Men drink, mistreat their wives and girls don't



On the first day Sushma joined she was told, since she was a girl, to move, well, maybe 10 cars. Instead, she drove 37, impeccably. The male drivers were shocked. And livid. They used to shift only 26 cars every day. "If a man can do it, so can a woman," said Sushma.



Captain Indraani Singh



Pradeep Verma of Maruti Udyog

All through Indraani counsels the girls telling them to be friendly, confident and not huddle into a group. Body language, she says, is important and here a dress code counts.

get to join the workforce. Indraani wanted to change gender equations and was looking for a male bastion to break. She found driving to be a good target.

But Indraani had to counsel the girls' families. Driving is seen as a somewhat shady male occupation. The girls talked to their families too. "We argued it's not the profession which is bad. Everything depends on how we conduct ourselves," says Sushma. "I don't believe parents

are reluctant to see their girls succeed. We ourselves lack confidence and live in fear."

Indraani sent the girls to the reputed Institute of Driving, Training and Research (IDTR) to learn. She hired a car for Rs 1000 per day to get the girls there safely. Once they got driving licences, she even bought a second hand Maruti car so that the girls could gain experience.

Then began the job hunt. Indraani came to know the Maruti factory hired drivers on a salary of Rs 2,700 through Peregrine Security Systems. She asked IDTR to put in a word and spoke to Captain Chauhan who talked with Maruti's Sales and Despatch

team.

The auto giant had already been tinkering with the idea. "Female drivers would instil discipline and drive with care, we thought," says Pradeep Verma, Assistant General Manager of the Sales and Despatch section. "Even slight damage to new cars can really hurt us financially."

After Sushma successfully infiltrated the male bastion, the other girls followed. The men bitched behind their backs and continued to be hostile. But the supervisors were helpful. According to Asha about 15 percent, mostly younger drivers, have started accepting the girls as colleagues. "It's the drivers in the 35 plus age bracket who are the worst," she says. Drivers retire at the age of 40. If the girls do well they can get promoted as supervisors.

Captain Chauhan says he's doing his bit. Every morning he informs the men to behave like 'brothers and sisters'. "You study together in school so you can work together, is what I tell them. If I get any complaint I will deal with it strictly."

The girls say they are not complaining because they want to be friends. "We want to break down these perceptions about women being lesser beings. It's all in the mind. This job is a big challenge for us." All through Indraani counsels the girls telling them to be friendly, confident and not huddle into a group. Body language, she says, is important and here a dress code counts.

The girls always reach work on time. They pedal furiously on their bicycles, setting out from their villages at 6 am to reach the factory at 7 am sharp. Their families wait, fretting over a moment's delay. The girls then cook, fetch water and tend to buffaloes. Sushma is a final year graduate from Dronacharya Government College in Gurgaon and computer literate. So is Asha. Their success is breaking down conservative perceptions. "A village woman approached me recently and asked whether I could convert her daughter into a professional driver," says Indraani.

Schoolboys invent a wonder leg

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

HOW do you get a new product idea? That has been a problem plaguing the largest of corporates. Most product design courses around the world teach that looking around and observing the problems that people have in interacting with current products gives you new ideas. Design researchers employ sophisticated techniques that anthropologists have developed to watch 'tribes' to 'observe' how people behave.

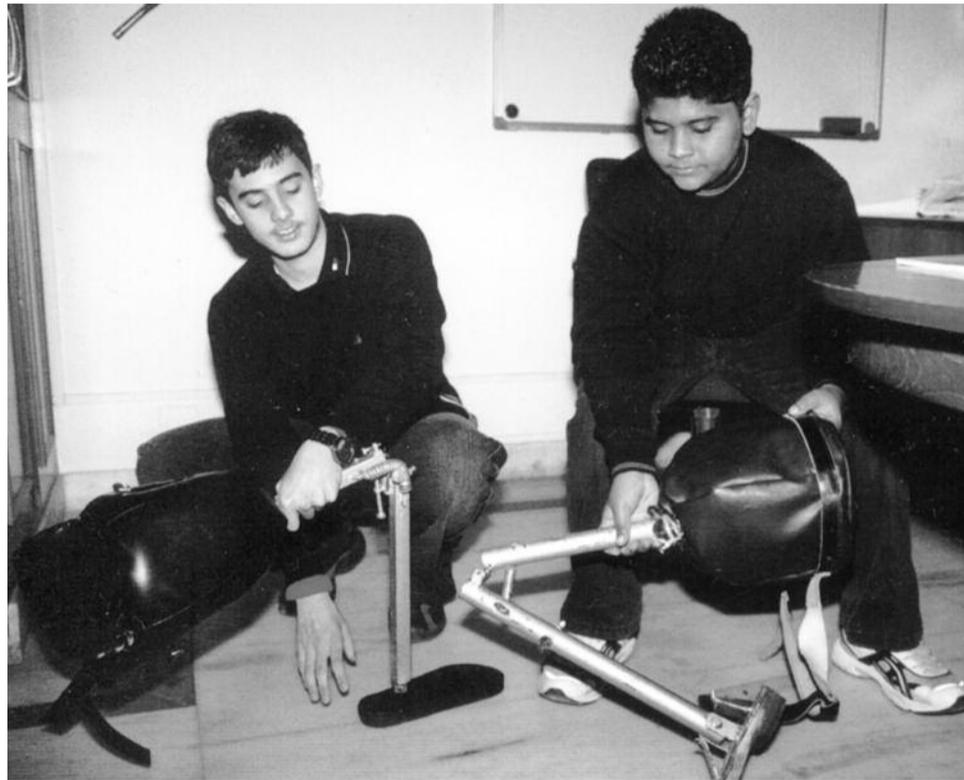
Mihir Tandon and Riddhiman Yadava, two cellphone toting, chauffeur driven, carefree boys living in south Delhi do not know all this, yet that is exactly what these two boys studying in Class 10 in Modern School, an up-market Delhi school, did.

Nearly three years ago, Mihir and Riddhiman had gone out to play football in a park in Gitanjali Enclave. They saw a beggar boy who had lost both legs (amputated above the knees), pushing himself on a crude skateboard. It struck

them that he should have access to inexpensive artificial legs and set out to build them for him. They made rough sketches of their model and got the legs built at a local welding shop. They planned to put springs in the knee joint so that it gave the wearer extra thrust while walking. That took them 10 days. Their first prototype was made of railing pipes with a scooter shock absorber and an old floater for a foot. That model was really stiff and wouldn't bend much.

"We then went and studied how the human body works at the Indian Institute of the Physically Handicapped at Vasant Kunj. Dr Sharad Ranga, the head of the department there, helped us. We also worked with professors at the mechanical engineering and applied mechanics departments at IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) Delhi," says Riddhiman. The two boys - typically for their age - are squabbling all the time even as they explain the details of their project.

They then built their second model. This one had a rigid spring going across (inside) the two pieces (above the knee joint and below) of the tube and two springs



Mihir (left) and Riddhiman (right) with the artificial leg they invented

outside on either side of the joint. The inside spring makes sure that the knee returns to its position quickly. They had to measure the expansions of the various springs. "Our physics teacher, Anuradha Handa, told us what to do. But our school did not have the adequate resources. So we took it to a *chakki* shop (flour mill) to calculate Young's modulus. We put 50-kilo weights on them," says Riddhiman. This was better, but they had not worked out the centre of gravity, which turned out to be far ahead of what it should have been.

The boys have been working on the project for nearly three years now and have spent about Rs 25,000. They built their model, took a year's break and started all over again. What has kept them going are the science contests in which they have been participating. They first sent their entry to a project organised by the chief minister of Delhi. They lost at the science fair held by Discovery channel, but were among the 16 winners in different categories in the Intel Science Fair finals held in Chennai in December 2004. They have now won the final round held in Mumbai and are among the six children who will rep-

resent India at Phoenix, Arizona, where they will compete internationally.

The final foot costs Rs 595. "It is built with mild steel railing pipes. Any artisan can make it. The rubber at the foot is MRC rubber, or the rubber used to make floaters. It bends like a foot would," demonstrates Mihir, turning the model around. "You can squat and even sit cross-legged," adds Riddhiman, bending the joints in a second model.

Have they heard of the Jaipur Foot? "Yes, I went and looked it up when I drove over with my mother to visit my grandfather. That foot is made of a solid chunk of vulcanised rubber and weighs 2.5kg. Ours weighs just 2 kg. Our leg has more degrees of freedom than the Jaipur foot, which costs Rs 2000," claims Riddhiman. The boys have actually made a report comparing their leg to what is available in the market. Their leg is a simple mechanical prosthesis. The Mukti leg, which is made out of polyethylene water pipes, costs Rs3000. The Tata Manufacturing Solutions leg, made of aluminium and steel, weighs just 1.9 kg, but costs

Rs18,000.

The boys concede that their leg is only functional, not aesthetic. Their report lists sophisticated solutions, equipped with microprocessors, available from research labs across the world at a whopping cost of more than US\$50,000. The report also works out the market size for the product with both the official figures from a 1991 national sample survey and unofficial figures from the Rehabilitation Council of India. The figure could be anywhere up to about 15 million children, most of them in rural areas.

Have people tried their foot? "Yes, we took it to the Old Delhi area and filmed people using it," says Mihir. Is the rubber socket of the leg comfortable to wear on an amputated stump? The insides are inflatable. "However, you could take a plaster of Paris cast and then custom-make it. But that would add to the cost," comes the answer. Are the springs durable? "They are common cycle springs. But we have sent them to the Sriram Institute to check for spring fatigue." "And our school is proud of us now," say the boys in a chorus.

Is baby food law being junked?

Civil Society News
New Delhi

IT seems the union ministry of food processing industries (MoFPI) wants to repeal the Infant Milk Substitutes (IMS) Act (Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods Act, 1992 and Amendment Act 2003). The ministry has drawn up a draft 'Food and Safety Standards Bill' which is all about adulteration, food quality, standards, export and import. It wants to bring about a single law and the IMS Act is included in its list of laws to be repealed.

Activists warn that the MoFPI is barging into an area that is none of its business. "The IMS is a special Act that protects and promotes breastfeeding and is intended for the survival of infants. It has nothing to do with the purity or adulteration of baby food," clarifies Dr Arun Gupta, national coordinator of the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI). It's the ministry of HRD that is the nodal agency for this Act, he points out.

The IMS Act bans advertisements and promotion of

baby food, infant milk substitutes and feeding bottles. It defines the relationship baby food manufacturers can have with health care providers. Manufacturers are known to give donations and incentives to doctors, hospitals, pharmacies and health workers to promote infant milk substitutes and baby food to lactating mothers. Advertisements and promotions have often given wrong impressions to women.

In 1993, loopholes in the IMS Act were plugged to rein in baby food manufacturers. BPNI with help from the Association for Consumers' Action on Safety and Health (ACASH) lobbied nearly nine years to get the laws amended. Multinationals, corporates, the media, even public sector undertakings flagrantly violated the old IMS Act.

On the face of it, the objective of the MoFPI is to bring about a uniform food law, implemented by a single authority. Last year, a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) had found eight ministries, several standard-making bodies and about 15 food adulteration laws dealt with food safety and standards. A Group of Ministers (GoM) was set up to draft suitable legislation which would be submitted to

Parliament. The new draft law has been pasted on the MoFPI's website (www.mofpi.nic.in) and comments invited from consumer groups, individuals, industry etc.

Now a single food law has been a long-pending demand of the food processing industry, considered one of India's sunrise sectors. A clutch of big corporates dominate this industry-Nestle, Kellogg's India, Hindustan Lever, ITC - Agro etc. BPNI suspects some of these giants are behind the move to get the IMS Act quietly repealed so that they can flood the market with advertisements and promotions of baby food.

"The draft Food and Safety Standards Bill of 2005 is meant to promote trade under WTO laws. But the health of infants and mothers and breastfeeding is not a tradeable commodity nor a trade barrier," says Dr Gupta.

The IMS Act is in keeping with global public health standards. India is a signatory to international resolutions and treaties relating to nutrition for infants and breastfeeding. Late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was an early supporter of correct infant feeding practices.

Activists can send their objections to www.mofpi.nic.in

Jute matches and a cycle for floods

Vidya Viswanathan
Ahmedabad

A case study is being presented in the minimally designed, amphitheatre style Ravi Mathai Hall at Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad, India's most sought after B-school. The presenter is Uttam Sambu Patil, a 76-year-old retired science teacher and his charged audience, many of whom have not finished school, have collected here from all over the country. Patil's case study involves his rather unusual innovation - matchsticks made of jute!

Patil is talking at one of the sessions at the third annual function of the National Innovation Foundation (NIF). NIF recognises grassroots innovations and traditional knowledge. Every year, it honours innovators; this year, they numbered 98. Speakers at the function included NIF governing board members such as Ela Bhatt of women's cooperative SEWA, Lalite Gupte, joint managing director of ICICI Bank, and Dr R A Mashelkar, chairman of the government's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, (CSIR).

NIF started 10 years ago with the Honey Bee network, said Professor Anil Gupta, the man behind the NIF movement, in his speech. Honey Bee is a networking newsletter that publishes grassroots technology innovations and traditional knowledge from India. An entirely voluntary effort, the newsletter is published in Hindi, Gujarati, Kannada, Tamil, Bengali, Punjabi, Pahari, and Spanish. Till date, the network has collected 46,000 innovative entries from 360 districts in the country, several of which are for traditional medicines.

The Honey Bee network has scouts, people who voluntarily look out for innovators or people with traditional knowledge. The credit for discovering several ingenious innovators goes to the intricate scouting system, an integral part of which are Gupta's Shodhayatras (journeys of exploration). The Shodhayatras consist of 10-day trips to several villages and talking to the people there. During one such Shodhayatra in Nainital, Kanwaljeet, a scout, heard schoolchildren relate a story about Padmadatta Balutiya, a man who built a check dam after British engineers had tried and failed three times. Balutiya's dam survives to date, 109 years after it was built, without any repairs in the interim. After several enquiries, Kanwaljeet found a descendant of Balutiya in Haldwani and invited him to speak at the NIF function.

Says Gupta ruefully, "The dam is a curved structure, rather than a straight line and so pressure is not exerted at one point. It has two walls. The first wall lets the water into the canal. So the water inside the canal matches the pressure of the water inside. It is built with traditional materials. But no architecture school or civil engineering institute has studied the technology it employs."

The formidable Honey Bee network now also includes experts from several academic institutions and civil society organizations, all of whom help evaluate and brainstorm for the network. Gupta is trying to bring even the isolated Indian Institutes of Technology into the fold. This year, for example, he invited Kartik Kashinath, a second-year mechanical engineering student, to study the innovations presented at the function and go back and check if he and his colleagues could come up with practical applications for the ideas.

Now the network is building itself. Balram Singh, 23, of Pasiyala in Haryana, who built a remote control for fire-crackers, has part funded and brought into the network Ashok Dhiman, 22, who has set up a tea-vending machine that uses conventional tea leaves and a filter.

The success of the Honey Bee network in raising consciousness about grassroots technological innovations is sparking a lively debate. The awards function has not only boosted the self-confidence of the innovators, it has also raised their hopes that they will be able to benefit monetarily from their inventions.

Gupta feels that some of the innovations have an international market. One of these is the bamboo cutter

thought up by Usman Shekani, which some NGOs in the North East have agreed to market. Another is Patil's matchstick technology, which Gupta feels can be licensed to large companies worldwide and to several small entrepreneurs in India.

A note of dissent was struck by David Martin, a supporter of the Honey Bee network and CEO of M-CAM Systems, a Washington-based international intellectual property company. Martin pointed out that patents for similar innovations were being filed in the rest of the

innovators. After all, Edison was bankrolled by a financier who had faith in him.

Darshan Shankar, director, Foundation for the Revitalization of Local Health Tradition (FRLHT), felt that knowledge should be widely disseminated for use. He cites kaajal as an example. His mother made her own kaajal and she could thread a needle at 85 years of age! If the medicinal properties of kaajal and traditional recipes were made freely available, it would enhance the health of the people. But the traditional healers in the country



Mohammed Saidullah from Champaran, Bihar has invented a cycle which floats on water

Anil Gupta has put together a Rs 20 crore, micro-venture fund and hired IIM graduate Chintan Parikh to help commercialise some technologies under the aegis of an organisation called GIAN. A few licences have been signed. To keep transaction costs low, some of the products may be manufactured by self-help groups and distributed through them and NGOs.

world between 1880 and 1920. "Showcasing these as what India is capable of now would present a wrong picture to the world. These are minds that would solve any problem presented to them. Show them problems that the world will face in the future like clean water or desalination of soil and India will be way ahead," he said. Martin also said that commerce works in weird ways. Current interests may be deeply entrenched and may not want a better technology, which is why an innovation may not always result in monetary benefit.

Kuldeep Mathur, an anthropologist who had taught at IIM Ahmedabad and is Gupta's mentor, pointed out some interesting facts. He had studied European agriculture during the last years of his career. He says he was surprised to find that most of the myths about India were wrong. For example, the population density in Europe was higher than in India. The farms there were smaller, too. The difference was that when their railroads were being built, for instance, local artisans were involved in building parts like the wheels. He said that a society should concentrate on its innovators, not on the innovations themselves or building an enterprise around the

are languishing in poverty and their children do not want to learn their trade because it will not fetch them money.

CSIR's Mashelkar said, "We had one freedom movement. We need another - the innovation movement - to free us." Ela Bhatt, chairperson of SEWA, could not resist taking a potshot at the system. "It is a matter of pride for IIM Ahmedabad that this function is taking place in its campus. IIM usually goes in its own direction. But I hope there will come a day when IIM professors, students, and our innovators can meet and cooperate. The lessons learned from these exercises should get mainstreamed into education, policy, and banking," she said.

Gupta has put together a Rs 20 crore, micro-venture fund, and hired IIM graduate Chintan Parikh to help commercialise some technologies under the aegis of an organisation called GIAN. A few licences have been signed. To keep transaction costs low, some of the products may be manufactured by self-help groups and distributed through the NGOs. In some cases, the licence could be sold to small entrepreneurs. There will be a multi-media, multi-language interface that will allow access to these databases across the country.



Members of the GRP and People's Action flaunt the one-page manifesto of the new party. "One page is enough. We don't want to waste paper," they said.

HOW TO LAUNCH A PARTY AND FIGHT ELECTIONS

Gurgaon's middle class gets into politics and shows the way to being treated as a vote bank that matters

Umesh Anand
Gurgaon

A year and a half ago, residents of Gurgaon, a rapidly growing city in Haryana to the south of Delhi, inspected their world in dismay. Their roads were full of potholes, the power supply went off frequently, shopping malls had closed in on residential buildings, the water table was falling and garbage lay strewn all over. There was no public transport to speak of and areas originally designated for parks and open spaces were being freely converted into real estate. All this and more even as hoardings and advertisements by builders proclaimed extravagant lifestyles and an environment free from pollution.

Most of Gurgaon's residents had put their life's savings into their homes, but when they went to the government and its officers for relief they were invariably snubbed and turned away. As their grievances grew and they poked around for solutions, the residents discovered to their horror that no master plan existed for Gurgaon. Colonies had come up as a result of random deals sealed by successive governments over the years. In this way, several thousands of crores of rupees had been made without any public scruti-

ny. Similarly, a mockery had been made of laws that existed. So, apartments, for instance, were not registered under the Apartment Owners' Act, putting a question mark on the legality of such transactions.

As politicians and builders colluded, Gurgaon became the urban magnet it was never designed to be. Loose money took real estate prices up and down in fictional cycles. A middle class in search of shelter, which it could not find in Delhi, ensured that Gurgaon continued to grow. It helped that housing finance was available on easy terms. Malls, restaurants and call centres opened. Corporate offices fleeing the chaos and squalor of the business districts in Delhi found better alternatives in Gurgaon, increasing exponentially the number of people coming and going from Delhi. The result was traffic jams and even greater demands on the limited power and water available.

On December 12, Gurgaon's residents' welfare associations met and decided that to stem the rot it was best that they take the plunge into politics and get their own candidate elected to the Haryana Assembly from the Gurgaon seat. They launched the GRP, or the Gurgaon Residents' Party, which will contest the elections in February. Their candidate, selected through a unique electoral college of RWAs, is Col Ratan Singh, a retiree



Electoral college at work: Members of the residents' welfare associations at the election of the GRP candidate, Col Ratan Singh.

with a record of spirited public service. The question now is whether a middle class party can take on seasoned politicians in the rough and tumble of a Haryana election. And, even if elected, will a single candidate in the state's Assembly matter?

The RWAs believe that they have a point to make. Even one elected representative can ensure that they get a hearing. And if their man is defeated, he will eat into established vote banks. Numbers may just be on their side. A campaign by RWAs last year added 100,000 new names to updated electoral rolls. At least 75,000 of the new voters owe some allegiance to the RWAs. In the last elections to the Haryana Assembly, 149,000 people came out to vote in the Gurgaon seat. The 75,000 RWA supporters can clearly change equations. Considering that the last candidate to be elected won by 15,000, the RWAs could well be more than just a casual force flirting with elections.

In Haryana in these elections there is a strong wave of resentment against Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala's Indian National Lok Dal (INLD). The beneficiary of this wave is likely to be the Congress, which won the Mahendergarh parliamentary seat, of which Gurgaon is a part, without much difficulty in 2004. The Gurgaon Assembly seat is currently held by the discredited INLD.

All hard-headed calculations have it that the Congress will win the Gurgaon seat. But the GRP is hoping that all the 75,000 RWA votes and a few thousand more will go to Col Ratan Singh. This of course is what the GRP is dreaming of.

But it is one thing to run a confederation of RWAs and quite another to lead a political party. The GRP and the RWAs are not without their tiffs and jealousies. There are personality clashes to contend with. Should these get worse, they would undermine Col Ratan Singh.

Then again, getting people out to vote on election day requires a party machinery. The GRP is as yet at the stage at which it is learning. Its middle class members have only now begun to shed their political inhibitions. They are a long way off from becoming effective street-level mobilisers.

Then there is the question of money. The GRP's contention is that it can raise enough from residents, but once again it does not have a system for doing so. The GRP also believes that not much money is needed unless you are buying off rivals or renting crowds. But the reality is that just moving around in Gurgaon, which is twice the size of a mega city, is expensive. Also getting votes from the villages, which

fall within the seat and account for crucial votes, requires some of the traditional fanfare such as showing up in a cavalcade and making donations.

Nevertheless, the GRP's strength comes from the fact that people are fed up with the corruption and fecklessness of politicians in Haryana. Residents first tried to forge common cause through the setting up of RWAs. When they went to local officials with their complaints they continued to be treated like beggars. Clearly, even as RWAs, they did not count for anything. It was then that they realised that Gurgaon (just as it did not have a Master Plan for its fancy buildings) did not have updated electoral rolls. So, though several hundred thousand people had settled in Gurgaon in recent years, their votes did not count. There was no organised way of updating the rolls. Anyone wanting to register as a voter had to tackle so many imponderables that she invariably gave up.

Politicians encouraged this state of affairs so that they could continue to get elected by going back to well-oiled, large rural pockets of support. They also did not have to cater to the middle class urban settlers' demands for urban facilities. This gave builders a free hand and left new settlers at their mercy. So, while, builders, politicians, property dealers and bureaucrats prospered, the middle class suffered and for just one reason: its votes did not matter.

In May 2003, People's Action, an NGO fathered by Sanjay Kaul, stepped in to bring the RWAs of Gurgaon together. They formed a loose coalition to take up issues with the administration and to ensure that the names of the new settlers were put on the electoral rolls.

Demonstrations followed over power cuts, traffic jams, water shortages and the location of shopping malls next to residential buildings. Gurgaon officials who had so far not bothered to listen to residents now found themselves confronted by numbers. And these were educated people capable of arguing and going to the courts. From complete rejection, the RWAs graduated to a situation in which they could be heard and in certain instances they even had their way.

But the real challenge was in updating the rolls of voters before the parliamentary elections of 2004. (See Civil Society cover story Gurgaon Wants To Vote, April 2004). Under the system which was prevalent, it meant going to the district administration, providing proofs of residence, getting one's picture taken by a government-appointed photographer who would

DREAMS & REALITIES

At least 75,000 new voters will back the GRP

Fighting elections does not cost money

RWAs and the GRP are united behind Col Ratan Singh

A GRP victory will bring clout with the government

People have to be brought to booths. Can the GRP do it?

It does and raising money is also proving difficult

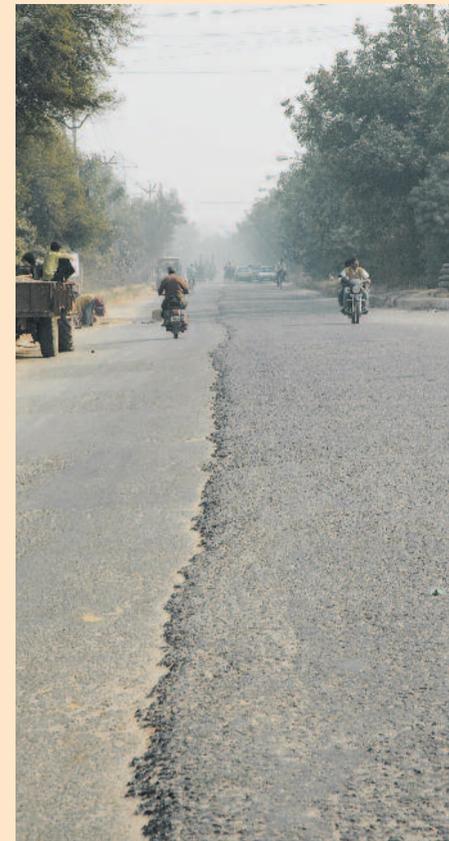
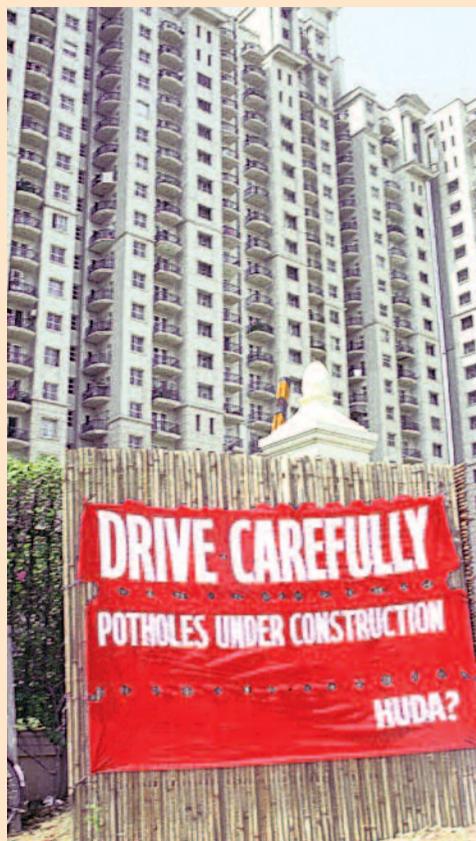
There are petty jealousies and differences

One MLA may not matter and may actually compromise



GLAMOUR AND DIRT

In Gurgaon residents face a whole host of everyday problems related to poor governance. Shopping malls have come up next to apartment blocks resulting in traffic jams and pollution. These properties were sold on the claim that they would be prime residential locations surrounded by green areas. When the residents first settled in, they were surrounded by open spaces. But as time passed the open spaces were converted into commercial constructions. For all Gurgaon's posh structures, there is garbage festering in the open and you will find pigs roaming free. A big grievance of the residents is the poor condition of roads.



They are either not repaired or patched up so shoddily that they are difficult to drive on. Hamilton Court in the pictures above pleaded to have the road running in front of the building repaired. Finally the residents had to take to putting up hoardings to embarrass the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA). The hoardings had the opposite effect. Instead of being embarrassed that a key road had not been repaired for months together, the HUDA officials became vindictive. Gurgaon is full of highrises and corporate head offices. But it doesn't even have a well equipped fire station. When Microsoft's office caught fire, tenders had to be called from Delhi.

invariably not show up. Most often the application form would not be available. The process was so dodgy that it ensured people did not get registered. Was this merely inefficiency on the part of Haryana's election authorities or was it well-planned chaos?

People's Action decided to correct things by going to the Election Commission and insisting that Gurgaon's new residents be given their constitutional right to vote.

At the insistence of the Chief Election Commissioner it was agreed that RWAs be empowered to distribute forms and verify proofs of residence. These could be handed over to the election commission's machinery in Haryana.

The RWAs went about their registration campaign with gusto and, in the first round, collected some 30,000 applications on photocopied forms. The RWAs bore the cost of copying the forms. But with the applications ready for submission, the Haryana administration said that it could not accept so many together. Sanjay Kaul spent several days ferrying the forms around in the boot of his car before the chief election commissioner intervened again and had them accepted. This brought 30,000 new names onto the rolls and even though identity cards could not be issued in time for the parliamentary polls, people were given voter numbers and allowed to vote.

Having ensured a surge in the number of voters, the RWAs next added a list of demands for the candidates in the parliamentary election.

Gurgaon falls under the Mahendergarh constituency. The demands pertained to water, roads, traffic, clean air, power supply and public transport. These are all quality of life demands that do not normally figure in a Haryana election dominated by caste followings and corruption.

It was clear that 30,000 middle class voters would not matter in a parliamentary constituency as large as Mahendergarh. But what was important was the assertion of Gurgaon's middle class identity. More important than the election was the inclusion of names in the rolls.

"The middle class is the most powerful lobby in the country, but it is also the least interested in politics," explains Kaul. "This is because it believes that its vote does not count. But if you can provide the connection between the quality of life and politics, as we have done in Gurgaon, then it is easy to get the middle class involved."

Success with the voters' list showed Gurgaon's middle class that it could bring about change. It did not have to sit back and allow itself to be taken for granted. The campaign also forced people to get out on the streets and drum up support from auto-rickshaws and vans. Hitherto, RWA office-bearers had met in clubrooms and community halls.

Above all, the voter registration campaign gave them a measure of their numbers and how by using their votes they could actually influence decisions, which would improve the quality of their lives. The numbers were simply awesome. The campaign finally led to the inclusion of 100,000 new names on the lists, some 75,000 coming from the direct efforts of the RWAs. Till the RWAs got the rolls updated, Gurgaon had 190,000 registered voters though twice the number probably live here.

So just who are the movers and shakers of the RWAs instrumental in setting up the new party. They are mostly retirees who have spent a lifetime in jobs far removed from such activism. Take the case of Inder Nath, a former railway official, who is in his seventies and is now interim president of the GRP. He was in the forefront of the campaign to update the electoral rolls. At the first press conferences, he would address mostly

empty rooms and get scant mention in the media. But he persisted and even hit the road on behalf of the RWAs. Or Madan Mohan Bhalla, convenor of People's Action. Bhalla was an electrical engineer with the government. As secretary of the Hamilton Court RWA, he led the way in registering complaints with the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) over the poor condition of the road in front of Hamilton Court. When the complaints did not cut ice, the RWA put up a series of hoardings ridiculing HUDA. Slogans were thought up at the RWA's meetings. Finally, the road was repaired.

The GRP now has among its leading lights Sanjeev Garg, a CEO of an international call centre, Vivek Sehgal, a financial consultant formerly with Citibank, Ajay Jain, a media entrepreneur who runs a campus paper. And of course

Col Ratan Singh, a former Army man who has taken up many lost causes among the residents of new Gurgaon and in nearby villages. SK Behera, a radiologist, is also an important member.

Sanjay Kaul, who has led the movement, is a communications consultant and runs a public relations company. Kaul has been the key strategist. He has worked through People's Action, which has retained its identity as an NGO while putting the GRP in place. Kaul as president of People's Action cannot have a position in the GRP.

The residents of Gurgaon are in sharp contrast to the traditional politicians in the fray: Gopichand Gehlot of the Indian National Lok Dal, which is Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala's party, Sudha Yadav of the BJP and Ranbir Gauba of the Congress.

So, if you are middle class and disillusioned with governments what is it that you can do to improve the quality of life around you? What can you learn from the Gurgaon

'The middle class is the most powerful lobby in India but it is the least interested in politics because it believes that its vote does not count. If you can connect the quality of life with politics, then it is easy to get the middle class involved.'

'RWAs are political entities'

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

SANJAY Kaul set up People's Action as an NGO to voice middle class concern over poor governance. In 1998-99 Kaul was a member of the BJP's backroom as a communications specialist. In Delhi People's Action took up the issue of auto-rickshaw fares and put together a fare chart for commuters. It wanted the government to be held accountable for the poor service provided by auto-rickshaws. The campaign failed because just 45,000 auto owners proved to be a more effective lobby than millions of disaggregated commuters in Delhi. In Gurgaon, People's Action has played the role of bringing residents' welfare associations (RWA) together to demand for better civic amenities and accountability in the government. Kaul takes a back seat, but he is clearly the key strategist for the RWAs. In two years, the RWAs have gone from despair to assertive politics. The Gurgaon Residents' Party (GRP) is the perhaps the only one its kind in India. Kaul tells *Civil Society* why.

When was the decision taken to launch a party?

Well, the decision was taken on December 12 when all the RWAs met.

But there must have been some point at which it became clear that a plunge into politics was necessary and possible?

In my mind, it has been clear all along that unless the middle class engages with politicians and the system of governance there is little hope of reform. Middle class votes have to count and for this the middle class has to be convinced that it can make a difference. During the auto rickshaw campaign in Delhi what happened was that the middle class commuter said "I have my

car, my scooter, my bus." So just 45,000 autos held the whole city to ransom and the government did nothing because the autos were a dedicated vote bank. So it is all about mobilisation and making the connection between action and result. The middle class does not vote because it thinks that its vote does not matter. But when you make the connection, as we have done

in Gurgaon, you can see the difference.

What was the turning point in Gurgaon?

It was the campaign to put names of voters on the electoral rolls. For the first time residents felt that their involvement had resulted in tangible gain.

But what has made the Gurgaon experience different?

Common problems have helped to get everyone involved. The residents have gone from stage to stage. It was very important that the RWAs could deliver political empowerment by way of getting names on to the electoral rolls. When the 80 RWAs came together and began confronting the administration on different demands they found that if they were united they could not be ignored. This naturally led to the decision to have a political party.

There is a view that RWAs should not be involved in politics.

This is ridiculous. The RWA is an expression of political intent. What else is it? Why would you be in an RWA if you did not want to be in politics? What has happened in Delhi is that through the Bhagidari system the government has successfully infiltrated the RWAs and made them powerless. What we are asking for is people's power. We want the government to work and not pass its responsibilities to the citizen.

How important is a cause?

A cause is important. But it cannot be just any cause. Animal rights is a cause too. But you need a cause which will bring a whole lot of people together. A cause to be effective has to relate to the quality of life. You also have to be ready to take the whole plate of problems and look at all of them.



Sanjay Kaul of People's Action during the voter registration drive.

'What we are asking for is people's power. We want the government to work and not pass its responsibilities on to the citizen. RWAs are an expression of political intent.'

experience of setting up a party? Here are some key lessons:

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A CAUSE: You will never get to mobilise people unless you are talking about the civic administration, about the quality of life. And the quality of life is directly related to politics. Now the quality of life all over India is affected. The question is whether you can articulate this coherently and find solutions and take people step by step through the exercise of solving these problems.

COUNT YOUR VOTES AND SUPPORTERS: It is important to identify your supporters and know that they can be held together for achieving certain ends. In the case of Gurgaon, all the new settlers form a well defined body of support.

MOBILISING PEOPLE: You have to federate and push the administration because it is politicised and then push the politics of the state. So, first network. People's Action networked all the 80 RWAs. Even if 15 people go and meet an official there is an impact. Regular circulars and press releases keep people in touch. There was a time when People's Action had no real organisational presence but because it was regularly saying things people believed that it had a well-oiled organisation. Also, it mattered that when all the RWAs met for the first time the media covered the event however cursorily. It gave the RWAs a new sense of importance.

WALKING THE TALK: You must have a real solution to a problem and it should be seen as working. You need one success. The campaign to register voters was key to establishing this connection. The middle class in Gurgaon realised that they could make a difference. If People's Action and the RWAs had failed in the voter list campaign, the RWA movement would have faltered.

REGISTERING A PARTY: You need a hundred members to form a political party which the Election Commission of India is ready to register. You have to register within 30 days of forming a party. Each of the hundred members has to be on the electoral rolls and have a voter number. This can be a major problem because the Election

Commission's own lists are in a mess. So, if you have a voter identity card, but they cannot find your name on the lists, then you don't count as one of the hundred needed to form the party. The Gurgaon Residents' Party had to find replacements for 60 of its founder members because of this chaos.

SYMBOL SEMANTICS: A symbol could be a problem too. What if you don't want to be represented by a lantern, cricket bat, broom or fan? The ballot does not have the name of a party, only symbols because the entire system is geared towards catering towards uneducated rural voters. When the GRP said it wanted GRP on the ballot, it was told this was not possible.

CHOOSING A CANDIDATE: The party is more important than the candidate. Having said that the Gurgaon residents also realised that a candidate must be known for public service. It is equally important that he or she be thick-skinned and ready to take insults and criticisms. It is also good to be a little pragmatic. For instance, caste does matter. Col Ratan Singh's chances are bright not only because of the middle class support he enjoys, but also because he is a Yadav. The GRP has used an electoral college to choose its nominee. The college consists of 80 RWAs. There were three candidates in the fray: Col Ratan Singh, RS Rathee and Sudhir Kapoor. To get to the final stage each of the nominees had to have support of at least 20 RWAs. The winner was to be chosen by a two-thirds vote of the electoral college consisting of 80 RWAs. Ratan Singh did not get the two-thirds, but because he was way ahead of the other two nominees he was chosen by consensus.

HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU NEED?: It may surprise you, but you don't really need much money if you are a candidate chosen in this manner. The GRP has decided to collect Rs 50 from each of its estimated 75,000 party supporters. This adds up to Rs 35 lakh. The GRP believes that this all the money that it needs for canvassing. But to get in each of those Rs 50 donations you need a system of collection. The GRP has discovered, to its remorse, that it does not have it. The GRP, however, spends less because it has clearly defined support.

You can be a Col Ratan Singh

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

As is the case with middle class Indians, getting into politics was always back of the mind for Gurgaon's residents. The greater the disillusionment with the administration, the more they would talk of political roles and the less they would do. Making the transition seemed too difficult.

Activism under the residents' welfare associations (RWAs), demonstrations outside shopping malls and meeting officials to demand action on long-pending grievances helped them bridge the gap somewhat. Finally, it was the campaign to put names on the voters' lists which really gave them a taste of political activism and the success they could enjoy.

The number of new voters emboldened them. People's Action and Sanjay Kaul in particular helped them articulate their achievements and strengths. The decision to set up the Gurgaon Residents' Party (GRP) followed. The big question that remained was who would be their candidate. An electoral college of RWAs finally chose Col Ratan Singh. But just who is this Col Ratan Singh? More importantly, can you too be a Col Ratan Singh?

Col Ratan Singh is 72. He served 30 years in the Army and settled in Gurgaon all of 20 years ago. To that extent he is not a new resident. He isn't flashy or upwardly mobile in the way many of the new residents are. He turned up to face the electoral college of RWAs dressed



in boots and beret. He cried when he was nominated. He speaks freely about corruption and publicly accuses politicians and bureaucrats of taking money and ignoring their duties.

Col Ratan Singh is fluent in Hindi in a fashion that many of the other residents are not. "Speak in Hindi.

Your Hindi is good," we've heard people say to him at GRP meetings where English is often the tongue which is favoured. He is as comfortable in Gurgaon's villages as its urban quarter. This is a big plus.

No one in the GRP will readily admit it, but Col Ratan Singh scores over all other possible candidates because he is a Yadav. Caste is important in Gurgaon. He also has a good equation with Bhajan Lal of the Congress who could be the next chief minister. This equation could be useful for getting things done. A sizable number of ex-servicemen live in Gurgaon and it is hoped that they will vote for him.

What you get from Col Ratan Singh is straight from the shoulder. It is invariably anecdotal. "People were not getting their rations. The grain was being diverted. I took them to the FCI and ensured that they got their rations."

Or : "A number of young people were told by one of the factories here to stop coming to work. Just like that. Over night. They came to me and I went to factory's owners and asked them if the factory was running losses. Had the workers done anything wrong. The owners had no answer and workers had to be taken back."

Col Ratan Singh is clearly a doer. For a middle class political party feeling its way across political streams, he is the perfect leader as others follow and understand the different roles that have to be played out in public life. To this extent it doesn't matter whether he wins or loses. The decision to contest and the learning it brings with it is victory in itself.

AD : HUMAN SCAPE

Civil Society

PERSPECTIVES

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

What shall we talk about?

ARUN MAIRA



Let's Talk

RITA and Umesh Anand have invited me to talk to readers of Civil Society. I told them I would love to listen and have a conversation and not just talk. However, since I have the pen and the page, I will have to begin the conversation by saying something. So, what shall we talk about? I would like to talk about many things on my mind, principally how people can solve intractable problems and bring about desired change by working together in a different mode. Through systemic approaches, rather than band-aids. By working towards a shared aspiration, not merely fixing problems. By talking with and not at each other. Rita and Umesh have asked me to write a series of six articles. Let me invite you into the conversation

by telling you what they will be about. These are big issues on my mind to which I do not have all the answers. But I do have some observations and questions, which may be a good way to begin the conversation.

The next piece, following this, will question whether economists have gone too far in their influence on human society. And whether one should venture, like the little child watching the imperial procession, to ask whether the present day emperor-the profession of economics-is wearing any clothes. (This could be heresy and I may be compelled to drink the hemlock cup, I fear!) The concept of homo economicus, of man as a rational decision-maker acting in his self-interest, suits mathematical modelling. The reality is that we that we do not take decisions rationally (whatever that means!), that our emotions play a strong part, and that very often our decisions emerge without any rational application of mind. Economists are wont to describe countries as economies, in terms of their GDP, the sizes of various economic sectors, and the flows of trade between them. And we listen in awe to their evaluations of nations' strengths and prospects. But nations are not merely economies. They are also societies, communities, and polities: in fact they are a complex amalgam of many facets, and therefore their trajectories cannot be explained by the equations of econometricians that factor only those variables that economists understand. No wonder there is so much acrimonious debate among economists themselves about the fundamental solutions for a country's progress. Do physicists and engineers need to argue as much about the right way to build and maintain a structure? Therefore, should we not take the priests of economics less seriously than we do?

I think we should also talk about what is the proper role of 'scientific' approaches. I have been working with the International Futures Forum, which is a small group of thoughtful people from many disciplines who have been meeting for three years to understand the power of scientific approaches that have led to the so-called Enlightenment of mankind, as well as the inherent limitations of scientific approaches to solve major problems facing

mankind, such as persistent poverty in spite of the scientific means and the material resources at disposal to eradicate it. Scientific approaches run into difficulty when confronted by complex phenomena in which many different aspects of a system (that are subjects of different scientific disciplines) interact. And when one thing does not lead to another in a linear, cause-and-effect relationship but things just 'come with' each other and 'mutually arise'. Like chickens and eggs and yin and yang. Our lives are surrounded by such wonderful phenomena. Systems thinking is a more useful way to comprehend them. It can give better insights than many prevalent scientific approaches. So let me talk about systems thinking in my third article. In that conversation, I also want to comment on man's desire to play god - to change the state of systems and alter their course. Stanley Kubrik's memorable opening scene in Space Odyssey 2001 put the idea eloquently: that

human beings are more evolved than other animals because they have the desire to understand why things are the way they are with the desire to change them.

In our fourth conversation, let's talk about freedom. And how societies of truly free people can shape a system that will benefit them all. Amartya Sen won a Noble Prize for expanding the limits of materialistic economics to broader wants and needs of human beings with the concept of development as freedom. George Bush's drive to change the world, beginning with Iraq, is ostensibly about spreading democracy - the freedom for people everywhere to shape their own futures. The United Nations is struggling to develop an effective, yet democratic institution of nations. India's economic growth is supposedly hamstrung, when compared with China's, by India's democratic drag. I believe there is a fundamental clash of theories about how results can (or should) be produced. What mankind needs, and India maybe one of its' best laboratories, is a way to produce faster, all-round progress in societies that aspire to be both efficient

and truly democratic at the same time. What does it mean to "manage" in such a system? And what is the relationship between those who manage and those who are managed?

The fifth conversation may be about how an outsider to a human system, whether it is a nation, a local community, or a business organisation, can help it become more capable and more free. This should be the objective of international aid organisations, social NGOs, management consultants, and even spiritual gurus! Let us talk about the motivations of such change agents and how these can complicate, and perhaps impede the process of development of freedom in the client system. Therefore what are principles for intervention with humility, recognising the Heisenberg-like interplay between observer and observed, 'intervener' and 'intervenee'? This is at the core of the learning agenda of the International Futures Forum, the International Society of Organisational Learning, and other forums.

What shall the sixth article be about? Let us see what emerges as the conversation unfolds. Maybe some readers may have something to say as we talk that I could weave into my last piece.

(Arun Maira is the chairman of the Boston Consulting Group in India)



Activists at a Jan Sunwai for the right to information campaign

Diaspora gives like never before

RAM GIDOOMAL



Through NR Eyes

stand up comedy routines.

DJ Nihal of BBC Radio One joined forces with Bobby Friction to perform a special event for the aid agency OXFAM. They have also put together plans to link up with other leading musicians like Raghav and the Rishi Rich project for other events.

Faith groups have mobilised local people to lead relief efforts. Temples, mosques, gurdwaras, churches and community centres across the UK are flooded over with volunteers and gifts in kind spilling out of their doors.

One of the largest churches in London, Kensington Temple in Notting Hill, is releasing a UK exclusive from Anil Kant's recently released album 'Pray for India'. The album titled 'Hope Music to Change Lives' features his hit song 'Khudha' sung by the renowned King of Ghazals, Jagjit Singh. The album also features a special appeal from Johnny Lever and songs by other Indian music artists who have been generous enough to help raise funds for children's work including the reconstruction of home and schools.

I was also touched to see a special appeal by the Lions Club in Harrow, an area with a large Indian population, targeting their efforts to Banda Aceh in Indonesia. They had received a direct appeal for help from their Indian friends in that part of the world.

One Diaspora group with links, networks and relationship with another Diaspora group, responding with amazing speed and generosity. And stories of Diaspora groups responding to other Diaspora groups kept coming in.

Another friend from Jakarta, emailed me with news of his NRI group that has been actively involved in coordinating relief work in Aceh. Their local connections have enabled them to be effective link-people for outside agencies.

It is also heartening to see members of some Indian communities targeting their efforts to the devastation in Sri Lanka. The wife of the Indian CEO of a large software outsourcing and call-centre company in London, Prospectbase Ltd, has arranged home help and child care for their three young children and decided to go to Sri Lanka for two weeks. She told me: 'I lost a child recently and just feel for those who have been bereaved. I may not be a nurse or a doctor, but I can offer comfort and love to those who have been affected. I just cannot stay back and watch. I want to go and help!'

The response of the Diaspora to the Asian disaster fills me with awe and pride. Our people and the media have demonstrated a response reflecting global citizenship at its best. During previous tragedies, the focus of media coverage and concern dwelt only on Britons. This time, compas-

DIASPORA communities have come together in force to keep the spirit of giving alive following the devastating Asian Tsunami tragedy. The headlines in almost every newspaper in the UK reflect their incredible generosity. 'British Asians dig deep...' 'Spirit of people is astounding'

The stories from across the country are truly humbling. Celebrities, charity organisations and local groups have joined hands to honour the victims of the largest natural disaster in recent memory. As the South East Asian region begins to recover from the initial shock and is now facing the task of reconstruction and rehabilitation, all sections of the community are stepping up their determination to help.

Meera Syal, the star from the BBC's Goodness Gracious Me series, will be hosting a special charity event with Sanjeev Bhasker of The Kumars at No. 42 performing

tion has reached out to all without regard to ethnicity, religion or nationality.

My colleague Deepak Mahtani, International Director of South Asian Development Partnership (SADP), recounted his discussions with one of his Swiss business contacts in Geneva. At the end of the telephone conference call the board responded with a pledge of 100,000 Swiss Francs towards the initiative that SADP are coordinating with the Emmanuel Hospital Association in India. He told me how he just wept after putting the phone down, moved by the generous response of his Swiss associates.

A crucial challenge will however be sustaining efforts over a longer period.

I will never forget the generous response of the British Asian community following the earthquake in Latur in Maharashtra in 1993. However, once the story went off the headlines, the victims were forgotten. Six months later, I was approached by a breakfast TV programme, GMTV, enquiring whether there were any needy causes overseas that they could help raise funds for as part of a new dimension to their broadcasting. My mind immediately went to the forgotten victims of Latur. GMTV launched a special appeal on their Breakfast Television programme with a fitness expert, a person of African Caribbean origin, known as Mr Motivator.

The simple slogan for fundraising was 'Lose Pounds, Give Pounds' i.e. get fit and give to

a good cause. Several hundred thousand pounds were raised and a brand new hospital built in partnership with EHA named Priya GMTV Hospital. Priya being the name of a little girl who survived after being buried alive for several days. She was the longest surviving victim of that earthquake – saved by the iron frame of the bed she was hiding under.

Many similar stories are emerging of people who have survived the tsunami in miraculous ways - a man afloat on a coconut tree for eight days, a little child thrown by a wave to the top of a tree and literally hanging on for his life.

The challenge facing us all is to ensure that the efforts for rebuilding towns and villages continue long enough for the infrastructure of the affected areas to be rebuilt – but rebuilding will take more than money. The hardest hit communities will need near total reconstruction – that is if they can be rebuilt at all.

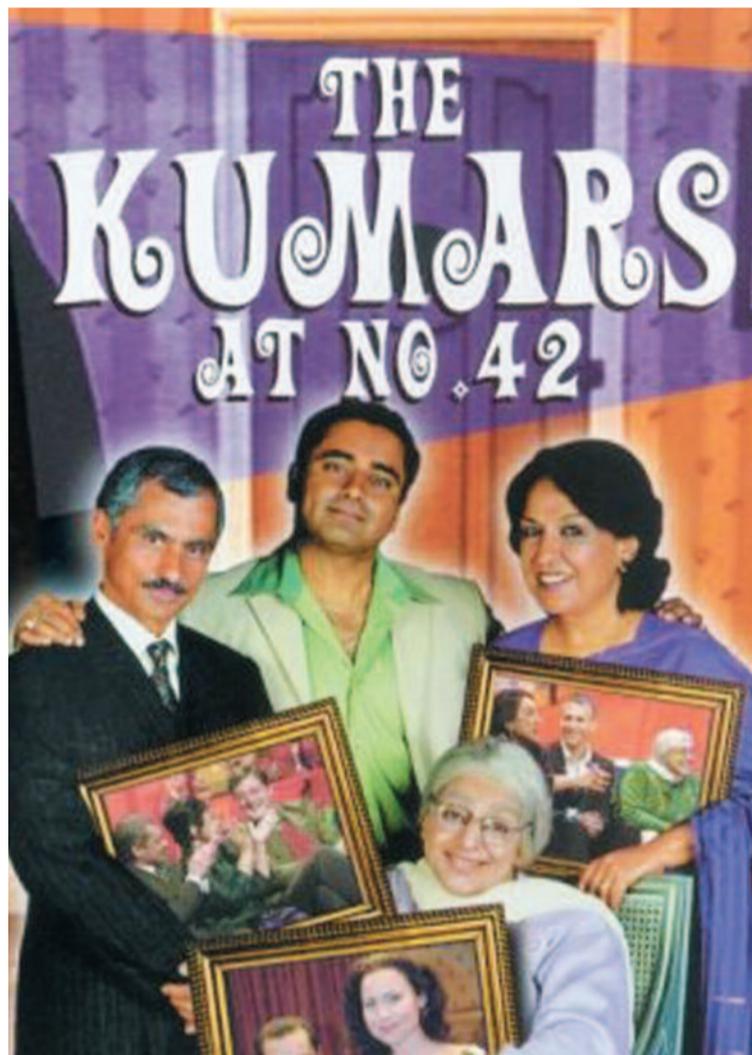
The first week back at school for many highlighted just how serious the issues are. In Sri Lanka, for example, students face important exams in March. How will they be motivated to study? Where? (Over 200 schools have been destroyed.) With what?

Local groups have responded by working to provide counselling, 'back to school' packs (with books, clothes and stationery), temporary study halls and vocational guidance - but they need long term help, the needs are overwhelming.

It is encouraging to see how this catastrophe has provided all manner of diplomatic openings. India, although itself afflicted, has sent aid to Sri Lanka and the Maldives to cement its standing as the primary power in the region. China is also loosening its purse strings. Within Sri Lanka, the government and Tamil Separatists appear to be cooperating in the relief effort, but recent reports seem to indicate that this may be short-lived.

And across the affected region, rumours are already spreading of greedy officials pocketing goods intended for the victims. Political differences between regions and controlling governments are causing tensions. The Diaspora communities, along with donor governments and aid agencies, have a crucial role and responsibility to ensure that internal political wrangling does not hamper the fair distribution of aid and relief. Transparency and accountability must be monitored for all funds transmitted to receiving countries. There is also the responsibility to ensure that the media takes an ongoing interest in reconstruction efforts as this in itself performs an accountability function.

(Ram Gidoomal CBE, Chairman, South Asian Development Partnership, London)



I was touched to see a special appeal by the Lions Club in Harrow, an area with a large Indian population, targeting their efforts to Banda Aceh in Indonesia. They had received a direct appeal for help from their Indian friends in that part of the world. One Diaspora group helps another Diaspora group.

Success is all about inclusion

SUBROTO BAGCHI

I was the last child of a small-time government servant, in a family of five brothers. My earliest memory of my father is as that of a District Employment Officer in Koraput, Orissa. It was and remains as back of beyond as you can imagine. There was no electricity, no primary school nearby and water did not flow out of a tap. As a result, I did not go to school until the age of eight. I was home-schooled. My father used to get transferred every year. The family belongings fitted into the back of a jeep – so the family moved from place to place and, without any trouble, my mother would set up an establishment and get us going. Raised by a widow who had come as a refugee from the then East Bengal, she was a matriculate when she married my father. My parents set the foundation of my life and the value system which makes me what I am today and largely defines what success means to me today.

As District Employment Officer, my father was given a jeep by the government. There was no garage in the Office, so the jeep was parked in our house. My father refused to use it to commute to the office. He told us that the jeep is an expensive resource given by the government – he reiterated to us that it was not 'his jeep' but the government's jeep. Insisting that he would use it only to tour the interiors, he would walk to his office on normal days. He also made sure that we never sat in the government jeep – we could sit in it only when it was stationary. That was our early childhood lesson in governance – a lesson that corporate managers learn the hard way, some never do.

The driver of the jeep was treated with respect due to any other member of my father's office. As small children, we were taught not to call him by his name. We had to use the suffix 'dada' whenever we were to refer to him in public or private. When I grew up to own a car and a driver by the name of Raju was appointed – I repeated the lesson to my two small daughters. They have, as a result, grown up to call Raju, 'Raju Uncle' – very different from many of their friends who refer to their family drivers as 'my driver'. When I hear that term from a school, or college, going person, I cringe. To me, the lesson was significant – you treat small people with more respect than how you treat big people. It is more important to respect your subordinates than your superiors.

Our day used to start with the family huddling around my mother's *chulha* – an earthen fire place she would build at each place of posting where she would cook for the family. There was no gas, nor electrical stoves. The morning routine started with tea. As the brew was served, father would ask us to read aloud the editorial page of *The Statesman's* 'muffosil' edition – delivered one day late. We did not understand much of what we were reading. But the ritual was meant for us to know that the world was larger than Koraput district and the English I speak today, despite having studied in an Oriya medium school, has to do with that routine. After reading the newspaper aloud, we were told to fold it neatly. Father taught us a simple lesson. He used to say, "You should leave your newspaper and your toilet, the way you expect to find it". That lesson was about showing consideration to others. Business begins and ends with that simple precept.

Being small children, we were always enamoured with advertisements in the newspaper for transistor radios – we did not have one. We saw other people having radios in their homes and each time there was an advertisement of Philips, Murphy or Bush radios, we would ask father when we could get one. Each time, my father would reply that we did not need one because he already had five radios – alluding to his five sons. We also did not have a house of our own and would occasionally ask father as to when, like others, we would live in our own house. He would give a similar reply, "We do not need a house of our own. I already own five houses". His replies did not gladden our hearts in that instant. Nonetheless, we learnt that it is important not to measure personal success and sense of well-being through material possessions.

Government houses seldom came with fences. Mother and I collected twigs and built a small fence. After lunch, my mother would never sleep. She would take her kitchen utensils and with those she and I would dig the rocky, white ant infested surrounding. We planted flowering bushes. The white ants destroyed them. My mother brought ash from her *chulha* and mixed it in the earth and we planted the seedlings all over again. This time, they bloomed. At that time, my father's transfer order came. A few neighbours told my mother why she was taking so much pain to beautify a government house, why she was planting seeds that would only benefit the next occupant. My mother replied that it did not matter to her that she would not see the flowers in full bloom. She said, "I have to create a bloom in a desert and whenever I am given a new place, I must leave it more beautiful than what I had inherited". That was my first lesson in success. It is not about what you create for yourself, it is what you leave behind that defines success.

My mother began developing a cataract in her eyes when I was very small. At that

time, the eldest among my brothers got a teaching job at the University in Bhubaneswar and had to prepare for the civil services examination. So, it was decided that my mother would move to cook for him and, as her appendage, I had to move too. For the first time in my life, I saw electricity in homes and water coming out of a tap. It was around 1965 and the country was going to war with Pakistan. My mother was having problems reading and in any case, being Bengali, she did not know the Oriya script. So, in addition to my daily chores, my job was to read her the local newspaper – end to end. That created in me a sense of connectedness with a larger world. I began taking interest in many different things. While reading out news about the war, I felt that I was fighting the war myself. She and I discussed the daily news and built a bond with the larger universe. In it, we became part of a larger reality. Till date, I measure my success in terms of that sense of larger connectedness.

Meanwhile, the war raged and India was fighting on both fronts. Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Prime Minister, coined the term *Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan* and galvanised the nation in to patriotic fervour. Other than reading out the newspaper to my mother, I had no clue about how I could be part of the action. So, after reading her the newspaper, every day I would land up near the university's water tank, which served the community. I would spend hours under it, imagining that there could be spies who would come to poison the water and I had to watch for them. I would daydream about catching one and how the next day, I would be featured in the newspaper. Unfortunately for me, the spies at war ignored the sleepy town of Bhubaneswar and I never got a chance to catch one in action. Yet, that act unlocked my imagination. Imagination is everything. If we can imagine a future, we can create it, if we can create that future, others will live in it. That is the essence of success.

Over the next few years, my mother's eyesight dimmed but in me she created a larger vision, a vision with which I continue to see the world and, I sense, through my eyes, she was seeing too. As the next few years unfolded, her vision deteriorated and she was operated for cataract. I remember, when she returned after her operation and she saw my face clearly for the first time, she was astonished. She said, "Oh my God, I did not know you were so fair". I remain mightily pleased with that adulation even till date. Within weeks of getting her sight back, she developed a corneal ulcer and, overnight, became

Success to me is about Vision. It is the ability to rise above the immediacy of pain. It is about imagination. It is about sensitivity to small people. It is about building inclusion. It is about connectedness to a larger world existence. It is about personal tenacity. It is about giving back more to life than you take.

blind in both eyes. That was 1969. She died in 2002. In all those 32 years of living with blindness, she never complained about her fate even once. Curious to know what she saw with blind eyes, I asked her once if she sees darkness. She replied, "No, I do not see darkness. I only see light even with my eyes closed". Until she was eighty years of age, she did her morning yoga every day, swept her own room and washed her own clothes. To me, success is about the sense of independence; it is about not seeing the world but seeing the light.

Over the many intervening years, I grew up, studied, joined industry and began to carve my life's own journey. I began my life as a clerk in a government office, went on to become a management trainee with the DCM group and eventually found my life's calling with the IT industry when fourth generation computers came to India in 1981. Life took me places – I worked with outstanding people, challenging assignments and travelled all over the world.

In 1992, while I was posted in the US, I learnt that my father, living a retired life with my eldest brother, had suffered a third degree burn injury and was admitted in the Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi. I flew back to attend to him – he remained for a few days in a critical stage, bandaged from neck to toe. The Safdarjung Hospital is a cockroach infested, dirty, inhuman place. The overworked, under-resourced sisters in the burn ward are both victims and perpetrators of dehumanised life at its worst. One morning, while attending to my father, I realised that the blood bottle was empty and fearing that air would go into his vein, I asked the attending nurse to change it. She bluntly told me to do it myself.

In that horrible theatre of death, I was in pain and frustration and anger. Finally when she relented and came, my father opened his eyes and murmured to her, "Why have you not gone home yet?" Here was a man on his deathbed but more concerned about the overworked nurse than his own state. I was stunned at his stoic self. There I learnt that there is no limit to how concerned you can be for another human being and what is the limit of inclusion you can create. My father died the next day.

He was a man whose success was defined by his principles, his frugality, his universalism and his sense of inclusion. Above all, he taught me that success is your ability to rise above your discomfort, whatever may be your current state. You can, if you want, raise your consciousness above your immediate surroundings. Success is not about

(Continued on page 20)

Will Delhi Govt act on its law now?

ARVIND KEJRIWAL



The Right To Know

SANTOSH, a 20-year-old Parivartan worker, was attacked by an unidentified boy on 30 December with a blade when she was coming to the office from home in the morning. The upper part of her throat was slit, which had to be stitched. If it had been a centimeter below, it could have been fatal.

This is the second attack on Santosh within a fortnight by the ration shopkeepers, whose corruption she has been consistently exposing by seeking their records using the Right to Information Act. On 13 December also, two boys attacked her face with a blade. Her hair got cut but her face was saved. This is the sixth attack on Parivartan workers in the last year and a half by the ration dealers.

What did Santosh do that the shop-owners turned so violent? Every day, she helps poor women in Sundernagari, a slum colony in East Delhi, file complaints with the local Food office of the Delhi government when they do not get their rations properly. Sometimes, records of ration dealers are obtained using Right to Information and complaints are made on the basis of discrepancies detected. Discrepancies range from false entries made in distribution records to forged signatures on cash memos. More than 100 complaints have been filed in the last few months. And at the end of every month, Santosh uses the right to information law to know the action taken on complaints.

The Essential Commodities Act requires that a shop-owner should be prosecuted for each of these offences. The punishment ranges from three months to seven years of sentence. Strong punishment is provided in Indian Penal Code too for some of these offences. In the case of PUCL vs UOI, the Supreme Court has directed that the licenses of such shops should be cancelled forthwith. The law, therefore, requires that local Food officials should suspend the shops immediately and register FIRs against them on receipt of such complaints. However, either no action is taken by the Food officials or at best, the shop-owners are let off with minor fines.

The complaints have proved to be a goldmine for the Food officials. A deal is struck to hush up each complaint. In one case, a shop-owner is believed to have paid about two lakh rupees to the Food officials to get one complaint against him scotched. In another case, a shopkeeper claimed having spent one lakh rupees. After taking the money, the shop-owners are told not to worry about any government action but to "take care" of Parivartan people, who keep nudging Food officials for action on complaints-hence, the violence against Parivartan workers.

But the complaints had some positive impact. The cost of corruption became steep with the flood of complaints. As a result, the shop-owners started opening up shops.

The people who had not received any rations for years started receiving their full quota. The ration dealers of Seemapuri told us that they have decided to give proper rations to everyone and not to give any opportunity to anyone to make a complaint.

The critical role in this drama was to be played by the "public servants". They did play a critical role but they acted against their masters. The people of this country pay through their nose and provide a comfortable living to these babus. The babus had the duty and the necessary powers to set the machinery right. They opted not to do so for purely selfish gains. Various surveys indicate that more than 90 percent of the rations are being siphoned off. Obviously, they are partners in the loot. As a result, the public has been suffering. When some citizens took initiatives to reform the system, these servants of the public created conditions to scotch these initiatives, even if it required violence. Simultaneously, they squeezed the ration dealers from all sides. In addition to regular hafta, they started extorting money from the ration dealers for settling complaints and providing protection against Parivartan. It needs to be understood very clearly that the real villains in this entire drama are these public servants. And their business is thriving because there is a total absence of any effective law under which they could be punished.

It is high time we had specific laws to hold them accountable and to punish them. Let the Government make certain basic commitments to the citizens of this country. Each Department should be asked to list down different types of interface that it has with the public. For each such interface, it should be clearly mentioned how and in what time would the work of a citizen be done. It should also be mentioned in how much time would complaints from the public be acted upon. These commitments should be non-negotiable. If any of these commitments are violated, the citizens should be able to appeal to an independent body like Lokayukta or a Public Grievance Commission (PGC). The PGC should have the powers to fix responsibility and impose penalties on the guilty officials within a fixed time frame for each case of violation.

When we approached the Delhi government after the attack on Santosh, a very senior authority remarked, "Jhanda utha kar chale ho to marna aur pitna to padega hi." (If you are fighting against injustice, be prepared to be beaten up).

Are we fighting a foreign government? The governments cannot remain a mute spectator if the people exposing corruption are beaten up and murdered.

It was easy for the governments to enact Right to Information laws. It would need a very strong political will to take action on the corruption exposed through its usage. The governments would also need to provide strong support to the people who use right to information and expose corruption, as they would be increasingly attacked by the vested interests. Right to Information laws provide a unique opportunity to declare a war against corruption. It provides an opportunity to every citizen to participate in this war. If all right minded people, both within and outside the government, join hands in this war, I am sure we can together make India a better place to live.

of thought processes, of dialogue and continuum.

Two years back, at the age of eighty-two, mother had a paralytic stroke and was lying in a government hospital in Bhubaneswar. I flew down from the US where I was serving my second stint, to see her. I spent two weeks with her in the hospital as she remained in a paralytic state. She was neither getting better nor moving on. Eventually I had to return to work. While leaving her behind, I kissed her face. In that paralytic state and a garbled voice, she said, "Why are you kissing me, go kiss the world." Her river was nearing its journey, at the confluence of life and death, this woman who came to India as a refugee, raised by a widowed mother, no more educated than high school, married to an anonymous government servant whose last salary was three hundred rupees, robbed of her eyesight by fate and crowned by adversity – was telling me to go and kiss the world!

Success to me is about Vision. It is the ability to rise above the immediacy of pain. It is about imagination. It is about sensitivity to small people. It is about building inclusion. It is about connectedness to a larger world existence. It is about personal tenacity. It is about giving back more to life than you take out of it. It is about creating extraordinary success with ordinary lives.

Thank you very much: I wish you good luck and Godspeed. Go, kiss the world.

(Address by Subroto Bagchi, Chief Operating Officer, MindTree Consulting to the students of the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore on defining success.)



Parivartan team under attack. Santosh (in the middle)

Success is all about inclusion

(Continued from page 19)

building material comforts – the transistor that he never could buy or the house that he never owned. His success was about the legacy he left, the memetic continuity of his ideals that grew beyond the smallness of an ill-paid, unrecognised government servant's world.

My father was a fervent believer in the British Raj. He sincerely doubted the capability of the post-independence Indian political parties to govern the country. To him, the lowering of the Union Jack was a sad event. My mother was the exact opposite. When Subhash Bose quit the Indian National Congress and came to Dhaka, my mother, then a schoolgirl, garlanded him. She learnt to spin khadi and joined an underground movement that trained her in using daggers and swords. Consequently, our household saw diversity in the political outlook of the two. On major issues concerning the world, the Old Man and the Old Lady had differing opinions. In them, we learnt the power of disagreements, of dialogue and the essence of living with diversity in thinking. Success is not about the ability to create a definitive dogmatic end state; it is about the unfolding

More custody deaths in Bengal

RINA MUKHERJI

WITH three recent custodial deaths in a row, the dubious track record of West Bengal's police is in the spotlight. Two of the men who died were high-profile criminals: Babulal Sharma was wanted for the murder of Dum Dum civic chairman Sailen Das. The second accused, Sampad Mukherjee, was indicted for the death of teenager Kuntal Sain.

An inquiry has been ordered into the death of the third accused, Abhigyan Basu. On November 12, he was hospitalised in a badly tortured and burnt state. Before dying, on November 19, Basu stated the head warden and his colleagues in Presidency Jail had burned him. When questioned, Joydeb Chakraborty IG (Prisons) claimed that Basu was mad and had killed himself. Human rights activists question why was a mentally unsound person lodged in a prison instead of a mental asylum?

According to statistics, West Bengal had the highest number of custodial deaths in 1999-2000 and in 2001. The West Bengal Human Rights Report of 2001 states since 1995, 458 detainees died in police custody, including 34 in police lock-ups.

People have died after being picked up for petty offences. Take, for instance, Deben Sardar, a labourer who was arrested for playing cards at Hogalberia near the Indo-Bangladesh border on October 12, 2003. He was picked up for "causing public nuisance" under Section 290 IPC. By noon, the same day, he was dead. There were injury marks on his abdomen, point out activists of Masoom, a human rights organisation, that took up his case. The police claimed he had died of illness.

Similarly, Barun Chattopadhyay, a worker of the defunct Bengal Potteries was arrested on September 27, by the Belghoria police "without any specific charge" says Masoom Secretary, Kirity Roy. The next day his family was informed he had been admitted to Sagar Datta hospital since he had become very ill. They rushed there only to find him dead. "In spite of a Supreme Court judgment making it clear that a memo of arrest has to be prepared by the arresting authority at the time of a person's arrest and members of his family informed without delay, Barun's family did not know anything about him until the next day when they saw him dead," points out Masoom advocate Abhijit Datta.

The Supreme Court judgment in the 1996 in the *D K Basu vs State of West Bengal* case clearly spells out the guidelines to be observed by the police while arresting, detaining or interrogating a person. As per the judgment:

- Police personnel carrying out arrest and interrogation should wear accurate, visible and clear identification and name tags with their designations, the details of which should be recorded in a register.
- A memo of arrest (including the relevant date and time) shall be prepared by the arresting police officer and shall be attested by at least one witness (either a relative of the arrestee or a respectable local person and countersigned by the arrestee)
- One friend or relative of the arrestee (or another person known to him or her who has an interest in his or her welfare) shall be informed as soon as practicable of the arrest and detention at the place in question.

But these norms are rarely followed. There are other related problems as well.

According to the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), there are no independent judicial officers to handle the filing of complaints relating to judicial deaths in West Bengal. The police are responsible for keeping court records. To begin an inquiry into a custodial death, the complaint has to be lodged with the police who could very well be friends of the accused. The likelihood of documents being tampered, damaged or "lost" is very high.

The post-mortem, too, is badly handled. Most morgues lack freezers, air-conditioners or equipment. The bodies rot within hours. Doctors assigned the task may not be qualified. The post-mortem is sometimes done by illiterate *doms* who use rusty nails and hammers to pries open the corpse and discard body parts at will, making it impossible to prove torture or subsequent death.

India has repeatedly refused to ratify the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment stating that there are adequate provisions in its national laws. Even if existing laws are inadequate, as claimed by activists, the Supreme Court judgment mentioned above and the Fundamental Rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution are wide enough to serve as protection.

Although the police have a legal duty to legitimately arrest criminals and interrogate them while investigating an offence, the law does not permit the use of third degree methods. In fact, as Roy and Datta explain, "the confession made to the police in a police station is never accepted under the law. A confession must be made to a magistrate to be legally acceptable." And therefore such torture is absolutely unnecessary, they point out.

The Third Report of the National Police Commission (1980) found nearly 60 per cent of arrests to be unnecessary or unjustified. Such arrests accounted for 43.2 per cent of expenditure in jails. The inhuman condition in jails and lock-ups is often the cause of death even when torture is ruled out. In February 2004, the government of West Bengal granted Rs 1 lakh compensation to the families of Nema Ghosh and Anesh Das. Both died in police custody on August 1, 2002.

Ghosh and Das had been locked into a cell crammed with 262 persons, as per police records. Independent witnesses put the figure at around 400. The cell was meant for only 15 detainees. The men collapsed as temperatures rose to 40 degrees Celsius. They kept pleading for water. But the policemen were selling water at Rs 40 per bottle. Over 150 other detainees were hospitalised. On June 30, 2003, officers of Coke Oven police station sent Kamal Badyakar to the Durgapur Court in Bardhaman district where he was held with 46 other detainees. Badyakar committed suicide by hanging himself with his underwear in the toilet, according to the police. A co-prisoner reported that the latrine was so filthy that even detainees used to sub-human conditions could not enter it. Such procedures are not in line with the Police Regulations of Bengal (1943). These rules clearly state there has to be 36 square feet of space for each prisoner in a lock-up and immediate medical treatment when required.

In recent years, West Bengal's police have been trying to curb crime by involving citizens. But such disclosures mar their image. When people accused of crime and murder die in police custody, investigation is stymied and justice miscarried.

Chintan makes a clean sweep

BHARATI CHATURVEDI

CHINTAN means many things. For us, it means an alternative perception, a different way of thinking. We apply this practice to all our work. We address issues of sustainable consumption and social equity. We seek to improve consumption choices and practices that benefit our health and our environment; practices that are sustainable and do not put additional burden on the poor. You might think, "OK. All that's fine, but how do we actually implement these politically correct ideas?"

We've taken waste as the most vital and visible aspect of consumption and we're addressing the issue of waste and toxics in its myriad forms.

First, we work in partnership with Delhi's waste pickers or rag pickers and small junk dealers. These are the people who mine the city's bins for paper, plastic, metals and find themselves additionally laden with cuts, beatings, insults and toxics. Is that fair? We believe that recycling in India is not a green activity -- it is a dirty and hazardous occupation with significant social and environmental costs.

That is why the Chintan team works for greater safety and empowerment for those involved in dealing with and recycling New Delhi's waste. We help them to learn more about waste, to deal with it in a safer manner, to

learn their legal rights and liaise better with the police, get the children educated (so that they don't have to grow up to be waste pickers) and insist on a safer livelihood and dignity. We have organised them into strong grassroots groups with confidence in their own abilities. These groups also include a strong association of small waste

KNOW YOUR NGO

traders, and of women waste pickers, apart from self-help groups and local level groups. In all, we reach out to at least 5000 persons in Delhi alone.

Secondly, Chintan also knows that many people actually want to do something about the way their lives are impacting the environment, but cannot. That's why we have teamed up with the Bharti Foundation to set up the Chintan-Bharti Waste Resource Centre. The centre takes up waste audits to reduce waste, offers solutions to waste related problems, has a rich library open to anyone interested, helps organisations to recycle their waste constructively and puts important information into the public domain.

We believe in education, but not the kind of boring stuff many of us underwent in school. We see it as a way of

skilling oneself to live more safely. We undertake programmes with school children, teachers, communities, waste recyclers and the general public and the government.

Thirdly, Chintan works on the issue of toxics. These are the poisons that we have to get rid off. We've been building awareness among the public and joining hands with other organisations to particularly work on children's environmental health.

Volunteers have a strong place here. From people who donate paper from their offices to those who help raise funds, surf the net, and who simply give their time doing things that matter with children and adult waste pickers. So basically, we work from the grassroots upwards, pushing for improved policy with an ear to the ground.

We often have to combine complex scientific ideas with everyday action, much of which is driven by class, prejudice and poverty. We work hard to make sense of the deep environmental destruction and social inequity around us, addressing it through our work in different ways. It keeps our minds ticking and the team on its toes. If you want to learn more, contact us.

Tribals suffer the court's orders

Biswajeet Padhi
Khariar

DURYODHAN Majhi, a Gond tribal living in the Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary in Nuapada, is a worried man these days. His community can no longer collect and sell non-timber forest produce (NTFP) to earn their livelihood. Their straitened circumstances are the direct result of a Supreme Court order passed in 1996 in the ongoing *T N Godavarman Thirumulkpad vs Union of India* case, and its insensitive implementation by the Forest Department of Orissa.

Nuapada is part of the Koraput, Bolangir, and Kalahandi (KBK) region, where 70-80 per cent of the families supplement their income through the sale of NTFP; 83 per cent of the families here fall below the poverty line (BPL). The tribals in the sanctuary are mostly Paharias and Bhunjias who live in harmony with the forest and the wildlife. Several forest officials acknowledge this fact. Wildlife has increased over the years. The latest survey indicates there are 32 tigers in the sanctuary, the highest number in Orissa.

The Paharias are bamboo craftsmen. Although their counterparts in Chhattisgarh, the Kamars, are included in the list of scheduled tribals, the Paharias are not. The Bhunjias practise a traditional and primitive form of agriculture. Their food habits are mostly forest-based.

The implementation of the Supreme Court's directive takes away the livelihood of nearly all the people in the sanctuary area. Much before the area was notified, the people had been supplementing their income by selling NTFP either as food, commodity or as barter. "The present situation arises because of the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) and the directive of the Supreme Court as understood by the Orissa government's Forest Department," said Pabitra Pradhan, an activist in Nuapada district.

On January 3, during a consultation on protected areas in Bhubaneswar, writer and activist Madhu Sarin pointed out that the Supreme Court directive had been wrongly interpreted. In states such as Haryana, for instance, the Forest Department has not stopped the collection of NTFP. Ashish Kothari of Kalpavriksh shares Sarin's opinion and his organisation is approaching the Supreme Court to seek correct interpretation of the court's orders.

The conflict between the people and the authorities began when, following an order issued by the principal chief conservator of forests and wildlife and chief wildlife warden of Orissa, collection of NTFP from the sanctuary area was stopped, citing the Supreme Court directive. Soon, starvation deaths began to be reported in the media. The Supreme Court then directed the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to conduct a fact-finding enquiry and it was established that lack of livelihood was the main reason for starvation in the region. The Supreme Court specifically ordered the spe-

cial rapporteur to "supervise government wage employment programmes to ensure continuous livelihood options to the poor to avoid starvation deaths".

Although the programmes were speeded up, they were not enough. The tribals depend on NTFP for survival because livelihood options in the region are limited, especially during the lean season. Access to irrigation is only 5 per cent. Nuapada is often afflicted with drought, although it receives more than 1,000mm of rainfall on an average. Nuapada has also been declared a zero industry area because of poor infrastructure, says Laxmikant Khamari, a retired government chief engineer. There is mass migration to urban areas, especially between November and June. It's only during the kharif season

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cial agriculture and allied activities provide wage employment to the people here.

In the Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary, the options are even more limited. Spread over 600 sq. km, Sunabeda is a hub of biodiversity, unique for its grassy plateau. This natural resource zone was notified as a sanctuary in June 1983, and officially declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1985. As per the records, the collector of Nuapada, vide his office order no. 5023, dated November 15, 1997, invited objections before determining the rights of the people, most of whom are tribals who have been living in the sanctuary area since time immemorial.

But it seems the whole process was rushed through to meet the deadline fixed by the Supreme Court in the Godavarman case. The collector unilaterally determined

the people's rights without listening to their grievances. The tribal communities thereby lost the right to collect and sell NTFP. According to Prassana Padhi, Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president in Nuapada, the rights of the people have not been determined as per legal procedures.

Also because of the Supreme Court order, the *Kendu* Leaf Division has had to close all its *phadis* inside the sanctuary area. On an average, 5,000-6,000 families living inside the sanctuary used to earn Rs33 lakh a year from collecting *kendu* leaves, according to the records of the Khariar *Kendu* Leaf Division. Add to this other NTFP like mahua and char, and it is clear that the tribals have lost a sizeable share of their earnings, says Pradhan.

This loss and the ensuing impoverishment will have other fallouts, too, say experts. According to a confidential report submitted by the Forest Department to the government, if the tribals' right to livelihood is taken away, many will resort to *ganja* cultivation. The terrain will work against the enforcement agencies curbing such activities. In recent years, richer people living outside the sanctuary have been trying to lure the innocent, impoverished tribals into petty crime. This will increase now. Illegal poaching of wild animals is also another dimension that will be added to the problem.

In April 2001, a movement to secure the tribals' rights to NTFP was led by A.V. Swamy, director of the NGO, Vishwas. Swamy and his group issued the government notice of 15 days. There was no response. They removed the check-post barrier, entered the sanctuary, and collected NTFP. The government filed five cases against Swamy, his associates, and an entire tribal village, accusing them of violating the law. The chief minister ordered the cases to be withdrawn after Swamy brought the situation to his attention. Yet the cases are still pending in the lower courts and the tribals are living in perpetual fear of being arrested.

Swamy says the tribals have been denied the constitutional right to govern themselves by a departmental order. The government talks about empowering panchayats, but four panchayats inside the sanctuary have been told not to take up developmental work.

The state of Orissa has placed a proposal before the Union government to settle all land held by the tribals and other poor communities before 1980, regardless of land classification, but the land occupied by the tribals in Sunabeda have not been recommended for settlement in their favour.

So far, the Orissa government has not initiated any steps to address the contradictions created by the Supreme Court's order. When these inconsistencies were raised before the NHRC, it directed the collector of Nuapada, Lingaraj Khadenga, to submit an action taken report within six weeks. Khadenga, who has worked in the Forest Department, said the government has moved a proposal to allow the tribals to collect NTFP. He promised to look into the matter, but no action has been taken so far.

Forest protection yields lac

Aaloka
Ranchi

TWO tribal women from the Rugdi and Pidihatu villages in the Murhu block of Jharkhand started an initiative to mobilise and sensitise their co-villagers about the necessity of protecting the forest around them. And so successful has been their effort that neighbouring villages, too, are now copying the idea.

Adjoining the two villages is a lush forest, spread across 300 acres. The two tribal women – Subharmani Bakru and Pyari Munda – went on a door-to-door campaign, talking to people about the significance of forests and how they depended on them. Gradually, they won over the whole village, which then got determined to protect the forest. Groups of villagers now guard the forest

through the night to prevent illegal felling. Nobody can cut a tree without authorised permission.

The forest is an important source of livelihood for the two villages. Rocky terrain and lack of water ensure that merely Goda rice can be cultivated here and that too only in the rainy season. But the forest presents a plethora of opportunities. Women use dried twigs and branches as fuel for cooking and used leaves to make bowls. Herbs and plants found in the forest are used as medicine.

But the most important forest resource here is lac, which tribals sell in the bigger markets. According to Shanti Mandu of Rugdi village, since the initiative began, the production of lac – a secretion of lac worms that is used as a silk dye and for medicinal preparations – has increased. Whole families survive on the rations bought by the women from the proceeds of their lac sales.

Manki Mundu of Pidihatu says, "All village activities are governed by community decisions. The joint decision to protect the forests has proved to be profitable for all." A major share of the profit incurred from this life-nurturing forest is provided to those with the poorest economic status in the village. As Sani Mundu of Rugdi village states, "Nature has gifted us a valuable wealth and it should be used judiciously and safely."

According to the village coordinator and the leader of this *Jangal Bachchao Andolan* (Save the Forest Movement), Subharmani Bakru, "The villagers understand that the forests are a member of our family and it is their responsibility to protect them. One cannot depend wholly on agriculture. If the villagers preserve the forests selflessly, one need not go outside the village to earn a living." (*Charkha Development Communication Network*)

EU emissions trading generous to industry

THE EU Emissions Trading Scheme starting 1 January 2005 marks a key phase in the EU's implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.

But WWF warns that the emissions market, and the potential climate benefits of the system, has been undermined from the outset by Member States allocating too many emission rights to their industries.

"Because of the over-allocation of allowances, there are hardly any incentives for industries to reduce emissions more than business-as-usual," said Oliver Rapf, Senior Policy Officer at WWF European Policy Office. "As a result, the CO2 emission market will most likely see low prices and the environmental effectiveness of the system will be reduced."

The EU Emissions Trading Directive is the key mechanism for EU member states to achieve their CO2 emission targets as agreed in the Kyoto Protocol.

According to the Directive, each member state has to develop a National Allocation Plan (NAP) establishing specific emissions targets for the power sector and energy intensive industries, as well as deciding how this target is divided among the installations.

According to WWF, all EU member states have distributed their emission rights rather generously, mainly due to heavy industry lobbying. Countries, including Germany, United Kingdom, Portugal, Denmark, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, France, and the Netherlands have given their industry a 'free ride' by handing out excessive emission allowances. They are inflating the CO2 market by giving out more than industry's "fair share" for achieving Kyoto Protocol targets.

All new EU Member States have also given their companies more allowances than their "fair share", however, these countries are mostly on track to achieve their Kyoto target.

WWF defines "fair share" as the emissions reduction contribution which national industries need to make in relation to their country's Kyoto target.

The tsunami and 9/11

THE Boxing Day knockout by the tectonic shifts in the Indian Ocean floor may have had, in addition to being one of the worst natural disasters to hit humanity in living memory, a more than minor effect on the paradigm of current human thinking.

In contrast to the sharply declining numbers (from the initial 60,000 to the final 2868 dead) in the other memorable disaster, the man-made twin-tower collapse on September 9/11, the death toll climbed upwards dramatically, to what may well end up into two or even three hundred thousands. The number of Europeans dead has already surpassed the total number of deaths on September 9/11. In this, the tsunami was indiscriminating in its choice of victims. It didn't differentiate between the white and the brown skinned, the French-speaking and the Sinhalese, the rich blue-eyed tourists or the poor lungiclad Banda Aceh residents. To paraphrase a famous post-9/11 European quote, on New Year's Day everyone on the planet was an Indonesian, a Sri Lankan, a Thai...

On September 12, 2001 the world's sympathy was with New York. The human energy released provided the momentum to start and carry on the 'war against terror' however misguided and skewed it may have ended up being. Similarly, today we have the energy of this vast human suffering and the sympathy it has engendered - many times greater than 9/11- which can be effectively channelled to fight many of the real dangers that mankind faces: natural disasters and related environmental issues, AIDS and other epidemics, hunger, poverty, water shortage...the list is long.

Without resorting to cynicism one can see that the sheer number of dead European tourists has touched a raw nerve in the West, where television and the Internet have been awash with images of the disaster. Public reaction has been overwhelming and money has been pouring into aid collection in unprecedented numbers, shaming governments and the corporate sector with their miserly offerings and finally bringing them around to be more generous. Of course one has to take their public pledges with several grains of salt, looking at their past record. Exactly a year ago, the earthquake in Bam, Iran elicited international pledges of about a

billion dollars of which only \$17 million have been realised.

The way United Nations is gearing up with Kofi Annan asking for \$1 billion to be freed immediately by pledgers and the public mood worldwide may just make a difference this time. Gordon Brown, the British finance minister, has outlined a big enough program (even before the tsunami) to tackle global poverty. Berlusconi has asked for a special G8 tsunami meeting. Other European heads of states are making similar noises.

The truth is, it is not an impossible job - if the moral will is there.. Europeans spend over \$30 billion on pet food alone. The United States government requested an extra \$82 billion for its war on Iraq. It's annual defence budget is close to \$500 billion dollars. One is free to imagine what a fraction of such amounts can do to fight some of mankind's problems, should the will be there.

As anyone familiar with my views, as expressed through this column knows,

the ineffectiveness of public protest and the resultant waning of public interest over the political crimes committed in the last few years, has nearly made a cynic of me. Looking at the world from Europe, it becomes evident that fairness and justice in global affairs are utopian concepts. The people's reaction to the tsunami however, makes me want to believe that empathy has not wholly disappeared in this land of "I and Me".

Having said that, one must allow time to verify that this 'television' horror, vicariously lived, will not dissipate from the minds of the viewers shortly, to make room for the next blockbuster. The fickleness of our short attention span has been pretty well researched and directly attributed to television. Little wonder the UN and all the other NGOs are so eager to bind all the pledgers of aid to sign and seal their pronouncements, made with so much bravado, before they wake up sober the morning after and renege or find devious ways to wiggle out. Discussion between the UN and Price Water House Coopers, one of the world's leading auditors is currently under way to establish the means to monitor the collection and disbursement of the tsunami aid funds in transparently. Keep your fingers crossed.

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

Small islands need protection

AT a United Nations conference on the future of small island developing states held on January 10 in Mauritius, climate change remained the thorniest item. Islands are most vulnerable to rising sea level caused by global warming. The recent tsunami disaster demonstrated how islands are unprepared for an unpredictable sea.

Tsunami warning systems will be installed in the Indian Ocean, said Michel Jarraud, secretary-general of the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). These systems would provide timely warning and can also collect data, including seismic data.

Islands face specific problems such as small size, remoteness, geographical dispersion, vulnerability to natural disasters, fragility of ecosystems and isolation from markets, among others.

Speaker after speaker emphasised the importance of preserving islands and highlighted the risks they face. The capital of Maldives, for example, was still under seawater and Tuvalu and other countries were threatened by rising sea levels. Those islands, and others, would take years to recover and enormous financing would be needed, said Paul Raymond Berenger, prime minister of Mauritius.

Marine and coastal areas were key ecosystems for islands. Island biodiversity was of global significance as many of the insular systems included sites with a high concentration of biodiversity. Island biodiversity placed small islands in a unique position to achieve targets set

by the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Barbara Bentein, area representative for Comoros, Madagascar and of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), said that nearly 40 per cent of the population of small island states were children. The recent tsunami had provided a stark picture of the risks run by those countries and their children.

Small island states suffered from a lack of access to wireless technology and other advancing technologies, said Cosmos L Zavazava, head of unit for Least Developed Countries and chief of business development in the International Telecommunication Union. For progress to be made, it was important that governments put in place an appropriate policy and regulatory framework to stimulate competition in the ICT sector.

During a panel discussion on 'building resilience', Toke Talagi, deputy prime minister of Niue said his country often faced natural disasters. A particularly bad cyclone last year caused extensive destruction to the island resulting in economic losses of \$87 million.

Niue had been referred to as the "rock" and was the largest upraised coral atoll in the world. The island gained independence in 1974.

The cyclone caused extensive environmental and biodiversity losses. Certain species were lost and the coral reefs sustained damage from which it would take years to recover. In reaction, the government and people of Niue took several steps to ensure that immediate recovery efforts would be sus-

tained in the long term. Initiatives in fishing and tourism were taken to create economic opportunities. Moreover, partnerships between a private sector company and the government were forged to for additional development activities.

Steps were taken to minimize the negative impacts to species. At the time of the cyclone, most of the country's water utilities were underground and, therefore, they were restored shortly after the disaster. New partnerships had also been formed among the European Union, Greenpeace and the government in renewable energy.

After the cyclone, communications were cut off for the weeks and it was then realised that technical communication facilities must be developed urgently. Moreover, a regional register of technical professionals was created, who could be called upon when required.

Cultural heritage was also a priority, especially since a large part of Niue's population was lost to New Zealand and Australia. Good managements and planning were critical when small islands were faced with such disasters, said Talagi.

Ultimately, management of risks was the rational approach to building the resilience of small island developing states. But most states lack necessary financial resources. In the wake of the disastrous impact of hurricanes, volcanoes and now the tsunami, the insurance industry was backing away from small islands. Cayman was no longer eligible for insurance, because of the recent hurricanes. (Reported from www.sidsnet.org)

In Leh, a royal helping hand

Rathi A Menon

Leh

BLIND Thukje is a singing sensation. Her tuneful voice echoes through the hills of Leh singing about disability. Sangrup, afflicted with cerebral palsy, is learning Thangka painting at the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies in Choglamsar, eight km from Leh. Samina, a paraplegic, is a topper at a regular school. Tsewang Dorjey, also paraplegic, is starting a shop in Leh town where he can display his exquisitely carved Chogtse tables.

You can take your pick of success stories from the Namgyal Institute for People with Disability (NIPWD) in Leh. Set up in 2001, the institute's director and founding father is the venerable King Jigmit Wangchuk Namgyal of the Namgyal dynasty. "He has given us a free hand," says Tundup Angmo, NIPWD's bubbly project leader. "His pet phrase is: I am confident that whatever you do will be in the best interests of the people."

The king's daughter, the princess, has a disability called Rhet Syndrome and needs constant support, says Tundup. Her health condition, made the king think about all those other princesses and princes out there in his hilly kingdom.

"Juley," smiles Rahul as you enter the institute. Rahul is mentally retarded. He helped his mother but never went out. "Now he comes here every morning and sells milk to a few households. He knows how to apply his mind and is quite ambitious. When we brought him to the institute for the first time, he was scared of traffic. Social etiquette and manners were alien to him. But now if he has to go out, he asks us, 'Am I looking all right?' We are planning to open a bank account for him. Slowly he will become independent," says Tundup.

That's what the Institute aims at. Disability is seen as a temporary obstacle to a person's progress. "We don't believe in providing limbs or in supplying everything they need. We encourage them to stand on their own

feet, even if those feet are on the wheelchair," explains Tundup.

The institute has a scientific approach. A community study is done to analyse the terrain, climatic conditions, support systems and resources available. Then the institute assesses how the disabled person can be fitted in. Is it better education, a job, special equipment or business skills that he or she needs?

So far 545 disabled persons have been identified in Leh district. It is a big achievement considering the inaccessibility of the terrain. The maximum cases are of

"The disabled are never neglected in Ladakhi society," says Tundup. "Even in old age, somebody will look after them." The Buddhist faith makes people compassionate. They believe disability is the burden of karma. "Parents think God will make my child all right. It is very difficult to break that psychological barrier," says Tundup.

orthopaedic and hearing disabilities.

"The disabled are never neglected in Ladakhi society," says Tundup. "Even in old age, somebody will look after them." The Buddhist faith makes people compassionate. They believe disability is the burden of karma. "Parents think God will make my child all right. It is very difficult to break that psychological barrier," says Tundup.

Vidhya Kalyani, who was with the Spastics Society of India in Delhi, started a training programme for a few volunteers from Ladakh at the Spastics Society of Northern India in Delhi. The NIPWD sends teachers for training regularly. "Though we have trained a few from mainstream schools so that our children get integrated, it

is still not perfect. Teachers complain about extra trouble. But we tell them, you can use games, songs, to make the children understand. Don't look for perfection in every child, look for what is special in each."

Interestingly, children of mainstream schools have accepted differently-abled kids. And why not? Samina, studies in Class Two and is a topper. "It makes you proud to see her speak to fellow students, sitting in her wheelchair," says Tundup. Students of a Government High School in Stok got a bridge constructed so that a schoolmate, confined to a wheel chair could attend class.

Another inspiring example is Mohammed Iqbal. He has quadriplegia and is confined to bed with a curved spine and arched legs. Iqbal is the president of the Disability Leadership Group, which spreads awareness and has over a hundred members in Leh district. "When he goes to villages, lying on a bed, and speaks to people, it creates an instant rapport that hours of our counselling can never achieve," says Tundup.

The biggest boost to livelihoods for the disabled emerged from the ban on plastic.

"One disability group is making paper bags at home. Another collects and distributes them in Leh and Choglamsar markets. They have a tie-up with the Merchants Association of Leh. A second

group has a paper recycling unit. Every winter they make notebooks and photo frames." It was a proud moment for these groups when their products-table mats, tea coasters, pen stands, diaries- were launched on World Disability Day.

The king has shown the path to a sensitive society.

The health department included disability for the first time in their 2001 population survey. A disabled person took part in an expedition to Stok Khangri, Leh's snow-clad peak at 21,000 feet, thanks to the Ladakh Adventure Sports Institute. The education department has a special educator now and another government teacher is undergoing training.

A workshop to make you smile

Civil Society News

New Delhi

WHY should we brush our teeth twice a day? Why should we rinse our mouth after meals? Why, why, why? Children are full of these whys. If they do not get an answer at home, they pose these queries to teachers. Can the teachers fail them? Well, to ensure that they should not, the Smile Foundation organized a workshop for teachers from the urban poor belt of the Capital region.

About 45 teachers from non-formal NGOs attended the one-day workshop held at the Indian Social Institute. With the slogan 'Daanth fit tho life hit', the Foundation, under the aegis of the National Oral Health Care Programme, conducted a lecture-cum-demo by Dr Vij. "This is part of our regular programmes. This time we chose teachers as they can make the children understand better," said Anupama of Smile Foundation.

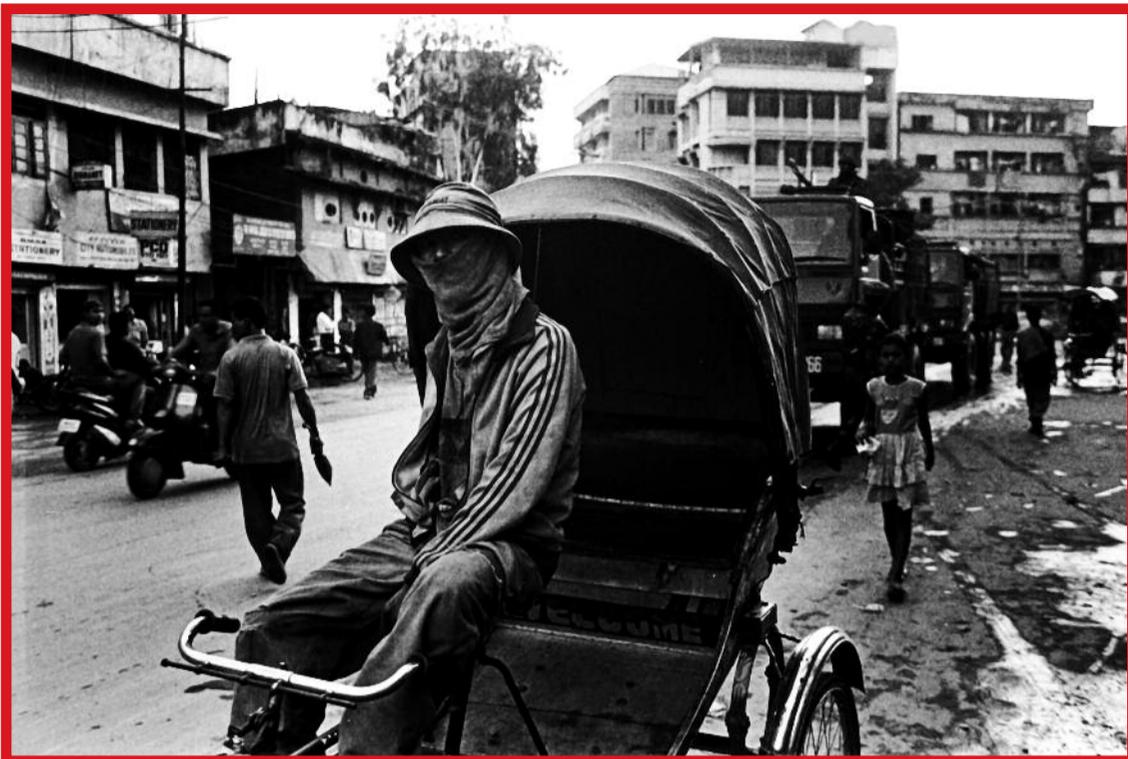
The workshop had two sessions. The afternoon session was devoted to First Aid and was conducted by Dr T C Gupta from the Indian Red Cross Society. He gave tips and made the teachers practice them with a dummy on the table.

So the teachers got hands-on experience on the right CPR-resuscitation method and how they should react in cases of heart attack, asthma and wounds. Though the workshop was only of one day, the lectures were so thorough that the participants could imbibe well within that short span of time.





Women in strife-torn Eritrea
by Morton Krogvold



Masked rickshaw-pullers in militant Manipur
by Suvendu Chatterjee's

Shots of resistance in Dhaka

Rina Mukherji
Dhaka

DHAKA saw a veritable explosion of photographic talent at its Chhobi Mela III. Photo-journalists showed rare panache in documenting third world conflicts and the hapless situation of innocents caught in a crossfire.

The theme "Resistance" was tailor-made for South Asia, a region that is the epicentre of conflict. There were pictures from war-ravaged Afghanistan, the Maoist movement in Nepal, Bangladesh's Naxalite movement and India's turbulent northeast. The exhibits went beyond borders and included photographs from Bosnia, Eritrea and Mexico.

Reza Deghati's portraits of proud Afghan mountain warriors resisting the Russian juggernaut in 1983 evoked images not easily forgettable. Their flat mud-homes bereft of any trappings of modernity spelt the identity of a people who have resisted modernisation. Especially noteworthy were photographs of a namaz-reading warrior and a rebel tribesman enlisting comrades for a war against the invader.

Shahidul Alam's pictures were about Bangladesh's forgotten Naxalite movement and its women. The portraits were sparse yet eloquent. Bangladesh's Naxalite movement, led mostly by women, lasted from 1973 to 1979. The women hoped it would usher in gender equality. But, as an erstwhile ex-Naxalite admitted, this was never to be. Alam's portraits of those revolutionary women, confined today to the drudgery of home and hearth, are telling.

Dipendra Bajracharya's photographs depicted the loss of childhood innocence. His pictures captured the confused faces of youngsters as they gaze at vehicles set on fire in Nepal. There were images of passive resistance,



Ahmedabad workers of closed mills
by Parthiv Shah

notably Suvendu Chatterjee's photo-essay on Manipur. Masked rickshaw-pullers shielding their identities were juxtaposed against the non-violent resistance of the Meira Paibi (mothers' movement). The dignity and determination on the face of the Meira Paibi leaders at a massive graveyard remains etched on every viewer's mind for a long time.

Sudharak Olwe's pictures of Mumbai conservancy workers, immersed in human filth even as they eke out a sub-human existence in overcrowded tenements, were stark and strong. It is not as if mechanisation cannot be introduced to clean this muck. It's just that no one cares.

Parthiv Shah's photo-essay on the Ahmedabad workers of closed mills who battle insecurity and loss of self-respect was another excellent piece of work. An entire way of life has changed and this was brilliantly captured by Shah. There is a telling photograph of the trade union office. And another showed women changing family equations as they take on the role of breadwinners.

Swapan Nayak captured the insecure lives of the Nowhere People living near the Brahamaputra chars. The changing course of the wayward river wrecks havoc in the lives of people. They have to shift at the spur of the moment. The gray, dreary, sandy landscape, the lost look in the eyes of people make the pictures poignant.

Abir Abdullah uses light cleverly. His pictures are technically brilliant. Abdullah depicted the sub-human lives led by Hindus of Adi Dhaka (old Dhaka), Bangladesh.

The glow of Puja thalis is the only light in their dark dingy homes which are still stigmatised under the Enemy Property (now Vested Property) Act.

Morton Krogvold's photographs document the effect of strife in the lives of women in Bosnia and Eritrea. Women always resist death for life. The evanescence of two Eritrean women walking away from the camera is offset by the darkness all around. His depiction of people surviving along railway tracks in Bangladesh were a reflection of human nature which always draws on its inner reserves.

Technical excellence marked Pedro Mayer's kaleidoscopic "Writing with Light." His photographs were about how the people of Mexico and Bangladesh interpret religion in their own context.

Two other photo-essays which caught the eye were Michael Szulc-Krzyzanowski's World of Little Heroes that contrasted the lives of two mentally disabled girls in different parts of the world and Omid Salehi's Sleeping Beauty which was about an Iranian man confined to bed for nearly two decades after a fatal accident.

The militant who loved Rafi

RAHUL PANDITA

WHENEVER I see kohl-lined eyes, I am reminded of Latif Lone wearing a pathani suit on his well-built body. Latif looked at you, his eyes rimmed with kohl, and the world looked more beautiful.

Those days there was no cable television and Doordarshan was as insipid as it is now. So the only entertainment in the Kashmir valley came from the antenna, fitted in the attic, shooting through the tin roof. Thanks to that we saw serials on Pakistan Television.

My uncle's son Ravi, who was our neighbor, had installed an antenna with a long handle on his verandah in the first floor of his house. The weather often played spoilsport and the antenna would change direction so we couldn't receive signals. When that happened, Latif Lone would be in demand. Wearing faded jeans, he would climb to the rooftop while Ravi's mother prayed for his safety. He would look at the sun, then look in the opposite direction, as if offering namaz, and set the antenna's direction right.

On the base of the antenna was a wooden block to keep the it in an upright position. When rain or snow fell, it became damp. Moss and some mushroom-like growth would cling to it. "What is this?" I would ask Latif impatiently, tugging at his pheran sleeves. He would lift me in his arms and say, "Algae."

Those days Mohammed Rafi's songs ruled the hearts of lovers and Latif Lone was one of them. On the streets if you met him, he always hummed a Rafi song. Latif ran a cosmetics shop, where girls went unhesitatingly and he slipped red and green bangles on their delicate wrists. But there was one who would not let him do so. Her name was Ghazala and Latif loved her. Ghazala was like a couplet on the lips of a Sufi singer. She always draped a dupatta over her head and looked like a leaf from a newly printed Quran.

As a child I would go for long rides on my cycle and often I saw Latif and Ghazala walking together on the by-pass bridge. Latif would see me and smile. I would wave enthusiastically at them and they would wave back. Everybody in my family knew Latif. If any lady got into a crowded bus a seat for her was assured if Latif was there.

Sometimes Latif would go to Lal Chowk to pick up Ghazala from the women's college and then board a Swaraj Mazda minibus from the bus stand near the clock tower. If I was occupying a seat and there was none other, I would leave the seat for Ghazala and stand with Latif. I felt proud, like a man and looked forward to giving her my place. Ghazala would want me to sit on her lap but I always declined. She would take my heavy school bag off my shoulders and keep it with her.

I told her one day that if I ever had a girl friend she would look just like her. Latif, who was standing nearby, burst into laughter and she hid her face in her hands.

In 1989, I saw very little of Latif. Ghazala would board the minibus alone and even when she smiled at me, her eyes were like deep pools of sadness. Latif would disappear for months on end. And then suddenly one day, outside Amla's grocery shop, I saw him with a few men, holding a sheet in his hands. He was collecting money for the local mosque. The radio played a song by

Mohammed Rafi, I remember, but his lips did not hum that tune.

In a few months time, the word 'crossfire' became an integral part of our lives. The killings started - selected killings. Militants barged into the house of B.K. Ganjoo, a telecommunications engineer. They wanted to kill him, but he hid himself in a rice drum in the attic of his house. The militants could not find him and began to leave. At the gate of the house, Ganju's neighbor signaled to them to go to the top storey. They climbed up and found him hiding in the rice drum.

Heartlessly they killed him on the spot. They even forced his wife to eat the blood-soaked rice. Killings like these resulted in a mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. We too left for Jammu, to start from scratch. In Kashmir, I had been gifted a pair of football shoes by my father. But I could not carry these with me. So I bought a pair of inexpensive shoes from Bata. They became a symbol of my 'migrant status'. The shoes felt like a badge, like a yellow star worn by the Jews during the Nazi rule in Germany.

In June 1990 I was sitting on a cement pavement outside my single-room home browsing through a local newspaper. Somewhere in the neighborhood, Mohammed Rafi's songs echoed across. Jo unki taman-na hein barbaad hoja. I read the headline: Dreaded militant Latif Lone shot dead in an encounter with the Army. Suddenly everything spun around me - the Bombay Beauties cosmetics shop, the algae at the foot of the antenna, faded jeans...and then Rafi's song came to an end.

It happened the day the results of the higher secondary school examination were declared in Kashmir. Latif stood outside his shop, under the Angel's Garden School building. He was wearing a new pathani suit and his eyes were decorated with kohl. Suddenly an army jeep screeched to a halt in front of him. Latif started running behind the school building. As he crossed the barbed wire leading to the nearby fields, his dress got entangled. While he struggled to release himself, the soldiers shot him. His body lay there, dangling on the barbed wire, like Toba Tek Singh's body in Manto's short story. That day, as I broke the news to my parents, the gas burner in one corner of the room that served as our kitchen, did not burn.

Around two lakh people attended Latif Lone's funeral. Another newspaper informed us that Latif had even fought in Afghanistan against the Russians. He was an expert in handling anti-aircraft gun, reported India Today. His comrades killed one of our Muslim neighbors, known for his addiction to opium, for allegedly informing the army about Latif. The neighbor had curly hair and his body was found hanging on a tree, a short distance from his residence.

A few weeks later, I was traveling in a minibus in Jammu. I got down before my destination and my friend thought the heat had driven me crazy. How could I tell him that I was just trying to avoid listening to the Rafi song the driver of the minibus was playing on his stereo system?

(Charkha Development Communication Network)



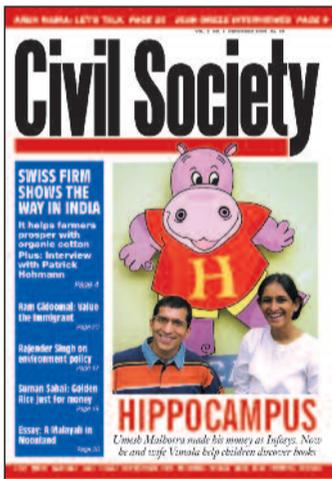
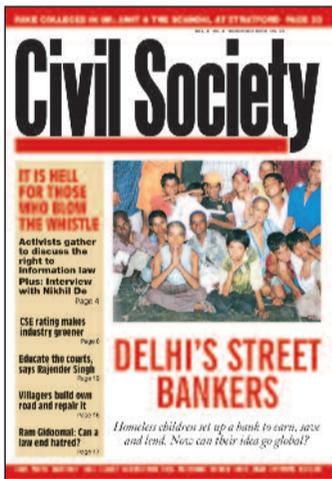
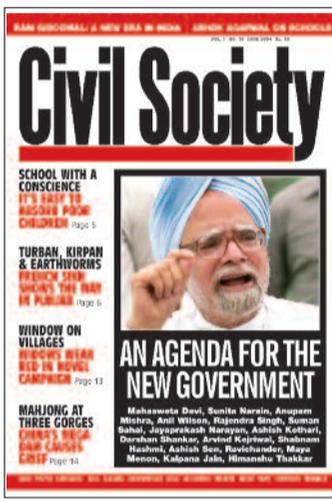
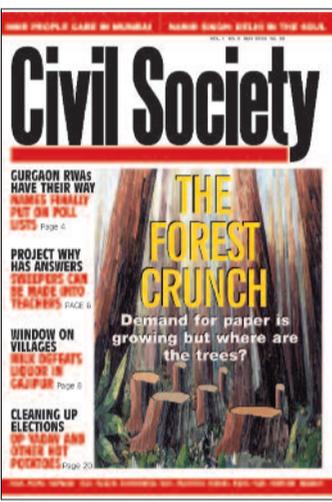
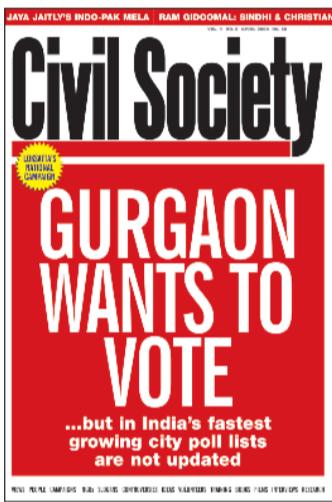
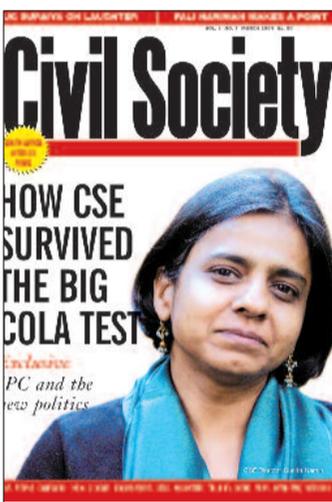
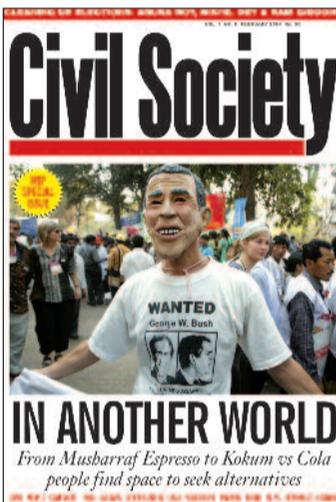
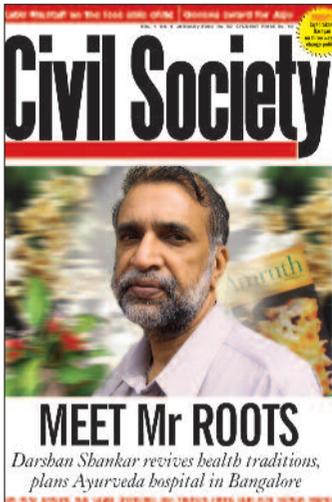
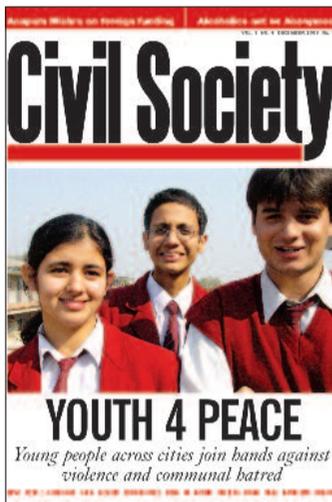
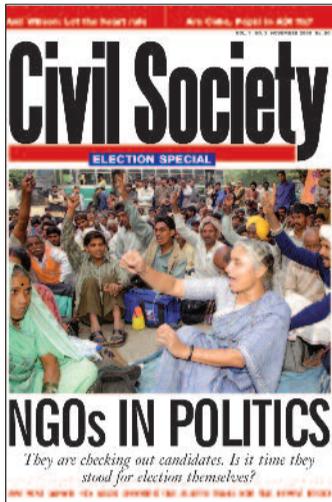
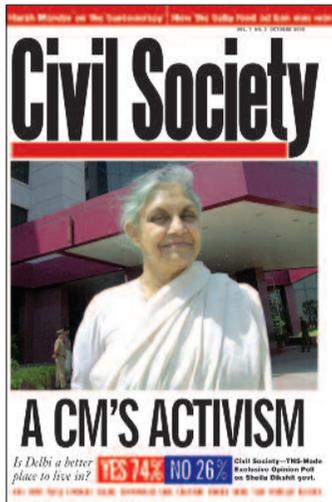
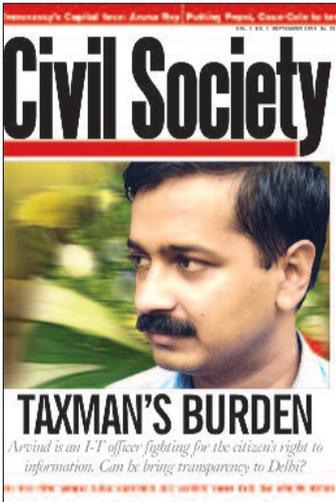
Those days Mohammed Rafi's songs ruled the hearts of lovers and Latif Lone was one of them. On the streets if you met him, he always hummed a Rafi song. Latif ran a cosmetics shop, where girls went unhesitatingly and he slipped red and green bangles on their delicate wrists. But there was one who would not let him do so. Her name was Ghazala and Latif loved her. Ghazala was like a couplet on the lips of a Sufi singer. She resembled a leaf from a newly printed Quran.

before my destination and my friend thought the heat had driven me crazy. How could I tell him that I was just trying to avoid listening to the Rafi song the driver of the minibus was playing on his stereo system?

(Charkha Development Communication Network)

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