

Civil Society

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COVER STORY



EVERYONE LOVES THE TIGER

A quick survey of what conservationists of different convictions are saying as the PM goes to Ranthambore and the tiger task force gets down to work.

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Cover photograph by Lakshman

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Civil Society

The dead tiger's tale

It has become fashionable to talk of economic reform in India only in terms of banking, stock markets and industry. Privatisation debates make our economists and administrators turn pink with excitement. All progress is invariably hooked to FDI and GDP. But when it comes to managing India's biggest natural asset, its forests, no one seems interested in finding solutions. Reform must reach here. It only requires a few chartered accountants and MBAs to get the government out of companies. But getting the government out of forests, so that they can be used to create wealth for everyone, is a much more complex task.

The disappearance of tigers from the sanctuary at Sariska and the rapid decline in their numbers elsewhere in the country has once again shown up the colonial moorings of our forest policy.

The tiger deaths have made headlines, but the rot goes much deeper. India is not only losing wildlife, but its forests remain under utilised and degraded. Used creatively, they can provide widespread prosperity. Healthy and well managed forests are also needed for a wider ecological balance.

Forest policy, as we know it, has been inherited from the British. Its chief supporters have been the conservationists who believe that armed guards can stop felling and poaching.

Under this policy, tribals and other local communities have been excluded even though traditionally they have been efficient managers of forests. These people, mostly alienated and hostile, now either live illegally within forests on in abject poverty on the fringes. They are harassed by the forest service and are easy recruits for poachers and smuggling syndicates who put their traditional hunting skills to use for their nefarious business.

If the tiger and other forms of wildlife are to be saved, then forest policy has to change. It has to be fashioned at ground level because years of neglect have made issues complex. Activists, alienated communities and the government can work together. In a country as diverse as ours, it is perhaps foolish to look for a single answer.

Several local level solutions are needed – solutions that are as different from each other as the Sunderbans is from Sariska. It is for this reason that we have tried in our cover story to talk to a cross-section of people who may not normally find a voice in the media. Many more need to be spoken to and our point is that there should be a multiplicity of views.

It is important to note that where the tiger is hale and hearty and safe from poachers, local people have been involved and governance has come with flexibility. This message should not be lost. It is also necessary to look at other countries. Nepal, for instance, has taken a big leap into community forest management and benefited from it.

With this issue we begin a new section called Insight devoted to grassroot research. We begin with an offering from Harnath Jagawat on the Hariyali programme for watershed management.

We are also proud to launch a column by Harivansh, chief editor of our editorial ally, *Prabhat Khabar*.

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Taking the LEAD on plastic bags



Jill Carr- Harris

Civil Society News
New Delhi

LEAD India is leading a campaign to wean people away from using plastic bags. Called, "Living without plastic bags – It's possible," the anti-plastic bag campaign is being launched through Chintan from Defence Colony in Delhi.

In addition to Defence Colony, all plastic bags will be banned in the capital's ethnic market Dilli Haat on June 10. LEAD Fellows will also not use plastic bags for four days. A programme of street plays and skits, to educate people on the evil plastic bag, is to be held at India Gate on 11 June.

Attempts have been made in the past to get people to refuse plastic bags. The Delhi government repeatedly exhorts citizens to resist the temptation, but the plastic bag pops up everywhere.

Shopkeepers shrug and say that people ask for them. So how do you get people to honestly say no and opt for the eco-friendly cloth bag?

"It is one step backwards and two steps forward," says Jill Carr-Harris, Director of LEAD India. "But social change is a process of creating awareness. It does not happen with just one campaign."

What is LEAD planning to do?

As an environmental training institute, LEAD is concerned by a situation where many people are talking about environmental clean-up, environmental sustainability and so on but when you look around there is indifference to physical environments. An example of this is the profusion of plastic bags which are littering tanks, sewers, water pipes, children's parks, rail lines, vacant lots. Moreover, in spite of a government ban on the sale of recycled plastics in 1998 and again reaffirmed in 2001, plastics continue to be used. It also makes one wonder whether there is any genuine link between our talk on sustainable development and action towards plastic clean-up or looking for alternatives.

Campaigns are not LEAD's mandate, so is the organisation moving in a new direction?

LEAD is a capacity development organisation on sustainable development. LEAD is using this campaign of 'Living without plastic bags - It's possible' as a way of helping campaign groups like Chintan, a Delhi-based group working with waste-pickers, to be more effective in advocacy and contact building. Some of our Fellows are involved with this issue, and we are hoping to tap their skills in mentoring others.

Most of the difficulty that we see with young campaign groups is first, they do not get their voice heard among decision makers or the citizens that are instrumental with the political elite, and secondly they need to reflect on, and improve their campaign techniques so as to increase their overall effect. LEAD has a role to play in assisting with skills development with regard to these two areas.

There have been many attempts to stop plastic bags.

Social change, whether in plastics or otherwise, is not something that happens after one event or one campaign. It is a process of making people aware and then often a process of trial and error. World Environment Day gives us a chance or an excuse like a peg to hang our campaign hat on.

World Environment Day gives us a chance or an excuse like a peg to hang our campaign hat on.

What alternatives to plastic bags do you suggest?

We are working with poor women to produce more cloth bags from tailor cuttings. In other words, the production of packaging materials, for instance, cloth, bamboo, paper, etc. in the past was employment generating and effectively cheaper. So also the employment of waste-pickers was more when there was more recyclable products. We used to live on local biomass materials without depending on large corporations producing plastics – which by the way is an oil-based product coming from places that are oil producing states.

PROGRAMME

June 8-11: LEAD Fellows will not use plastic bags

June 8-9: Campaign in Defence Colony market

June 10: No plastic bags in Dilli Haat

June 11: At 6 pm, street plays and skits at India Gate

If readers want more information, please contact npd@leadindia.org

DEFENCE C

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FOR years together, residents of Defence Colony in south Delhi have watched the decline of their neighbourhood. Builders have muscled their way in, a storm water channel is choked with filth, cars and two-wheelers take shortcuts through the narrow inner roads, the main sewer is too narrow and the local market is often the scene of brawls because of restaurants and bars.

This is a sorry state of affairs for an area originally set aside for some 4000 ex-servicemen to live but where now more than four times that number occupy flats and many others come to work in offices opened illegally in residential buildings.

"A first class colony has been reduced to a slum by the municipal authorities," says Brig RD Dhawan, general secretary of the Defence Colony Welfare Association. He points to the ugly cluster of buildings in the market area and filth around illegal food stalls.

"We have a dirty drain running through the colony, garbage dumped in the open, slums, roads dug up and not repaired. They should charge us the house tax applicable to the lowest category of colonies in Delhi," says Geeta Bhargava, joint secretary of the association.

The sewer system of the colony was renovated because of the persistence of the association. The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) finally opened it up and dredged it. The sewers hadn't been touched for 50 years before that. No one in government had shown any concern despite the load having increased manifold.

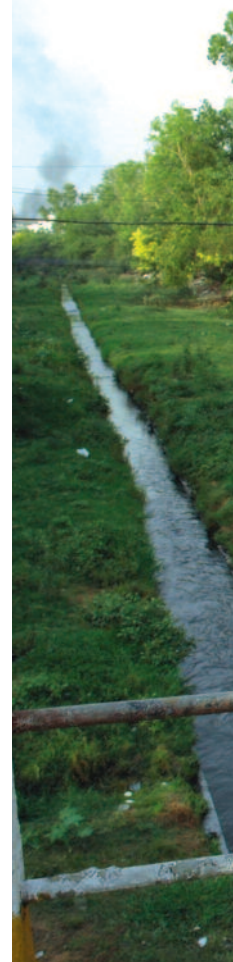
Where work has been done in Defence Colony, the residents can claim credit for it. Dhawan, Bhargava and Comdt Lajpat Dang, treasurer, take us on a tour, pointing out the parks that are maintained by the residents and look good. A rainwater harvesting system has similarly been put in place with the help of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

The residents have often been left to their own devices to raise money. The parks are paid for through annual contributions: the houses on the periphery of the park forking out more than the others.

The residents have also found support from Airtel, the telecom giant, which has supported their community development efforts such as composting and water harvesting.

Appeals to the councillor and MLA of the area, both from the BJP, have yielded no result. "We didn't get a sausage out of them," says Brig Dhawan.

But there was the odd lemon on offer. Ajay Maken, often called the young and dynamic face of the Congress, actually suggested covering a part of the channel and using it as commercial space! The residents said a hasty "no thanks" to Maken.



COLONY ASKS TOUGH QUESTIONS

Meetings with the deputy commissioner (DC) were mostly aimless. Delhi's much-publicised Bhagidari scheme, the brainchild of Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit, under which residents and the government work together to solve governance problems, was of no help either.

When the residents went to the government with questions they were mostly turned away. For instance, they wanted to know who were the owners and the builders of the properties that were being freely converted in contravention of zoning norms. They also wanted information on the civic works undertaken by the municipal authorities.

No answers were forthcoming from the authori-

Taking a cue from Amanullah, the other residents have bunged in four similar petitions. They now want details of what has been done and how much has been spent on sewers, garbage vats, roads and so on.

They suspect that the petitions will open a can of worms. For instance, the roads were resurfaced recently but are already giving way. The Right to Information Act allows them to ask for inspection reports, bills, approvals and the exact nature of the work claimed to have been done.

The residents have set up groups to look closely at civic works and prepare for confronting government officials with inconvenient questions.

LAKSHMAN



Geeta Bhargava, Brig. R.D. Dhawan and Comdt. Lajpat Dang at the infamous drain

ties on any of these counts. On the contrary, the more interest the residents took in saving their colony from further decline, the more obdurate and uncooperative people in official positions became. There was always the danger of turning officials off completely.

When they went to someone as high up as the Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi, he, incredibly, told them to forget about past illegal constructions and misuse of residential space for commercial purposes. But if there were further violations, they could complain to him. They went back with four written complaints. Once again there was no response.

The residents of Defence Colony finally decided to attack the Delhi government's silence by going to the High Court and simultaneously using the state Right to Information Act. One of the residents, Parveen Amanullah, with the help of Arvind Kejriwal and his group, Parivartan, had on her own filed an application seeking to know the status of civic works claimed to have been undertaken in the colony.

"We may not be able to purge the whole place," says Brig Dhawan. "But what I'm hoping is that once we initiate the process officials will realise that the law will finally catch up with them. We hope our petition will make the officials cooperate and improve things."

The petitions under the Right to Information Act were filed in the end of the April and answers are required to be given within a month. At the time of going to press, the residents of Defence Colony were still waiting. The decision to take on the government also comes as a result of disillusionment with the Bhagidari system of participatory governance in Delhi.

Brig Dhawan says: "Under Bhagidari we are required to cooperate with the government instead of it being the other way around."

He cites the example of collection of water bills by residents' welfare associations. The government announced with much fanfare that the bills could be paid painlessly in the offices of the associations. But in reality this was never the case. "We had to

The right to information

Civil Society News
New Delhi

ON 11 May, the Lok Sabha passed the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005. The law comes into effect 120 days after being passed and applies across the country.

The law is the result of the efforts of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI). Finally it went through the National Advisory Council (NAC) chaired by Sonia Gandhi.

A citizen can ask and get information from the government. So if your roads are bad, if sewers are overflowing, zoning plans are being violated, a simple application is all that is needed to get to the facts. Other matters of governance are also covered.

- **The new law is applicable to all levels of government: Central, state and local.**
- **A strong information commission at the state and central levels will deal with violations of the law and impose penalties.**
- **An application for information has to be answered within a fixed number of days. There is a penalty for each day of delay.**
- **An application for information cannot be refused. There are penalties for wrong information.**
- **Security and intelligence agencies have to provide information on corruption and human rights violations.**

collect and deliver bills and papers each time. Which association can do that? We neither have the resources nor the manpower. So finally we just dumped it. All that was needed was some simple cooperation."

Then again, Defence Colony has a good record in segregation of garbage: biodegradable stuff from plastics etc. It has managed to achieve 70 per cent compliance. It was given two vehicles for collecting the bins, but suddenly, without any reason, one of the vehicles was taken away.

So what do you do if you are fed up with your government and want to get it to work by using the law on the right to information.

Step One: Use an NGO like Parivartan in Delhi to guide you in the matter of filing applications for information.

Step Two: Have a detailed knowledge of your neighbourhood. Look for the simplest of civic works like roads and sewers.

Step Three: Once you have exposed the guilty hang in and insist on punishment. If there is no accountability the same problems will recur.

Award for Sister Leo

Madhu Gurung
New Delhi

THE first thing you notice about 57-year-old Sister Leonardo Lakra is not her nondescript brown saree or the silver medallion of the Ursuline Convent to which she belongs, but her brown eyes that reach out to envelope you with warmth.

Day in and day out in indifferent Delhi, she, a doctor and a counsellor move from house to house, maybe five or six, letting relatives unburden their fears about their loved ones while they try to make the last days of terminally ill cancer patients comfortable.



Sister Leo

Leonarda Lakra was 20 when she joined the Order of Saint Ursuline in Ranchi, leaving her peasant family behind in Gumla district. At 22, she underwent her first professional commitment to nunhood. That very year she began a three-year training programme as a nurse and mid-wife. Her first posting, as a nurse, after she had worked a year

in a hospital, was to the remote villages of Jumpani, Rangari, Samtoli and Tongo in Gumla district. "Patients would come to the dispensary carried on bullock carts or on the backs of their relatives. Often I was their last stop." For seven years Sister Leo, as she is popularly called, would visit villages for delivery cases and to cheer up her patients.

In 1982, she was chosen by the Convent to attend the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health in Kolkata. She returned to teach a post-graduate course at the Ranchi Diocese, training village health workers in first aid and basic medical care. For 10 years she remained at the Lohardaga Saint Ursula Hospital as a public health tutor, after which she came to Delhi as health coordinator for the Arch Diocese in 1995. In 1998 she joined Cansupport as a nurse to provide palliative care for cancer patients.

"In the beginning it was very difficult to watch the agony of the terminally ill and the constant stress and helplessness of their loved ones. Every day I would leave a part of me behind," she recalls. Most of the terminal cases that Cansupport takes in are from the organisation's own helpline, or referred by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).

Often when she encounters despair from her patients she prays for their "happy death". The case that left a lasting impression on her mind is that of 45-year-old Ramesh, who was suffering from cancer of the penis. His relatives were unable to look after him because of the foul smell that emitted from his body. Sister Leo asked his relatives to boil neem leaves in water. With this she showed them how he had to be sponged and cleaned. "The next visit was a happy one. There was no smell, he had guests and he was eating."

Sister Leo travelled to London recently to receive the prestigious 'Best Palliative Care Nurse of the Year Award, 2005' which has been jointly instituted by Macmillan Cancer Relief and the International Palliative Journal of Nursing.



Kamal Kapoor and her students

School gets govt roof

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

SIX years ago, Kamal Kapoor settled into her house at Silver Oaks in Gurgaon's DLF Phase One. Having retired from formal employment, and not having much to do with her time, she started a school for children of migrant labour on her lawn.

At first there were just five children. But Gurgaon, the epicenter of a real estate explosion, has a lot of migrant labour at construction sites. Many migrants are servants in middle-class homes.

Kamal Kapoor's school, with just five students, soon attracted a flood of poor children. She moved from her lawn to a verge down the street. But soon when traffic picked up, and yet more children came, the verge was no longer a safe place to be. There was always the danger of children getting run over.

Managers of DLF, the developers of Silver Oaks, then asked her to shift to a part of the colony's green belt where she arranged benches, tables and a row of steel cupboards under shady trees.

Few schools look so idyllic. And the number of children kept growing till it was 250. Teachers came as volunteers from the neighbourhood. Companies chipped in to provide a mid-day meal, milk and so on. Similarly anonymous donors turned up to pay for books and uniforms. The support was really quite endless.

Then last month, she was suddenly told by the Haryana government to pack up her school. Just like that. Officials of the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) told DLF and Kapoor that a school under the trees of Silver Oaks was not their idea of how a green belt should be used. It did not matter to them that the school was changing the lives of so many children and giving them an education and a meal.

Faced with eviction, Kapoor ran around for a reprieve. DLF was sympathetic, but said it could not contravene HUDA. Kapoor had earlier been given a small building meant for a crèche in DLF

Phase One. But that was just good enough for an activity centre. It could not accommodate 250 children. So she had used it for computer classes and for teaching cooking to the children.

But for the regular classes a much bigger space was needed. And with HUDA adamant about implementing its rules, it seemed the school would have no option but to shut down. It was then that a petition was made to the Department of Child Welfare of the Haryana government for an empty school building in DLF Phase One.

This school building was put up as a part of the original infrastructure of the colony. It had never been used and became a crumbling mess. The Department of Child Welfare said Kapoor could have the building if she undertook to repair it at her own cost and paid a monthly lease of perhaps Rs 1500.

This new building has classrooms, toilets and a playground. It has rooms for an office. It is possible to run a school here in an organised manner.

So, very shortly, Happy School will be shifting from its lovely location under the trees of Silver Oaks to its new address where it will hopefully enjoy greater permanence.

What does it take to provide basic schooling and a hot meal a day to 250 children? For sure, the first thing it requires is grit and an interest in teaching children. Kapoor began on her lawn when she needn't have done anything at all. Ditto for the volunteers who take classes, week after week.

But what about money? In these days when schools have become flourishing businesses, what does it cost to touch 250 young lives? The figure shocked us: just Rs 50,000 a month! If you were to hike that ten times it would be Rs 500,000 and Kapoor says she would not know what to do with that kind of money.

At the school, children laugh and play and gather around you to show their drawings. The bigger ones learn to read and write, add and subtract. This is a school as good as any other. It is also what few other schools with fat fees and air-conditioned buses can claim to be: it is a Happy School.

Hazaribagh women fight liquor

Prabhat Khabar
Hazaribagh

AN anti-liquor campaign begun by the women of Mukundganj, a village in Jharkhand's Hazaribagh district, has spread like wildfire to nearly 100 villages. Led by poor and illiterate women, with no help from any outside agency, the movement has forced the administration to begin development work. Ponds and schools are finally being constructed. Alternative livelihoods are on the anvil. The women, ignored all these years, now want to carry out development work themselves.

Mostly Dalit families, classified as below the poverty line (BPL) live in Mukundganj, the epicentre of the agitation. For years they brewed and sold illicit liquor to survive. There was no other work available. The government's development schemes, locked in red tape, always bypassed them. Most of the villagers don't even have ration cards.

The liquor, a cocktail of herbs and chemicals, made people sicker and poorer. Young and old got addicted. On an average, a villager, who worked as a daily wage labourer, spent Rs 20 to Rs 30 per day on alcohol. There were drunken brawls in the village. Women were unsafe. Families fell apart. Even children, it was said, asked for alcohol, instead of milk in Mukundganj.

Then, at 11:30 am on 28 March, the day after Holi, an agitation to pull Mukundganj out of its quagmire started. The inebriated men had fought violently with everyone during Holi. They had misbehaved with a woman. Fed up with their drunken husbands, sons and fathers, the women met at the local Devi mandir and decided to fight the growing terror of alcohol.

They spilled on to the streets and broke illicit liquor manufacturing units. They warned their men to stop brewing and consuming alcohol, or they would launch an aggressive agitation. Dalit women, who earned money by selling liquor, destroyed their own

shops. Most of the women were vegetable vendors.

"After selling vegetables the whole day, when I would return home, I used to see my husband drinking at the village liquor den. I felt helpless. My son started drinking as well. Both would fight after getting drunk. The peace of my home was shattered," said Kunti Devi of Mukundganj.

"Liquor made me a widow. My husband, who was a driver, used to drink and drive. One day he rammed

demanding alcohol. Entire families have been destroyed."

Prabhat Khabar broke the story on its front page. Other newspapers followed. The electronic media tracked it too. News of the agitation reached many villages. More women joined the anti-liquor movement. The Lakshmi Mahila Mandal, a group of women who brew and sell liquor, raised objections. In Charhi market a pitched battle between the two sides followed.

But the opposition got swept aside as the agitation developed a momentum of its own. The women targeted people buying liquor. They destroyed small houses where liquor brewed with rice was being made. They also started demonstrating before senior officials of the district. Public pressure forced the police and local administration to act against illicit liquor.

The nature of demands began to change. The women now asked for 50 percent reservation in the panchayats polls, when they occur, and demanded the district administration take up development projects in their areas. Hazaribagh DC, Rahul Purwar, a young and sensitive person, went to Mukundganj village with his subordinates. He assured the women that development work would be started soon. Ponds, hand pumps and primary schools are being constructed in the village. These are likely to generate employment. The women are keen that alternative livelihoods be created.

All the liquor shops in Mukundganj have closed down. Even if this movement fizzles out, it has left a deep impact on the personality of these rural women. They feel they have a voice and a role in society. Whenever panchayat elections are held in Jharkhand, different women will emerge from Hazaribagh's villages. The new rural women may be illiterate but they are becoming bolder, more confident and aware of their rights, on their own.

(By arrangement with Prabhat Khabar, Jharkhand's leading Hindi daily)



Women breaking pots in which liquor was brewed.

Hazaribagh DC Rahul Purwar went to Mukundganj and assured the women that development work would be started soon.

the car into a tree and died. I bear the burden of looking after the children. I don't want other women to suffer the same fate," explained Usha Devi.

"My husband is only 30 years old but looks about 60," says Sita Devi. "He becomes unconscious after drinking liquor. My children have also started

Bank asks child to repay loan

Prabhat Khabar
Ranchi

A seven-year-old boy, Raju Mahto, has been asked by a cooperative bank to repay a loan of Rs 25,000. The money had been given to his father who died some months ago.

Raju Mahto is an orphan. He lives in Heth Budhadeeh village in Bundu Block of Jharkhand.

The bank has demanded repayment, once or twice. Raju's relatives are also poor, and can't help him to repay the money.

His father, Doman Mahto, had received a holler grinding machine worth Rs. 23,5000 under the Sampurna Gramin Rozgar Yojana.



Raju Mahto

He used the machine to harvest paddy and grind wheat and rice. Raju's mother, Dhanpati Devi was from Juradeeh Pathsay village, Tamar. She had been ailing since Raju was born. His father had to spend money on her medical treatment and he couldn't repay the bank loan. His wife passed away when Raju was five years old.

His father got married for the second time to Somni Devi of Madhukama village, Bundu. Doman fell ill soon after. He couldn't get medical attention and finally died on the way to hospital. Raju's stepmother stayed with him for six or seven months. But in early May she went to her father's home, abandoning Raju to his fate. The boy is now living with his father's younger brother, Vaidnath Mahto.

Mining mafia haunts Jardhargaon

Rakesh Agrawal
Jardhargaon

JARDHARGAON in the Hemwal Valley of Tehri Garhwal district, Uttaranchal was the epicentre of the *Beej Bachao Andolan* struggle and a hub of the historic Chipko movement. Since the last 20 years villagers here have assiduously protected a 630 ha civil-soyam and reserve forest. Now a local contractor wants to mine soapstone. Although his activities have not, as yet, harmed the forest, the threat is very real and Jardhargaon is fighting back.

In 1980 the people stopped soapstone mining after a long struggle. The contractor tried to restart in 1995, but had to give up. Six months ago mining activity began once again.

"Initially, the contractor had a 30-year lease. When it expired in the beginning of 2002, the contractor's son, somehow got it renewed in his name," says Raghubhai Jardhari, president, Astha Jan Kalyan Ewan Vikas Samiti (AJKVAS), an organisation fighting for the natural resource rights of the people. The contractor allegedly enjoys political support.

"The mining is taking place in the van panchayat area and will destroy our water resources," says Vijay Jardhari of the BBA and a leading light of the Chipko movement. The *van panchayat* was established in April 1998 on about 81 ha.

Besides staging a dharna (sit-in) and physically preventing any mining, the people lodged a lawsuit against the contractor in the district court, Tehri. However, the district judge passed a stricture against three notable persons: Vijay Jardhari, Kunwar Prasun and Kalan Singh Khadka. "Since the *van panchayat samiti* was formed only in 1998,

and the lease paper for mining does not explicitly show it, the contractor with the connivance of officials made the original file disappear, but we will not let go so easily," says Asha Devi, 45, one of the activists.

And, true to their word, women prevented mining at Kataldi village and loading of soap stone on mules. But one of the contractor's musclemen, at



Miners at work in Jardhargaon

his behest, provoked a mule and it kicked a demonstrator, Guda Devi who was seriously injured. This created a grave and tense situation. The good news is the Uttaranchal High Court, Nainital, passed a stay order, vacating the district court's stricture.

The mining has caused a schism between villages. Some people in Matli, Katali, Patuli, Palas and Bhtisauin support the contractor, hoping to reap some benefits. "Tomorrow, our village may not remain united and they may come to the forest as well," fears Ramesh Jardhari, a youth activist of Jardhargaon.

Besides mining, increase of chir-pine is damag-

ing the forest. "The forest has become denser, because of chir-pine. This will dry our water resources and increase chances of forest fires," says Rajendra Singh, AJKVAS' youthful secretary. Since two-thirds of the forest was closed for 20 years, pressure for biomass extraction was confined to the remaining one-third area which is becoming sparse while the number of dead and fallen trees

in the closed area is increasing alarmingly. The ingress of chir-pine is also restricting the growth of *banj* and *buransh*.

Another problem is people-wildlife conflict. "Animals like wild boars, *kakar*, *ghurad*, monkeys and birds such as Himalayan magpie and parakeets have increased a lot. They are attacking fields close to forest areas," says Raghubhai. Wheat and corn are badly affected and monkeys don't let walnut ripen.

The spread of cooking gas connections in the village has helped women hugely. "At least, 70 per cent households have LPG connections and this has made our lives really easy," says Bindu Devi, 42. It has eased the pressure on the forest. "We really do not take much fuelwood except during winters for heating," says Asha Devi.

Some households have gobar gas connections, given by officials under the Doon Valley Integrated Watershed Project. But the efforts of officials to grow trees have failed. "They forcefully carried out plantation, without involving people and not a single sapling survived," says Raghubhai. Their attempt to carry out consolidation of holdings in the area met the same fate. But efforts at flood prevention by constructing about 10 *johads* proved successful. These structures increased water sources and prevented floods.

Evicted Baigas promised govt help

Anil Kumar Gupta
Dindori

SIXTY-year-old Nanhu Baiga from Titarahi village has been cultivating his ancestral land before 1980. In September-October 2004 a mob of 200 people, including members of the Forest Protection Committee and the Forest Department came to his village. Apparently acting in accordance with Section 80 of the Forest Act, the mob destroyed crops belonging to 26 Baiga families without any notice. Nanhu informed the local police station and the district collector but no action was taken. Today, these people have neither a livelihood nor any food.

Nanhu narrated his story with tears in his eyes to a crowd of 850 people who are facing a similar fate. Belonging to the Baiga and other tribal groups, these people collected to take part in a public hearing and fasting, organised by Ekta Parishad on May 1, near Dindori, on the plight of the Baiga tribe who have lately become victims of forest eviction.

Ekta Parishad decided to help the community and carry their voices to the government through the public hearing. Prior to the hearing, a survey was conducted on the destruction of crops in the region. According to this survey, about 381

indigenous families in 18 villages of Dindori district, Madhya Pradesh have lost about 1200 acres of land that yielded various crops such as wheat, maize, *jagni* and *kodo*—a wild variety of rice. The yield from this region generated about Rs 28 lakh.

Hiralal Baiga, a resident of Tehighati village says that they have been staying in the same region for generations, earning a livelihood from farming. However, when his crops were destroyed and his hut burnt, he was forced to shift to Amarpur. Bhai Baiga used to farm his ancestral land in Samardha village. But thrice the forest guards destroyed his crops. He has even paid fines to them. Due to lack of any legal documents, the Baigas have been termed "encroachers".

Even women haven't been spared. According to Sumaru Bai of Dami Titarahi village, nine Gond families have been cultivating their ancestral land without being able to get their entitlement papers. The forest ranger and the Forest Protection Committee destroyed their crops in February 2004. Sumaru Bai was beaten up brutally by employees of the Forest Department. She reported the incident to the nearest police station but no action was taken.

Almost 850 people belonging to 32 neighbouring villages were present at the public hearing. It was also attended by Sharad Chandra Behar, former

Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh, Avdesh Kumar, Gandhian activist, Rajgopal PV, founder of Ekta Parishad and Ran Singh Parmar, national convener, Ekta Parishad.

On 2 May a rally was organised to the Collector's office. There was a discussion between the Collector, 14 members of Ekta Parishad and representatives of the Forest Protection Committee.

The Collector assured Ekta Parishad that a Committee would be set up which will also include the patwari and Ekta Parishad. It would look into the destruction of crops by inspecting the concerned villages. The Baiga families would be given cards under the Antyodaya scheme. The representatives of the forest department agreed to help implement these directions.

It was also agreed that cases of violence will be looked into and the victims shall be recompensed through programmes at that level. The seeds and equipments that had been taken away from the tribals will be duly returned. These actions will be implemented within a month. Meanwhile the activists have decided to collect as much evidence as possible about the violence committed against the Baigas.

Bishop Cotton wins Slater after 7 yrs

Jashwinder Sabharwal
Shimla

AFTER seven years, Bishop Cotton School, (BCS) Shimla, finally won the Reverend Dr Samuel Slater Memorial Invitational Inter-School English Debates. The finals were held at the awesome Irwin Hall and the topic was "Freedom of the individual is a myth." BCS was against the motion. The chief guest for the evening was RR Verma, IPS (Retd). After a hard fought debate and the chief guest's speech, BCS were declared winners.

The roar of the audience was deafening and the joy on the faces of BCS students, who had backed their school with utmost loyalty right through the debates, was unmistakable. The winning BCS team, consisting of Vaihav Rajour, Jash Sabharwal and Abhishek Chand held up the trophy and as per tradition, being the hosts, passed it on to La Martiniere for Girls, Kolkata, the runners-up.

This year the Slater debates kicked off with 10 teams battling onstage for the ultimate glory- to be crowned the Slater winner. The 10 teams that took part were:

- BCS, Shimla
- St. James School, Kolkata
- La Martiniere for Girls, Kolkata
- Auckland House, Shimla
- Cathedral and John Connon, Mumbai

- The Shri Ram School, New Delhi
- Doon School, Dehradun
- Sagar School, Alwar
- Mayo Girls, Ajmer
- La Martiniere for Girls College, Lucknow.

The first round was completed on the first day with each team taking part in two debates. The next day the quarterfinals were completed and four teams reached the semi-finals. They were BCS, La Martiniere for Girls, Kolkata, Mayo Girls, Ajmer and St James School, Kolkata.

After the quarterfinals the teams departed for a well-deserved picnic to Caignano where everyone relaxed and interacted with the other teams. All the boys who helped with the Slater debates were there. A sudden downpour didn't dampen anybody's spirits. Everyone returned by 6 pm. They were invited to the Headmaster's Lodge for dinner.

The following day the semi-finals were held in the morning with La Martiniere and BCS emerging victorious. These teams were to debate the final debate after a few hours. There was tension in the air. Finally, BCS emerged victorious.

The debates concluded with a special dinner and a jam session organised by the boys.

The Slater debates have been going on for the past 10 years and have become a forum for young minds to come together. The time spent at Slater is not so much about competition as interaction, exploration

and learning. It is a time for getting to know students from all over the country, understand their concerns and thoughts and ways of dealing with challenges that they have tried and are thinking about. The debates provide a time to widen our minds and expand our horizons. The topics are varied and thought provoking and range from global issues to teenage difficulties, technology to women's issues, history to future possibilities, environment to musical trends.

Another important aspect of the Slater debates is the total involvement of the staff and students of BCS. Every single member of the community participates in one way or another. The local community of Shimla is also supportive. The judges for the event are eminent journalists, writers, professors of English and social activists, who themselves add to the ambience with their inputs and responses.

On the last day the teams began to depart one by one, each not wanting to leave. Every great event has an end and so does Slater. As I watched the last team depart, a thought crossed my mind. "All the times, I have cried, my thoughts were full of pride." Tears of joy, tears of pain, moments of triumph, moments of failure. Never ending laughter, everlasting friendship, the welcoming handshake, the goodbye hug; all in one challenge, one competition... Slater 2005.

(Jashwinder Sabharwal is a student of Class X, Bishop Cotton School, Shimla.)



Bharat Ratna C. Subramaniam Fellowship Programme, 2005-06 for Voluntary Sector Workers and Community Leaders

The National Foundation for India has a programme for **Mid Career Voluntary Workers** particularly those working at the grass-roots level for a period of 8-10 years in the areas of Food Security, Sustainable Livelihood and Natural Resource Management as well as for **Community Leaders** who are working at the community level in the areas of sustainable livelihood and natural resource management. The fellowships would allow them to upgrade their skills and deepen their leadership qualities. The Foundation offers two fellowships of Rs. 50,000/- each under both categories. Women candidates are encouraged to apply. The last date for receipt of application is September 15 2005.

For application guidelines:

Dr. Asok Ray

National Foundation for India

Core 4A, UGF, India Habitat Centre

Lodi Road, New Delhi 110 003

Phones: 91-11-24641864/65, 91-11-24648490-92

Fax: 91-11-24641867

Email: info@nfi.org.in, roy2000@nfi.org.in

Visit our website <http://www.nfi.org.in> to download application form.

NFI is a professionally managed philanthropic organization. The Foundation supports development action for social and economic justice in India. It is both a fund-raising and a grant-making institution.



11th National Media Fellowships Programme, 2005-06 for Giving Voice to the Unheard

For Print and Photo Journalists

The National Foundation for India has a fellowship programme for young (upto 40 years), mid-career (5-7 years experience) journalists, to research and publish articles / photo essays on issues of importance to ordinary Indians, in their battle for a better life and to cover diverse aspects of development work viz., the working conditions of people, environment related matters and other social concerns.

The foundation offers seven fellowships of Rs. 1,00,000/- each. Women journalists specially, from small local newspapers, with demonstrated capacity to publish well-researched articles/photo essays are encouraged to apply. One of the fellowships will be awarded to a photojournalist.

The last date for receipt of application is August 12, 2005.

For Application Guidelines Contact:

National Media Fellowships

National Foundation for India

Core 4A, UGF, India Habitat Centre

Lodi Road, New Delhi 110 003

Phones: 91-11-24641864/65, 91-11-24648490-92

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Backing an anti-people democracy

WHAT is the difference between the 'popular' anti-government movement in Ukraine and the current one in Uzbekistan? Nothing and everything, depending on who you are. For the people in these two countries there was no difference. There were both against a corrupt, anti-people, non-democratic government. For the governments in the West, they are completely different. In Ukraine the movement was against a pro-Russian government inimical to the West. In Uzbekistan the movement is against the very pro-West government of Islam Karimov. As a result, the TV screens were awash with the orange of Viktor Yushchenko's western-minded supporters but even after over 500 people were killed last Friday by government troops in Andijon the media coverage in the west has been not only minimal but non-committal for the first five days. It follows the same pattern in each and every country in the developing world. Two different standards are applied. Fortunately for the Uzbek people, the hue and cry raised by several human rights organisations has forced some European governments to question the events.

The export of democracy currently being flaunted with so much panache by Bush and his 'coalition of the willing' is carefully applied to nations where the population is not anti-West. If however, as in the case of Algeria in 1994, direct democracy would bring about a popularly elected government that is anti-West, then all the empty photo-op blabbering of western leaders about democracy dissipates into thin air. The strange thing is that such transparent hypocrisy is rarely questioned by their own citizens. "Why must I sacrifice my gas-guzzling 4-by-4, my lifestyle for some stupid, lazy goon in Asia and Africa? And don't they hate us anyway?" goes the popular thinking in the US and in much of the Western world. How else can one explain the re-election of war-criminals like Bush and Blair? If one looks back at the history of humankind, rarely has justice or apology been an altruistic voluntary act. It has always been extracted by the victors. This is all the more true of modern day politicians and businessmen – from Nixon to Enron. Moral of the story: no matter how many proofs you uncover of their villainy, don't expect them to bow down in shame and apologise.

Even though Craig Murray, the British Ambassador to Uzbekistan in 2003, risked the ire of Blair and eventually lost his job trying to alert the world to the heinous abuses of Karimov, the Uzbek President, continued to be in favour and even visited the White House as an honoured guest. Can one seriously expect

him to apologize to the Uzbeks for boiling two of his opponents in oil? He will have no problem doing so should he ever be put on trial for his misdemeanors. Then he will display some sophistry of his own, justifying his 'fight against terrorism' like his patrons in the West who have done pretty much the same and got away with it. Fear-mongering is the name of the game, where, like the mafia, one first creates terror and then sells protection - a guaranteed formula that never fails to work.

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

★★★

THIS week the American Senators had a taste of what Parliamentary exchanges are like across the Atlantic. George Galloway, the British Member of Parliament, ex-Labour Party, now Respect Party, from Bethnal Green and Bow, displayed a more pugilistic style than the powerful US Senators - more used to benign, over-awed witnesses - have experienced. Perhaps, they even expected it. At least they

prepared for it - by their absence. Only the head of the Senate Investigations sub-committee, Republican Senator Norman Coleman and his Democrat counterpart, Carl Levin from Michigan were left to face the barrage of punches unleashed by this anti-war parliamentarian from Dundee, Scotland.

Under the present climate where America sees itself as the defender of the faith in its clash of civilizations against the barbaric Muslims, Galloway with his Palestinian wife, Amireh Abu-Zayyad, was the most likely candidate to attract the ire of the American establishment because of his long history of association with Muslim and Arab causes going back to the 1970's, when he convinced the Dundee Labour Party to select Nablus as its twin city and even flew the Palestinian flag over the Dundee Town hall. In fact, the author of 'the clash of civilizations', Christopher Hitchens was actually present at the Capitol during the hearing and took a lambasting from the vitriolic Galloway.

Drawing the wrath of the Right as well as his own Labour Party for being so stridently antiwar ended in accusation of accepting oil money from Saddam Hussein by the Telegraph and being ousted from the Labour Party itself. He won a libel suit against the Telegraph and several others and disproved their allegations. But the damage was done and today no one in public life wants to associate himself with Galloway. The US Senate hearing may however, restore some of his political capital simply because it rhymes with popular anti-American sentiments in the UK and in Europe. For those of us who are galled by the antics of the US government in the recent years it was a brief moment to cheer.

Trek in Nepal with 3 Sisters

Rina Mukherji
Kathmandu/Kolkata

A few years ago, 20-year-old Batuli Giri was desperately seeking employment to escape the misery of her home in western Nepal. Today, she confidently leads a group of European adventure tourists on a trek across rocky terrain in Himalayan Nepal. Looking at her, it is hard to believe that Batuli belongs to a marginalised family and has studied only up to Class 3.

But that is the magic wrought by Lucky Chhetri and her NGO – Empowering Women in Nepal (EWN). They teach women to be guides for treks. Brought up in Darjeeling, Lucky Chhetri's training at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute sparked her interest in adventure tourism. She recognised the market potential of such training when she qualified as Nepal's first woman trekker guide in 1990.

A large number of single women tourists visit Nepal for the thrill of adventure in the outdoors. Some recounted to Lucky their unhappy experiences with male guides. That gave her the bright idea of a guide service consisting of women. So, in 1993, Lucky and her sisters, Dicky and Nicky, started the '3 Sisters Adventure Trekking Private Limited.'

In 1999, Lucky decided to train girls from marginalised areas in western Nepal as trekker guides. She set up EWN to coach the girls with the intention of



absorbing them in her adventure tourism outfit and thereby providing them a stable income.

Lucky Chhetri's training is not confined to mountaineering and basic language skills, which are essential since most adventure tourists come from Europe. Her girls are taught hygiene, health and environmental awareness. They make sure a trekking expedition does not leave behind plastic bags or non-biodegradable material. The one-year free training she provides comprises classroom teaching with fieldwork and learning on the job.

Every girl is neatly turned out and trained to take good care of her health since the job is

rigorous. The training offsets the disadvantage women face in Nepal due to their low literacy rate, which is just 14 percent.

Lucky has trained hundreds of guides. Many have returned to teach others in their villages. Although her rates are more than others in the same business, demand for Lucky's services is so high that she is forced to hire guides from outside for tourists who come knocking at her door. And the Maoist insurgency has never affected her business.

"We are the most expensive, but people realise the superiority of our service. Besides, our reputation is such that every one trusts us, more so in these troubled times," says Lucky. E-mail: ewn@3sistersadventure.com

EVERYONE LOVES THE TIGER



But making sure it survives will require more than just good intentions.

Civil Society News

New Delhi

PRIME Minister Manmohan Singh was off to Ranthambhore. A task force of experts constituted by him under Sunita Narain was headed for Periyar. In Delhi, Valmik Thapar and Rajendra Singh, two environmentalists who are not known to see eye to eye, met at Thapar's Chanakyapuri house to fashion a new conservation model for the sanctuary at Sariska.

The newspapers are full of head counts: ten tigers here, nothing there. Theories abound of how forests need people as much as people need forests. Wildlife thrives when there is a healthy balance, it is argued. But a new draft law to give tribals rights to forests and land comes under scrutiny. The wildlife lobby says not enough discussion has taken place.

Suddenly everyone loves the tiger and is eager to protect its natural habitat.

All hell broke loose when the government formally declared in March this year that there are no more tigers in Sariska. And at Ranthambore nobody is sure of the exact extent of the crisis. Thanks to rampant poaching, the tiger is facing extinction in India. The loss at Sariska is particularly galling because it is a few hours from Delhi and is intended to be the showpiece of Project Tiger, under which come 27 sanctuaries.

People who want to save the tiger have so far been in two camps. There are the staunch conservationists who believe in guns and guards and sealing off of forests so that wildlife can thrive. On the flip side there are the environmentalists who argue that forests should go to local communities with certain conditions and safeguards. They believe that tribals and others in forested areas have a symbiotic relationship with the forest and the health of wildlife is a part of that equation.

India's current forest policy is a leftover from the days of the British Raj. It is designed to work to the exclusion of people and make forests the property

Why there

Biswajit Padhi

Nuapada

SPREAD over 600 square kilometres, the Sunabeda sanctuary in Nuapada district of Orissa is mostly a grass-covered plateau adjoining Udanti and Sitanadi sanctuaries of Chattisgarh. Even as tigers have vanished from Sariska, a recent census shows that Sunabeda has 32 tigers, the highest number in Orissa. If parts of the Khariar forest division are amalgated, Sunabeda could provide one of the best corridors for the big cats up to the Udanti sanctuary in Chhatisgarh.

Sunabeda's success is all the more interesting because it is not as yet part of Project Tiger. It is likely to be included soon.

Santosh Banchhur, the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Sunabeda, though new to this assignment in a wild life division, is young and committed. Biswajit Padhi asked him how Sunabeda was so successfully managed.

How should sanctuaries be managed?

Sanctuary management is not only enforcement of the law. A sanctuary can be managed harmo-

of the State. The British took over India's forests when they needed timber for the expanding railways and they pushed tribals to the fringes of the forests. They were forced into settled agriculture or daily labour. Traditionally, however, the tribals understood the forests well. But decades of exclusion have caused local communities to sink into abject poverty. Poachers have stepped in to recruit them.

The chief supporters of this colonial policy have been the conservationists who believe that armed guards can stop felling and poaching. Backed by international development agencies, which regard forests as wilderness, the conservationists have for long enjoyed political support and patronage. Over the years, environmentalists and conservationists have made it plain that they cannot stand each other.

The imminent extinction of the tiger shows up all the holes in the colonial policy. Finally the conservationists agree that the tiger does not have a decent habitat to live in. But they are not sure that forests should be opened up to people. The environmentalists, on the other hand, point to hundreds of examples where local communities have regenerated forests and protected wildlife, responsibly. Is it time for India's unwieldy forest bureaucracy to hand over forest management to communities?

A slow and tentative convergence of views on some ideas is in evidence.

The Prime Minister's task force is an example. It is headed by Sunita Narain, whose NGO, the Centre for Science and Environment, has been stridently in favour of giving communities rights over forests. But with her on the task force is also Valmik Thapar, a guns-and-guards man till now, HS Panwar of the forest service, Samar Singh, an administrator, and Madhav Gadgil, India's foremost ecologist.

When Narain was given the job, unkind stories appeared in newspapers saying she had perhaps not seen a tiger in her life. It is not tough to imagine where those stories emanated from. But fears that the task force would not make headway were quickly belied. Narain seems to be successfully carrying others along.

Valmik Thapar's meetings with Rajendra Singh are headline stuff for the NGO fraternity.

Singh, a Magasaysay award winner, is known for his work on community water projects. He has for long challenged excessive state control over natural resources. At Sariska he was originally responsible for taking on the mining mafias and the poachers and believes that tigers and other wildlife will thrive when forests are healthy and managed by people.

Thapar continues to think an efficient forest service is needed. Currently it is short of men and the average age is 53. But he now agrees that communities should also be involved in protecting forests and wildlife.

The task force early in its tenure has pointed to successes achieved through the use of communities for forest protection. It has also pointed out that a lean and mean organisation is needed to confront poaching. Such an organisation

would track crime, manage databases and follow investigations. It would coordinate with forest officials and local law enforcement. Legal reforms too are overdue. Poachers are caught from time to time. But they get away.

At present, far from achieving any such sophistication, India does not even have an adequate record of its stock of wildlife. The current method of counting tigers through a census of pugmarks is misleading.

Wherever the forest department has involved communities in protection, wildlife has thrived. Our correspondent, Biswajit Padhi, visited the Sunabeda sanctuary in Orissa, to find that there are 32 tigers in a 600 sq km area. The divisional forest officer said tribals had been used to keep poachers out.

In Tamil Nadu, only five tigers were reported to have died between 1999 and 2003. Nationally 114 tigers had died during this period. Here tribals were formed into anti-poaching squads with weapons and wireless equipment. One member from each tribal family was employed like this.

Conservationists have so far been in two camps. There have been those who believe in guns and guards and sealing off forests so that wildlife can thrive. On the flip side there have been the environmentalists who argue that forests should go to local communities.

In the Periyar Tiger Reserve poaching stopped when forest officials used seed money from an eco-development project to involve communities. In the Chilika lagoon, the Chilika Development Authority arrested wetland decay and biodiversity loss by involving local fisherfolk, says Ashish Kothari of Kalpavriksh. Sharing the benefits of tourism has also helped.

What is even more notable is how communities have on their own protected forests and wildlife. Kalpavriksh, for instance, has a large database of such efforts.

"Communities have been able to curtail and stop encroachment in Mendha-Lekha, Maharashtra. They have prohibited hunting and timber theft in Luzophuhu, Phek, Sendenyu, and dozens of villages in Nagaland," says Kothari. "They have changed resource extraction and use practices to make them more sustainable, for example in Jardhargaon, Uttaranchal, Bhaonta-Kolyala in Rajasthan and the Biligiri hills, Karnataka. They have even declared their own wildlife sanctuaries where all or many kinds of resource extraction are prohibited."

If land and rights to forest use are given to these communities within the

are 32 tigers in Sunabeda

niously with the tribals and inhabitants living inside. They have been doing it traditionally over centuries. They know the area and the habits of wild animals well. This skill needs to be tapped by the enforcement agencies.

Moreover the forest division here has been plagued by vacancies. This year onwards we have made provisions in our Annual Plan of Operation (APO) to rope in tribals as watchers and they will be compensated for their work. While securing their livelihood, it will add to their involvement.

What are the concrete measures that have been taken for their development?

The livelihood issues of the inhabitants have to be addressed on a priority basis to wean them away from potential poachers. Eco-development committees that consist of tribals are more into protection activities, which provide wage employment. We are planning to train them as guides, to drive boats and vehicles inside the sanctuary and also to provide catering services under eco-tourism.



Santosh Banchhur

Sunabeda has the largest concentration of tigers in Orissa. What steps are being taken for their conservation?

There is no approved plan of management. There isn't much research data on tigers and their habitat. In the past there has been work on infrastructure development inside the sanctuary. Now we have started habitat development.

Water and food have to be ensured. Water is a major problem in Sunabeda, especially in the summer months. This year we have constructed some game tanks and water-harvesting structures for the animals. We also need pasture development to prevent cattle from trespassing into the

sanctuary area. Development of grasslands and meadows increase herbivorous animals and provide enough food for the big cat.

Cattle immunisation is another area we are focusing on to curb the import of virus to the sanctuary. Health camps for tribals and other local people are also equally important.

How does the presence of people in the core area affect management?

The core area needs to be free of humans and cattle as they cause disturbance to the movement of wild animals. The rapid rise in their population is of concern for us. They should be rehabilitated outside the sanctuary area.

Any suggestions you would like to make?

Alternative livelihood augmentation for inhabitants is necessary in view of the restrictions on collection of NTFP (Non Timber Forest Product) grass because of the provisions of the Forest Conservation Act and recent directives of the Supreme Court.

The livelihood issues of the inhabitants have to be addressed on a priority basis to wean them away from potential poachers.

'Overhaul governance now as a priority'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

VALMIK Thapar, an ardent wildlife conservationist, sits behind a table in his office, angry and upset about the disappearance of the tiger. For 30 years he has worked for the big cat. "We have failed miserably," he said. "I never in my life thought that in Sariska, which is just three hours from Delhi and one and a half hours from Jaipur, the state capital of Rajasthan, that the tiger would become extinct." *Extracts from an interview:*

Why has the tiger disappeared?

The government, the NGOs and individuals like myself have failed. We are not able to save tigers in this country. The primary reason is we tried to save tigers through institutions that are totally eroded. Project Tiger is just a project of the Central government by which Rs 18 to Rs 20 crores is distributed to some 28 reserves. Nobody goes into the details of where and how that money is used to save tigers.

What needs to be done?

You require a complete overhaul of governance to save tigers. You have to start first with a dedicated ministry of forests and wildlife, not clubbed with environment. The ministry should have its own secretary and machinery to take independent, time-bound decisions. Overhaul Project Tiger. Make it much more field-oriented. Check where your money is going. In Sariska it's not a problem about money. The CBI report on Sariska states 75 percent of the field staff are not fit to patrol. You are spending crores of rupees in an operation with people who are not fit to patrol, with posts abandoned, with poachers walking in with live bait to tie in front of a tiger.

For 20 years we didn't allow recruitment into the forest staff. The average age of the forest staff is 53. How on earth can they patrol? The poachers are in their twenties. We have vacancies of over 40 percent in the forest staff. It's not treated at par with the army or the police. And the forests are the national treasure of India. Six hundred rivers and perennial streams are born here. And we just kick it.

We have to start with the ministry, Project Tiger and a Protected Areas Service of India totally different from the Indian Forest Service. We require managers of protected areas who are trained for that job.

Do you believe local communities should be protecting the tiger?

I am not saying don't involve local people. Everybody thinks I'm on some kind of wildlife picnic looking at tigers. I have walked around Ranthambore's villages. If you have a village of about 2000 people, you will

get about eight boys and girls who are ready to work for nature. They need a small institute for training with the best instructors.

Shouldn't tribal communities be given land rights and involved in tiger protection?

As someone said on TV, since 1960, about 30,000 square km have already been given to tribals on paper. If the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill, the present draft, goes through, the tribal will be misused and exploited by the land sharks, the mafia, everybody, because we have an army of those people around. The *gram sabha* is not going to help. It will be politicised, changed around in a minute.

If you have a tribal bill it should be called the Tribal Forest and Wildlife Bill, because tribals, their life and culture have eroded badly. Their culture, ceremonies and rituals are inter dependent on forests and wildlife being alive. So if you have a bill giving the tribals rights to the forest, then have one that gives wildlife and forests the right to live. This little bit of our national parks has to be treated like sacred groves.

Do you think all actors at the grassroots need to work together?

I have no problem with that. In the 1990s I worked with Rajendra Singh of the Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS) on how to involve local people in tiger protection at Sariska. We are working together on building a model for Sariska. We should begin with Kanha, the jewel in Project Tiger's crown and Sariska the biggest thorn in it.

Should the proceeds of eco-tourism accrue to the local people?

Give them all the benefits. It is the stupidity of government that in Ranthambore you collect Rs 2 crores and then you send it back to the Treasury.

What is the way in which tigers can now be brought back in Sariska?

In Sariska only one tigress can come from Bharatpur. She can be tranquillised and transferred but where will the male come from? That is the question. Relocating an individual tigress and a male with so many people and livestock around can become a nightmare.

'The average age of the forest staff is 53. How on earth can they patrol? The poachers are in their twenties.'

How can conflict between tigers and local villagers be reduced?

Kanha has a scheme for compensating people if their livestock is eaten. In Gir, why do the lions live? They live because they eat local livestock and Rs 38 lakh is given each year for livestock kill. The Maldharis (a pastoral community) get the actual market price and there is a very happy relationship between them and the lions in Gir. In Kaziranga humans don't walk there. Wild buffalos, rhinos, elephants and tigers will kill you. Poachers go in with semi-automatic guns. Finally, six areas will survive.

should not just cover scheduled tribes, but other communities as well, he says.

Who are the poachers? Invariably, smuggling networks use the poorest of the poor in the vicinity of the sanctuary to kill animals. The Bawarias, a denotified tribe, are treated as criminals. They are traditional hunters and a nomadic community who have lost their livelihood because of the Wildlife Protection Act, which bans hunting. No other livelihood was offered to them. The challenge is draft them for protecting the forest and using wildlife in a regenerative manner..

Commercial interests like mining and extraction of resources also needs to be kept away from forests. "Mineral deposits are all in the forests. Commercial exploitation has brought destruction of forests without proper checks and balances," says Rajendra Singh.

But since the ecology of Sariska is different from that of the Sunderbans each



Valmik Thapar

LAKSHMAN

context of specific rules and regulations, then every protected area could be ringed by forests guarded by communities. They could use their part of the forest for eco-tourism or for collection of non-timber forest produce. India can learn from Nepal's experience in community forestry.

But the reverse has been happening. A recent ruling of the ministry of environment and forests that all traditional rights to collect minor forest produce cannot be enjoyed in protected areas has increased conflict enormously. It is estimated that four million people living inside protected areas or on their fringes have lost their livelihood. Their anger is naturally directed at wildlife like the tiger for which they are kept out of the forest. Sorting out a historic injustice is important for protecting the tiger.

Ashish Kothari supports the need for a law which give people access to forests. The current draft bill, which has been scuttled by conservationists,

'Communities have an important role'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

ENVIRONMENTALIST **Ashish Kothari** of Kalpavriksh strongly believes in involving tribal and local communities in forest management. There is a need for protection, even more guns and guards, but this needs to be done in the framework of greater community involvement.

"How long will we protect tiger habitats in the midst of hostile communities, made more desperate by the denial of basic livelihood resources?" he asks.

Why do you think the tiger is disappearing from India's protected areas?

Conservation in India has been subject to 'development' technocrats who view wildlife habitats as sites for dams, mines and industries. It has failed to involve and benefit local communities who are long-standing residents of wildlife habitats. Conservation strategies have not adequately reached out to urban residents, horribly alienated from nature, demanding more and more of the country's natural resources.

Policies and programmes on conservation (especially protected areas) have made enemies of traditional dwellers and users of natural habitats, ignored their own traditions and knowledge related to conservation, and assumed that a 'guns and guards' approach will be adequate to save wildlife. This is the single biggest failure of formal conservation policy in India.

What do you think needs to be done?

Conservationists who ask for more guns and guards to protect wildlife habitats are ignoring the political and social context of wildlife conservation. This is not to deny the need for more protection, even for more guns and guards. But this should be done within the context of a package of measures.

These include partnerships between officials, communities, and NGOs through joint management committees and channelling revenues from protected areas into local conservation and community welfare activities. Legal status should be given to traditional resource use rights and responsibilities, within conservation limitations. Alternatives can be provided for those activities that are irreversibly damaging. Rural development funds should be targeted into ecologically sensitive livelihood activities for villagers. A diversity of collaborative and community-based conservation initiatives must be encouraged.

Stop all destructive 'development' mega-projects from tiger habitats. Also, combine traditional knowledge and practices with modern ones. Depute

'Build partnerships between people, officials and NGOs through joint management committees.'

more and better trained staff, build local community capacity for conservation and provide security and arms against powerful poaching gangs. There should be regular public dialogues at the level of each tiger habitat and each state

Are there any models we can follow?

In the Periyar Tiger Reserve, forest officials have, over the last five or six years, turned around a situation of intense poaching, hostility from local people, and 'porous' boundaries to one of much greater security for wildlife. How did they do this? They used some seed money from a project on eco-development to reach out to communities, understand and help them in enhancing

livelihoods, involve them in anti-poaching and other management activities, and guide them to earn from ecologically sensitive tourism. In the Chilika lagoon (which includes a bird sanctuary), the Chilika Development Authority arrested the process of wetland decay and biodiversity loss by involving local fisherfolk, combining modern with traditional knowledge, and taking other participatory measures.

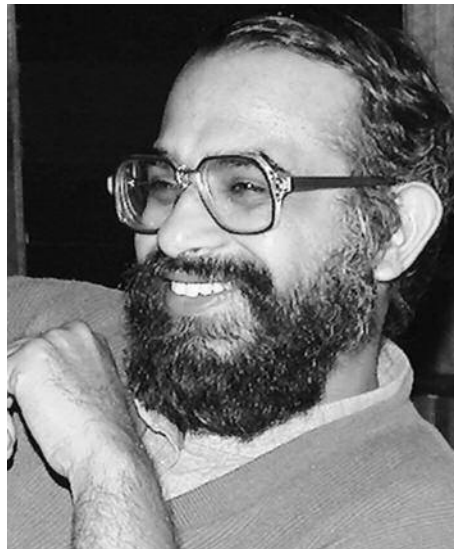
How can it be ensured that traditional resource rights to communities don't destroy forests?

There are enough examples where rights have led to sustainable use and conservation but also where they have led to misuse and ecological destruction. Some initiatives have been

successful for a number of reasons. First, rights to natural resources are clear in their scope and extent, and provide for in statutory or other laws. Secondly, these laws are accompanied by explicit sharing of decision-making powers relating to natural resources and accompanied by conservation responsibilities, and there are clear deterrents if responsibilities are not being met. Thirdly, these rights are not alienable (either by selling or other means) and exercised on the basis of adequate capacity. Lastly, these rights are regulated by institutional mechanisms, including checks and balances provided by official agencies and/or NGOs.

Initiatives by communities, across virtually all states of India, demonstrate that the above is possible. For instance, communities have been able to curtail and stop encroachment in Mendha-Lekha, Maharashtra. They have effectively prohibited hunting and timber theft in Luzophuhu, Phek, Sendenyu, and dozens of other villages in Nagaland. They have changed resource extraction and use practices to make them more sustainable, for example in Jardhargaon, Uttaranchal, Bhaonta-Kolyala in Rajasthan and the Biligiri hills, Karnataka.

(For more information on community conserved areas, or other initiatives, contact Ashish at ashishkothari@vsnl.com, or Neema Pathak at natrails@vsnl.com).



Ashish Kothari

area will have to look for local innovative solutions. In the Sunderbans, for instance, the entire habitat of the tiger is undergoing a change.

Rise in sea level and temperature, coastal erosion and population pressures are playing havoc on the deltaic island system of the Sunderbans and severely affecting its biodiversity. The changes are so severe that half a million environmental refugees are expected to be displaced in the region by 2020, according to a study conducted by the School of Oceanographic Studies, Jadavpur University under Prof Sugato Hazra.

If we sum up what people we spoke to across the country had to say, this is what we would get:

PEOPLE: Give local people rights over land and forest produce with adequate safeguards. Involve communities in the protection of animals. Ensure sustainable livelihoods.

HABITAT: Parks and sanctuaries must have healthy forests. There should be no mining, plenty of water, animals for the tiger to prey on, trees and grasses and so on in the core area of the sanctuary.

POLITICS: Saving the tiger must be a political effort.

FOREST SERVICE: Modernise the service. Make it younger. Let it look for creative local solutions.

TOURISM: The tiger can be a means of generating tourism revenue, which should then be used locally. People around forests should benefit.

DATABASE: There is a need for accurate data on wildlife crimes and wildlife.

GLOBAL CRIME: Crack down on smuggling syndicates. Create awareness, international pressure.

INVOLVE THE YOUNG: Conservation should be the work of the young both in cities and the rural areas. There should be ways of bringing them in.

Stop mining in forests

Rajendra Singh, Water activist

If you want to save the tiger, bring back the forests and understand the links between the people and animals who inhabit the forest.

You can't have tigers without forests. Commercial interests today have an upper hand in the country. Mineral deposits are all in the forests. Commercial exploitation has brought destruction of forests without proper checks and balances. It is important to strengthen social organisations so that forest conservation and the saving of the tiger become a mission undertaken at a national level.



Let everyone earn from the tiger

Asad Rahmani, Director, Bombay Natural History Society

At least half of the money earned from tiger tourism should directly benefit local people. If they see the tiger as revenue, they will have reasons to protect it. There is no substitute to good governance. There should be strict control on the poaching of tigers and the tiger prey base. If necessary, an effective electric fence should be put in place around some tiger reserves to prevent the entry of livestock and stop the tigers going outside. The South Africans have developed fencing to almost an art. This fencing should be done only wherever necessary.

We must collaborate with national and international agencies to control smuggling of tiger parts across the border. We should also develop tiger DNA fingerprinting (as claimed by Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad) so from the confiscated skins we will know from where they are coming. I fully support CCMB for developing a DNA profile of tigers.

Build trust with locals

Dr Pranabes Sanyal, Visiting UGC Professor, School of Oceanographic Studies, Jadavpur University

Networking with locals helps authorities to get information about poaching beforehand. In Jaldapara, for instance, when I was field director of the Buxa Tiger Reserve, we checked the poaching of rhinos through forest protection committees formed with locals. From just 14 rhinos then, the numbers have grown to 84 today. We built trust with the locals, who in turn worked towards building up a buffer force, a human barricade against poachers. Jaldapara is a typical example of how good networking can work wonders. As per the last census, the Sunderbans had 271 tigers. But locals say, 20 tigers are poached every year. It is high time we checked poaching if we want to save the tiger.

Preserve habitats

Dr Tapan Saha, Senior Scientist, Institute of Environmental Studies and Wetland Management

It is important that the habitat in which tigers dwell remains favourable. We ought to rethink our development strategy to ensure that the ecosystem remains

undisturbed. Even when people talk of eco-tourism, we find that tourism rules, while the 'eco' part of it is conveniently overlooked. Why only the tiger? The entire gamut of wildlife comprising animals, plants and birds needs to be conserved. An inventory of the various plant species is very essential for our own well being. To prevent any drop in biodiversity, unscientific human intervention must be kept at bay.

Political will is a must

Ananda Banerjee, Wildlife activist

What is ailing the tiger is constant destruction of its habitat along with its prey base. The degradation of ecosystems has become a major threat to the tiger and to people living around forest areas. Conservation of such habitat and ecosystems are a priority. We need habitats with linking corridors so that the dispersal of a gene pool takes place evenly and creates space for a healthy sustainable population and not isolated pockets of forests surrounded by any ever populating human race nibbling into it which will make or is making the tiger an increasingly 'urban' animal.

Secondly, without political will there is no way we can ever save our tigers and forests. All problems pertaining to India's wildlife can be better dealt with if there is political support for conservation. Political will on wildlife conservation gets easily diluted when the issue of votes comes into play.

People living in and around tiger reserves do need to be involved in the tiger protection efforts and they should be seeing the tiger as a source of income. Only people friendly conservation management programmes can protect our ecosystems and biodiversity.

Look after livelihoods

Dhrubajyoti Ghosh, Regional Vice Chair (South Asia), Commission on Ecosystem Management, IUCN

Give local people sustainable incomes, especially the poorest of the poor, who will take to any activity for their subsistence. In the Sunderbans, for example, prawn seed collection is the worst possible danger to the ecosystem. But the collection of prawn seeds is how local people eke out a living.

A tiger needs not just his forest but a larger ecosystem within which to survive. It needs a stock of biodiversity. Lack of adequate security arrangements for the forest guards renders them almost ineffective against the large-scale felling of timber within the core area of the Sunderbans.

Involve the young

Asit Biswas, Partner, Help Tourism

It is important to ensure that the jungle and the ecosystem are maintained so that the tiger has enough food at its disposal. For this, the prey base should remain steady. Local villagers must be dissuaded from feeding on deer and wild boar meat - something generally considered a delicacy. This can prevent tigers from straying into human settlements or the buffer zone and getting poached or killed in the bargain.

It should be remembered that the survival of the tiger is no stand-alone issue. It is part of something much larger. Climate change, for instance, seriously affects the ecosystem, food availability and hence, animals too.

Where the Sunderbans is involved, there are four authorities working independently. It would help if these (Project Tiger, Sunderbans Biosphere Reserve, Ministry of Sunderbans Affairs and the Sunderbans Development Board) worked together. Radio mapping and a holistic study of the natural resources of the Sunderbans are absolutely essential. Radio-collaring of tigers will also help us understand the behaviour of the animal much better.

Involving school and college students in disseminating the idea of conservation has always yielded good results. It would help if the youth is actively involved in the matter.

Protect coastal areas

Prof Sugato Hazra, Director, School of Oceanographic Studies, Jadavpur University.

It is necessary that some concrete steps be taken for coastal protection in the Sunderbans. Adequate planning and assessment is needed to address the problem of environmental refugees or migrants resulting from the submergence and erosion of islands. A national policy needs to be formulated for the rehabilitation of these people, taking into account the fact that half a million people from the Sunderbans are expected to become environmental refugees by 2020.

Stop poaching

Suman Sahai, Director, Gene Campaign

Unless there is a complete crackdown on poachers, the tiger cannot be saved. Poaching is not possible without complicity. This means the nexus between poachers and government agencies/officials will have to be exposed and the guilty punished so severely that everyone gets the message.

On the other side, forest guards and communities living around forest areas must be educated that it is in their interest also that the tiger survives and so they should be vigilant about suspicious activities and report these.

Business

BEYOND PROFIT

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

The secret of Namdhari freshness

S. Gautam
Bangalore

In a large air-conditioned room men and women, dressed in white coats with their heads in caps, work quietly at long steel tables under fluorescent lights. The atmosphere is surreal. At first glance it seems like a laboratory. But a closer look reveals that the tables have on them red capsicums, yellow zucchinis, purple brinjals and other vegetables.

No, this is not a lab. It is a sanitised sorting centre, far removed from the filth and squalor of the customary *mandi*. And, oh yes, these are special greens. The antiseptic conditions are a part of their higher status of being free of chemical pesticides and fertilisers. Some, like the ubiquitous *bhindi* on the cold steel table, are being wrapped and carefully packed in cartons, for export, while others will be sold in air-conditioned upmarket shops in India.

Welcome to the clean and wholesome world of Namdhari's Fresh. About 48 km southwest from Bangalore and just off the highway to Mysore is a 200 acre farm whose produce make it to shelves in supermarkets in the UK, Germany, Dubai, Maldives and Australia. There are also four outlets in India: three in Bangalore and one in Delhi.

The farm is where Namdhari's Seeds, now one of India's largest producers of vegetable seeds, began operations in 1985. In 2000, Namdhari's Fresh was set up to directly market vegetables. Since then the business has only grown. Sales from the four Indian retail outlets alone are Rs 10 crores annually. The sales revenue from exports and the seeds business is much more.

The Namdharis belong to a sect of Sikhism that was founded by Balak Singh (1797-1862). They believe in a simple life without any religious ritual other than repeating God's name and therefore are called Namdhari. They don't imbibe alcohol, tobacco or meat. They dress in white handspun cloth and tie their turbans in a style of their own, flat across the forehead instead of angled across. Their exploits are famous on the hockey field, the Namdhari Eleven being one of the top-ranked teams in the country.

It is their belief in leading a healthy life that prompted the foray into growing vegetables using the least possible chemical inputs. Like the Quakers, for the Namdharis inspiration for their commercial activities comes from their religious beliefs.

"Our Satguru (Jagjit Singh, the religious head of the Namdharis) provided the inspiration with his staunch belief in the organic way," says Thakur Uday Singh, nephew of the Satguru and the force behind Namdhari's Seeds and Namdhari's Fresh. "We wanted to start something new and challenging."

Namdhari's Fresh is not completely organic, but comes very close to being so. There is a limited use of pesticides and fertilisers when growing fruits and vegetables, but the final products are certified free of chemicals.

"It is difficult to feed everybody using purely organic means. It is not economically viable either," Thakur Uday Singh continues as he stands in a poly-tunnel watching the harvest of fresh lettuce.

The pesticides that are used are registered and not banned in Europe. Safer insecticides are also applied. Namdhari's Fresh prefers the use of organic pesticides made from neem oil, garlic paste, chilly powder, seaweed extract. The use of fertilisers is only at the stage of vegetative growth of the plant.

"We do not use pesticides on our leafy greens and growing them in these polytunnels helps protect them from pests. We get a lot of our greens from our



Thakur Uday Singh at the Namdhari farm off Bangalore



Sorting and packing of vegetables at the farm



A Namdhari's Fresh store in Bangalore. Below: Sorting of chillies

holdings and growers in the Nilgiris where there is little problem from pests," explains Thakur Uday Singh.

"We were certified by EureGAP (European Retail Parties Good Agricultural Practices) in 2004 which involves following a set of practices that ensures the safety of the consumer, grower and worker," he says. "Records are maintained about the use of fertilisers and pesticides to insure that no residues remain when the product is harvested."

The products are tested in supermarkets abroad before they are put up for sale, so it is important to ensure that procedures are followed in the use of insecticides. There is also a no-use period before harvesting to allow insecticides to dissipate. EureGAP also conducts random tests and their authorised agent may conduct surprise checks.

The water used is of primary concern and fits in with the Namdharis' belief in clean, hygienic living. "We ensure that the water used in the growing of vegetables and even on farms that are under our contract is uncontaminated," says Satnam Singh Roopra, 46, managing director of Namdhari's Fresh.

Other than their own holdings in Ooti, Tumkur and Coorg, they have also taken land under contract farming where they provide the seeds and all other inputs. Taken altogether the Namdharis have farming activities on 10,000 acres.

"Our supervisors ensure that records are maintained of every input and that



the water source is pure. The use of sewage water in producing vegetables is rampant and we are extremely careful that this does not happen," he adds.

Customers at their outlets at Sadashiv Nagar, Koramangala and Indira Nagar in Bangalore come again and again for the freshness and superior taste of the vegetables. "The vegetables are of very good quality and a better bet from those available elsewhere. I trust them because they use a clean water source and the taste is so much better", says Babak Kardan of Canadian origin who teaches in the Canadian International School in Bangalore. The outlets are very popular with the foreign residents of Bangalore.

Josephine Harath from Holland has been shopping at Namdhari's Fresh ever since she shifted here two years ago. "Their greens are the best and some of the vegetables like the asparagus, broccoli and other ingredients used in Chinese food are available nowhere else. I don't know whether they are organically grown or not and it doesn't matter to me because I get what I want and its clean and fresh," she says.

It's the same for Mickey Zaveri, who is aware that the vegetables are not organically grown but buys them because they are fresh and clean.

Chillies, capsicum, gourds, beans etc. are kept in sealed plastic containers with stickers printed with the date of packing and a best-before date.

"We maintain a cold-chain process right after the vegetable is harvested till the time it reaches the shelf in the store. They are pre-cooled before being packed and transported and the sorting and packing is also done in air-conditioned environments. Our products have a longer shelf life because we maintain strict controls on the temperature", says Roopra as he bites into a grilled sandwich from the salad bar that they have opened at the Sadashiv Nagar outlet.

The vegetables are kept in shelves that were specially imported and a constant temperature of 2 to 4 degrees Celsius is maintained 24 hours of the day. They even have a 63 KVA genset to ensure uninterrupted supply. The salad bar has turned out to be another success with some customers, who are total vegetarians, coming especially to enjoy the variety of salads and to take home eggless cakes and pastries.

Mango orchards, long rows of polytunnels growing spinach, lettuce and other greens, and greenhouses for the seeds make up the farm. Water use is an important aspect of the Namdhari approach to conservation. It is also a wise business strategy given the rising cost of water and its poor availability. So, thin black pipes make up a drip-irrigation system.

In parts, the farm near Bangalore looks like a resort, with low apartment blocks and tennis courts for the Namdhari families. In a room next to the complex, an old man sits with a rosary, continuously reciting sacred texts in a soft murmur.

"This practice has continued non-stop 24 hours a day for the past 23 years. A few members of the Namdhari community, who still lead the orthodox way of life, reside here and have kept up this practice ever since this farm was established in 1982," Roopra says after paying obeisance and moving on.

"We do surveys by comparing our prices with those in other stores and we are generally about 20 percent more expensive than the rest," says

Roopra. *Bhindi* sells for Rs 32 per kg here. And Roopra is reminded of a customer who came to their shop when it opened four years ago and said, "*Sardarji, yeh kya nakhra kiya hai? Bas sabzi hi bechoge?*" From one shop to four and another one opening in a month, the Namdharis have come a long way.



Vandana Shiva



Customers at the Navdanya Café



Navdanya products on display

Catch up with Slow Food in Delhi

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

AN unassuming yellow residential building in Delhi's Hauz Khas is increasingly becoming a popular meeting place for lunch. The design theme at this small café is the seed. The frosted glass door has long ears of grain etched on it. The walls are painted with blades of golden grass. There are five glass top tables. There is the cereal table, a lentils table, a spices table and a herbs table. Look through the glass top and you will see geometrical containers filled with seeds. The menu, this Friday, includes peach *lassi*, white bean salad, salsa, *jhangora* mould and *jhangora kheer*. The food is aesthetically presented.

Jhangora is a form of millet and just one of the indigenous food grains that the Navdanya Slow Food Café wants to bring into the mainstream. The Café that was inaugurated on 2 October 2004 by Carlo Petrini, the Italian founder of the Slow Food movement, is meant to showcase the rich diversity of agricultural produce grown organically in India by small farmers. The café also retails lentils, several varieties of rice, spices, herbal tea, juices, mustard oil, desi ghee, brown bread baked by Nirulas, and ragi cookies made by women from Katha, a Delhi-based NGO.

The Navdanya Café is the brainchild of 54-year-old physicist turned activist Vandana Shiva who is clad in an elegant apple green khadi silk saree. She launches into its history animatedly with a practiced ease that comes from two decades of vociferous campaigning.

"This is the final step of a 20-year movement. It started with seed saving in 1987. All the seed saving programmes in India – the *Beej Bachao Andolan* in Jardhagaon, the Green Foundation in Bangalore, Appiko in the Western Ghats and the Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems in Tamil Nadu were started by Navdanya," she says. Her fingers, adorned with ethnic silver rings, wave in the air. The silver pin that holds her hair up has bells and tinkles as she speaks.

People can become members of the Navdanya Slow Food movement. The café already has 1000 members in Delhi who get a weekly grain and vegetable basket. A few regular consumers have had one person in the household struck by cancer and want only organic food. Some regular shops have also begun stocking Navdanya's produce. Navdanya sells about Rs 1 lakh worth of goods from the Café every month and another Rs 50,000 from an outlet at Dilli Haat.

The Navdanya movement has now established 32 seed banks across the country. "The brilliance of Navdanya is that we have turned seed conservation into production and for economic livelihoods at levels much better than with chemical methods," says Shiva.

The seed saving movement consists of collecting indigenous varieties for

crops in a locality. These seeds are stored in local seed banks that then donate them to farmers who want to grow a particular variety. The farmer who takes these seeds gives back twice the amount to the seed bank the next season or gives away seeds to two more farmers. Isn't this similar to the open source movement? "It is open source seed and this is older than the software open source movement," says Shiva.

Navdanya has a 30-acre model farm in Dehradun. About 70,000 households which have already got into organic farming have signed up for fair trade. Navdanya has trained more than 200,000 farmers. "But we deal with farmers at different levels. We have touched 10 million at least through our various movements where we fight patents and the WTO," she explains.

The farm produce also goes to small agro processing units run by women's groups. They pop Amaranth seeds to make ready-to-eat breakfast cereals, squashes, and *desi* ghee. If products are alien to the farmers culture, they work with partners or women's groups in Delhi.

Has the farmer's income increased after moving to organic farming?

According to Shiva, informal assessment suggests that there has been a three-fold increase in family incomes. No formal study has been done.

Navdanya makes sure that a rural family gets nutrition first. They will help a farmer market produce only if the family has enough food to eat. Shiva explains that farmers have to fill up a form, when they become members, recording what they are growing, the acreage they have and how much their families need. "And then we say sorry we will take only so much *ragi*. Your kids must be eating it. So we say, first the earth, then the household, then the local market and then the national and international market. So far we only export Basmati rice."

Navdanya pays a 10 percent premium to the farmer for organic produce. By just cutting fertilisers and pesticides, 90 percent of the farmer's costs are saved.

The purchased seed is another cost that is saved. But even though organic farming is cheaper in financial terms, it is more labour intensive and Navdanya feels that farmers have to be rewarded and that consumers should pay for healthy food. Because farmers grow more than one crop they are not at the mercy of volatile prices in the market. "If the market does not pick up the rice, farmers are not bothered because they are growing vegetables, pulses, cotton and fruits and they will not starve if they don't sell the rice. And they don't need money immediately to buy fertilisers and seeds. So we put the bargaining power in the hands of the farmer," points out Shiva.

And as we part, Shiva has an appeal: "Through your article I would like to make a plea. All you IT kids who are making it rich through outsourcing, please share a bit of your money to build a food security base by protecting the farmers of this country and feed yourself good food."

AD (ASAHI GLASS)

Perspectives

CATCHING TRENDS

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

Think of tomorrow

HARIVANSH



Inside India

THE spirit of democracy is nurtured by tradition, values, ethics and good conduct. If we want to make Indian democracy healthy then there are two issues that urgently need attention. First, we have to strengthen internal democracy in our political parties. Secondly, we have to ensure that institutions like the legislature, judiciary and the executive are given the respect they need to function. These two ends should be high on the agenda of India's civil society.

What is really going on in our political parties? Leave aside the CPI and CPM and we find that most parties have been converted into family businesses. The demise of democracy within the Congress is well known. But critics of the Congress have done no better. Karunanidhi, Mayawati, Ramvilas

Paswan, Mulayam Singh, Sharad Pawar, Laloo Prasad Yadav, Bal Thackeray and others also have personal fiefs where they do as they please.

The BJP talks about its annual party convention, internal debates and discussions on different policies. But the BJP has set itself completely in the Congress mould. The BJP high command's decision is final. Its leaders are imposed and not chosen from within. If democracy is nurtured within parties, good people will come forward to join politics and raise the level of interaction in Parliament and State Assemblies.

If we want to make democracy strong then democratic institutions have to be autonomous, result-oriented and impartial. Hardly a month ago, while talking to *The Times of India*, CBI Director US Mishra said the autonomy of the CBI is a myth. People wielding power try to influence the agency. The CBI needs the approval of senior officers and politicians before it can undertake important investigations. Often, this approval is not forthcoming. Mishra referred to a former petroleum minister against whom the CBI found sufficient evidence for prosecution. But the government did not give its sanction. Although he did not mention the name, indications are aplenty that the person he was referring to is none other than Satish Sharma of the Congress. If the Congress or the UPA behaves in such a fashion, stopping prosecution of their favourite people and initiating prosecution against their political opponents, the CBI will continue to lose its impartiality and respect in the public eye. The NDA behaved in the same fashion while dealing with the Ayodhya issue.

See also how Mayawati is accusing the CBI of prosecuting her only because she is a Dalit. It is such a shame that the UPA government cannot come to the

public defence of the CBI. In today's politics many corrupt leaders, blackmailers, power brokers and criminals glibly raise the bogey of discrimination on the basis of caste, creed and religion. This behaviour will never allow a civil society or constitutional system to gain in strength.

It is in much the same way that the reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) are dismissed. The UPA government has initiated an inquiry into the disinvestments of Centaur Hotel. It's a welcome step. But the NDA thinks nothing of denouncing the CAG report. The CPI(M) is all excited about the CAG's findings because it involves the NDA and the selling of a public sector hotel. But in West Bengal, for the last 20 years, the CAG has been reporting serious lapses on the part of the Left Front government and nobody has taken it seriously. You take the CAG reports on UP and Bihar of the past 20 years and you can see financial anarchy and loot in these states. Once again the CAG has been ignored. Unfortunately issues of personal enmity between the UPA and the NDA have severely weakened public institutions like the CAG, CBI and the Election Commission.



What is really going on in our political parties? Leave aside the CPI and CPM and we find that most parties have been converted into family businesses. The demise of democracy within the Congress is well known.

Perhaps one of the most shocking examples is that of the bureaucrat LV Saptarshi writing to the union law ministry to complain that the Election Commission is biased on grounds of caste. Now, who is Saptarshi? He is the Director General of CAPART. The Prime Minister came to the defence of the Election Commission. But within a week of Saptarshi's outrageous allegations came the disturbing news about the extension of his services.

Time and again the judiciary is weakened. For instance, hearings in the disproportionate assets case against Laloo Prasad Yadav ended in 2004. After some time one judge retired, so the remaining judge could not give a judgment. Again, a fresh bench was reconstituted. A fresh trial started and ended. When the hearings were completed, again one judge excused himself from this case. Now, once more, another bench will be constituted and hearings will begin afresh.

In Ranchi, in an unprecedented move, 20 accused in the fodder scam case tried to harass special CBI judge AK Sengupta, in court. They have moved the High Court against this judge. Now we have reached a point where the accused and the offenders will decide what kind of court and judges they need. Nobody is asking why animal husbandry scams are being heard in the court since the last 10-12 years. Who is responsible for such delays? The animal husbandry scamsters were looting the public exchequer openly with political patronage, for nearly 20 years. Now they are trying to delay the trial in all possible ways.

It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that institutions on which democracy is built are sustained. Unfortunately, political parties of all hues are quick to abuse institutions for short-term gains. The question we must ask ourselves is what are we leaving behind for future generations?

Pursuing Gross National Happiness

ARUN MAIRA



Let's Talk

AN agreed upon goal is necessary for a process of change and development because, as some wise man said, "If you don't know where you are going, you will end up somewhere else!" Unfortunately, people from many sections of society, each of whom believes they are working towards a healthier, happier India, are unable and unwilling to work together, and even to talk to each other! NGOs and business people suspect each other's motives; both of them doubt the ability of the government; and politicians, apart from being divided amongst themselves, are considered the source of all problems by everyone else! Each has his own vision of what the goals of develop-

ment should be, and the visions have not yet been aligned. Though this may not be easy, it must be done.

An article in *The New York Times* in April 2005 said that Norwegians have no business to feel rich when the 'facts' show they are not. According to this article, Norwegian consumers have fewer choices of goodies than people in New York and generally pay more for what they buy. Moreover, the average private consumption figure in the USA is \$32,900 whereas in Norway it is only \$18,350. Even the public facilities in Norway are not in as good shape as those in the USA. Therefore, according to this article, Norwegians are wrong to feel rich. But what irks the author of the article is that nevertheless they do!

The article was another pointer to the inadequacy of purely economic measures, such as growth of GDP per capita, as goals of national development policy. And another reminder that happiness is not obtained merely by making people richer. It raises the question, what should be the goal of the socio-economic development of a nation? The Kingdom of Bhutan has chosen to pursue Gross National Happiness as its objective. Should this be the goal? The problem is that we know how to measure the size of economies. But do we know what makes people happy? We must also look carefully at the correlation between growth in national incomes and happiness of people.

Richard Layard of the London School of Economics presents some revealing insights in his recent book, *Happiness*. The first is not surprising: people in very poor countries are less happy than people in the richest countries. After all, extra income is really valuable when it lifts people away from sheer physical poverty, enabling them to buy adequate food and shelter, which are the most basic requirements in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Therefore it is imperative to raise income levels in poor countries such as India. Other findings of the research are more intriguing. For one, that people in the richest countries are not happier than people in relatively poorer countries: for example, people in the USA are not much happier than people in Mexico, even though their incomes are 250 percent higher. Another intriguing revelation is that while real incomes per head have almost tripled in the USA, as a result of the remarkable growth of its economy since 1945, the percentage of people in the USA who say they are very happy has remained the same, at less than 30 percent.

Which brings us to the million dollar question: what makes people happier if it is not a million dollars? The US General Social Survey reveals seven major factors affecting people's happiness. A person's financial situation is only one, and that too not the most important. The other six are: family relationships, community and friends, personal freedom, the nature of work the person is engaged in, health, and personal values. Therefore, a national development paradigm that puts GDP per capita as the most important measure of success (and sometimes the only one), cannot guarantee that people will be happier. Indeed, as Layard shows, a development paradigm focussed excessively on stimulating economic output per capita will, over time, destroy many principal sources of happiness. For example, while the greater willingness of people in the US, as compared to many European countries, to move to other places for better jobs, may contribute

to the US economy's dynamism and higher productivity, it also disrupts the stability and quality of family and community life. Thus it has a negative impact on two of the most important sources of happiness for people.

A more holistic model is required that integrates the perspectives of the various social sciences. Because, as Nobel Prize winning economist, Douglass C. North writes, in his book, *Understanding the Process of Economic Change*, "The human environment is divided by social scientists into discrete disciplines-economics, political sciences, sociology – but the constructions of the human mind that we require to make sense out of the human environment do not coincide with these artificial categories. Our analytical frameworks must integrate insights derived from these artificially separate disciplines if we are to understand the process of change". The problem in combining the perspectives of the various social sciences is that their proponents do not know how to talk to each other. They have their own jargon, which is generally understood within their own community only. And they have their special models of the world, in which they include only those factors they consider important. Indeed, the proponents of the various social disciplines may not even like talking to each other. Not wanting to talk, nor able to talk with each other, they live within 'conceptually gated communities', talking to and listening to their own kind only.

Many economists have emphasised the importance of 'trust', within societies to reduce transaction costs and enhance economic progress. Therefore they are interested in the conditions that create trust amongst people. The principal conditions, according to economists, are (1) availability of adequate and symmetrical information to the parties involved and (2) confidence that all parties will comply with their obligations in the transaction. (Therefore institutions, such as

stock market regulators, are empowered to ensure transparency and adequacy of information, and to ensure compliance.) The transactional mode of working with others, if properly governed by written, or widely accepted 'unwritten rules', creates confidence in the predictability of actions of the parties involved. Hence it is efficient in economic terms, and also adds to the stock of 'trust' in society. But this trust is limited to the bounds of the transactions, and does not automatically extend beyond them. To put it simply, New Yorkers know how to complete daily transactions with each other quickly and efficiently, with no waste of time on pleasantries. But New Yorkers are also notorious for avoiding needless contact with others because their instinct is not to trust them.

It is necessary to distinguish different types of situations in which trust is required.

One type, already explained, are 'market transactions' between strangers. In such situations, the actors trust that the system will ensure that others will perform to their contracts within the context of that system. They will not necessarily trust these others outside the purview of that system, as the example of New Yorkers illustrates, because they cannot predict how they will act in a different context. An established system provides the scaffolding for working safely within its contained space. Therefore, what we must examine is what will engender trust between parties interacting in situations beyond the safety of accepted systems, or when the rules governing the system have to be substantially changed in other words, when there is no scaffolding, or the scaffolding has to be realigned with the parties working inside.

In such situations, a deeper trust is required of each other. For this, they must have confidence the other is unlikely to cause harm. Therefore they need to know the principles that will guide each other's actions, and know each other's wants and fears. They can learn these through the hit-and-miss of trying to work with each other, which could lead to greater mistrust. Or they can sit down and listen to each other's aspirations and beliefs, and locate the trip-wires they will watch out for and help each other across, and thus build stronger coalitions for development. Such deep dialogues are not the norm when parties try to work together. Perhaps they should be, to create the foundations for a richer and happier society.

So, let's talk! But not just talk-there's too much 'just talk' in the country. Let us also listen deeply. Let's have a dialogue.

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



The big mess in Delhi's water

ARVIND KEJRIWAL



The Right To Know

increase. According to them, the water sector should be run on commercial principles, like any business. Tariffs should be raised to a level so that DJB recovers the full cost of operation and maintenance, including depreciation and debt charges, in a phased manner. Presently, political considerations keep the government from raising tariffs. Therefore, the power to fix tariffs should be vested with an "independent" regulator who would be guided by purely economic considerations.

The consultants recommend that government subsidies should be phased out. But what would happen to DJB's finances if the subsidies were phased out? Where will the money come from? Even if the steep hike, as proposed by the consultants, were implemented, the annual cash flow projections for DJB for the next decade or so show that DJB's finances would continue to be in the red and keep mounting every year. To overcome this, the consultants recommend that annual cash "grants" be given by the Delhi Government to the water utility to meet the balance cash requirements. Rather than decreasing, the cash grants keep increasing every year and reach Rs 1045 crores by the year 2011. What is the difference between a subsidy and a cash grant? They want the Delhi Government to stop giving subsidy but start giving cash grants!

The consultants also want cross subsidies to be phased out. Presently, domestic consumers consume 87% of the water and contribute 48% of the total revenue, whereas industrial and commercial consumers use 13% of water and contribute 52% of the total revenue. The consultants consider this situation as unfair and want it to be rectified over a period of time. Hence, they recommend a very steep increase in prices of domestic water. The consultants have projected an increase by more than 10 times in revenue from Rs 69 crores in 2002-03 to Rs 725 crores in 2011-12 from domestic consumers. For the corresponding period, they have projected a three-fold increase in revenue from commercial consumers from Rs 38 crores to 107 crores. And an increase of just a little more than double from industrial consumers from Rs 22 crores to Rs 56 crores.

Why do the consultants have such a strong bias in favour of commercial and industrial consumers? The consultants have not given any convincing explanation why they want the cross-subsidies to be removed. If better profits are available to DJB from the commercial and industrial sectors, why should it forgo this advantage? It does not seem to make business sense. And since water is essential for human survival, the first right over water should belong to individual human beings for drinking and other purposes. Commercial and industrial purposes should have last right over water. They should, therefore pay much more than individuals.

In Delhi, water charges include sewerage charges. Now, the cost of

At the instance of the World Bank, the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) requested a consortium of consultants consisting of Price Waterhouse, DHV Consultants of Netherlands and TCE Consulting Engineers Ltd, to write a prescription for the ailing water sector in Delhi. This group of consultants has submitted a series of reports. The Delhi government has already started implementing their recommendations.

Solutions to Delhi's water shortages are closely linked to the working of DJB. The consultants have observed that it is in a financial mess and depends on a subsidy of Rs 350 crores a year from the Delhi Government.

DJB's poor finances, the consultants say, are the direct result of the extremely low tariffs that it charges for its water. They recommend a steep

One is not sure of savings in water resulting from tariffs going up. Inequitable distribution of water is either due to systemic problems or a conscious decision of the DJB to supply more water to certain areas than to the others.

collecting, conveying and treating effluents is much more than that of treating and distributing water. The consultants admit that commercial and industrial users put a much greater burden on sewer system than the domestic users. Therefore, they should be made to pay much more. However, the consultants have not quantified the extra burden put by the commercial and industrial sector on the sewer system.

Interestingly, the consultants do not recommend any hike in water prices in the NDMC and cantonment areas. For NDMC areas, the revenue collections are

projected to increase from Rs 17 crores in 2002-03 to Rs 18 crores in 2011-12. In the corresponding period, the revenue collections would increase from Rs 4.9 crores to Rs 5.3 crores in cantonment areas. This means that the people living in MCD areas would end up heavily subsidising the NDMC and cantonment areas. What is the reason for this bias in favour of the NDMC and cantonment areas? It seems that the consultants have not been guided by sound economics.

According to the consultants, the total cash requirements of DJB would be Rs 8669 crores in 2011-12. The water availability, net of losses, would be 3388 MLD. If we assume that by then subsidy and cross-subsidy were

completely phased out as per the consultants' prescription, the cost of water would be Rs 71 per KL in 2011-12. This means that a middle class family of five with an average consumption of 30 KL of water would have to pay Rs 2100 per month against their present monthly bill of Rs 192. A family of five living in slums and consuming 6 KL of water would pay Rs 425 per month against their present monthly bill of Rs 75.

The consultants say that tariff rationalisation will bring the following additional benefits:

- The wastage of water would be reduced.
- People in water surplus areas will use less water thus making water available for deficient areas.

The above two advantages seem theoretical and simplistic. There isn't evidence to show that the wastage of water by consumers is a significant issue in a water balance sheet. So, one is not sure if any significant savings in water would happen through tariffs going up. Besides, inequitable distribution of water has no relation to tariffs. It is either due to systemic problems or a conscious decision of DJB to supply more water to certain areas than to the others. Against an average 100 litres available to a person per day in the MCD area, 400 litres of water is available to a person living in the NDMC area. If the consultants were serious about stopping wastage and checking inequitable distribution of water through tariff, they should have increased tariffs for NDMC areas rather than MCD areas.

Let us see who gains and who loses from these prescriptions. Industrialists and shopkeepers, all across Delhi, gain in terms of lower water tariffs. The people living in NDMC and cantonment areas gain similarly. But 93% of the population living in MCD areas lose tremendously. Their water tariffs are likely to skyrocket to a level where water just might become unaffordable, not only for the poor, but even for the middle class.

Do these steps benefit the government? The government would continue to dole out huge amounts every year, as it is doing at the moment. Presently, the element of cross-subsidy reduces the government burden. Removal of cross-subsidies is likely to further increase the government commitment from the Rs 350 crores subsidy at present to Rs 1045 crores as "cash grants" and Rs 2310 as loans by 2011. This is projected to keep increasing thereafter. So, the government will continue to bleed.

So, what exactly do the consultants hope to achieve? To my mind this seems an elaborate exercise not to improve water services in Delhi but maximise the profits of the private companies that will finally takeover from DJB.

Losing votes and winning elections

RAM GIDOOMAL



Through NR Eyes

THE UK elections saw the re-election of a Labour Government with Tony Blair as leader – a record for the Labour Party, which has never before achieved three successive wins. But Tony Blair's majority in Parliament was reduced from 160 seats to 66 seats - still comfortable for purposes of government but with serious challenges and questions being raised. Not only is the Labour Party challenging Tony Blair's authority – with calls for him to resign growing by the day, but the anomalies of the first-past-the-post system of Britain's electoral system have been exposed yet again resulting in a call for urgent changes. The result, some may argue, was a reasonable reflection of the people's will. But how far it was representational or democratic is another matter.

One newspaper summed up the situation with a headline: "While Britain lectures the world on democracy, others put it into practice", referring to democratic alternatives in use in Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Israel amongst others.

The anomaly of the British electoral system sticks out like a sore thumb. In two General Elections the party that won the most votes lost the election: Labour in 1951 and the Conservatives in February 1974. Margaret Thatcher in 1983 and 1987 won landslide majorities in Parliament on about 40 per cent of the vote. Tony Blair did likewise in 1997 and 2001. In 1992 John Major beat Neil Kinnock's Labour Party by a clear and significant seven percentage points but was rewarded with a barely workable majority of 27.

In the current election, we see Tony Blair beating the Conservative Party's Michael Howard by just three points and yet being rewarded with a comfortable 66 seat margin in House of Commons.

There appears to be a system failure that gives a message that all voters are equal, but some are more equal than others. Everyone can see the unfairness of rules that allow one party, Labour, to barely reach 36 percent but win all the power and another, the Liberal Democrats, to win nearly a quarter of the vote but fewer than a tenth of the seats. It somehow doesn't seem fair.

The cry coming from many quarters, including 100 Labour MPs, is: "It is time for a change."

The outcome would have been very different if the principles of Proportional Representation (PR) had been used. While there are many variants of PR being used in different countries, if the PR system currently used in the European and Regional elections in the UK had been used for the current elections we would have a result that gave Labour 247 seats - 109 fewer MPs than it has now. The Liberal Democrats would have 148 MPs, 86 more. The Conservatives with 219 seats would be better off with 19 more seats. There are of course different formulae that could be chosen, but the point remains that there are alternatives to the first-past-the-post system which has gone past its sell by date for a country that is no longer a two party state.

One Labour MP who saw his majority of 5000 slashed to just 163 after people voted tactically to protest at Tony Blair said: "We have the most unsophisticated system in the world. By the simplest system of just 1, 2, 3 instead of X you could have a representative system."

Nina Temple, director of *Make Votes Count*, which campaigns for electoral reform, said: "This general election has been a travesty of democracy. We have now got a government with a working majority elected by just over one-third of voters. When turnout is taken into account, only 21 per cent of the electorate voted for the government."

Could these and other anomalies be the reason that voter turnout has been falling? This year's was the second lowest in 60 years. Many voters were effectively disenfranchised and smaller parties got nowhere.

The message that appears to be emerging from a closer examination of the results is that while British voters have not given up on democracy, they do take part when they consider it works.

Thorough reform of the electoral system needs to be embarked upon now, before faith in the system is lost entirely. PR does have disadvantages. Some argue that PR will more often than not produce coalitions, rather than single-party government. There is the risk of political stagnation, weakened accountability of MPs to their constituencies (although this defect can and must be avoided).

But the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. Speaking personally, my



interest and direct involvement in politics was catalysed by the introduction of PR in the London Mayoral and Assembly elections. When I realised that just 5 per cent of the popular vote would entitle a party to a seat on the London Assembly I felt that it would be worth my while to run as a candidate and campaign with a smaller independent party that more closely reflected my views. I could see the possibility of directly influencing the political agenda and the potential to bring about change and make a difference. In fact in my first foray into politics in 2000 I won just under 100,000 first and second preference votes in the Mayoral election and technically won a seat on the London Assembly! (Although I won the necessary number of votes to be allocated a seat, my Party did not get the minimum 5 percent to be eligible to claim it - but the point was made!).

Successive governments have failed to implement electoral reform and it is easy to understand why. Working majorities lead to the temptation to take the easy way out - keep the status quo and hold on to power at all costs with minimum accountability. Change must not be just for a fairer electoral system, but also for a more accountable system of government altogether. The danger of a total loss of credibility in our democracy was succinctly summed up in a letter to a national newspaper:

"Sir: What exists in this country is the equivalent of tyranny, when 36 per cent determine how 64 per cent are governed. And we preach to the Middle East about democracy!"

(RAM GIDOOMAL, Chairman, South Asian Development Partnership)

Meet Meena by the Teesta

MILINDO CHAKRABARTI



Reforms Report

CONSTRUCTION work for the Teesta Low Dam Project Stage IV by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation Limited (NHPC) is slated to begin soon, now that the project has been accorded the necessary environmental clearances by the competent authority at the Ministry of Environment and Forests of the Government of India. The plan is a part of a bigger project that visualises the realisation of the huge hydro-power potential that the Teesta basin has in store – 3900 megawatts to be precise – for effective extraction by mankind!

The proposed construction for Stage IV is being taken up near Kalijhora lying about 18.3 km downstream of the Teesta Bridge and 3.75 km upstream of the Coronation Bridge on National Highway 31A. The name of the project – Teesta Low Dam

Stage IV – is quite misleading as the height of the dam – 30 metres above the riverbed – is well above the internationally accepted norm for a low dam fixed at 15 metres and below.

The project, once completed, will probably supply a good amount of energy to boost economic activities in regions far away from the location of the dam. Earlier, the plan was to have the dam constructed about 400 metres upstream from the Coronation Bridge. Later, the plan was altered in view of danger posed to a portion of the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary and the location of the dam was shifted another 3.35 km upstream. As per the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the proposed project, carried out by experts from the University of North Bengal on the basis of the earlier location, 11 households consisting of 41 members were to be relocated to a safer place to avoid inundation. The Environmental Management Plan (EMP), carried out by the same group of experts, suggested a Resettlement and Rehabilitation Plan of Rs 52 lakhs that includes:

- Land for construction of house (150 sq metres)
 - Land for kitchen garden and animal sheds (50 sq metres)
 - Special grant for house building
 - Transportation charge for cattle and household items
 - Assistance for major unmarried daughters
 - Provision for providing drinking water, drainage and electrification of houses.
- The displaced were proposed to be resettled within the project colony near

Rambhi Bazar, around six kilometres from Kalijhora.

Meena Sundas heads one of these 11 families. Her husband died recently. She runs a roadside tea stall and earns about Rs 175 a day, on an average. Her two sons are going to school. With the change in the final location of the dam, these households are not sure if they are to be relocated at all, as they are no longer facing the threat of inundation. Meena is very happy about her family's future prospects, once the dam is set up. She foresees increased livelihood opportunities with the likelihood of increased inflow of visitors around the dam site.

She is, however, totally oblivious of the long-term concerns vis-à-vis the structural stability of the region – an issue raised at several fora by informed observers. A report by the Geological Survey of India clearly points out the structural vulnerability of the construction site to possibilities of increased threats from landslides and neo-tectonic movements leading to increased seismic activities. There are concerns around the apparent neglect of the high rate of silt the Teesta carries and the consequent likelihood of flooding a larger region in future. The scorecard about the possible impact on ecological ambience and the socio-ecological crisis that may evolve, as a corollary, needs a thorough re-look.

However, Meena does not mind. She is happy if her sons are well settled and capable of earning a better livelihood in the days to come. She would have been a worried mother if she were resettled at the project colony. Her skills would not have enabled her to easily find an alternative means of livelihood there. Now that such threats are apparently reduced, she plans to cohabit with the dam and looks forward to better life in the days to come.

If displaced, Meena looks for:

- A job for one member of her family
- Free education for her children and health services for the family
- A house constructed for her by the NHPC at the project colony with ensured availability of electricity and drinking water

The Environmental Management Plan (EMP) provides for these requirements. Meena worries if NHPC will keep its word. She is also not very certain what is in store for her and her children if relocated to a new environment. She is, however, not against the dam being constructed.

Why this conflict of perceptions? The votaries for sustainable development are keen to protect the interests of future generations - the need to ensure inter-generational equity. Meena's concerns focus on the sustainable livelihood of her own family, resulting, possibly, out of our failure to ensure intra-generational equity. Can the former be achieved in the absence of the latter? And quiet flows the Teesta....

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Insight

EXPOSE HYPE

How deep do you go in search of facts? What new news do you bring back from the field? Are government programmes and projects really what they are cracked up to be?

Hariyali in black and white

HARNATH JAGAWAT



THE unsatisfactory and relatively poor performance of many of our rural development programmes, resulting in perpetuation of rural poverty and degradation of natural resources, was well comprehended by the Dr C H Hanumantha Rao Committee in its report. Based on the recommendations of this committee, the Union Ministry of Rural Development formulated a Participatory Watershed Development programme which it began implementing from 1995. The ultimate objective of this new programme was to promote and achieve sustainable economic development of the village community within the micro watershed through appropriate interventions around land and water resources and to achieve restoration of the ecological balance, keeping in mind the sustainable use of such natural resources.

Watershed development is a concept, which if properly implemented, can transform rural lives and the village ecology on a long term and sustainable basis. It's a concept that should have been considered in our national planning much earlier and governed all our rural development programmes from the very beginning.

Although the watershed programme is an excellent project with tremendous potential, our poor track record of implementation and the present deterioration in all spheres of life makes it questionable whether this programme will be more successful than previous rural development programmes. Once again, it may turn out to be the same old story of a good programme implemented badly and as a result without much impact considering the huge investments and massive efforts made. Already there are signs, in fact authentic reports, which are not encouraging. Several shortcomings and deficiencies have been observed in its implementation. A few of these are:

- In several cases the Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs) are not selected on merit.
- Unscrupulous elements, both in the NGO sector and the government, have entered as implementing agencies making a mockery of the programme.
- Each village covered by the programme, gets massive financial allocation and big money. This encourages vested interests among many sections of society who work to defeat the programme's objectives.
- The programme, like the government's other programmes, is becoming target oriented. The achievement of physical and financial targets, then, becomes more important than a quality outcome.
- In many cases, the programme and its interventions are not technically sound.
- In most cases, the prescribed qualified Watershed Development Team (WDT) is conspicuously absent.
- In several cases, the WDT team members are not appropriately trained as prescribed in the programme's guidelines.
- Even the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) officials are not well-trained or motivated to guide and monitor this important programme, in most cases.
- In many states where this programme is being implemented through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), the performance is no better. The PRIs



and people associated in implementation are neither well equipped nor motivated enough to make this programme a success. In fact, PRIs are even less equipped than the relevant government departments and NGOs.

- The institutional aspect of the programme is seriously missing in most places, placing a question mark over the sustainability of the programme.

The above observations have been based on discussions and interactions I have had with various government and non-government groups in as many as 16 states. In fact, it was shocking to learn that even in high profile states, the impact is not what is claimed. I was involved in the evaluation of six watershed projects in one state which were described by the district authorities as the best projects, and yet, the impact was far from satisfactory. If this was the state of so-called "best projects" one can imagine the condition of other projects.

The Hariyali guidelines

The watershed development programme of the Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development, is now going to be implemented under the newly formulated Hariyali Scheme. The new scheme is expected to be better than its earlier version in implementation and impact. However, going through the guidelines of the Hariyali scheme, one has genuine apprehensions about its implementation and thereby its results.

I will start by expressing serious reservations about a part of the preface of the guidelines which confidently assumes that "the gram panchayats/gram sabhas are expected to perform far better than the watershed associations/committees". Perhaps, the author of the preface had no real idea about the actual working and functioning of most of our village panchayats. The author, perhaps, has even less of an idea about the capability of village panchayats or gram sabhas to implement economic development programmes, which have several technical, social and professional components for effective implementation. The author of the preface, perhaps, forgot that many of our rural development programmes, though well designed, have failed due to poor implementation and that is related to the ill-equipped implementing agency. It is the overall quality and competency of the implementing agency that makes or mars a



development programme. The question is whether, at this stage, our panchayats have the qualities and competencies to implement an extremely crucial development programme. People who have framed the guidelines of the Hariyali scheme need to give honest answers to this question, rather than resort to rhetoric and a politically oriented stand.

Don't ignore the proven NGO

My specific views on certain provisions of the Hariyali guidelines are:

As stated in Para 11 of the guidelines, at field level, the watershed project is to be implemented by gram panchayats under the overall supervision and guidelines of the particular block/taluka panchayat which would act as the PIA. The first and foremost preference is to be given to PRIs in the selection of PIAs. Failing this, the second preference is to be given to various line departments of the government or government agencies or the university. The last consideration will be that of a "reputed non-government organisation" in the district. This virtually excludes the NGOs (even if they are reputed), as political bosses and bureaucrats would end up with PRIs or government departments, ignoring the NGOs.

The watershed development programme is basically an economic programme which seeks to develop and regenerate natural resources. Therefore merit should be the main criterion for selection of PIAs. Whoever is capable, whether they are PRIs, government departments or NGOs, should be selected as PIAs. At least proven NGOs must be given the opportunity to contribute to such a crucial programme. While a large number of projects could be entrusted to PRIs, a few have to be entrusted to proven NGOs, wherever available. It is possible that in many states and districts, capable NGOs may not be available and all projects may go to PRIs.

Involving proven NGOs brings additional benefits not available to PRIs or government departments. NGOs with a reputed track record will not only deliver assured good results, but integrate additional essential programmes by mobilising financial and other resources apart from the watershed project. Such advantages cannot be expected from PRIs.

NGOs are a part of society. They are universally recognised as playing a role in all our policies and programmes. To my knowledge, the Hariyali scheme is the only rural development scheme that virtually closes the door to NGOs. In fact, in all government programmes, such as tribal development, irrigation, forest, health, education, welfare, and in many government departments there is scope for NGOs to contribute. It is totally inexplicable why the framers of the Hariyali guidelines have treated NGOs, not as second class, but as third class institutions, ignoring the reality that most highly successful watershed projects have been implemented by NGOs.

I would therefore suggest that there should be scope for reputed NGOs to implement the Hariyali scheme. Guidelines could be amended. May be a supplementary clause can be added that if the respective gram panchayat concurs, the watershed project of that village can be allotted to NGOs.

Consensus and the gram sabha

According to the Hariyali guidelines, the gram sabha will act as a watershed association. This is all right. I do see one potential problem: a few powerful members of the gram sabha who are not beneficiaries of the watershed programme since their land is outside the project area, may create problems. If most households of that particular village are beneficiaries of the programme, this particular problem could be taken care of by the gram sabha. The users group has a big stake in the programme but all households may not be users. Empowering the gram sabha to act as a watershed association is a good step. But we have to ensure that there is no conflict between the households who are users and those who are non-users.

Financial transparency of accounts

As per Para 20 of the Hariyali guidelines, the accounts of the watershed proj-

ect are to be operated jointly by the sarpanch of the gram panchayat who will be the ex-officio chairman of the watershed project along with the secretary of the gram panchayat, or the talati/patwari. I strongly feel that this duo of the sarpanch and talati / patwari is not a desirable provision. We all know that under the previous Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) programme this duo played havoc with finances. We also know the image of most of our talatis / patwaris. It would be better that, along with the sarpanch, another signatory for the operation of accounts be selected by the gram sabha from among the educated persons in a village. The second signatory may also act as secretary of the project. This suggestion will eliminate the dubious role of the talati / patwari in operation of accounts involving huge amounts. I think this provision requires re-looking to prevent any possible malpractice in the operation of Hariyali accounts.

Choosing the right chairman

In the Hariyali guidelines, the gram panchayat sarpanch is to act as the chairman of the watershed committee which in this scheme is the village panchayat. I see potential problems in this provision. In a group gram panchayat the watershed project area may be in one village and the gram panchayat sarpanch may be from another village. How do we resolve a situation in which the sarpanch may not have a stake in the watershed programme? I think, in such a situation, it would be better to allow the gram sabha to appoint the chairman of the watershed committee from the users group. Alternatively, a panchayat member, elected from the watershed village, may be appointed as the chairman of the watershed committee. We need to look into such possible operational problems and find solutions.

A qualified WDT team

How do we ensure the gram panchayat gets a qualified and competent watershed development team (WDT)? It is easy to suggest, on paper, that the gram panchayat will be able to get a good WDT from the government line departments or the block panchayats or the tehsil panchayats. In reality, it is very difficult. The functionaries of these agencies are often overloaded. For such staff, the watershed development programme would be of very low priority. Past experiences suggest that even government departments and many NGOs could not put together a well qualified team, so how can we expect the gram panchayat to get a good team and manage it?

My suggestion is that wherever reputed NGOs with qualified staff are available, the gram panchayat should be encouraged to utilise their services as WDT. The prescribed remuneration may be paid to such staff or NGOs. Such a collaborative provision would be very helpful to well meaning panchayats, especially if good NGOs are available. Of course, sarpanches and gram panchayats with dubious intentions will not like to avail the services of NGO staff.

Community organisation and training

In the earlier guidelines on watershed development, there was adequate provision for community organisation, training and capacity building. Yet this aspect was largely neglected. In the Hariyali guidelines, the provision for community organisation, training, and capacity building is very inadequate. It has been reduced by nearly 50 percent. This may create problems in capacity building and training of various groups. I also feel that the responsibility of community organisation and training should be transferred fully to PIAs. Even if part of this amount is retained by DRDAs / Zilla Panchayats, it should be exclusively utilised for this purpose alone, otherwise communities will not be strengthened.

Guidelines are not a Bible

Whenever we raise the issue of particular provision of guidelines for various schemes with the union government, invariably we have been told that the guidelines are not "rules, laws or a Bible" and that the guidelines can always be modified by state governments. In reality, state governments treat guidelines

as a Bible and follow them like the Ten Commandments. What is the way out? Perhaps the easiest solution is to mention in each guideline that the state government may suitably modify some provisions as per their need and situation within the overall frame work of the financial provision. Otherwise the state governments will continue treating guidelines as a "Bible". The bureaucrats usually play safe under the pretext of guidelines and seldom deviate even if such deviations are essential.

In a recent workshop on watershed management, one presenter nicely suggested that due credit should be given to bureaucrats who deviate from the guidelines in the interest of development. One simple fact needs to be remembered. In such a huge and diverse country, uniform guidelines without scope for modification will always create a lot of problems in implementation. On one hand we talk of decentralisation and devolution of power to the grassroots and on the other hand, guidelines are framed at national level without giving any freedom to the state, district, tehsil or village for modification in the interest of smooth implementation and better results.

Village has room for co-existence

In the preface of the Hariyali guidelines it is mentioned that there is no need for parallel institutions/organisations in a panchayat or village. This is not rational. Constitutionally, and legally, in practice and reality, many institutions and organisations can co-exist in a village, depending on their aims, objects, activities, functioning, etc. Should we ban milk cooperatives in a village? Can we ban irrigation cooperatives in a village? Or fisheries cooperatives in a village? Shall we ban the existence of organisations managing schools, colleges, or hospitals in a village? Do we expect village panchayats to look after the industrial development of a given village?

I think all kinds of institutions and organisations can co-exist in a given village. Contrary to the views expressed in the preface, the monopoly of the gram panchayat in all perceivable activities in a village will stifle the initiatives and growth of need based, activity based democratic institutions in the villages. If we have real faith in the people and in democratic decision-making, then it is the village community which should have the right to decide whether a particular development activity should be managed by the panchayat or by any other specially created institutions. Government guidelines or regulations must not hamper such democratic decision-making.

I can quote two examples of decisions by the villagers. When we wanted to handover community lift irrigation schemes to the community, the villagers were offered many options. One of them was to handover irrigation systems to the village panchayats. There was unanimity in all villages that such systems should not be handed over to the village panchayats and they should be managed by separate cooperatives of the irrigators. The sarpanches were also part of this decision. In a second recent example, a networking organisation involved in watershed development in Gujarat asked a large number of sarpanches whether watershed projects should be managed by village panchayats or by separate organisation of users. The unanimous opinion of all the sarpanches was in favour of separate organisations.

The term "parallel institutions" for user groups or any other organisations in a village is not a proper term. It has negative connotations. "Co-existence" is a better term and the co-existence of such institutions, apart from village panchayats, should not be objected to. If we welcome and encourage NGOs and organisations other than the government at national, state and district level,

why should such organisations not be encouraged at the village level or for a cluster of villages? Such organisations come up and exist only if people need them. The world over, community-based organisations are encouraged. Apart from development organisations formed by users, after a few years, we may see human right groups, minority organisations, consumer groups coming up at village level. Should we treat them as parallel organisations to village panchayats and deny them the opportunity to operate and co-exist?

Build and strengthen PRIs

We have to make sincere and honest efforts to build and strengthen PRIs. Right now most of our PRIs, at least at village panchayat level, are not well equipped for good governance and development efforts. Their empowerment, capacity and competency cannot be brought about overnight. It is a long drawn process that requires long-term efforts. One single factor that can transform our village panchayats into vibrant institutions is the right kind of enlightened leadership. It is leadership that makes all the difference. Of all the watershed groups that I have come across from 16 states, I have been particularly

impressed with those from Himachal Pradesh. Watershed associations and watershed committees in that state have been, in many cases, led by retired army officers, police officers, administrative officers, and a few others who returned to their villages.

I am not arguing that our village panchayats should be led by retired government officers. What I am saying is that an enlightened leadership is a pre-requisite for institutions like village panchayats or similar institutions in a village or in a cluster of villages. It's a very vicious circle. Enlightened leadership can enrich village life. Prosperity and other amenities in a village may attract enlightened leadership. If tangible prosperity is brought about by watershed development activity in a village, perhaps over the

years, good leadership may emerge as such developed villages may encourage people to stay back.

We know our history of village panchayats and village republics in the good old days. Our village panchayats or cluster of village panchayats should become like a republic, well equipped and empowered to take care of everything in that village or cluster of villages. Of course, in these modern and complex times, it is not possible for a village or for that matter a village panchayat to become totally self sufficient and self reliant in every aspect. Therefore, it would be necessary to provide some external support to these institutions. Such support should be available to them as and when needed. Giant corporate houses also depend on external support and services. Similarly, such services should be available to our village institutions (panchayats). These may be offered by government agencies or from outside the government.

Finally, development is a serious affair. The results must commensurate with the investments made. There has to be total accountability in performance and in results. We owe it to the nation and the public who contribute huge funds to see that public money is well invested, ensuring expected results and not to give an impression that such investments in development are charity or largesse to be cornered by vested interests.

Our political elite will have to decide whether they want votes or development. If development is ensured, votes will follow automatically. If this simple prescription is followed, much of the misuse of our funds could be prevented.

Hamath Jagawat is director of the Navinchandra Mafatlal Sadguru Water and Development Foundation.

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WHERE
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MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Classroom on stage in Kolkata

Shuktara Lal
Kolkata

TEACHERS often verbally and physically abuse their hapless students. Parents don't object because they fear victimisation. Violence in the classroom is, therefore, on the rise, and recently newspapers in Kolkata reported two incidents.

In the primary section of a school, a teacher yanked out a girl's hair. The little girl was left with a painful bald patch. In another school, a girl studying in the senior secondary section, committed suicide when she heard that a teacher, who had repeatedly picked on her in the past, would be teaching her again in the next session.

Theatreclan, a Kolkata theatre group, decided to highlight these disturbing trends by staging Eugene Ionesco's *The Lesson*. The play, which was staged for the first time in 1951, describes a seemingly harmless classroom lesson which gradually turns macabre.

It was the contemporary feel of the play that attracted Bobby Chakravorty, the director. "Almost immediately after I read *The Lesson*, the incident involving the teacher pulling the hair of her student occurred. The script seemed uncannily relevant to what was happening around us," he says.

Bobby adapted the script. The tutor was called Professor Sen, and the student, Pooja. She has finished school and is seeking admission into a good college. The professor is eager to teach her. Pooja appears a conscientious student. The teaching session begins in a comfortable and enthusiastic manner.

But the professor begins to feel frustrated when Pooja does not understand a particular part of his lesson. The situation gets worse. Pooja can't understand other parts of the professor's lesson too. He gets angrier and angrier. Pooja begins to lose interest. This irritates the professor further. Finally, he stabs her to death. The professor's maid makes it clear that this incident is not an isolated one: each of his students is killed at the end of the lesson.

The play jolted the audience. It was explicit, chilling and very real. *The Lesson* attacks conventional methods of teaching maths and language. Bobby demonstrated the mechanical and insipid teaching methods used in schools. In one hilarious scene the professor tries to explain to Pooja the difference between the f and ph sounds. From the child's point of view, the whole exercise is pointless



A scene from the play

and absurd. This reality is depicted starkly to the audience.

Theatreclan organised a panel discussion between teachers and students before they performed *The Lesson*. Surprisingly, many participants at the discussion did not see anything wrong about teachers hitting students. They took it for granted. In fact, there were murmurs of disbelief when all three teachers in the panel stated that they had never beaten a student. Pressure from parents seemed to encourage violence. Most wanted their sons to study science or commerce.

Rongini Chakravorty, who played Pooja, is no stranger to misconduct by teachers. "Like Pooja, I was terrible at maths. When I was in Class IX, my maths teacher was extremely impatient and would verbally berate and slap me," she says.

Theatreclan deserves to be lauded for staging a play that questions the quality of education imparted in schools. Theatre that creates social awareness is very rare in English language productions. Bengali and Hindi theatre practitioners are much more likely to promote social consciousness through their plays.

The northeast comes to Delhi

Shailey Hingorani
New Delhi

THE cultural heritage of the northeast is often relegated to the background because it doesn't occur to many of us to get to know our friends living out there. As a result, stereotypes cloud perceptions.

"Most people think we are an exotic tribal group who probably dance around naked, or that we are just an insignificant part of the country's population," said Naga poet and teacher Nini Lungalung.

To promote the cultural heritage of the northeast through its wonderful stories and writings, and thereby dispel stereotypes, Katha, a Delhi-based non-profit organisation working in education and literature, organised the *New! Katha Utsav*.

Forty-five writers from the seven northeast states, as well as academics, filmmakers, journalists, teachers and students met to discuss and debate writings from the northeast. The celebration focused on story activism, linking cultures and raising awareness about the region through a Writers' Conference, workshops on theatre, *Haiku*, a teachers colloquium, seminars, book releases and a north-east film and documentary show.

"The people of the northeast still live in a cocoon because of geographical compulsions. No doubt, the region is industrially backward and financially unsound but when it comes to culture and sports, the region is not lagging behind the other advanced states of the country," said theatre personality Ratan Thiyam in his



keynote address.

Leading lights of the literary world took part: Hiren Bhattacharyya, Nilamani Phukan, Homen Borgohain, Nirupama Borgohain, Kula Saikia, Margaret Zama, Mamang Dai, Easterine Iralu were there. There was also Dr James Dokhuma, a former militant and member of the Mizo National Front, who is now a revered writer in Mizoram. His novels are prescribed as part of the curriculum at universities in his home state.

For Pankaj Thakur, editor of the *Ajir Asom Weekly Magazine*, this festival proved to be a catalyst in forging bonds between the reader and the writer. "The *Utsav* provides people like me a great platform to interact with writers from the northeast whom I had previously not met," he said.

Another unique feature was the shadow parliament. Students from eight handpicked schools of the northeast along with students from Delhi and Punjab passed a bill on the development of the northeast region (DONER). The shadow parliament

gave the students an actual feel of how parliament functions.

Some participants were a tad disappointed about the unenthusiastic turnout of Delhites at the festival. As Manipuri writer Bijoykumar Thiyam said, "We are very happy with the exposure and level of interaction that is being seen at the festival, but the number of local people present is a little discouraging. We are not an insignificant number you know."

One world. One nation?

RIAZ QUADIR

Is the nation-state an anomaly today? An anachronism from yester years? In a world so tuned to associative memory it is difficult to dissociate ourselves from everything the nation-state means to us. It has, over the centuries, become the prime source of our identity – at least for the majority stake-holders in most nation-states. From civic and social interactions, public and private, to language and the tiniest minutiae of our cultural identity we are tied to a larger body of men with whom we share these things.

Yet humanity has been constantly evolving. In a dialectic that contrasts our vision of the future with the baggage of our history, we stagger forward in miniscule steps often with what seems like an interminable hiatus. As with all things in nature, this march continues to that threshold point before we can make a quantum leap to the next stage. In this light, I believe, the life cycle of the nation state is fast approaching its end.

The clue to this lies in the continent of Europe, where, according to western historians, it all began. The ambit of our locality, our reach, was tribal before it extended to the city-state. Wars compelled us to extend our reign over conquered states, and thus we grew. Assimilation is a function of time, indeed a very slow process. History moves faster. A thousand years later the English still find enough to separate the Normans from the Anglo-Saxons. We don't wish to let go of our identities so fast.

The compulsions of our daily lives compounded by technologies that have conquered distances, continues in a ferocious way to bring humanity closer and closer together. Those who were unable to accommodate the friction of this process take to wars and the resulting bloodshed is always terrible. Europe saw more bloodshed than the rest of humanity. World War II was horrific, bringing forth technologies that would insure the total destruction of man should he continue his old ways. Thus the idea of United Europe was born. I believe there wasn't another option. The short-term gains were sacrificed for long-term ones, but only because they spelled disaster. The process, albeit a long one, started, in which the hitherto unthinkable idea of the gradual yielding of power by the monolithic nation states of Europe was put into action. Fifty years later the process continues and the Union grows.

Of course it hasn't been easy. Each tiny gain by the Union had to be wrestled away from the member states. Being both fearful and tired of war, the easier part was to sign a common peace pact and create laws protecting the rights of individual citizens. The more difficult areas involved economics, trade, finance and foreign policy. National interests which often conflicted with collective interest, raised its ugly head (and continues to do so). Finding the equilibrium between what we gain and what we give up is the challenge for every politician in each of the member states in the Union. Unfortunately, this is so because a vast majority of the population (at least the 30 plus generation) still think in national and nationalistic terms. They are still not 'Europeans'. Only years after one's wedding day do the in-laws become 'family' – if they ever do. Usually it is for the next generation to complete that process.

However, the European Union is not the world. Nor does it exist in a vacuum. Its membership comprises a small fraction of the nations of the world. In the global scheme of things it is but one more nation. Perhaps a giant one; challenging other mighty nations like the USA and the China, India and Brazil of tomorrow. What would that mean? Not very different from the old Empires of the past, with perhaps a slightly different orientation and agenda. The basic dynamics of global politics will not have really

changed. When we study the workings of the European Union today this is exactly what we are confronted with. Europeans, who wish to delineate the boundaries of what is Europe and once having done that, continue to establish the European Identity as distinct from the rest of humanity. The debate on whether to admit Turkey as a member of the Union or not is clearly indicative of this.

The natural evolution that has given us the European Union cannot come to a halt. The process of evolution is unending. So what is to follow? Similar Unions on a continental basis? North American Union that would include Canada and Mexico? South American, African, Asian Unions that would evolve out of natural geographical blocks? Or based on other criteria: economic (G8, Nafta...), military (NATO), political (OAU, non-aligned nations, Arab League, SARC...)? Do we dare to think of the next stage of this evolution? A global entity that would cover all of humanity? I have

seen the look of incredulity every time I have suggested this in the classroom. But how would the idea of the European Union have been received in the 1930s? With similar incredulity, I presume. Victor Hugo envisioned the 'United States of Europe' over a century ago. Where are the visionaries who provide humanity with a reminder of its potential in this age of narcissistic consumerism?

There lies the rub! If compromise and negotiation occur only among equals and if one were only to weigh the gain and the loss such compromise entails, why would the powerful abdicate their power? Here I refer to the lone super-power (or hyper-power as a French Minister named the post cold war USA). True to the dictum, this power has fed upon itself and others, and reached proportions which are dangerous and frightening. Should the trend continue? Are we looking at a world empire

like never before? For those who can see the ambitions of the current United States government and its agenda know that mankind is indeed in danger of being overwhelmed into submission. It has opposed every attempt that the rest of the world has made to come together and find common solutions which it could not dominate or which challenged its self-interests. The Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court and now, even the United Nations, are striking examples of its disdain for the rest of mankind.

For the moment most of the leaders of the rest of the world have their heads buried in the sand and are still vying with each other to curry favours with the USA. Alas, this behaviour too is embedded in the nature of things and we will continue to do so till the seeds of discontent take root and swell to proportions that will ultimately dispel it. A brief study of colonial history shows similar patterns. The danger of course is the magnitude of the upheaval when the eventual change comes. Will the USA go out with a bang or a whimper? A bang could surely mean the end of the world we know.

If an optimist were to believe that our survival instincts will guide us through the uncharted waters of the future and will unflinchingly bring us to the shores of a safer haven, then establishing human rights on a universal basis, without distinction, and extending equality to every citizen on the planet must surely be a prerequisite. The nation state with its selfish agenda cannot have a place in such a world, if, in the words of the modern bard, "We are the World..."



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