

Civil Society

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PRIVATE SECTOR IN QUOTA FRIGHT

ARUNA ROY, SUKHADEO THORAT, DIPANKAR GUPTA, NARAYANA MURTY, CII

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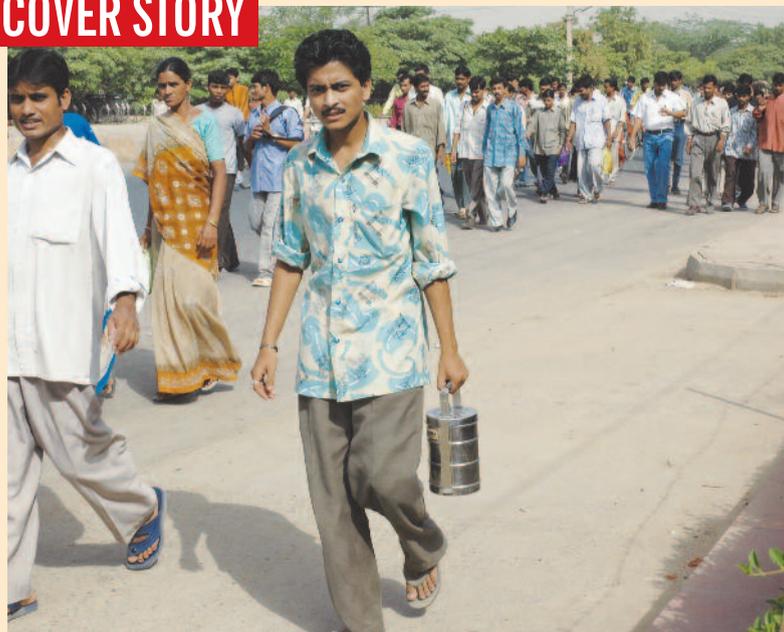
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COVER STORY



JOB QUOTAS WORRY PRIVATE SECTOR

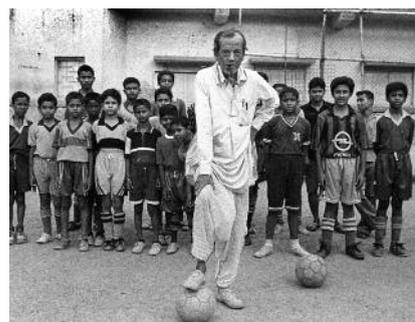
Top industrialists pledge social justice. But are promises of voluntary affirmative action good enough?

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Residents take no-bribes pledge at RTI meeting in Delhi 6

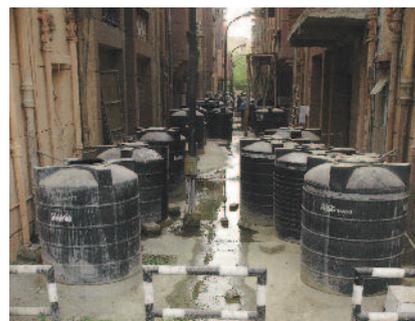


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Civil Society

What industry can do for Bharat

THE public declaration by 22 business leaders of their commitment to fulfilling certain social obligations is very welcome. Industry has an important role to play in the uplift of disadvantaged sections of society. It is not enough to generate profits for shareholders. It is necessary to ensure that society at large benefits. In the Indian context the challenge is to bring backward castes and tribes, some of them unlisted as yet, into the mainstream of the economy. At quite another level, people with education and technical qualifications in far-flung parts of the country, such as the northeast, need to feel wanted and valued. There is similarly a need to bring women into the work force and guarantee them respect and equality.

The question is how should the process of inclusion be undertaken. Indian industry, going by its recent statement, wants its contribution to be voluntary. It says it does not want a law stipulating reservation of jobs in the private sector for backward castes. It says recruitment on the lines of caste will hurt merit and that reservations in other sectors of the economy have not worked well. No doubt industry also worries about coming under pressure from political quarters once there is a law.

Industry's points can be debated. But an important step forward has been taken in the private sector admitting that a lot remains to be done and that it has an important role to play in creating equal opportunity.

But the private sector must go further. It must show how it is making a difference and be ready to be monitored by society even if it won't accept mandatory job quotas set by the government. This is the practice all over the world from America to Southeast Asia and Ireland.

The private sector must also define a larger role for itself by creating an environment in which backward communities have greater access to capital and consumer markets. Without doubt the banking system needs to be made less elitist. The private sector could also be a catalyst for rapid social advancement by making new technologies available. Telecom and computers readily come to mind and not enough has been done with either.

With the exception of the Tatas and a few others, industry's record is pretty lousy. But it is society at large which must take the blame for that. Politicians use reservations to get votes. Governments have little to show by way of primary education and health. It is easy to talk of equal opportunity, but how many NGOs practise it? Our best schools are closed to poor children. If industry leaders are serious about their social obligations, they can run their companies better and begin the process of changing mindsets.

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Who's the hero? Why Burning

Civil Society News
New Delhi

MAY 31 was a Red Letter day in the office of an unknown activist group in Chandigarh called the Burning Brain Society. On that day Dr Anbumani Ramadoss, Union minister for health, announced that no Indian film would be permitted to show actors smoking on screen. It was akin to 'surrogate' advertising for tobacco.

The film industry protested noisily, alleging restrictions on its creative freedom. But Burning Brain's 5000 plus volunteers were whooping with joy. The ban was a big, big victory for them, coming as it did at the end of a three-year campaign to stop proxy advertising for tobacco.

"I would say no school of acting across the world recommends the use of a cigarette to depict an emotion. In fact, *Bharata Natyashastra*, the Bible of Indian acting expressly forbids the use of any intoxicant," says 33-year old management consultant, Hemant Goswami, founder and head of Burning Brain.

Most members of Burning Brain are between 18 and 22 years of age. The name Burning Brain, explains Hemant, is inspired by the Chinese philosopher Confucius who said: "The brain is not a vessel to be filled. It is something to be ignited."

A small, slim man, Hemant looks more like a middle-class executive than a *jhola*- swinging activist. As a student in Class 12 he did a project on tobacco and came to know about its harmful effects. His father died of heart disease, having been a heavy smoker and though he'd given it up 10 years earlier. While studying at SD College in Ambala, Hemant tried to put together a group called the Society for the Prevention of Crime and Corruption. "But nobody wanted to seriously volunteer," he says.

Hemant realised that the key was in motivating the young. So, when he took up the campaign against tobacco, he framed his own strategies for reaching out. He conducted workshops, held painting competitions and kept up a flood of emails. He also used successful professionals to mentor the young. "Motivate youngsters. Pat them on the back and say well done. Prevent them from getting into aberrations. Smoking is one of them. Find more people who are professionals and successful in their own fields so that they can mentor young people," says Hemant.

India is a signatory to the International Framework Convention of Tobacco Use (FCTC), which bans surrogate advertisements of tobacco. We have a national law called the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, (COTPA) which forbids companies from using their trademark or logo to promote tobacco

But advertising continues in round about ways. In the film *Swades*, for instance, Shahrukh Khan smokes Marlboro cigarettes and the pack and brand name are clearly visible. The budgets of films like *Swades* are inextricably tied to revenues from surrogate advertising, which could be between Rs 2 to Rs 10 crore, says Goswami.

Swades is a film about social issues. Well-displayed packets of Marlboro in the hand of a hugely popular actor like Shahrukh Khan are hardly integral to the film's creative message. Besides they have an enormous impact on the young, who idolise film stars.

Smoking is a lifestyle statement. When icons promote social causes and then smoke on screen, young people equate the two. Eight five percent of new con-



Hemant Goswami: hero of the ban on smoking in films.

sumers of tobacco are in the age group of 11 to 25 years of age.

Tobacco companies sidestepped the law by using their brand name to promote events and by clubbing their brand with another name and product. For instance: 'Wills Lifestyle', 'Gold Flake Expressions' greeting cards or 'Kuber Namkeen'.

When companies promote cigarette brands through such surrogate advertising they get out of putting up the statutory warning 'Cigarette smoking is injurious to health.'

"It amounted to 'sublimely sly' publicity," pointed out Burning Brain.

"We have seen movies with subtitles all our lives. Where is the problem with a scroll? It will deliver a subliminal message," says Hemant. It's more important to prevent youngsters from smoking than worry about aesthetics, is his reasoning.

In Chandigarh, every year, Godfrey Phillips, India, manufacturers of the Red and White brand of cigarettes would give away 'Red and White Bravery Awards' as part of their 'social initiative' programme. Their guest list read like the Who's Who of officialdom. The Governor of Punjab would invariably be the chief guest. The function would be held in a government-owned hotel.

In March 2004, Burning Brain volunteers took to street level activism. They positioned themselves with placards at a hotel where the award ceremony was taking place and stopped Justice OP Verma, the Governor of Punjab who was the chief guest of the function, from going in.

Brain of course



Hemant pointedly told him, "You should not attend this function. You are indirectly promoting a cigarette brand and thus encouraging smoking. Such 'bravery' shows by a cigarette company can influence young minds." Verma admitted he had a point but gave away the awards anyway.

Burning Brain volunteers were furious. The dignitaries didn't care a twit. Officials attended the next year's function as well. The Governor of Punjab, General SF Rodrigues, was the chief guest. Burning Brain described his act as 'unpardonable'. The Advocate-General, Harbhagwan Singh, the Director General of Police, AA Siddique, the Principal Secretary, Dharam Vir were all there.

"Awards and ceremonies and the presence of high dignitaries like the Governor give official recognition and public acceptance besides adding glamour to the name of the cigarette brand. This helps the cigarette company hook more youngsters to their brand of tobacco," say Burning Brain. A logo of "Red and White" was visible at the venue of the function.

Section 5 (3) of COTPA clearly states:

No person, shall, under a contract or otherwise promote or agree to promote the use or consumption of (a) Cigarettes or any other tobacco product; or (b) Any trade mark or brand name of cigarettes or any other tobacco product in exchange for a sponsorship, gift, prize or scholarship given or agreed to be given by another person.

But it seemed the government was hell-bent on stamping on its own law. Doordarshan, the government's channel, led the way in broadcasting the 'bravery' awards. Private TV channels followed. Godfrey Philips issued press releases

and paid advertisements, which were carried in newspapers.

Burning Brain kept informing the government. Angry letters were shot off to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, President Abdul Kalam Azad and the Governor of Punjab and Haryana. By now Burning Brain had a big base of friends on the Internet. When they carried out an Internet spot poll asking whether General Rodrigues did the right thing by attending the award function, 80 percent said 'No'.

In February, this year, Hemant filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Punjab and Haryana High Court, pointing out how violations of COTPA were taking place. He fights his own case. His petition asks the court to stop Godfrey Phillips India from promoting their cigarette brand by holding 'Red and White Bravery' awards. Some of Hemant's other requests are that action be taken against all the people, organisations, media and the hotel who took part in the function. He has petitioned that a fine be slapped on Godfrey Philips for violating the law and money paid to the media for advertisements be recovered. The court has taken note and issued notices to the Government of India, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and to the company Godfrey Philips India Ltd.

Burning Brain started 'spoof awards' named "Red and Black Shame Awards" which were bestowed on officials who had failed to enforce COTPA and were hand in gloves with the company.

In June 2004 they campaigned against ITC when the company launched greeting cards under the brand name 'Gold Flake Expressions' with the same logo, design and colour as their cigarette brand 'Gold Flake'.

They distributed fake 'Impressions' cards with a logo which read "Fake Gold Tobacco Warning Cards." Over 22,000 such New Year e-cards were eagerly downloaded from www.burningbrain.org/card.htm.

They sent letters and memorandums to the Prime Minister, the President, Health Ministry and hundreds of Members of Parliament. Notices were issued to ITC Ltd and its major stockholding companies. Finally, the Union ministry of health told ITC to withdraw its greeting cards, which, according to Burning Brain, cost ITC Rs 7 crores.

It was actor Vivek Oberoi who alerted Burning Brain to the danger of using movie stars to promote tobacco.

In 2004, Oberoi, much admired by the young, got the "World No Tobacco Day Award". He was given the award by WHO in recognition of his stand against tobacco.

Then, to Burning Brain's horror, on March 21, Oberoi accepted the Red and White bravery award! It was given to him for helping victims of the tsunami crisis. This was sheer hypocrisy. Burning Brain wrote him a letter telling him to return the award and apologise. Through the Internet, Oberoi was bombarded with e-mails. Burning Brain alerted the Cancer Society, which had nominated the actor for the 2004 World No Tobacco Day award. A week later, on 28 March, Oberoi gave back the award to Godfrey Phillips.

But he continues to play Jekyll and Hyde. Activists are wild with him for promoting pesticide laden Coca-Cola for a fat fee and then espousing social causes to whitewash his image.

Meanwhile ITC managed to get a letter from the ministry of information and broadcasting saying that 'Wills Lifestyle' was not a form of surrogate advertising for tobacco. Burning Brain once again dispatched letters to the ministry of health, ministry of information and broadcasting, the Censor Board and the Controller General of Trademarks, Patents, Designs and Trademarks telling them not to allow companies to bypass the law by booking products with similar sounding names under a separate category and then advertising it across different mediums. Companies who had got this done should be deregistered.

In a letter to the Censor Board, Burning Brain also pointed out that Shahrukh Khan in *Swades* and Sunjay Dutt in *Musafir* were smoking the brand Marlboro and showing the packet several times.

"We asked that any movie with a tobacco product should be certified A and not be shown on any satellite channel," says Hemant.

Sharmila Tagore, chairperson of the Censor Board, acted even before the health ministry. She gave a commitment that all scenes glorifying smoking and/or showed any tobacco brand would be deleted. This was a big achievement for Burning Brain.

Then came the 'mother of all victories'-the letter from the health ministry saying that smoking in films would be banned and rules amended so that companies would not be able to indirectly advertise tobacco products. Shahrukh Khan and Salman Khan are now publicly supporting the ban.

Burning Brain has also asked that tobacco be sold only through licensed vendors, like liquor. This would bring revenue to the government and stop the proliferation of shops selling tobacco to minors.

"This is the first step. It may take 10 years, but the law has been changed and the process has begun," says Hemant, philosophically.

For details on the new tobacco rules log on to www.burningbrain.org

Or e-mail: info@burningbrain.org

Hole-in-one with literacy in slum

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

WHAT can an avid golfer and his loyal caddie of 20 years do for literacy in a Delhi slum? Quite a lot really if you visit the *Kallu Shiksha Kendra* at the Janata Colony across the road from the National Science Centre near the Pragati Maidan.

The Kendra is a 20 feet by 10 feet shanty where some 20 women watch letters on an ageing computer and learn to read and write in all of 40 hours. The software comes from the Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), but that is just a part of the story. It is Kallu the caddie and Pramod Chawla, the golfer, who have made it possible for the women to get their daily lessons.

If you go to Kallu's at three in the afternoon, you will find the women, with sarees over their heads and notebooks and pencils in hand. Over the voices of children of assorted ages they are listening to a computer. The screen looks like a puppet theatre and one-inch size letters fall like puppets on a string. The letters form words which are repeated three times. The words are simple: like *makaan* and *kaam*. With repetition, they are easy to pick up.

Pramila, a ninth class student at the Pandara Road government school, is operating the computer. Occasionally she calls one of the women to the computer and asks them to read. She also looks at the notebooks to see who can now write. The class has reached lesson nine - *rozgaar, dhandha, bachat*. Most of the women there can read the letters on

the computer now. Some women laughingly say that they find it easy when they are here but forget it once they are into their daily routine.

Rajkumari, 24, the fastest learner in the class, said, "I love reading and spend one and half hours reading at home too". Her writing is perfect. Most of the women write in well-formed letters and yet just a month ago they had not even held a pencil. Chandravati, Kallu's wife is nursing a baby even while the lessons are going on. Vimala Devi from Mirzapur whose husband works as a gardener in posh Sundernagar explains how they can at least identify bus routes without having to ask someone.

The women have a lot to thank Kallu, 36, for. He works at the Delhi Golf Club, which is just two or three kilometers away. Fifteen days before the inauguration, Kallu started taking women from his neighborhood to his house to show them what can happen. "When I saw it first, I was stunned. I knew they would be too" says Kallu who wants to earn a name for himself even though he is a "*chota aadmi*".

"When he first started calling us, my husband laughed," says Vimala Devi. "How could a woman who has not read or written for 30 years start now, he said. But he doesn't laugh anymore". Kallu is popular in this basti where an estimated 150 caddies out of the 500 that work in the Delhi Golf Club live. All of them come from villages close to Sultanpur in Uttar Pradesh.

Kallu first saw the software playing when Pramod Chawla of NNFI (National Network for India) invited him and asked him to bring along a couple of his caddy friends to his house in Delhi's

posh Haus Khas, Chawla, who has been playing golf for more than 25 years, knows many caddies.

During the last general elections, when NNFI, which is interested in electoral reforms, had got regulation passed that all contestants have to make disclosures about their assets and criminal antecedents, Chawla wanted to spread this message to the 'vote banks' too. So he got a leaflet done in Hindi and gave Kallu some 150 copies to take home. Kallu, went around slums where people from his village or surrounding villages live, and explained to them. He created a register of 560 names with addresses for Chawla. This exercise boosted Chawla's confidence in him.

When Chawla got his hands on the TCS software in January this year, he knew that Kallu was the right man to start his literacy campaign with. The TCS software is free. It has lessons in three parts. The last part ends with letter writing.

Ask Chawla for a target at the end of two years and the answer is: "Six out of 10 Indians are illiterate. At least 10 per cent should be functionally literate. That means 60 million." How can this be achieved? "Take all the networks in India. There are 180 golf clubs, the Indian army bases, air force bases, the CBSE board and the ICSE board. Now can you imagine what would happen if you could convince the Army chief's wife that she would go down well in history if all the bases could educate the rural population around them? Then there is the Nasscom Foundation and the Swaminathan Foundation..." The unit of expansion is one network at a time.

No-bribes pledge at RTI meeting

Tonusree Basu
New Delhi

UNFAZED by the summer heat, 110 representatives of Residents' Welfare Associations (RWAs) in New Delhi set aside their weekend plans to attend a workshop on the Right to Information (RTI). They were looking for a cure to broken roads, no water, power cuts, bad sanitation and an unresponsive bureaucracy.

The RWA representatives took an oath that they would not bribe government officials to get civic works done, during the workshop.

"The road outside my colony has not been built for over three years. There are old people who use that stretch. Let us see if by using the RTI any visible difference is made," said the representative from Sheikh Sarai.

"Our ultimate aim is good governance and for that a continuing relationship between various civil society groups and RWAs has to be established. We just hope to be a catalyst in this process," said Air Marshal D.S. Sabhikhi (Retd), president of the Citizens' Alliance for the Promotion of Responsive Government who organised the workshop.

According to Pankaj Agarwal, secretary and treasurer of Citizens Alliance, workshops serve as a link between the RWAs and RTI activists so that the RTI law can be used to its best capacity.

In a two-hour session, Shekhar Singh, Convener



Pankaj Agarwal

of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) and Arvind Kejriwal of Parivartan explained to participants the central Right to Information Act, which was passed on 12 May by Parliament, and the RTI laws in other states.

These Acts taken together do give citizens access to information from several government departments. By seeking information, people can force the government to be more transparent and accountable. Therefore better governance can be ensured if people use these laws.

Arvind Kejriwal also narrated some success stories of people from different socio-economic backgrounds who had successfully used the RTI in Delhi.

Uday, an employee of HCL in Delhi, told participants that he travels to work via the Outer Ring

road every day. He noticed that the road next to the Panchsheel flyover was barely two months old and already had huge potholes. Upset at this, he filed an RTI application with the Public Works Department asking for an inspection of the material used to build the road and a copy of the contract. Two days before the inspection was to take place, the road was miraculously rebuilt.

Kejriwal urged the RWA office-bearers to ask for information on a regular basis. He cited the example of the RWAs at Defence Colony and Rajinder Nagar who are improving civil amenities in their areas by constantly asking for information. "Keep government officials on their toes," he advised, "If they know that the RWAs will ask for their records every few months, the officials will be forced to work."

Kejriwal also distributed 20 forms among the participants and helped them format questions for government departments, regarding problems being faced in their areas. Both Singh and Kejriwal reiterated that the government needs to take action against corrupt officials. A question-answer session followed.

Most of the audience were completely unaware about the Act. There was also the initial scepticism about this being just another "government gimmick". BK Madhokar of the Chirag Delhi RWA said, "If the Act is indeed as good as it sounds, and our interests concur with those of the panelists, we would want to carry this association further."

No vendor space for Mizo women

Suresh K Pramar
Aizawl

It is Friday night. In a village some 40 km from Aizawl the capital of Mizoram, over a dozen women, young and old, load fresh vegetables into a bus bound for Aizawl. They are small farmers who grow vegetables on their *jhum* land. They must reach early to reserve a spot in the city's Bara Bazaar for the weekly haat. The women will sleep overnight on pavements, braving adverse weather conditions.

Every Saturday, people in Aizawl visit the bazaar to buy vegetables for the week. Farmers from neighboring villages bring their produce to the market since they are assured of customers.

"If I do not come at night I will not have a place to sit. All the available space will be taken up by regulars from the city," says Lillianpuii who has been selling her produce at Bara Bazaar for over a decade. Like others she earns between Rs 1500 to Rs 2000 every week. Without a sale these small vegetable vendors, who grow their own produce, will face severe economic hardship.

Aizawl is located on high ground. It is one of the oldest urban centres in the northeast. Bara Bazaar, its main market, is over a century old and is located on a hill slope. Apart from vegetables, fruits and meat products, second hand clothes and imported goods are sold here. Most shops are owned and run by women. They guard their turf jealously and do not allow the village vendors to occupy space near their establishments.

Small hill farmers, like Lillianpuii, grow a variety of vegetables. They have been encouraged by the state government's aggressive campaign to promote self-reliance under the Mizoram Intohdel Policy (MIP) which exhorts Mizos to produce their own requirements. Farmers are encouraged to cultivate produce for sale and consumption in the state.

"Women in Mizoram have taken up the MIP with great zeal. These small hill farmers grow a variety



Women farmers slug it out for a bit of room

of products like beans, pumpkins, leafy greens, squash, oranges and other fruits," says Linda Chhakchhuak of Grassroot Options. In addition, farmers produce many local vegetables, including a variety of mustard leaf called *antam*, a must in every Mizo meal.

For over a decade these small hill farmers, mostly women, have been struggling for space in Bara Bazaar to sell their produce. The government has not helped them.

In fact, whenever the women have identified a suitable location, in and around Bara Bazaar, they are shooed away by local authorities. The farmers find themselves pitted against local brokers, called Kharchawng, who are again mostly women. These city-based brokers have shops in the main market for which they pay a fixed monthly rent.

The Kharchawngs depend on the hill farmers for their supplies. They procure fruits and vegetables at rock bottom prices from the small farmers and then sell at a high premium. The women farmers are not against selling their produce to these city traders. What they resent is that they are forced to make distress sales on terms very favourable to the Kharchawng.

The farmers are annoyed with the authorities for ignoring their interests. According to one of the

farmers, "It is very essential that we sell our produce in the capital. Our economic survival depends on this." Though they have been petitioning the authorities regularly for over a decade, no one seems to have any time for them.

"Because we are women our problems and needs are not considered as having a major economic impact," says Ms Zothanpari, President of the United Mizoram Grassroot Women (UMGW). She points out that the state can prosper only if villages gain economic strength. The government makes grandiose plans, but seems to have little or no time for grassroots people, says Zothanpari.

"The government asked us to grow vegetables, ginger and other produce," say the women farmers. "We have done so. Now they cannot even provide us with space to sell our produce. We were initially told to go to the Directorate of Trade and Commerce to collect money as transport subsidy. When we went to the Directorate they informed us that the funds were spent in the minister's constituency."

An official from the department of trade and commerce told Linda: "We can't give them space in our market because they come to sell their produce only once a week and the government will lose revenue. Even if they were provided space they will not be able to sell anything since they don't produce enough."

The women contest this. They point out that their produce has increased substantially and the amount of vegetables and fruits arriving in the market is a clear indicator. Many of them have been coming to Bara Bazaar almost daily.

"The government of Mizoram claims that more than 80.5 percent of the population depends on agriculture. Yet the state does not respond to the needs of the small farmers. This gives the lie to the government's policy of supporting self-reliance among the Mizos," says Linda.

Charkha Feature

Marching into people's hearts

Tsewang Rigzin
Leh

SINCE the past five years, the Indian Army has been helping inhabitants of border areas like Ladakh and Leh through Sadbhavana programmes that provide quality education, growth opportunities and training.

"About 100 villages are being electrified with micro-hydel projects (MHPs) Steps to tap wind energy are also being taken. The endeavour is to electrify all villages in Ladakh by the end of 2005. The MHPs will be handed over to the local village administration for future maintenance," say the army's Sadbhavana officials. The army hopes, in future, MHPs will be used for flourmills, cotton combing, lathe machines, welding machines and air reservoirs.

Tyakshi and Patsathang are two villages in the Turtuk region to the north of Leh where people are happier with the army than the civil administration or the local Hill Council. "Our leaders make promises during elections but they have not helped us. The army is our lifeline,"

lamented the leaders of these villages. They have a Sadbhavana high school with 125 students. The army has electrified their villages. Many villagers are employed as porters. Their donkeys work too. Donkeys in Turtuk area have a record of earning up to Rs 1000 per day.

The army has opened 16 Army Goodwill Schools to provide quality education to needy students. These schools provide free uniforms, transport, meals, books and medical services. Educationists say the army could have strengthened education more by helping existing government schools.

Over 3000 women have been trained in Women Empowerment Centres (WEC). Some have been absorbed in Sadbhavana programmes as teachers and some have started their own ventures.

The army has set up computer centres in different Sadbhavana centres of Leh and Kargil where young women learn basic computer skills. Besides this computers have been provided to many school libraries.

Twenty-four-year old Prem Lal suffered nine percent burns in September last year after a stove accident. An army medical team at Kargil saved him

and he is on the road to recovery.

Losing her first child at birth and pregnant with her second child, Ayesha Bano of Kargil developed complications. She was rushed to the Army Hospital at Dras in February where a team of doctors saved mother and baby girl. "There is a record surge in the number of patients reporting to Army Medical Aid Posts and Field Ambulances," says an army spokesperson.

Between 2000 and 2005 the army treated almost three lakh patients at their hospitals in Leh, Hunder, Turtuk, Dras, Kargil, Darchik and Achinathang, in addition to occasional health camps in remote locations.

Operation Sadbhavana should not be short-lived. Social activist Sonam Wangchuk has stated earlier, "Officers keep on changing every two years and with them often the priority also changes. This might be acceptable with machines and tanks, but when dealing with human lives and sentiments of so many people in sensitive border areas, it's a thin line between *Sadbhavana* (good will) and *Durbhavana* (ill will)"

Charkha Feature

QUOTAS WORRY PRIVATE SECTOR

But are promises of voluntary affirmative action good enough?

Umesh Anand
New Delhi

ON May 30, heavyweights of Indian industry issued an uncommon public pledge. They committed themselves to social justice and the need for giving disadvantaged communities equal opportunities for living with dignity.

The industrialists said with liberalisation and the shrinking of government, the private sector had a greater role to play. They would through their businesses provide education, health, schooling and vocational training. They would also sponsor entrepreneurship and help build small businesses to bring excluded people into the mainstream of the economy.

What prompted leaders of industry to make such an elaborate declaration of their social commitments? When it comes to social issues of this magnitude, industry is known to deal through the mandarins of CII and FICCI. What then was the need for this public display?

The answer was available in a letter sent by Ratan Tata to the ministry of social justice under Meira Kumar, the daughter of the erstwhile Congress Harijan leader Jagjivan Ram. Tata wrote that industry was "relieved" to learn from government that it had "no intention of resorting to legislative action to impose" reservation of jobs for backward castes on the private sector.

As social obligations of companies go, there is perhaps no more credible name than that of the Tatas who have steadfastly integrated the interests of vulnerable stakeholders into their businesses.

Ratan Tata's letter and the statement issued by 22 top industrialists thus could only be seen as a grandstanding of efforts to ward off mandatory reservation of jobs for scheduled castes and tribes in the private sector. If industry was already sensitive to the needs of neglected communities and ready to offer proof of affirmative action, where was the need for the government to enact a law?

What are industry's objections to the reservation of jobs by law? First of all, industry says it doesn't recognise caste and functions on the basis of merit.



Activists burning an effigy of Rahul Bajaj on World Dignity Day after he opposed reservation of jobs in the private sector

LAKSHMAN

Secondly, it questions the gains from reservations in other sectors of the economy. Thirdly, it stresses the need to be efficient and globally competitive. Fourthly, industry says it is more important to make backward castes employable than to set aside jobs through a law.

But not everyone agrees. Many observers say that industry is protesting too much.

Reservation of jobs in the private sector for scheduled caste and tribes figures rather prominently in the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the United People's Alliance with whose support the Congress is in power. One by one, CMP pledges relating to the social sector have been implemented through the National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by Sonia Gandhi. The NAC includes academics and grassroots activists who have been successful in enriching the debate on issues of poverty and economic growth. They have been instrumental in pushing through contentious measures like the right to information and employment guarantee.

It is a matter of time before the need for reservations on caste lines in the private sector would be articulated. Reservation of jobs is also a powerful political card that the Congress could be forced to use it both because of its allies and its own electoral arithmetic involving Dalit votes.

Industry clearly hopes to stall this or, at the very least, get involved in the process and steer legislation in a direction it would find more palatable.

But barely had industry made a public declaration of its social obligations when the politics of reservation acquired another sponsor and industry leaders have every reason to be mopping their brows all over again.

On June 19, the tempestuous Mayawati of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) accused the Congress of letting the Dalits down by promising industry that there would be no law on reservations in the private sector. She said the BSP would highlight the failure of the Congress and its UPA allies to keep their election-time pledge.

Politically, matters couldn't get stickier. And by all accounts, industry really has itself to blame. The Tatas are the only really serious example of a business house which has pursued social obligations as an integral part of businesses activities.

There are other newer examples such as the younger generations of the Thapars and the Bhartias who have begun taking the companies of these families in directions that are mindful of social realities. There is also Anu Aga of Thermax who speaks her mind. ITC, a cigarette manufacturer and therefore an enemy of public health, can claim some achievements in its agricultural and paper businesses. Fish around and you are sure to find some other examples.

But for Indian industry as a whole, the record is a rather sorry one. Its leaders have largely been happy to dole out money by way of charity and then greedily claim publicity for themselves. There could be a school here or there, the odd water harvesting structure, perhaps some kind of health facility. Setting up temples is a popular activity.

But in a country where millions continue to live below the poverty line and are excluded from education and employment on the grounds of caste, scattered acts of generosity by wealthy individuals have added up to little.

Industry is generally seen as being neglectful of sustained affirmative action by which disadvantaged sections of the population can join others in enjoying the benefits of a modern economy.

"I think the call for reservations in the private sector has shaken them up and that is a good thing though I am not in favour of reservations," says Prof Dipankar Gupta, professor of sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Gupta worries about confusing reservation with poverty alleviation. He simultaneously believes that industry does not do enough by way of its core activities to help disadvantaged people come up. CII is in the mode of doing charity, which is not the answer.

Arun Maira, chairman of the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) in India, also thinks that it is time to wake up. Maira does not regard legally mandated reservation for the private sector as a solution because it is not clear what effect this measure will have. But he is clear that affirmative action needs to be measured in numbers.

"US laws do not impose quotas on any employer," says Maira. "Nevertheless, US society judges companies by the numbers of blacks and women they employ and

Is too much being expected of the private sector? Affirmative action needs to be a national goal. How many NGOs, for instance, practise equal opportunity in their recruitments? What do colleges and universities have to say for themselves?

promote: Are the proportions in the company similar to their numbers in the general population? Moreover, private sector employers evaluate the success of their own affirmative action programmes by the numbers also. Therefore there are 'quotas' in effect in the US private sector, though not legally mandated."

Maira's suggestion is that if some Indian companies have been successful in assisting backward classes to succeed within their ranks to reflect their numbers in the population at large they should publicise their records. "This may ease the political pressure for reservations in the private sector. And these companies' examples will give insights into what really works," he says.

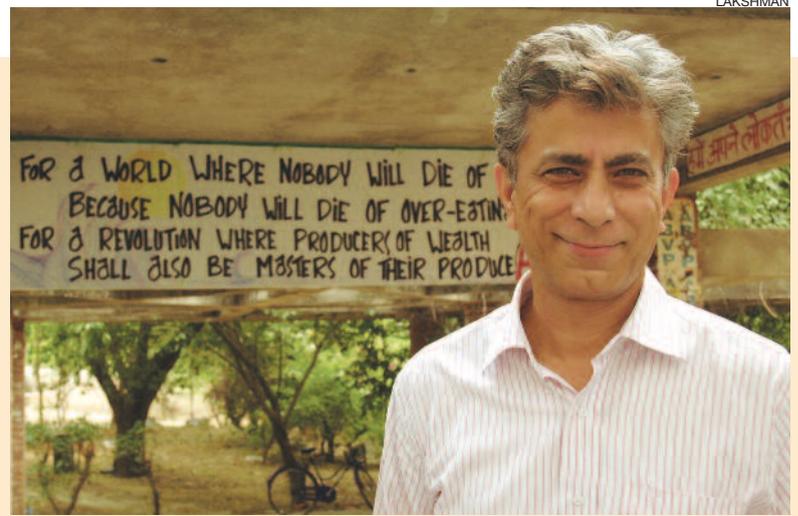
Sukhadeo Thorat, professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, says that the world over the private sector is expected to contribute to affirmative action. This is so in America, Ireland, Southeast Asia and so on. Everywhere the extent of involvement is measured. It is no different to quotas. Nowhere is it voluntary, as Indian industry wants.

Moreover, Thorat believes that the question of social equity should not be limited to the question of jobs. There is need to create an environment in which there is equal opportunity in access to capital, consumer markets and so on.

Aruna Roy of the MKSS and a member of Sonia Gandhi's NAC, says after discussion with her colleagues in the MKSS, that in principle they support reservations in the private sector. But operationalising reservations or affirmative action is a complex task. Ideally it should be linked to the benefits that the private sector enjoys.

Says Roy: "It is vital that this is worked out through a system that is transparent and participatory and takes into account all interests. In fact this is an opportunity for everyone concerned— industry, government and civil society to work together to ensure that the interests of the most disadvantaged are secured in an atmosphere of cooperation rather than confrontation."

"The merit that is the private sector's pride needs deconstruction and cannot be accepted at face value," says Roy. The private sector draws heavily on IITs and IIMs which are funded with public money.



Dipankar Gupta

'It is the State's job to create fraternity'

Dipankar Gupta is professor of sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University and a keen observer of corporate behaviour.

What are your views on reservation in the private sector?

Let me make it clear that reservation for me is not a substitute for anti-poverty programmes or development programmes or just good politics. Reservation is meant to remove discrimination from a certain section of the population. The problem is that politicians and others concerned with development get confused. This is a fundamental problem. Liberty can be registered by law, so can equality. But there is no law which says be fraternal. Fraternity grows over time. I think its is the State's job is to create conditions for fraternity. I believe fraternity is really a very big problem for India riven with barriers of caste, class, religion etc. Dr BR Ambedkar felt that reservation was a means of enhancing fraternity, of creating conditions for it.

What can the private sector do for fraternity?

The State can do certain things to make sure the private sector also participates. The State is the leading partner. The State can say should you do X, Y and Z things, we can encourage you. Like, for instance, if you employ people from backward communities, encourage suppliers who come from downtrodden communities, start good self-help groups and so on. These things can be thought of carefully by industry. The State can do many things in terms of affirmative action programmes.

If you think of reservations alone, you don't pay attention to other things. But think of the other collaterals of reservation, primarily health, education and transport too.

You can also bring in things like an ombudsman who oversees jobs in the private sector to make sure that jobs are widely publicised in general so that all people can actively apply, instead of a network that throws up particular candidates. I don't think the corporate sector is interested in which caste you belong to, other than perhaps the caste of the owner or the promoter. You can belong to any caste, if you are in the network, you are in, if you are out, then you are out.

What is your reaction to the recent offer from industry?

This recent talk of opening up the private sector to reservation has shaken them up. I think that's good though I don't agree that there should be reservation in the private sector. I think they should look at the way they employ people though that's not on the agenda right now and it's hard to do. So they fob it off by saying we'll do this and that.

Some of them are genuine and do a lot for the poor people of this country. In the typical mould of upper middle-class people we want to do charity. So far CII is more in the philanthropic mode. No matter how many corporates you get together you can't really open schools for all the people in the country who need them. So at some point in time you have to think how can the corporate sector energise the government, support the government, perhaps play the role of watchdog, say, for instance, in education.

'Quotas are an opportunity to work together'

Aruna Roy and her activist group the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) spoke to Civil Society on their view of reservation in the private sector.

Do you support reservation in the private sector and why?

In principle, yes. There is no doubt that all employers should meet basic norms of social equity. Equality of opportunity is a basic tenet of any democracy. On the other hand, inequality of opportunity based on caste continues to be the most pervasive feature of Indian society that needs urgent redressal. The idea of reservations in the private sector as an instrument to redress social inequity is not new or unique to India.

The private sector says that while reservation in the government is fine, but not for the private sector because it is merit based and caste does not matter. Do you think this is accurate?

The issue of reservations, in the private or public sector, needs to be understood in the larger context of social inequity and cannot be reduced to a merit versus patronage binary. The backbone of the private sector in India are professionals with sophisticated entrepreneurial, managerial and scientific abilities who come from IIMs, IITs and other such institutions that have been nurtured with huge investments and subsidies from public money i.e. by the government.



Aruna Roy

Do you think that industry has fulfilled its social responsibilities adequately so far?

Programmes in education, health, vocational training etc are necessary but are not sufficient. They are but a first step in ensuring that there is equality of opportunity but cannot be an alternative to reservations. In any case, the private sector's record with respect to taking concrete measures in these areas and fulfilling its social responsibility, has been largely symbolic. In fact this is one of the reasons why the pool of talent continues to be small, in effect restricting merit.

Some industries through their CSR programmes have brought about changes. The Tatas are an example. Are we replacing responsibility with reservation and thereby perhaps damaging a system of merit?

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is welcome and any sincere attempts by industry to fulfil its social obligations is to be encouraged. It would in fact be a contradiction in terms to have CSR without reservations or any other kind of affirmative action. Reservation seeks to address inequality and that is about meeting responsibility.

How much reservation should industry provide and at what level?

The operationalisation of reservations or affirmative action is a complex but not intractable issue as there is a lot of experience and lessons both from India and abroad to learn from. Ideally the mechanism should link the extent of benefits (direct and indirect) that accrue to the private sector with their compliance of affirmative action norms and standards agreed upon. It is vital that this is worked out through a system that is transparent and participatory and takes into account all interests. In fact this is an opportunity for everyone concerned — industry, government and civil society to work together to ensure that the interests of the most disadvantaged are secured in an atmosphere of co-operation rather than confrontation.

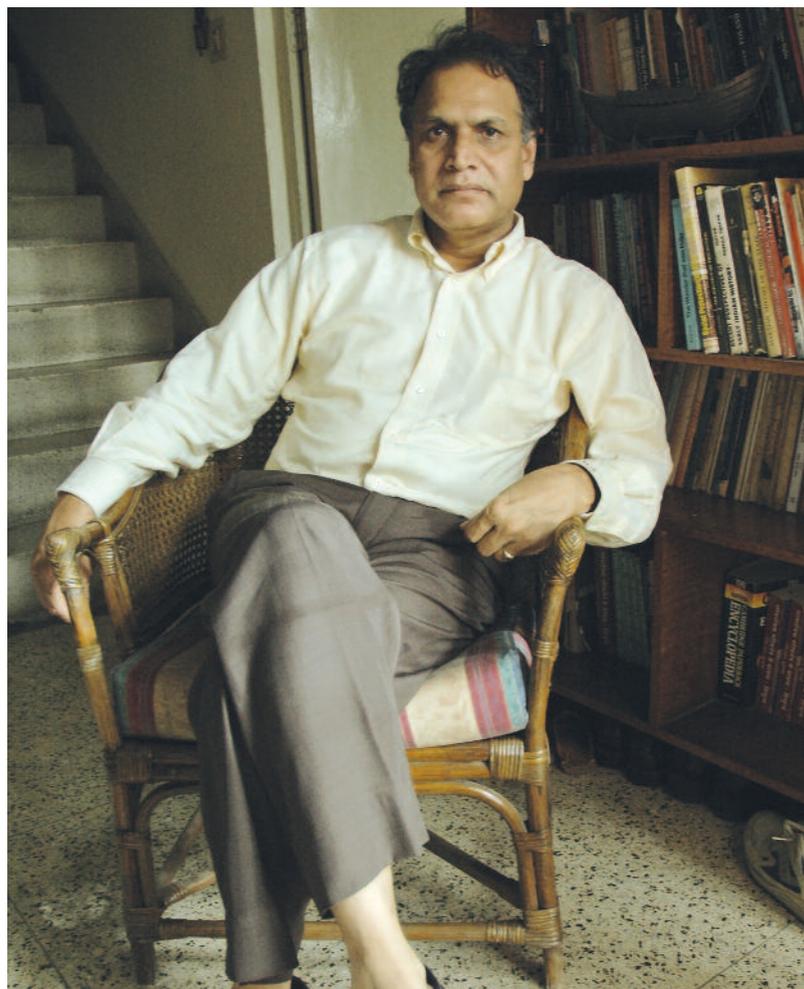
The private sector also abounds with stories of tax evasions, accounting frauds, loan defaulting, breaches of labour and environmental laws, bribing or hoodwinking regulatory bodies and last, but not the least, buying favours and concessions from politicians. The 'merit' that is the private sector's pride needs deconstruction and cannot be accepted at face value.

'Discrimination

Sukhadeo Thorat is a professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and a keen observer of the Dalit cause.

Is reservation in the private sector viable? What is your response to what industry has said so far?

There should be reservation for the SC/ST in the private sector for public reasons. In India and other parts of the world, anti-discriminatory policies are



Sukhadeo Thorat

LAKSHMAN

But what exactly is industry's position on reservations? Is it opposed to reservations in general or only with specific reference to jobs in the private sector? Questions answered by CII director-general N Srinivasan offered some clarity.

Industry is of the view there is a genuine need for providing employment opportunities to scheduled castes and tribes in the organised sector, but the experience with reservations in other segments in the economy has shown only marginal benefits. There is no reason to believe that reservations in the private sector would be more successful.

Instead, industry is in favour of creating employability through education, vocational training and so on. It believes it can do so on a scale large enough to make a national difference. It is similarly ready to promote entrepreneurship. Srinivasan cites the example of the Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust (BYST) under which disadvantaged youths are provided modest loans to implement a specific entrepreneurial project. Through this 1000 young people have become employers and given jobs to 12,000.

CII has given the government a detailed paper with a strategy for what it can achieve. But on the question of reservations, the private sector emphasises that it only recognises merit. To now create employment opportunities on the basis of caste would be to take a step backwards.

Dipankar Gupta agrees that the private sector does not discriminate on the grounds of caste. But it does depend on networks. "As long as you are a part of the network it does not matter what your caste is," says Gupta. "The only caste that matters is that of the owner."

He says industry can be accused of not using the best talent available in the country. To that extent it excludes people from lower castes because they don't belong to the right networks.

Sukhadeo Thorat complains about industry not advertising jobs adequately and not making a sufficient attempt to create employment opportunities for a wider

is in the private domain'

used as an instrument to provide a safeguard against discrimination. There is no other reason for which reservation or affirmative action is used because discrimination is the only distinguishing factor of the poor.

Backward castes suffer discrimination in the private domain. The public domain does not discriminate. So the trends for reservation has been built up on the ground that there is discrimination in the private domain. It is different that Ambedkar who pioneered this policy began arguing for reservation in the public domain because that was relatively easy for him. There are 52 countries in the world with similar programmes and from the beginning these are put into the public and the private sector.

How common is it to tell the private sector to reserve a certain number of jobs?

We have to give share and space to the discriminated in the market and in employment. In other countries, they pass the Equal Opportunities Act so that everybody is equal before the law and has the right to participate in the public domain (capital market etc) and if somebody discriminates then the discriminated person can go to the court of law.

Everywhere in the world, there are laws which protect people from discrimination. The law we have only gives safeguards in the social sphere. There has to be a mechanism where you ensure a certain level of participation in employment, housing education, government contracts and other areas. In India we give employment in the government sector in proportion to the population. In America they give employment to Latinos, Afro-Americans, women, not in terms of population but the labour force. They don't have a quota but they do have a timetable. If you ask Afro-Americans if this is a quota they will say it is.

How do you measure the fair participation of a particular community? In the US you either take the share in the population or the labour force. We take population. The question is not whether you have certain fixed quotas or not, the question is one of providing participation in certain proportions.

In Northern Ireland they have a fair employment opportunity office. Every industry which employs more than 10 people has to register with the office and indicate the religious background of its employees. Industry by industry they see whether there is any imbalance between Roman Catholics and Protestants. If they discover that in a particular area the population of Catholics is 50 percent and their share in employment is 20 percent, then they send a polite message to these people, your employment is imbalanced, you better correct it. It is not a quota but indirectly it is the same thing.

You will have to give share and employment in proportion to some measurement. Whether it is a legal quota, a voluntary quota, a compulsory quota can be decided.

range of people in the country.

Gupta is of the view that instead of a rigid and politically driven system of reservations, perhaps there should be an ombudsman to ensure fair play. He worries about reservations being mistaken as an anti-poverty measure and then being regarded as a right irrespective of merit.

The question that arises is whether the private sector is being asked to achieve what the government and political parties have been remiss in doing so far. To make equal opportunity the subject of legislation may be a political move with short-term dividends. But what of a larger environment in which affirmative action and equal opportunity are regarded as national goals. How many NGOs, for instance, practise affirmative action and equal opportunity in their recruitments? What do colleges and universities have to say for themselves? How equitable is the school system and what is the government's record in providing education and health to the lower castes?

These, too, are questions that need to be answered. Raising the questions does not absolve industry, whose record, with some notable exceptions, in social commitments is questionable. But to impose a law without imbuing it with a national sense of purpose may be meaningless.

Reservations in government jobs and educational institutions have so far been implemented without enthusiasm and imagination. It is this that has perhaps led to the proposal that there should be a law when what is really required is a movement.

Thorat argues that there is a lot the private sector could do by way of making purchases from disadvantaged communities, creating access to bank loans and other forms of capital. He cites the example of the Vamikis who have difficulty selling their milk in Haryana.

The important thing is to concede that caste is a problem and markets by themselves are too imperfect to provide equal opportunities. Affirmative action is needed and like elsewhere in the world it has to be evaluated with reference to

Legality is not a punishment. There are large categories of jobs in the government sector which are not filled. The government is not being punished by the Supreme Court. My suggestion is to ensure some participation and share in capital, in housing, in education, in business wherever there is discrimination.

Is there a role the private sector can play in making capital available to backward castes and creating consumer markets for certain goods?

Absolutely. This is exactly what private industry is trying to avoid. Let's start with the labour market. The policy would be of having some kind of reservation in employment, which they are discussing. Then we come to the capital market. That has to be handled in two ways: ownership of shares and debentures of the company. In Malaysia the Malays who constitute 70 percent of the population had only two percent in the share capital of companies since it was dominated by the Chinese and Indians. The Malays established a national trust, which gives money to the Malays to buy shares and debentures in private companies. Their share has increased to 30 percent. Why can't we do this?

To start a business you require capital. You spend a whole lot of time on that. They are saying commercial nationalised banks should give credit on priority to SC/ST. They are completely silent about the private banks. Private sector banks should have a policy of preferential lending to the SC/ST.

Scheduled castes in business have a problem in selling their products. The government has certain quotas for its purchases. It can set aside 30 percent or 25 percent for SC/ST. The private sector is silent on this. It makes huge purchases. It should come forward and say that 25 percent of purchases should be from the SC/ST category. That's how you promote business and also serve as a safeguard.

Today a large chunk of the new economy like software firms and call centres are now beyond caste.

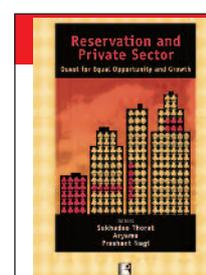
Certainly an effort should be made to develop such skills among the SC/ST. But that is not adequate. This is industry's argument also. I am arguing that if there is no discrimination in employment then they don't require anything. But the hiring mechanism used by the private sector is exclusive in nature. Industry is arguing that it does not follow discriminatory policies. But half of the employees of Reliance are from Gujarat. Fifty percent of the employees of Kirloskar are from a particular caste. I raised this question with a group of industrialists and I said they follow a policy of discrimination bypassing merit. They were shocked. They said they only value merit. So I asked them what was the catchment area in which they looked for merit? What was the method of hiring to ensure that they got the best? Sixty percent of recruitment in the private sector is informal. Only five percent of applications are taken for employment. They don't advertise posts.

social realities. Industry thus must be ready to be judged and someone must ask the question whether things are getting better or worse. Companies that are good performers with respect to their social obligations deserve greater respect and a pat on the back from society.

It is the government, political parties and society at large that need to make this possible. There is also a need to understand the new economy companies. There are huge employment opportunities here that can't be tapped by a law on job reservation. On the contrary education and skill-building strategies could deliver dramatic results. But once again to achieve this policy-makers and politicians have to learn to think differently.

Narayana Murthy of Infosys says that politicians must "commit to some performance and achieve that performance". The solution according to him is not in reservation but in education and a belief that Indians can achieve world class standards. Companies like Infosys have to meet global standards in India itself. There is great opportunity in this.

"Unfortunately, our governments (both central and states) have failed miserably," says Narayana Murthy. "As Rajiv Gandhi himself said less than 20 percent of money earmarked for development actually goes into development. Thus, our leaders have to improve that first before looking at anything else."



JUST OUT. GET YOUR COPY.

Reservation and Private Sector
Quest for Equal Opportunity and Growth

Editors: Sukhadeo Thorat, Aryama, Prashant Negi

Published by Rawat Publications

Extraordinary lives, ordinary people

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

NEXT time you walk down Kolkata's streets take a look at the crowd. There are many people tucked in there who are artists and poets. There are others who make life special with the things they do. Would you believe, for instance, that a traffic policeman could be an inspired poet?

News photographers Kumar Roy, Swapan Nayak, Rajib De and Nilayan Dutta scoured the city to catch on camera a range of unusual ordinary people. They displayed their pictures at an exhibition called 'City Characters,' organised with Kolkata Images.

There is Surendranath Boral (*Boralbabu*) of Bowbazar, Kolkata, who buys a bagful of fish every Sunday to release into the Ganges. A vegetarian for the last 40 years, Boral has been assiduously throwing fish back into the river since the past 25 years.

There is nothing fishy about Boral's affection for fish: he even collects stamps with fish pictures. He has never married. The reason? He couldn't find a Bengali woman who wouldn't eat fish. Boral's service to society extends to his community too. He dedicates part of his day attending to street children at the Nabodisha school in his locality.

There were photographs of people like Ramananda Bandopadhyay, an artist, who nurses pigeons back to health. Some 10-12 years ago he put an injured pigeon back on its feet. Since then he has healed thousands of pigeons and his bungalow is home to some 300 pigeons recouping from injuries.

Bipin Ganatra has devoted his life to rescuing people caught in fires. Any blaze has him rushing to the spot. Yet Ganatra has refused an offer of employment by the Kolkata Fire Department. This do-gooder is happy preventing casualties in a fire prone city.

Then there is Gauri Dhamrampal, Kolkata's first female *purohit*. Dhamrampal conducts wedding rituals in accordance with traditional Vedic rites. She has broken the Hindu patriarchal code of priesthood.

There is also Sukhsam Singh who runs eastern India's only all-woman petrol pump.

Amit Roy looks like just another police officer, directing Kolkata's traffic. But at heart he is a poet, in search of inspiration. His four selections of poetry speak volumes for the intriguing influence his job has on his creative talent: *Krishnachura aar traffic* (Gulmohars and the traffic), *Paakhir thonte chithi* (An epistle on the bird's beak), *Baishakher ei bhorer hawa* (The early summer morning breeze) and *Aadigante Mukti* (Freedom on the far horizon).

Commuters collecting their tram tickets would never guess that their conductor Dhruva Basu Roy is a gifted film guitarist. Neither would customers sipping tea at Rajesh Pal's 24-hour shop in Nimtala Ghat realise that the muscular tea stall owner is a three-time state wrestling champion and a national level wrestler.

Likewise Bholanath Mahal the proud owner of Bholanath Cabin at Bagbazar started life as a tea-stall owner with savings of just one and a quarter rupees. He has business acumen, say people. What they don't know is that he has authored two books. Similarly, Pranesh Kundu, who repairs bicycles, is an internationally acclaimed wood sculptor.

Dhrupadiya and flautist Anil Mahanta makes music on the streets. He is happy sculpting, selling and playing flutes. Sometimes he stops in his tracks to teach an interested learner a thing or two about the flute. The flow of money may be erratic, but his is a life devoted to the arts.

There is Amit Hazra who zealously greens Kolkata's concrete jungle by planting saplings in and around his home on Vivekananda Road and generously gifting potted plants to friends and acquaintances.

Visually disabled Alefiya Tundwala has an MA in politics. She is now studying the partition of India to earn a doctorate degree. There is pavement artist Ramzan Ali who has moved up the social ladder to lower middle class status, and Raju Charlie from Belegkata *bustee* who has been portraying Charlie Chaplin with a conviction that makes him a fixture at most city functions.



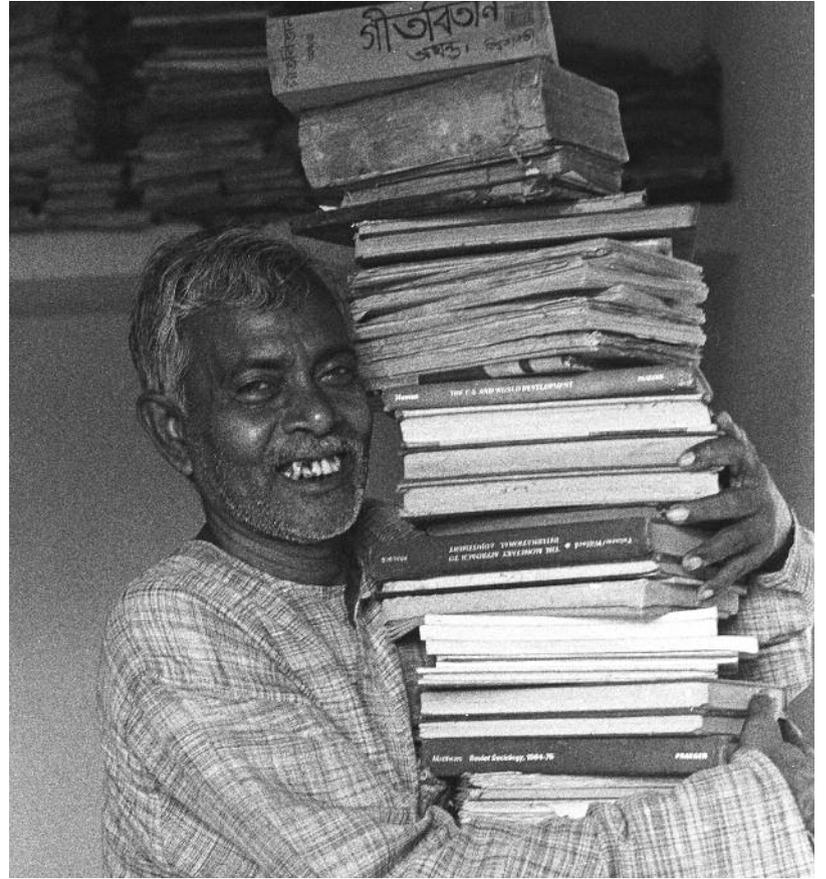
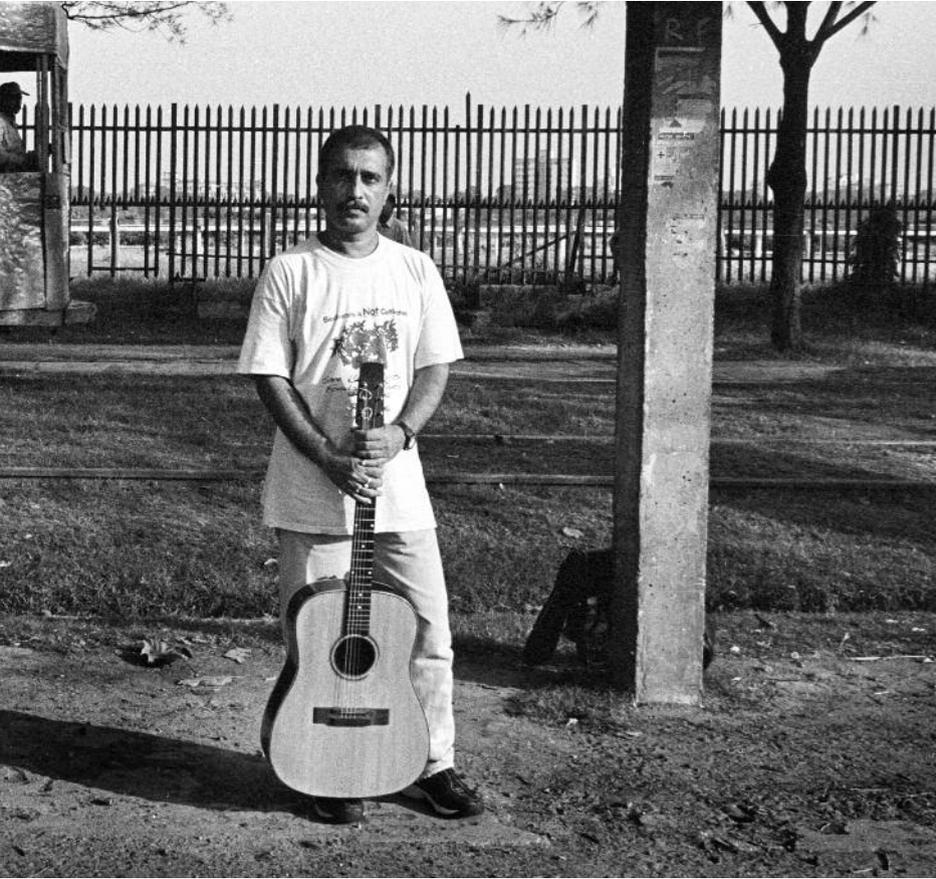
Dhruva Basu Roy, tram conductor and gifted guitarist



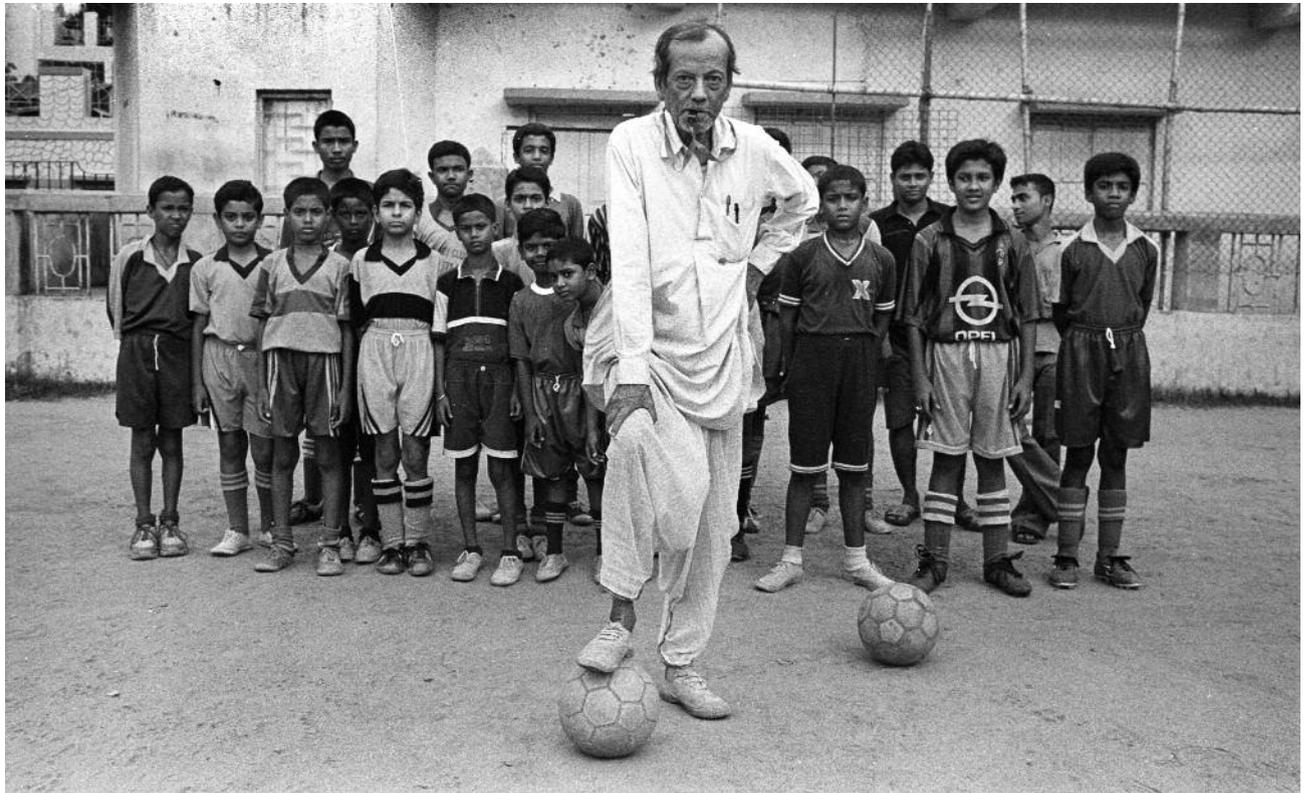
Anil Mahanta plays music on the streets



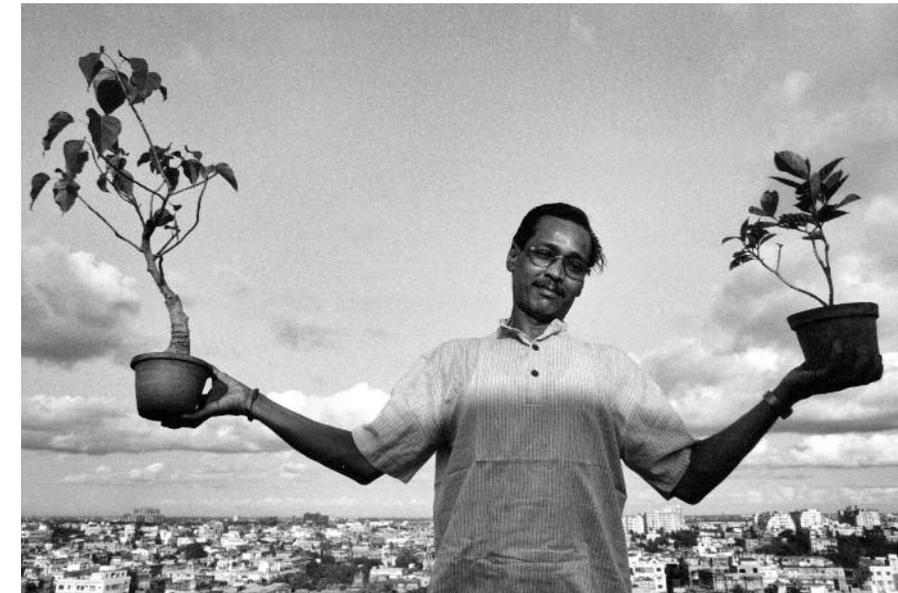
Sukhsam Singh runs eastern India's only all woman petrol pump



Paritosh Bhattacharya is a bookseller who cares for books



Football enthusiast Krishnapada Sengupta coaches children at Rishikesh Park in North Kolkata



Amit Hazra greens Kolkata's concrete jungle



Mrs Easton chose to stay on in Kolkata and run an old-age home

Yes to Europe, no to America

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

THE 50 years evolution of the European Union (EU) was recently thrown into the limelight during the referendums in France and Netherlands, whose results took the world by surprise. The EU has grown by fits and starts over the years, from the original six member European Steel and Coal Community (ESCC) formed in 1951 as a direct reaction to the historical friction besetting Europe from the dawn of history, to the Treaty of Nice signed 50 years later in 2001. By this time its membership had grown to 15 States with 12 more in the waiting line.

It is important to note that the nature of the union, its agenda and ambitions as well as the environment in which it existed have changed significantly from those early years. The communist half of Europe has disappeared and has been absorbed by the market economy of Western Europe.

The social contract which has been the guiding principle of European political thought for over two centuries and deeply embedded in the European body politic is itself in the danger of being washed away in the tide of liberal market economics that is sweeping the world today.

The paradox of modern democracies is that while the *raison d'être* of governments is to improve the economic lot of its people, in attempting to do so it becomes beholden to the competitive nature of globalisation which in turn forces it to adopt measures which open its markets to the rapacious nature of the free market system creating a greater divide between the shareholders and those who hold none. No longer in control of its policies it must readapt its social agenda to the logic of pure capitalism.

While an average Pierre Dupont may not understand the intricacies of economic theories his instincts told him that should he vote for the United States of Europe he too might end up without healthcare insurance like 45 million Americans or have his minimum pay of Euros 8.5 (\$11) an hour reduced to less than half of what his American brothers earn.

Hence, while every government in the EU accepted the draft constitution without a whisper last year, the people in France and the Netherlands gave a resounding "Non" to it in the referendum, showing the vast divide between the rulers and the ruled.

What was even more interesting was that the exit polls showed a resounding "Oui" (79.5 percent) for a United Europe by the same voters. In short, the people of Europe want a United Europe but not a replica of the USA. A very healthy sign indeed! The pessimists have been calling this the end of Europe without the slightest awareness that all the achievements of the EU will stay in place. We will not be going back to the franc or the lira any time soon.

★★★

DEMOCRATICALLY elected leaders, it is often said, have their minds on their political agenda during their first term in office and on preparing their place in his-

tory during their last term. Of course in the case of Tony Blair and his counterpart across the pond, George W. Bush, history may have different connotations. For the Briton, a scion of an Imperial legacy, the scope of history is more global despite Britain's ever-diminishing stature. For the Texan (he only poses as one, being really from Connecticut) the extent of human civilization becomes fuzzy if he stares too far beyond his ranch in Crawford, Texas.

Blair, perhaps realising deep down in his guts his immense failure on betting on the wrong horse in the Iraq War is determined to undo his dastardly deed by another one, this time to redeem himself. This is his Save Africa project! Tony Blair must however, live in a fantasy world. He doesn't realise that the one inescapable feature of history is that it ultimately yields the truth - even if it takes ages. And in these days of the Internet, that could be months, weeks or just days. Even as he crossed the channel to hold his periodic pow wow with his captain, the recent history of the dark continent was being held to light, glaring, often blinding light. Light that would put to shame any mention by Western governments of playing doctor to the tortured continent.

That same week the ActionAid Report on Africa (authored by Romilly Greenhill and Patrick Watt) came out to reveal what has always been known to

sceptics of occidental altruism. In a nutshell it spelled out the collusion between governments, development and private sector banks, big businesses, and even consulting companies to ruthlessly exploiting Africa for profit and strategic interests, and was akin to gang-raping a helpless woman by a coterie of doctors and nurses.

The audacity of Blair and those that are participating in this feel good charade to even suggest that Africa owes them \$100 billion in debt is grossly criminal. Apart from controlling the African economy for over 200 years and having set-up puppet governments and dictatorships in the post-independence period where democracy didn't have a chance in a million to flourish, they funneled aid which was recycled to the West; even the portions which were pocketed by dictators and their henchmen—where else would they park it except in the West (like the Nazi loots in Union Bank in Switzerland).

And now having made these paper loans they seek accounting from the people of Africa. What just law would allow for loans incurred by dictators, whose spending was dictated by the Aid-givers, to be now repaid by those who have not only not benefited from the aid but actually suffered because of it.

Maybe in this topsy-turvy world we have lost our innate sense of justice and fairness, and money and clout can buy us any amount of media publicity to make the rapists look like healers. But only to a point, before the pendulum begins to swing the other way.

The true prescription for Africa's health (and for that matter Iraq's, Saudi Arabia's and many other places in the world) is for all non-locals, in whatever guise they have invaded Africa, to get out pronto and leave the locals to deal with their own situation.

After basic teething problems each place should stabilise as democracies, free thereon to trade and relate with whosoever they choose. Simple accounting shows unequivocally that Africa has declined with every year of aid it has received. The same mix of institutions that is responsible for this decline cannot now be allowed to provide the remedy.



People celebrating the results of the referendum

What was even more interesting was that the exit polls showed a resounding "Oui" (79.5 percent) for a United Europe by the same voters. In short, the people of Europe want a United Europe but not a replica of the USA. The pessimists have been calling this the end of Europe. We will not be going back to the franc or the lira any time soon.

Perspectives

CATCHING TRENDS

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

Why industry must lead

ARUN MAIRA



Let's Talk

It is rare to find a news item on the front page of a national economic daily that warms the heart. News of big deals and big scandals, announcements and debates about new taxes and regulations, and reports and projections of national and corporate economic performance are the usual fare. However I found something different on the front page of *The Economic Times* on June 1. (No, this was not the issue the Finance Minister edited.) The paper reported that twenty business leaders had accepted their responsibility to prepare under-privileged people to join mainstream business organisations. A year back some of these industrialists had been in a ding-dong stand-off

with social and political leaders on the issues of discrimination and quotas in employment in the private sector.

I remember watching a 'Big Fight' on NDTV on this subject last year. The pugilists were a free-market economist, a former CEO of an MNC, the secretary of the Communist Party of India, and a leader of the backward classes. The sixty-second bursts of scorn for each other's views couldn't lead to any conclusion. However all four concurred with a young man in the audience who, when he was finally allowed to get a word in, said it was a shame that discrimination against certain classes of people continued in practice even after fifty years of affirmative action in India. The young man, who was from Assam, recounted his personal experience at the entrance to a private company's office where he had been invited for an interview. The security guard had tried to shoo him away, saying, "Bahadur, what job have you come here for?"

Even though the debate could not settle anything, it threw up several issues. One was the expansion of the categories of people now considered underprivileged, which has gone beyond the scheduled castes that India's constitution framers had in mind. Another was a perverse outcome of affirmative action in practice whereby the 'creamy' layer amongst the underprivileged gains the benefits rather than the poorest. Third, was the adverse effect reservation of jobs could have on the efficiency of private sector companies.

India is not the only country struggling with such issues. So are Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, the USA, and others. Last year, the largest anti-discrimination suit ever in the US was filed by women against the largest private sector employer in the US—Walmart. The US constitution says that all people are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. The affirmative action movement in the USA started in the sixties to remedy the position of a minority of the population viz. blacks. It has now expanded to include the rights of highly educated white women, and has become a protest by the majority of the population against discrimination by a historically established minority of white males! In India also, affirmative action has extended well beyond the scheduled castes the constitution makers had in mind, and is no longer restricted to a minority of the population. In both countries, the issue is no longer about the rights of a minority but about unfair discrimination.

It is a fact that perceptions about communities lead to discrimination against individuals as the man from Assam had pointed out. Some communities are perceived to be backward and incapable to do some types of work because they did not do such work in the past. They did not, either because they were barred from doing so, or did not have opportunities to acquire the required capabilities.

Such was the situation in Malaysia in the seventies, when the Malays were considered incapable of managerial and professional work. Change in perceptions begins with the visible success of a few people from these communities. The first to succeed cannot be the poorest of the communities as the movements in the USA, Malaysia and India have shown. Invariably the first to break through are those who have the 'complementary capabilities' required to navigate selection processes which never are purely objective. These complementary capabilities come from prior wealth and social connections and therefore it is no surprise that the 'cream' rises and benefits from affirmative action before others. The success of the first brings new recognition and respect for their community, as did the success of the first Malays for the Malay community. Therefore to dismiss the process of affirmative action because it has not so far changed the lives of the poorest in the communities is shortsighted. As Thomas Sewell says in his book, *Affirmative Action Around The World: An Empirical Study*, "A 'temporary' programme to eliminate a centuries-old condition is almost a contradiction of terms".

US laws do not impose quotas on any employer. Nevertheless, US society judges companies by the numbers of blacks and women they employ and promote: Are the proportions in the company similar to their numbers in the general population? Moreover, private sector employers evaluate the success of their own affirmative action programs by the numbers also. Therefore there are 'quotas' in effect in the US private sector, though not legally mandated. If some Indian companies have been successful in assisting backward classes to succeed within their ranks to reflect their numbers in the population at large, they should publicise their records. This may ease the political pressure for reservations in the private sector. And these companies' examples will give insights into what really works.

Sewell claims that affirmative action movements in both India and the USA have been ineffective. He says that the condition of blacks in the USA improved much more in the half century preceding the civil rights movement when society was not doing anything consciously to uplift blacks, than it has in the half century since. Ironically, the evidence of success he cites is in numbers because numbers seem to be the most objective evidence. Which begs the question: why should not employers set their own goals in numbers so that there is concrete evidence of achievement?

Sewell misses the main point about affirmative action. The poet Robert Frost wrote, "When to the heart of man was it ever less than a treason to go with the drift of things, to bow with a grace to reason..." Once we admit that there has been discrimination against communities in the past which affects their future prospects in the future, we must do something, and not merely hope the situation will improve by itself. If quotas are not a good solution, we must find another, bearing in mind that the solution has to be really fair and not merely efficient. Economists and managers know how to measure efficiency. We must also find acceptable measures of fairness. But we will not find these measures or a solution if we debate in the spirit of a 'Big Fight'. Systemic problems with deep roots deserve deeper dialogues that elicit and respect many perspectives.

What warmed my heart this recent June morning and affirmed my faith in our best business leaders is that they have stepped out of the debate and shouldered their broader social responsibility. I hope they will show the world a better way to solve a centuries old problem that plagues many countries.

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

Diaspora has a green soul

RAM GIDOOMAL



Through NR Eyes

In the UK, civil society organisations have a strong interest in sustainable development in India and other countries — but too often the focus can be on how the UK can teach the world rather than how we can learn together as partners.

London Sustainability Exchange (www.lsx.org.uk) a London-based charity that I chair, has highlighted the power of London's family relationships worldwide to act as a significant resource to move together towards a more sustainable world. If we can establish here in London how to have a high quality of life without damaging the environment, then hopefully we can spread this informally worldwide. Equally, London's diversity should mean that we can network more effectively across continents and learn the best new approaches wherever they come from.

New migrants to London have an important contribution. They often arrive with a strong commitment to conserving resources, avoiding waste and other sustainable behaviour. But if these behaviours are driven only by poverty then there is a risk that they will be discarded with increasing wealth. One note of hope is that London's children from all communities seem to be equally concerned about environmental issues.

London Sustainability Exchange is trying to stimulate this networking by promoting environmentally responsible behaviour to London's minority communities. For example, we recently published a series of articles on the environment in one of London's local Turkish language newspapers.

The story of A Rocha Living Waterways (www.arocha.org.uk) in Southall is a challenging example of what can be done. Southall is the only town in Britain where the signs at the station appear in both English and Punjabi! Working in a community with 52 separate places of worship (churches, mosques, temples and gurdwaras), the A Rocha project has succeeded in uniting a diverse community around the theme of caring for God's creation. "A biblical view of creation recognises the command God gives to people to care for and "rule over" the earth and its creatures (Genesis 1.26-28)," explains A Rocha UK Founder & Director Dave Bookless. "This command is given to people of every faith and none. It demands cooperation between all people."

In partnership with local faith leaders, two local councils and numerous volunteers, A Rocha has succeeded in transforming the local environment. When Dave Bookless began to study some of the area's many environmental problems, including high levels of air pollution and large amounts of litter in public places, he was shocked to discover that some parts of Southall had the lowest ratio of public green space per household in England. He also uncovered research by the King's Fund that revealed an increased likelihood of mental health difficulties among those deprived of access to green spaces.

In 2001 he and others established a UK branch of the international Christian environmental charity, A Rocha. The project began researching the potential of the nearby Minet site for people and wildlife. I remember seeing the Minet site in the early '70s when as newly arrived refugees we visited Southall regularly to buy cooking ingredients. Burnt-out cars, piles of tyres and industrial waste littered the 90-acre Minet site. It was seen by many local people as simply a dumping ground — a 'tip'. But after discovering a diverse range of birds, butterflies and other wildlife, A Rocha, along with the local MP and others, approached the local authority, Hillingdon Council, to propose a council-funded project to create a Country Park and wildlife reserve. After many discussions — and after involving a lot of other community groups — the council accepted the proposals, and appointed A Rocha as Ecological Advisors on a regeneration project that would transform the disused site into one of the largest public access parks in urban West London.

Their efforts were rewarded on June 14, 2003, when local residents joined council officials, community leaders and volunteers to celebrate the opening of Minet Park.

From the beginning the project involved leaders of Southall's different faith communities. At a meeting held on a boat on the local Grand Union Canal, religious leaders were challenged about making a commitment to care better for the local area. One leader stated: "I find it shocking that in a place with so many religious people — where we ought to know better - Southall and Hayes are only known for their rubbish and dirt." The leaders saw a presentation in which the importance of water as a symbol of purity and cleansing in world religions was contrasted with the way their community failed to keep local waterways clean and pure.

Later they signed an "Eco Pledge", which:

- States that faith communities have a vital part to play in solving global environmental problems
- Admits that the faith communities have, has often been as bad as everybody else at caring for the earth
- Commits local faith leaders to teaching their members about our religious duty to look after the environment
- And commits faith leaders to helping people practice what they preach at a local level.

Dr Ken Gnanakan, who heads an environmental project in Bangalore slums, was recently at the United Nations' Commission on Sustainable Development in New York. "My part in the event was organised by the Norwegian Government and their University of Life Sciences. We were speaking about environmental aspects of waste water and various approaches for developing the poorer nations. I addressed the part on Capacity Building which is what we are doing here in India. There were Africans and Asians (as well as Eastern Europeans) and they all



In partnership with local faith leaders, two local councils and numerous volunteers, A Rocha has succeeded in transforming the local environment.

seemed convinced about our approach to ecological sanitation."

As a member of London's Worshipful Company of Information Technologists, I am particularly aware that the internet offers a powerful tool for civil society networking. Following the recent disaster, the Tsunami Recovery Network (www.tsunami-recovery.net) was created by an international network of universities, consultants, NGOs, media and professional associations with experience in the development of human settlements and the built environment. Their concern is to ensure that rehabilitation is driven by local wishes and needs, is transparent and rebuilds lives not just infrastructure.

It is encouraging that ACEVO (Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations in the United Kingdom) are planning their first international conference in London in October 2005 under the title "North-South - Learning from Each Other". www.acevo.org.uk

FAITH LEADERS PLEDGE

- As representatives of the religious communities of Southall and Hayes, we
- Express our deep conviction that religious and ethical values are vital in addressing the environmental challenges facing humanity both globally and locally;
 - Acknowledge that members of our faiths have often contributed to the poor state of the local environment and have rarely practised the true teachings of our faiths;
 - Commit ourselves to educate our respective communities and followers on the environmental content of our religion with a view to promoting environmentally responsible behaviour;
 - Commit ourselves, to promote practices that are in accordance with our religious beliefs and based on respect for life and the need to live in harmony with nature.

(RAM GIDOOMAL, Chairman, South Asian Development Partnership)

Advani, Deng and Lalu

HARIVANSH



Inside India

RSS chief Sudershan has compared politicians to prostitutes. Just as prostitutes pretty themselves up in different ways to make themselves appealing, so also politicians keep changing what they stand for. Significantly, Sudershan's remarks came after the LK Advani resignation drama in the BJP.

Advani had visited Pakistan and praised Jinnah for being secular. He was criticised within the party, resigned and then took back his resignation. Is Advani's new stand on Jinnah a serious change in his understanding of the future of the subcontinent's politics or is he mere posturing for political survival?

Some political commentators have gone so far as to compare Advani's utterances on secularism and Jinnah to Deng's shift from Marxism-Communism

to a capitalist road. Can we compare the two? Perhaps not. Deng's move came over time and was famously summed up by his remark: "It hardly matters whether the cat is black or white till it catches mice."

Deng remained steadfast in his personal transformation and now it is widely accepted that if China is today emerging as a superpower, it is because of what Deng did from 1977-78. Advani by comparison went back on his Jinnah view in no time at all.

Advani had to sign the resolution brought by the BJP regarding Jinnah's historical role in the politics of the subcontinent. The resolution had the same old view about Jinnah that the BJP has been holding since the time of its Jan Sangh avatar. Had Advani remained steadfast to his statement made in Pakistan regarding Jinnah, he would have never have put his signature to that resolution. Whatever

the consequences, he would have stood alone and led a new political trend.

Advani made yet another statement on the subject on May 17-18 that history has undergone a sea change, times have changed, a new generation in India and Pakistan wants to create a new world. This generation doesn't want to live according to religious dogmas. It has modern dreams, he said. Well, here Advani has really uttered a truth.

Just like the maulvis of Pakistan, Hindu fundamentalists in India are rapidly losing their sway over the people. They have nothing to offer. If Advani has truly understood this vast change, he should put his party in the liberal-secular mode. But then, it is not all that easy. A party that has been thriving on its political capital of communal issues for last 50 years can't be changed in the blink of an eye into a party charting a middle-liberal course. It has communal issues in its genes.

Had Advani been of the stature of Deng he would have worked to reform his party and discover a new politics that would take India and Pakistan and the rest of the subcontinent forward. This would have made him a truly great leader who has moved with the times. This would have given him the stature of a Deng.

I happen to remember an interesting incident. One day Lalu Prasad Yadav attended an official function along with his wife and CM Rabri Devi in Patna. He showered words of profuse praise on computer technology. The same day in the evening, at a public gathering 70 km from Patna, he held computers to be an enemy of the poor even though he has given his daughter in marriage to a computer engineer. Similarly, at an official meeting he made an appeal for population control, but at another meeting he said that the rising population of the poor was a good thing.

Unfortunately Advani, having lost the opportunity to show that he is a leader of great vision, must learn to live with the barb delivered by Sudershan. He has shown that he is not much better than Lalu Prasad Yadav or VP Singh or a host of Congress politicians who have been quick to take political positions with little personal conviction. A Deng-level of reformer he certainly is not.

Vanishing tigers, vanishing people

MILINDO CHAKRABARTI



Reforms Report

TIGERS are vanishing despite several 'tiger reserves' being carved out of forests to increase their numbers. In the early 1980s, the Buxa Tiger Reserve (BTR) in West Bengal was notified with the same intention. Located in the Himalayan foothills bordering Bhutan, BTR has about 27 big cats, according to a statement by the state's forest minister. Sceptics question the reliability of such figures. Local villagers have not sighted any tiger in the last few years. Neither have there been reports of tigers attacking cattle or humans in recent times. Some people, associated with the forest department, suggest that all the tigers have migrated to Bhutan.

Since the BTR was notified, forest officials have allegedly killed six people from one settlement alone for disrupting their 'sincere' attempts to save the tiger. Located near the Poro river the settlement

is divided into two hamlets, North and South Poro. Inhabited by Rabhas, an indigenous tribe who traditionally practice shifting cultivation, this region has always been a 'problem' spot for forest officials 'smoothly' carrying out their mission of conservation. South Poro has a population of around 300. Only one Rabha has been fortunate enough to attend college. Most have not studied beyond primary school.

When the forest department needed a steady supply of labour to carry out forestry operations like felling trees and creating new plantations, they found it convenient to set up 'forest villages'. The settlers were given some land for cultivation, a small plot as homestead, fuel wood and rights to graze a certain number of cattle in the forests along with de facto rights to collect non-timber forest produce necessary for subsistence. South Poro was one such forest village set up in

1916, with 28 households. One more household was settled at a later date. Over the years, the population increased and so did the number of households. But the land available for use remained the same.

Today, there are 105 households out of which 76 are not 'recognised' by the forest department. Till the early 1980s the department followed a 'commercial' policy so forest villagers were not in much danger of losing their minimum livelihood requirements of food and shelter. Health and educational services were unavailable though. But during the late 1980s the forest department started following a policy of 'conservation'. Employment opportunities for forest villages declined drastically and stringent restrictions were imposed on the extraction of non-timber resources from the forests. The people found their livelihood threatened.

Lets shift our focus to Teesta Rabha. She is the breadwinner for her family of six comprising three children and aging in-laws. Married for nine years, her husband Purna Rabha was hit by bullets fired by a forest department official on 24 September 2004. He succumbed to his injuries. Yes, Purna was cutting trees and ferrying them to Phanskhawa for sale to residents of Alipurduar, the sub-divisional headquarters of the region. Interestingly, Alipurduar also houses the headquarters of BTR. A bundle of firewood — called a *bhari* — weighing around 35-40 kg would fetch him about Rs 30. Yes, Purna was cultivating a small plot of land too. But that yielded enough food to feed his family for just eight months. How was he to provide food for the remaining period? With no other skills to earn a living, the only alternative he had was to fell trees and sell them at the cost of his life.

After Purna passed away, Teesta's family cannot afford to farm. The children are too small and her father-in-law too old to be of any help. The family is now totally dependent on trees felled from the forest. Teesta's mother-in-law joins her in procuring and ferrying fuel wood. Is Teesta unafraid of meeting the same fate as her husband? Not really. She does not think about the future of her children as long as they are alive today. She laments that she can't afford to buy any new

(Continued on next page)

Delhi's murky water plans

ARVIND KEJRIWAL



The Right To Know

AT the instance of the World Bank, the Delhi Government is handing over the operations and maintenance of two zones of the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) to companies under management contracts.

The zones are South II (S II) and South III (S III), which include both poor and middle class areas.

The contracts will be for six years initially. The companies to which the contracts are awarded will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the entire gamut of services relating to water supply: distribution, collection of revenues, addressing consumer complaints etc.

Two years after these contracts, DJB's operations elsewhere in Delhi would similarly be handed over to other companies.

Presently, most of the areas in these two zones receive less than four hours of water supply every day. Water pressure in many areas is so low that people have to install booster pumps. Repeated complaints to DJB yield no results.

The private companies are expected to put such systems in place that there will be continuous water supply to each person living in these areas 24 hours a day seven days a week. These companies will also be expected to provide efficient complaint handling systems.

The zones South II and South III have middle class areas that include Kotla Mubarakpur, Defence Colony, Dayanand Colony, Jangpura, Bhogal, Okhla, Srinivaspuri, GK, Girinagar, Nizamuddin, Malviya Nagar, Gulmohar Park, Saket, Madan Gir, Tughlakabad, Harkesh Nagar, Dakshinpuri, Madangir, Green Park, Hauz Khas, Dr Ambedkar Nagar and Sangam Vihar. Poor areas include several slums, resettlement colonies and urban villages.

GKW, a consultancy firm, has provided a road map for the distribution of water by private companies.

The promise of 24X7 : Where will the water come from?

Let us see whether there is enough water available to provide it all day seven days a week.

According to GKW, if continuous water were to be provided to S II areas, 226 MLD of water would be required in the first year. Subsequently, the private company would take steps to reduce leakages and reduce requirement to 190 MLD by the end of three years. Even after this, there would be a substantial gap between water demand and supply. Similarly, if continuous water were to be provided to S III areas, 180 MLD of water would be required in the first year. This requirement would reduce to 150 MLD by the end of three years.

Where would the additional water come from? GKW says it is DJB's responsibility to provide additional water! If DJB provides this much water to S II and S III, then the private company will be able to provide universal 24X7 supply.

Where will DJB get this water from?

There is no clear answer. It was expected that the Sonia Vihar water treatment plant would become operational by the time these management contracts were given out. It was planned that these zones would then be provided all the water necessary to enable the private companies to provide water 24X7.

But the Sonia Vihar plant is not functioning as yet. So, will the water be

diverted from other areas to these two zones to help new managers demonstrate their efficiency? The consultants say that "success" in these two zones would be showcased so that management of other zones can be similarly handed over to private players. But if success is achieved either by providing additional water from Sonia Vihar or by diverting supply meant for other parts of Delhi, then how could the credit for its success be given to the "efficiency" and "expertise" of the private firms who have taken over from DJB?

Is there a 24X7 water supply for poor people?

Water sector reforms hold out the promise to provide supply 24X7 to rich and poor alike. But there are no concrete suggestions as to how the poor will be served.

There are no water connections for 53,000 households living in slums in the S II zone. It is the same story in other poor localities. These areas do not have any distribution networks. Almost 265,000 people depend on unreliable and ad hoc supply from standposts, water tankers or through illegal tapping of water mains. Just about 10 litres of water is available per capita per day to these people, which isn't sufficient for even drinking and cooking purposes. Similarly, 14,000 poor households in S III are not a part of the regular water distribution network.

Water reforms envisage putting an end to the stealing of water from mains. Water supplied through tankers and standposts will be seen as non-revenue water (NRW). There will be annual targets for reducing NRW. Penalties are planned if these targets are not met. Each bucket of water provided to the poor would increase NRW. So, all the "illegal" sources of water to these areas would be plugged without making corresponding legal arrangements for providing water to these areas. Forget 24X7, it is not clear how these areas will get any water at all after reforms.

The private company will have to pay a penalty to DJB if it fails to provide 24X7 water to people with regular water connections. Naturally, in the case of any shortfall etc, water would be diverted from poor areas to areas.

Why should these people remain permanently out of the mainstream? Why shouldn't the water distribution network be extended into these areas? Why shouldn't they also be provided regular water connections? Why shouldn't they also be a part of the proposed 24X7 systems?

Evaluation of private company on its promise of 24X7 supply

It is proposed that a penalty would be imposed on the private company if it fails to provide 24X7 water. Sounds good. But how does it work?

This performance is conditional to the DJB making a promised quantity of water available. Given the difficult water supply position in Delhi, DJB may not be in a position to fulfil this commitment most of the time, thus freeing the private company from his commitment of 24/7.

Even when the DJB supplies that much water, performance of the private company will be assessed not on the basis of whether you received 24X7 water in your house, but on the basis of whether the private company provided 24X7 water at the input point of each district metering area (DMA) or not. Each zone is being planned to be divided into several DMAs. The DJB has to supply the required quantity of water at the input point of each zone. The private firm has to ensure 24X7 water supply at the input point of each DMA in that zone.

Thus, if you are not getting water for the last three months in your street due to some local fault, the manager could still be assessed to have provided water 24X7 in the entire zone and could still get his bonus for good performance as long as water is available at the input point of all DMAs.

(Continued from previous page)

clothes for her children ever since her husband died.

In early April, a public hearing was organised by a group of activists at Rajabhatkhawa in BTR to record the grievances of the people about several incidents of human rights violation. Two months have passed. The final report is yet to see the light of the day. No FIR could be lodged to bring Purna's killer to justice, even though Teesta claims she had to shell out her entire savings of Rs 1000 to a local political activist to initiate the process. As you are reading this piece, Teesta may have returned home with Rs 30 earned from selling fuel wood. Or a bullet, fired by a forest department official, might have struck her.

Tiger protection is not ill-conceived. The tiger's existence is definitely an indicator of what is in store for future generations. However, the methods followed to

increase the number of tigers have not yielded results. Shouldn't we redesign a conservation programme that has not only failed to achieve its objectives but has also denied the right to livelihood to a section of our vulnerable citizens? Should a programme that does not deliver justice continue to be acceptable? The tiger task force must keep an open mind on this issue.

Increasing the proportion of land under protected areas is neither necessary nor a sufficient condition to ensure conservation of biodiversity. A more direct approach to conserve and protect the heterogeneity in our gene pool is urgently required. Circumstantial evidence suggests a lower level of 'human development' among people residing in and around biodiversity rich areas. In our zeal to conserve wildlife we must not compromise the interests and aspirations of the present generation to further those of the future generation.

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?

Cold cash and Ayurveda

Umesh Anand
Bangalore

A year ago Darshan Shankar of the Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT), Bangalore, set out to create a hospital which would bridge the gap between Ayurveda and Western bio-medicine. He is still at it and the reason is that though he has super credentials and a great idea what he really needs is money. Lots of it.

The hospital, when it is set up, is intended to offer the best treatment in Ayurveda to rich and poor alike. It will be located in Bangalore and be the hub for talented physicians of various disciplines. It will also seek to preserve traditional skills such as those of midwives and bonesetters. Formal systems of medicine meet the needs of just one-third of the Indian population. The rest turn to these folk practitioners.

But more importantly, the FRLHT hospital will seek to get practitioners of Western science and Indian traditional medicine to speak to each other. Right now the position is that one does not understand the other because they come from two entirely different epistemological systems.

Darshan believes that it is possible to validate Ayurveda and Yoga in ways that would be acceptable to the Western system. This is not because traditional treatments need validation in a modern context. But in the absence of modern explanations for these treatments, they tend to be dismissed as being unscientific, which indeed they may not be.

Darshan set up FRLHT 12 years ago (see *Civil Society* cover story, *Meet Mr Roots*, January 2004) and has focused on the conservation of medicinal plants in the wilds by communities, forest gene banks, traditional remedies, building bridges between science and traditional knowledge, folk practitioners and their therapies. The FRLHT campus just outside Bangalore has laboratories for validation of Indian systems of medicine.

A research hospital is the natural step forward from this work. But setting it up with some 100 beds and a pool of specialised talent is quite another endeavor. A beginning has been made by acquiring land adjacent to the FRLHT campus, because it was available, and would have changed hands anyway.

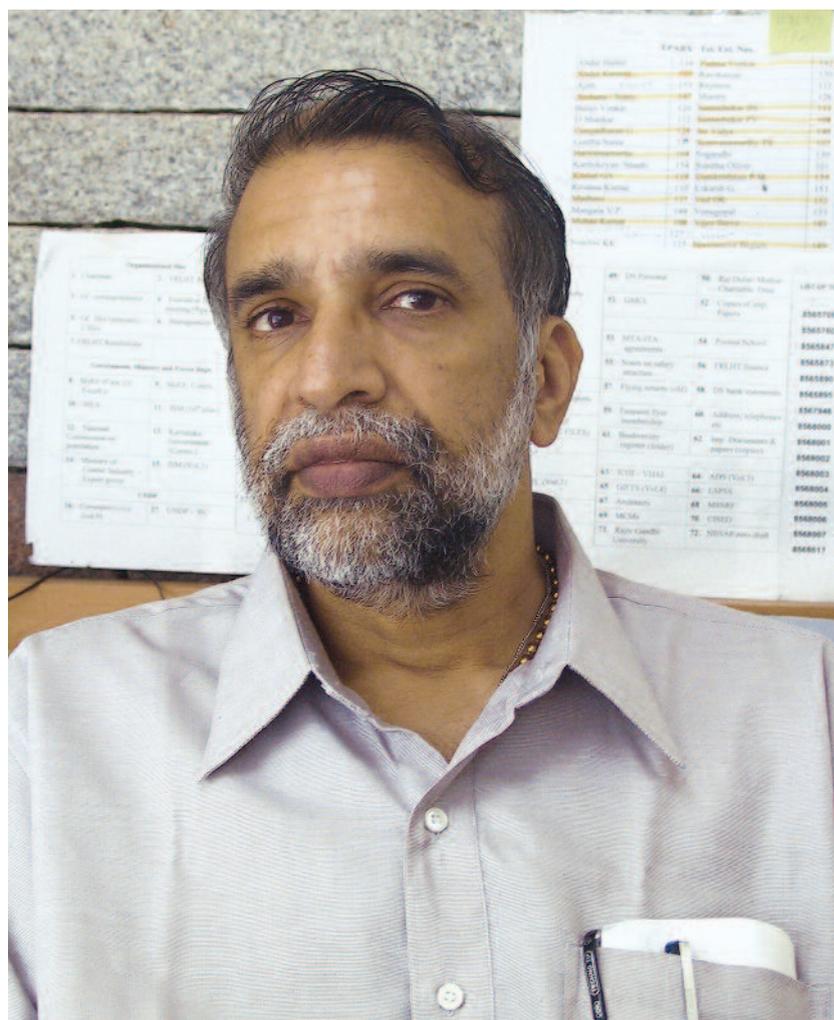
But the research hospital itself needs some Rs 20 crores. Much of this money will go into creating infrastructure and buying equipment. There is no sign yet of the cash coming in, but Darshan has learnt to think business as he has gone along.

The research hospital itself will be a non-profit enterprise, but another company on entirely commercial lines will draw on its expertise and set up clinics, wellness centers and nursing homes. These are expected to bring in revenues which can then be ploughed into the research hospital.

FRLHT hopes to be able to stitch together donations and interest-free loans to get the hospital up. The past year, however, has seen more frustration than success. But Darshan says he is hopeful that he will find enough people who are ready to support an effort which is designed to mainstream traditional Indian medical knowledge and help it compete globally.

Darshan's work at FRLHT has earned him many international accolades. Last year he received Columbia University's most prestigious award for leadership in complementary medicine. He has also been given the Borlaugh Award and a Commonwealth award for linking education to community needs.

For the research hospital he has been joined by Dr G Gangadharan. He is a well-respected Ayurveda physician, who was with the Arya Vaidya Pharmacy



Darshan Shankar

in Coimbatore.

The question before them now is whether they can turn a cause into an ethical business and in turn rescue traditional Indian medical knowledge from the twin dangers of rampant commercialisation and absolute decline.

Darshan's estimate is that the research hospital, once up and running, can begin to meet its recurring expenses in four years. The capital investments will take much longer to recover. Given the interest in Ayurveda and Yoga, the company passing on the hospital's specialised knowledge for setting up clinics and nursing homes for a fee should be commercially viable. But as is the case with all entrepreneurs, the biggest hurdle is in putting those first building blocks of capital in place and getting started.

What is the difference between the Ayurveda and Yoga hospital you are planning and those that already exist?

There are some excellent Ayurveda hospitals and nursing homes in different parts of India. We expect to learn from their best practices. The difference is that not only do we want to implement the best clinical practices of Ayurveda

and Yoga but we also want to generate scientific evidence about their efficacy. We must hasten to clarify that scientific evidence will sought to be generated in our project not because Ayurveda and Yoga need scientific support for their survival, but, really, in order to communicate more effectively with the world of Western bio-medicine.

It is necessary to note in this context that the enormous corpus of documented knowledge that is available on Ayurveda and Yoga, was born, nurtured and evolved from 1500 BC to the current period without the aid of Western science and solely on the strength of indigenous sciences. The foundations, world-views, principles, categories and concepts of the Indian and Western sciences are naturally different.

However, the differences should not lead to alienation in the knowledge communities but rather to collaboration. Western bio-medicine does not understand the epistemology of traditional medicine, but we believe bridges can and must be built if India desires to mainstream its medical heritage.

So far traditional and modern medical professionals have lived without effective communication. But FRLHT feels that the time has come to mainstream traditional systems of medicine and hence in our hospital project we have decided to include modern diagnostic tools in order to generate scientific evidence which can be more easily communicated to a wider community of medicinal professionals in India and abroad.

Astute observers of the health industry believe that any model of healthcare based on a single system of medicine will become obsolete in the next two decades unless it broadens out to judiciously combine with complementary systems of medicine.

This obsolescence will occur on account of the insufficiency of a single system to offer on its own, effective treatment for curative and preventive healthcare. The most experienced and sophisticated complementary systems are very evidently Ayurveda and Yoga of Indian origin (1500 BC - 2004 AD) and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

Will your hospital be a business or a not-for-profit venture?

The hospital will itself not be a profit venture. It will however generate the know-how that can help another health enterprise to run the business of replicating the experiences of the hospital into a) Rural and urban clinics b) Nursing homes c) Hospitals and d) Wellness centres.

This medical enterprise will be intellectually promoted by FRLHT. It will however be an independent for-profit entity registered under the Company's Act. It will pay the research hospital for its know-how and expertise. This payment will help the hospital to sustain and improve its work. The hospital will also have its own revenue stream from its patients.

The hospital will be run on ethical lines. Its motto will be to help all patients who come for help irrespective of their economic status, to heal themselves, through appropriate diet, drugs and non-drug therapies. It will combine treatments for body and mind. It will develop protocols for measuring physical, biological and psychological change in patients.

How much does it cost to set up such a facility and where do you find the money for an enterprise like this?

It could cost up to Rs 20 crores to set up such a facility for 100 residential patients as well as for the equipment for both modern diagnostics and traditional treatments. We expect to raise this money through donations and interest-free loans. We believe the organisations and individuals who back

this project will share FRLHT's conviction that 'the time has come' for India to mainstream its rich medical heritage.

We shall also be creating in this project a complex for training of folk (village-based) healers like midwives and bonesetters. We have also planned to create a traditional pharmacy for training housewives in preparing 'home remedies'.

Clearly when the investment needed is substantial, revenue flows are an issue. Money has to be paid back. How do you hope to make the hospital self-sustaining?

We are working out a business plan and expect that by the fourth year the hospital will generate sufficient revenues to meet all its recurring expenses. We anticipate that 25 percent of the patients will need free or subsidised treatment. The infrastructure cost, however, may be recovered over a much longer period of time.

Do you see yourself having to make compromises by relying on some treatments which have become fads so as to bring in revenues for the more serious work? What kind of demand do you envisage for the facilities of the hospital?

In this research hospital, we will be covering 12 speciality areas where Ayurveda is strong and where we perceive public demand. These areas are: women's health and maternity care, geriatrics, mental health, diabetes, skin diseases, cardiac disorders, neurological disorders, musculo-skeletal disorders, gastro-intestinal and respiratory tract disorders, cancer, ophthalmology and preventive and promotive health.

This hospital will be addressing the needs of the general public. Its patients will come from the poor as well as the middle and upper classes. The construction is designed in such a way that all the different economic groups can stay and get treated comfortably.

FRLHT will not be compromising on any of the treatment modalities to suit modern fads. We will implement classical Ayurveda treatments in an acceptable and effective way.

Is the medical tourism spoken of so often these days a part of your plans? Do you hope to attract foreigners?

India is becoming a destination for medical tourism from the developing nations in Asia as well as developed countries and India attracts foreigners because of its holistic Ayurveda and Yoga treatment packages.

FRLHT will also offer foreigners genuine curative and preventive treatment as per their need, but this project is certainly not being set up exclusively for them.

When you are setting up a hospital like this where does money get spent most on land, equipment, construction, staff.. ?

This kind of hospital needs around 40 percent of the total expenses on equipment and 30 percent on infrastructure. Another major area of expense is on high quality technical personnel both from Ayurveda and Yoga and modern bio-medicine.

Will it also be a teaching and research facility?

FRLHT expects this facility will, after five years of its inception, serve as a teaching hospital for undergraduate, postgraduate and doctorate students and also for paramedics on subjects like folk medicine, pharmacy, Yoga, Panchkarma and nursing. FRLHT visualises that this project will grow into a deemed university for teaching and research on Indian medical heritage.



Herbal Garden at FRLHT



A modern clinic at FRLHT

BILT reaches out, builds trust

Civil Society News
New Delhi

BALLARPUR Industries Ltd (BILT), India's largest paper manufacturer, was last month given a national award for its work in corporate social responsibility by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI).

BILT's factories are located in some of the most backward areas of the country and its immediate stakeholders are very poor and marginalised people. Traditionally, equations between the factories and the communities were built on hostility with misconceptions on both sides. A change in top management over the past five years has seen a new approach and a shift from hostility to partnerships.

The company has teamed up with NGOs to reach out to surrounding villages. The strategy has been to help people identify their needs and find self-sustaining solutions to their local problems.

While earlier the company was largely seen as a donor trying to buy peace and local support, BILT says it has succeeded in an image makeover and is now regarded as a facilitator. About 200 self-help groups (SHGs) have come up in about 100 villages and BILT's programmes have impacted 150,000 marginalised people. In the process, the company also understands the people around its factories a lot better.

The inspiration for these changes has come from Gautam Thapar, who, as managing director, has taken a personal interest in BILT fulfilling its social responsibilities. Since 2001, BILT's policy on CSR has been clearly articulated. The CSR department is headed by Yashashree Gurjar, head, Corporate Social Responsibility, BILT, who reports directly to Thapar. *Civil Society* spoke to her.

How do you get these communities involved in your programme?

It is important that the projects be relevant to their lives. We began the process by trying to understand the needs of these communities through formal surveys to comprehend education levels, income, health, indebtedness etc and, most importantly, their aspirations. The surveys also try to understand the perception people have of BILT and their expectations from the company and other industries in the vicinity. These expectations are discussed at the village level along with the responsibility and the role of the community.

The programmes, while focusing on the needs of the communities, also focus on developing their abilities and capacities so that they can carry the programmes forward.

What are the problems you face in your interface with communities and how do you overcome them?

Initially there were questions about the company's intentions. Although, since its inception, the company has always helped communities, this was in the form of donations for specific issues and always through local leaders. It was therefore natural that communities had apprehensions about our reasons for going into their villages.

These apprehensions were understood through a series of community meetings. In these meetings, it was very clearly emphasised that BILT wanted to be a partner with the communities to facilitate the process of development and not merely play the role of the charitable benefactor. Therefore no promises were made that the company could not fulfil and the strategy of intervention programmes was also worked out in consultation with the stakeholders. Due to the openness in the discussion process, vested interest groups gradually dissociated themselves with the community processes and the misconceptions gave way to a positive attitude.

Even so, it took us a while to win over their trust. Sometimes we had to change our strategy to win the confidence of the people. For example, at one of our sites, although people were okay with the NGO representative conducting village meetings, they were not very comfortable seeing BILT representatives. They felt that the BILT representative had an ulterior motive. This was a contrast to our strategy of involving our employees in the project. We had to ask the management at the unit to keep away from the villages for some time till the villagers could trust us. It took about six months for people to be comfortable.



Yashashree Gurjar

'Our interventions have resulted in the socio-political empowerment of the local people. The government now finds it easier to implement its own programmes.'

What are the main areas you focus on in the villages where you work?

The main focus of our activities is related to livelihoods. For us the pursuit of a livelihood requires not only skills but also includes health, basic education and empowerment. Hence all these form the focus areas of our projects. We give emphasis to development of women and children, who are the more disadvantaged among the marginalised.

Strengthening local level institutions, which may be the women's groups or the youth groups and the Panchayati Raj members (local elected representatives), can help create leadership in the community which is essential for taking the development programmes ahead.

Can you tell us how you help local people identify their needs?

Local NGOs conduct the need assessment studies. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Micro Planning Exercises were conducted at the village level. Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted specially with the marginalised section (women) of the communities to seek their views on the needs of the villages. Following this, matching exercises were done to relate the expectations to the genuine needs of the communities. Various expectations were raised which were the manifestation of some development related needs and some due to the influence of their peers and local leaders and opinion leaders. Following the matching, detailed action plans were worked out. All this also involved the BILT employees at the units.

What are the main successes you have achieved so far?

We have had a positive impact on 150,000 people living around our various factories. These have been in the form of improved standard of living due to enhanced income, improvement in the health status of women and children, access to basic education through regular attendance in community education centres and schools.

Our interventions have resulted in the socio-political empowerment of the local people. The government now finds it easier to implement its own programmes and banks and financial institutions are willing to provide financial assistance to individuals and community groups.

We have also significantly increased the income of around 16000 farmers who are growing pulpwood for us as raw material. Moreover, they have also benefited by taking up inter-cropping for the interim period. We have been able to form nearly 200 self-help groups of women. There are groups for farmers and young people. We are able to facilitate vocational training in carpentry, welding, dress designing, motorcycle repair and so on. Thanks to this, they are able to access bank loans and start micro-enterprises.

We are enablers and not just a provider.

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?

The truth about the water business

SUCHI PANDE

PRIVATISATION of water utilities owned by governments is being seen as the "next best thing" to guarantee huge profits to the private sector. The primary argument put forward by proponents is that privatisation is essential because the state has failed to provide basic services. Besides, institutions like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) impose privatisation on governments as a pre-condition for aid, loans and debt relief.

Generally, as a result of privatisation, bulk water supply and sewerage services are handed over to multinational corporations (MNCs) by governments who are made to believe this will result in greater efficiency of services. The contractual agreement varies from one year to 40, fee-for-service or renewable contracts. Ownership of assets often remains with the government. Sometimes the agency ends up owning the utility. The most common form of private sector deals are PPPs - Public Private Partnerships with governments overseeing service delivery.

Experiences from countries like the Philippines, Bolivia, Argentina, Peru, Chile, Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia demonstrate that instead of improved service delivery and increased efficiency, privatisation brings with it violation of the basic human right to water. It leaves millions of people vulnerable to the whims and fancies of those who see water as a "commodity" and its scarcity as "creating one of the world's greatest business opportunities".

THE PHILIPPINES

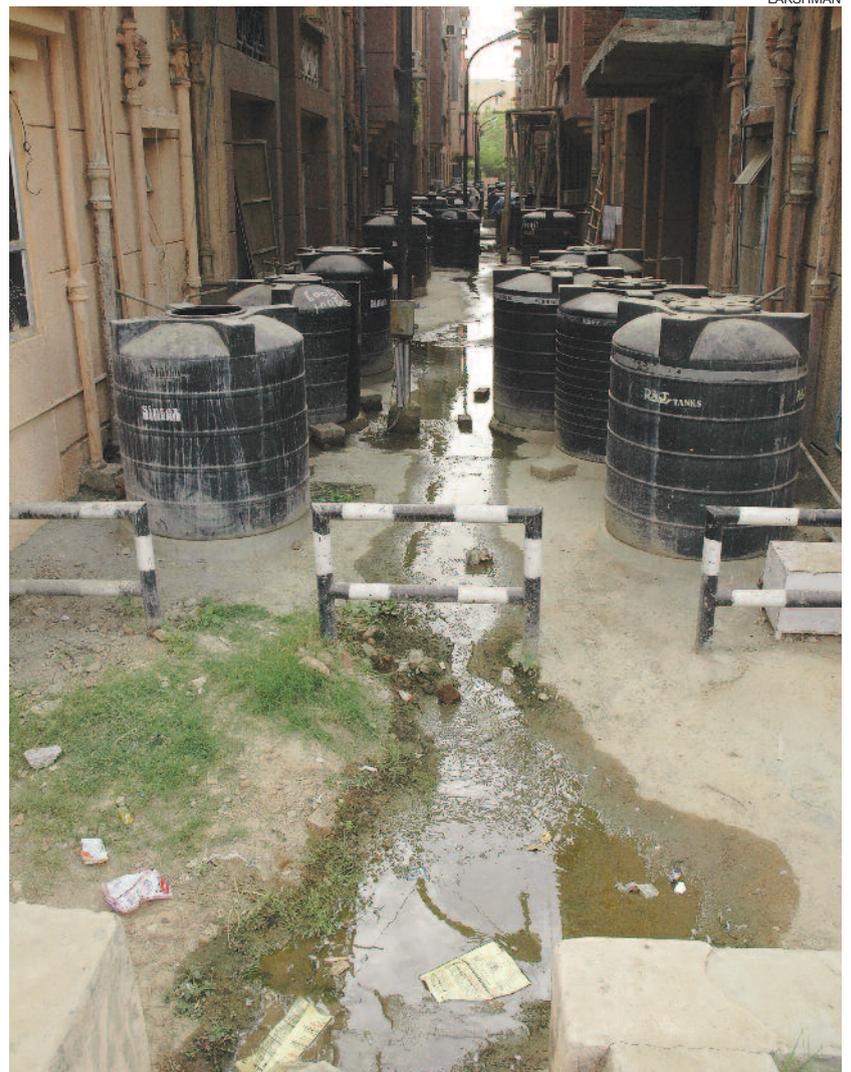
In 1997 one of the biggest privatisation agreements in the world was signed in Manila between its Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage Systems (MWSS) and two corporate giants, Bechtel and Ondeo on the advice of the International Finance Corporation, the private sector lending arm of the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). In 1995, MWSS had taken a long-term loan of \$307. ADB and the WB had financed \$250 of this loan amount.

The city of Manila entered into a 25-year lease agreement with Bechtel and Ondeo. The MWSS approved the rights for operation and expansion of water and sewerage services in the east zone to the Manila Water Company, which was co-owned by Bechtel, the Ayala family with UK's United Utilities and Mitsubishi Corporation of Japan as a foreign partner. The west zone concession was given to Maynilad Water, co-owned by Ondeo (earlier French Suez Lyonnaise de Eux) and the Lopez family.

Ondeo entered the deal guaranteeing 100 percent water coverage within 10 years and no real increase in water rates during the first 10 years. In fact lower rates were promised. In addition, unaccounted for water was to be reduced from 56 percent to 32 percent by 2007. Further, the company promised 100 percent infrastructure coverage by 2007 for 7.5 million households covered in the concession contract. Most importantly uninterrupted 24-hour water supply that met Department of Health standards was promised within a period of three years to all connected consumers.

The private players were committed to providing water at a price of 4.96 pesos. While the government claimed that the price was guaranteed until 2007, several mechanisms were incorporated into the contract permitting "extraordinary price adjustments". Within a year into the contract, Maynilad announced a rate increase. In 2001 the price rose to 6.58 pesos with succeeding hikes to 10.79 pesos, 11.39 pesos and 15.46 pesos.

For an ordinary Filipino family this price hike meant foregoing an additional 87 to 147 pesos a month to pay for water. In some cases families were deprived of



LAKSHMAN

three meals or 3 kg of rice. It cost a poor vendor one day's income to meet the cost of water. The Asian financial crisis of 2001 was used as an excuse to hike rates. Both concession agreements were amended to allow the companies to recover foreign exchange losses in the same quarter these were incurred, rather than over the lease period of 25 years. By January 2003 Maynilad increased water rates four-fold to 21.11 pesos. Manila Water hiked rates by almost 500 per cent.

Shortly before Maynilad took control, to reduce its costs, some 3000 employees were displaced or forced to retire. Within six months 750 workers were laid off. Only 200 out of 5400 employees remained with what was left of MWSS after the take over.

Maynilad continued to seek contract renegotiations, including continual rate increases. The company postponed its obligations to meet investment targets of \$7.5 billion over 25 years. It was unable to meet set targets of reducing the amount of unaccounted for water. Probably the most controversial contract re-negotiation involved passing on foreign exchange losses to consumers.

In Parola, a poor urban area, 3000 out of 8000 families had no access to water services. Nearly 70 percent of these 3000 families could not afford to pay the one-time meter instalment costs of 4000 pesos. The remaining 30 per cent were "not allowed" to be connected since they were to be evicted in the next "five years". Maynilad further prohibited those who had water connections to share or sell water to them. An old faucet, which was a free source of water, was taken over by Maynilad leaving those unconnected with absolutely no access to water.

When the regulatory commission denied Maynilad a further increase in tariff to 27 pesos, the company decided to exit, on condition that the government paid an early termination amount provided for under the agreement. Maynilad claimed that Manila had not met its obligations. The company took its grievances to the International Chamber of Commerce. It sought a compensation of \$303 million from the government. In addition, MWSS had to undertake \$530 million in loan payment to creditors. Residents of Manila had to incur these debt payments.

BOLIVIA

In 1999 the Bolivian government entered into a 40-year contract for water and sanitation services in Cochabamba with a transnational consortium Aguas del Tunari led by the International Water Limited (IWL) jointly owned by Bechtel and the Italian energy company Edison. The price of water climbed by 200 percent. New legislation led to loss of local control over rural water resources. Massive social unrest followed in Cochabamba and spread to the country.

Within months of privatisation Aguas del Tunari hiked water tariffs. The increase had an adverse impact on the people of Cochabamba where the minimum wage is less than \$ 100 per month. The price of water now cost a self-employed man 22 percent of his monthly income and a woman 27 percent of hers.

The 200 percent escalation in water prices was meant to finance the Misicuni Project which was estimated to cost \$200 million. A dam and a hydroelectric power station were to be constructed. A tunnel, to bring water from the river Misicuni to Cochabamba, would also be made.

The citizens of Cochabamba were expected to cover the costs of the project before work commenced. Despite serious irregularities and omissions, the tender was offered to Aguas del Tunari (there was only one bidder). Besides bearing the costs of the Misicuni Project the concessions agreement provided a guaranteed 15 percent real return.

In 1997, the World Bank offered a loan to the Bolivian government on condition that it privatised water utilities further. The government had already privatised its airline, train services, and electricity utilities. The public water system of El Alto and La Paz, the capital of Bolivia, was now handed over to Aguas del Illimani, jointly owned by the French water giant Suez and minor shareholders.

The contract for El Alto included extending water services to poor households and shanty towns. But it did not provide adequate financial incentives to enable extensions in some areas. Therefore it was proposed that services be offered on the "ability to pay" and not as a matter of public policy.

The consortium made profits but failed to provide services to the poor. By pegging rates to the dollar, water prices were hiked by 35 percent. The total cost for families who wanted to get sewage and water connections came to around \$ 445, or over six months of income at the national minimum wage. More than 200,000 people were left without water connections. The company failed to expand water infrastructure to the periphery of municipality areas saying that the 30,000 people living there were not covered by "contractual obligations of the concession".

After protesters took to the streets and shut down the city, the government agreed to reverse the tariff increase. La Coordinadora (The Coordinator for the Defence of Water and Life) led a peace march which ended in a violent clash. There were massive public protests. Finally, the people of Cochabamba and El Alto succeeded in driving out Suez and Bechtel from Bolivia. The contracts were terminated and the management of water and sewerage systems reverted to the municipalities.

UNITED KINGDOM

In 1989 water and sanitation systems were privatised in the UK and in Wales. The Daily Mail described it as the "greatest act of licensed robbery."

The UK privatisation model was unique. The government signed off water and sanitation systems completely to the private sector. The reason given was that water companies would be "released from the restraints on financing which public ownership imposes".

Under the Water Act of 1988, regional water authorities (RWAs) were transformed into private companies and sold.

The RWAs were constituted in 1974 and were responsible for water quality, water supply and sanitation services in their areas. Now as private companies they were given full ownership rights to the RWA systems. A 25-year concession

contract to each took care of any potential competition. To make sure these companies became profitable enterprises and to ensure that the process of privatisation became as smooth as possible, debt worth £5 billion was written off by the government. The new private companies were provided with £1.6 billion as "green dowry" and sold at 22 percent below the market value. A generous pricing regime was put in place to allow for exemption of taxes on profit for these companies.

There were price increases of 46 percent in real terms, adjusted to inflation, in the first nine years, post privatisation. Water bills are expected to rise by 18 percent till 2009. As a result, one in every five households owes money to their water company.

In UK higher profits for companies and higher water tariffs go hand in hand. In the first year itself, pre-tax profits doubled. Between 1990-97 profits of 10 sewage and water companies rose by 147 percent while sewage and water prices rose by 42 and 36 percent respectively. In Britain profit margins for companies were typically three to four times higher than in France, Hungary, Spain and Sweden.

After the initial five-year 'golden share' or protection period provided by the government, 10 water companies were quickly purchased by water giants like Suez- Lyonnaise, Vivendi, SAUR and RWE. Fourteen smaller water companies were taken over straight away, bypassing the protection period.

Nearly half the water and sewage companies have been purchased by multinational corporations - two are owned by US MNCs, one by a French company and another by a Scottish company. UK's largest water corporate Thames Water has been bought by a German company, RWE.

The private companies had little incentive to invest in improving infrastructure for water and sewage. One way of avoiding expenditure has been to exaggerate the level of investment required for infrastructure, which would in effect, increase prices and boost profits. Prior to privatisation, the level of capital investment in the water industry was on the rise. After 1992 it began to fall. A number of companies deliberately cut their investment programmes and diverted funds to increasing profits. For example, Southern Water submitted plans for sewage treatment plants (STP) that were not installed and Yorkshire Water avoided spending £50 million expenditure on an STP. One serious problem inherited by private companies was water leakages. Distribution losses across the country were as high as one-third.

With privatisation the quality of water improved, better connectivity was achieved, and there was less sewer flooding. However, in 1998, a review report by the Drinking Water Inspectorate indicated weaknesses. In five key parameters: nitrate, iron, lead, PAH and other pesticides, less than 80 percent of zones complied. A 1992 study recorded a rise in the rates of dysentery in most urban areas. A 1996 study by Save the Children UK reported that on an average a low-income family was spending 4 percent of its income on water. About 18,636 households were disconnected after a three-fold hike in prices in the first five years, post privatisation.

The water companies started using "pre-payment meters" for customers unable to pay their bills. The meters supplied water when customers paid money by buying a plastic card. By 1996 over 16,000 pre-payment meters were installed. Eventually the Water Industry Act 1999 forbade disconnections for non-payment of dues and the use of pre-payment meters was abolished.

The percentage of people employed in the water industry also declined by 21.5 percent. The 1995 drought highlighted the failures of privatisation. Due to under investment the water companies were unable to meet the increased demand for water. Public cynicism grew. People disregarded all appeals by the companies for water conservation because they felt exploited. In sharp contrast, when a drought took place in 1976 and publicly owned water authorities called for restraint, people responded and there was a 25 per cent decrease in consumption.

In 1998 water companies in the UK were ranked as the second and third worst polluters. Ten water companies were prosecuted 260 times between 1989 and 1997. Paying fines was considered simpler than making investments in infrastructure. Since 1998 the situation has improved. Water companies have been prosecuted for 22 water pollution offences, since.

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The consortium made profits but failed to provide services to the poor. By pegging rates to the dollar, water prices were hiked by 35 percent.

Giving girls their bodies back

Shuktara Lal
Kolkata

IN 1996 Sohini Chakraborty visited Kolkata's annual book fair. It was very crowded, as usual. She moved from stall to stall and then a poster caught her eye. It had a picture of a girl with a poem that read: *They sell me, my own blood for some gold and some silver, I rinse and rinse my mouth but the treachery remains...*

"I went inside to know more about them and unconsciously embarked on a new journey," says Sohini.

She now uses dance as a medium of therapy to rehabilitate girls and teenagers who have been forced into prostitution.

Sohini has a Master's degree in Sociology. She has trained in Bharatnatyam, Navarritya and theatre. She has also worked with the Dancers' Guild and *Rangakarmee*.

While drama therapy, art therapy and music therapy have been explored in Europe and America, Indians are much less familiar with creative therapy. Artists who want to practice alternative healing either apply to universities abroad or teach themselves by reading foreign publications on the subject.

Sohini volunteered as a dance trainer for the girls of Sneha, a home run by Sanlaap, an NGO in Kolkata, for rescued prostitutes, their children and sexually exploited girls. Initially, Sohini taught the girls dancing. But gradually she realised that the sessions were becoming therapeutic.

She began planning her classes so that the girls could talk about their suffering and express their pain through dance movements. "I started my

session with physical exercises and story-based movements. Each was based on a simple theme: the movement of people walking on the street, the movement around a home, etc. Through such sessions I started to teach them about the body and different positions using various kinds of music, including Hindi film songs. After two months they began to communicate with me and at that time I also started to spend more time with them".

Sohini's association with Sanlaap grew deeper. In 1999 she launched *Rangeen Sapney* (Colourful Dreams). The programme was supported by the government. Using art forms like dance, drama, mime and music, *Rangeen Sapney* helped the girls deal with their trauma and get involved in normal social activities. Sohini worked with 120 children between the ages of 6-14 in the red-light areas of the city and in homes run by Sanlaap.

Rangeen Sapney led to the birth of Sanved in 2000, an autonomous unit under the umbrella of Sanlaap. Sanved strives to rehabilitate child prostitutes, including HIV positive children and adolescent mothers. Around this time, Sohini met Tripura Kashyap, a renowned practitioner of dance therapy and she fine tuned her skills with her guidance.

"Girls who are subjected to sexual trafficking are extremely uncomfortable with their bodies," she explains. "They do not like their physicality because they feel it is responsible for the stigma attached to them. I teach them dance movements so that they can learn to love their bodies and be proud of them. Dancing also makes the girls self-confident. They believe that they can embrace all kinds of career options".

Members of Sanved work as performers and lobbyists spreading awareness on rights issues. Some have become trainers who assist Sohini. Her unique form of therapy enables her to rehabilitate as many girls as possible. NGOs in New Delhi and Mumbai have sought her advice on how they could incorporate these techniques. Recently, Sanved collaborated with the Association for Community Development in Bangladesh (ACD) to rehabilitate young Bangladeshi prostitutes. This initiative was funded by Sanlaap and Dayawalka Foundation which is based in the US.

Sanved puts up performances for the public. Tickets are sold commercially. In 2003, they performed at the Asian Social Forum. In the same year, Sohini became a recipient of the prestigious Ashoka Fellowship. She has also run a school programme that enabled school students to communicate with sexually abused children. This interaction helped to curb prejudiced perceptions of prostitution and establish mutual respect.

The astonishing success of Sohini's endeavor can be seen in the responses of the girls. Sohini gives them detailed questionnaires asking them whether the dance therapy sessions were beneficial. The girls effusively write about how they loved the classes. They also observe that the workshops reduced their aversion to their bodies. They could accept and love all that they were. The girls have written beautiful Bengali poems as well.

For Sohini, it is of paramount importance that society sees these girls not as victims, but as human beings. In future, she hopes to open an institute in the country where creative therapy can be taught as a vehicle for self-expression.

Putting Yamuna on Delhi's mind map

LAKSHMAN



Valentine Shipley

Shailey Hingorani
New Delhi

ON 4 June, World Environment Day, 'We for Yamuna', a social movement, along with Vasant Valley School, Visual Arts Gallery and Youthreach organised a screening of *Jjivisha*, a film on the river Yamuna at the India Habitat Centre (IHC).

Jjivisha, a Sanskrit word means 'a fervent desire to live'. It is an apt title for a film that celebrates the undying spirit and resilience of the Yamuna. The screening was preceded by a musical performance by Valentine Shipley, who has composed the music for the film. "My dad was a priest who used to have his weekly meetings at the river side. I have literally grown up with the river, but going back to it was an experience which can only be described by one word- disgusting," said Shipley.

Once a flowing river, now a stagnant drain. To most people in Delhi, the Yamuna doesn't hold any meaning. To be revived, the river has to be first brought to the 'mind-map' of Delhi's citizens.

An 'accidental remark' by Vimlendu Jha, the founder of 'We for Yamuna' to five college students of MCRC, Jamia Millia Islamia seeking internship, culminated into the film *Jjivisha*.

For MCRC students- Shirley Abraham, Charu Lata Menon, Ishita Moitra, Kuber Sharma and Amit

Madheshiya, the Yamuna meant nothing until they decided to undertake a 'Yamuna Yatra' with school children.

The film begins with a shot of a diver looking for coins under the mucky water. It then cuts to a shot of the Yamnotri, where the Yamuna bids adieu to the Himalayas. The river touches Dhak Pather where Buddhism is said to have flourished. The river also touches Paonta Sahib, where Sikhism evolved and goes on to irrigate Haryana and Punjab.

The Yamuna enters Delhi at Pallav village. The city's 17 drains empty sewage into the river, reducing it to a 'clogged drain'. Delhi, with its power and knowledge, is juxtaposed with the pathetic state of the Yamuna.

At Vrindavan, people believe that Yamuna is the fourth queen of Lord Krishna, and she is treated with all the grandeur befitting a queen.

But in Agra behind the Taj Mahal, the pathetic remains of a Queen dethroned, limp on sluggishly. Deep inside Chambal, the parched Yamuna meets four other distributaries and then at Prayag devotes itself to the Ganga.

"The Yamuna is not just water. It is a connection between different religions, different people. We want people to see this and develop a unique relationship with the river and work towards its restoration," says Jha.

Water sense from rural folk

Eklavya Prasad
Ahmedabad

THIS year there will be no thirst' is a documentary about a decentralised water management movement initiated by women's groups in Gujarat's Panchal region. The film, which is in Gujarati and English, inspires rural communities to emulate this outstanding example so that they can always be water secure.

Directed by Nimmi Chauhan, the documentary has been produced by Drishti Media Collective (DMC), a group of media professionals working on gender justice, human rights and development with a firm faith in the ability of video, theatre, radio, other media and the arts to contribute to a just society.

It is an informative, extraordinary and sensitively made documentary. A range of technical water conservation and management options have been incorporated and shared with rural communities.

The actors and supporting characters are rural folk who have communicated their real life struggle for water. This makes the film completely authentic. The ease with which the water problem and its solution have been dealt with convinces the viewer that such movements are practical and doable. The documentary sensitively underscores the complexities, contradictions and challenges of rural life.

"In DMC we have always believed that people are not reduced to mere passive objects of our films," says Chauhan. "A participatory method of production through a series of workshops and informal interaction with women and communities becomes the source of generating material for the content and storyline of the film."

The documentary can be divided into four phases: First, it describes the water problem. Secondly, the film explains how the community explored various options to solve the crisis. Thirdly, it describes how efforts to address the water problem began and the challenges encountered by the people. Fourthly, implementation of the project with peoples' support is shown. The film has captivating visuals and easy to comprehend dialogues. It has poignant folk songs that describe a journey of self-determination in Panchal region from struggle to contentment.

Chauhan has highlighted the women's struggle for water, from dawn to dusk. The opening scene shows women preparing to collect drinking water from *viradas* (manual excavation of the river bed to collect seeped groundwater) before the onset of dawn. It is a lesson for all those people in cities who squander water without a thought.

The film subtly highlights the life of a woman whose daily struggle encapsulates her relationship with her dominant and orthodox husband. She looks after household chores, manages children, contributes to agricultural work and ensures that the family is water secure. The imbalance of workload and leisure becomes apparent through the division of work between Nathabhai and his family. At times, one wonders, how many more years society will take to value the work done by women.

The conflict over water for drinking and irrigation, which leads to inter-village feuds, is an important contemporary issue raised by the documentary. The film delves further and showcases the relevance of village specific water usage guidelines. Formulating these require collaboration between the community and grass-roots bodies such as the panchayat — an approach which the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme strongly believes in.

The crucial links between water and the health and sanitation needs of girls and women could have been further captured. This would have helped to emphasize that lack of water impacts men and women differently.

'This year there will be no thirst' should be translated into other languages because it has the potential to change mindsets and convince people that similar water management systems can work for them too. Nimmi Chauhan, spoke to Eklavya Prasad about the making of the film.

What was your experience of working with real village leaders?

This has been my most difficult shoot. Everything went smoothly till we reached there four days before for shot planning and rehearsals. Suddenly, we were not welcome. Most of those who had agreed to work with us did the disappearing act. For the first time, in all these years, despite a participatory and transparent work methodology, I found the trust, the rapport all gone. There were many reasons. In this region, the impression of people about those working in film is very low. Even if people were willing to work, they were pressurized by their relatives not to. I was left without my actors.

The couple who were to play husband and wife, walked out due to some personal crisis. The lady eventually agreed to work but I could not cast her in the same role as who would play the role of her husband in the film? If I cast a husband-wife character, they have to be married in real life too or else the village will gossip and the reputation of both will be in shreds!

I usually cast the person whose experience is closest to the character. So in a way they are not acting but merely reliving their experience, in a way. So I had to change the storyline and characters to accommodate her. Eventually, we had to turn to people from other villages. Finally, during the shooting phase, the attitude of a few people did change. Some even laughed at their behavior and most of them participated.

What was the most difficult message to showcase in the film?

The most difficult thing for me was to show a woman sarpanch as a mere rubberstamp as I am associated with Mahila Swaraj Abhiyan—a network of NGOs in Gujarat working on empowering women in politics. I could have taken poetic licence by choosing to depict a strong woman sarpanch. But I did not, simply because I also wanted

to show that if there is a strong women's collective in the village, they can work with a weak sarpanch for village development. The other difficult choice was to show the women interacting with the panchayat, which has always been considered a male bastion. Women have to realise that if they want solutions to their problems they will have to engage with the panchayat and other government structures. If a village unites, creative solutions to their problems can be found somewhere between the government and the private spheres.

The documentary has beautiful folk songs on water...

In most of our films we make liberal use of cultural and folk art forms like songs, 'duha', 'garba', 'bhajan', 'raas'. We always believe that if we don't root the message in the local cultural idiom of the people, it will not be effective and acceptable to the people. Sometimes, we take poetic license in re-working the folk form at other times we use them in their original form. It all depends on what works best for the film.

What impact has this documentary had on you and your crew?

Every filmmaking process is shared with my crew so that they too are aware of the issues under consideration. I still feel that I need to expose them further to the issues of gender, equity and human rights. This film had a great impact on my crew after they experienced how rural women and marginalised communities changed their own lives, despite all odds.

'I could have taken poetic licence by choosing to depict a strong woman sarpanch. But I did not, simply because I also wanted to show that if there is a strong women's collective in the village, they can work with a weak sarpanch for village development.'

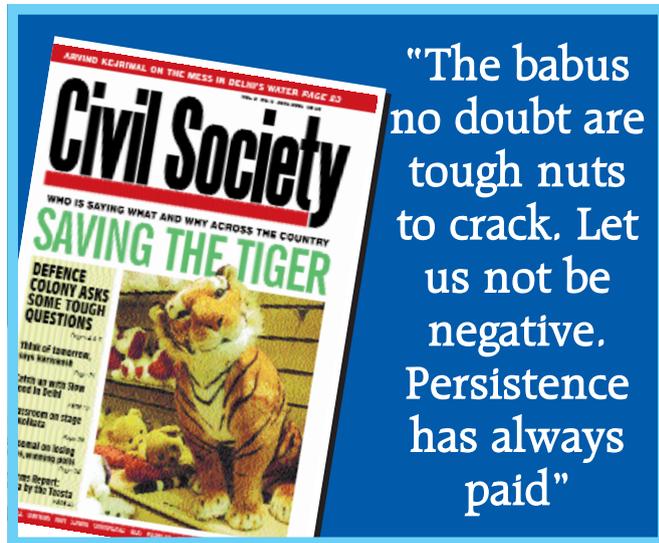


Nimmi Chauhan

Nail politicians

Your magazine's nicely done up cover caught my attention and I could not resist buying it. The articles and write-ups chosen for publication in the magazine's June issue were all very good, informative and very current. I particularly liked the article 'Think of Tomorrow' by Harivansh. The politicians, big or small, in or out of government, are so united in their pursuit of power that they think of nothing in arrogantly trampling on the functioning of institutions be it the Supreme Court or the Election Commission or any other institution created under the Constitution. The one lesson that comes out through the article is that all politicians are unscrupulous and that they derive their power from standing united. They tower over all other institutions and bodies because irrespective of their ideological differences (do they have any ideology?) they remain united against anything that even remotely could harm them. The other institutions have lacked it all along and no wonder they have all suffered and found themselves playing second fiddle to politicians.

Rishabh Gulati



"The babus no doubt are tough nuts to crack. Let us not be negative. Persistence has always paid"

Facts about mangoes

The article by Vidya Viswanathan, under the caption 'Catch up with Slow Food in Delhi', in your June issue made interesting reading. It made me recall a report, carried prominently by all the leading dailies of Delhi not long time ago, about the use of harmful gases in artificially ripening the crop of mangoes. After reading the article I was sure that there must hundreds of others who stopped eating mangoes until I met this fellow from Mother Diary who claimed that mangoes sold in their vegetable outlets were not artificially

ripened. I do not know about the veracity of this claim but since it concerns public health I was wondering whether it would be possible for you to do a story on the subject and lay bare the facts before the public.

Pankhuri Jain

RWAs and the RTI

Your magazine has done a yeoman's service by publishing an article entitled 'Defence Colony Asks Tough Questions' in the June issue. A sustained campaign needs to be launched to educate the people about the right to information available to them. What I particularly

liked was the steps listed in the article about how to use the RTI. The babus no doubt are tough nuts to crack. But then let us not be unduly negative.

Persistence has always paid as has amply been demonstrated by the RWA of the Defence Colony. The need of the hour is for the people to come together. I am sure after reading this article many RWAs in Delhi would be eager to take on municipal bodies which have been hitherto treating them like dirt.

Mohana Rajan

Be small to be big

I am a college student deeply interested in social issues. To say that the usual fare provided by the leading dailies and popular magazines is dismal, will be unnecessary because we all are in consensus on that. I was always on the lookout for interesting articles, and I can very safely say that Civil Society satisfies that need in me to read socially relevant articles. From the first time I picked up the magazine, I have been completely amazed by the range of topics covered and the depth of each article. Just one

thing; the size of the magazine gives it visibility, but makes it cumbersome. Keep up the good job!

Sughanda Malhotra

Too pricey

I do not know what your compulsions are but do you really believe that you are going to find enough readers for your magazine at a princely cover price of Rs 50? Or is it that you want to keep your magazine out of bounds for the masses and want it to be read only by the elite people? Even among them you would find a minuscule percentage for your magazine. So why not be down to earth and have some earthy price for the magazine?

Ashruti Khara

Change matters

The one thing that catches my eye whenever I pick up an issue of Civil Society is the kind of events that receive coverage. I don't get to read about them anywhere else. Your concentration on change leaders and NGOs is commendable. Another thing that truly stands out is that all your articles are very well-researched.

Surbhi Gupta

WHERE TO VOLUNTEER

Rahi

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

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

AID works for the environment, children, women's issues, education, and health. They also undertake fund raising. Contact Details: Anuj Grover E-mail: anuj.grover@gmail.com Ph. No. 9818248459 B-121, MIG Flats, Phase-IV, Ashok Vihar Delhi, Delhi 110052

Youthreach

A volunteer team at Youthreach helps to match your skills and interests with the needs of their partner organisations. This exchange is monitored and facilitated from beginning to end by the volunteer team. The team also partners other non-profit organisations that are working with children, women and the environment. Contact Details: Anubha or Ria 11 Community Centre, Saket New Delhi - 110 017 Phone/Fax: (011) 2653 3520/25/30 Email : yrd@youthreachindia.org

Deepalaya

They work with economically, socially deprived, physically and mentally challenged children. They believe in helping the children to become self-reliant and lead a healthy life. They work in the field of education, health, skill training and income enhancement.

You can volunteer online and choose from a number of volunteering opportunities. Contact Details: www.deepalaya.org Or 46, Institutional Area, D Block, Janakpuri, New Delhi - 110 058, India. Tel : 25548263, 25590347, 25595326

Mobile Crèches

Mobile Crèches pioneered intervention into the lives of migrant construction workers by introducing the mobile crèche where working parents can leave their children. They work in the following areas: health, education, community outreach, networking and advocacy, resource mobilisation and communication. You can volunteer by filling out a simple form online. Contact Details: www.mobilecreches.org OR DIZ Area, Raja Bazaar, Sector IV, New Delhi 110 001, PH. NOS.91-11-23347635 / 23363271

WHERE TO DONATE

Indian Red Cross Society

The society provides relief, hospital services, maternity and child welfare, family welfare, nursing and community services. Contact Details: Red Cross Bhavan, Golf Links N. Delhi-110003 Ph. No. 24618915, 24617531, 24611756, 24621023

Child Relief and You(CRY)

CRY, a premier child rights organisation, believes that every child is entitled to survival, protection, development and participation. You can sponsor a child's education, healthcare, or you can sponsor a health worker and a teacher. The most convenient way of donating is through

their website. www.cry.org

Community Aid and Sponsorship Program (CASP)

CASP enhances the capacities of children, families and communities through participation and advocacy leading to sustainable development and empowerment. You can help by sponsoring underprivileged child/children from any work area where CASP implements its programmes. These include building old-age homes, projects relating to AIDS etc. There are several donation options available. Contact Details: www.casbindia.org

ActionAid

ActionAid is an international development organisation which works with poor and marginalised women, men, girls and boys to eradicate poverty, injustice and inequity. You can become a part of their Karma Mitra loyalty program, which is based on the concept 'When you do good things you should get good things in return.' As a member of this program you can avail various tangible benefits. You can donate and become a member online or you can mail a cheque or postal order. Contact Details: ActionAid India C-88, South Ex. - II New Delhi-110 049 Website: www.actionaidindia.org

EVENTS

India International Centre, New Delhi

The Growing Consciousness of the Other

Against the pluralist tradition that has thrived in India for centuries, this lecture series opens with the film *Garam Hawa*. The lecture series seeks to bring into the open niggling questions and doubts in the minds of two major religious communities in relation to the other. The series has speakers, from Delhi and Mumbai:

2 July, 6 pm, IIC Auditorium

A screening of the film *Garam Hawa* Directed by MS Sathya with Balraj Sahni and Farooque Shaikh. Pankaj Butalia will introduce the film.

5 July, 6.30 pm, IIC Auditorium

Rediscovering Islam and Hinduism Speakers: Maulana

Wahiduddin Khan. Dr Karan Singh.

6 July, 6.30 pm, IIC Auditorium

Countering Communal Propaganda and Riots Speakers: Shabnam Hashmi, activist with Anhad.

Farooque Shaikh, actor, lawyer and social activist Chair: MJ Akbar.

11 July, 6.30 pm,

Conference Room 1 Profile of a Community: Where is it at?

Contrary to popular perception the Muslim community is heterogeneous and in different stages of socio-economic progress. One issue that could be explored is that the Muslim community has always

lacked a strong political leadership. This has enabled the clergy to fill the vacuum and hold the masses in sway.

Speaker : Prof Imtiaz Ahmed Chair : Saeed Naqvi

25 July, 6.30 pm, Conference Room 1

The Spread of Modern Education.

Speakers: Prof Syed Hamid, Ex Vice-Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University and Kamini Prakash from the Hope Project.

THEATRE

Kolkata Nandikar presents "Bappaditya"; directed by Gautam Halder. This is a solo performance by Sohini Sengupta. Venue: Academy of Fine Arts 4 July 6.30 pm.

The Red Curtain presents Anthony Shaffer's "Sleuth". Directed by Katy Lai Roy, this is a classic thriller with comic overtones. The play is perfect for those with a quirky sense of humour. Venue: Gyan Manch 21 and 25 July.

Compiled by Shailey Hingorani. Kolkata events by Shuktara Lal. Send engagements and letters to civil_society@rediffmail.com

Errata: In the April issue of Civil Society, in the story, 'A shelter and medical help in Delhi,' it was erroneously stated that Gauhar Nisha, a homeless woman, was staying securely in the Palika Hostel. The government had in fact evicted homeless women and children from the hostel, last year, and Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan had led a campaign against the eviction of homeless people from the shelter. The error is regretted. Editor.



