

Civil Society

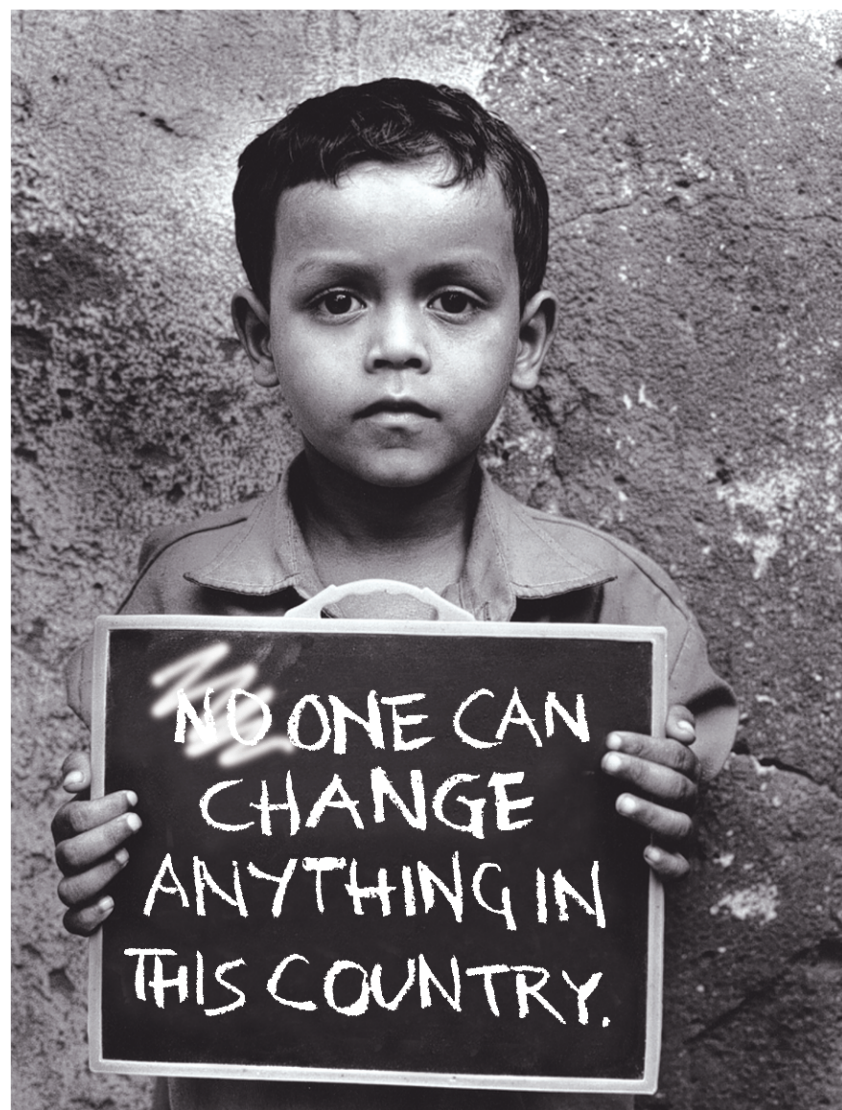
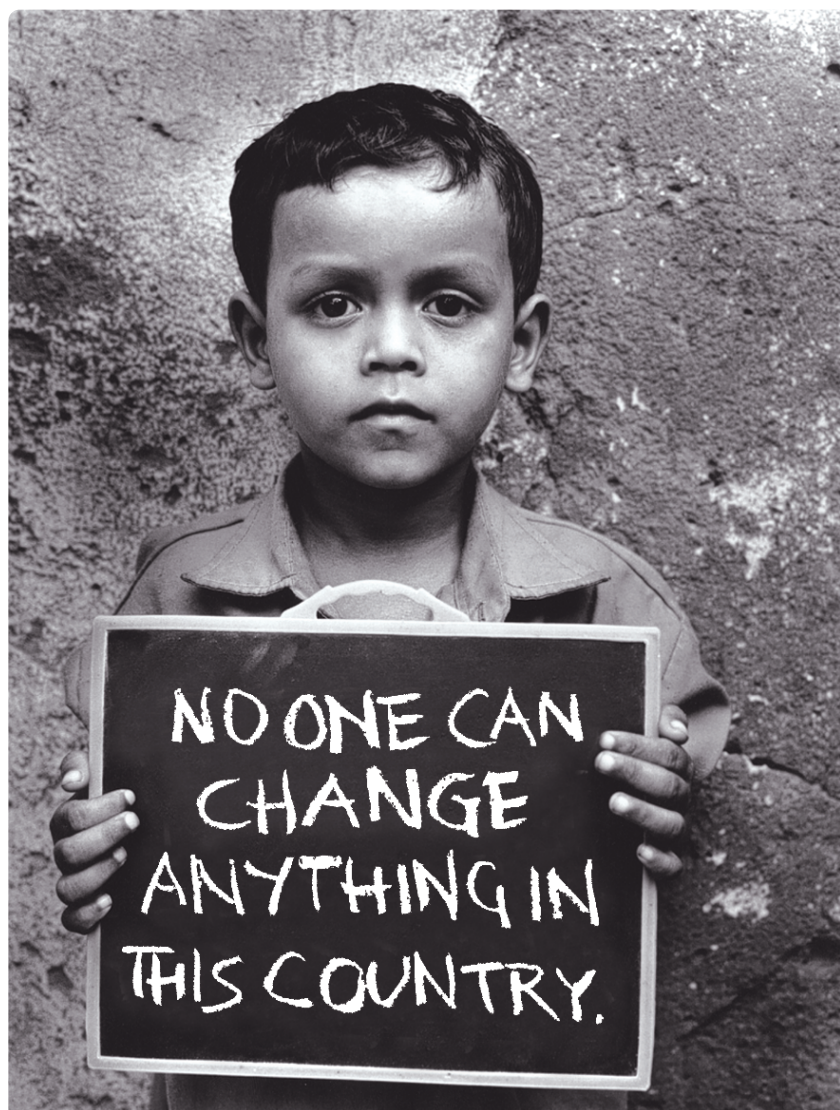


A CM'S ACTIVISM

Is Delhi a better place to live in?

YES 65% **NO 29%**

Civil Society/TNS-Mode
Exclusive Opinion Poll on
Sheila Dixit govt.



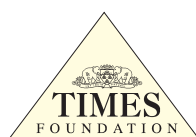
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COVER STORY



A TIME TO SHARE

A Civil Society/TNS-MODE opinion poll in Delhi shows most citizens want to play a role in development and support Sheila Dikshit's Bhagidari system.

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Cover Photograph: LAKSHMAN ANAND

Civil Society

You, me and Bhagidari

THE Sheila Dikshit government completes its term with many initiatives to its name. Chief among them is Bhagidari or participatory governance, which seeks to involve citizens in the process of providing solutions to urban problems. So important has Bhagidari been, that it is at the core of the Congress' campaign for re-election. *Civil Society* decided to go directly to the citizens to find out their perception of Bhagidari and whether it had improved the quality of life in Delhi. We also wanted to know what people felt about CNG for public transport and power privatisation. What better way could there be of doing this than to hire the country's premier opinion poll agency TNS-MODE. The results show that people favour Bhagidari and have huge expectations from it in the future. People also felt that participation had improved government functioning and given Delhi a better quality of life. Bhagidari may well be a masterstroke which will bring Sheila Dikshit and the Congress back to power in Delhi. It could also be a model for other cities in the country.

One of Mrs Dikshit's biggest achievements has been the Right to Information Act, but even as we were in the final stages of writing up the TNS-MODE opinion poll's findings, news came in of an assault on Parivartan activists Anand and Rajiv. Our first cover, Taxman's Burden, was on Parivartan, which has been leading a campaign on the right to information from the government on matters of public interest. Anand and Rajiv had in this instance gone to inspect ration shop records at the food department's local office in North-east Delhi.

The question, which now arises, is what is the purpose of laws if the ordinary citizen, for whom they are meant, cannot use them. Bhagidari must thrive at street-level, where reality can take the shape of the brick which hit Anand on his back. What if it had hit him on his head instead?

Harsh Mander's essay on the civil services is relevant in this context. People cannot replace the government. It's the government, through its various votaries, which has to get more sensitive to the needs of people.

An NGO effort that has gone largely unrewarded is that of the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI). After nine years of persistent lobbying and advocacy, BPNI got the Union government to amend the Infant Milk Substitutes Act of 1993 in June this year and ban promotions and advertisements of baby foods and infant milk substitutes for children below the age of two. We dissect their quiet strategy for interested fellow NGOs and corporates, which might want to take a look.

Elections are on the horizon and we inform readers about NBA's decision to back political candidates supporting their agenda. In the coming months we will be tracking politicians in their constituencies.

We profile Suresh Sharma spreading the message of conservation through education and rescuing snakes from people. Our Book Review section talks to Mridula Garg, well known writer and feminist, about a recent translation of her novel. Our Campaign page captures the agonies of being amid the hurly burly of Gurgaon's crazy expansion.

There has been a warm and enthusiastic response from our readers to our first edition. We thank you for this support.

Umesh Anand

Printed and published by Umesh Anand on behalf of Rita Anand at Maximus Packers, 49, DSIDC Sheds, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-1, New Delhi.

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Teaching children to read

Civil Society News
New Delhi

ON World Literacy Day, September 8, Bangalore was witness to a special gathering. Children were treated to a most enjoyable session of story telling. The story was of the little tribal girl Moina *The Why Why Girl* who kept asking everybody endless questions like why fish didn't talk and why stars were so small. Written by Mahasweta Devi and translated into Kannada by Girish Karnad, the story was read out with great feeling and aplomb by the theatre personality Jayashree B. And the additional treat for the children was the presence of cricketer Rahul Dravid who sat through and relished the story as much as they did.

The grownups were there too. Their aim was to put together a programme whereby little children like Moina could learn to read and write and satisfy the curiosity that god had given them. The book was published by Tulika to launch Read India Books, part of a unique project called Read India. It incorporates the accelerated learning programme devised by Pratham, a non-government organisation, and is supported by Akshara Foundation, headed by Rohini Nilekani.

The aim of Read India, founded by Madhav Chavan, is to get every child in India to read in a short predictable time-frame. In the first half of 2003, 150,000 children in states as diverse as Karnataka, Maharashtra and Bihar have already done so and the initial success has led to action being taken to rapidly upscaling the exercise so that over the next year over a million children can be covered. For 2003-04, Pratham has been able to garner \$ 2 million (Rs 9.4 crore) from non-government sources. This will be a tidy sum for most NGOs but as it seeks to directly work for 220,000 children, this works out to no more than \$ 10 (less than Rs 500) per child.

The aim is of course not to stop at getting children to read but go further as captured in its sequential slogan: Learn to read; read to learn. So the next step is to start a publishing exercise, Read India Books, which will try to create good quality books for children at affordable prices. The idea is to get children to read at least 50 books a year—slim books printed in colour, costing no more than Rs 20 each. And the third aim is to have community libraries where there is a book per child in the area it seeks to serve.

How does Pratham manage to deliver reading capabilities in a few weeks? It has innovated and developed a new technique using an integrated approach to learning: do it like a game; no sequential learning; integrate saying, doing, reading, and writing. How did Pratham hit upon the idea? Its workers experimented with children and periodically shared notes and a breakthrough was reported by Sunita, who said, "I am not sure how, but we did all these activities and the children seemed to 'pluck' something out of the air, and they had learnt!" . It was probably the most perfect observation about how children were learning. When children are engaged in a variety of activities which have implicit inter-connections, they make the connections and these snowball into a larger skill.

The technique starts with 'reading' (even imitating reading as 3-4 year olds do in households where they are read to regularly) from the first day and the children try to make sense of what they see. They 'read' sentences. They stumble to make sense, they try to guess what the words might be. Adults just need to give a smile of encouragement, nudge the child towards the answer without actually answering, and ask an occasional question to help the child correct herself. Anything beyond that can slow down the pace.

Pratham's whole approach is contained in a story, possibly Chinese. It goes like this: Go to the people, love them, learn from them, start with what they know, build on what they have, and when it is done, they will say, we did it.



Amin Hashwani received with garlands at Wagah border

'We are at base camp' CEO activism in Indo-Pak ties

Civil Society News
New Delhi

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) brought CEOs of India and Pakistan together in New Delhi for a forum that promises to boost trade between the two countries. *Civil Society* caught up with **Amin Hashwani**, the youthful and extremely cautious head of the Pakistani delegation:

Journalists, parliamentarians, cultural artists and now CEOs. What purpose will your visit serve?

Yes, there have been many visits on both sides and they have each had their own significance, but ours is a different kind of mission. We are here to do something very concrete and that is to set up a forum of CEOs from both countries and it will be the goal of this forum to encourage greater trade between India and Pakistan.

It is therefore a historic visit and we are very hopeful that we will be able to make a difference on the ground.

Of course we have our eyes wide open and are aware of the complexities of the issues involved. But we would like to complement our respective governments in their efforts at bringing about better relations.

Any particular reason for pushing this to the level of the CEO? Is there a message in that?

Yes there is. We are basically serious people and are regarded as such within our countries. We aren't activists. We do not carry any baggage. We are by profession problem solvers and regarded as being quite efficient in that role. But having said that, the ground reality is that there is no dialogue between our governments at this time. Whatever the issues are I feel that they can be discussed. Progress can come only when the two governments sit and talk. There are a number of conflicts around the world and still a dialogue goes on. If you take China and Taiwan, for instance, there are very basic and fundamental differences, but there is still dialogue going on, investments going on. Here we have a situation where there are no rail and air links and only a bus service which resumed recently and can at best be described as symbolic.

So, as I said, we have come here with our eyes wide open. We are not here to raise people's expectations. We are here in the long term. We have had detailed discussions and set up groups with team leaders to report on how business can be developed. As and

when the two governments sit down to talks we hope to be able to play our role.

What do you expect in the near term?

I am very cautious in my expectations. We see ourselves right now at base camp. We look at it as a starting point. The journey is long but it is important that we start taking steps in the right direction. For me the direction is more important.

So this the time for some quiet CEO activism?

You see the key thing is that the governments sit down together. I think that is just a question of time. In a very broad sense we are activists. But we are doing it in our own way: very cautious, solid, step by step.

What are the missed opportunities in trade?

After coming here and listening to what businessmen on two sides can do together, I realise the scope is enormous. There are regional strengths, which have not been explored unlike in other regions of the world. I think the cost is too high for us not to move ahead through dialogue on all issues and at all levels.

SOME NGOs TREK TO THE POLLS

Civil Society News
Bhopal

It was on August 28 that NBA leader Medha Patkar told a news conference in Delhi that her organization the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), as part of the National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM), had decided to support the Samajwadi Jan Parishad and the Kranti Dal candidates in the forthcoming Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh to counter Chief Minister Digvijay Singh's "anti-Narmada people" agenda.

It is a remarkable shift for an organization that has so far steered clear of electoral politics in pursuance of its objectives. This, effectively, means that across the country the NGO sector will be observing the MP experience as a test-case for such a 'cross-over'. And while the prominence of the NBA is responsible for this focus, the actual electoral fight will be waged by the two organizations named in Medha's statement.

While the Kranti Dal is basically a one-man show centred around Dr Sunilam, currently an independent MLA from Multai in Betul district, the Samjawadi Jan Parishad is an umbrella organization of NGOs such as the Shramik Adivasi Sangathan in Betul and the Nari Chetna Manch in Rewa. The SJP will contest at least four seats, in Betul, Harda, Itarsi and Rewa, while a proposal to contest the Mandla seat is under consideration.

The Shramik Adivasi Sangathan loosely associated with the NBA, has been active among the tribals in and around Betul and Harda over the past decade. Through a careful mix of mass-based agitations, jan sunvais and work on the ground, the NGO has been effective in raising a host of issues related to the adivasis. It will be candidates from this organization that will contest a seat each from Betul, Harda

and Itarsi districts, all three of which have a fair proportion of adivasi votes.

The Nari Chetna Manch, recently in the news after the Rewa administration chose to lathi-charge a handful of women protesting the power situation in the state in the course of a visit by Digvijay Singh, has been working in and around the Rewa area.

Points out Anurag Modi of the sangathan, "We have contested an election in Itarsi earlier but that was a localised affair. Now we shall be part of a platform fighting on the Samjawadi Jan Parishad agenda. We have already chosen our candidates through a series of public meetings. Each of our candidates will declare their assets and the election will be fought with chanda (donations) collected from the people - 'ek note, ek vote'. After the elections accounts will be submitted to the people."

The candidates have been finalized and they include Shameem, who is one of the moving forces behind the Shramik Adivasi Sangathan, from Harda, Ajay Khare, the convenor of the Nari Chetna Manch, from Rewa and Phagram from Itarsi. Points out Modi, "We have not gone by traditional considerations and it is reflected in our choice of candidates. Shameem is a Muslim woman, Ajay Khare is a Brahmin and Phagram is a adivasi, but

Across the country the NGO sector will be observing the MP experience as a test-case for such a 'cross-over'.



Medha Patkar and NBA hope to counter Digvijay Singh

this is incidental. We will not be contesting on the worth of individual candidates but rather on our party platform."

The entry of this morcha into the election arena has hardly gone unnoticed in the state. The seats they hope to contest are currently held by some of the most high-profile politicians, from the Congress and the BJP in the state. These include incumbents Kamal Patil, Bhartiya Janta Yuva Morcha convenor for the state, from Harda, Srinivas Tiwari, speaker of the state Assembly, from Rewa, minister

Pratap Singh Uike from Betul and veteran BJP leader Sitasharan Sharma from Itarsi. Clearly, the inroads made by the morcha could upset much of the poll calculations carried out by the veterans on their home grounds.

But the effect of the NBA will be most visible if the morcha does decide to contest a seat in Mandla district. The considerable number of people affected by the Bargi dam on the Narmada, with rehabilitation promises filled more in the breach, will be a potent voice in any campaign in

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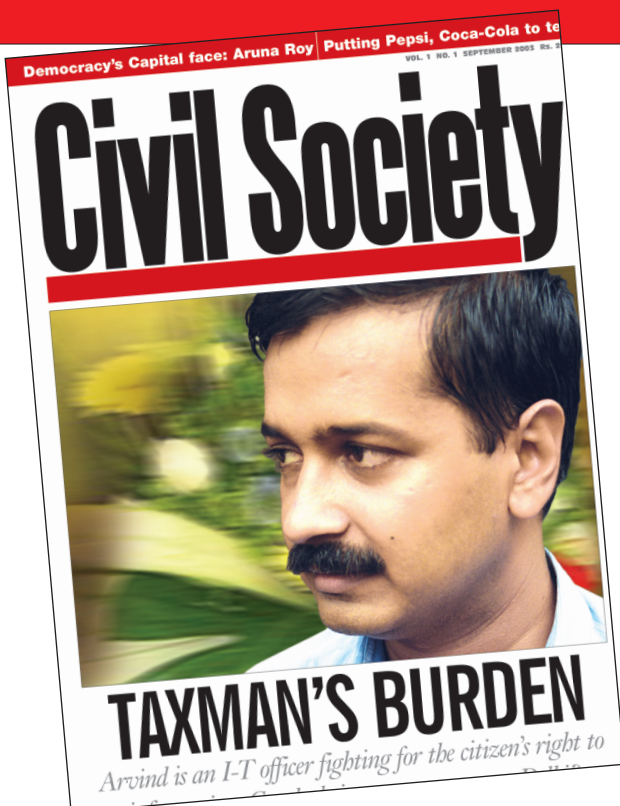
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DO YOUR OWN THING

Civil Society

MAKE A DIFFERENCE





Snakeman is saviour

But all he gets is venom from the govt.

Rathi Menon
Chandigarh

I was 3 am. Bleary eyed, I watched Captain Suresh Sharma manoeuvre his way into a tiny bathroom. Some time later, he emerged, a writhing bag in his hand. Inside was a common krait that had driven the household hysterical. The lady of the house shed tears of gratitude. "You asked me what I get from this work. This is my reward," said Sharma, as we left.

A typical call for the Snake Cell in Chandigarh.

"People have all sorts of fears about snakes, fuelled no doubt, by the mindless serials and films they watch," grumbled Sharma in the car. He has rescued 625 snakes, among them venomous common kraits and Russell's vipers.

By saving snakes from people Sharma conveys the greater message of nature conservation. That is why he and his wife, Rajbir, founded the Snake Cell on June 5, 1997, World Environment Day. Chandigarh provides fertile ground for his efforts as it is surrounded by a dense forest.

The city is familiar with his Tempo Traveller with its King Cobra logo. Curious passers-by

stop him at petrol pumps and even on the road. "People think I collect snakes for anti-venom preparations. When I say I release them in the jungle, they ask, 'Isme aapko kya milta hai?' (What do you get out of this?)" I tell them, 'You pray to the gods and spend money on pujas. What do you get out of it? This is my puja to nature.' Then they nod in agreement."

Another FAQ is, has Sharma ever been bitten by a snake? "I tell them, no, because I respect snakes and handle them very carefully."

Every newspaper in Chandigarh carries Sharma's Snake Cell phone number and the Police Control Room is always in touch. Calls for help come early morning or late at night and peak during the monsoon.

After Sharma stages a rescue operation, he educates the family and its neighbours about snakes. "It's a good moment; if I stand on a street and start lecturing, nobody will listen. At times, I even use the snake I've caught, but only if it's non-venomous."

Not many schools invite him to educate their students, though he's willing to do it for free. Those who do, find chil-

dren handle the reptiles fearlessly. "Ninety per cent have no fear and 98 per cent handle snakes as if born to it. With adults, it's another story."

He believes if children become sensitive to nature, conservation will thrive. "You can't talk to them about the polar bear or the chiru—they are not famil-



iar with them. But you can show them the life around and how that life is affected by human activity. People think it is the job of the government and NGOs or wildlife activists, but what I stress is that everybody can and should do it."

What about money? "The Snake Cell is a totally self-financed project. Till date I have not received any grant or help from the government or the UT administration here."

Ironically, administrative policies actually compelled him to close his souvenir shop at the Sukhna Lake, a tourist hot spot in Chandigarh. Sharma sold his special Ecosense brand of souvenirs-T-shirts, key chains and door knockers. Each item told the story of an endangered species such as turtles, leopards and black bucks. The Snake Cell was financed from this money.

"Chandigarh Industrial and Tourism Development Corporation (CITCO) kept raising the rent and when it got to Rs 15,000 a month, I had to close shop." Obviously, officialdom could not see the difference between a venture for a good cause and an ordinary commercial enterprise.

Since then, Sharma has been negotiating with some national parks to sell his products there, "but they behave like a Lala in Chandni Chowk". He raises some money by taking tourists on wildlife tours, though he stays away from group tours.

Initially Sharma used crude equipment he had designed himself, but now he has professionally designed hooks, tongs, torches, bags and first-aid kit, given to him by an American benefactress, Mary Barber. In return, Sharma took the 73-year-old Barber on a trip of India's wilds. "She shed tears of joy when I showed her a tigress and her cubs in the Kanha National Park. It was her first experience of this gentle animal," recalls Sharma.

A few wildlife enthusiasts are helping him start village level workshops, set up a snake park in Chandigarh and film wildlife. "We have formed a group of people who share our passion. If you run after money, conditions will be imposed on you, but if you run after your passion, you can function as free birds."

The Bhakhra Beas Management Board wants Sharma to educate their workforce. He is upbeat about the offer. "But first, I asked the organisers to conduct an anti-venom allergy test on their personnel. What is the use of teaching someone who is allergic, to handle snakes?"

Sharma's "mission impossible"? Only Chandigarh's bureaucratic set-up can answer that one.

RATI PARKER'S GURGAON

WHEN A MALL PUTS ITS BACKSIDE IN YOUR FACE



Rati Parker has an ugly neighbour who billows smoke and makes a noise from 9 am to 2 am. Her lovely apartment in Gurgaon overlooks a swank shopping mall called the Metropolitan Mall.

Now you've probably seen only the glittering exterior of the mall. Rati and many other residents spend every day with its backside in their faces.

Backside, we hear you ask? We felt it was a better word than the genteel "rear" for describing the atrocity, which resembles something from an outdated industrial hub.

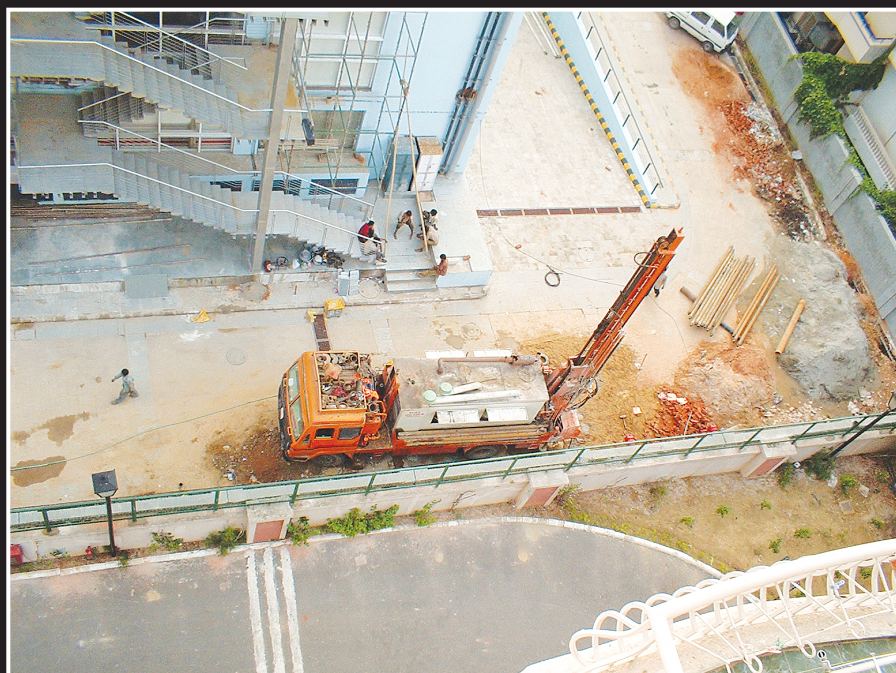
The mall may be glitzy, but it does not have a power connection. So, massive diesel generators emit carcinogenic fumes into the sky. Cooling towers thunder away. Noise levels can touch 80 decibels, whereas the prescribed limit is 55 decibels during daytime. Windows and doors vibrate. A truck unloads diesel into an underground sump. During weekends, cars are parked near it.

"If a fire takes place, God help us," says Rati. There are several cinema halls there and any chaos could cause a stampede. The mall management assured Beverly Park II that toxic fumes would be "treated". They said they would build walls around the cooling towers to lessen the din. But nothing has been done. Worse a routine inspection by residents revealed that walls cannot be built.

Malls are sprouting on the Gurgaon-Delhi stretch and hemming in residents. Fed up of writing letters, an anti-mall campaign is being launched and public interest litigation is being planned.

Residents want to know who is responsible for allowing the malls to continue to be such a nuisance. Do these malls belong in the master plan for Gurgaon? Recently top officials of the Uttar Pradesh government and at the Centre were removed over the malls planned adjacent to the Taj Mahal. Will the Supreme

Court intervene here as well? Rati Parker wants to know.



NGO with grit defeats Heinz,

From a dusty office in North Delhi BPNI fought cases,

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) is a humdrum NGO working out of a cramped office in dusty North Delhi. It employs a handful of people and is headed by an earnest doctor. In May this year, the NGO won a major victory in its long battle against baby food manufacturers. BPNI got the Union government to amend the Infant Milk Substitutes Act of 1993 and ban advertisements and promotions of baby food for children below the age of two. The ban will go into effect from November 1.

This was a defining moment for BPNI. But the news barely found mention. Over the years, the breastfeeding cause has lost its lustre. The media has buried it. The corporate world has retreated into studied silence. But fellow NGOs were intrigued. How did BPNI get laws changed without campaigns, slogans, celebrities, dharnas? Arrayed against them were multinationals like Nestle, Wockhardt and Heinz. There was also India's dairy cooperative, Amul.

Dr Arun Gupta, BPNI's national coordinator says there was no single strategy. "We simply adjusted our plans as we went along." This meant relentless advocacy with MPs and the bureaucracy for over eight years. Every stage of the campaign needed new guerrilla tactics.

Early days The history of the battle against the feeding bottle dates back to the 1970s. Several case studies documented the deleterious effect infant foods and milk substitutes were having on the health of infants in developing countries. Multinationals promoted these through aggressive advertising and marketing.

Seduced by pictures of chubby babies, mothers opted for packaged products instead of breast milk. In countries where clean water was not available, the use of feeding bottles resulted in a marked rise in diarrhoeal deaths. Colostrum a rich source of antibodies in mother's milk was being denied to babies, lowering immunity. Malnutrition and the infant mortality rate recorded an increase.

The issue was hotly debated for a while and led to the adoption of an International Code for Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes at the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 1981. The Code sought to control marketing practices by manufacturers of infant foods and milk substitutes. Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made a stirring speech at WHA in support. The United States was the only nation that declined



Dr Arun Gupta (third from right) and his team at their Pitampura office in New Delhi

to be party to the agreement. Other member-states, including India, agreed to draw up a suitable national legal framework for implementation.

It took 11 years for that to happen.

India has the highest number of under-five child deaths in the world. Research establishes that most deaths are caused by poor nutrition. According to WHO and UNICEF, about 1.5 million babies can be saved each year by increasing breast-feeding during the first six months.

First law In 1983, the Indian government inserted a Code on Protection and Promotion of Breastfeeding including labelling rules into the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act (PFA). But comprehensive legislation had to wait.

Explaining the long gap, Dr Gupta points out the mid-eighties were a time of political instability. He says dairy giant Amul stalled attempts by the Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) to get legislation through.

Finally, a group of concerned activists came up with a draft bill and won the support of the Bharatiya Janata Party's Ram Naik, Union Minister for Petroleum. "Naik was approached because he was perceived as being honest and sympathetic to the cause," explains Chander Uday Singh an activist lawyer who works with BPNI and the Association for Consumers Action on Safety and Health (ACASH).

Naik agreed to introduce the draft in the Lok Sabha as an innocuous private member's bill. After three attempts the bill was picked by lottery. The ruling Congress wanted the honor of presenting it. Arjun Singh, former Union Minister of Human Resource Development (HRD) took responsibility. In August 1993, the Infant Milk Substitutes Act 1993 was notified and India became the tenth country in the world to pass such legislation.

Legal tangle BPNI began work in 1992. "We knew the IMS Act was imperfect. But we thought, at least we have a law," says Dr Gupta. The government passed on the onerous task of monitoring the IMS to ACASH in Mumbai and BPNI in Delhi. But there were contradictory provisions in the law and companies used them to their advantage while marketing.

Under Section 2 (f) infant food meant "...any food being marketed or otherwise represented as a complement to mother's milk to meet the growing nutritional needs of the infant after the age of four months." But the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended exclusive breastfeeding till the age of six months and introduction of baby food after six months to two years of age.

Section 3 (a) stated: "No person shall take part in the publication of any advertisement for the distribution, sale or supply of infant milk substitutes or feeding

bottles." Advertising infant milk substitutes and feeding bottles was therefore banned, but infant food was not.

However in Section 3 (c) promotions of all three were prohibited... "no person shall take part in the promotion of use or sale of infant milk substitutes or feeding bottles or infant foods otherwise than in accordance with the provisions of the Act."

Every container had to carry several lengthy messages and warnings. These were to be displayed rather prominently. Pictures of babies, women or graphics were not permitted for infant milk substitutes under section 6 (2) of the Act.

Section 7 (1) stated that "educational material" circulated should include information promoting breastfeeding and "the harmful effects on breastfeeding due to the partial adoption of bottle feeding". But since "educational material" was not clearly explained advertisements were printed as pamphlets and passed off as being educational.

The Act made it illegal to provide "financial inducements" to health workers but doctors and medical researchers were left out.

A futile chase For nearly eight years BPNI and ACASH doggedly pursued multinationals, corporates, public sector undertakings and even Doordarshan as they skirted the IMS Act.

Nestle, Amul, Wockhardt...

lobbied for 9 years, got baby food advertising stopped

Infant food ads popped up on soap wrappers, tins of talcum powder and other unrelated products. Posters put up by Nestle said "...I love you Cerelac" and were splashed on streets and in markets. Worse mandatory warnings were not printed. This was illegal. BPNI sent a notice. An apology arrived. The posters were reprinted with statutory labelling requirements in fine print. Now this was against the rules, said BPNI.

Gujarat Dairy's Amul Spray container was sold with a teddy bear on its label. Feeding bottles were given as "free gifts". Indian Oil beamed a TV commercial showing its Maruti Engine Oil being poured into the engine of a car with a feeding bottle. When BPNI objected, the company's marketing director replied: "The feeding bottle used in our commercial for promoting Maruti Genuine Oil is only an analogy to portray that the most suitable nutritious food should be...."

Nearly all TV stations including Doordarshan telecast commercials. The law ministry's advice to Doordarshan to please uphold the IMS Act was ignored.

Gupta says the insidious hold of the baby food manufacturers on the health system began to grow. Free samples of baby food were given to doctors for "testing". Nestle's nutrition services offered international fellowships to paediatricians and sponsored meetings and seminars. Likewise Heinz's publication "In Touch" announced sponsorship for research in nutrition. Multinationals also financed seminars and workshops for paediatricians.

Court to court As early as 1994, BPNI and ACASH approached the criminal courts to pin down Nestle. That year Nestle advertised Cerelac for babies during the fourth month whereas the IMS Act section 2 (f) specifically stated infant foods could be introduced only after the fourth month.

The two NGOs hired a young lawyer for a fee of Rs 2000 and filed a complaint in the court of the Metropolitan Magistrate, New Delhi. In 1995 the criminal court found Nestle guilty of violating the IMS Act, took cognisance of offence and summoned the company through its Managing Director.

Nestle approached the Delhi High Court and stated it was complying with PFA rules, therefore the IMS Act was not applicable to them. Chander Uday Singh, who represented ACASH, contends that a new Act supersedes an older one if the two are in conflict.

Nestle wanted the case in the lower court quashed. "But the judge did not give an injunction," says Dr Gupta. In 1998 the High Court gave directions for the criminal trial in the lower court to

proceed. It comes up for hearing in December 2003. Throughout, says Dr Gupta, Nestle employed a battery of lawyers to adjourn the case and frustrate BPNI and ACASH.

World opinion Meanwhile, the WHA was getting uncomfortable about the trillion-dollar food industry's role in child health. Over the years, the assembly had passed several resolutions with limited success. In 2001 a WHA resolution recommended exclusive breastfeeding for six months and complementary foods only after that.

At a meeting of the WHA in May 2002, the Indian government was most critical of baby food companies. India said since companies were driven solely by profit, it was unrealistic to expect them to promote breastfeeding. It urged careful watch on the financial support such companies offered to health professionals. Led by the Indian government, member states said no to public-private partnerships.

The WHA meet limited the role of the commercial sector to ensuring quality control and said companies had no role to play in nutrition programmes for babies or young children as it led to a "conflict of interests". WHO endorsed WHA's position.

Act local Dr Gupta says international agreements do influence national governments but finally it is local action, which works.

"Remember from the start that the government is not going to do anything. You have to prepare the bill, convince them, answer all questions and pilot it through," he says. In 1994 BPNI and ACASH had approached the government to amend the IMS Act in order to control marketing. "We were not pushing women into breastfeeding," says Dr Gupta.

With Chander Uday Singh's help appropriate amendments were drawn up and the Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) was approached. "The ministry especially the Department for Women and Child Development (DWC) were very supportive," recalls Singh. The department constituted a task force from various ministries and departments of the Central government and voluntary agencies. The National Commission for Women gave its inputs.

It took quite a while for some members of the task force to understand what BPNI was talking about. Dr Gupta explained international agreements India was party to, the importance of breastfeeding, the IMS Act, the violations taking place and the legal changes required.

The file travelled through the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Food and Civil Supplies and the Law ministry. There were objections at every stage and BPNI

had to defend its position. "It is crucial to know how the government works," says Dr Gupta, "you need to have legal advice at all times to answer queries". Finally in 1998 the task force recommended these amendments to the government.

After this the file got stuck at the HRD department. On and off BPNI would make inquiries about its progress. Frequently, clarifications and questions would be sought. "Once a junior official inquired whether any precedent to such amendments existed anywhere in the world," recalls Dr Gupta. Examples were sent from Ghana and Bangladesh, countries with similar problems. "These are just



Sushma Swaraj made a difference

small countries," Dr Gupta was told, dismissively. BPNI was convinced multinationals were behind the delay.

Still Dr Gupta befriended the deputy secretary and made a presentation to lower rung officials. "Educate everybody," he says and don't ignore the junior staff.

Personal networks In 1998, BPNI had organised a national workshop on child nutrition to sensitise the media. Former Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Sushma Swaraj was invited. "She was very supportive and endorsed our stand," says Dr Gupta.

Her personal physician Dr Ashok Dutta was a good friend of his. He advised Dr Gupta to meet her and offered to arrange it. Dr Gupta went to her home and informed her about TV channels, including Doordarshan, misusing the IMS Act. He told her that his file was stuck in the department under Sumitra Mahajan, former minister of state for HRD. Swaraj spoke to her. The next day the file finally moved to Mahajan's table. Meanwhile, BPNI got a question on the amendments raised in Parliament. The deputy secretary in the HRD ministry was asked to reply. In this way pressure built up on the bureaucrats and Mahajan.

The turning point came in September

2000. Swaraj banned direct or indirect promotion of infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles and infant foods through the Cable Television Network (Amendment) Act and Rules.

Dr Gupta had won half the battle. Nearly 40 million Indians watch TV. Overnight ads for baby food and infant milk substitutes were blanked out.

Right atmosphere But the legal amendments were still stuck in the HRD department so BPNI began networking politicians. This was considerably tougher. "Nestle can get a meeting with a minister easily, but we cannot."

Mahajan agreed to organise a meeting of parliamentarians. Several MPs attended. Dr Gupta and his colleague Dr RK Anand made a presentation. The MPs listened and said they would be supportive. But nothing happened.

In September 2001, BPNI went back to Ram Naik and told him emotionally about the cause they espoused and the file. Naik was leaving for Indonesia, but he was sufficiently moved. He picked up the phone and spoke to Mahajan in Marathi and fixed a meeting for BPNI the next day. This time Dr Gupta informed her about WHA and WHO resolutions to which India was party and provided her with printed proof.

In March 2002, the bill finally entered the Lok Sabha and was debated. Prior to this, BPNI activists met politicians to garner support. An advocacy kit was prepared for each MP to educate them about the amendments. The HRD ministry suggested a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) examine the bill. This was a dangerous stage. "It was essential to keep the heat on, otherwise the bill may have been put on the backburner," says Uday Singh.

The sessions of the JPC were not placid. Chander Uday Singh recalls sitting around a table while some 18 MPs asked questions. Many MPs were openly hostile. "Even if people are unsympathetic, just soldier on," says Dr Gupta. Fortunately Arjun Singh was the chairperson. Dr Gupta went to his home and briefed him.

The JPC passed the bill in December 2002.

"Once a bill is okayed, it is better not to tamper with it, otherwise the process will start all over again," cautions Dr Gupta. The December 13 attack on Parliament stalled its safe passage once again. BPNI worked overtime to keep interest in the bill alive. In May 2003 the bill was passed in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. In June, came the President's assent.

But the baby food companies did have one last victory: they managed to delay its implementation till November 2003.

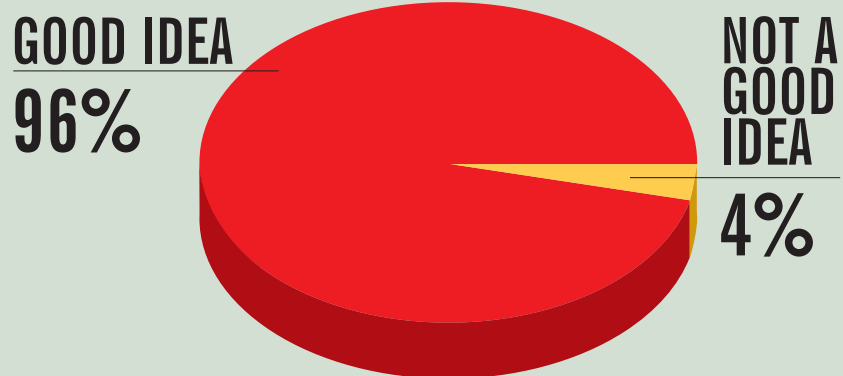
It took nine years for the amendments to happen.



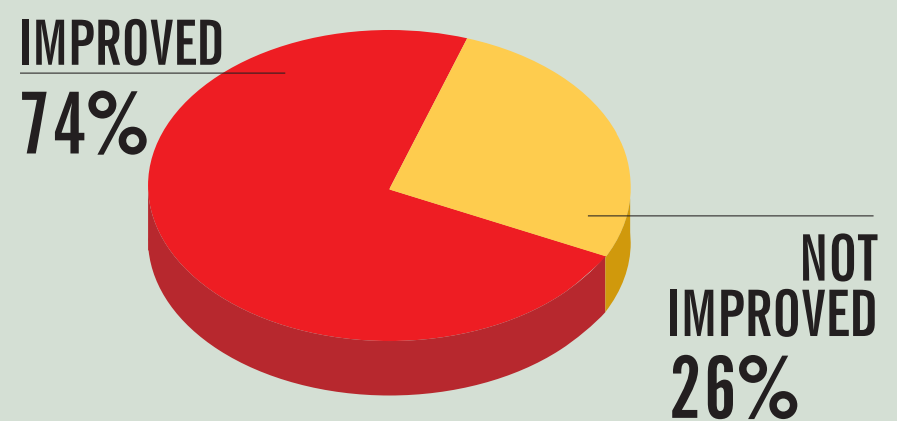
A TIME TO SHARE

*A Civil Society/ TNS-MODE opinion poll finds
people want a role in governance*

Do you think Bhagidari is a good idea?



Has Bhagidari improved the quality of life in Delhi?



Civil Society News
New Delhi

RESIDENTS of Delhi feel that the quality of life in the city has improved under the Congress government of Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit. They attribute the improvement to the Bhagidari system of shared governance, which they consider a good idea despite hiccups in its implementation.

These are the findings of an independent opinion poll conducted for Civil Society by TNS-MODE among resident welfare associations (RWAs) across Delhi. The sample consisted of 132 RWAs representing neighbourhoods with different levels of access to civic infrastructure and varied political and social concerns. The sample reflects the sizeable upper, middle and lower-middle class vote.

A majority of the respondents gave Mrs Dikshit personal credit for Bhagidari. They said the system could have worked better had bureaucrats in the government been more willing to share power and be more responsive to people's needs.

It was also felt that Mrs Dikshit could have done much more for Delhi if her state government had been given more powers by the Centre.

To the key question whether Bhagidari had improved the quality of life in Delhi, 74% said it had and 26% said it had not. Asked if Bhagidari was good idea, 96% said they thought it was.

This is good news for Mrs Dikshit as she prepares to face another election. The Bhagidari system has been her innovation and she has staked her re-election on it eliciting a positive response from people.

The opinion poll seems to indicate that Mrs Dikshit can go back to the voter in Delhi on the basis of her government's performance and worry less about the erosion that takes place while seeking re-election.

Residents of Delhi, it appears, are ready to give her another term so that she can implement the reforms she has

taken up.

In fact, the opinion poll shows significant support for Mrs Dikshit on the two contentious issues of compressed natural gas (CNG) for public transport and privatisation of power supply. Eighty-two percent of the respondents said the issues had improved the opinion residents have of the Dikshit government.

Asked if the introduction of CNG had resulted in the quality of air in Delhi improving, 97% said that there had been an improvement.

Asked about the supply of power and the management of electricity bills, 53%

weathering these problems seems to have paid off. Less pollution is seen as an achievement of her government. For the first time in an Indian election, a clean air campaign will actually translate into votes.

As with CNG, there have been transitional problems with the privatisation of power supply. Private power companies inherited an ailing and corrupt system from the erstwhile Delhi Vidyut Board. The switchover has been complex, but the opinion poll indicates that residents expect power supply improvements over time and are ready to wait.

The opinion poll confirms widespread unhappiness with the government officer. Asked if the Bhagidari system were to fail, whom would they blame, 73% of the respondents said government officials/bureaucrats, 14% said citizens themselves and 13% would blame the chief minister.

But citizens clearly have hope that the Bhagidari system is not failing. To the question whether it had made a difference to the attitude of government officials towards the people, 68% said officials had become more responsive. And 32% said there was no difference.

Bhagidari is, however, not seen as having reduced corruption among government officials with 58% of the respondents saying it was the same, 30% that it had decreased and only 12% saying that corruption had gone up. The poll addressed specific civic issues across zones in Delhi.

WATER: Municipal water supply has been a major concern, especially after the ban on digging tube-wells, but 47% said the supply had improved and 42% that it had remained the same.

ROADS, PARKS: On maintenance of roads and parks, 48% said it had improved, 29% that it had remained the same.

GARBAGE: Garbage removal is clearly a growing problem: 35% said it had improved, 46% said nothing had changed.

SEWERS, DRAINS: Like garbage, sewers and drains are a continuing problem: 46% said there had been no improvement, 34% saying it had improved.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Govt. babus are a problem
- Quality of life in Delhi is better
- Corruption same
- State should get more powers
- High regard for Sheila Dikshit

said privatisation had brought an improvement, while 23% said the situation was the same and 24% said there had been deterioration.

The Dikshit government had stuck its neck out on both these issues. The introduction of CNG for the entire public transport had resulted in disruptions and inconvenience to commuters. An initial shortage of CNG had meant long queues. An inadequate number of CNG buses had made it difficult for children to travel to school.

All this was expected to lead to middle class disenchantment with the government. But Mrs Dikshit's gamble in

The opinion poll shows significant support for Mrs Dikshit on the two contentious issues of CNG for public transport and privatisation of power supply. 82 percent of the respondents said the issues had improved the opinion residents have of the Dikshit government.

LAW AND ORDER: This is not under the state government, but contributes to quality of life and is a part of Bhagidari: 48 % felt it was the same, 39% said it had improved.

WATER CONSERVATION: This is strictly a citizens' initiative with the government only serving as a catalyst. The respondents felt conservation, such as through water harvesting, had a long way to go: 69% felt that there had been no change and 23% felt it had improved.

What is interesting to note is that in all these sectors, the percentage of residents saying that things had deteriorated is very small.

Interesting comparisons are possible between North, South, East, West and Central areas on specific issues.

Water supply has improved in North, West and Central. The government does not score well on this count in the East and South.

On garbage removal, North and East are less satisfied with the government's efforts than the other areas. In the West, 47% of the respondents said it had improved as compared to the citywide average of 35%.

Roads and parks seem to have improved in East and North with scores of 62% and 50% against the citywide average of 48%.

On drains and sewers, only 21 % in the South and 19% in the East said maintenance had improved.

Law and order gets the highest score of 50% in Central and 46% in East Delhi. In the South, only 24% agreed that there was an improvement.

On all counts the quality of life seems to be at its best in Central Delhi and worst in East Delhi.

Bhagidari has not solved all of Delhi's problems, but the Civil Society-TNS-MODE poll shows it has made a difference. It has also created a new threshold for what residents expect of a government and their leaders.

The poll also shows that people want greater accountability and more responsive bureaucrats. People are eager to participate in the process of governance and solve their own problems. They see officials as being a hindrance in this process.

'It's most difficult to

It is a novel experience hearing political speeches on plastic bags, the right to information and water conservation. But that is what Civil Society found as it tracked Sheila Dikshit in campaign mode. Her foray into Rohini, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) bastion in northwest Delhi, drew people in large numbers. That was worth noting. But even more interesting were the dustbins given out as prizes to schoolchildren. And the public oath, taken several times over, on not spitting in public, not using public spaces as toilets, segregating waste and greening the city.

Are political strategies going through an overhaul? Does a politician have to dump traditional baggage to connect with people? Are our cities in such a mess that the only route to political power is through less power and more peoples participation?

Sheila Dikshit answers all these questions with a "Yes". Bhagidari appears to have worked in her favour. People seem to welcome the big-ticket political importance given to local issues. Clearly, the citizen wants a government it can direct and inspect. Transparency and accountability are on everyone's minds.

Interestingly, in Sheila Dikshit's case, her government has often not done enough, but it is the promise of taking this slow process of change further that seems to have added to her popularity.

Perhaps no state government has made clean air and power privatisation an agenda for coming back to power. This is despite both these having a direct impact on the quality of life in cities across the country. The Delhi government's decision to bring in CNG and break up the Delhi Vidyut Board (DVB) was fraught with risks because it meant tampering with established structures. Both seem to have paid off handsomely.

The BJP could not keep in step. They

opposed the conversion of public transport to CNG, despite the directions of the Supreme Court on unsustainable levels of air pollution. They also made power privatisation an issue. In the process they seem to have missed the pulse of the middle-class and the political importance of something as intangible as the quality of life.

Excerpts from an interview with Sheila Dikshit:

People call you an activist chief minister. How do you see yourself?

Politics is a means to serve. I have never been interested in power for power sake. I am an activist and I encourage anything that can bring about change, because I feel this country is poised for change.

Is this what you came into office with?

I have been in politics for a long time but I have been more oriented towards development. In my own constituency in Kanauj, UP, I worked to bring change examining issues which concerned farmers and women, roads and irrigation. We changed areas which had been lying barren for years.

What are the four things you have done, which will bring you back to power?

If I look at it in general I think it is development and change in the quality of life. Specifically it's the better quality of air and a change in the mindset of people. They are beginning to look at greenery, flyovers, the metro, increase in the forest cover. Power reforms too I think have generated hope among the people.

You are on a sticky wicket with roads and sanitation.

Yes we are. Most roads are with MCD. What made you think of Bhagidari?

I was in the PMO when Rajiv Gandhi spoke about the 74th Amendment.

Unless people are involved in democratic governance, it will not work. So having come to power here I spoke to officers, so-called spin doctors, journalists. I asked how do we involve Delhi's citizens in governance. Then we narrowed down institutions we could bring into this. You can't just ask people on the streets to become part of Bhagidari. The most obvious ones were the RWAs.

NGOs work on specifics, they want to do this or that. Then we had to decide what do we call this movement. Suggestions included Sahyog, Ekta etc. Then we came across Bhagidari and we mulled over it, but I must tell you we started with a lot of fear. I thought if this flops, we've had it. We came across this organisation called Acord. We spoke to them and had structured workshops. We started off with about 30 RWAs. It was like a leap in the dark.

There had to be a sea change in the government view of thinking. Most of our MLAs and elected representatives were very sceptical. My ultimate goal was for people to feel this was a government which belongs to them. When you are elected your work has just begun. Remember you are the one who can give power to the people. We took on education, electricity, water, policing, MCD.

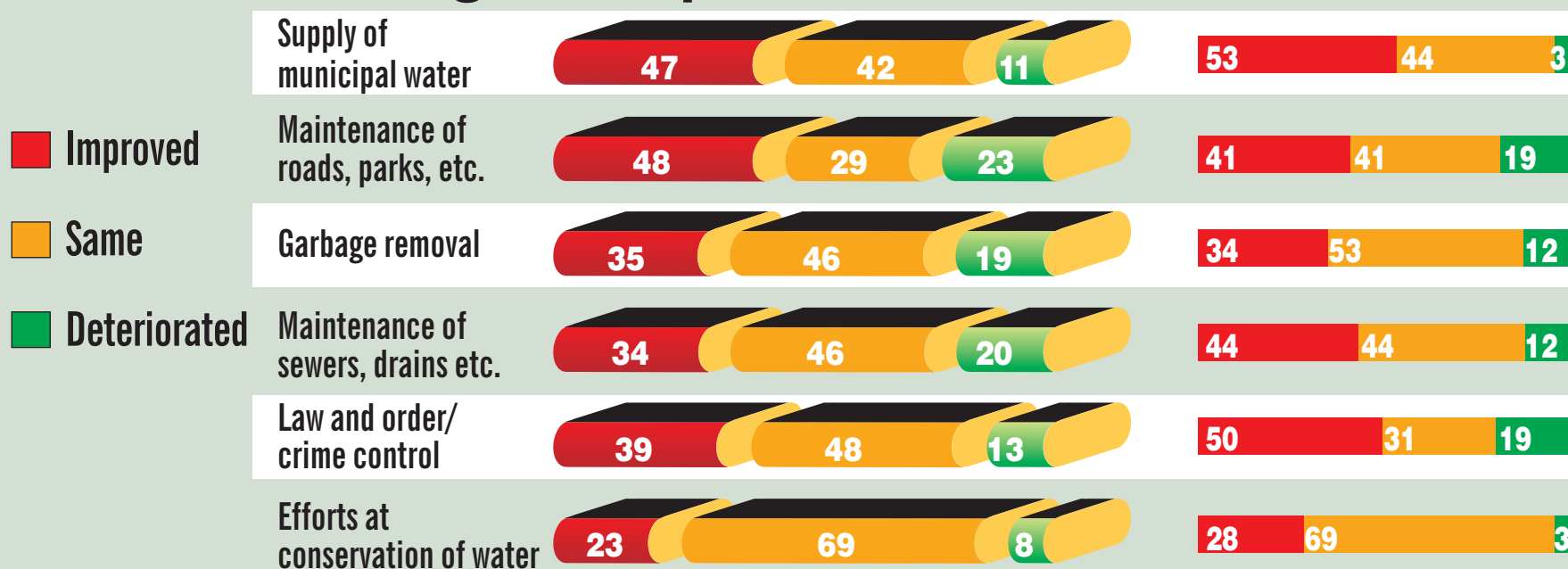
Finally, it took off and it is everything the government does.

Are you happy?

So far yes. We have to be very careful about the future. There is a bureaucracy, don't think it's like you can replace them. We've given RWAs funds also. Now they do little things on their own... maybe upkeep of a garden. I got the corporate sector also in. But with the corporate sector the thing is they talk big and

Bhagidari Impact—all Delhi

CENTRAL DELHI



change the bureaucracy'



when it comes to actual work...

Is the bureaucracy a problem? Is this a slow process of change?

Look it's a slow process of change definitely. The bureaucracy was a problem what we did was to put Bhagidari as part of an officer's CR. The government's Ministry of Personnel agreed to it. What has your contribution to Bhagidari been is a question the officer has to answer. Right to Information Act is also part of this.

One of the most difficult things to do in the world is to change the bureaucracy. That's why I sat through

workshops personally. Even now I do it. It ensures attendance but there is internal resistance even now. What was very encouraging was the Ministry of Personnel which again happens to be in a non- Congress government sent observers to the Bhagidari workshops. They documented Bhagidari and found it a fabulous idea. In fact they have written to many other states governments to implement it.

Then the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management picked up Bhagidari as an innovative means of governance. I was sceptical because this was just the first year. They studied the

whole thing, took documentation from the Ministry of Personnel, went to London, didn't meet me at all and then picked us for innovative governance, not first but third or fourth. It meant for us that people were noticing what we were doing.

We also picked up a very good idea on how do you involve people in the budgetary process.

Water I think will be taken care off in the next few years. Then what are people looking for? Is it health, education? Are roads and traffic the most important? So we will do these and have them involved through the RWAs in the budgetary process.

What about local MLAs? Should they not be more proactive in involving people in governance?

The local MLA does not look at his local politics like that. But now when election time is coming they are thinking: How did we miss this? First they thought it was a check to their authority now I think next time they will also come in. I must admit I touch things very slowly because I want to be sure. Everything is thought out and discussed

The Right to Information is a big thing you have done but there is criticism you have not done enough.

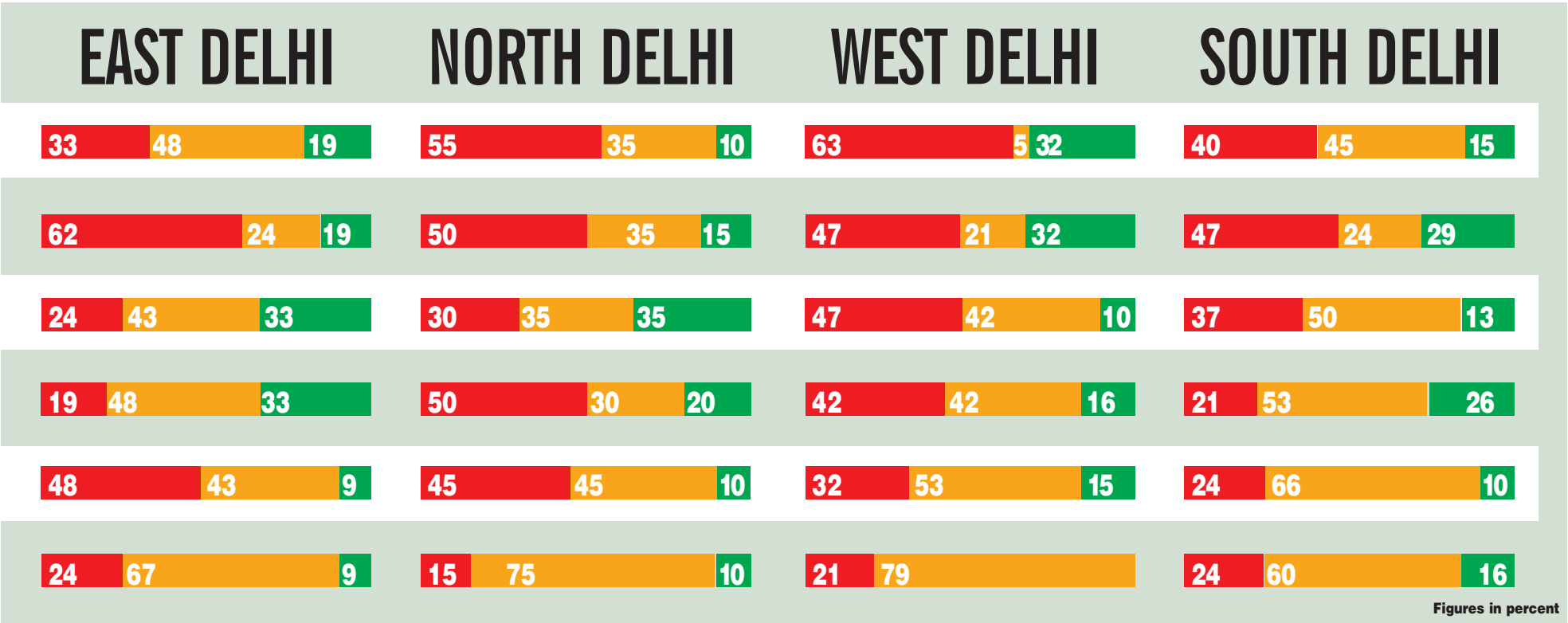
No. I would say the journey is long. We have covered a part of it but there is much more to cover.

People want more Bhagidari not less. They want to take over parks, garbage dumps, levy spot fines on erring residents?

No we want in- built discipline and this was also part of our exercise. People have to understand they are part of society. If RWAs step into areas held by the bureaucracy the police or political leadership then there can be a clash. I have been careful to avoid clashes. It's been more of an awareness campaign.

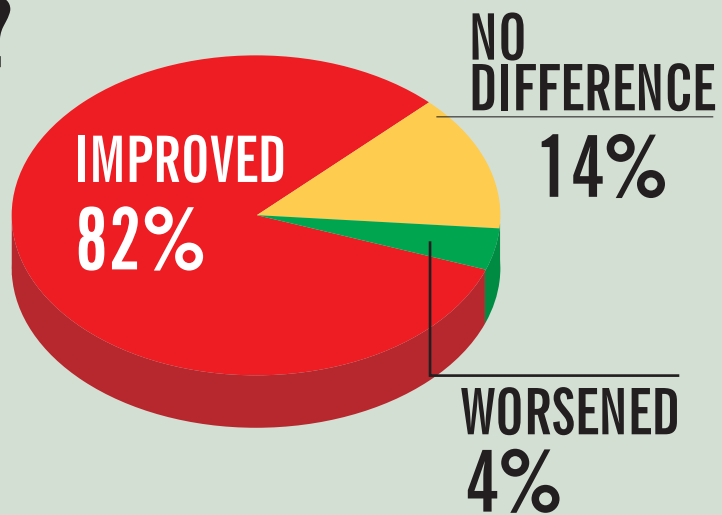
Have you enjoyed this stint in power?

It's been very enjoyable with a few moments of frustration and tension, especially the week over CNG conversion. There were questions of what people would do, how children would go to school. Was it safe? There were buses that caught fire. Finally, the CNG experiment got international recognition.

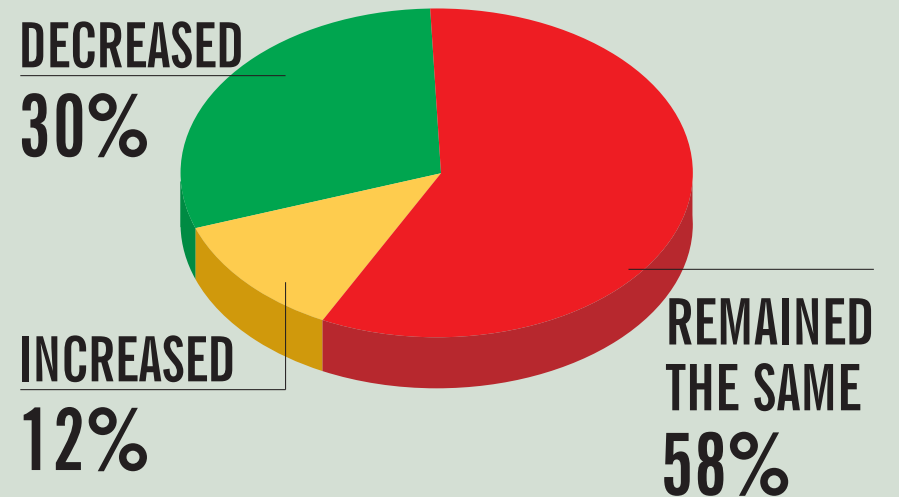


Figures in percent

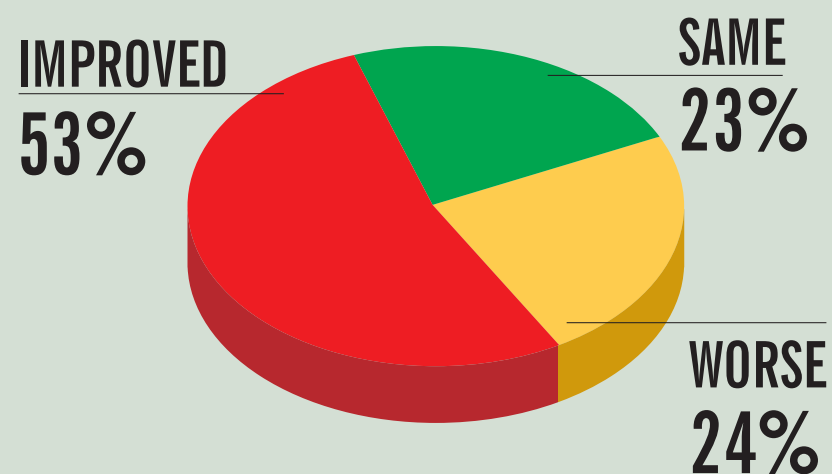
Have CNG, private power improved your opinion of the govt?



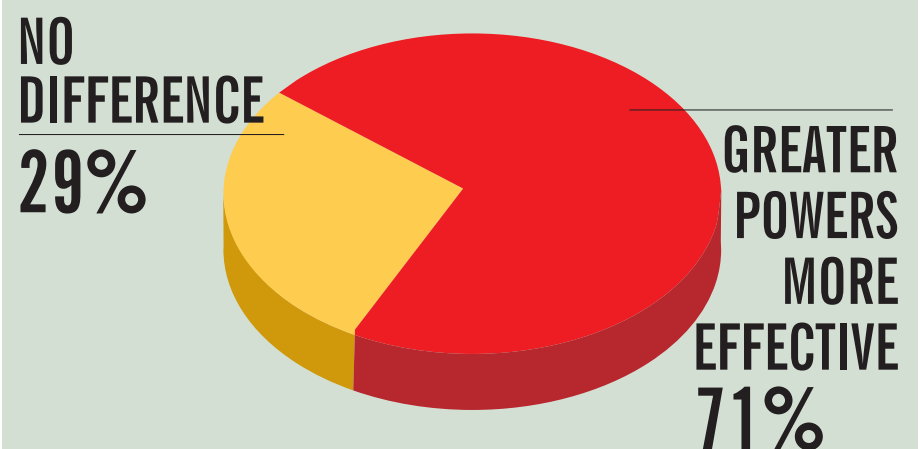
Has corruption increased after Bhagidari?



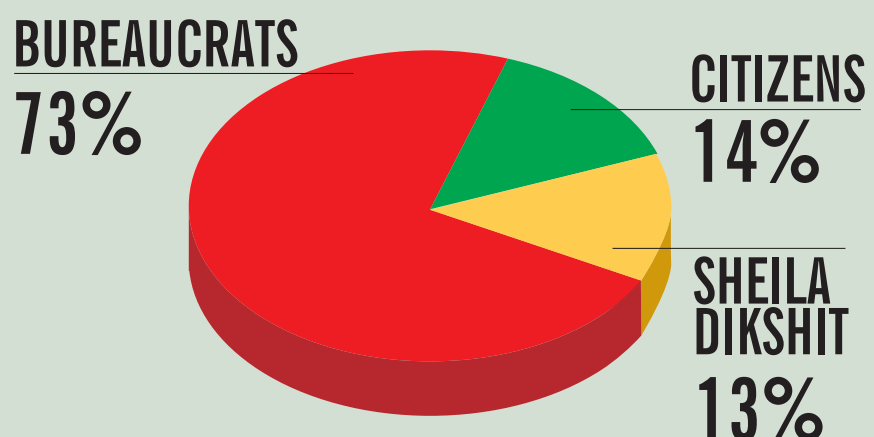
Is power management better after privatisation?



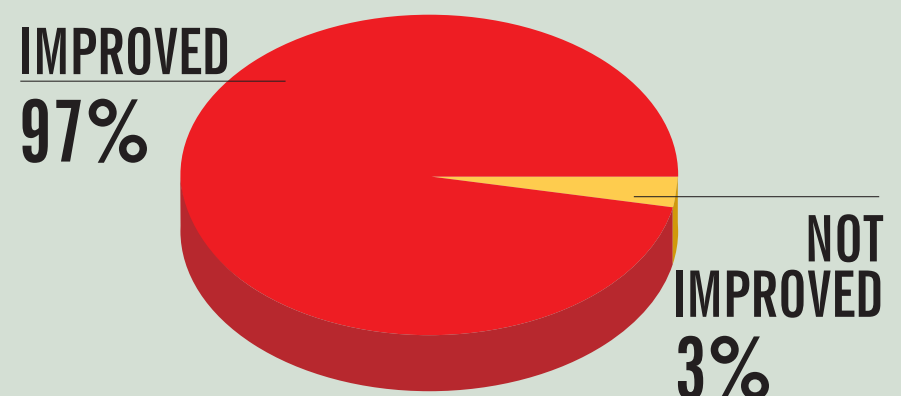
More powers to Delhi govt would strengthen Bhagidari



If Bhagidari fails who would you blame?



Has CNG brought down pollution levels?



Right to information applications end in violence

Parivartan activists beaten up, were they trapped by officials?

Civil Society News
Delhi

ABOUT 40 ration shop owners beat up two Parivartan volunteers, Panini Anand and Rajiv Kumar, outside the office of the Assistant Commissioner, Food and Civil Supplies Department, North-East Delhi, on September 23.

Parivartan has been leading a campaign on the right to information in Sundernagari a resettlement colony in east Delhi.

The organisation's workers have been examining corruption in the public distribution system (PDS), following widespread complaints by residents against ration shop owners.

Using Delhi's Right to Information Act, Parivartan filed applications asking to inspect the records of the shop owners. The records revealed large scale corruption by the ration dealers, in connivance with officials from the Food and Civil Supplies department.

The department then clammed up and the ration dealers obtained a stay order from the High Court.

This was possible because the office of the Food Commissioner, Sumati Mehta, did not act on the order of the Public Grievance Commission.

The ration dealers used the time to go to court, even though they have no case and it is almost certain that they will lose.

On August 29, over 150 residents from nearly 300 resettlement colonies filed applications asking to examine records of ration shops after a meeting organised by Parivartan. A delegation met the Commissioner, Food and Civil Supplies Department.

The Delhi government agreed to permit applicants not covered by the stay order to scrutinise the records. Letters were sent to applicants asking them to come to the department and examine the records. This is a victory for Parivartan's ongoing campaign.

Records of ration shops of Circle 46 were to be shown on 23 September, in the office of the Food and Supplies Officer (FSO). Parivartan workers went there to help the applicants. But the ration shop owners arrived before them and were ensconced with the FSO, drinking tea with him. They hindered Parivartan workers from accessing the records and started beating them.

Anand took shelter in the Assistant Commissioner's room. Rajeev entered a staff room and bolted the door.

A police van arrived and advised them to lodge a complaint in the Nand Nagari



For this young team street-level Bhagidari comes with high risk. Arvind is in the centre. Anand and Rajiv, who were beaten up, are behind him left and right

police station. Anand and Rajeev boarded a rickshaw to go to the police station. The ration dealers followed them on motorcycles and in cars.

Anand was hit by a brick. The number of ration dealers swelled to nearly 80. Four women workers from Parivartan who arrived there were abused by the ration dealers.

An FIR (No. 548/2003) was registered in the police station. Outside nearly 250 ration dealers congregated. They demanded that Parivartan workers be handed over to them and that they would burn them alive.

Finally, at 8:30 pm the Deputy Commissioner intervened and Parivartan workers were escorted under police protection to the bus stand.

Frustrated in their attempts to prevent people from gaining information, the ration dealers some times with food officials, are now visiting people who had filed applications and offering them bribes to withdraw their applications. Ankur and Bhalswa Lok Shakti Manch, who work in the Bhalswa resettlement

colony report similar incidents. The change in tactics indicates that ration shop owners are finally beginning to feel cornered.

Parivartan wants to know why the ration dealers were in the food department's office in such large numbers when the NGO's activists had been asked to come there to inspect records. Was this some oversight or was it a trap?

Even after the incident the government has done nothing to pull up the officers. They have not been questioned on how they allow such a murderous assault to take place from their offices.

Arvind Kejriwal of Parivartan says this is consistent with the general attitude shown by the government in the implementation of the Right to Information Act.

Even after the Food Commissioner allowed the matter to go to court and thereby delay the opening up of records, she has not been made accountable for what she has done.

Parivartan held a Jansunwai earlier this year in which it was publicly established there had been a huge diversion of funds

spent on municipal works. Despite this, no action has been taken against the officers of the MCD who presided over this fraud.

The Sheila Dikshit government's plea is that the MCD does not come under it, but there has not been any pressure of any kind to get the MCD, where the Congress has a majority, to bring the erring officers to book.

What should an NGO do when its activists are assaulted in the way Rajiv and Anand were.

Should it file a police case, go to court, get the assailants arrested?

Parivartan spent a day debating its strategy. It finally decided that it was in its best interest to show generosity and cool the atmosphere.

It felt that pursuing cases would be time consuming and create bitterness.

Instead, it reached out to the people of Sundernagari who were shocked at what had happened. Parivartan's strategy is that its own restraint will strengthen the community's resolve to get the information everyone wants out of the food department.

US to dismantle 57 dams

FIFTY seven dams in 15 states and the District of Columbia in the US are scheduled for removal in 2003. The objective is to restore rivers and improve public safety by removing stream blockages, reports American Rivers.

A recent example is Milltown Dam a hydro dam on the Clark Fork river in western Montana. The dam was operational from 1907.

For years, the Clark Fork Coalition had been fighting to remove the dam and its toxic mess of metals sitting at the confluence of the Blackfoot and Clark Fork rivers eight miles upstream of Missoula. And finally, in April 2003, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) agreed that the dam and the dangerous sediments must go.

The final resting place for Milltown Reservoir's contaminated waste is likely to be Bandmann Flats. The area is at a distance from the floodplain and a good 50 feet above the groundwater. A repository here would be lined and outfitted with a leachate collection system and would receive sediments via slurry pipeline.

Dismantling the dam will allow the Clark Fork and its celebrated tributary, the Blackfoot River, to flow freely once again.

And removing the estimated 2.6 million cubic yards of poisonous waste from the riverbed will improve the river's long-term health. The cost of dam removal, estimated at \$95 million will be paid by responsible parties, not taxpayers.

More than 114 dams have been removed since 1999 when the breaching of

Edwards Dam on Maine's Kennebec River captured national attention. This promising trend is the result of two converging developments -- a growing appreciation of the ecological benefits of removing dams and the rapid aging of much of the nations dam infrastructure.

"Communities across the country are experiencing a new beginning on their local rivers," explained Serena McClain, of American Rivers' Rivers Unplugged campaign. "And while many regard these efforts as dam removals before they happen, afterwards they are remembered as river restorations."

The dams slated for removal this year represent just a tiny fraction of the total number of dams in place across the US. There are approximately 76,000 dams and countless smaller obstructions.

The vast majority were built for running mills, controlling floods and creating municipal and agricultural water supplies. Less than 3 percent generate hydroelectricity.

Apart from the negative environmental impact, dams create several safety hazards, some of which increase with age. Small dams are sometimes called "drowning machines".

"Dams do not last forever, and as they age they tend to move from being assets to liabilities," said Leon Szeptycki, Eastern Conservation Director for Trout Unlimited. "Many communities choose to remove local dams when they have reached the point where expensive repairs can no longer be deferred."

All said and done it's always EU + US

I watched in awe a familiar thousand-year-old battleground scene between the English and the French. Blood was spilled as a brave French warrior lay stretched on the ground. The roar of the French battle cry rose into the cooling night air of the Marseilles summer. Alas, the English had outmanoeuvred the French yet again, and victory was theirs. It was August 30, 2003 and the battle was for the European Rugby championship. Gone were the days when the two ancient European rivals fired arms, unless one counts the countless snide remarks they like to shoot at one another, their respective languages being full of metaphors, each deriding the other.

The last time they actually fought was in July 1940 when the heavy units of the British

Navy, code named Force H (Somerville), launched an attack (Operation Catapult) on the French fleet stationed at Mers-el-Kebir near Oran in Algeria, sinking the battleship Bretagne and heavily damaging the battleship Provence and the battle cruiser Dunkerque. 1,300 French sailors were killed and hundreds wounded. Some 59 other French warships that had sought refuge at Plymouth and Portsmouth were seized by the Royal Navy, but only after overcoming armed French resistance in some cases.

A statistical trivia I ran into the other day: over 500,000 Britons are property owners in beautiful France.

Today, they battle in the sports arena and the boardrooms of multinationals. The other day I witnessed firsthand the strategy session of a French company about to buy an English one and felt optimistic that at some future date the Palestinians maybe doing the same with the Israelis and the Indian with the Pakistanis.

Yet, fraternity has its unsavoury side. Sceptics have often pointed out that in global matters, any difference between the Americans and the Europeans is merely sibling rivalry and that they strictly follow the honour among thieves code. If the failed Cancun Summit is any yardstick by which to measure this claim one is at once shocked by the distinct team up of Washington and Brussels against the rest of the world. It reads like a rerun of an old class war movie where the business aristocracy

bands together against the Union hoi polloi.

This time however, the battle lines were better drawn and the US and EU had a harder time lording it over the developing world, led by the increasingly powerful G21.

Subsidies in advanced countries exceed the total income of sub-Saharan Africa; the average European subsidy per cow matches the \$2 per day poverty level on which billions of people barely subsist. America's \$4bn cotton subsidies to 25,000 well-off farmers alone bring misery to 10 million African farmers and more than offset the US's miserly aid to some of the affected countries.

Continuing its bizarre logic of protective farm subsidies while insisting on multinational investment

rules for developing nations, was the first phase of the game plan of Robert Zoellick (USA) and Patrick Lamy (EU) of the transatlantic fraternity. Assured of the inevitable failure of the summit they can now move into the second phase through bilateral free trade agreements such as the one existing between USA and Singapore.

Not without irony, it was this small vulnerable island's trade minister, George Yeo who added cautious words of wisdom, saying: "It's not in the interests of those of us who are better off to have them remaining impoverished because eventually, their problems become our problems -- whether through terrorism or disease or migration". But the conference bullies continued their arm-twisting tactics. Chile, who did not support the Iraq war, was made to wait on the signing of its free trade agreement.

Zoellick, the US trade representative, has said it was unlikely that New Zealand, which did not support the war, would be granted a free trade agreement. Zoellick has already made it clear that agreements will be used as a way of rewarding friends.

The most heartening part of the contentious Cancun conference was that every major western development NGO (Oxfam, Action Aid, Cafod, War on Want, World Development Movement) spoke strongly against the trans-Atlantic Alliance. And there was Adriano Campolina of Action Aid summing it all up succinctly by remarking, "The EU and the US leave Cancun in shame".

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

Less chem exposure, less cancer

A recent study in Sweden indicates that restrictions on the use of chemicals reduces the incidence of non-Hodgkins lymphoma (NHL).

The study analyzed data from the National Swedish Cancer Registry. It linked Sweden's national policies to reduce chemical exposure with fewer cases of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL).

The Cancer Registry data indicate the incidence of NHL increased annually in Sweden at a rate of 3.2 percent for men and 3.1 percent for women between 1971 and 1990. But it declined between 1991 and 2000 at a rate of 0.8 percent for men and 0.2 percent for women, roughly 20 years after use of a number of chemicals was severely restricted. Similar trends have been noted in

Finland, Denmark and the U.S.

NHL is associated with a decrease in immune system function and has been connected with exposure to three types of chemicals: phenoxyacetic acids and chlorophenols, organic solvents and persistent organic pollutants (POPs). The HIV virus has also been shown to be a risk factor for NHL. Since the cancer can develop decades after exposure, an emerging trend in NHL now is likely to be the result of environmental factors decades ago.

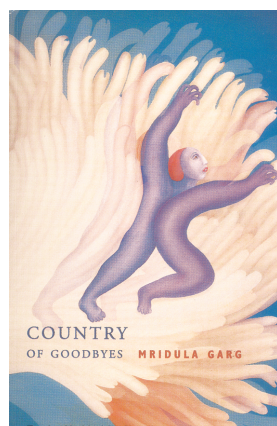
The Swedish researchers developed a mathematical model to arrive at a percentage of NHL cases that could be attributed to exposure to a specific chemical, based on risk estimates and exposure frequencies found in

their previous case studies. With this method they calculated, for example, that 25 percent of Swedish NHL cases could be attributed to organic solvent exposure.

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency reports that the use of these chemicals peaked during the 1960. In the 1970's, chlorophenoxyacetic acids and chlorophenols were banned.

Organic solvents were not banned, but occupational exposures were reduced by stricter handling instructions. Restrictions on the use of these chemicals, improved work practices to reduce occupational exposure, and cleaner products may all have contributed to lower rates of NHL in Sweden.

Feminism without barriers



Country of Goodbyes
Author: Mridula Garg
Publisher: Kali for Women
Price: Rs 250

By Rita Anand

WORDS have never failed Mridula Garg, feminist Hindi writer. For her fiction is reality.

The characters a novelist creates are imbued with a life of their own. And the

act of writing can transform the writer. "For me writing is all about asking questions," she says, "it is about questioning your own world view. Because you are creating characters you can have a number of world views".

In this book, a translation, Garg weaves an engrossing story about relationships and of women trying to break free. The book explores five different personalities. Each speaks about their lives to the reader. Each has a different point of view.

Smita lonely and scarred by an abusive marriage to an American psychiatrist returns to India. She had run away from her sister's home, worked her way up. Is she looking for revenge against her brother-in-law who had violated her? But jija is dead, ironically dumped by his wife, whom he had constantly belittled. It is Narmada, the maidservant who cares for him tenderly in his last days. Narmada describes her life as an orphaned girl protecting her mentally deficient brother and working in a horrid bangle factory.

She eventually becomes a darzin helped by Aseema the tough talking feminist, who loses her heart to Vipin. But Vipin, obsessed with fatherhood marries a girl much younger. There is also Marianne, fixated by a would novelist. She unknowingly writes the bestseller he passes off as his own.

The story entwines all these people, brought to life by Garg's merciless pen.

The dilemmas they face are not always resolved. But then as Garg puts it, "That is the beauty of the literary

work. You don't have to stick to any one thought, you don't have to resolve the dilemma, but leave it to the reader to take it on from there".

She is one of the earliest women writers in Hindi, to be forthright about contemporary Indian society and take the flak for it. Women writers are expected to be emotional, to save tradition she says. "Somewhere this whole Indian culture syndrome puts a kind of limiting factor on a lot of writers. You feel the market won't like it. I've not toed that line".

She has fought to retain her individuality. Marxism or feminism can breed a herd mentality among their devotees. For her,

questioning every belief is the right of the writer. Thought, after all, is individual.

Excerpts from a conversation with Mridula Garg:

ON FEMINISM

I was a feminist before the term was coined. I believe each woman has the right to be different and there are no norms, no ideals, no set rules of behaviour and there is no definition of Satyam Shivam Sundaram which can be imposed. If a woman thinks its great to be a mother or working women she is free to decide. Of course, society reserves the right to pay respect to one or the other. So someone said to me so and so is an artist the other likes to go to kitty parties, it's her decision. I said yes, but it is society's decision to respect her less, in the same way as you respect a person who is honest more than a person who is manipulative. But society must first accord women the right not to conform to a particular mode.

ON MEN

I don't hate men. There is a lot they were never taught. Like they were never taught to take care of the sick.

When men of a society are not caring and they have control over resources and policy making then the face of society becomes selfish and harsh. I have a positive image because my father looked after us. Some of the younger generation of men are care givers, they look after children and they do it rather well.

There is nothing feminine or masculine; it's a combination of qualities. A woman can have so called masculine qualities and a man can be feminine and there is no need to suppress these. This search for perfect love, perfect marriage, causes the divide. You have to come to terms with the whole relationship.



ON INDIAN CULTURE AND BEAUTY CONTESTS

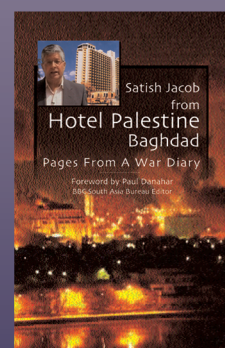
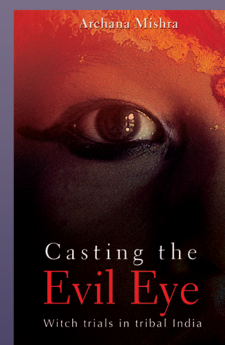
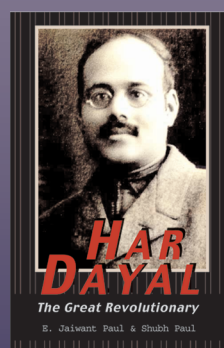
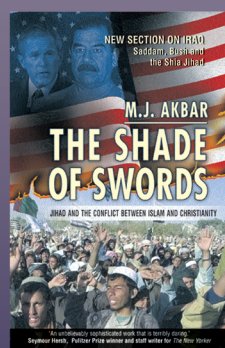
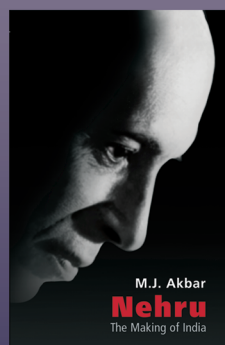
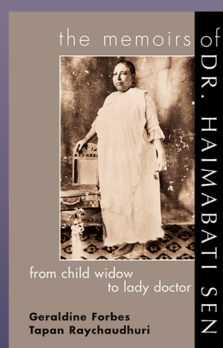
I don't believe that our culture is greater than anybody else's. Or that it was more moral. In the Indian tradition when Yudhishtira put Draupadi as a wager he described her beauty in great detail. Now look at the humiliation. First of all you treat your wife as a piece of commodity and then you describe her in order to imbue that commodity with value as

if she is in a slave market. What beauty competition can be worse than that?

In an arranged marriage within five minutes or through a photograph or by hearsay what is again and again emphasised? It is beauty. And this whole business about the colour of the skin. Where did it come from? A woman was considered to be a decorative piece apart from other things like be a good mother. Beauty remained paramount. I don't believe in this myth about Indian culture.

We were not all bad also. We have very good concepts, ascetism, self sacrifice, celibacy following the middle path... We also had this great hedonistic principle that life is to be enjoyed. So we had every possible philosophy at our command.

Books that make a difference... Titles from the Lotus Collection



Indian civil services are a shaky instrument for justice

HARSH MANDER

HALF a century after India shed its colonial shackles, it continues to retain a peculiarly hybrid bureaucratic framework that is in many ways essentially incongruous in a democracy. On the one hand, it holds on to many of its colonial trappings, and public servants who are not elected exercise enormous unaccountable power over several aspects of the lives of ordinary people, both at the local level and in the framing of policy and law.

But, at the same time, during the decades that the state in India assumed leadership of nation-building and social justice, this same bureaucracy was charged with combating poverty and protecting the rights of dalit and tribal people, minorities, women and the working classes. It is this that attracted many of us to the civil services. I spent twenty of the best years of my life in the Indian Administrative Service, living with my family in remote, mostly tribal, districts of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, and I do not regret a single day.

My most memorable years were spent working with tribal and dalit communities, peasants and rural workers, people with leprosy, homeless people, rickshaw pullers, manual scavengers, undertrials in jails, children in institutions, and so many other of the most excluded and vulnerable segments of our people. No other employment could have enabled me to see and learn so much from the resilience, struggles and humanism of people in distant corners of my land. Like many colleagues I found enormous opportunities to implement my beliefs about land-reforms, laws and programmes for tribal and dalit equity, communal justice and programmes to combat poverty as well as to fight corruption. There certainly were personal costs, but there was also substantial support both within and outside the system, as well as enormous democratic spaces for dissent and conscience within the civil services.

And yet, even as I worked with the opportunities that the system afforded, I could see from the start its fatal flaws and rapid corrosion as a democratic institution. It recruited many of the country's better talents, but did little to make them genuinely accountable to the people they were mandated to serve. A spirit of abject, sometimes humiliating subservience, set in as civil servants habitually obeyed without protest even illegal and unjust directions of political superiors. But to the real masters in a democracy, the ordinary citizen, civil servants frequently acted as remote, inaccessible, corrupt and arbitrary rulers. A common sight in most government offices is of bewildered, harassed and frequently frightened citizens clustered in courtyards, buffeted from desk to desk, subjected to abuse and humiliation, powerless to secure their rights from public servants. Even when people organise themselves to secure their rights, public servants often are intolerant and repressive of democratic struggles and movements.

The rot has deepened in the civil services during the last two decades, primarily due to two trends. The first has been grave setbacks to the socialist ideal, amidst the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rubble of the Berlin wall. With the ascendancy of neo-liberal policies of structural adjustment promoted by the World Bank, belief in state responsibility for the welfare and equitable development of its disadvantaged citizens, has considerably weakened. As a result, civil servants have felt substantially freed from erstwhile responsibilities to plan and implement laws and programmes for redistributive growth and social justice. The civil service

today remains bloated and powerful, but feels even less responsible than in the past to serve its people.

There are innumerable outcomes of this. Just one is the persistence of desperate hunger and pervasive malnutrition at a time when the country has more than three times the maximum buffer stock of food grains rotting in its godowns. The failure to resolutely reach this food to the hungry millions is not just of the political leadership, but of the higher civil services of India. It is reflected also in the virtual demise of the implementation of land reforms laws, reduced social sector spending, the crumbling of primary institutions of education and health care, abject urban homelessness, and burgeoning corruption at higher levels of the civil services.

The other paramount national trend that has undermined the civil services in recent decades, has been the systematic and pervasive communalisation of the Indian polity. The anti-Sikh massacre of 1984 marked a watershed in this decline, as civil servants consented to enable the brutal slaughter of a segment of the people. The precipitous collapse that followed, with blood-drenched land-marks like the Bhagalpur riots of 1989, the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and the Bombay and Bhopal riots, and the culmination in the Gujarat carnage of 2002. Not only did civil servants openly abet a state-sponsored massacre, but they also for the first time in Independent India, were party to the subversion of all civilised norms of relief and rehabilitation. For the first time since Independence, the state government refused to set up relief camps, forced even the closure of relief camps established by a terrified and battered community, and refused to assist devastated survivors to rebuild their homes and livelihoods. To me, this is the most shameful moment in the history of the civil services, apart from their submission to the illegalities and excesses of the Emergency.

If I still see hope in the civil services, it is in the resilience of the idealism of some of its young members, with several of whom I developed deep bonds during my tenure on the faculty of the national civil service academy in Mussoorie. Among these are the young police officers who defied their superiors to bravely protect minorities during the Gujarat carnage, an officer who fearlessly moves without security to serve his people in rural Manipur or another in the violent Naxalite-affected forests of Malkangiri, a district officer who strengthens gram sabhas in Maharashtra, another who extends the right to information in rural Orissa to enable people to fight corruption, and the humanity of a district officer who secures some justice for the dispossessed Musahar community in East UP. There are many such unsung young men and women of humanity and resolute character that I encounter in the civil services even today, which fills me with pride.

However, in the end, the answer is not in such stray luminous examples, but in the establishment of fully democratically elected governments at the district and local levels. Even more important is the strengthening of people's movements and left and democratic struggles, for the rights of workers and peasants, for the right to information, the right to food and work, the rights to education, health and shelter, combating globalisation, and ultimately the right to democratic struggles and to a life of dignity and equality. It lies in the end in defending the sovereignty of the ultimate masters of this land, who are its people.



Even as I worked with the opportunities that the system afforded, I could see from the start its fatal flaws and rapid corrosion as a democratic institution. It recruited many of the country's better talents, but did little to make them genuinely accountable to the people... civil servants habitually obeyed without protest even illegal and unjust directions of political superiors