

Civil Society

PLEASE LISTEN TO THE JAL BIRADARI

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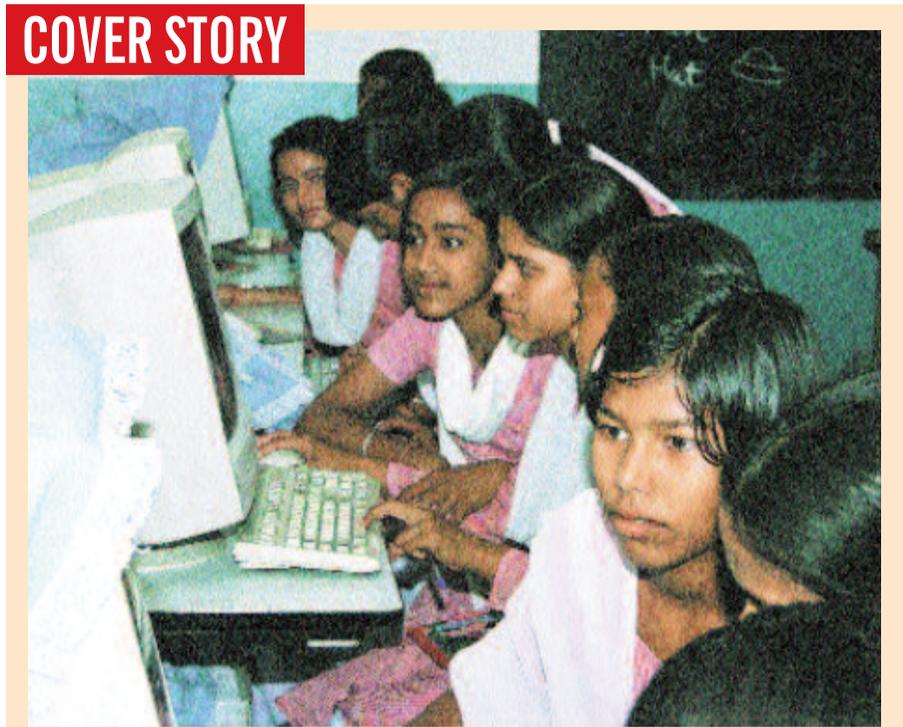
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IS IT BEYOND BUSINESS?

Senior HRD professionals have been working with NGOs. But can they get companies to think differently?

ALSO: Interviews with Nandan Nilekani, Gautam Thapar, Pranav Roach...



COVER STORY

BEYOND BUSINESS

Senior HR professionals have come together to connect with NGOs and help them build capacity. Will this help corporates reach out better in the long term?

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Civil Society

Businesses and people

It is unlikely that we would have heard of Beyond Business if they hadn't got in touch with us and sought coverage. But what really drew us to the group and influenced us to position them on our cover was that the people involved are in the upper and middle rungs of their companies. They see themselves as change leaders who want to not only help NGOs with better systems, but also influence boardrooms to think differently. They clearly represent a new trend, which could over time result in companies reinventing themselves. When Beyond Business members volunteer to work with an NGO they see a side of Indian reality they may have never known. It makes them richer. Since they are all primarily human resources development people, chances are the influence they have will run deep.

For NGOs, Beyond Business is a window through which they can take a close look at corporates and decide whether they like them or not. It is an opportunity to evolve better management systems that suit their needs. These are times when corporates need to think a lot more like NGOs and NGOs need to get much more professional. There is capacity building to be done on both sides.

This is of course not to say that there shouldn't be adversarial positions as well. It is the responsibility of civil society to question and validate. Companies, which spend massive sums on influencing public opinion, must be shown up for what they actually do. Revelations of reckless behaviour by Coca-Cola and Pepsi in India, for instance, have resulted in a growing revulsion for these companies. Their local leaderships are frequently ridiculed as being out of date. Imagine drawing huge quantities of groundwater in drought-hit Rajasthan and hoping to get away with it. The same can be said of several other companies, but Coke and Pepsi are really big brands and just look at the social concern they show.

Businessmen who are serious about their social responsibilities will think into the long term and beyond the puny parameters of the Indian market. They will look for meaningful strategic relationships from which their companies and the community benefit. So it is that Infosys helps Bangalore pull up its socks and become a better city. And BILT tries to substantially improve incomes in tribal communities in areas where its factories are located. Invariably the vision for this comes from the people at the top. Nandan Nilekani or Gautam Thapar apply their minds to issues way beyond the immediate scope of their businesses.

Our Special Report on the Jal Biradari is meant to serve as a record of its demands. Its *jan sunwai* in Delhi went largely unreported in the mainline media though it was an event of immense importance. With this issue we also begin an exclusive column by Rajender Singh whose Jal Yatra over two years and now the *jan sunwai* have done much to raise public consciousness on water use and conservation. The National Water Policy urgently needs to be rewritten.

Aruna Roy reminds us that the Congress government has miles to go and promises to keep. Employment guarantee is on the top of her agenda. Ram Gidoomal tells us from London that the diaspora is worried about economic and administrative reforms getting derailed. Suman Sahai has done an outstanding piece on Monsanto and its Bt cotton claims. The company must answer now. Finally, we are very proud to present Asghar Ali Engineer's essay on the complexities of bringing up the Muslim child in India.

With this issue our magazine completes twelve issues – all brought out on time month after month. On behalf of our small and hardworking team, I would like to thank you for reading us and thereby making it possible for us to survive.

Umesh Anand

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IN MEMORIAM

Unsung heroes of Tilonia

Aruna Roy
Tilonia

WE lost Bhurji (Bhanwar Gopal) a very dear friend and comrade in a tragic road accident near Patan on National Highway 8 in the afternoon of June 20. He died along with five good friends, Lakshmi Narainji (who was with the SWRC for many years, and later founded Praytna in Solavta), Brij Mohan and Raju, from the communication section of the SWRC, Manju a trainee with the SWRC and Ram Rattan, the young driver of the jeep from the village of Tilonia.

For readers who don't know Bhurji, he could be recognised as the man who shot part of the footage in the MKSS films on transparency, helped evolve the Ghotala Rath Yatra with Shankar and was one of the main artists who helped us design the 'muthi' as the MKSS symbol. Bhurji took photographs, used the computer with ease, wrote songs, sang and played the *dholak*, acted in plays, was accomplished in puppetry, made films, was knowledgeable about Rajasthani folk traditions, did graphic designing, and painted miniatures. He was really a latter day Renaissance man!

Bhurji was born in Barna, a small village in Kishengarh Tehsil, in what we would define as a poor family, but what his world would have defined as the middle-class. He was trained to be a miniature painter and a commercial artist. He was always sorry he did not have a proper degree and that he never went to college. But he was self-taught in the most creative way.

He was my friend, and a brother by choice. We have shared a relationship through 24 years, in which we grew to appreciate and tolerate each other. I will miss him in many ways, but most for the "masti" and unconcern for what anyone would think. He was never constrained by practical consequences of a consuming pre-occupation, and I sometimes got drawn willingly into his creative grand designs.

Lakshmi Narainji, whom I met in 1974, was a conservative and correct person, for whom the break with tradition was not easy. The clash between conservative norms and justice sometimes drew him into internal conflict. He most often chose justice, and our friendship was bonded on those choices. He was an intelligent person, a wonderful storyteller with a lovely low baritone voice and a sly and biting sense of humour.

We met over a project of an alternative school, but he soon understood the larger connotations of education in its broadest sense, and took those additional steps into the development world.

Brij Mohan with his serious countenance was a gifted traditional communicator (*Nat*), who played the *bankia*, the *dholak*, the *dhol*, the *nagara* and acted with intensity and ease. He even did the role of the *behurupia*, an act of impersonation of divergent personalities, to dupe the onlooker to mistake the act for real. Raju, who acted and sang, was also a communicator (*Mirasia*) and was just beginning to find his feet. Brij Mohan and Raju came from extremely poor families.

While performances, entertainment and communication absorbed them, they had to hide the burden of being the primary breadwinners in large families at the edge of survival. Manju was a young girl who was physically challenged, but who was brave enough to fight social norms about female behaviour and her disability. Ram Rattan was a young man who drove well, never drank liquor or smoked! We have lost six members of my family. For the development sector in Rajasthan, where there is constant travel, this is a

Painkiller for cattle killing off vultures

Deepali Gupta
Mumbai

A drug called diclophenac, prescribed by veterinarians as a painkiller, has wiped out the Gyps species of vultures from Indian skies. These magnificent birds are virtually extinct since their population has declined by nearly 99 per cent, according to research by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and Peregrine Fund.

The endangered species are the white-backed, long-billed and slender-billed Gyps vultures. The vultures now have to be bred in captivity.

Three conservation breeding centres are coming up in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and West Bengal, funded by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), UK. BNHS is taking charge of the programme. A population of about 100 vultures will be raised in 15 years.

BNHS has informed the government that diclophenac must be banned. Vultures clean up the environment and are important members of our world. "Unless we phase out the drug there is no hope for the vulture," Dr Asad R Rahmani, director BNHS, told *Civil Society* in an interview.

What do the latest studies on the declining vulture population show?

The studies show that the major decrease in vulture populations is because of a painkiller drug called diclophenac. The drug has been used by humans for over 30 years, but veterinarians started prescribing it just ten years ago. And that is when the decline began. This has been proved by experiments not only in India but in the US and the UK. Incidentally, I don't know why diclophenac was introduced in India in the first place, because it is banned in many countries worldwide.

Are all species of vultures affected by the drug?

No, only the Gyps species is affected. We know because of their behavior and feeding habits. They have long necks and eat the carcass from the inside. Diclophenac mainly accumulates in the liver and then kidney failure occurs. One dose is enough to kill the vulture. They don't die immediately, but once the vulture has consumed diclophenac it will not survive. Other breeds of vultures scrounge around the outside. That is probably why they have not been so badly affected. This still needs to be studied, but it's a possible explanation.

What is the implication of this drug for the species?

The Gyps species is almost extinct. We've seen a 97 to 99 percent decline. Unless we phase out the drug there is no hope for the vulture. There is still some

population of vulture, especially in secluded areas, where the drug has not reached.

Often the veterinary doctor doesn't know. He injects the drug into the cattle and they look fine. Diclophenac, as far as I know, stays in the body for three to four days. If the cow dies meanwhile and eight to ten vultures feed on the carcass, all of them will die.

What is the drooping neck syndrome?

Drooping neck is connected to the weakness a vulture feels. It is not alarming. It's like when we are sick and dose off. It's about lethargy. Actually drooping neck is more a symptom. The vulture droops its neck when it is tired or while hiding its head from the hot sun.

What is your recommendation to the government?

Instead of spending crores of rupees on page three species like the tiger and elephant the government should focus on the more common but endangered wildlife. Diclophenac must be phased out immediately. It must be banned. We've had meetings, but the government is sleeping over it. At the same time we must keep captive care facilities not only for breeding purposes but also for safe guarding. If we are able to ban the drug in two years time, these vultures can be released. They should not be kept permanently.

What about the breeding programme?

Breeding will be done in captivity. Vultures are not difficult to breed. Our aim is to ban diclophenac and help the recovery of the vulture. The other is if the population becomes very low then we need to breed them in captivity and prevent them from becoming extinct.

What is the dependant eco-system of the vulture?

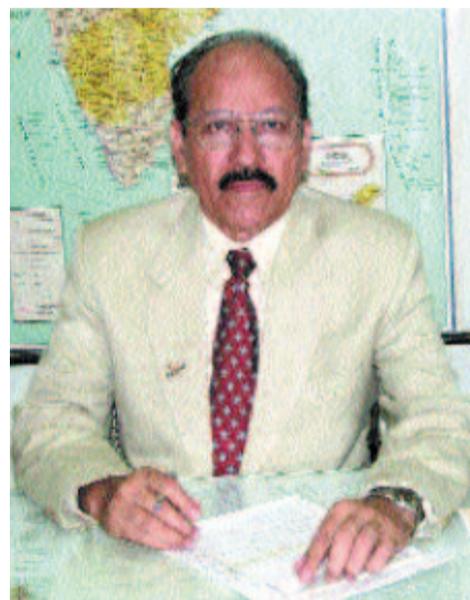
They live in rural areas of Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. They finish a carcass in 30 minutes, so they clean up the environment. There are a lot of cattle that die, especially in summer. If there is no way of disposing of the carcass, there is a greater chance of disease spreading. Any meat is a good medium for bacteria.

Secondly, the crow and dog population has increased. They feed on other things as well, but freely available meat is certainly a boost. Whether dogs and crows are affected by diclophenac is still to be seen.

Is there a chance for the vulture to survive naturally?

If the government bans the drug, as they promised on April 18, then there is a chance for the vultures survival. Drugs for humans have been banned many times before. But those were affecting humans. This is for the eco-system, so we continue to procrastinate.

Interested bird activists can e-mail: bnhs@bom3.vsnl.net.in



The Gyps species is almost extinct. We've seen a 97 to 99 percent decline. Unless we phase out the drug there is no hope for them.

Getting hawkers a place of their own

Deepali Gupta
Mumbai

EIGHTEEN million people in less than 450 square kilometres...is it any wonder that land in Mumbai sells at such a premium? Not everyone can get a piece of it legally. So, a lot of business in Mumbai is done on the streets. From cheap CD covers to original Chanel perfumes, its all available on the streets of Mumbai.

Selling these are hawkers, who put up stalls and crowd the pavements. To be there, each hawker pays off the police, municipal workers...and of course, the underworld. Business in Mumbai is such that although together they pay close to Rs. 1 crore per day, they still make enough to live!

In some cases, these hawkers have captured areas that are now accepted as markets, like the bazaars at Crawford, Colaba, and Fashion Street. However, in certain other areas, hawkers pose a danger to themselves and pedestrians by impeding traffic on the streets. Apparently, in 1985 the Mumbai High Court had issued a ruling defining hawking and non-hawking zones. But that was never implemented by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM).

To push the MCGM to take action where required, several organisations got together under NAGAR (NGO Alliance for Governance and Renewal) to monitor protection of public spaces, air pollution and garbage in Mumbai.

One of them is CitiSpace which handles the protection of public spaces and is presently pushing to get the MCGM to clear all non-hawking zones and systemise hawking. In fact, Punj and her colleagues took the MCGM to court, and got a favourable ruling in December 2003. The court directed that even within hawking zones, each hawker had to abide by certain specifications before setting up a stall.

CitiSpace collects information with the help of its 500 member organisations. It takes proposals to MCGM for clearing of pavements or green spaces and asks for action. "We disseminate, advocate, persuade and litigate," asserts Nayana Katpalia, co-convenor of CitiSpace.

In July, Katpalia and Punj plan to take the MCGM back to court to highlight the inaction of the municipal authorities. According to them the municipal authorities have a problem with hawkers, even though they've made quite a packet off them. So, now when they go back to move them the hawkers give it back to them saying: "You have taken so much money, how dare you try to move us now!" Not



DEEPALI GUPTA

all MCGM officials are reluctant; some take action. That is why Marine Drive has been successfully cleared of all hawkers.

Other impediments to actual clearing of the city include human rights activists and "bleeding heart citizens" as Katpalia calls them. These citizens have only a limited objective in clearing their street of the "nuisance". As long as the hawkers are in the next lane, it is convenient to buy goods from them. So, really, even the "charitable people" are believers of NIMBY (Not In My Backyard), Punj declares.

"Then, certain NGOs approached us straightaway and asked if we were against hawkers," she adds. The fact is that CitiSpace's aim is not to stop hawking, but merely to institutionalise and systemise it so that hawkers can be licensed and won't need to pay heavy tolls.

They do, however, agree that food must not be cooked and dispensed on the street, for the simple reason that hawkers on the road do not abide by any standards of cleanliness. Naturally they sell food cheaper, taking away the clientele of the vendor who has taken the

trouble to establish a formal food joint. For the others, relocation is not such a bad deal. Take, for instance, Fashion Street. Earlier, all those vendors were around Regal. At the time they were relocated, hawkers put up a valiant fight, but now that they have moved, Fashion Street is well known all over India. Their clients have followed them.

Punj and Katpalia have solutions for hawkers who may find themselves removed from sales hotspots. They suggest such vendors get together, make a list of products they provide and get cellphones. These lists can be put up in residential colonies and the hawkers can do regular door-to-door selling.

The point CitiSpace makes is valid: shutting down small businesses can affect many lives, but crowding public spaces is a nuisance too.

The law has provisions for all of us to live in symbiosis, but everyone has to live up to his or her role. Hopefully, organisations like CitiSpace will continue to remind us of our civic responsibilities and eventually achieve harmony among all interest groups.

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In Gurgaon, hope for Northeast's addicts and a home for everyone

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

If you are hopelessly addicted to drugs and want to change your life, pack your bags and head for Gurgaon in Haryana. There is hope there at a unique therapy centre called Asha Bhawan.

About sixteen months ago, 24-year-old Thang Vaiphei was hooked on heroin. He was living in Churachandpur, Manipur, 60 km from the Burma border. Thang's family was fed up of his ways, so they left him alone. His girlfriend dumped him. The drug was destroying his health and burning a hole in his pocket. Thang wanted to start life afresh. A friend recommended Asha Bhawan. Others had returned reincarnated, he said. So Vaiphei packed a bag and travelled to Gurgaon, a city he'd never seen.

Eighteen months later, Thang is going home, freed of his addiction. He is also carrying a return ticket. "I'd like to come back," he says. "I want to help others like myself."

Thang did not get medicines for detoxification. Instead, he learned to live with other addicts in a house in Sector 10 A. And regularly did physical labour at a farmhouse run by Asha Bhawan in rural Gurgaon.

"The addict is generally lazy," says Alex Hauzel the Men's Leader at Asha Bhawan. "The body is not tuned to work. There is no discipline. We teach them a work ethic and how to live." The problem with most de-addiction programmes is that the reformed person tends to go back to drugs. At Asha Bhawan 75% of addicts who join complete the programme.

Hauzel too comes from Churachandpur. He was a former addict who drifted to Delhi. "I took up a job, but couldn't cope. A friend suggested this new programme started by former addicts who were members of the International Substance Addiction and Abuse Coalition. It worked."

Hauzel returned to his home town, a new man. Family and friends were surprised. He was known for being a nuisance. Now he is upheld as a shining example.

Inspired by him, a steady stream of addicts find their way to Asha Bhawan. About 90 people live here and 60 per cent are from the Northeast. The rest are from other regions. Like Amar from Sitamarhi in Bihar, a hotel management graduate. His brother sent him to Asha Bhawan after he came across a calendar printed by them. Today he is a Responsible Leader who heads the programme. Or Yogesh from a middle class family who found himself homeless after his family disowned him.

The young men from the Northeast say leaving their homes takes them away from a tense environment. "It's like starting with a clean slate," says Thang. "Families in Manipur live in a constant state of fear. Every home has a licensed gun. You have to cope with the underworld drug



At the farm house: (left) Lalrinmawia from Mizoram with Amar

'The addict is generally lazy,' says Alex Hauzel. 'The body is not tuned to work. There is no discipline. We give them a work ethic.'



Alex Hauzel



Thang Vaiphei

mafia, simmering militancy and the Indian army's dreaded combing operations."

There are hardly any job opportunities for the young and the army is the best bet. "You get a gun and a chance to travel. If your son is in uniform, the army leaves you alone" says Thang. But if you don't make it into the Army peddling drugs is easy. "For Rs 50,000 you can ride into Burma on a truck. Or you can walk across for less," explains Thang. Just avoid annoying the mafia he advises. "Otherwise they will shoot you in the leg the first time and in the head the next," he says.

Amar says there are hardly any professional centres for addicts. "In several centres the boy is chained and beaten. It is a prisoner's life. The parents are told this is the only treatment, be harsh," says Lala from Manipur. "They don't release you since they make money." One

youngster inserted wire and wood into his leg in desperation. He is now at Asha Bhawan and has been hospitalised at St Stephen's hospital.

In Asha Bhawan, people are free to leave whenever they want. "Our only condition is that addicts must be willing to change," says Amar.

Rooms are neat and tidy. Volunteers are trained in

personal hygiene. Every member is assigned jobs: driving, financial administration, cooking, sweeping, washing clothes and milking buffaloes in the dead of the night.

The volunteer reports to a Responsible Leader, who is trained to identify specific problems like anger and anxiety and counsel him. After about four months trust builds up. The volunteer is then given a small amount of money. He is sent to the market to empty the garbage and buy milk. This is the first big test. In the market there is a chemist shop from where cough syrups can be bought. "Prescription drugs like these are used by addicts and are cheap," explains Amar.

If the addict passes the test for several days, he is assigned calendar duty. Volunteers on calendar duty span out in teams to homes in the National Capital Region (NCR) to sell calendars, create awareness and bring in money. "We also go to areas in Delhi where addicts congregate like Red Fort Paharganj and some city parks," says Amar. "We tell them, it is possible to lead a better life."

Volunteers are put to work at the farmhouse because, as Alex says, "being close to nature heals the mind." Milk and vegetables from the farm are sold and the money used to finance Asha Bhawan. Members also approach families in Gurgaon and the NCR region for donations of rice, lentils and other groceries.

To meet with rising demand, Asha Bhawan is planning a similar centre in Guwahati. But this time addicts from the north will travel to the verdant Northeast in search of a new life.

Telephone: 0124-2372589. From Delhi: 95124-2372589
Address: Sector 10A-660, Gurgaon, Haryana

LAKSHMAN

Please listen to the Jal Biradari

Rita Anand
New Delhi

MONSOON clouds elude half of India once again. Those who dug tanks can harvest the rain that arrives. Those who didn't will face a punishing drought.

India's economy depends on a short span of rain and the UPA government's first budget comes with the promise of water. An ambitious nationwide national water harvesting campaign is planned and Rs. 1,000 crore set aside for renovating traditional water harvesting structures.

To do that the government will have to change the present water policy. "It is against the rights of panchayats, states and of the 73rd and 74th amendment to the Constitution. It goes against the spirit of the budget," says Rajender Singh, convenor of the Rashtriya Jal Biradari (RJB), a national network of water activists. He was awarded the Magsaysay for building traditional water structures which not only provided water but also revived dead rivers in Alwar.

Rajender Singh spent two years on a Jal Yatra, which took him across India. The yatra brought together a network of organisations. From June 25 to 26, the RJB held a *jan sunwai* or public hearing at the Gandhi Peace Foundation in New Delhi, where the former government's water policy was discussed. Activists and groups from 16 states were unanimous that they wanted a new water policy. Here are some of their chief concerns.

WATER IS NOT A COMMODITY: Water is a common property resource which belongs to the people. Unlike industrial goods, water cannot be produced in response to demand. Water is not the property of the state or any individual. Privatisation of water is a crime against mankind.

COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT: The shortage of water is caused by mismanagement. Water management should be local, decentralised and community based and integrated into a wider network of institutions.

TRADITIONAL SYSTEMS: Older systems of water management and conservation should be revived with modifications if necessary. These must find space in land use patterns, pastures and forest management systems. Society has to relearn how to harvest water and respect it. Awareness campaigns are needed.

RECHARGE WATER: Surface and groundwater should be recharged with rain. Government agencies must conduct scientific studies on aquifers, share such knowledge with the people and help in recharging efforts. Only the amount of water which has been recharged should be used.

STAKEHOLDER FORUMS: Water disputes between urban and rural regions can be resolved by forming stakeholder forums. Awareness must be created in urban areas about rooftop water harvesting, water saving techniques, groundwater rules and pricing.

PRICING: There is a strong need for differential water pricing. In urban areas, industries, hotels and affluent colonies should pay the full cost of water. There should be subsidised pricing for the poor and free supplies for the very poor.

GROUNDWATER: Reckless exploitation of groundwater must be controlled through regulation. New state laws should restrict private ownership over groundwater and decide how much can be used. Electricity and diesel subsidies should be there only for the very needy.

WATER QUALITY: The pollution control boards must be



Rajender Singh, D.R. Patil and Sunita Narain at the public hearing in Delhi.

held accountable. Existing laws should be implemented strictly. In areas affected by extraction of groundwater, recharge must be done to improve quality.

NO RIVER LINKING: Link people to rivers, instead. Each river should have a river parliament with water users organised into groups. The government should devolve authority to them.

WATER USERS ASSOCIATIONS: To curb the inefficiency of surface irrigation projects, the government should facilitate Water Users' Associations (WUAs) through education, awareness and capacity building. Major and medium irrigation projects can be transferred to associations of farmers.

Water is not a commodity

The present water policy favours privatisation and globalisation of water resources, says the RJB and people's struggles against them are gathering momentum.

In 2002 NGOs and activists staunchly opposed the Chhattisgarh government's decision to lease out the Sheonath River in Durg district to Radius Water Ltd for a period of 22 years. It would have prevented local communities and fishermen from using the river.

The extraction of precious groundwater by cola companies in 88 places is being resisted by the people in Palakkad in Kerala and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. The RJB supports these struggles and has asked people to boycott colas and bottled drinking water.

The RJB believes water for life cannot be treated as a commodity and privatised. Water which is required for drinking, washing, sanitation or for "social good" - fire fighting or hospitals - has to be provided. Since water is a finite resource, reduce wastage, recycle water and restrain demand, says RJB.

But water which is used by industries or splurged by affluent homes cannot be described as water for life. The RJB supports differential pricing for water. Richer people and industry should pay. There should be subsidised pricing for the poor and free supplies for the very poor.

A citizen of Delhi pays only 0.35 paise per 1,000 litres for water. Water costs Rs. 5 per 1,000 litres in Bangalore. The Delhi government spends between Rs. 7 to Rs. 9 to provide a litre of water. Charges should include the cost of treatment and disposal. While water rights must be there, pricing should also be in place, say RJB activists.

Tanks and ponds

India has always been a hydraulic society. Every region built water harvesting systems after a careful study of local ecology. This is why a desert city like Jaisalmer has no historical evidence of being abandoned because of water scarcity. Tanks, stepwells, ponds were scientifically designed to catch every drop of rain. In hilly areas, people harvested water from streams and shared it.

When the British came to India they could not understand local water management. It rains through the year in their country. Traditional water structures were destroyed or left to decay and supplanted with the systems we have today. India also forgot about her old systems, including the reverence people had for water. An awareness campaign has to be carried out to teach people how to harvest water and respect it, said RJB members.

"In Rajasthan the innovative *kundi* delivered water. Laporiya village despite scarce rain is green because they collect every drop from *gauchar* lands and take it to tanks. No canal or irrigation scheme set up by engineers has been able to replicate these systems. Tanks are important in cities too because they recharge the groundwater," said Sunita Narain, Director, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). Since we get a short span of rain, we should stop work and catch that rain, she suggested.

Villages don't need to have shortages because they have land to recharge their wells and tanks. Size is unimportant. Research has proved that small watersheds catch the most water. So far people don't have rights to save their tanks and are mired in rules. Economic progress will rest on empowering people, especially women.

Politicians too are trying to spread the water harvesting movement. DR Patil, Congress MLA from Gadag constituency in Karnataka won for the fourth time defeating his rival, a *lingayat*, from the majority community. Patil comes from a farming community which comprises just three per cent of the population.

He presented his drought proofing model at the *jan sunwai*. Inspired by Rajender Singh, Patil persuaded

Intentions fine but change the policy

RAJENDER SINGH



Paani

ON July 8, the newly elected UPA government presented the nation's annual budget. A notable highlight of the budget was its accent on promoting decentralised water management. If the government truly wants to make its intentions work, the present water policy will have to be changed.

The outgoing NDA government's water policy, announced on April 2002, is against the rights of panchayats, development authorities, states and the 73rd and 74th amendment to the Constitution. It contradicts the spirit of the new annual budget.

It would be better if talks on making river basin organisations (RBOs) start at the grassroots and ensure the fundamental rights, cooperation and participation of vil-

lage level organisations such as gram sabhas.

The water policy 2002 states that "appropriate river basin organisations with statutory powers will be established for the management of water resources on the basis of river basins." The approach is sound. The difficulty stems from the constitution of the RBOs. Will they be appointed by the central government or the states?

Will they have adequate representation from the local communities?

State legislatures cannot double up to discharge the role of RBOs since most of our rivers cover only part of the state. The state legislature of Uttar Pradesh may be more preoccupied with the Ganga basin to give attention to smaller rivers flowing from Madhya Pradesh into the Yamuna. It is essential that people of Haryana, MP and UP residing in the Yamuna basin manage their resources in an integrated manner. This is not possible with the state legislatures.

The present water policy can enable the centre to appoint an RBO and disempower the states. The central government can involve itself in the constitution of an RBO within a state. As per constitutional provisions, the management of such river basins is entirely the prerogative of the state governments. But the water policy 2002 can be interpreted to mean that the centre has a say in their management.

Instead people residing in river basins should elect representatives to the RBOs. The RBOs could be given statutory authority similar to those granted to the autonomous council of Jharkhand and Sikkim. Water related issues can be decided by the RBOs subject to ratification by the state legislatures.

Water is a state subject under our Constitution except for inter-state matters. The philosophy underlying it is that the centre should intervene only when the states are unable to resolve matters among themselves.

But the present water policy adds a section stating that the "detrimental consequence of over-exploitation of ground water needs to be effectively prevented by the central and state governments". Here again the centre is unnecessarily intervening in a matter which lies at the discretion of the states. It is true the states have

failed to take effective steps to prevent depletion of ground water. But this cannot be made the reason to disempower them.

The problem is further complicated because the Supreme Court recently empowered the centre to regulate the exploitation of ground water. It is not clear how this matches with the constitutional provision of water being a state subject. The policy should have come clear on the issue.

An alternative would be to place the primary responsibility of preventing depletion of ground water upon the respective panchayat or, if constituted, the RBO. If the panchayat or zilla parishad fails to prevent depletion, the state government intervenes in the matter. And only when the state government fails to prevent depletion of ground water in an adjacent state, the centre may intervene.

The present water policy provides for the Inter-State Water Disputes Act 1956 to be amended for timely adjudication of disputes referred to it. In doing so, the method of legalistic resolution of water disputes continues to be endorsed. There is a need for revision. Water disputes have many ramifications such as use efficiency, equity, minimum flows in downstream rivers, etc. These are often technical matters. The centre should consider establishing an independent Water Resources Regulating Authority along the lines of the Insurance Regulatory Authority. Such an authority would have the technical skill and understanding to deal with inter-state disputes in a comprehensive manner.

The policy admits that planning and implementation of water resource projects has to be done at state level. Such projects involve a number of issues such as environment protection, rehabilitation, public health and dam safety. "On these matters "common approaches and guidelines are necessary," says the policy. This is again a centrist approach, because only the centre can frame "common" guidelines.

The implication is that the states are no longer 'free' to develop policies regarding these issues. In case a state feels that the 'common' policy developed by the central Ministry of Water Resources is not suitable it will nevertheless be morally committed to follow it. Otherwise what was the need to develop a common policy at all?

In fact is desirable for states to have the freedom to experiment with different strategies. It enables us to select the one most suitable. For instance, why is it not possible for Andhra to levy a water tax on water used for cultivating grapes? Or what is wrong with one state providing land as compensation while another provides cash? The draft policy should encourage the states to try diverse methods of dealing with these issues.

The basic flaw of the present water policy is that it seeks to strengthen the centre and does not provide enough scope for people's management of the nation's water resources.

Our present water policy should be sent back to the drawing board and rewritten in keeping with the spirit of local self-governance enshrined in our Constitution.

farmers to a dig a pond on their field. After two years those ponds filled and farmers had water for irrigation. Initially, farmers built these with their hands and later through the government's food for work programme. The zilla parishad now sets aside money for them.

Patil got farmers to grow trees and organised them into self-help groups to get them credit and technology. Today old tanks are brimming with water, the farmers are growing amla, neem and mangoes organically and the SHG's have collected nearly Rs. 3 crore.

"Traditional water harvesting is becoming a people's movement in Karnataka and the government should encourage it to grow," said Patil. "We know our problems and our solutions. The government must provide all powers to village institutions like the gram sabha to make sure money is spent by the panchayat honestly and wisely. Ward sabhas can ensure that weaker communities participate. Organise the beneficiaries and tell them about government schemes to curb corruption. We believe the Common Minimum Programme and food for work programmes should create assets like traditional water structures for villages."

Rain on the roof

Cities and towns are guzzling more water from rural areas and conflicts are brewing. Bangalore gets water from the Kaveri, Delhi from the Tehri dam and the Krishna waters Chennai. In Udaipur water is drawn from the Jaisamand Lake.

Cities need rooftop rainwater harvesting, tanks and urban forests. In Delhi, some Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) have installed water harvesting techniques and the water table has gone up. Indore provides a 6 per cent rebate on property tax if people opt for rainwater harvesting. But on the whole recharge efforts are slow. RJB believes people in cities should be educated on conservation, pricing, harvesting and augmentation of water.

While a city like Copenhagen sets aside only 100 litres per capita, Delhi provides 200. Nearly 80 per cent of domestic consumption is for personal hygiene and for flushing. "If this water can be recycled through a dual pipeline system, we can save water," said MN Mehta, senior joint commissioner, Ministry of Water Resources.

Instead the dirty water pollutes rivers, which are hard to clean. In Delhi, some RWAs are keen to set up small sewage treatment plants and recycle their water.

Conflicts over water between different stakeholders can be resolved through Stakeholder Forums. The Madras Institute for Development Studies, for instance, has been trying to resolve the Kaveri issue by getting warring farmers from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to talk.

"We got 100 farmers from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu together and we were in for a surprise. The meeting was extremely peaceful. Both sides said, "We are children of the Kaveri, so let's find a solution," said Ramaswamy R Iyer, water expert with the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi.

The farmers from Tamil Nadu accused upstream Karnataka of growing water-guzzling sugarcane. Karnataka

accused them of growing three crops of paddy. "There has been some constructive understanding. Farmers visited each other's area, to assess things for themselves," said Iyer. "The issue has been politicised but it can be worked out between farmers."

Although the present national water policy does speak of river basin organisations (RBOs) it does not draw up a plan for decentralisation of authority.

Several speakers emphasised that every river should have a river parliament with water users organised into groups. NGOs, governments and village level institutions must work together to address the specific problems of each river basin.

Nearly 119 million hectares of agricultural lands continue to be rainfed and the inefficiencies of surface irrigation are well known. Associations of farmers can be organised into Water Users Associations (WUAs) with help from the government. RJB recommends participatory irrigation management (PIM) by which a certain part of the irrigation network can be transferred to WUAs.

Replenish and recharge

Despite huge sums of money spent on large scale water projects 90 per cent of drinking water comes from groundwater. The quality of water has declined because of over extraction. Hand-pumps and bore-wells dry up and cause fluorosis.

Groundwater depletion has been blamed on the government's policy of providing subsidised diesel and free elec-

Trees, tanks and an election won

Rita Anand
New Delhi

FARMERS from the Gadag assembly constituency in Karnataka showered votes on DR Patil, Congress MLA, in the last state assembly elections. He won a fourth term with ease, though his community comprises just three per cent of the population in Gadag. His rival came from the majority Lingayat community but rural areas voted overwhelmingly for Patil.

Patil taught marginal farmers how to harvest rain water. His constituency, like Rajasthan, is drought-prone and has no irrigation or borewell facilities. Inspired by Rajender Singh, Patil persuaded small farmers to dig ponds and grow trees. He also propagated organic farming techniques since these consume less water, bring in money and are healthier.

Tanks in Gadag have been spruced up and are filled with water. Farmers are growing neem, amla, mangoes instead of bajra and jowar. Patil has organised them into self-help groups making it easier to get credit.

Although Patil proved water harvesting is good political strategy, he says that was not his intention. "I believe in selfless service."

How did you motivate marginal farmers to set aside land for ponds?

After three years of drought it was easy to persuade them. I convinced farmers I knew to dig a small pond on their fields. Since ours is a black soil region, water percolates slowly. After two years of rain, they had water for irrigation. This motivated others to dig ponds as well.

My target was 790 ponds. Instead, the people dug 2,500 in just one year. Initially, they did it as selfless labour and later under the government's food for work programme.

We are now approaching every farmer, regardless of his political affiliations, to dig a pond. My constituency consists of five tehsils with a population of one million.

This year the rains were good and all the tanks have filled up. We have done so much development work in villages. But it is the sight of tanks filled with water which people are excited about. Water brings happiness.

Tell us about your drought proofing model.

We are encouraging farmers to switch to tree-based agriculture. This means growing neem, amla, mangoes, tamarind and cultivating crops alongside. Trees consume

very little water and provide a good income.

A small portion of the land should be kept aside for a pond. We are propagating organic techniques. For that you need biomass which can be provided by trees. We have demonstrated in an experimental farm that productivity improves by going organic.



It is the sight of tanks filled with water which people are excited about. Water brings happiness.

It takes three to five years to drought proof, since time is required for the trees to grow. Our next step is to find good markets for farmer's products. But our priority is to cater to local markets first.

People in rural areas spend what they earn and rely on credit to begin the next sowing season. We organised

them into self-help groups. This has made it easier to provide timely credit and disburse loans. They have saved nearly Rs 3 crores during drought years. The cooperative bank movement reached only 20 per cent farmers, who were better off. To avoid useless expenditure on alcoholism and bad habits, we approached the Ramakrishna Mission to set up an ashram here.

How will you replicate this model on a larger scale?

In every village there are at least four to five farmers interested in implementing our model. Farmers are keen to be economical. But for large scale implementation, orders have to come from the top.

In my area government agencies are promoting our model, not out of conviction but from compulsion. The problem is they are used to propagating pesticides and fertilisers. In Karnataka, a policy for organic agriculture has been accepted by the government and we are going to implement it.

Do you think there is a change in the mindset of politicians, especially about water?

River water is becoming a big political issue. But I don't think micro-level management of water has turned political. Rainwater harvesting is more of a people's movement, especially in my state. The government should encourage this trend and strengthen grassroots institutions.

How can grassroots institutions be made stronger?

They must be given full powers. Allow them to manage their own affairs. We know our problems and the right solutions. The panchayats do get money. We have to ensure that every paise is accounted for.

For that we have to strengthen the gram sabha. Every programme must be implemented under their supervision. We should have an ombudsman in each district to address complaints. In Karnataka it is the responsibility of the ward sabha to ensure participation of weaker sections in the gram sabha. In village communities you find, almost naturally, certain communities dominating discussions and dictating terms. The less privileged don't open up. We should also tell people about government schemes and encourage use of these facilities. This can curb corruption and plug leakage of public funds.

We also suggest the Common Minimum Programme provide work which will create assets like water harvesting structures for the people.

tricity. Farmers leave the pump on since electricity supply is erratic and extract more than they need, said Mehta. The RJB has suggested free electricity and diesel should be provided only to the very needy.

Activists said farmers grow water-guzzling crops in semi-arid areas and rely on chemical fertilisers and pesticides which consume more water.

"Instead, drought varieties of seeds and organic techniques should be promoted," said Vibha, an activist from Maharashtra. "Growing a canopy of trees to shade crops saves water. Water saving technologies could also be propagated to farmers."

Karnataka has recently issued a policy on organic agriculture and other states could follow. "When orders come from the top, everybody falls in line," said Patil.

Deforestation was another reason cited for depletion of aquifers. Nilesh Desai of Sampark said in Jhabua instead of growing back trees the government encouraged borewells. If a farmer draws on groundwater, others are affected. After three years of drought, the groundwater is depleted, tribals are afflicted with alcoholism and society is beginning to disintegrate. Finally, forest committees are planting trees. In hilly areas too, RJB members said, water rolls off steep treeless slopes and can't be harvested.

Older systems of water management can be integrated with forests, pastures and land use patterns. Since the ecology of regions varies, there can be no single water policy guidelines. It doesn't make sense to have the same guidelines for Mizoram as for Rajasthan. RJB is also

opposed to anti-water activities like quarrying and mining.

RJB members said a major problem in recharging aquifers was lack of data. The Central Groundwater Authority (CGWA) does not provide guidelines. It notifies areas under stress but nobody can recharge, once the notification is issued. Data and studies should be shared with the people and they must be helped to recharge scientifically.

Aquifers can be brought under a regime of regulation. This would require changes in laws, to curb private ownership over groundwater and regulation to prevent over extraction. Aquifer management committees in villages can supervise groundwater extraction. RJB suggests declaring a depth at which the community will ensure water availability. Only water which has been recharged should be used. "We should use the interest and not the principal capital," said Narain.

Apart from fluorosis caused by dry hand-pumps and bore wells, rivers and streams are filled with industrial waste and domestic sewage.

The Damodar river is probably the worst, said RJB members from Bihar. Pollution control boards behave like toothless tigers and take no action. Members emphasised existing laws should be implemented. The polluter must pay. Vigilant citizen groups should be able to take action against polluters.

Members said Bihar was poor because of water mismanagement. Dams were built, no compensation paid. Rail lines cut across drainage lines. Embankments had wors-

ened floods. They agreed floods needed to be understood better and instead of "controlling floods" it would be more prudent to put together systems to minimise damage through floodplain zoning and disaster management.

Government help

Despite emphasis on community based water management the RJB is not telling the government to disappear. The government is important as a facilitator and regulator.

It could consider a national water law integrating central and state laws.

Large projects by the state should be undertaken only as a last resort. "Small may not be beautiful but big is certainly problematic," says Iyer. Such projects must be placed under a microscope and would require a Freedom of Information Act, changes in the Land Acquisition Act and a National Rehabilitation policy to reduce displacement and environmental impacts.

Instead of helping a few villages here and there, members agreed water harvesting must be carried out large scale. Although the government does bad work, it can implement policy nationally and provide technical and financial help. So detailed plans, a clear understanding about which laws and institutions need to be changed are to be drawn up. Society too has to be taught how to recharge water and respect it. "We have to stand behind the government armed with our knowledge," said Narain. "Change is difficult but we have to decentralise supply."



LAKSHMAN

Girls at the Government High School in Carterpuri, Gurgaon, use computers provided by Hughes Software.

THE BUSINESS OF REACHING OUT

Corporates need to connect with the rest of society

Civil Society News
New Delhi

LET'S get a fix on you. You are vice-president something in a Rs 1,000-crore plus company selling soaps, phone connections, paper, cars, software or whatever. Your day begins early and ends late. The week passes in lengthy meetings with perhaps a quick trip out of town. Your desk in the office is always clean, but about the backlog in your personal life, the less said the better. Given these rigours, what would you do on a sultry Sunday? Flop out at home? Go for a swim? Take the kids for a movie? Or drive across Delhi to a crummy flat at Kalkaji to brainstorm on how to help NGOs?

Chances are that you don't belong in that last seemingly insane category because very few really do. But in the past two months, we've taken the punishing stairs up to the

Kalkaji flat to observe a bunch of senior human resources development professionals invest personal time and money in finding out how they can do their bit for society.

Calling themselves Beyond Business, these people have been trying to help NGOs with fund-raising, brand-building, accountancy and recruitment. They have had some success and a good measure of failure. But their importance lies in the fact that they represent a trend among senior professionals who want to look beyond the perks of the corporate firmament. On a bigger, more impersonal canvas they would like to drive businesses by marrying them to social realities.

Beyond Business focuses on how corporates and NGOs could work together and learn from each other. It emphasises the need for corporates to tune their own internal mechanisms to go beyond the market. And it says that there are strategic advantages to be derived from bonding with communities.

COMMON CAUSE: In an India where the government is withdrawing and solutions have to be found to problems of equity, infrastructure and resources, communities are increasingly stepping in to improve their own lives. Non-profits are indeed playing an important and creative role in this process of development. They could be taking up environmental problems such as water pollution or issues concerning governance such as the right to information. Or, they could be helping run cities better or managing schools and clinics. Often the issues are global: organic food, child labour, sustainable forestry, the girl child, empowering of women, education, etc.

Companies that are serious about building their own brands and seek to command the respect of society need to connect with these processes of change. Those that think otherwise should be preparing for redundancy. At a basic level one cannot build healthy markets amidst abject poverty and filth. So it is in the interests of every business to support efforts that bring prosperity with equity.

Take the case of Hindustan Lever, which needs to penetrate deep into rural areas to sustain business growth quarter after quarter. The megalith has no option but to involve itself with NGOs at the strategy level to drive distribution as well as understand the needs of consumers in remote areas.

More tangentially, Infosys sells software but has a stake in improving Bangalore because it is headquartered there. "You cannot have a bunch of rich software guys or just a million super rich guys in an economy," says Nandan Nilekani, CEO of Infosys. "We have to create more jobs. We have to make the country more competitive. So corporates have to work on development in their own enlightened self-interest."

Similarly, BILT, India's largest manufacturer of paper, has learnt to work with tribals in areas where its factories are located. The company has involved itself in promoting extension farming, self-help groups for women and drinking water supply. "Factories are a part of the community," says Gautam Thapar, managing director of BILT, which he transformed from an ailing family-run concern into a modern corporation. "You have to be a participant in the community, not a monarch. You cannot grow without the consent of the community. In the old days, you took it for granted. Today there is nowhere to hide."

Interestingly, Pranav Roach, President of Hughes Network Systems, found that a trust barometer in Europe showed Greenpeace and Amnesty International as top brands three years running. "What does that trend identify? The respect for a business is not just a function of profit. It is also how you engage," says Roach.

"If you want to reach younger, evolved or rural consumers, you need to be worried about how they view you. This is a lot tougher and slower than a blast on prime time TV or a full-page colour ad," says Roach.

In pure business terms, Viraf Mehta, who till recently was with the Tatas, says expectations from businesses are different today. "Increasingly, the markets will reward the top five per cent of the companies not in terms of size but in terms of their practices. Look at the Tatas. They are in business after 130 years. That is the proof." Mehta is now chief executive of Partners in Change, an NGO that helps corporates build partnerships with civil society.

WIN-WIN SOLUTION: But mere tokenism should be avoided. Mathew Cherian believes companies often miss out on the long-term benefits that accrue to them by raising comfort levels vis-à-vis the community. Cherian is executive director of LEAD (Leadership for Environment And Development). He has worked with Schlumberger and is also on the advisory board of Beyond Business. He says it is important to create this awareness at the top in corporations. "A guy like Sunil Mittal can do wonders if he integrates community development with his business plans," says he.

"The Bharti Foundation sponsors schools. But that doesn't solve any big problem for India. It is just a feel-good factor for the balance sheet. Why can't he borrow the Grameen Bank business model and loan women money to buy mobiles phones that they can rent out. He makes money and they make money. It is a win-win situation, provided it is built into the business model. It needs innovative thinking."

'A corporate can't just make money'

Nandan Nilekani is the CEO of Infosys and has been part of several public-private initiatives. He spoke to Vidya Vishwanathan of Civil Society.

What is a corporate's role in development?

I defined a framework in the speech that I made in Shanghai. That defines how a corporate could take part in social development or poverty reduction. I was the only private sector representative at the conference organised by the World Bank on poverty reduction. Whether a corporate works with a non-profit or a government is an implementation issue.

Is working on development issues strategic for a company like Infosys?

Absolutely. But working with non-profits is not the only route. We often have programmes that we run ourselves. For example, we are running a programme on upgrading curriculum in engineering colleges and improving teaching. The outcome of this benefits everybody including us. We know that the government does not have the resources to do this.

Should a non-profit work with a corporate?

We are not many-tentacled animals. The problem with



Lead with values: If a corporation is committed to economic development, it must establish its credibility with its partners: citizens, public sector, government and NGOs.

Facilitate goal alignment: The corporate sector must lend its expertise and experience of working with the latest management techniques to actively help the government and bureaucracy develop a two-pronged action plan, i.e. how to enable rapid growth of industries (job engines) with local competency and advantage and how to mobilise all sections of society, including the public sector, towards Millennium Development Goals

Establish action networks: The corporate sector must develop networks with all facets of society to create a focus on development and poverty reduction. In my opinion, these networks can be categorised into the Corporate-Corporate network, Corporate-Informal network, Corporate-Government-Citizen network and the Corporate-Society network.

Extend to the bottom: Corporations must not consider the poor as victims, but should accord them the status of consumers. This will improve their quality of life, provide them access to new products, expand choices, increase purchasing power and productivity, raise income levels and build trust.

Raise quality standards: The corporate sector must specifically focus on participating in defining the quality standards in the areas of infrastructure, education and healthcare. This means direct active involvement through task forces and quality standards bodies.

most non-profits is that they are run by the heart and not by the head. They can leverage a corporate brand, money and capability.

Non-profits also work parallel to the government. They create a small sample and tout that as a model for change. The real challenge is to scale that. To make an impact you have to engage with the public delivery system. So non-profits, the government and corporates have to work together.

How can non-profits raise resources from corporates?

If a non-profit comes to a corporate with a clear proposal for a time-bound program with clear goals and accountability, they are likely to get a response.

Why are you so involved in development activities?

There is no choice if we want economic growth. All of us talk about the quality of our public services. They are completely dysfunctional. Billions of rupees are spent on public services every year but the quality is pathetic because of corruption.

Society has to be seen as fair and equitable. Otherwise, there will be a social revolution. You cannot have a bunch of rich software guys or just a million super rich guys in an economy. So corporates have to work on development in their enlightened self-interest.

In the long term, if there are corporates that only make money, people will rebel against that. Development has to be broad-based. This election is proof of that.

Often companies may be caught in the process of evolution. This is perhaps the case with Bharti. Sunil Mittal may not align with the Grameen Bank stage of strategic business thinking but two of his top people, Jagdeep Khanpur and Pritha Chatterjee, are closely involved with Beyond Business. Clearly, Mittal encourages his executives to think out of the box. There is also the Bharti Foundation for which he has recently hired Mamta Saikia from deep within the social sector. Her brief is to make the company more socially relevant.

Santrupt Mishra, director HR of the AV Birla Group, says they spend Rs 150 crore a year on development. Asked if the group would allow a senior manager to take a year's sabbatical to head an NGO, he replied: "We don't want to under-utilise their capacity. But if the question is, would the Aditya Birla group fund a CEO of an organisation like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation if he was already our employee, the answer is yes."

CHANGE AGENTS: If these are overarching ideas beneath which corporates must re-examine what they do, the members of the Beyond Business team in their crummy Kalkaji flat atop the punishing stairs are the earnest agents of change.

Beyond Business, on its part, helps NGOs build capacities. And it prods the corporate world to gain a better understanding of social realities and terms of engagement.

Importantly, what Beyond Business members set out to achieve is defined more by their own enthusiasm and less by the strategic interests of the companies they work for. They serve as frontrunners. In this sense, they have all the spark and adrenalin of NGO activists themselves.

In relation to corporates, they try to sell to CEOs the Beyond Business model, seek out volunteers and live in the hope of influencing long-term company policies.

For the NGOs, Beyond Business holds regular workshops. Executives serving as volunteers also hook up with an NGO to provide targeted advice. The workshops serve to float ideas and remove various misconceptions. In fact, one of the workshops on raising funds drew participation from 60 small NGOs. At the meet, Shankar Venkateswaran, executive director of American India Foundation, suggested: "Don't approach corporates for money. Instead ask for other resources like using their premises at night."

But would a corporate be willing to extend such facilities? Sujit Bakshi, head of operations of vCustomer, a BPO outfit in Delhi, says he would be open to letting people use facilities that include 2,500 computers when they were not being used by the staff. He even offered the services of two voice trainers to teach people how to talk on the phone.

GREY AREAS: The NGOs Beyond Business has worked with include the Smile Foundation, Cansupport, Literacy India, Cancer Concern, Family of the Disabled, Udayan Care and Mobile Creches. The results are however mixed. The NGOs are eager for support but they say the Beyond Business volunteers often have a problem making the journey from their rigid business environments to the fluid situations the NGOs contend with. The approach, therefore, calls for greater flexibility and innovation.

Cansupport, which provides palliative care to cancer patients, has been with Beyond Business right from the start.

Reflecting on the association, Harmala Gupta, who set up Cansupport, says she found the fundraising workshops to be useful. NGOs could learn how to make presentations and the like. But when Cansupport needed an administrator, the volunteer who came, though well meaning, tried to implement an appraisal system which was not meant for a small hospice.

"We can't possibly set targets of visiting five or six patients a day. In one instance, three of the five had passed away and making bereavement calls at each home is so emotionally sapping that one really needs to take a break at the end of the day," says Gupta.

Notably, Indraani Singh, an Airbus pilot with Indian Airlines who runs Literacy India, a small network of schools in Gurgaon, says her experience with Beyond Business has been highly positive. Though at the outset she felt that the first Beyond Business workshop had on offer advice that suited big organisations like Pratham and CRY more, she now credits Beyond Business with helping her build bridges with the corporate world. Literacy India has received funding from Bharti and Hughes as a result of the interface.

Anupama Puri of Smile underscores a point raised by Singh when she says that small NGOs are most urgently in need of help. It is important to find a way to connect with them. Beyond Business has made a beginning in this regard but there is much more that needs to be done. For instance, the language barriers need to be overcome. The presentations at the seminars need to be printed and circulated and also put on a website. And, they should be available in Hindi if not other languages. As of now, only one person from an organisation attends a workshop. That is perhaps not enough for getting an entire NGO ticking.

Talking of certain mismatches, Cherian believes that companies tend to dictate to the NGOs. "I have done work with CII on primary education and had to tell them to relax," he says.

BIG IDEA: But how did the big idea of setting up Beyond Business emerge? The Beyond Business idea was floated three years ago by the Delhi chapter of the National HRD Network (NHRDN). Bimal Rath, currently Group Vice-President HR at Tata Sons, thought a lot could be done to use business skills to help NGOs increase efficiency.

He and Pankaj Bansal of Hughes sought to work with the disabled. Initially, they wanted to organise a seminar for getting jobs for the disabled but ran into all kinds of prob-

lems. It was one thing to talk of jobs for the disabled and quite another to get the disabled into buildings that were not designed for them.

They then decided it was best for them to function as facilitators and trainers. But the NHRDN team had no contacts and could not position itself among the NGOs. The plan gained momentum in November 2002 when Pritha Chatterjee, VP Group Management Development at Bharti, held a brainstorming session along with Bansal.

They decided that they would not look at 'end-users' but at NGOs, and called their project Abhilasha. The name was discarded later as it was too 'NGO sounding'. The team wanted a name corporates would take note of. A roundtable with NGOs followed, coordinated by Cherian who was then with Charity Aid Foundation. Attended by twenty NGOs, the participants were quizzed on their requirements as well as expectations from the project, which eventually took the name Beyond Business.

Bansal recalls that though the issue of funds was brought up, a majority of the issues brought forth were not money-related. "They wanted to know how to go about raising funds, how to source volunteers, how to develop a website, how to manage their assets, etc.," he says.

The roundtable did see a clash of ideas. For instance, Chatterjee says Mobile Creches accused the corporates of being unprofessional. "We too did not know the NGO lingo. There was a lot of you and us," she explains.

Also, it bothered Beyond Business members no end that the NGOs overlooked emails and would not respond quickly to letters. But the systems were already in place at NHRDN, says Chatterjee. "It was just a matter of modifying them to suit the NGO sector. We had all the requisite skill-sets and felt that we could aid and contribute our expertise to NGOs that lacked the management and resources to utilise their capacity to the fullest."

FAST FORWARD: Once the big idea found stakeholders, Beyond Business went ahead with its launch at an NHRDN conference held in early 2003 that was attended by 300 members. At that stage, Rath, NS Rajan, a senior partner in Ernst & Young, and Amit Gupta, founder of the Jagannath Management

Institute, donated token amounts to get things off the ground.

The office space was organised and Usha Kala chosen as relationship manager -- a bridge between corporates and the NGOs. Kala, with a decade's experience in the development sector, was asked to marry volunteers to projects.

The team then put together a 3P model -- People (volunteers), Projects (where the volunteers could utilise their managerial skills) and Programmes (a series of workshops on a variety of topics). As part of their programmes, Jagdeep Khanpur, Group HR head at Bharti, held a seminar on branding while Gautam Brahma, much respected at Hughes for knowing about everything from thermodynamics to the Byzantine empire, organised a seminar on fund raising, drawing upon Harvard Business School literature.

Wipro Spectramind's head of human resources, S Vardarajan, subsequently held a workshop on compensation while Eicher sponsored a workshop on web designing and Aadesh Goyal, EVP and GM Hughes, spoke on how to bring in volunteers.

In late March 2004, yet another meeting was organised as many felt the 3P model was not the most efficient. Prema Sagar, Saikia, Cherian, Rekha Mehra of the Ford Foundation, Amit Gupta, the core team of Beyond Business and a few members of the Delhi chapter of the NHRDN attended the meeting. The focus thereafter shifted to capacity building with Brahma being in charge of organising workshops (at least 10 a year in Delhi and one outside) and Chatterjee took over voluntarism.

Prof. Ashok Kapoor, chairman communications at the Management Development Institute (MDI), was put in charge of engaging corporates on corporate social responsibility (CSR) while Bansal would handle all backroom operations.

Three levels of CSR were decided upon. Level One would be to introduce the Beyond Business concept to corporates -- particularly CEOs; Level Two, to push for volunteers from the organisation and some more involvement from the organisation itself; and Level Three to help corporates assimilate the Beyond Business ideals into their respective company policies.

At each monthly meet of the Delhi chapter of the NHRDN, one NGO would be invited to give a presentation on its cause, that is, what it has done, what it wishes to achieve and what it needs.

Beyond Business set itself a target of five corporates and 10 volunteers to be networked this year. Kala informs that they've surpassed the target with 25 volunteers.

Is Beyond Business a workable model? Shankar Venkateswaran, who used to head Partners In Change, says as HR professionals its members are more likely to be successful in changing the way corporations think. "At Partners In Change we tried to engage with the National HRD Network in Hyderabad. Engaging with the CIIs and FICCI is a lot of effort for little output," he says. Since HR managers are already geared to being people-centric it is likely they will push and campaign for their ideas because of their intrinsic merit unlike public relations or marketing professionals.

For NGOs, of course, the eternal challenge remains in doing something well and then scaling up. Nilekani perhaps sums it up best: "NGOs create a small sample and tout that as a model for change. The real challenge is to scale that. To make an impact you have to engage with the public delivery system. So non-profits, the government and corporates have to work together."

What Beyond Business members have set out to achieve is defined more by their own enthusiasm and less by the strategic interests of the companies they work for. In this sense, they have all the spark and adrenalin of NGO activists themselves. They serve as frontrunners.

'Pizza parties have their limits'

One of the founders and a core team member of Beyond Business, **Pritha Chatterjee** is vice-president, group management development at Bharti.

Where did all this start?

Bimal Rath in Tata Sons and I were toying with the idea together. I think it matters to everyone. It just depends on how seriously you want to take it finally.

After 9/11 the world changed. There had to be a purpose beyond acquisitions, pursuing my interest, material comforts and my family. I wanted to do free counselling for slum children. But I hadn't the vaguest idea how to go about it. There were not enough interfaces available. Indians donate money for charity, but there are enough people who want to go beyond.

We also knew that non-profits could use help. We had done no research but knew it was true. Then we got some people to put together a group of non-profits for us.

Have you volunteered before?

Yes in a befriending facility for the suicidal for three years. I went there every Sunday. I felt I had the ability to listen. We Indians are very quick to give advice. The person on the line does not need advice. He needs to share. This NGO had a tough selection process. It was a very humbling experience.

Sometimes I would be on the line for 15 minutes and nobody would talk. Sometimes we would talk for an hour and half. You have to interpret sighs and monosyllables. Mind you the caller could be a lonely CEO. You will be amazed at the kind of people who call. It certainly teaches you to treat your colleagues with more empathy.

So that helped you at work?

Absolutely. You first learnt that your problem is nothing compared to others. You have to be non-judgemental and have empathy. I learnt concepts like active listening and



LAKSHMAN

co-befriending. Just to befriend someone is a skill. Everybody has talent. Organisations have pools of these people. This talent could be in the professional area or elsewhere.

Is there any reason for companies to encourage employ-

ees to engage with non-profits?

Employee engagement increases manifold if they are doing something meaningful. There is only so much that pizza parties and Friday dressing can do to motivate people. When I was with the Oberoi Hotels, we had bright young people training at our property in Jaipur. They were cleaning toilets, high-tech but still toilets. So they started educating some school children and that worked wonders. Everybody has some hot buttons.

How does Beyond Business organise workshops?

Through our contacts, we don't have any problem getting space, speakers and material. What is it to a company like Bharti to sponsor a lunch or two or every now and then?

There are always people at the National HRD Network as well as in our organisations who are more than willing to give time on a weekend to come and speak on any topic, be it branding, fund raising or compensation.

Do you think there is a mismatch between Beyond Business and the philosophy of most corporates?

We are quite aware that even though most of our organisations do not whole-heartedly support us, they have nothing to lose by stating that their employees are involved in this programme.

We are doing this out of our own free will; the company has nothing to do with it.

And volunteers?

Well at the first workshop, we had 10 volunteers. For the fourth, 14 volunteers confirmed, but 25 showed up. We instituted a three-page code of conduct for all people signing up as volunteers to let them know that this is serious work.

Although it isn't meant to dissuade them, it gives them a very clear picture of what volunteering entails so that we get higher levels of commitment from them.

Harmala gets help, but...

Harmala Gupta, founder of Cansupport, an NGO which provides palliative care to cancer patients, spoke on working with Beyond Business.

How long have you been involved with Beyond Business?

We at Cansupport have been with Beyond Business from the start. We were at the first roundtable that was facilitated by Matthew Cherian and we've attended quite a few of their workshops as well.

In order to be effective in both costs and management, we need to have systems in place. There are many well-meaning people who begin NGOs but haven't a clue on how to run them efficiently. They do need help organising systems of appraisal; managing staff as far as leaves and compensation goes as well as for volunteer recruitment.

Beyond Business has also conducted some very useful workshops. Take fundraising for example. We can all raise our own funds up to a point within our own circle of contacts. Then we need to look outside and many people don't know how to prepare presentations, to show the donor what he's looking for.

There are obviously many pitfalls along the way. If an NGO starts functioning too much like a corporate, volunteers lose their dedication and enthusiasm. It should not end up being just another job.

Do you think corporate systems are suited for an NGO?

A year ago, we required an administrator to run Cansupport as I could not be on call all the

time. The volunteer, who took over, although well meaning, did not understand the structure of our organisation and tried to copy systems directly from a corporate.

We are primarily a hospice at home – we provide home care for the people who are in their terminal stages of cancer. We operate through three teams of a doctor and a nurse each, which goes out and visits patients in their homes.

We can't possibly set targets of visiting five or six patients a day. In one instance, three of the five had passed away and making bereavement calls at each home is so emotionally sapping that one really needs to

take a break at the end of the day. Setting targets like that takes away the necessary emotion that is needed for a job like this.

However, we do need appraisal systems and we need systems that can be adapted to our way of working. Our organisation is not geared toward income and profit generation like a corporate's set up, hence the systems we employ have to be suited to our work philosophy.

Do you have any issues as far as volunteers go?

The biggest problem we've had with volunteers so far is how much time they can give us and when. Most can only come in and work on weekends, which is when we like to take the day off, since they can't come in during the week. This lack of coordination means that they can't always meet our requirements and schedules.

Ajay Bhave, who volunteered with us from Beyond Business, helped us set up management systems. Most volunteers come with set views and ideas. He came with an open mind, ready to adapt corporate thinking in an NGO world. He proposed a system of consensus where all decisions were voted on, and although this was useful, it was also very laborious. We spent more time in meetings than doing any hands on work.

On the other hand, he did introduce a daily monitoring sheet for the home care team whereby the number of kilometres travelled everyday; the number of patients and time spent with them was noted.



LAKSHMAN

'You need the consent of the community'

Gautam Thapar is the vice-chairman and managing director of BILT, India's largest paper manufacturer. He has turned an ageing family concern into a modern and highly profitable corporation. Thapar has a serious interest in social issues and expects the same of people who work with him. He spoke to Vidya Vishwanathan of Civil Society.

Bangalore has done a good job of accountability. Government bodies fix deadlines and give citizens access to project details. How do you see such initiatives?

I am on the board of Pratham with Rohini Nilekani. She was talking about accountability. That is an interesting concept. It's happening in Delhi as well with the Right to Information Act being implemented by an NGO, the government's Bhagidari scheme and resident's welfare associations getting organised. Each place will find its own solutions.

We have learnt a lot by implementing corporate social responsibility. You get things done, not by throwing money, but with patience, understanding and care. We take people to see what we have done to a tribal area and they tell us you haven't built a clinic. But that is not what they need. Tribals don't have two square meals a day. They die of hunger and malnourishment and not some rich man's disease. Our paper mills are in tribal areas. We have got income generation schemes going, organised self-help groups of women, village medical helpers and so on. The moment we get tribals to stand on their feet, we initiate them into horticulture, breeding and eggs. We don't feed them fish, we teach them to fish.

Why are you involved in these activities?

A lot of it is personal. We follow a three-pronged strategy: what is good for business, what is good for the community and the things I do at a personal level.

We support Pratham, an NGO that is placing street and working children into schools. The infrastructure already exists. They use our office premises or government schools at night. We are founder supporters. We invest a lot of time. The canvas is vast since they also deal with issues of kidnapping and child molestation.

Factories have to engage with communities. We are involved in basic education with NGOs. We help NGOs build their capacity. Look business is all about learning. When you are dealing with impoverished people you have to be innovative. You put in a little money but a lot more of many other things.

We work with 20,000 farmers. Some of them were in debt for 25 to 30 years. They have fallow land, there is no irrigation and they depend on scanty rainfall. They are into subsistence farming and often land is hawked. We are getting them to grow trees. These don't require irrigation or rainfall. Farmers can pay off debts when the trees grow.

Why are you involved with farmers?

They supply vital raw material. Their land is subdivided and they need horticulture. In Jabalpur we are trying to build linkages to the market. We have to bring in NGOs to create trust for us in the community.

Why does trust matter?

For growth and profitability. We need farm supply. Growth

is an imperative for us. Government policies are not supportive. So we have to be innovative. Despite successive governments failing to deliver, people trust the government. They trust PSUs even if they run losses. I have to tell people that I'm as trustworthy as the government.

How did you get the whole company to do all this?

It required a full three years of walking the talk and building a reporting system. Once you have a network in place



you can deal with many things.

Look, everything is a function of time. In the last balance sheet we wrote what we do in CSR. Our own shareholders will ask questions. CSR has to be unobtrusive. It has to be a part of daily life. If there is an environmental issue, if something is dripping somewhere, don't just pass by, fix it immediately or get someone to fix it.

But yours is an old organisation. How did you get people to change their mindset?

Make it a part of your reporting system. Make it part of transparency. Make it clear to people that this is not a passing fad but is here to stay through exposure, cajoling and sometimes by demanding. People come and ask me 'But where is the money?' They have a budget. They have to cut and save elsewhere. This is priority. It is part of the performance of the mill's general manager.

But now employees have seen the goodwill of the people. For example, villagers used to punch our waterlines. Then we explained to them that if they do that, the pressure falls and we cannot run our plant. Now we give them water at regular timings by boosting the pressure. So the lines don't get punched anymore. You don't have to spend hundreds of crores of rupees. You just have to stop being arrogant.

You are thinking five to seven years into the future?

Well, I have a GM level person in Pune responsible for all this. She is self-effacing and travels extensively. We are into a lot of businesses, paper, food, chemicals and so on. She reports to me directly. I get a monthly report. We are thinking 50 years into the future not five. Hopefully my company will be around for a hundred years. If you are serious you cannot delegate these things. My regular business does not need much thinking. We know where to buy machinery...but this needs more innovation.

Is all this built into the business too?

Absolutely. Look we are not in the business of CSR. We are in the business of making money so all this has to be part and parcel of everyday business. If you look at our vision statement, it says we will respect our stakeholders - employees, customers, communities around factories and of course our shareholders.

For example we have been in the forefront in environmental issues. We helped formulate the effluent treatment policy. Some parameters have been set and will have to be followed till 2007. By 2007 it will become law. But we will invest now and that means Rs 80 crores to Rs100 crores.

Should NGOs work with a large company like yours?

Both parties are free to disengage at any point of time. If a corporate has the right mindset the objectives may not be all that different. Your objective is community development so that the community doesn't come to you for jobs. The NGO's goals are social development.

We need to teach women's self-help groups to trust each other and do some basic book keeping. Some women in Maharashtra, for example, have formed a women's cooperative society and have approached the rural bank for credit. Repayment of loans among these groups is incredibly high. It makes sense to lend to them.

In Orissa, a women's self-help group bid to build a village road competing against contractors. They constructed the road and made money. In five to seven years, self-help groups will need help in marketing. A lot of these NGOs are in very remote areas. The lives of many people will improve faster than infrastructure.

What are the other ways in which you connect with the community?

Last week, I was at a function at the Thapar Institute of Technology in Patiala, an engineering college that my family has been running for years. The college has 800 computers, all networked. I asked the principal what he was doing with them on weekends. I told him to let children in the neighbourhood use them. Let them play games and enjoy themselves. At most a couple of keyboards will get broken, but that is a small price to pay.

Does your family approve?

This is my strategy, my make-up. There is a lot of continuity from the earlier leadership. We are still in the same business. But with every change in leadership comes a reorientation. We want to grow. Telecommunications and TV make it difficult to live in isolation. You have to be a participant in the community, not a monarch. You cannot grow without the consent of the community. In the old days, you took it for granted. But I found out that they don't like you.

They don't like you? How do you know that?

Oh! We did surveys in some towns in Maharashtra. So I said open the gates of the factory and take people on a tour. We showed them what we do, how we treat our effluents and the environment. Then they actually told us they did not know we did all this. They did not know because we kept them out.

MARKETS AND IDEAS

Why is Greenpeace trusted? Just think

Pranav Roach is the CEO and President of Hughes Network Systems India. Hughes as an organisation believes in supporting social initiatives and encourages its employees to do so.

Why engage with non-profits?

A year ago I read an interesting article. I think it was a magazine called Microcosm or something which published a trust barometer in Europe. It was a survey and Greenpeace and Amnesty International were top brands three years running.

What does that trend identify? The sustainability or respect of a business is not just a function of profit. It is also how you engage. If you want to reach younger, evolved or rural consumers, you need to be worried about how they view you. This is a lot tougher and slower than a blast on prime time TV or a full-page color ad. But there is no easy way out.

You are saying it is part of corporate branding.

In addition to a good product, it is about how you engage with society. Are your working conditions safe? Do you have respect for the community? How transparent are you? The 1990s were about access to capital. The 21st century is about relationships in a larger group.

Once you decided that what did you go about doing it at Hughes?

We said let's put up a budget. But there was going to be no direct return. So to satisfy the shareholder we put it under corporate brand enhancement. This is not about calling up the sales department of Star TV or Bennett Coleman but a well thought out strategy. We put up a facility to make handmade paper in The Shri Ram School in Gurgaon. After school street children use the same facility. We set up a computer centre in a village school at Carterpuri, in Gurgaon.

Unfortunately most corporates don't have an organised way of dealing with this. They are dealing with cost pressures. Where the equation used to be price = cost +

profit, it is now profit = price minus cost. So cost will have to be eliminated. People will have to think within this. The trend will come. To safeguard the brand and not just make profits, we will have to show transparency and engagement.

Training is important. Then people like you will go around and talk and it will become visible. People will have to shape policies in this manner instead of throwing their hands-up. Ten per cent will be leaders, 50 per cent will follow.

What are the areas that concern you? What would you support?

Education, infrastructure and a non-profit's internal challenges. It depends on what is required.



Pranav Roach

How do you bridge the gap between the two sectors?

Have a board of eminent people. Get non-profits into company boards and companies into the non-profit boards.

Are collaborations possible between non-profits and corporates?

There can be engagement, dialogue. If you asked me ten years ago my perspective would have been different. For example broadband is the next big thing. There are enough applications, and if NGOs in education and healthcare became aware, they can utilise these much better. They can also make money in a reasonable way.

But the relationships between NGOs and corporates are very strained. I was watching the CNBC debate with Greenpeace and Gurcharan Das. There was no dialogue. They were fighting.

Would you encourage volunteers from Hughes to work in NGOs?

Yes. Workplaces and corporate structures are changing. Ten per cent of the people are always in transition. They could always assist NGOs. Young people are more aware of how they want to spend their money, time and work. They are becoming conscious. So we have to change.

How do you make sure that corporates influence policy for the larger good?

In today's world, capital, policy or technology is just one leg. There are three or four more legs -- corporate social responsibility, showing respect and being communicative. People will prefer to go with a well-rounded brand. The vehicle for that is partnership.

To be real it's got to be business first

Viraf M Mehta is the Chief Executive of Partners in Change an NGO that is an offshoot of Action Aid and is in the business of building strategic alliances between non-profits and the corporate sector. Mehta is a social anthropologist who trained abroad but chose to work in India and spent several years in Tisco building community and industry interfaces. He then moved to the Tata Council for Community Initiatives and has spent about 20 years in the company.

Should non-profits work with corporates?

NGOs need to "engage" with profit making activity. They should do it within a framework of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). If we are on a common page, then there are dozens of roles that an NGO could play to help a corporate. They could be consumer organisations, local bodies, trade organisations, environmental NGOs and so on.

One strategy could be opposing a company. Such organisations are essential. There is no evidence that large companies behave responsibly without the Government mandating them to or civil society opposing them. These are watchdogs that should confront companies with pieces of information that they are not willing to reveal.

The other part is to be prepared to work with companies in a direct way to support

business effort. In policy articulation, refining their community initiatives or their employee related policies. But one needs to have a clear view. The most base level is to look at corporates as donors. That means don't "engage", don't "partner", don't "oppose". The private sector is growing and so the need to go beyond is increasing.

But in the Tatas, since the late 1980s we transformed our community initiatives from a philanthropy driven model to policies driven by sustainable business interest. We then called it corporate citizenship. And the proof of the pudding is that Tisco is a globally competitive company, in a sunset industry in a third world country.

'In the Tatas, since the late 1980s, we transformed our community initiatives from a philanthropy driven model to policies driven by sustainable business interest. We then called it corporate citizenship.'

How does one engage?

Many Indian companies are looking at rural markets. They should develop their rural market strategy in consultation with us. First if you are engaging with an NGO to empower women in rural areas, you should make sure that your policies are gender friendly in the city. Demonstrate that with the ratio of women in your workforce. If you are going to empower women in rural areas, should you not do it in the city first?

Then you may want to work in micro finance and use an NGO or a self-help group as a channel. It has after all been proved that in this market the repayment rate is high and the risk is low. You have to make sure that the women in these groups, who take loans, are not exploited by the men. It has to be ensured that they are really borrowing money on their own accord for a legitimate purpose. You have to work with them on income generation so they can pay back the loans.

Take another case of a consumer company wanting to sell products through self-help groups. It is a great idea to cut middlemen out. It is great that they are encouraging women to come forward and open bank accounts. But the plastic packing is not biodegradable. Somebody has to work on picking it up and collecting it.

The rural consumers have to be made aware. The health warnings and instructions have to be in the local languages. Companies also have to spend time researching the social negatives.

The problem is that company business models are top down. Local community is not an equal power partner. You need a mediator.

What do you think of the Beyond Business Initiative?

"Beyond Business" is at the heart of what misleads people. The world over corporate social responsibility is about how you conduct business. If you are engaging in philanthropy, charity or giving, the title is fine. But this is about business.

My predecessor Shankar Venkateswaran said that it was not about how profits are spent but about how profits are made. If I'm a CSR enlightened company and you approached me with this initiative I would not entertain it.

A company benefits by their volunteers working in the community. They get to understand their labour markets; they even get a pulse of their own markets. Social responsibility is strategic. Aren't honesty, leadership and teamwork in a business strategic?

At Amlasole, tribals die, no one cares

Rina Mukherji
Amlasole

Every weekend, tourists arrive at the Kankrajhore forest reserve from Jamshedpur and Kolkata to rest in the wild. Deep inside the forest is a tribal hamlet called Amlasole where nobody wants to go. Since the past six months, Lodhas and Sabars, denotified tribes who live in Amlasole and 76 other villages in Jhargram sub-division, have been dying of starvation.

"People die at this time every year," says Balai Nayek, secretary of the Lodha Sabar Kalyan Samity. Surprisingly, no NGOs work here except for the Right to Food network consisting of the Shramajibi Mahila Samiti and Krishi Mazdoor Samiti. The reason is roads are non-existent and transport hard to find.

The tribals survive by collecting firewood, sal and kendu leaves. A few goats and poultry are their only possessions. They live in flimsy huts propped up with bamboo poles and covered with babui grass. Inside there are a few pots, pans and a bucket. Children are naked and the women cover themselves with a piece of cloth.

Water is a luxury. Tribals depend on mountain streams in the forests. These dry up in summer, leaving a few puddles behind. Women use gamchas (thin muslin cloth) to strain the water and use it for washing and drinking.

Although the area is under the National Watershed Development Project and lift irrigation schemes have been planned, nothing has been done. "These schemes are all defunct," admits Block Development Officer (BDO) Subhashis Bej.

Maternal mortality is high and impoverished parents find it hard to keep their children. Boys are given away as bhatua - a system of bonded labour where the child works for his master for a meager sum, two square meals and clothing. Forget Below the Poverty level cards (BPL), many don't even possess a ration card. Schooling is a distant dream. There are hardly any health care facilities despite an Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) in operation here.

Dr Benoy Kumart Mahato, a homoeopath, has been providing medical services to the Lodhas and Sabars for the past 15 years under the ITDP. He shells out money from his own pocket for them. "I earn an honorarium of Rs

Water is a luxury. Tribals depend on mountain streams in the forests or on puddles in summer



Tribals at the local government hospital

500 a month. Another Rs 400 is given by the government for medicines. This amount was fixed some 15 years ago. No revision has been made though the costs of medicines have gone up. I come here twice a week and attend to 400 patients. The government pays me Re 1 per patient."

There is a government hospital here. But conditions are appalling. There are 15 beds for 88 patients. Subhashis Bej said more people were sick since this was the peak of the malaria season. There are no lights in the dirty, dinghy corridors.

Patients lay in abysmal conditions. Thirty-year old Shambhu Sabar of Banspahari, suffering from tuberculosis, had been admitted a couple of days ago and condescendingly allotted sleeping space in the verandah. He was lying on a dirty sheet, too weak to protest. His bed was opposite a garbage dump. His mother, Sarathi Sabar, had died of TB that morning in the hospital.

Patients who had the luxury of a bed were hardly better off. The iron bedsteads were covered with dirty bed sheets and filthy pillows. Some were minus sheets and

pillows. Patients complained that nurses rudely brushed them off if they asked for help at night. But nurses did not attend to patients even during the day. Kalipada Mura was being injected with saline drip on the floor. Malnourished and suffering from gastroenteritis he was lying on a rag in the corridor. His wife was struggling hard to keep swarming flies away from his open mouth.

Sick children were denied admission. Sixty-year-old Kajal Sabar was shooed away when she approached the hospital to admit her four-year-old grandson, Sujan Sabar, who had been diagnosed with malaria.

It was Kailash Mura, CPM Banspahari panchayat member who blew the whistle on the starvation deaths. Mura's native Banspahari is the worst affected, along with Jamboni and adjoining areas. Media attention has improved things slightly. The BDO claimed to have distributed 12 kg of rice per family, but residents in Amlasole said they received only around 6.5 kg each.

Another major problem the tribals face is the presence of the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and People's War (PW). The police and Border Security Force (BSF) have cordoned off the forest, making it impossible for the Lodha Sabars to enter. If they try to collect sal leaves they are arrested as informers or sympathisers.

When bhatuas like Madan Sabar or Pradeep Mura are picked up, they face the worst torture in custody, until they shell out amounts ranging from Rs 500 to Rs 3000 - a princely sum for a bhatua earning a meagre Rs 100 a year from his master.

To rein in the MCC, the administration has reduced the amount paid for kendu leaves from Rs 24 a kg to Rs 12, to ensure that impoverished tribals don't have any money to pass on to the MCC. This has worsened incomes for the tribals. Many have never had more than a single meal for days. They survive even otherwise on iguana lizards (gosaap), ants (kurkut) and jungle cats.

The other problem is the mindset of the administration towards the Lodha, Sabar and Kheria tribals. The British notified them as criminal tribes under the Criminal Tribes Act. In 1952, the Indian government did denotify them but attitudes have not changed.

Sweeping unpleasant facts under the carpet will not do. West Bengal's chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has acknowledged there is a problem. Justice should be done by restoring the historic rights of the Lodhas and Sabars to the Kankrajhore forest.

Charkha Development Communication Network

Child editor loves his job

Champalal Kushwaha
Bhopal

WHEN children create their own magazine or newspaper using their own creative resources, the zeal and the happiness they exude fills onlookers with an incomparable thrill. Eklavya, an educational institution in the Hoshangabad district of Madhya Pradesh is carrying out such an experiment with remarkable success since the last several years. Eklavya's children groups - known as Bal Samooh - have been conducting various activities like origami (preparing paper toys), clay toys, plays, poetry, comics and cartooning at 15 places.

Children's groups are doing important work by tapping the talent of children with limited resources available locally and providing them a proper forum. Eklavya monitors the overall activity. Similar work is being done successfully at Dewas in Bhopal. In Hoshangabad, children are active at Pothia, Bairakhedi, Hirankhera, Bagratwa and Mahendrabadi villages.

The Wall Magazine is a communication tool where children either write their own compositions or cut and paste compositions and pictures from other sources with a title, place and a date for giving it the semblance of a wall magazine or a newspaper.

Editorial inputs with names of the editorial team are duly acknowledged. It is then pasted or displayed at some public place for readers of all sections and age groups of society.

Preparing the Wall Magazine isn't simply mechanical report writing or presenting the information in an attractive manner but also aims at inspiring creativity and communication as well as inculcating a sense of civic and social responsibility at an early age. Wall magazines provide them with a forum, which they own and where their writ holds sway; a very effective form of self-expression for them. The medium, although created by the children, is read by adults too.

"Binna" being brought out by Gram Sewa Samiti, Rohna, edited by a free lancer Sushil Joshi is related to sociological issues and has served as an effective

forum for the community. It has provided an alternative media. Though, Wall Posters are confined to the children's groups, efforts are being made to take up similar experiments in schools as well so that these could provide children an opportunity for expression as well as recreation after the tiresome process of formal learning. It will probably revive the zest for creativity among them.

The Wall Magazine has helped children to articulate the problems of their village and identify important issues. The Hirankheda children's group works in the Sivani Malva tehsil of Hoshangabad district.

The child editor of the Wall Magazine, Ashutosh Luteria loves his job and really enjoys bringing his magazine out with his teammates. He says, "I like my magazine more than printed newspapers." It is evident that despite its limited access, the Wall Magazine is very effective. Many voluntary organizations have tried it, yet it needs to be taken on a larger scale and brought out more professionally.

Charkha Development Communication Network

Near yet apart in Kashmir

Ishfaq-ul-Hassan
Srinagar

If there is one thing which touches the hearts of politicians and separatists in Kashmir it is the separation of families divided by the Line of Control (LoC). Fifty-three years after the state was divided, politicians say it's about time people were allowed to meet each other.

"It has been a painful experience for my family," says Moulvi Mohammed Abbaas Ansari, Hurriyat Conference chairman. "Separation is a wound, which can only heal after reunion with loved ones. Apart from being a political dispute, Kashmir is a human issue. It needs a cure very fast."

Ansari is the leading voice in the soft border movement. Half his family lives across the LoC. His uncle Ashiq Hussain Ansari migrated to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) in 1947. A highly educated man he became a settlement commissioner in Muzaffarabad. But tragedy struck. "My aunt died in PoK and I could not go. We came to know about this tragic news late. We offered just fathe (prayers for the dead). She was the eldest in our clan. We regret we could not participate in her last rites," he says.

Ansari's father-in-law Syed Mohammed Abbaas also settled in PoK. "He solemnized a second marriage and had two sons. A few years ago, he came here and died. His sons could not come and we performed his last rites. It is painful for them to be absent at their father's funeral."

Some family members migrated because of their polit-

ical ideology. Others were forced to go. Ansari is an important man today but his heart longs to meet his kin. "I visited Pakistan in 1993 to participate in the meeting of the Organization of Islamic Countries. It gave me a chance to meet my relatives in Muzaffarabad, Gilgit, Sakardu and other parts of Pakistan."

Another senior leader of the Hurriyat Conference, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq is likewise separated from his family. About half his loved ones, including his uncle, have migrated to PoK.

Mainstream politicians too feel sad and lonely. Syed Bashir Ahmad, J&K's minister of state for roads and bridges and a senior leader of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) is another victim. His father Syed Abdul Gani, a religious scholar and a revered figure, is buried in Lala Musa, district Gujarat in Pakistan's Punjab province.

Gani had a large following in Pakistan and PoK. "He was traveling to and fro till 1952. After that borders closed and restrictions were imposed," he says. In 1984 Gani passed away. Despite being a senior political worker, Syed Bashir Ahmad could not go. "When I finally got the visa for 15 days, his last rites had been performed. All I could do was offer fathe and return. I could not perform the last rites of my father, who was a revered figure in the sub-continent," he rues.

"We Kashmiris are so close yet so far," says Mohammed Shafi Uri, a senior National Conference leader. His story dates to the tribal invasion of 1947. His cousin Aisha Begum fled to Muzaffarabad with her husband. After that they did not hear from her.

In 1983 she died and Shafi's family came to know a year later. "She was a jewel in our crown. We applied for visas. My mother got hers but I was refused since I am a political worker. After a long fight I was granted one. But we could only pray and sympathise with her children. We live in Uri and they in Muzaffarabad. Under normal circumstances it would have taken us a few hours to reach," he says. Shafi's daughter got married last year and just one cousin brother made it to the wedding from PoK.

Political leaders are ready to put politics aside for their cause. They want road links reopened and families to visit. "Make the two parts of Kashmir a free zone where people can meet each other," says Moulvi Mohammed Abbas Ansari.

"We know unless the Kashmir issue is solved this problem cannot be settled fully. But meanwhile let roads including the Uri-Muzaffarabad, Kargil-Sakardu, Jammu-Saalkot routes be reopened. There should be no passport system or visa restrictions. People must be allowed to travel freely, akin to Nepal."

Syed Bashir Ahmad believes reopening of road links will be a huge confidence building measure. "My party is championing this cause because we realise the pain of the people who are separated. Kashmir is a human issue."

Mohammed Shafi Uri agrees. "People at the top fear if there is any free movement along the LoC it will become a de facto international border. We need to evolve a mechanism to bring families together. India and Pakistan have to unite on this."

Ishfaq-ul-Hassan is a fellow with Charkha Development Communication Network



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Ethiopia prefers to go organic

Sue Edwards
Addis Ababa

Encouraged by the success of its Tigray project, the Ethiopian government has launched a national campaign to help farmers switch to organic cultivation.

The Tigray project was started in 1996 by the Bureau of Agriculture and Natural Resources (BoANR) to help marginal farmers, including women, improve productivity. The project proved that farmers could produce and use compost and that Ethiopia could enter the international market for organic products in a bigger way.

Last year, the government announced a task force to draw up an Ethiopian Organic Agriculture Regulation, which can become law, and a Regulation for Organic Agriculture Products to describe how organic products are defined, and what may or may not be used in their growing and processing.

The documents covers crop and animal production, as well as food processing and marketing, with the second providing the basis for a local organic certification scheme.

The international trade in organic products is an expanding niche market that Ethiopia is geographically well situated to exploit. Already, some communities in the south and southwest have started to grow and export Arabica coffee with an organic and fair trade label.

A domestic market for organic products is also growing. The expanding middle-class and expatriate community especially in Addis Ababa is more aware about the importance of healthy fruits and vegetables.

For example, Genesis Farm started three years ago and production already covers over 40 ha. The farm combines dairy and poultry production with growing vegetables, fruits and ornamental plants. It is totally organic and sells certified products to the export market. It is interesting to note that none of the items sold by Genesis are more expensive than locally produced items. Some are actually cheaper.

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Should governments think like corporates?

ONE has often wondered about the contradictions between the corporate structure and the democratic society within which it exists. The former a strictly hierarchical autocracy with its decision-making process controlled by a handful at the top while the other has leaders duly elected by the populace.

The contradictions seem further magnified when confronted with the preoccupation of modern day governments with national economies and the necessity of providing employment and livelihood to the same populace.

When a better part of the economy is privatised it becomes more than obvious who eventually provides employment. The resulting relationship between government and the corporate world becomes a highly questionable one. At best it is one of compromise. Increasingly, it is becoming harder to tell them apart.

The intellectual argument justifying such economic inequality has always been that of meritocracy. It is considered tautological to even question that success isn't proof enough of such merit. Success - the theory would have us believe - has little to do with one's circumstance of birth or the vagaries of life. We are meant to believe that lineage of aristocracy had given way to the solely deserving, the truly meritorious and the worthy. The parallel rise of political democracy, with votes for one and all, had us fooled for a while.

Today we find that economic success has little to do with merit in any recognisable form. Those who have cornered the key functional areas of our society are successful. Those who could not, or more significantly, did not care to, because they have goals other than economic and financial ones, are relegated to the periphery of society as losers whose very failure is the incontrovertible proof of his laziness and stupidity.

Such worship of wealth in a globalised culture is rapidly spreading as incomes of those at the helm of corporations rise exponentially defying all links between pay and performance. What was once a strictly American phenomenon is now also a European one. It is one thing to reward executives for taking the company forward, but surely ridiculous to repeatedly find them being rewarded for fail-

ure. One rarely finds a CEO with a contract that doesn't provide for a golden parachute, a euphemism for his bailing out after crash landing the mother ship, turning the rules of meritocracy on its head. As a matter of fact provisions for failure are negotiated even before the job begins. No moral compunction demands a Lord Jim of him - neither from society nor from the Captain of the company himself.

Sir Peter Davis of Sainsbury is one of many such cases in point. His parting from Sainsbury (the Grocery King in the UK) after leading it to significant decline resulted in payoffs of close to Euros 20m. It was discovered that he even gave himself a bonus for finding a replacement for himself. When society worships wealth this becomes their morality so why are we shocked? The wealthy now have a new accomplice, the poor. One researcher in the USA was amazed to find that

those in the ghetto weren't resentful of the super rich because they fantasised being one of them in the future. "Who wants to be a millionaire" is not only the most popular TV gameshow on both sides of the Atlantic it is a compass of our morality. How can we grudge the rich becoming richer, by any means, when we are merely waiting our turn to do the same?

The Europeans tried hard to make amends for some of its more belligerent governments (i.e. UK, Italy, Spain, Poland...) joining Bush's "Coalition of the Willing," by awarding the prestigious Palme d'Or to Michael Moore's documentary 'Fahrenheit 9/11' and thereby enabling some much needed truth telling to the American people. The film was released in UK, France and several other European countries a week after it recording breaking release in the USA.

I was fortunate to see it in its original version and feel that it is bound to raise numerous questions in the minds of viewers who haven't any vested interest in the Bush Government. Likewise, it provides further arguments - if at all any are needed - to the European population as to why their governments should have taken a stand against the United States.

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Biotech has yet to fulfil its promises

By Claire Robinson
San Francisco

BIOTECHNOLOGY is the answer to problems ranging from hunger in Africa and Asia to obesity in the West, trumpeted the industry's promotional showcase, the BIO 2004 conference, which took place in San Francisco in June.

But not everyone was persuaded. This year's media coverage of the annual event was decidedly cynical. "Most of what I'm looking for here is in the 'promise' category - and has been each year I come to this ever larger industry fete," wrote David Ewing, reporter of the San Francisco Chronicle.

Disappointment at the biotech industry's unfulfilled promises is reflected in its falling bottom line. As the New Zealand Herald said, "Investment in genetically modified food is drying up in the world's biggest GM market, the United States, because consumers in the rest of the world are not willing to buy its products." Roger Wyse of Burrill and Company, the biggest investment firm on life sciences, said consumer backlash against GMOs had

forced a lull.

"Last year, this industry lost \$5.4 billion and has lost a staggering \$57.7 billion since BIO last held its annual conference in San Francisco in 1994, according to an Ernst and Young study. Only a few companies have been consistently profitable in the 30 years since biotech was born-- a few, such as Amgen and Genentech, fantastically so. Remove them, and the losses and numbers are far worse for the rest of the industry," remarked Ewing.

Even the usually biotech-bullish Wall Street Journal drove home the point. Entitled "Biotech's dismal bottom line: More than \$40 billion in losses", the journal said: "Biotechnology may yet turn into an engine of economic growth and cure deadly diseases. But it's hard to argue that it's a good investment. Not only has the biotech industry yielded negative financial returns for decades, it generally digs its hole deeper every year."

After a three-year slump, biotech companies raised \$1.5 billion from new stock offerings in the first quarter of 2004, almost three times the level of a year earlier. So BIO was able to boast that while major stock indexes have slipped this year, the Nasdaq Biotech Index had edged up

about six percent at close of markets on June 2. In the absence of consumer take-up of its products, selling stocks has become a biotech industry lifeline. Only 12 of the 50 largest biotechs turned a profit in 2003. Biotech drugs have long provided a refuge of hope for investors wary about the prospects for agricultural biotech.

The promise of lucrative magic bullets against intractable diseases attracted those who kept faith in the genetic determinist model of illness. Biotech pioneers stoked investor enthusiasm by arguing that since biotech drugs are often versions of human proteins, genetic engineering could cut short the long safety trials that traditional drugs go through.

But that didn't turn out to be the case, and most genetically engineered medications take 10 to 15 years to win approval, much the same as other drugs. At the turn of the millennium, hopes rose when deciphering of the human genome appeared to herald a new age of treatments tailored for individual genetic differences. This sparked an incredible 170% rise in biotech stock prices in just four months -- followed by a steep crash over the next year.

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PERSPECTIVES

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

Govt's task on Day 1: 100 days of work

ARUNA ROY

AS we get over a round of celebrating the wonder of Indian democracy and come to terms with another instance of peaceful but dramatic change, it is a good time to look at what we can expect from this coalition government, and what we need to look at collectively as a nation. There are issues about which the debate is likely to continue: Was it a vote against reforms? Was it a vote against Hindutva? Was it an anti-incumbency vote? There are nevertheless issues that are beyond debate and need to be urgently addressed.

The 14th Lok Sabha has a difficult task to perform. The electorate has given a mandate based on unemployment, hunger, indebtedness, the desire for self-reliance.

The "Common Minimum Programme" of the ruling coalition has made specific assurances. The credibility of this government rests on having these "minimum assurances" fulfilled, quickly and effectively. The government has two primary avenues open to demonstrate its seriousness on the various assurances it has made.

The first is through appropriate legislation/legal mechanisms to put its policies into place. The other is through requisite monetary allocations to priority areas. Budgetary allocations are obvious indicators of real intent, and if the current budget is anything to go by, many of the priority areas of the common minimum programme have been left horribly underfunded.

The debate following the presentation of the budget has also been very restricted and exclusive. One of the biggest mistakes any government can make in a democratic framework is to cut itself off from the opinions, views, and reactions of common people. The last government paid the price, and its leaders are still trying to understand the reasons for its defeat. Rulers very easily convince themselves that they are being open, consultative, transparent, and accountable, without asking themselves to whom.

In the recent past the government has begun consultations on the economy with industry and business representatives. It is time these consultations were made broad based and taken to those sections of society who have no opportunity to express their opinion except at the ballot box. An effort must be made to not just consult representatives of farmers, and workers, but the process of policy formulation, debates about financial allocations and the formulation of important legislation must be done by involving the people themselves.

The UPA government already has a mandate to implement certain important measures. Those in government must realise that the acts and programmes will have to be put in place and implemented in consultation with people who are going to benefit from the programmes. Whether it is the extremely significant promise of a national Employment Guarantee Act ensuring 100 days employment to all households, the assurance of a more open and accountable democracy through a stronger Right to Information Act, a stronger panchayati raj structure with real powers to the Gram Sabha, strengthening of the beleaguered farm sector, strengthening of the public distribution system, or education and nutrition guarantees through government schools and aanganwadis.

These are all issues on which minimum guarantees should have been provided to our citizens with independence. Even the capitalist countries that our rulers are now trying so hard to ape, ensured the livelihood basics years ago. The fact that in India these remain fundamental concerns even today should make us think not just about the questions, but also about the manner in which we have sought solutions. If we want to do any more than merely pay lip service to these concerns we need to more fundamentally involve people in finding the solutions. The transparency of government functioning

cannot be restricted to post facto reviews of expenditure. The nature of a true democracy will have to be built into all acts of interface with the people. From village panchayats to national development — policy will have to be shaped in consultation with the beneficiaries. Basic needs like schooling and health care will have to be looked at not only in terms of curricula and recruitment of teachers and doctors but in terms of performance.

Even more importantly, those who are asked to pay the price for "development" must be consulted if we are to prevent the continued pauperisation of many for the benefit of a few. The needs of the most adversely affected tribals living in remote areas will have to be addressed. To amplify the voice of the marginalised, there must be emphasis on protecting the common person's right to protest against inefficiency corruption and injustice. Government servants proverbially prone to taking it easy will have to be made accountable not by replacing government by the even less accountable private sector, but by making officials directly answerable to ordinary people.

There will have to be a review of the process of privatising the service sector.

State responsibility for health and education has a critical significance in a poor country. In this process the accountability of all concerned — the NGOs, the private sector and even political parties is vital. Affluent policy makers need to understand that the helplessness of a marginalised and poor individual vis-à-vis a powerful state functionary is multiplied several times when that role is performed by a private sub-contractor whose primary motive is profit. The need once again is to listen to the beneficiaries, who are asking for greater accountability from the State — not the convenient abdication of its primary responsibilities.

The country cannot project only the concerns of the rich and substantiate the notion of well being on the basis of ten percent of its population. The concerns of development, skewed and so heavily weighed in favour of the rich in the last ten years, have to be reviewed and modified. If fluctuations of the stock markets make the middle class scared, it should worry even more about the future of a country in which millions go hungry and have little hope of employment or housing. Such stark inequalities aren't the foundations

on which stable markets are built. There is no logic or justice in the poverty of millions. This cannot be a matter of indifference to a democratically elected government. The numbers of suicides of farmers, weavers and bankrupt small entrepreneurs, will only multiply the guilt of an already overburdened conscience of a nation. When villagers battle Coke and Pepsi bottling plants because of the threat to groundwater sources, we have to ask ourselves what our priorities are. Food security, employment, schooling, drinking water, and sustainability, are the primary indicators of the country's well being.

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The wealth of the nation belongs to its people, even more explicitly in a democratic framework. Not even an elected government can tamper with this sovereignty of its people. Selling away natural resources indiscriminately has and will corrode the self-reliance of the nation. And if we really mean to take decentralisation seriously can we ignore the people's right to control and own their natural resources, and whether the Panchayat so much a part of the propaganda of pride, be just allowed to be one more figurative decoration in the annals of democracy.

Aruna Roy is a Rajasthan based activist who works with the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) and the National Campaign for the Peoples Right to Information (NCPRI). Email: mksrajasthan@yahoo.com



Aruna Roy spreading the MKSS message

Let legislators be legislators

ARVIND KEJRIWAL



The Right To Know

One of my friends asked me the other day, "How is the new MP of your area? Do you think he will deliver?" For a moment, that set me thinking. What is an MP or an MLA supposed to do? What are his duties and what powers does he have?

The Constitution lays down distinct roles for the Legislature and the Executive. The Executive is supposed to run day to day governance. The legislature performs two important functions. It is supposed to make good laws. It is also supposed to keep a

check on the executive. As a member of the Legislature, an MP or an MLA is to ensure that the government is run in accordance with the laws by asking questions in the Legislature, by actively and intelligently participating in debates within Legislature and by holding the Executive accountable through various Legislative Committees, of which he is a part. This is what the Constitution wanted a Legislator to do.

But suppose legislators started running the government. Then who would keep a check on them? The last decade or so has seen more and more Executive powers being conferred upon the legislators. The Constituency Development Fund is one such example. Every legislator gets roughly Rs 2 crores (for MLAs, it varies from state to state) every year to spend on the

development of his constituency. In the state of Meghalaya, the MLA even issues letters to the contractors awarding them works, which have to be carried out of these funds. In Delhi, the MLAs are required to draw up the lists of beneficiaries of old age pension and widow pension. A number of legislators are co-opted in the Executive by making them members or chairpersons of various Boards or government companies.

In normal situation, any wrong work done by the government would be questioned in the Legislature. But glaring discrepancies brought to the notice of the nation in the use of constituency development fund by the CAG year after year do not cause any flutter in Legislature because the legislators themselves are at fault. Transparency International India, C. M. Michael from Meghalaya and several others have filed PILs in Supreme Court for scrapping of Constituency Development Fund scheme precisely for these reasons.

Recent times have seen an increasing trend of co-option of legislators into Executive. This trend has dangerous ramifications as it breaks down the internal checks and balances envisaged in the constitution. Parivartan sought lists of beneficiaries of old age pension and widow pension under the Delhi Right to Information Act for a small area in Delhi and found several discrepancies including bogus entities etc.

When action was demanded, we were told that no official is guilty as the lists were drawn up by the local MLA. Whom do you complain against the MLA? In Delhi, even the forms for these pensions are available only with the MLAs. The personal staff of some of the MLAs sell these forms, when the forms are supposed to be available free. Further, the forms are given only to their party

supporters. Where do you complain? The normal vigilance machinery has no powers to proceed against legislators. Since the legislators themselves are indulging in these practices, the issue will never be raised in the Legislature.

A common citizen also needs to understand the role of a legislator. People rush to their elected representative whenever there is any problem in their area, including water, sanitation, electricity etc. A legislator is expected to provide solution to every problem. He is expected to call up the local government officials and order them to rectify the problem.

But that is not the role of a legislator. By doing this, a legislator directly interferes in the day to day functioning of the Executive, which he is not supposed to do. And by rushing to our local elected representative for every such problem, we are encouraging this trend. The people are expected to approach the local officials for redressal of their problems.

If they do not get a solution, then the elected representative is expected to either raise the issue in Legislature or seek a solution from the concerned Minister. However, I do not think any legislator follows this process.

The day to day interference of the legislators in the functioning of the local officials has become so rampant that it is commonly perceived to be their legitimate role. If any legislator refuses to do that, he is taken to be an insensitive and inefficient person.

But all this makes the role of a legislator quite unglamorous and dry. Following the above process would also need a lot of patience and understanding of constitution and democratic processes. How many of the present day legislators would qualify that?



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But what happened to reforms?

RAM GIDOOMAL



Through NR Eyes

wisdom after the sensational outcome of the May elections says that 'it is the poor what won the elections for Congress!' But to interpret the surprise election victory as the triumph of one explanation over another is being over simplistic argues Fareed Zakaria, the Newsweek columnist: rural poverty has declined sharply in 15 years and the election results were too messy. "Like soothsayers reading chicken entrails," he concludes, "political elites have used the vote to trumpet their own message - and some influential leaders in the Congress party...still believe in the old gospel of state socialism."

I was of course delighted to see that the Finance Minister has proposed to send development funds directly to locally-elected district bodies, to circumvent huge layers of bureaucracy and patronage. As a Christian Democrat, I whole heartedly agree that decision making should be delegated to the lowest levels and should be taken higher up only when necessary and appropriate.

The other important question regarding the budget is how all the additional expenses proposed are to be paid for, e.g. the doubling of bank lending to farmers, food subsidies, speeding up of irrigation projects, reviving rural infrastructure funds and encouraging farmers to diversify to oilseed to stem edible oil imports are all welcome initiatives but it is not clear how the budget deficit is going to be cut.

Despite new taxes on higher earners and some incentives for foreign investors, boosting defence spending by 30 per cent does not send encouraging signals either to neighbouring Pakistan or indeed to overseas investors. But I am reminded by friends in the subcontinent that India needs to engage in a delicate balancing act when it comes to setting its defence budget because of the apparently huge appetite for military equipment of its other neighbour, China. NRIs, especially those born in the Diaspora may not necessarily remember this aspect of India's history.

Talking of which, I have just received my invitation to the third Pravasi Bharatiya Divas that is being held in Mumbai in January 2005. While the first event succeeded by virtue of its novelty, the second struggled to hold the interest of NRI's despite its focus on youth. Future events should consider providing opportunities to be refreshed about our Indian heritage and culture and ensure that actions agreed are followed up and reported on to all delegates. It is also imperative that investment and trade are given a high priority as I am sure that NRIs wholeheartedly endorse Mr. Chidambaram's statement that "The key to growth is investment. Public and private, domestic and foreign."

I asked some members of London's NRI community what they would have liked to have seen in the new budget. While it is not the place of the Diaspora to dictate India's economic policy, the NRI community was keen to see more radical reforms - immediate action on privatisation, slashing of a whole range of subsidies and reform of labour laws to name but a few. But what many NRI's continue to find frustrating is the bureaucracy and red tape; poor public services and infrastructure. All this makes investing in India a challenge for many potential NRI investors. The promised one stop shop for inward investors is yet to become a reality and this goal must be pursued with urgency.

The basic problem is obsession with control on the part of the political and administrative elite which demonstrated its economic incompetence over some forty years till

awaited news of Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram's first budget speech on behalf of India's new ruling coalition with great anticipation. Would he take his cue from what Prime Minister Manmohan Singh did when he was Finance Minister? At that time Manmohan Singh launched India on its historic programme of market liberalisation and administrative reform initiating policies that have seen growth rates double to 8 per cent within a decade.

But it would appear that efforts to placate powerful parliamentary partners representing India's poorest have produced a budget that is, as one newspaper in the UK reported, "Populist with a few token sops to international investors..."

The incoming coalition, led by the Congress Party, appears to have responded to the cry of the rural poor who have felt left behind in India's new boom. Perceived



1991. The progress since 1991 indicates that the sooner this elite gives up control more completely the better it will be for the country. So why does this elite not relinquish control faster? The simple reason is that they risk losing the possibility of bribes.

If India does not move with urgency to tackle this issue it risks losing the goodwill of many willing NRIs. I speak with some personal experience bearing the scars of past investment attempts but nevertheless persisting because of my firm belief that working together we can help fight social injustice and help India take its rightful place in the global economy.

There may be lessons that Indian politicians can pick up from the British scene. It is exciting to see plans for a Bollywood academy in the UK to harness and nurture the talents of NRI youngsters. Plans are currently afoot to set up an Indo-British Arts group. We have so far just scratched the surface when it comes to fusion art and culture and fusion food and design. I was struck by paintings shown at an exhibition at the Nehru centre in London by the renowned Indian artist Ramesh Darji who has set up shop in London

following his brilliant success in Holland. His work demonstrates the creativity that is just beginning to be unleashed when members of the NRI community work with those from the subcontinent.

Nitin Sawhney working with artists in India has demonstrated what is possible in fusion music. Anish Kapoor's works are now being promoted beyond Britain and Europe to the USA. I have been involved with the production of an Indo British fusion musical of MM Kaye's bestselling 'The Far Pavilions' scheduled to open in London's West End next year. NRI investors including Arjun Waney (who is also the co-producer), have joined hands with mainstream theatre investors, led by John Whitney (former chair of Andrew Lloyd Webber's The Really Useful Group who launched Bollywood Dreams) to make this dream a reality.

If Indian culture in Britain undeniably gains from such collaboration with NRI and western entrepreneurs, then Indian society has nothing to fear from them either. In fact, everyone will gain much more from the resulting prosperity, including those in the current elite who have their mind fixed on bribes, manipulating markets and other such nefarious practices which still dominate India along with the shameful Hinduism sanctioned practice of caste.

While Mr. Chidambaram has produced a budget that may not have upset anyone, he has done little to advance badly needed reforms. It is imperative that the new government take action not steered just by its socialist past, nor steamrollered by selfish business interests but focussed on achieving the changes necessary to help realise the dream of a fairer society for all.

RAM GIDOOMAL CBE is Chairman, South Asian Development Partnership.

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It's time govt probed some Bt facts and many Monsanto fictions

SUMAN SAHAI



In The Fields

THERE has been a great deal of controversy over the performance of Bt cotton in India. On the one hand is Monsanto-Mahyco, engaged in a massive PR exercise, putting out data that portrays Bt cotton as a runaway success. On the other hand is everybody else.

All studies done by organisations like Gene Campaign, reports submitted by state governments, independent investigations done by media teams and even data collected by central government agencies

have reported that Monsanto's Bt cotton has been a failure and farmers have by and large suffered losses.

In this backdrop, like the first year, Gene Campaign had conducted a field study on the second cotton crop, to assess the situation in Andhra Pradesh, a cotton growing state over which lies the tragic shadow of farmer suicides.

A total of 136 farm families were surveyed in the four districts of Warangal, Guntur, Mahaboobnagar and Rangareddy.

The study found that like last year, the economics of cultivating the Monsanto variety remains adverse for the farmer. Monsanto's seed is about four times more expensive than the best local cotton varieties. Since the performance is poorer, the farmers suffer a loss and often cannot even recover their investment.

However this year, we found that Andhra Pradesh, as almost all other cotton regions, was swamped with a large number of illegal variants of Bt cotton. A complicating feature in the Bt cotton situation in India is the spread of illegal varieties which originate from a variety called Navbharat 151 which was sold by Navbharat seed company without a license and bypassing the mandated official procedure.

There is chaos in the cotton fields now and nobody can say with any guarantee what actually has been cultivated in this cotton season and how much.

Like our findings in Andhra Pradesh, colleagues are reporting a similar situation from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab, in addition to Gujarat where the mixture of Bt varieties has been known to exist since at least two years.

Most farmers were not willing to admit the real name and source of the seeds they had planted since they are aware that the Navbharat derived variants are illegal and their purchase is punishable.

Almost no one had planted Monsanto's failed Mech 162 from last year. The few that did, reported the same poor results as last year. An interesting finding that we encountered was that farmers who had planted Monsanto's Mech 162 last year got poor chilly crops in those fields in the next season. Other fields of chilly where the Monsanto cotton had not been planted were not affected. This needs to be investigated.

Farmers cited fictitious names like Rasi Bt, Banny Bt,

Jalna Bt, Ratna Bt, Ankur Bt, as the cotton varieties they had planted. None of these varieties have been released for cultivation officially.

The only known Bt varieties in the pipeline are from Rasi and Ankur but they were still undergoing field trials when the 2003-04 crop was planted and were not available to farmers.

There are three distinct possibilities of what has taken place. One, that varieties like Rasi Bt, Ankur Bt and Banny Bt have actually been leaked to the farmers before completion of the required procedure and official approval, in much the same way that Navbharat 151 was.

The second possibility is that knowing such varieties are under development, farmers are using these names to cover up for the illegal Navbharat varieties that they are actually using but are afraid to admit to. Most of the Bt seeds have been procured through gray channels and neither farmers nor seed stores had either seed packets or bills of purchase to show the Gene Campaign team.

Reports of the performance of Monsanto's Bt cotton in the 2003-04 cotton season need to be taken with a pinch of salt. Gene Campaign's study in Andhra reveals that there is widespread cultivation of illegal Bt cotton in the state and reportedly in all the other cotton regions of India. It is not possible to assess the performance of individual varieties of Bt cotton anymore. Only one thing appears to be clear – all the illegal Bt cotton varieties outperform the Monsanto cotton.

Only the Guntur cotton farmers, who are on an average the larger farmers in this study, admitted that they had procured the Bt seed from Gujarat.

The third possibility is that fly by night operators are marketing spurious Bt cotton seeds which may not even contain the Bt gene. Several Bt variants are available in the market and can be procured easily, and at a much cheaper cost than Monsanto's Mech 162 or Mech 12.

The complete failure on the part of the GEAC to take action against the spread of illegal Bt cotton varieties, originating from the original Navbharat 151 has resulted in several variants becoming available to the farmers. This has been going on for at least the last four years, some say longer.

The rash of Bt cotton varieties has spread to all the cotton growing regions including Punjab, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. A number of agencies including progres-

sive farmers have backcrossed the Bt gene to local, high performing cotton hybrids.

This has resulted in a range of hybrids available in the illegal cotton seed market, with varying performance. Due to this development, it is now probably impossible to get an accurate picture of the performance of Bt and non-Bt cotton.

Only one thing seems to be emerging clearly, that most local cottons carrying the Bt gene are out performing the Monsanto varieties. Because of their better performance, farmers have assiduously sought the illegal seeds in preference.

Monsanto's unsubstantiated claims

In this situation, one cannot but wonder at the boldness of Monsanto's statements asserting the superb performance of the cotton that the farmers seem to have rejected. A recent survey commissioned by Mahyco Monsanto and conducted by the agency AC Nielsen ORGMARG, has reported outstanding performance for Bollgard, (Monsanto's Bt cotton variety) in the 2003-04 cotton season! The executive director of AC Nielsen, Mr. Inamdar, even chose to give Bollgard a resounding endorsement....."For us it has been an enlightening experience to see, at first hand, the difference that Bollgard has made in the life of India's cotton farmer."

Given the fact that the cotton fields of India are awash with a mixture of Bt cotton variants and that it is impossible to know the performance of individual varieties in this tangle, Nielsen's data must be questioned. What have they actually surveyed and what do their results mean? Knowing the reality on the ground, it would be difficult to take at face value the data that AC Nielsen has put out and their ringing endorsement of Monsanto's Bollgard.

The Nielsen study showing superlative performance for the Monsanto cotton is of a piece with the earlier, controversial and thoroughly discredited study by Qaim and Zilberman which reported an 87% increase in yield when Monsanto's Bt cotton was used! The little catch was that the Qaim and Zilberman study was done exclusively on the field trial data of Monsanto. No other data was analyzed, nor any farmers' fields studied.

We therefore have a rather curious situation where the only people praising the Monsanto varieties are Monsanto themselves. Its friends and supporters have ensured both times that these questionable data are circulated widely and enter the record as the authentic data from India. Every other agency is reporting results to the contrary, that Monsanto varieties are the worst performers when compared to good local hybrids and illegal Bt variants.

It is high time the Indian government, the GEAC particularly, woke up to this charade. A long due investigation into what is actually happening with respect to Bt cotton must be undertaken immediately and the mess has to be cleaned up. Finally someone has to get up and cancel the permission given to Monsanto's non-performing Mech varieties before the farmers are fooled any further.

E-mail: genecamp@vsnl.com, www.genecampaign.org

Leapfrogging into Pakistani hearts

Rita Anand
New Delhi

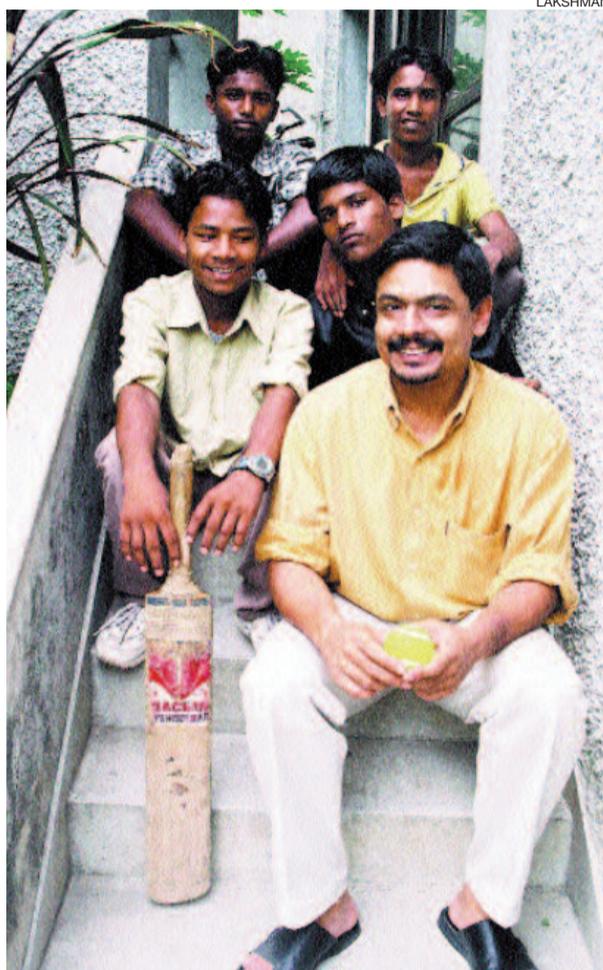
EVERYTHING looks just fine at Leapfrog, Soumya Sen's ad agency with a large, large heart. He has done the creative work for Karma Mitra, a programme launched by Action Aid, New Delhi. And then there has been this brainwave of getting street children from India to play cricket with their counterparts in Pakistan. For nearly two weeks they lived like one big happy family as they travelled across Pakistani cities.

But two months later, a strange sense of dissatisfaction seems to have gripped Soumya. He can't put his finger on it, but he gets emotional talking about that trip. "I keep thinking what I can do for street children. As a communicator, you tend to be neutral. But now a bond has formed. How can I genuinely help them? I can raise funds for smaller NGOs working with children. Perhaps I can integrate street children into schools. I have started a silkscreen painting project for them."

Soumya's transformation from ad man to activist began earlier this year. He was touring Pakistan on a peace mission with the Anhad delegation. At that time the Indian cricket team was all set to go there too. Then questions were asked about how safe it was. The media played up these fears. Pakistan kept making reassurances but at one point it looked as though the team would not set sail.

"I then got this idea of taking street children to play cricket across the border. I wanted to bring down these walls of hate and suspicion. I shared my thoughts with Anhad members, Shabnam Hashmi and Harsh Mander, and they said I should go right ahead." Then a second brainwave hit him. "Why not have a children's media team accompany the cricketers? They can be commentators and journalists."

Soumya had wanted his team's arrival to coincide with the Indo-Pak matches. But getting his idea off the ground wasn't so easy. First he had to select his team. Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan (AAA) identified 12 interested children for him. The Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) sent 14. Six children from Delhi Public School, Kerala Education Society and Ramjas also joined. So now he had a team of



Soumya Sen with some stars of his cricket team

32 from UP, Bihar, Rajasthan and Delhi.

Action Aid's office in Pakistan agreed to organise the cricket team from their end.

Next he organised a seven-day orientation programme. Gandhi Darshan offered their premises. Apart from cricket, the children learnt dance, theatre, music and cartooning. They also did yoga and sang songs of peace.

The bigger hurdle was getting passports for the street children. BBA signed up as guardians for their children.

But the others had no legal guardians or an address.

Then Amod Kanth a senior police officer and social worker informed Soumya that by law everybody is entitled to a passport. The state becomes the legal guardian of the child, if there is nobody else.

So Soumya approached the Ministry of External Affairs, (MEA) who took their own sweet time. He told his story to the media. The MEA hurriedly acted.

Since they were visiting six cities in Pakistan, it took another 12 days to get visas. An Indo-Pakistan Forum and Action Aid helped out.

Finally, Soumya and his team arrived at the Wagah border. The customs officials were stiff, he says. Suddenly an impromptu cricket match started. A window was broken. And that broke the ice. The officials were all smiles.

The children travelled with their new Pakistani friends by rail and bus, under police protection. There was absolutely nothing to fear. The children were especially eager to take a ride in police jeeps. "Their police are much nicer than ours," remarked one child.

They went to Sakkar, Lahore, Kasur, Rori, Khairpur, Larkana, Mohenjo Daro and Karachi. Everywhere they were showered with affection. At Kasur nearly 7000 people cheered waving flags and singing songs. The slogan the children chanted was "Cricket toh bahana hai, dosti ko barana hai."

In Karachi they played a night match. An interactive theatre session with children of fishermen, shared the agony families suffer when their fisher-folk cross troubled waters. They met children from NGOs, Godh and Insaaf. Everywhere the media followed but the children answered questions with panache. "One child was asked about Kashmir. He replied, I don't know about governments, but I'm loving everyone here," says Soumya.

Departure was marked with tears and flowers.

Back in Delhi, Soumya recalls one night he was woken up by a phone call from one of the children who had travelled with them to Pakistan. "The child was being harassed by the police. He actually phoned me for my help. I felt grateful and touched. It got me thinking. I started with an idea: I wanted to work for peace by bringing people together. But a far deeper bond has been formed. Maybe if I only worked on this, I'd be just fine."

Textbooks finally put in dustbin

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHEN the school history textbooks introduced by the former BJP-led government were scrapped because of their biased contents, Youth4Peace had reason to celebrate.

Even as teachers and schools toed the line and taught from the books, students of Youth4Peace showed the courage to speak up. Exams over and the BJP defeated, Youth4Peace campaigned to get the Ministry for Human Resources Development (HRD) to dump the text books and not just tinker with their contents.

They submitted a memorandum, to JS Grewal, member of the textbook review committee, appointed by the HRD ministry. It was signed by a long list of students from all over India, asking for the tainted books to be removed.

"The committee must scrap these books because not even one more batch of students should be subjected to this," said Moyna Manku, member Youth4Peace and a history student at Delhi's Gargi college. "History gives you a sense of identity and perspective. Students tend to imbibe whatever their textbooks say. But if they start absorbing biased history it will be difficult to change



LAKSHMAN

their perspective."

The HRD ministry finally removed the books and produced a list of alternatives which students could study from for this academic year. The ministry had initially dithered, saying offensive passages could be deleted. The three-member panel of historians in the review committee comprising S Settar, JS Grewal and Barun De pointed

out "cosmetic surgery" was impossible, since large chunks of the books were unacceptable. Although the committee has not put back the older textbooks, they did recommend that, in the long term, NCERT bring out model history textbooks. Authors with undisputed credentials could get together and write them.

Youth4Peace member Sahir Raza finished school this year and is interested in history. But the books he had to study from in school were full of wrong facts.

"A whole book of errors from our textbooks has been printed by the Indian History Congress," he says. "They tried to glorify Hitler. Nathuram Godse assassinated Mahatma Gandhi but this was not mentioned. Since our question papers are based on these textbooks we had to learn wrong facts to pass. Why should we be made to study history which is incorrect?"

"Those books were imposed on us in the month of September and we had to read them and pass our exams. So there is time, even now," said Kandala Singh of Springdales School, who appeared for her Class 12 exams this year.

"We, as young people, believe in love, harmony, equality and peace and we want to grow up in an atmosphere free of hatred," say Youth4Peace.

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Suresh Sharma's mission is to rescue snakes from people. Here you see him introducing his snakes to

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The four walls of marriage

RITA ANAND

IN recent years, society's invention of the family has come unstitched. More women are coming out of faceless devotion to warn the world about the pitfalls of marriage.

As author and activist Rinki Bhattacharya's book, *Behind Closed Doors: Domestic violence in India*, published by Sage, showed, the household is often a battleground and less a place for love.

"I may add a legal chapter or one on mental health in the second edition of the book," she says. Bhattacharya has gone on to become immersed in activism on the issue. Her next book is on motherhood and will be part autobiographical. "It will also be about how gifted women perceived motherhood, their experiences and so on," she says.

Her first book however, remains intensely relevant. Through the narratives of 17 women from different regions and classes, we got an insight into the private lives of victims, the choices they made, or were made for them, the humiliation they endured and how they escaped.

As Katy's narrative told us, relationships outside marriage are not necessarily a better bet. Then, urban middle-class girls like Aruna or Bina marry into conservative joint families. Freedom vanishes, there are dowry demands, the husband doesn't want to work, and the new bride gets tortured. As Deepa said in her story, "I want to caution women about being complacent, easy going and idealistic."

In all cases, the women never did anything to invite such harassment. Maya was tortured for listening to music. Aruna's husband burnt her with cigarette butts for spending time with a friend. Karuna, an elderly lady, was abandoned because her husband did not like her literary talent. Anger, jealousy, ego and unfettered power give the man freedom to do what he wants.

The process of breaking away is never easy. The men threaten to take away the children. Police, lawyers and in laws have to be fought off. Aruna had to run away with her child. Karuna lived with her daughter. In Tina's case a long legal battle followed, but her father shut her out when she won. If families support their girls, justice is easier though perpetrators are rarely punished. Society has yet to view domestic violence with the same revulsion it reserves for police torture.

Attractive and articulate, Bhattacharya has volunteered with Nari Kendra in Mumbai and helped found HELP, India's first crisis hotline for victims of domestic violence. She has also achieved recognition as a documentary film maker for Chaar



Diwari, a film on domestic violence. Excerpts from an interview: **You are not just a writer but an activist as well. Why?**

I belong to the early generation of women coming out from a cloistered life and then plunged into the vortex of violence. Among our generation, few people spoke of being abused. There were even fewer ready to listen – it was a natural outcome therefore to be involved in activism. We had to do our own awareness raising, demos, take to the streets...like women in the West. The early feminists came from "empty nests".

Do you think it is important to implement research findings?

If research is available on the subject and can be harnessed it helps create authenticity. This is true of a subject like domestic violence – where there is poor visibility and disbelief and myths that only result in the victim being blamed.

Did you find any contradictions between writing and activism?

None at all. I was able to use my skills as a writer and promote the issues dear to me – specifically issues of women's empowerment, their lack of bargaining power, domestic violence, dowry and the general question of women's status.

Do men ever ring up to complain or threaten?

Yes. Husbands of wives who reached out for help have always complained that she is mad or hysterical. Men do use threats or intimidation. We were lucky not to be troubled too much – but domestic violence workers run huge risks of being killed by violent men. In Hyderabad recently, the wife and her social support worker were stabbed to death.

Threats are real.

Have any men expressed a desire to join you and help?

They have, occasionally, but we are wary because there is always a hidden agenda. Unless the man is a professional such as a mental health expert or a lawyer, we do not accept them.

Is there any single factor which makes men more sensitive?

It helps if the male child is brought up to believe his sister, mother or female relatives are as important as him or his father. Generally a male child's socialising is based on patriarchal value patterns. But parents can change their perception by early lessons in gender sensitivity, or by giving boys kitchen utensils as toys instead of toy guns.

Hear the Valley speak out

MANISHA SOBHRAJANI



Kashmir: The Untold Story

Humra Quraishi
Penguin
Rs 250

SINCE 1989, Kashmir has rarely been out of the headlines, as militants and security forces battle it out in a region once called 'paradise on earth'. In all the propaganda, news and statistics talk about terrorist strikes, counter-insurgency operations and the foreign hand. The human stories are often lost.

"We have no respect for human psyche," said journalist Humra Quraishi at the launch of her book *Kashmir: The Untold Story*. In the author's own words, "This book is an attempt to document what the Kashmiri people have stopped talking about - the extent to which everyday life in their valley has become a struggle, at times an impossible one."

Present during the launch of the book was journalist Ajit Bhattacharjee who said, "This book brings a certain sensitivity while dealing with the human aspect never touched before. It is an essential element of trying to understand the tragedy and consequences faced by Kashmiris. The media has failed to write on the people of Kashmir."

Humra Quraishi narrates tales of mothers waiting for their young sons who disappeared years ago, picked up by the army or by militants; minds undone by the constant uncertainty and fear and daily humiliation; old harmonies tragically undermined by the atmosphere of suspicion; an entire generation of young Kashmiris who have grown up with no concept of security; and families falling apart under the strain of endless turmoil.

In Kashmiri artist Veer Munshi's words, "The horrendous events have reduced the status of the common Kashmiri to a label: secessionist, extremist, fundamentalist, militant, terrorist, migrant, refugee."

Journalist Prem Shankar Jha, recalling his days in Kashmir said, "It was difficult to sift propaganda from truth. We were bombarded with stories, most of which were manufactured. Humra's book has a certain piercing honesty about it. One feels like being in a cauldron of information."

A crafts coalition is born

Civil Society News
New Delhi

BIG events always need a comprehensive record. In March 2004, when artisans from Pakistan arrived at Dilli Haat, Delhi's famed ethnic bazaar, it was a historical moment. For the first time, artisans of both countries shared wisdom and talent to reinvent ancient crafts. Pakistani and Indian artisans became family members because working together always bonds hearts and minds.

Jaya Jaitly, president of the Dastkari Haat Samiti worked hard to make this exchange a reality. Dilli Haat, which she founded, was celebrating its tenth birthday. Instead of candles and cakes, peace and friendship were on offer. The design workshop was a big success and now similar bonding is planned with Vietnam.

While the event did find mention in the media it is important to capture it in print.

So Jaitly has published an attractive project report called *Dostkari* with eye catching visuals and informative copy. Journalist Saeed Naqvi invented *Dostkari*, a new word which combines friendship with craft.

Painted mirrors, trays, cushion covers, photo-frames, screens and floor covers were lovingly made, combining techniques and colours from both countries giving old craft products a new identity.

While Dost Mohammed of Swat carved a mirror frame, Nazir Ahmed Mir of Kashmir painted a door for it. Swat's wood carving skill blended nicely with Kashmir's art work. Riaz Ahmed, wax painter from Peshawar painted a large leaf in wax brushed with gold powder on a floor lamp while Ram Kishore a block painter from Sanganer in Rajasthan printed flower motifs on all four sides.

Finally, a *Dostkari* interior was put together. From the ceiling to the floor, it was all wrapped up in a fusion of colours from both countries: cushions, curtains, durrees, lampshades and so on. "Now this is what homes in India and Pakistan should look like,"

Bringing up the Muslim child

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

THE future of the community depends on the upbringing of our young ones. India is home to more than 140 million Muslims of diverse cultural and social origins. For Muslims, India is a country of challenges and opportunities. It is a non-Muslim country but certainly not an un-Muslim one. We can call it, if I am permitted to do so, as a proto-Muslim country. Historically, Islam and India developed a synergistic and composite culture. Indian Islam has been liberal, humane and open. This is its real strength.

Our discussion will relate mainly to children of middle class families living in urban or semi-urban areas. It is likely that both parents are educated. Of course there are cases of upwardly mobile artisan families who have achieved economic success but are not educated themselves. However they want their children to be better educated.

Muslim middle-class families in urban areas have to face communal challenges and the question of religious identity becomes important. Muslims, like others in India, have plurality of identities, religious identity being one among them. Also, there is a great deal of tension between some of these identities because of the pressures created by communal forces. Are they Indians first or Muslims? This question haunts them in schools, colleges and work places. Such pressures drive them into conservatism or even to the communal fold.

In secular educational institutions teachers are either conservative or communal. There are few who are really secular and respectful of all religions and religious identities. The school environment creates unhealthy tensions in a child's mind and confuses him. The responsibilities of the parents increase as they remain the only healthy inputs for the child.

The first requirement of education is sharpening of intellect and this can be done by encouraging inquisitiveness rather than making children conform. The best education is one which cultivates critical attitudes towards existing realities. An inquisitive and critical mind can bring healthy changes in the world. We normally discourage it in children to buy temporary peace or to guard our own little interests. That for ever suppresses childhood creativity.

A child should be made to understand that there is no conflict in having religious and national identities. One can be a good Muslim and a good Indian at the same time. It is part of Islamic faith to love one's country as the Holy Prophet has said that love of a country is part of one's faith. Great Muslim leaders like Maulana Azad, Dr. Zakir Husain and others can be their role model. They were true Muslims and great patriots and served their country with great distinction. Darul Uloom, Deoband, one of the greatest Islamic seminaries in Asia has produced many Islamic scholars who were great patriots. One can give the example of Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani and Mufti Atiqur Rahman. Maulana Abul Hasan Nadwi of Nadwat-ul-Ulama, Lucknow, is another shining example. The *imams* in the mosques should emphasise this in their sermons and cite these examples.

Even if there is a conflict with any Muslim country our loyalty must be with the country of our birth as these conflicts are political in nature, not religious. The concept of *ummah* is also spiritual, not political, as pointed out by Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani in his book 'Composite Nationalism and Islam'. Our cultural values and customs and traditions treat women as weak and inferior. Parents often desire a son. The Qur'an does not treat women as inferior and gives her equal rights. In *hadith* literature, the Holy Prophet has repeatedly emphasised love for a mother and her rights.

Though the Qur'an stressed gender equality 1,400 years ago Muslim society always practiced gender discriminatory laws. Respect for women should be cultivated by parents, through schools and by *imams* though this is a tall order. Even if parents and teachers do it, *imams* are very unlikely to do so. For that *madarsa* education needs to be re-oriented.

Another important aspect is to stress Qur'anic ethics, not only rituals. This can be done by parents and *imams*. Usually parents and *imams* lay much more stress on prayer and fasting but not much on Qur'anic ethics. The important aspects of Qur'anic ethics are justice, benevolence, compassion and wisdom. A Muslim child should be made to cultivate these Islamic virtues.

Qur'anic teachings emphasise sympathy for the weaker sections. The Qur'an talks of

eternal struggle between those who are weak and those who are powerful and Allah always favours the *mustad'ifin* (weak) and inflicts defeat on the powerful. This sympathy for the weak and a deep feeling of compassion for those who suffer should become part of children's character.

The Qur'an teaches us respect for all religions as a matter of principle. A child should be taught to respect the religious beliefs of non-Muslims. Generally a human being takes pride only in his or her religion and even looks at others' beliefs and practices as inferior. This negativity towards others results in communal tension and occasionally in the eruption of violence. It is problematic for modern, plural societies.

In all modern societies religious, linguistic and cultural pluralism has become a way of life. Every religion has a plurality of its own in the form of different sects and one must learn to respect intra-religious plurality as well. We often come across sectarian killings. Acceptance of intra-religious pluralism is as necessary as inter-religious or inter-cultural pluralism.

An attempt should be made to induce in children a desire to seek the truth. One cannot truly worship Allah without being uncompromising on the search for the truth. The quest

for truth should be carefully cultivated. It should be stressed that truth cannot be the monopoly of any one community or person. One should have an open mind as far as truth is concerned. The Holy Prophet also says that wisdom is the lost property of a *mu'min* (believer) and accept it wherever it is found. This openness will make us richer intellectually and spiritually.

Sectarianism is a curse for humanity. Islam discouraged it and stressed unity of religions. Hazrat Shah Waliyullah, Maulana Azad and other eminent Islamic thinkers have stressed *wahdat-e-din* (unity of all religions). Each religion is unique and different but not false. A positive and respectful attitude towards other religions while being firmly rooted in our own religious tradition will prove to be a great boon for humanity today.

Those who emphasise the superiority of their own religion and breed contempt for others are enemies of peace and harmony. They benefit by conflict and bloodshed. No religion can encourage hatred and bloodshed. A child should be made to love all others, besides ones own.

Sufi Islam is the most popular Islam in the Indian sub-continent and the fundamental doctrine of Sufi Islam is *sulh-i-kul* or peace with all. This doctrine of Sufism is derived from Islamic teachings on peace. Unlike the widespread impression that Islam and *jihad* go together and violence is more fundamental than peace, the truth is that peace is most fundamental to Islam and war is only incidental. Islam means establishment of peace and surrender to the will of Allah and the will of Allah is peace.

Imams and parents should inculcate the value of peace in children's minds. One should learn to live in peace and harmony with all, whatever their religion or culture. The Sufis always kept away from ruling establishments as they issued religions for their vested interests and waged wars in the name of religion. Sufis were closer to the people than to the powerful. Another important doctrine of Sufi Islam is love. Maulana Rum's poetry is full of love and so are the teachings of

all Sufi saints. For Sufis love of Allah is more central than fear of Allah. The great Sufi saint Muhyuddin Ibn Arabi known as great Sheikh said that, "my heart is the centre of love for Allah and so it is the centre of all religions which teach us to love Allah". If we can impart this doctrine of love to children our world will be a better place to live in.

The real *jihad* is to fight against one's own lust, desire and greed. *Jihad* with a sword is a small *jihad*. But *jihad* against one's own lust and greed is *jihad-i-Akbar* or the greatest *jihad*. Today consumption and consumerism have become the only accepted norm and this is the root of all evil. The capitalist system is based on lust for consumption. One spends a lifetime to earn to consume and to earn more and consume more. This makes one crazy for possessions. Life loses all higher values.

We have to teach moderation to children and the virtues of basic material necessities and spiritual richness. One needs to cultivate virtues of patience and truth which lead to inner peace and sobriety. One who strives to struggle will die with the satisfaction of achievement. To make our lives rich we should enrich others lives.

This is the essence of Islam, of all world religions and of all great civilisations in the world.



Though the Qur'an stressed gender equality 1,400 years ago Muslim society always practiced gender discriminatory laws. Respect for women should be cultivated by parents, through schools and by imams though this is a tall order.