

Civil Society



BOLD NEW CINEMA

DOCUMENTARY FILMS ARE TELLING THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH



**'WE ARE
LOOKING FOR
PEOPLE FROM
THE TRENCHES'**

Dileep Ranjekar on
the Azim Premji
University's plans

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BIRTH OF A MODERN NALANDA

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GETTING INFRASTRUCTURE RIGHT

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Naye AVASAR
Nayee UMMEED
Nayee DISHA

नए अवसर
नई उम्मीद
नई दिशा

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BOLD NEW CINEMA

Makers of documentary films are taking up themes that have been mostly outside the purview of Indian cinema. And they are earning applause for their brave creativity.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Getting to the truth

A democracy is as strong as the number of diverse voices it encourages. For all our problems and inequalities in India, growing public debate and exposés of people in the establishment are signs that we have a lot going for ourselves. The fact that we can worry aloud about the dangers to our democracy is in itself proof that it is alive. But that is not all. The past five years have seen a surge in citizen initiatives. Technology has given us mobile phones and blogs and websites on the Internet. It has also put cameras and editing capabilities in the hands of people who earlier would not have dreamed of becoming filmmakers. Similarly, the Right to Information Act has made it possible for just about anyone to challenge the government. RTI is now being employed widely in the country by ordinary folks who are fed up with corruption and want better governance. From Itanagar to Mumbai, Srinagar to Chennai, RTI is being used to bring scandals into the open.

Our cover story on documentary films in this issue shows how technology very quickly overtakes old fashioned controls. Films with strong social messages are redefining cinema's concerns. They are being produced on tiny budgets. Innovative marketing and distribution strategies ensure that they get seen globally. The stranglehold a few entrenched interests have had on the film industry has begun to loosen. More importantly, such films represent a new creativity. They challenge and embarrass governments and corporate interests with an independence which is difficult to define. Their honesty is unpremeditated and can't be ignored.

The RTI national convention held in Shillong in March gives us an idea of how the movement has grown. People undertook long journeys from 23 different states to get to distant Shillong. Many of them came from remote corners of the northeast where news of the convention reached by word of mouth. It is also interesting to see the sophistications that the RTI movement has acquired and the new leadership that is taking it forward. Its strength is in disaggregated initiatives – people using RTI in their own backyards. Centralised movements are easily weakened. But how do you silence a multiplicity of voices on issues as diverse as the Adarsh building in Mumbai and the public distribution system in Itanagar?

People believe they can demand and get greater accountability and transparency. Politicians and bureaucrats have begun to slowly accept this reality. The Indian corporate sector, long accustomed to having its way, hasn't quite figured it out. It will have to if it wants to build businesses that are relevant in the markets of the future.

Publisher
Umesh Anand

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E-2144 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon,
Haryana 122017. Ph: 9811787772
Printed and published by Umesh
Anand from A 53 D, First Floor,
Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya Nagar,

New Delhi-17. Printed at
Thomson Press (India) Ltd,
18/35 Delhi-Mathura Road.

Postal Registration No.
DL(S)-01/3255/2009-11.
Registered to post without
pre-payment U(SE)-10/2009-11
at New Delhi PSO
Registered with the Registrar of
Newspapers of India under RNI
No.: DELENG/2003/11607
Total no of pages: 40

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Life after riots

Thanks for the cover on the aftermath of the Gujarat riots. It was well researched and written. It also clears many misconceptions. Given the scenario in Gujarat (and most of India) where the majority community is the most important vote bank, I doubt the victims will receive the justice they seek in its entirety.

Ashish

Our people in India have already

wasted their energy in useless fighting. All scriptures whether it is the Gita, Quran or Bible teach us the same good things. The problem is when we start owning religion and create divisions. Fighting for economic gain is understandable and solutions can be found. But fighting for religion is mad and sad in these modern times when we have access to information.

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Riots have had a definite impact on Muslims. Never before have we witnessed Muslim women coming forward in such large numbers to work. One such person is Firoza Sheikh. She is 23 and was recently elected to the local municipality of Saonli, a small town in the Godhra district of Gujarat.

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NREGA

NREGA has brought higher wages for labourers across the country. Farmers and landlords in Tamil Nadu have begun to feel the pinch following its huge success. They don't get labourers to work in their fields for the low wages they offer. Will the new choice force landlords to hike wages? Rural Tamil Nadu is

witnessing a critical migration of labour. Farm workers, 80 per cent of whom are women, now prefer to work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme that pays much better.

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Police reform

The people of Jammu and Kashmir have pinned a lot of hope on the state police to get their grievances redressed. It is the primary duty of the police to protect the lives and property of people while dealing with all kinds of situations.

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I would like to highlight the fact that the J&K police is one of the few government bodies to release its information booklet under Section 4.1.b. despite all kinds of negative publicity.

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Corruption

India needs reforms in the judiciary and bureaucracy. All political parties are two sides of the same coin. Nothing will change unless the judiciary and bureaucracy are made to work.

vishalthakkar@gmail.com

If a detailed study is done, it will reveal that the biggest source of corruption is the government. All discretionary powers given to government officers and politicians should be taken away.

Isha

Gay rights

I am inspired by the work and the struggle of the transgender community of India. Dr Santosh was indeed an inspiration for all Sanam fellows during our study programme on 11 February, 2011. Keep up the good work Mamma.

Zaheer Abbas, AMAL Human Development Network, Islamabad

Jackfruit

Thanks, Shree Padre, for the piece on non-stick jackfruit. I would like to plant 100 grafts this June.

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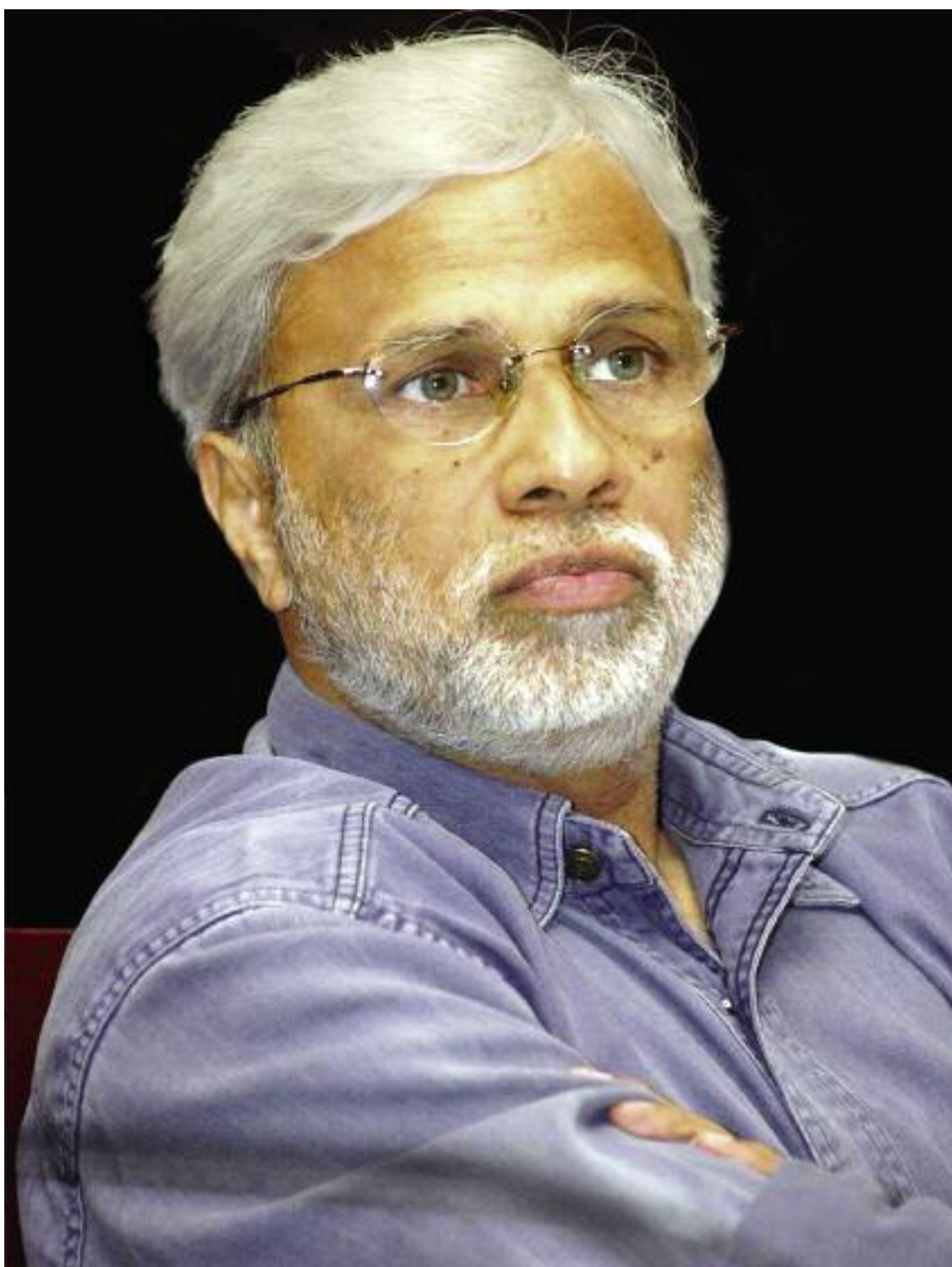
City and citizen

I agree with V Ravichandar's assessment of who is a citizen of a city. I am working in Delhi. Although I am originally from Patna but I am more of a Delhiite than a Bihari. Thanks for the article.

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INTERVIEW The Azim Premji University wants to develop

'We are looking for people from the trenches'



Dileep Ranjekar

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Azim Premji University in Bangalore has begun the process of admitting its first batch of students. The setting up of the university follows almost a decade of work with government schools by the Azim Premji Foundation.

The foundation's mission has been to sponsor systemic and large-scale change in the public education system. The university will similarly seek to train people who want to teach or become administrators at the grassroots in India.

Government schools cater to the majority of Indian children but lack well-qualified and motivated teachers. In the absence of political will, investment in education is inadequate and the administrative structure is in poor shape.

The Azim Premji University has put together a small outstanding faculty drawn from people with real experience in development. It offers two-year Master's degrees in education, development and teacher education.

Dileep Ranjekar, CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation, spoke to *Civil Society* about the ideas driving the university.

What made it necessary to think of a university? Isn't it a rather big commitment?

The concept of a university really came up in 2007. We have been working in the school education domain since 2001. We have come across several issues. But we want to work on systemic change and not just focus on changing a particular block or a school. It is really about working with the government to create large-scale systemic change without constraints.

The first issue is related to the whole system itself. The political will to provide quality education does not exist. You don't find any politician contesting elections saying, "If I win I will ensure every child in my constituency gets quality education, all teachers are appointed and infrastructure is upgraded."

People say money is not the issue, it's the

change leaders in education

idea which counts. That's not right at all. The biggest issue is the quality of execution and therefore the kind of money that is required to maintain the quality of education. For that again there is no political will otherwise you would not have had a situation where the Right to Education (RTE) bill was pending for the last five years. Around ₹65,000 crores is required. Now the Centre is saying the states must implement RTE. But the quantum of money to be given is not clear.

There is no accountability structure for education and development issues. Politicians at least have to stand for re-election so there is some accountability. But for the bureaucracy there is none. If 50 per cent of children in a district fail their exams, nobody is held responsible.

Hence the need for a university and not something smaller like an institute?

See, the first class of issues we confronted was systemic. This included lack of political will, accountability and uncertain tenure – in a mere two-year or three-year posting it is difficult for a government official to carry out meaningful changes.

Then within the government education system the kind of people who exist today don't have the competence, the vision, passion or motivation. So how do you bring about change?

You need to produce on a regular basis true professionals who are well-rounded in education.

You need a focused effort to transform the existing functionalities of education in education. For this you require people who have the calibre, the passion and the depth to bring about change.

Knowledge and research on education, especially in the Indian context, do not exist. Internationally, too, there is a dearth. There are several issues which should be researched. For instance, should there be a combination of primary, secondary and high school or should there be different units? Should more than 25 children in a village have a school or should there be a school for every block or cluster? Is a lady teacher better or a male teacher? A variety of socio-economic classes come to school. How do we orient the teacher to handle them?

The reality is that unlike other countries like China, the US or Brazil we have a lot of diversity here in terms of language, culture and just about everything. Brazil has done well in education in the past 10 to 15 years but nearly all their people speak Portuguese and 95 per cent are Christians so there is homogeneity.

In India, we have 450 languages, 360 dialects. Twenty-eight languages are spoken by more than one million and the official languages are 16. This huge variety reflects in the classroom and the teachers.

Besides you require a mechanism to deal with the current government situation which is not working. You need to create pressure, pull and demand from the stakeholders – the teachers, the parents. Our strategy is geared to tackling this by

the creation of talent and knowledge. In the coming years we will create a talent pool of education and development professionals who will create systemic change.

How did you go about getting the kind of faculty needed to create such a talent pool?

It was difficult to get a faculty. We realized the usual methods of advertising or word of mouth were not going to work. It was important for us that they should be aligned with our vision and belief in the kind of society and education we are talking about. A mere interview may not reveal that. You have to interact with people for a longer time.

So we reviewed and tapped into people working with us since several years. It required enormous interaction between us and the people we were considering. We had to institute a process by which several people in our current organization were aligned to our current vision/mission thinking.

We also decided we were not going to chase numbers. We chose to chase quality. We resolved not to recruit people only because they were available and we had a crunch. We do have a shortage.

'We are talking about people going back to where they come from. We want to enable and empower them. We are looking for people who have a semi-urban, rural kind of background.'

Our faculty is big enough to deal with the next two semesters. We hope to employ more people in the next three to four months. The search for talent will continue.

How much has it cost to set up the university? How much revenue do you see being generated out of the university?

It is an expensive proposition. The buildings and infrastructure cost close to ₹1,000 crores. To support that, and we are not government funded, you require nearly ₹150 crores every year.

In our university the potential to recover money is not high, unlike those who start institutes for management, medicine or engineering. If you examine the annual report of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), 85 per cent of what it spends comes from the government. Hardly five to 10 per cent or at the maximum 15 per cent is raised from fees.

Your admissions are now open. What kind of students are you trying to identify? How would you define your change agent?

The university is not just a structure which keeps

churning graduates and post-graduates. We want students to go back from where they've come and create change.

The first issue is the kind of people we recruit, the second is the process we go through, the third is the opportunities for change – where do they go and make that change?

We are not looking for urbanized people who will get a degree and then vanish to Harvard or Cambridge or Oxford. If that happens to more than half our students we will consider it a failure of the university. We are looking for that desire to work in your own milieu.

In India our education is fairly migratory. If you want to go to high school you travel about 15 km from your village, if you want to go to college may be hundreds of kilometres and if you want to go in for professional education then you go thousands of kilometres and you would probably never come back since there are no opportunities at your point of origin.

We are looking for people who have a semi-urban, rural kind of background who are much more prone to going back and working in their respective areas. We have 38 centres across the country for admission. No other university is following this kind of admission practice. We are enabling people who are really in the trenches to come and apply for admission to this university. We believe rural people have the intelligence. What they lack are the language skills (Hindi and English) and exposure.

These two things must be focused on when they come to our university. We would have liked to start courses in four South Indian languages, in Hindi and so on. Currently, we are not able to do that. There is a paucity of relevant literature outside English which is of high calibre. It is required of students to have basic skills in reading, writing, conversing in English. We are allowing candidates to answer in Kannada and Hindi – we have agreed to reservation for Kannada students. Hindi is our national language. We are allowing some students to express themselves in their local language.

Once students are admitted bridge courses will enable them to acquire language skills in English and maximize their ability to learn, read and acquire skills. Such courses will be for one or two months or in the evening.

The process of pedagogy we are using is not didactic or just about giving lectures. A lot of experience, discussion and application of mind are envisaged. It is because of this that the faculty is so different. There will be a lot of practical learning and that is where the foundation gives us an advantage.

Where will students find jobs?

We would encourage them to join the government because it is in the government that we would like to see the maximum change. They can also be entrepreneurs, run private schools and educational institutes, colleges, NGOs.... The Premji Foundation itself requires a lot of people.

RTI convention tells govt to

Activists seek more disclosure, protection for whistleblowers

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FIVE years after the Right to Information (RTI) Act was passed, activists complain that the government is not doing enough to implement some of the key provisions of the landmark law.

The third national convention of the RTI movement held in Shillong from 10 to 12 March regretted that it continues to be difficult to get out information and that the follow-up on disclosures is inadequate.

The Shillong Declaration issued by the conven-

tion calls upon the government to urgently ensure proactive disclosures by public authorities as envisaged under Section 4 of the RTI Act. It also says that there is a need for a commission along the lines of a Lok Pal or Lokayukta so that prompt action can be taken on information obtained under RTI.

The declaration expresses deep concern at the spate of attacks on activists and whistleblowers in recent times. It says that it is the "moral responsibility" of the government to protect people using the law. When someone is attacked it is necessary that the information being sought be quickly put in the public domain and acted upon.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BAIASHANBOK MARBANIANG



The MKSS' famous Ghotala Rath Yatra on the streets of Shillong



Aruna Roy looking at posters on RTI



Cultural show

A meeting of

**DIARY
OF AN
ACTIVIST**

Sowmya Sivakumar
Shillong

THE excitement on train number 15631 was palpable. It was to be a week-long pilgrimage of sorts for the 80-odd diverse travellers who had congregated to embark on a journey of two and a half days over 2,000 km from west to east. We, the people of Rajasthan, were off to Shillong to reclaim our democracy. And to be with hundreds of others from far-flung corners of the country who would undertake a similar expedition for the very same reason.

The Third National Convention on the Right to Information was very special for more reasons than one. It was the first since the path-breaking Right to Information Act was passed five years ago. And Shillong, set amidst the beautiful Garo Khasi hills of the northeast, was its venue.

Blery-eyed and tired from a back-breaking train journey, our spirits soared as the bus ascended the long-winding road from Guwahati. The balmy air, the eastern sun, the sights of tall deodar and pines dotting the hilly terrain infused a burst of energy in us. The endless shimmering lakes at plumbing depths, the little bridges leading to quaint bamboo huts and adorable children slung on the backs of tough women footing great undulating distances tuned our senses to a world different from ours – but only in a physical sense, as we were soon to learn.

By the morning of 10 March, participants from different states had touched down at the Central Library campus in Shillong, the venue of the convention. Over the next three days, this motley band of RTI users and activists would listen to, interact

act on corruption

In the past five years, RTI has been enthusiastically used across the country by people seeking to hold government organisations accountable and ensure a better quality of administration. From road repairs to the public distribution system and unravelling of contracts, RTI has been effective in unlocking files.

But it hasn't been easy. Individuals have had to show courage and persistence. Activist groups have had to help people understand the law and shown them how to use it.

It is this energy which took an estimated 700 people from 23 states to Shillong where they drew courage from each other and reinforced their

resolve to use RTI as a tool for ensuring transparency and better governance.

"We were overwhelmed by the response," says Tarun Bhartiya, who is part of the RTI movement in Meghalaya. "Many of them hadn't replied to our email invitation. But they came nevertheless as word of the convention spread. It is interesting to see the number of people in the northeast who have been using RTI. The Arunachal groups for instance."

The Shillong Declaration is significant because it sums up the concerns of people who have been using RTI in real time. The RTI Act was drafted through consultation with people's groups. But

after the law was passed in 2005, this is the first National Convention that has been held. It therefore provided an opportunity to share experiences and define the road ahead.

In fact, one of the demands is to have a National RTI Council with members from different states so that the problems of implementing RTI can be identified and dealt with.

The convention expressed unhappiness over the functioning of information commissioners. This is a post which is meant to facilitate the smooth operation of RTI at an arm's length from the government. Instead the information commissioner's post has become a sinecure for bureaucrats. The convention said the process of selecting commissioners needed to be made "transparent and participatory."

The Shillong Declaration makes an important demand on the way legislation should evolve. It calls for wide consultation with people's groups so that as many concerns as possible are addressed in a transparent manner. It is through such a process that RTI legislation was done.

hearts and minds in lovely Shillong

with, discuss, debate, brainstorm, sing, dance, feel, mourn, cry and laugh over the power of the right to information in our lives, contemplate its weak spots and high points and chalk out ways of sharpening this precious, if only one concrete tool in battling that larger-than-life adversary called corruption and bringing back a semblance of democracy in our country.

IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES: The challenges were many, and the convention, through its plenaries, workshops and infinite informal spirited discussions amongst participants acted as a significant platform not only in bringing all of these on board, but in the process, consolidated many experiences from different states leaving every one of the participants considerably strengthened.

At the opening plenary chaired by the former Chief Justice of India, Justice J S Verma, the chief guest, the Governor of Meghalaya, Ranjit Shekhar Mooshahary, stated, "Information alone is not power, but information combined with its right use is," a view echoed by many participants and panelists. Defining this further, noted RTI activist Aruna Roy said, "Now that we have transparency through the Act, we need accountability. This encompasses three main issues: a strong whistleblower Bill, a Lok Pal bill for accountability and a transparent pre-legislative process."

In their respective plenaries, both Justice Verma and Justice A P Shah, formerly of the Delhi High Court, unequivocally supported complete transparency in the judiciary, a process that still leaves much to be desired.

At the second day's plenary, law researcher Usha Ramanathan spoke of the thin line between transparency and privacy and how just as it was

important to have people's right to know about the government, it was equally necessary for legislation to guard legitimate individual privacy involuntarily being taken away by the government.

Sowmya Kidambi, director, SSAAT in Andhra Pradesh spoke of the importance of social audits to verify information brought out through the RTI Act, how this can lead to a truly empowering

We, the people of Rajasthan, were off to Shillong to reclaim our democracy. And to be with hundreds of others from far-flung corners of the country.

process which, in Andhra Pradesh, has been enabled because of the state government's commitment to transparency. This was reiterated by Amitabh Mukhopadhyay in the third day's plenary as he pointed out how social audits by the people were required to move from transparency to accountability because of corruption among financial professionals.

Experiences from different states and movements were shared. One got to hear how activists like Bah Jo Marwein (Meghalaya RTI Movement), Kavita Srivastava (General Secretary, PUCL), Kamayani Swamy (activist from Bihar), Vrinda

Grover (advocate in the Delhi High Court), Paul Diwakar (Dalit rights activist) and others had used the RTI Act across a wide range of subjects.

CULTURE AND RTI: Cultural expressions are not 'fillers' for entertainment but the very soul of the right to information movement and, in Shillong, the infusion of cultures along the length and breadth of the country exploded into a torrent of energy breaking down all barriers between participants.

A grand start to the entire convention was *thoh shun* a traditional Khasi ritual, the reverberating sounds of Khasi drumbeats and the convention's slogan *Kamai Ia Ka Hok*, an electrifying performance by Timmy Kharhujon and Snap Paka, the soul-stirring rendition of *Janne ka haq* by Vinay Mahajan and the popular 'Ghotala Rath Yatra' by Shankar Singh (MKSS) in his inimitable style which did the rounds of Shillong town.

Sundown on the three days refreshed weary participants with heart-warming cultural shows and musical forms – traditional and contemporary, dance, theatre and mime by well-known and talented artists from the northeast and other parts of the country.

If, as Ojus heart wrenchingly pointed out in her brilliant solo performance, 'Le Mashale' (or Torchbearer) on AFSPA and Irom Sharmila's struggle, that even Rabindranath Tagore's 'national' anthem found no mention of the entire north-east region, the power of RTI and this convention brought us all closer than ever before with our northeast brethren. Shillong, for many of us, was our first brush with the northeast. We returned, knowing in our minds, that it would certainly not be the last.

Sowmya Sivakumar is an RTI activist and freelance journalist based in Jaipur

Count homeless again, say angry NGOs

Civil Society News
New Delhi

VOLUNTARY groups are deeply unhappy with the manner in which the census for the homeless was carried out in the capital. Around 30 NGOs under the banner of the Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS), which is part of the Shahri Adhikar Manch – Begharon Ke Liye (SAM-BKL), have demanded a recount.

These groups say that the census enumerators treated the job as a burden. They devised innovative short cuts, skipped as many homeless as they could and were rude and condescending to homeless people and NGO workers who had volunteered to help them.

The IGSSS had offered its services to the census authorities. But the enumeration experience has shaken the organisations.

"We had carried out an awareness programme earlier informing the homeless why it was so important for them to be counted in the census. But the enumerators made a complete mockery of the entire exercise," says Indu Prakash Singh, Technical Advisor to the CityMakers Programme

of the IGSSS. "We demand they recount. We cannot wait another 10 years to see improvements in the enumeration process."

The census was conducted for three days. A mapping exercise was done on 26 February followed by two days of enumeration. NGOs say the enumerators saw the work as punishment and tried to cut corners to finish the job quickly. They point out the sloppy methods that were used.

Several homeless families, which were not related to each other but merely living on the same footpath, were recorded as one family in the census form. The names of sundry homeless staying at night in tent shelters were jotted down from the attendance register and listed as one family. Information was also cooked up. One female enumerator's husband sitting alone on a railway track filled one form after the other with no homeless person in sight.

Enumerators also refused to talk to homeless people who were inebriated but cooperative. In Nangloi and Old Bridge Loha Pul, the enumerators were themselves drunk and they were abusive to the homeless, allege NGO volunteers.

NGOs say the enumeration process was to

begin at 7 pm. But some enumerators kept NGO volunteers waiting and began the enumeration process after 10 pm. In other places, they didn't reach the designated spots at all. At some shelters enumeration started earlier but stopped at 10:30 pm when the shelters were only half full and people were still trickling in. The IGSSS had been assured that enumeration in shelters would go on till early morning so that all the homeless would be counted.

As a result, several of the homeless have been left out. Many shelters were not covered at all. In Azadpur, 1,000 homeless people were left out, in Dwarka, 5,000, in north-east Delhi, 3,000. It's a long list, the disappointed NGOs say.

It is important to have correct estimates for the homeless. Schemes for the urban poor are designed keeping such figures in mind. "Inaccurate figures could result in the setting up of fewer shelters. The number of shelters to be set up in a city is decided on the basis of population (one shelter per 100,000 population)," says Miloon Kothari from Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN).

"We are drafting a memo and sending it to the President of India, the Registrar General of India (RGI), the Governor, the Chief Minister of Delhi and the Chief Justice of India," says Indu Prakash.

NGOs and the government have often clashed over the number of homeless in Delhi. In 2000, Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan, an NGO which works for the homeless, counted 52,000 homeless. But the 2000 Census said, no, there were only 24,966 homeless. In 2008, an IGSSS study found 88,410 homeless. How many have the enumerators counted this time? It is unlikely that this war over numbers will end soon.



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The politics of fatness

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

HAS it ever occurred to you that food, fuel, fatness and fatalities on our roads are all inextricably linked? If it hasn't, listen to Dr Ian Roberts of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: "A lot of the problems that the world faces today are linked to fossil fuel energy use – climate change, obesity, deaths on the roads, chronic diseases, poverty and starvation."

His simple but radical premise is predicated on findings from two decades of concerted investigation into the links between traffic-related deaths, car usage patterns, global warming and the worsening worldwide obesity epidemic.

"About 20 years ago, when I was a junior doctor working in paediatric intensive care, one public health problem in particular horrified me," Dr Roberts recalls. "I learnt that 1,000 children die every day on the world's roads. It had quite an effect on me – it gave me the ability to feel strongly about a problem that most doctors, even those working in public health, couldn't give a damn about."

His research has taken the form of a book which he has authored with college friend and statistician Phil Edwards. The book titled, *The Energy Glut: The Politics of Fatness in an Overheating World*, puts forth with messianic zeal the claim that "the planet is getting hotter and its population is getting fatter and fossil fuel energy use is the principal cause of both".

The same clarity and urgency underlined his statements in the course of a conversation this correspondent had with Dr Roberts on the lawns of the India International Centre (IIC) on a balmy Saturday morning. The professor was in Delhi in the second week of March to deliver the fourth annual lecture of IIT's Transport Research and Injury Protection Programme (TRIPP).

"This is the first time I will be delivering a talk in the presence of a minister," he quipped, alluding to the fact that Jairam Ramesh, India's environment minister, was slated to be the chief guest at the lecture scheduled for later in the day.

"Fatness isn't a personal problem, it's a political problem," he said, explaining why the world had one billion overweight adults and 300,000 obese people on the one hand and starvation deaths on the other. "A fossil fuel-powered transportation system meets the needs of only the wealthy while putting common users of road space – those who ride bicycles or walk – at great risk. Traffic fatalities amount to socially sanctioned mass murder," Dr Roberts said.

"The absence of sustainable modes of transport," he explained, "has led to mounting loss of life, noise pollution and climate change. The urban environment gets taken over by people driving energy-guzzling vehicles and cyclists and pedestrians are wiped out."

This has happened, the professor argued,



Dr Ian Roberts

because roads have been made increasingly unsafe by the rapid addition of bigger and faster automobiles. The resultant sedentary lifestyles have caused both adults and children to put on weight, a situation aggravated by energy-dense food products pushed by multinational companies and supermarket chains.

The human body, which is designed for movement, has been forced to adopt a mode in which it gets moved, rather than moves itself. This has hastened the onset of adiposity. "By 2050, 50 per cent of the UK's population will be obese," Dr Roberts warned. "In the US, one-third of the populace already is."

Dr Roberts pointed out that 3,000 people lose their lives every day in road accidents across the world. "The situation is particularly bad in economically weaker nations," he said. "The only way out is to decarbonise the transportation system and look for a sustainable alternative to 'motorised madness'. Or else, air pollution, prevalence of diseases and body mass index will continue to steadily shift upwards."

In a blog that Dr Roberts had written in the last week of October 2010 ahead of the November release of his book, he said: "We will call on climate change negotiators at next month's climate talks in Cancun, Mexico, to look around them and see what fossil fuel energy use is doing to the waistlines of Mexicans and to their health."

"Car use has decimated physical activity in Mexico. Road death is the second leading cause of healthy life years lost; the capital is one of the most polluted cities in the world where a fifth of commuters spend over two hours each day in gridlock, and then with physical activity at an all

time low, the food and beverage industry have pounced on Mexicans like a pack of dogs – perhaps not surprising in a country that elected a Coca Cola boss to lead them as President."

India may not yet have opted for a corporate honcho as President, but everything else that Dr Roberts stressed with regard to Mexico should find instant resonance in India. *The Energy Glut* takes India and other developing countries like China, Senegal and Nigeria into its sweep while analysing the inequitable situation created by the growing demand for transportation fuel in parts of the world where walking and cycling have been all but eliminated, where a small percentage of people are consuming too much while others are dying of malnutrition.

Talking about the proliferation of automobiles on Indian streets, Dr Roberts alluded to the fact that "the US car market has reached saturation point". The automobile giants were, therefore, pushing their vehicles in the developing world. "Multinational corporations have huge wealth and wield enormous power," he said. "They design a world that serves their interests and feeds their insatiable greed."

Energy, he explained, was a key agricultural input and when the world uses up finite fossil fuels it pushes up cultivation costs and lowers food production, leading to starvation. "Food production and distribution have become energy-intensive. So food prices go up when oil prices rise. "Twenty per cent of India's population is undernourished. There is a direct link between starvation and poverty and the increased energy-depleting motorisation of transportation," he said.

Beautiful Delhi and the ugly

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAKSHMAN ANAND

Civil Society News

New Delhi

If you live in Delhi do visit Bawana. It was to be the Delhi Development Authority's (DDA) 'model' resettlement colony, a showpiece of sorts. Getting there is not easy. Take the Metro to Rithala, the last stop on the North Delhi line. Then catch a bus. In it you will lurch to a dirty canal with a muddy embankment. You need to climb down now. Careful, there is no stairway here, just a deep slit with lots of slippery mud.

Down below is Bawana, a vast expanse of garbage and sewage with wobbly brick homes and makeshift jhuggis. Drains overflow with dirt. Men who once worked as masons, plumbers, carpenters, mechanics, electricians, hang around disconsolately. Children, who should be in school, are running around wild. Harassed looking women are busy lugging water.

Bawana's residents are victims of Delhi's beautification drive for the Commonwealth Games.

Since 2006 about 200,000 families have been evicted from slum settlements in colonies like Ashok Vihar, Yamuna Pushta, Saraswati Vihar, Shalimar Bagh, Paschim Vihar. No eviction notice was served before the bulldozers arrived. Men, women and children were herded into trucks and driven off to Bawana.

The evicted were told by DDA resettlement officials that homes and facilities were awaiting them in Bawana. When they arrived they found Bawana was just a vast field infested with snakes. "There was no electricity, water or basic shelter. Dunu Roy of the Hazards Centre sent us food else we would have starved. After a prolonged struggle we got halogen lamps. Later the DDA made some drains," recalls Umesh, an activist with the Bawana Sangharsh Committee who lived in Saraswati Vihar for 28 years before being evicted.

The DDA finally marked out plots. Those who lived in Delhi before 1990 were given tiny plots of 18 square metres. Others, even tinier bits measuring 12.5 metres. Residents point out that their former homes were much bigger. Around 13,000 households did not get even this measly dot of land and they now live in jhuggis just below the embankment surrounded by muck.

While the DDA was supposed to build basic infrastructure, it was the job of the the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to put in place services like water supply and garbage collection. But even after five years there are no such facilities.

Bawana has no sewage connection. Instead DDA has built a toilet complex. "The place is filthy," says young Parveen who lives here. "It has broken taps and no water. A municipal employee opens and closes it as and when he likes."

The industrial estate nearby provides a few jobs



Bawana with its jhuggis and houses



Leelavati (middle) with Umesh (extreme right)

Three government agencies carry out eviction and resettlement and each has its own policy.

for long hours and measly pay.

"Some of us took loans from money lenders and relatives and sold off village land to build here. Now we cannot repay since we have lost our livelihood," says Julum Yadav. "We don't have access to housing loans from banks. Around ₹3 lakhs is what we need to build a small home with a toilet."

Some residents have sunk tubewells. Many residents don't have ration cards. Transferring a ration

card means making several trips to the food and supplies department. A ramshackle government school some distance away is where children are expected to study. There is no doctor or pharmacy. If a woman has to deliver her baby then getting her to a hospital is impossible.

"Bawana has become a symbol of sorts for the urban poor," says Brahma, a Hazards Centre worker. "Every household whose jhuggi is mowed down is told to go to Bawana. So there is a continuous flow of people arriving here."

POLICY MUDDLE: Three government agencies carry out eviction and resettlement and each has its own policy. The DDA has one policy, the MCD another and the Delhi Government's Urban Shelter Improvement Board (USIB) a third. The three policies clash with each other. "Eligibility criteria, cut-off dates, amounts...are all different. Officials have a lot of leeway to exercise their 'discretionary' powers," says Dunu Roy. Evicted people end up running from pillar to post to get basic rights.

Take the DDA. Many evictees have not been given plots for no fault of theirs. Before bulldozing their settlements, DDA did a survey. Of course it never informed the residents. Some people had gone to work, others to their villages, some were sick. So they got left out of the DDA survey.

"I was sick in hospital," says Ram Adeen of Balwan Nagar. "My nephew was home so the officials put his name down as resident. Now they are refusing to give us a plot. My nephew has signed

story of Bawana



Children amidst garbage

affidavits swearing we are the residents. We have gone umpteen times to the DDA and submitted all papers."

"My father-in-law had gone to the village," says Leelavati who earns money selling knick knacks on a cart. "So his name got left out. We have all the papers. But they are not giving us a plot."

Evictees have been holding protests outside the DDA offices. Scores of letters have been sent to Tejender Khanna, the Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi and chairman of DDA. Committees have examined the issue and ruled that the evicted people can't be given plots since they weren't in their jhuggies when the DDA conducted its survey. In some cases, documents bore dates after 1998.

The Lieutenant-Governor ruled that an evicted person was entitled to resettlement if a document such as a ration card or a Voter ID could be produced proving residence in a slum before it was razed, even if he or she had been left out of the DDA survey.

Soon after, the DDA allotted plots to 126 people from Ashok Vihar and Subhash Nagar Kela Godam, whose claims it had rejected earlier by saying they were not in their jhuggies during the survey. "The fact that they were given plots indicates that the DDA acknowledges that their methods of resettlement were wrong," says Dunu Roy.

But people evicted from the Sanjay Gandhi Camp have not been so lucky. The Land Commissioner of



Pools of dirty water and muck

the DDA rejected their claims by saying their jhuggies were located on the road, footpath and along an open drain and not in the settlement. Hazards Centre downloaded satellite maps from Google which clearly showed that these jhuggies were indeed within the slum cluster. Moreover, a Delhi High Court judgment has already declared as null and void DDA's relocation clause which says that such people are not entitled to relocation.

Another 114 evictees of Sawan Park are being made to wait endlessly for no fault of theirs. The DDA's excuse is that the CBI has confiscated pertinent documents due to its inquiry into the Ashok Malhotra land allotment scam case. Malhotra had illegally sold off plots meant for slum dwellers.

"How is that our fault?" asks Umesh. "Yet we are being made to pay the price for Malhotra's misdemeanors." The people of Bawana point to rows of empty plots. They have counted at least 1,000. There is no shortage of land.

All talk of inclusive growth sounds hollow if you visit Bawana. "We were better off in our old settlements. Our children were going to school, our men had work, we had food, water and electricity. Now we are just hopelessly poor people," says Leelavati.

SAMITA' S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



Hill state discusses forest rights

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

THE Van Panchayat Sangharsh Morcha, a forum of grassroots groups in Uttarakhand organized a two-day workshop in Dehradun on 2 and 3 March to discuss implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, also called the Forest Rights Act (FRA).

The meeting was attended by environmentalist Ashish Kothari, Madhu Sarin, activist and researcher, Tarun Joshi, convener of the Morcha, Ashok Chaudhury of the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW), and others. Politicians and government officials were also present. Matbir Singh Kandari, Minister for Social Welfare, attended.

Uttarakhand is lagging behind in implementation of the FRA. Activists feel there is not much awareness about this law. They say the forest department has been wrongly telling villages that the FRA does not apply here since people have van panchayats.

These are very small patches of forest close to the village which people manage on their own. There are more than 12,000 van panchayats in the state which has a little over 16,000 revenue villages. But most van panchayats have very little land and can't grow a decent forest.

"Most van panchayats cannot provide enough biomass for the people," said Madhu Sarin. "Yet the administration claims the creation of van panchayats as their achievement. They say every village of the state has one. The fact is that most newly created van panchayats exist only on paper."

In the past, van panchayats used to manage forests independently. But in 2001 and 2005, the forest department amended their rules and

regulations and made the panchayats mere appendages of the department.

Govind Singh Mehra had undertaken an intensive survey to find out how the FRA was being implemented in the state. He said more than 7,500 claim forms were submitted. But just four claims were accepted – two in Nainital district and two in Pauri.

The Social Welfare Department is the nodal agency for implementation of the FRA in Uttarakhand. "The social welfare department is making no effort to create awareness among the people about this law," alleged Munni Lal, convener, NFFPFW. "The failure to implement the FRA will lead to the grave consequences. We must focus on community rights rather than on individual rights," said Ashok Chaudhary, founder of NFFPFW.

Community rights, however, remain a distant dream. Ashish Kothari, member of the joint committee formed by the MoEF and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs to review the national implementation of the FRA, spoke about his findings.

"It is true that with some notable exceptions, the implementation of the FRA has been poor. Around 30,00,000 claims were filed nationally and 15,00,000 claims were rejected. People got just a fraction of the land they claimed. Only about 50,000 community claims have been made. Most of them are for development schemes like schools and water. Just between five to 10 thousand claims are community forest claims," he said.

Kothari explained the reasons for rejection. "There are shortcomings at every level. At many places Forest Rights Committees (FRCs) are wrongly formed as an additional committee of the gram panchayat. Also, officials took recourse to the excuse that claimants submitted wrong proof of residence."

Basic developmental schemes for people living in and around protected areas such as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries have been stalled. The authorities cite the Indian Forest Act, 1978, which prohibits any development activities. People are angry since they can't get basic facilities like schools, drinking water, pathways and roads. "Only one out of five villages inside the Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary has electricity. They have no access roads. This is forcing people to migrate. In Satari village just two households reside at present," said Ishwar Joshi, an activist from Binsar.

In protected areas the administration is making it difficult for people to claim rights. "We deposited more than 60 claim forms, but the SDM didn't give us receipts so they will be dumped," said Dwarika Prasad, an activist from Govind Pashu Vihar, a protected area in Uttarkashi district. The story is repeated in other protected areas as well.

"We deposited more than 1,100 claim forms of the Tharus and Buxas, adivasis in the Udham Singh Nagar district, but nobody knows what happened to our applications," said Jaya Mishra of Bhumi Adhikar Manch, an NGO.

The rights of nomadic tribes were also discussed. "We suggested that their rights at the pastures where they take their animals during their seasonal migration and their place of permanent stay should be ensured," said Kothari.

Politicians and bureaucrats tried to soothe people's anger. Matbir Singh Kandari, Minister for Social Welfare, said he would take immediate action. "I'll direct all district magistrates to tell me the exact situation. I will also establish a state inspection committee," he promised.

The workshop ended with a resolution to conduct public hearings at the block and district levels and to spread awareness of the FRA through posters, pamphlets and leaflets.

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Anushka Rai, Age 6, Zed resident.

My Story of ZED

Bina Rai can't stand the heat. She needs the AC always on, in the 'chill' mode. "Friends say I should live in a freezer!" She didn't bother when her power bill soared. With 100 pc power back-up at her apartment, the need to 'switch off' was never felt.

But something stirred in her one day. "You're a careless mother," declared her daughter on return from school. "Teacher says we've to be careful about using electricity. We make 'dirty things' when we produce power. It fouls the air we breathe, makes us sick." Little Anushka started switching off lights and fans at home. "I was actually ashamed," says Bina. "She made me feel like I was personally shoveling pollution into the air." For Bina, the 'awakening' came in the shape of her daughter.

She looked around, until she found a Zed Home.



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Picking straws becomes a rewarding business in Kerala

Farm mechanisation gains ground in southern states

Shree Padre
Thrissur (Kerala)

WE reached our destination, a sprawling paddy field, after driving for half an hour from Thrissur. The second crop had just been harvested. A tractor was drawing a machine which looked like a box. It was neatly picking up wisps of straw scattered on the field. Every minute it efficiently delivered a bale of straw tied with a length of jute rope.

Scarcity of labour is forcing paddy farmers to embrace machines in a big way. The farm mechanization movement is spreading fast to the southern states of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

On the whole farmers are positive about paddy mechanization. There have been some minor glitches though. For instance, paddy straw availability has drastically decreased. So has cattle rearing. For a farmer keeping cattle is feasible only if he has his own stock of fodder. Buying straw is unaffordable.

"We don't like it, but it is inevitable," remarked an organic farming activist from Karnataka on the recent trend of mechanized paddy cultivation in Kerala.

STRAW SHORTAGE: After paddy is harvested, straw is left uncollected in the fields.

Combined harvesters for paddy fields are of two types – cut straw and whole straw. In the cut straw harvester, after reaping and threshing, straw collects behind the tracks in small pieces. Collecting these bits is cumbersome and impractical. In the whole straw model, the machine leaves behind whole straw in a line or in heaps. Collecting this is only a little easier.

Collection of straw requires a lot of manual labour. Since labour is scarce and costly, farmers abandon the straw in the fields. It decomposes before the next cropping season. Many farmers burn the straw to make things easier. The majority of harvesters that are commissioned in Kerala are of the cut straw type.

Keeping these factors in mind, a Kerala team from the Agriculture Research Station (ARS), Mannuthy, which is affiliated to the Kerala



Balers on tractors bundle the straw

Agriculture University, set out to find a solution. Dr Jaikumaran, one of the key forces behind the Food Security Army, (*Civil Society, January 2010*) is professor and head of ARS. He was joined by Vivency Johny, Agriculture Officer of Venkidangu and Parameshwaran, president of Venkidangu's local group of paddy farmers.

They decided to use a baling machine to collect the straw. The experiment was started early February in the paddy rich panchayat of Venkidangu in Thrissur district. A straw baler was bought at the end of 2010 and thoroughly tested in the nearby Erumapetty area for bundling straw from 50 acres.

"Once I saw the baler functioning, I realized that this would be of great help to our farmers," recalls Vivency. Venkidangu panchayat has 750 hectares of fertile *kole* lands out of which around 600 hectares are cultivated. Dr Jaikumaran, Vivency and Parameshwaran put their heads together to make this experiment of mechanized collection of straw possible.

A set of balers with a tractor costs about ₹10 lakhs. The three experts drew up a project proposal for buying two sets. They approached the Venkidangu Panchayat. The panchayat granted the amount from their Scheduled Caste (SC) fund with the condition was that only SC people would be employed for the project.

CHASING STRAWS: The imported straw baler requires a 50-55HP tractor to operate it. The roller baler has two small wheels. When it is not in use it can be transported by the hydraulic lifting arm of the tractor.

After the paddy field is reaped with the combined harvester, straw is left behind in a row. The baler attached to the tractor, is run over the straw. As the baler moves on, reels fitted on a roller pick up bits of straw. These bits automatically get fed to its internal roller mechanism.

Straw bits are collected and made into rolls. Once the cylindrical bale rolls up the straw bits to its maximum girth, an alarm rings. Hearing the



Bundles of straw provide income for farmers

alarm, the tractor operator stops.

The tractor engine however continues to be on. A roll of rope is attached to the top of the baler. The arms now start dropping the rope. Within seconds the rope is wound around the bale. Once binding is complete, the arm cuts the rope.

The tractor operator has to be careful. Experience tells him the frequency with which he has to watch for two important signals. The first is the alarm to stop the tractor from moving. If he continues moving the tractor the rollers in the baler get jammed.

Secondly, while stationary the tractor operator has to keep looking back. Once he sees the arm cutting the rope he has to manually pull a string to open the baler's mouth. Once this is done, the baler ejects the bale into the field. As the tractor moves, the bale of straw rolls on to the field, from where it can easily be picked up.

Aditya, the tractor operator, used to work as a driver in the Gulf. He was trained for a day. He doesn't find the job difficult and is happy to have found employment.

Shinoj, who recently joined the Food Security Army, assists Aditya. One unit requires two people – a driver and an assistant. But if this work is to be done on a regular basis then two teams might be required so that they can alternate.

The straw which is collected has good demand. Guruvayoor Devasvam has a big dairy and requires paddy straw in large quantities. A contractor buys the bales at ₹3 per kg. One bale of dry straw weighs 15 to 18 kg. He supplies the bales to the Guruvayoor temple. Once news spread that straw is available in Venkidangu, local farmers started coming to these paddy fields. A committee of farmers sells the bales at ₹50 each.

"One acre would yield around 1.5 tonnes of straw. This means we would earn ₹4,500 per acre from the sale of straw. After deducting the cost of the baling operation, the farmer is bound to earn around ₹3,000 per acre. We lost this income in the past," says Parameshwaran.

BALES OF MONEY: Initially, the baling operation was slow. There were a few technical and management glitches. Stones from the field got into

the baling machine. The committee ended up paying four times the price of the jute rope till it finally got in touch with a bigger agency in Ernakulam.

Now things have stabilized. "Army members preferred to be paid per bale instead of daily wages. So we have agreed. Previously two units were rolling out 400 to 500 bales. Now they are producing 700 bales," says Vivency.

In a month about 100 tonnes of straw are made available. This means a neat income of ₹3 lakh. Says Vivency: "Around ₹1.5 lakh would be spent on wages and consumables. But now that we have gained work efficiency, we don't spend that much." One acre can yield 80 bales. If harvesting is done at still lower heights, this can go up to 100 bales. On an average, one unit can cover four acres per day.

The baler, made by Redlands Ashlyn Motors Ltd, Thrissur, costs about ₹3.5 lakhs. Says Ankith, marketing representative of Redlands, "Two types of balers are available. The one that produces square shaped bales is quite expensive and bulky and needs more space for turning. The baler that produces round bales is more suited to local conditions."

The other concern is that the balers are designed for fields which have been mechanically levelled. "But our fields are manually levelled," explains Ankith. "Though the fields are large they have intermediate bunds to retain water. The driver has to take care to raise the baler every time he has to cross a bund. Stones getting into the baler are another concern."

Currently a committee consisting of the local agricultural officer, farmers, Dr Jaikumaran and others keep tabs on expenditure. The net profits will be handed over to the *samiti*.

The committee, meanwhile, has one more novel action plan. It has included two rotavators in this project. The fields will be ploughed after the baling operations are completed using tractors fitted with rotavators.

The tractors bought for the balers will thereby be better utilized. These expenses will be deducted from the sale proceeds of the straw. "Using rotavators will expose the eggs of pests to the sun. The incidence of pests and diseases should decline next year," says Vivency.

At Manloor, baling machines have proved to be very useful. The work of collecting the straw was handed over to an ARS unit. "We spent ₹1,500 and now we can sell straw from one acre on the roadside," says Iyunni, president of the farmers committee. The unit rolled up straw from 40 acres.

According to Vivency, farmers will save a minimum of ₹1,000 per acre due to baling. The committee hopes to cover 350 to 500 hectares before the monsoon sets in. If this happens the paddy farmers of Venkidangu panchayat would have an additional income of between ₹8.75 lakhs and ₹12.5 lakhs.



Dr Jaikumaran

'It is a significant development. This machine will help paddy farmers revive animal husbandry in years to come.'

SCALING UP: But is it possible to spread mechanization across many more areas quickly? Dr Jaikumaran believes private players will enter this market with job work offers. Iyunni points out that soon Kerala will require balers and harvesters in equal number. Surprisingly, while many harvesters come from Tamil Nadu, a good number come all the way from Punjab because it works out financially for the operators!

But there is a hitch. Private operators can't do the work as cheaply as KAU. They have to keep on eye on profit margins. Dr Jaikumaran calculates that ₹15 per bale instead of ₹11 would provide the private operator with a decent profit.

But it took the KAU and the Venkidangu panchayat to experiment with mechanised baling. The panchayat put in public money. No private operator would have taken the risk.

Two seasons ago the KAU trained a Food Security Army to mechanise transplantation of paddy cultivation. The army carries out such work on a contractual basis. It now covers 9,000 acres per year in Thrissur district alone. It has also spread to some neighbouring districts like Palakkad and Malappuram. Will baler units follow suit?

"It is a significant development," says Dr Jaikumaran. "This machine will help paddy farmers revive animal husbandry in years to come."

The local demand for straw has been growing and so perhaps he is right.

"I think by next year farmers will come forward to get baling done in their group farms with more enthusiasm," says Dr Jaikumaran."

Contact : Vivency Johny, 094467 63113, vivency@yahoo.com

Villages get change leaders



All information on how funds were spent is painted on the panchayat wall

Bharat Dogra
Jaipur

PEOPLE'S movements in Rajasthan have been pegging away at making panchayats transparent and accountable in their way of working. Such efforts are now making an impact. Several sarpanches have made notable headway in converting their villages into models of transparent functioning.

Some of these sarpanches were activists of the Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) which led the campaign for the right to information (RTI) law and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). The MKSS activists stood for the last panchayat elections and won.

"We are cooperating with several organisations for a campaign to strengthen panchayat raj so that rural decentralisation is accompanied by greater transparency," says Nikhil Dey of the MKSS. "Decentralisation is most certainly needed but it will give good results only when panchayats function honestly and transparently."

The government has pitched in, haltingly. Its commitment has been patchy. At times the state appears to go ahead. At times it wilts under the pressure of vested interests. For instance, several elected panchayat raj representatives and officials ganged together some months ago to oppose transparency efforts, and the state government just cowed down.

Despite such opposition villages have forged



Naurati, sarpanch of Harmara panchayat

ahead. One inspiring example is Vijayapura panchayat in Devgarh block of Rajsamand district. During his previous tenure, Kaluram Salvi, the sarpanch, worked hard to create a transparent and honest panchayat and succeeded to a significant extent. Kaluram has been an activist of the MKSS. He was solidly backed by the sangathan.

An inventive leader, Kaluram got all essential information on funds spent on development works painted on panchayat walls. Anybody can examine these accounts. This initiative impressed the Rajasthan Chief Minister, Ashok Gehlot, who issued instructions that similar wall-writing should be done in other panchayats.

Kaluram's work is being continued by Rukmani Salvi, his wife, who is now sarpanch. Helped by

her husband she has further enhanced Vijayapura's reputation as a transparent and honest panchayat. Rukmani has herself toiled at NREGA work sites so she understands the problems of workers very well.

Rukmani is a Dalit sarpanch who won from a general seat by defeating a candidate from a very rich family. This rich candidate spent a lot of money on elections. Rukmani spent only ₹2,000 and each rupee was accounted for.

Today, in Vijayapura a system of transparency has become well-established. Here you can see how a scheme like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is being implemented according to the letter and spirit of the law. People actually get employment for 100 days. With NREGS funds pastures, greenery, soil and water conservation have been promoted, so that water scarcity can be overcome and livelihoods can improve in a water-scarce, drought-prone area.

Naurati is another shining example. She is sarpanch of Harmara panchayat in Ajmer district. Naurati is a Dalit sarpanch who won from a reserved seat. She has been an activist with the MKSS and the Barefoot College. Naurati has emphasised transparency and good implementation of NREGA including water-conservation works.

Then there is Kesi Bai, sarpanch of Barkochra panchayat in Jawaja block of Ajmer district. She belongs to the OBC category. Kesi Bai is known for good implementation of NREGS. As a result her area has water tanks and roads. She has also improved the public distribution system and exposed corruption.

A welcome trend has been the emergence of panchayat representatives from some of the poorest families and most neglected communities in Rajasthan. One inspiring example is Geeta Bai, a sarpanch from a village in Phagi block of Jaipur district.

Geeta Bai belongs to the Balmiki caste. All her life she had been engaged in sweeping. When this seat was reserved for Dalits, Geeta Bai went to

families in the village whom she had served for years and said: "Earlier you gave me *roti* but now you have to give me your vote." She won the election and has shown courage in removing encroachments on common land by powerful persons as well as in good implementation of the employment guarantee scheme.

The courage and honesty these sarpanches display shows what they can achieve if they are helped by people's movements. The MKSS, on its part, is trying to expand its reach to more grassroots leaders.

"We're trying to take our message not just to more sarpanches but also to ward-members. We feel that the important role of ward members needs to be re-emphasised and strengthened," says Nikhil Dey.



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BOLD NEW CINEMA

DOCUMENTARY FILMS ARE TELLING THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

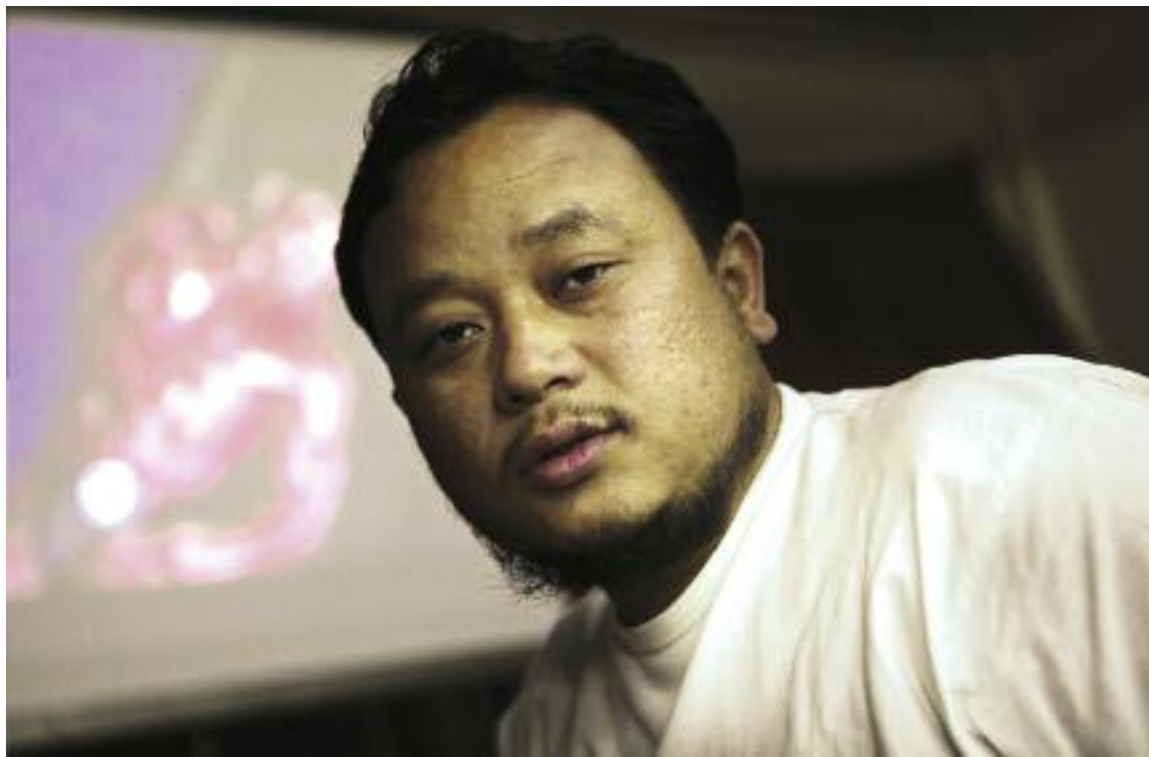
A few years ago when Haobam Paban Kumar, then a student of the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute (SRFTI) in Kolkata, would return to Imphal for his holidays, the neighbourhood would be agog with excitement. He was the only one in the locality who had anything to do with making films. "Back then, I would get special treatment. Today every neighbour in Imphal seems to be a filmmaker," he says.

What is true of Imphal is true of many other parts of the country. Independent documentary cinema in India has indeed received a dramatic shot in the arm in recent years thanks to the infusion of young blood. The ranks of aspiring filmmakers have swelled all over India as they find that access to the medium has become less cumbersome than ever before.

Easy-to-handle digital cameras, computers loaded with user-friendly editing software and an increasing number of funding agencies have empowered a new pool of talent to turn to documentary filmmaking as a means of narrating untold stories and exposing the myriad social and political ills that beset this land. India's indie documentaries, both in terms of substance and approach, have acquired a new vitality and sense of purpose.

But that certainly doesn't mean that the problems facing independent documentary filmmakers have vanished altogether. One, equitable availability of funds is still a major stumbling block and the medium remains largely an elitist pursuit. Two, the exhibition network has yet to acquire the requisite reach even as trusts and foundations in Delhi and elsewhere do their bit to streamline the distribution of these films. Three, the big city-small town divide continues to be yawning. And last but not least, a myopic interpretation of archaic censorship laws poses a huge challenge to documentary films, especially those that seek to articulate uncomfortable, unspeakable truths about the Indian reality.

Says Ranchi-based documentary filmmaker Shriprakash: "There is still little financial support available for those working outside the metros. The funding structure needs to change. The process of democratisation has to be hastened in order to link the movement to the Internet and other new modes



Haobam Paban Kumar

of distribution."

"Money isn't available," he asserts, "for young filmmakers in small towns and villages. Even if a boy here does manage to make a film, marketing it is virtually impossible. This domain is still in the control of big media players in the urban centres. So it's still a race between a thoroughbred Arab horse and a donkey." Shriprakash himself belongs to a family of peasants and grew up in a village.

Shriprakash, whose films include a series of hard-hitting exposes on the horrific impact of a lopsided development model on the indigenous population of Jharkhand, is, however, quick to admit that he has been able to do all his work out of Ranchi. "Thanks to the new filmmaking and communication technologies that are now available, I do not have to go to Delhi or Mumbai to make my films," he adds.

One of Shriprakash's early films, *Another Revolt*, made in 1995, dealt with the struggle of the tribals of Jharkhand against the Koel Karo dam, the first such movement in India against dams and the displacement caused by them. Since then, he has made films like *Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda* on the effects on local communities of uranium mining and the dumping of radioactive waste; *The Fire Within* about how a century and half of coal mining has



Supriyo Sen in Berlin



Suparna Gangal

Independent documentary cinema in India has received a dramatic shot in the arm thanks to the infusion of young blood. Their ranks have swelled as aspiring filmmakers find access to the medium less cumbersome.



Ashvin Kumar setting up a shot on a Srinagar street

played out in the benighted lives of Jharkhand's tribals; and *Kiski Raksha* (Whose Defence?), which exposed how an army firing range in Netarhat could have destroyed Adivasi homes.

"I have never claimed that I am out to change the system," he says. "But I do use the medium to whatever extent I can to support people's movements." Two of these movements – the ones against the Koel Karo dam and the aborted Netarhat army firing range – have yielded results, illustrating as much the power of the people as the efficacy of documentary films as a vehicle of protest.

Shriprakash's latest film, *Eer – Stories in Stone*, produced by the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT), traces the oral history traditions of various Adivasi communities of India – Mundas and Hos in Jharkhand, Ramnamis in Chhattisgarh, Bhils in Madhya Pradesh, the Warli tribals in Maharashtra and

the Banjaras of the Gujarat-Rajasthan border.

Eer – the title is a Bhillari word loosely meaning *gatha* or story – isn't, on the surface, an activist film of the kind that Shriprakash is associated with. But it is certainly of a piece with the critical work that he has done in documenting the lives, cultures and memories of those whose voices are rarely heard in the mainstream media, dominated as it is by urban filmmakers who have had a middle class upbringing. "I've done enough activism in my time," says Shriprakash. "*Eer* was an opportunity for me to do something different."

Paban Kumar, by his own admission, is not an activist filmmaker. But like Shriprakash, several years his senior, he is today able to ply his trade from his hometown in Manipur and reflect upon the political situation there. But it took him several years to break into SRFTI. Paban Kumar worked with veteran Manipuri filmmaker and cultural doyen Aribam Syam Sharma for six years before he passed the admission test and joined the Union government-run Kolkata institute.

In his second year there, in 2004, he was back in Imphal for a break when 32-year-old activist Thangjam Manorama Devi, branded a member of

the separatist People's Liberation Army, was raped and killed by the paramilitary Assam Rifles and the resultant outrage snowballed into a full-fledged street civil disobedience movement demanding a repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), 1958.

"It was a watershed incident. Manorama Devi was the first woman ever to be killed in custody by the armed forces. With the help of a journalist friend (Sunzu Bachaspatimayum, also a filmmaker himself), I began to record the events as they unfolded and the public anger that spilled over on to the streets. It was like a video diary. I did not have a full-fledged film in mind at that point," recalls Paban Kumar.

The random recordings eventually yielded a powerful feature-length documentary, *AFSPA 1958*, which instantly catapulted the young documentary maker and the cause he was espousing into the global limelight. Not only did

the 2006 film fetch Paban Kumar the highest national recognition – Swarn Kamal for the best non-feature of the year (making him the first Manipuri director ever to win the honour) – a rough-cut version of the film, *Cry in the Dark*, made for a foreign TV network, travelled to the Toronto International Film Festival and many other events around the world.

The SRFTI grad's march has continued unabated since then, with another National Award coming his way in 2010 for his next documentary, *Mr India*. The film is the story of a remarkable man, Khundrakpam Pradip Kumar Singh, who learnt a decade ago that he was HIV-positive but went on against all odds to become a champion bodybuilder.

Paban Kumar is now working on a documentary about three generations of a family of Nupshabis, the female impersonators of Shumang Lila, a form of traditional Manipur courtyard theatre in which men don the guise of women. "The shoot is over and the film is in post-production," he says. This film will mark a return for the young filmmaker, who is also currently working on the screenplay of a feature film, to the cultural documentary territory on which his mentor, Aribam Syam Sharma, stamped his authority through a body of work made up of both critically acclaimed fiction films and evocative documentaries about Manipur art and dance forms.

Manipur, a small state whose cinematic output was minuscule until the last decade, now produces 60 to 70 digital feature films every year, besides a huge number of documentaries and short films. "Cultural documentaries were once the norm in Manipur," says Paban Kumar. "Today, more and more young filmmakers are dealing with contemporary political issues in their work."

Of course, when Paban Kumar shot *AFSPA 1958*, it attracted no attention worth the name from the security forces, working as he did with an unobtrusive digital camera. "But now the armed forces personnel are far more conscious of cameras," he says.

Paban Kumar could well be talking about all of India. Independent documentary films have proliferated all around the country, and not just in the metropolises, where resources are still largely concentrated. The themes of many of these films are driven by a spirit of activism although not every filmmaker in this space is necessarily comfortable carrying the 'activist' tag.

"In the wake of the digital revolution," says Kolkata-based Supriyo Sen, who has seven internationally feted titles behind him, "the independent documentary movement has acquired a new vitality and dynamism with films being made in small towns and rural areas on a wide variety of subjects."

He points out that a new audience for documentary films is emerging in the big cities in India although its size is still pretty small by global standards. "We show our films only to a select group of people: friends, cineastes and members of civil society. It's all over with 10 to 15 screenings in all," he laments.

Sen, of course, hasn't so far had to depend too much on the domestic circuit for survival. His latest film, *Wagah*, made as part of a commission from the Berlin Film Festival to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, questions the relevance of the border that separates India and Pakistan. The film views the daily ritual of the closing of the border gates, seen through the eyes of three children who sell DVDs to the visitors who stream in every day to watch the extraordinary spectacle.

Sen, a journalism graduate from Kolkata University who is now preparing to mount his first fiction film, began his professional life as a freelance scribe before venturing into filmmaking in the mid-1990s. "A border has a special resonance for me," he says, "because I am from a family of refugees."

The subjective and the informative coalesce in Sen's films in subtle ways. In *Way Back Home* (1999), he traces his parents' journey back to Borishal, Bangladesh, where they grew up, and in *Hope Dies Last in War*, he focuses on the story of Indian PoWs stranded in Pakistan since the 1971 war and the struggle of their families to locate them in the hope of bringing them back.

Interestingly, none of Sen's seven documentaries has been funded in India, nor have any of them been telecast on Doordarshan. "I've made a living entirely by making films and all my funding has come from abroad," he says, alluding perhaps to the apathy that documentary makers still face in India.

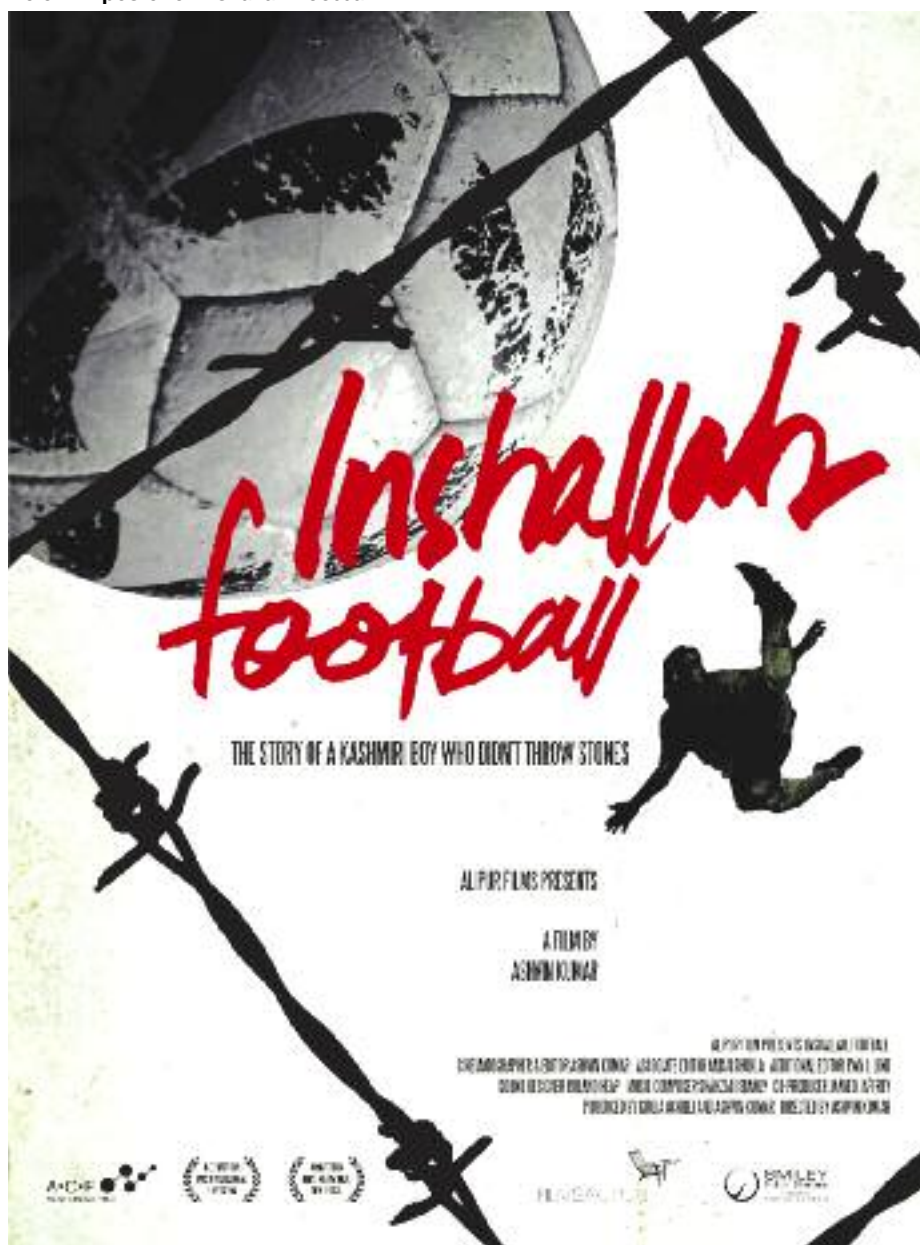
"Documentary films tend to be political in nature. That is perhaps why state funding for such films is limited at best," he says.

Over the years, Sen has received financial backing from the Sundance Documentary Fund, Jan Vrijman Fund of the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) and the Asian Cinema Fund of the Pusan International Film Festival, among others.

For Pune's Suparna Gangal, too, the urge to make films sprang from purely



Basha on the streets in *Inshallah Football*
Below: A poster of *Inshallah Football*



**Ashish Srivastav**

personal impulses. The management graduate-turned-filmmaker, who assisted Umesh Vinayak Kulkarni during the making of the successful Marathi feature film, *Valu*, trains her camera on the inequities that surround her in a city that is in the midst of an economic boom and fuelling rapid urban expansion.

Gangal, a former HR professional, has been making films for eight years but without depending on external agencies for funding. "I do corporate films and documentaries for clients and use part of the earnings to fund my own films," says the filmmaker, who has obviously benefitted from her MBA degree. It's a self-sustaining model that allows her to create documentary content through small films as a launch pad to bigger projects.

Urali Devachi – A Living Hell, a six-minute film about a village 25 km from Pune that has been turned into a dumping ground for the mountains of solid waste that the burgeoning city generates, has brought her into the spotlight. A UN agency now wants her to make a longer version of the film but she is still in two minds on whether she wants to go down that path or explore other options that lie ahead.

Urali Devachi village was once a very fertile area known for its onion produce. Today, due to its proximity to the overflowing dumping ground, it is a toxic wasteland where malaria and dengue are a constant threat. "While Pune prospers, its surrounding areas suffer," the film asserts, capturing the essential dichotomy of the development model that urban, middle class India seems to favour.

Yet another short film made by Gangal, *Life Goes On...*, homes in on an ageing ragpicker couple who collect trash from outside an upmarket Pune hospital and expose themselves on a daily basis to life-threatening health hazards. They are aware of the danger but are too poor to forgo the ₹100 they make every day.

India's independent filmmakers are increasingly tackling themes and issues that rarely find space in the mainstream media. And in doing so, they are coming into conflict with the censors.

Gangal is now researching for a documentary on the situation in Kashmir. "It will obviously contain political elements but will essentially document the situation in the Valley from the point of view of the common people of Kashmir," she reveals.

For Gangal, the explosion of activity in the independent documentary space is a godsend. "It is wonderful to see the dramatic increase in the number of young people making documentary films: the more, the merrier. It is like when you want to produce a sporting champion,

your chances of getting one improves if you have a pool of talent that is large and constantly replenished."

That is certainly happening in India's independent documentary cinema. Filmmakers are increasingly tackling themes and issues that rarely find space in the mainstream media. And in doing so, they are coming into conflict with the censors, who continue to place major hurdles in the way of getting these films out into the public domain. It is a battle that old hands like Anand Patwardhan and Rakesh Sharma, both of whom have dealt with the rise of rightwing politics and communalism, have fought for years for the filmmaker's freedom of expression.

As the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), the government-mandated body that sits in judgment on the suitability of films for public viewing, continues to apply antiquated laws that have been overtaken by the constant evolution of technology, film makers like Patwardhan and Sharma have had running battles with the establishment. Governments come and go, but the control mechanism stays firmly in place.

During the reign of the NDA at the Centre, CBFC had ordered nearly 20 cuts on Patwardhan's anti-war, anti-nuclear documentary *Jung aur Aman* (War and Peace). He appealed to the Mumbai High Court. He won the right to screen his film without a single deletion. During the same period, Sharma's film,

The Final Solution, an exploration of the politics of hate in the light of the Gujarat riots of 2002, was banned. It saw the light of day only after the NDA went out of power.

Nothing has changed several years down the line. Ashvin Kumar, nominated for an Oscar in 2005 for his short fiction film, *Little Terrorist*, is currently fighting to rid his new feature-length documentary, *Inshallah, Football*, of the 'A' certificate slapped on it by CBFC, headed by veteran actress Sharmila Tagore. The argument put forth by her is that the film contains "graphic description of torture" and is, therefore, suitable only for mature viewers. She has, however, said that "it's a beautiful film and I want everyone to see it."

Inshallah, Football narrates the true story of an 18-year-old Kashmiri footballer, Basharat Baba, who struggles to acquire a passport when he is selected by a FIFA-certified Argentine coach to train at Santos Football Club in Brazil and then play professional soccer. It tracks his dreams and frustrations in the face of attempts by the authorities to stymie his promising career only because his father is an ex-militant. Basharat's plight is no different from that of many other Kashmiri youngsters grappling with overwhelming prejudice and lack of opportunities.

So, *Inshallah, Football* isn't just one boy's story. It is also the story of a man, Basharat's father, who believed in the cause of *azadi* and was willing to

go the whole hog to achieve his goal, even if that meant joining a militant training camp on the other side of the border and taking up arms. It is also the story of an incredible football coach, Juan Marcos Troia, who lives and works in Srinagar with the sole purpose of identifying and promoting talented Kashmiri footballers.

"An 'adults only' certificate for *Inshallah, Football* defeats its very purpose," says Kumar, who was born in Kolkata, grew up in Delhi and now lives in Goa. "It is only a genteel critique of what's going on in the Valley. But it is also, importantly, targeted at children around India so that they can see what children in Kashmir are thinking."

Officially, the CBFC has informed Kumar that *Inshallah, Football* has "characters talking about graphic details of physical and mental torture they had to undergo" and that "the theme of the film is mature and some dialogues can be psychologically damaging for non-adult audiences." On his part, Kumar, in a blog addressed to Ms Tagore, has asserted that the real purpose of this censorship is to avoid causing embarrassment to the Indian government with regard to the conduct of the Indian armed forces in Kashmir.

In his open letter to the CBFC chief, Kumar has accused her of appropriating powers that far exceed her mandate. "This is why you find yourself defending conservatism and championing regression and devolution. This is illustrated by your pronouncement that the 'censor board will work in the same manner as it has been working and it's not going to back'," the filmmaker has written.

"If this is to be taken seriously," Kumar goes on, "it would appear that your organisation has no qualms in openly declaring that its philosophy, purpose and mandate is to remain stagnant while the society to which you are ultimately responsible becomes increasingly dynamic..."

Kumar's battle with the censors is still on. "I have appealed against the certification. I have received an acknowledgment from the Delhi censor board, but am still awaiting a final decision," he says. Questioning the very logic behind the CBFC decision to restrict the film's viewership to adults, he asserts that *Inshallah, Football* is simply a fervent appeal for humanity to prevail in the Valley.

Interestingly, another of Kumar's films, *Dazed in Doon*, set in Doon School, is facing similar suppression from the school authorities who commissioned the film in the first place but are now determined to prevent its distribution because it is not in line with what they consider appropriate. "It is sad that the Doon School authorities, who should be leading the way in the fight for artistic freedom, are themselves as intolerant as Sharmila Tagore and her band of censor board members," says Kumar, himself an old boy of the Dehradun-based school.

Encouragingly, in early March, Bangalore-based documentary film maker Shabnam Virmani won a landmark legal battle when the Delhi High Court ruled that her 100-minute film, *Had Anhad*, about the relevance of the living traditions of Kabir in today's fractious world, be given appropriate certification. The court also directed the Union government to pay ₹10,000 to the filmmaker to cover her litigation costs.

Lauding the maker of *Had Anhad* for her creative diligence, Justice S. Muralidhar said: "The impugned orders dated 28 May, 2010 of the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT) and the order of 5 November, 2009 of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) are hereby set aside."

In June last year, another documentary film, *Flames of the Snow*, a 125-minute cinematic account of the Maoist movement in Nepal, was denied a certificate by CBFC. The makers appealed against the order and a month later the film was cleared by a CBFC Revising Committee without deletions but with the imposition of a rider that *Flames of the Snow* would carry a disclaimer that the substance of the film was collated from various media publications.

"That was ridiculous," says the film's director Ashish Srivastav. " *Flames of the Snow* isn't just a collation of what has appeared in the newspapers nor is it only a mere reflection of the makers' point of view. It is a documentary and



Manipur has its own booming film industry



Mr India by Haobam Paban Kumar



Suparna Gangal's *Urali Devachi*



Shriprakash's *Eer*



Supriyo Sen's *Wagah*



Still from *Eer*

Srivastav asserts that his film does not glorify guerrilla violence. 'Our aim is to understand a people's movement provoked by over two centuries of monarchy and feudal exploitation.'

we could not have put words in people's mouths. The film records what actually happened in Nepal. It was shot in the heart of Maoist camps and contains the views of top political leaders, including the then Nepalese Prime Minister Prachanda."

Srivastav asserts that his film does not glorify guerrilla violence. "Our aim is to understand the whys and wherefores of a people's movement provoked by over two centuries of monarchy and feudal exploitation," he adds.

The film, produced and scripted by veteran journalist Anand Swaroop Verma, who has been covering the pro-democracy movement in Nepal since the early 1990s, was released across 42 theatres in the Himalayan country. "For India, we have received enquiries for distribution, but not yet for the theatrical circuit," says Srivastav.

The independent documentary movement in India is alive and kicking. But multiple obstacles still dog its progress. Many battles have been won. But the war is still on. The happy augury is that those battling for the right to provoke thought and question received wisdom are fighting fit.

Business

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A modern Nalanda takes shape

Subir Roy
Bangalore

THE caterpillar has metamorphosed into a butterfly – the Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT), which was

set up in 1993, has gone into the next stage of the evolutionary process by giving birth to the Institute of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine, (I-AIM).

The visible sign of the new avatar is a 100-bed ayurveda and integrative healthcare centre set up

next to the foundation's older campus on the outskirts of Bangalore with support from the Tata Trusts. The centre is modern and ethnic in look and style. It will be manned by 170 professionals. A youngster who joins here will practise knowledge as it is acquired – till the day he graduates



with a licence to set up a practice.

Ratan Tata, chairman of the Tata Group, inaugurated I-AIM on 17 March. Sam Pitroda, chairman of the National Innovation Council, said at the launch: "We can't adopt the western model – the five star culture of health delivery. Healthcare has to reach the masses."

Today, as chronic diseases take up most of the attention of medical science and healthcare budgets, it has become clear that allopathy offers only one source and not the entire gamut of answers that healthcare seeks. According to Darshan Shankar, founding father of FRLHT, "Health seeking behaviour shows that no single medical system has all the answers. Complementary and alternative systems of medicine are being sought out and this is resulting in a move towards integrative healthcare and medical pluralism." So what has till now been termed alternative and traditional systems of medicine is now a part of the mainstream too. "Medical pluralism is in, singularity is out" – this is really the slogan that has launched I-AIM.

The earlier effort of FRLHT was to preserve, revitalise and validate the knowledge of the past, build databases, store the data in an accessible digital format and ensure that endangered medic-

inal plants did not become extinct. FRLHT worked to ensure folk health traditions did not die out with the departure of their practitioners. The institute helped revitalise the supply of medicinal plants. Now, after the firefighting phase is over, I-AIM will have a multiple agenda – to conduct research, educate healthcare practitioners, treat ailments and promote outreach. Integrative means using modern diagnostic tools and ayurvedic systems to measure medical conditions before, during and after treatment. However, the treatment at the hospital itself will be 100 per cent based on ayurveda and yoga.

The aim is not just to establish a new integrative healthcare system and demonstrate that it works. It is also to spread the knowledge and message of an affordable low-cost healthcare solution that addresses grassroots Indian needs. "We

The ambitious vision is to make I-AIM another Indian Institute of Science that marries traditional knowledge with current science and eventually creates a new Nalanda.

want to create enormous new human resources to spread this new integrative science, this medical pluralism," explains Shankar. "We will try to put to use the conservation, recording and validation that we have done so far. We want to work with folk healers and households, have a focus on health education for millions as part of a preventive programme and do it by using modern dissemination tools."

The ambitious vision is to make I-AIM another Indian Institute of Science (IISc) that marries traditional knowledge with current science and eventually creates a new Nalanda that will introduce an era of new and comprehensive knowledge. The end result will be holistic but the process will be unique to India as it will integrate the five officially recognized medical knowledge systems in India – ayurveda, siddha, unani, homeopathy and Tibetan medicine (Swa-rig-pa) – with western allopathy. With so much of this knowledge rooted in India, if the final integrative offering is able to address some of the dead ends that modern medicine seems to be facing now, it will be a great plus for the country.

The foundation was born from a meeting in the late eighties between Darshan Shankar and Sam Pitroda, Indian's telecom pathfinder and knowledge leader. "We clicked though we had little in common," reminisced Pitroda. Darshan Shankar had in the early eighties discovered a virtually unknown tribal health tradition when he was working among the Thakurs in coastal Maharashtra. This had resulted in the setting up in 1986 of a network of NGOs, medical colleges

and research centres called Lok Swasthya Parampara Sambvardhan Samiti.

FRLHT, which means about the same thing in English, has built a comprehensive electronic database of Indian medicinal plants. To preserve biodiversity it has established 87 forest gene banks and set up a herbarium that has collected 70 per cent of the medicinal plants used by Indian systems of medicine. Plus it has assembled some of the most highly endangered plants on its campus, as also a bio-cultural repository of medicinal plants.

An IISc or Nalanda does not come out of nothing. I-AIM is both multi-disciplinary and elaborate in structure. Its academic setup consists of four schools and 14 centres. The first is a school of health sciences. It has an integrative healthcare centre, a centre for local health traditions, a centre for public health and a centre for clinical research. Then, comes a school of trans-disciplinary studies. This is made up of a centre for pharmacognosy, pharmaceuticals and pharmacology, a centre to study the history and sociology of India's medical heritage, a centre for theoretical foundations of ayurveda, and a centre that will incorporate an ayurveda pharmacy.

Then, there is a school of educational innovation which is made up of an Indian medical heritage library and a centre for educational innovation. Finally, there is a school for conservation of natural resources. This is made up of a centre by the same name, a centre for ISM informatics, a repository of medicinal resources (flora, fauna, metals and minerals) and a centre for herbal gardens and landscaping services.

In a sense the past, present and future congregate at I-AIM. The past consists of both codified and uncoded knowledge. The codified is in the manuscripts, the uncoded is with the folk healers. Altogether 300 associations of them at the taluka level in nine states have been aligned with I-AIM. The Indira Gandhi National Open University will accredit them as community health workers. The present is contained in the data banks and herbal resources being secured and protected through in situ banks and herbariums. The future is in the hope that research and practice will create a new world of integrated medicine which is the dream of Darshan Shankar and his colleagues.

Ambitious and far fetched as all this may sound, there is firm precedence for it in the history of knowledge. The European Renaissance and birth of modern knowledge went beyond the dark Middle Ages to seek out knowledge from the Grecian times and validate it through empirical verification. Then, modern science took it forward. Similarly, the current effort is to test, verify and take forward knowledge from India, match it with other schools of knowledge and take humankind's store of knowledge further so that intractable ailments like cancer, diabetes and the common cold can be beaten.

Will it succeed? We do not know. But the legitimacy lies in the sincerity of the quest and the justification of undertaking the journey is that medical knowledge currently seems to be at a dead end. Patents are ending, their pipelines are drying up but new ones are not being discovered. There clearly is the need for a lateral jump, for new paradigms and I-AIM is doing just that.



Ratan Tata inaugurating I-AIM in Bangalore: On his right are Sam Pitroda and Dr GG Gangadharan and on his left is Darshan Shankar

Jobs unlimited with CAP

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAKSHMAN ANAND

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

A small community college, three flights up narrow and steep stairs would appear to be an unlikely launch pad for new careers. But that is precisely what the CAP Foundation does for young people who often come off the street and have few skills.

Seema Sharma, 23, tells us proudly she takes home ₹5,000 a month. Its not much but this is hard-earned money and much better than what she was earning from her previous job. Seema is now employed by the Delhi government's Home Guards department. She keys in orders and fills volunteer details on a computer. It's a life she wouldn't trade for anything, least of all her past. "I worked in a jeans factory before, stitching seams. It was back breaking. Just thinking about those days is painful," she says.

In 2006, Seema enrolled for a three-month information technology (IT) course at a learning centre in Delhi's Sultanpuri area run by the CAP Foundation, a non-profit that helps disadvantaged youth – rescued child labour, victims of trafficking, out of school children – access employment and livelihood opportunities by providing them vocational training.

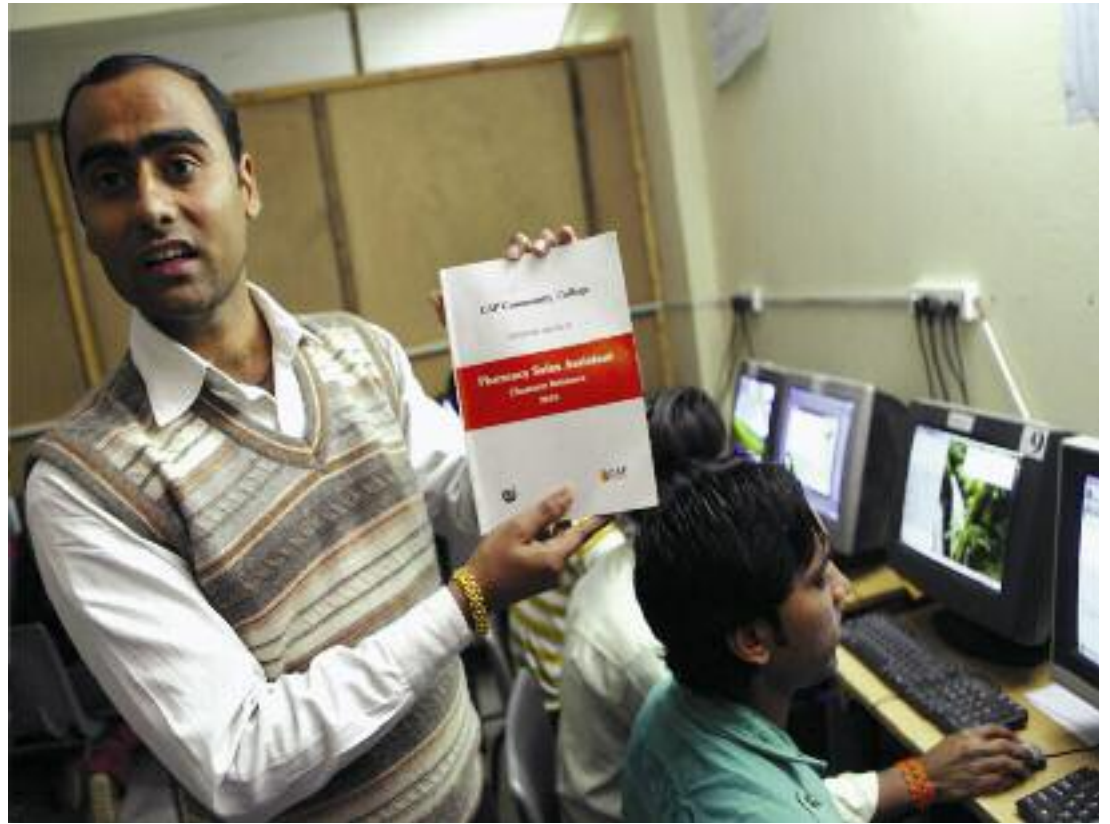
Seema learnt programmes like Excel, Word and Power Point in her course. CAP first helped her find a job as a computer teacher in a school. That was an unexpected full circle for her. She says till she joined the course she had only managed to briefly "touch a computer" once. "I never want to be in a job where I lose my ability to work on a computer," she says firmly, grateful that she got an opportunity to transform her life.

Since 2005, Microsoft has supported the CAP Foundation under its Project Jyoti initiative. The computer giant has already invested ₹47 crore in this programme which has impacted 20 states and Union Territories across India. This funding has helped their 14 NGO partners establish more than 1,300 Community Technology Learning Centres (CTLC), facilitating IT skills for close to 290,000 persons.

CAP's *Ek Mouka* or One Chance, a specific workforce development initiative, ties in perfectly with Microsoft's ambition to bridge the digital divide and ensure livelihood enhancement.

CAP has used its association with Microsoft well, effectively integrating the specially designed Microsoft Unlimited Potential curriculum with all the 20 plus training courses they offer students. The courses include healthcare, refrigeration and customer relationship management amongst others. Training is typically for six months. It consists of three months of classroom teaching and another three months spent on the job in hands-on training.

CAP has trained nearly 21,000 students across 20 centres in the National Capital Region (NCR) since 2007. They have placed candidates in a wide range of jobs – data entry, over-the-counter selling, hospitality, billing, rural marketing, in brands like Big



CAP Foundation's IT training and vocational centre in Sultanpuri, Delhi

'We train because we have to place. We are not merely a training centre. We link literacy to skills and then to employability. We have to make sure we place 75 per cent of all students enrolled.'

Bazaar, McDonald's, ICICI Bank, Hindustan Unilever and Cafe Coffee Day amongst others.

"We train because we have to place. We are not merely a training centre. We link literacy to skills and then to employability," explains Sachin Bharati, Business Development Manager, CAP Foundation. They have set themselves an ambitious mandate. "We have to make sure we place 75 per cent of all students enrolled."

Vikas Goswami, Director, Corporate Social Responsibility at Microsoft, says CAP's employability focus and its ability to take their curriculum beyond the realm of vocational training has enriched Project Jyoti. "They have shown us how the same programme can be used in different ways and lead to sustainable impact."

On the other hand, CAP says students benefit substantially from being certified and trained on a programme as comprehensively designed and well-

researched as the Microsoft Unlimited Potential syllabus. "It's been designed with market research. The modules are well suited and don't need any customisation," says Bharati. He adds, "Employability is achieved with domain expertise but without IT and English language skills, it's very tough to place students. Microsoft is a brand. Employers are very happy to hear of our association with them."

Other former CAP Foundation students like Ajay Sharma and Rajni Likhe agree. "It's a huge advantage," says Sharma who works in a supermarket, part of a huge corporate-backed chain. Now, he wants to learn Tally, an accounting system, and has asked the CAP Foundation for help.

To retain links with students and benefit from their on-the-job experiences, the CAP Foundation has a robust alumni network through an online alumni and jobs portal. It also interacts closely with employers and companies to make sure that the programmes introduced are relevant to industry needs. This research is mapped to a course and to a profile of their students.

"Voltas told us that they need 2,000 people in northern India for customer service, retail presence etc. That is why we have introduced the air-conditioning and refrigeration course," says Bharati. "Their hiring agents are in touch with us. We already have a job guarantee in that course this way," he says.

"This ability by CAP to capture feedback and respond to market realities is one of the reasons we partner with them," says Vikas Goswami. "They have an established model which ensures results." That's certainly something Seema would wholeheartedly agree with.

Insights

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Budget for a dream city

V RAVICHANDAR

LAKSHMAN ANAND

THE Karnataka Chief Minister jumped ahead of the Railway Budget and Union Budget to set out the State Budget. In his case the sops were very clear – a separate agriculture budget further reinforced by a 10 per cent cut in Bangalore's allocations. As is common on such occasions there were the usual pronouncements that often don't fructify since it is all about implementation efficiency. The reality of our cities is that they are under the control and spell of the State government and consequently their budget has to lay out the road map for the urban centres.

This dreamy author embarks on a wishful, fanciful speech about any Indian city that a State Finance Minister ought to make in his budget. Bangalore has been taken as an example since one has local context but the contours of the speech are adaptable for any city and available as open source shareware!

"Coming to Bangalore city, I wish to make a departure from the usual mention of hundreds of crores in the budget for city development across a slew of projects by government agencies. Instead I wish to focus on how we will secure the future of Bangalore for generations to come by thinking differently about what we do now. I am fortunate to speak from this Vidhana Soudha hall thanks to a former Chief Minister's foresight to get the project done despite reservations. My inspiration is that Lalbagh and Cubbon Park would never have been around for us to enjoy if the then decision makers took a clerical accountant's view of why it was not feasible. So we must dare to dream big.

For starters, if Bangalore is to be livable we have to start thinking about the extended region as the 'new city'. We will enable 'Rurban' (rural and urban) regions that extend beyond conventional satellite towns through tax incentives. Our government is committed to devolving greater powers to the City Corporation with a directly elected mayor within the next two years. With enabling legislation, Bangalore has a chance to be self-reliant and access capital markets with Municipal bonds. Consequently, scarce State resources can be used for rural and underdeveloped regions.

Under the JNNURM reform conditions we have



agreed to bring in a Disclosure Law and Citizen Participation by 2013. We have just passed an inadequate law on citizen participation that provides for nominated ward committees and veto powers to Corporators. We intend to rectify that through an amendment to allow for genuine citizen participation through elected area ward sabha reps and removal of veto powers. We have also chosen to advance the implementation of the Disclosure Law to the current financial year to bring in greater transparency and more accountability.

The peripheral ring road has been under planning for a while. This will be built as an eight-lane arterial road and there will be a demarcated green belt adjoining the service road. Unlike what happened with the Outer Ring Road where this stretch was de-notified subsequently, we will pass legislation protecting the green belt around the road for all time. The high speed rail to the airport has been under consideration. The State cannot afford it. This will be undertaken only if a private player is willing to take the complete financial risk. We also

wish to utilize existing infrastructure assets in the city optimally. Towards this end, we intend to use, where feasible, the existing railway lines for intra-city passenger and goods traffic and we will extend the Metro to the airport. In respect of the old HAL airport, we feel the State will be better served by two airports and we will seek a resolution acceptable to the stakeholders.

Bangalore's infrastructure stress can only be reduced by higher public transport usage. We do not see the Metro rail as just an engineering project. If it is to be a widely used solution there is need for feeder buses and world class pedestrian walkways around the stations. Our government will make the necessary investments to turn this into reality. This is proposed to be funded by allowing premium floor area ratios (FARs) for high rises in specific central and outer business districts on the Metro route. The Big 10 buses have been a success. We intend to extend the thinking to more direction oriented bus systems enabled with smart card technology that

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Tapping local energy

BHARAT DOGRA

THE recent unrest in West Asia sparking an escalation in oil prices and uncertainty of oil supplies, reinforce the increasingly strong argument that renewable energy is the energy of the future in an era of climate change. In India we need to focus on decentralised, self-reliant energy systems for rural areas which can combine a clutch of local renewable energy sources.

Such a rural-based, decentralised model of renewable energy is most suited to India where nearly 70 percent of the population lives in villages.

An energy model based on renewables should be designed and planned with the panchayat raj institutions (PRIs) or local self-government institutions. A consensus is emerging that PRIs should be reformed so that the gram sabha or the assembly of all villagers can play a more effective role. Village plans should be prepared after extensive discussions in the gram sabha with adequate opportunities for weaker sections and women to present their views. Planning for renewable energy should be linked to this process.

For example, there is a lot of potential for the development of water mills in hilly areas. While travelling to many hill villages I noticed that traditionally water mills played a very useful role particularly for milling wheat, though of late there has been a decline in their numbers. Several well-informed persons told me that watermills can be very useful as small-scale (micro) hydel power stations. There will be no adverse effect and a lot of employment will be generated.

When thousands of gram sabhas prepare plans for watermill-cum-micro hydel power projects keeping local conditions and sensitivities in mind, the opportunity of making electricity available to villages at low cost and with minimum



Village women setting up solar cookers

adverse impact is opened up. While each effort would be small, adding up the net effort of thousands of panchayats would lead to considerable generation of electricity in a safe and environmentally secure way.

In fact, according to research, if good quality solar lanterns are given to India's 72 million households that use kerosene for lighting, it would require only ₹3,000 crore or eight per cent of the committed subsidy of the National Solar Mission (NSM). The social payback of this investment is less than three months.

One organisation which has successfully carried out a programme of distributing solar lanterns among villagers is the Barefoot College in Tilonia, Rajasthan. Solar lanterns are being successfully used in their night schools. Several mid-wives and nurses who were provided solar lanterns used them for doing medical check-ups and for safe delivery of babies after sunset.

But the most important contribution of the Barefoot College has been to train hundreds of 'barefoot solar engineers'. It has achieved remark-

able success in using the hidden skills and talents of villagers with a modicum of education so that after about six months of training they emerge as barefoot solar engineers and technicians. On the job learning continues. It is these barefoot engineers who have lighted up villages with solar energy not only in remote regions of Ladakh, Barmer and Sikkim but also in Bhutan, Afghanistan and about 15 countries in Africa.

At the Tilonia campus 45 kilowatt of solar modules with five battery banks provide power for 500 lights, several fans, a photocopying machine, more than 30 computers and printers, a pump set, a small telephone exchange and a milk booth with freezers. The

installation of all these modules and applications were carried out by barefoot solar engineers with a maximum school education of Class 10. According to data available with the Barefoot College nearly 200,000 people were provided with clean energy and light in 16 states of India and 17 other developing countries.

Installing solar energy systems in the villages of Ladakh was a particularly challenging but equally rewarding task. These extremely remote and cold villages needed electricity badly but in reality had only kerosene lamps to light their homes. Barefoot College took up the challenging task of taking solar energy to these villages with the help of local youth who were selected by local communities and then trained by Barefoot College as barefoot solar engineers. This effort started in 1989. Today remote villages in Ladakh are serviced by these same barefoot engineers.

The Women Barefoot Solar Cooker Engineers' Society based in Tilonia is a registered association of rural women who complete the full fabrication and production of parabolic solar cookers.

Continued from page 29

will enable more rapid transit for citizens with less waiting time. Companies will be incentivized to encourage working from home and 'near home' centres.

Bangalore is blessed with a salubrious climate. Nearly one in two trips is made on foot, more so by the urban poor. Our government will move a 'Right to Walk' legislation which will enable a mission mode approach to build our sidewalks. Green thinking in all our plans is necessary. Property tax credits will be given to households that invest in rainwater harvesting and solar energy. Waste water treatment projects and use of this water for non consumption purposes will be encouraged. To overcome the reducing green cover our government will initiate a million trees planting programme this year.

We had suggested regularization of buildings

with violations through a one – time penalty. This is being dropped since it is a bad idea. The tragic Carlton fire has brought home the need to ensure compliance with good practices and enforce the rule of law. To encourage dwellings to put their 'house' in order our government plans a self assessment scheme for violations. Impact taxes will be payable till such time the violations are rectified. Going forward, we need to create a robust market for Transferable Development Rights (TDR) since this will allow land aggregation and use for productive purposes. To do this we intend to enforce the law equitably, be it related to building violations or traffic offences.

Bhoomi, a rural Karnataka initiative, has been a huge success. It is time for urban areas to learn from rural practices. Our government will implement Urban Bhoomi. This will bring in more

transparency on urban land titles allowing for a latter day move to guaranteed land titles, more so for slum areas. Through provisioning of medical facilities, schools, drains, power, water and sanitation in poor neighbourhoods, we are committed to inclusive growth.

A city is finally defined by its community energy, public spaces and its arts and culture scene. We intend to refurbish our existing public spaces like museums, galleries, auditoriums and invest in a few new world class facilities. Pedestrian plazas the world over are known to be great for business and as places of vitality. We intend to pilot one pedestrian plaza that should act as a demonstration of what is possible if citizens are given the keys to the city!"

Dream over. It is back to urban realities!

V. Ravichandar, Chairman, Feedback Consulting, is a day dreamer.

Sikkim dams on the horizon

KANCHI KOHLI

TODAY'S story goes back to 1998 when the Teesta river in Sikkim was the subject of intense hydro power debate.

At that time the expert committee for River Valley and Hydroelectric Projects in the MoEF was in the process of granting approval to the 510 MW Teesta V Hydro project to be constructed on the free flowing Himalayan river, Teesta. This approval was required as part of the procedure prescribed under the Environment Impact Assessment Notification (EIA). An initiative of the National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC), this project was set to be the first of the six stage 'cascade' plan to harness 3635 MW of hydropower, all within 175 km of the river Teesta.

At the initial stage, discussions within the River Valley Committee were veering towards the view that the Teesta V project should be allowed to go ahead only after a comprehensive carrying capacity study of the Teesta river is carried out. The purpose would be to ascertain the extent of load the river can actually take when it comes to social, ecological and environmental impacts. But this never happened and approval to the Teesta V project was granted in 1999 following pressure from the Ministry of Power. It came with the condition that no other project in Sikkim would be considered for environmental clearance till the carrying capacity study was completed.

Even as the Centre for Inter-Disciplinary Studies of Mountain and Hill Environment (CISMHE) in New Delhi began studying the carrying capacity of the Teesta, the processes for the grant of approval to the 1200 MW Teesta III project (another run of the river scheme) was initiated and approved by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). In fact, the MoEF granted approval to five projects on the Teesta river basin, in violation of the condition prescribed for the Teesta V project. CISMHE's study funded by the NHPC took six years to complete from 2001 to 2007.

In a parallel development the Government of India announced a list of another 10 hydro power schemes for the river Teesta as part of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's initiative to boost power generation in the country. It did not matter that the findings of the carrying capacity study had not been ascertained or articulated at this point of time.

This was also the time when several youth from Sikkim and the Affected Citizen's of Teesta group took to the streets of Gangtok and launched an unending *satyagraha*. Representatives of the Lepcha tribal community began an indefinite hunger strike to save Dzongu, their traditional homeland. It was one of the most inspiring campaigns led by the youth which received national and international attention. The Lepcha community and their supporters were deeply concerned about what would happen to the free flow of the Teesta and how it would impact their identity. Apart from land acquisition a crucial concern was



of cultural erosion due to the influx of outside labour into this protected region once dam construction begins.

It was in October 2008 that the MoEF issued a letter to the Government of Sikkim that no activities related to dams (even investigations) should be taken up North of the Chungthang region, home to the Lepcha, Bhutia and other communities. Whether this was in recognition of the *satyagraha* was not stated, but it was certainly a critical step forward. What the MoEF admitted was that their decision was in the light of the observation of the Carrying Capacity Study by CISMHE on the ecological sensitivity of the Teesta Basin in North Sikkim. MoEF asked the state government to scrap five projects – Teesta I (300 MW), Teesta II (480 MW), Bhimkyong (99 MW), Bop (99 MW) and Lachung (99 MW) HEPs, with a total installed capacity of 1077 MW.

But the tug of war continued between the Sikkim government and the MoEF. In January 2010, the Power Secretary of the Sikkim government attended a meeting of the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) on River Valley and Hydroelectric Projects set up as part of the environment clearance process. What is interesting is that the resource person for the Sikkim government at this time was PG Sastry, who was Chairperson of the EAC for River Valley Projects as late as 2007. Professor Sastry said that the carrying capacity study by CISMHE was exemplary and the project developers were willing to take on board the concerns raised in the CISMHE study. But the developers and Sikkim government were constrained by the decision of the MoEF to carry out exploratory work upstream of the Teesta, where they can gather additional data.

In February 2010, the EAC gave permission to

Teesta I and II projects to conduct investigations based on revised location and parameters. As the projects were close to the Kanchandzonga National Park, the Government of Sikkim was asked to take permission of the National Board of Wildlife (NBWL). In March 2010, EAC members visited Sikkim and were hosted by the government and local activists allege, by the project authorities themselves. In April 2010, the remaining three projects in North Sikkim were allowed to carry out investigations. These were Lachung, Bhimkyong and Bop HEPs. In the judgment of the sub-group that visited the sites of the above projects, Bop and Bhimkyong do not have any rehabilitation issues and the 10 km stretch of the tunnelled river is intercepted by several perennial streams.

Till then the MoEF had stuck to its decision of not allowing any dams upstream, though the processes were pointing to the inevitable. In November 2010, the MoEF granted Terms of Reference (ToR) to Lachung, Bhimkyong and Bop HEPs to initiate EIAs which will set the ball rolling for procuring environment clearances. This was facilitated by the 'optimisation study' that the MoEF allowed to ascertain the impacts of all three projects together so that the diversion structures/tunneling can be minimised, environmental flow determined and so on; and following which survey and investigations were approved in September 2010.

What all this means is that one has gone back to the pre-1999 scenario and opened the door for hydro power development in Sikkim's fragile ecology. The MoEF which can at one stroke decide on "no-go" or "go slow" regions chooses to turn the picture on its head.

The author is member of Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group and is based in Delhi



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SUSHEELA NAIR



The climb to the top can be daunting

Sholay's rocky trail

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

AFTER a 50-km drive from Bangalore along the road to Mysore, we reached the stunning granite cliffs of Ramnagaram, a Mecca for rock climbers. The rocky escarpments of Ramnagaram formed the backdrop to cinema blockbusters like *Sholay* and David Lean's, *A Passage to India*. Though the legendary *Sholay* was shot 35 years ago, the memories of Gabbar Singh, Basanti and Thakur still linger in the hearts of the villagers. As a mark of respect, the people of Ramnagaram have rechristened a hamlet as Sippy Nagar after the director of the movie, Ramesh Sippy. Apart from being a movie locale, it is famed for its historical

temples, mosques and clusters of towering, rocky formations.

Ramnagaram is steeped in history. During the British period, this place was called Closepet, after Barry Closepet, who was the first adjutant-general of erstwhile Mysore. It was renamed Ramnagaram after Independence. Tipu Sultan strengthened the fort and made it a storehouse for his arms and ammunition in 1791 around the time of the Third Mysore War. It was his bastion during the several wars they fought with the British. The present town has an *agrahara* on the left bank of the Arkavati with the temple of Arkeshwara built in Vijayanagara style. One can also see a sprinkling of historical burial sites and the ruined fort called Ramagiri Durga of Kempegowda built in 1530 AD. Ramnagaram has

another sobriquet, 'Silk Town' as cultivating silkworm cocoons is the main occupation here.

With its lofty pillar rock formations spiked with innumerable cracks and fissures, Ramnagaram has now become a natural destination for rock climbers. There are two main climbing areas here, the Ibrahim farm area and the Ramgiri pillar area. The best place to head to are the three peaks, huddled together at the village of Ramgiri. Some of the interesting climbs are on the Wanakkal wall ('Gabbar ki asli pasand,' 'Labour pain'), on the Rainbow wall ('UIAA', 'Kalia'), on Anna-Thamma ('Darkness at dawn', 'Black Diamond'). The name Anna-Thamma means 'elder-brother-younger-brother' in Kannada.

Continued on page 34

SUSHEELA NAIR



Fenced-in natural pond called Ramtheertha

Incidentally, rock climbing has become popular here because of Vanasiri, a Community Based Eco-Tourism (CBET) initiative supported by Samvada, a local NGO working with urban and rural youth in Karnataka. This project is led by youth living in the vicinity of the Ramdevarbetta forest. The group comprises local tribes, farmers and also some students with vast knowledge of the flora and fauna of the region. The enterprising group, Vanasiri, which means friends of the forest, conducts a multitude of day activities such as bouldering, bird-watching, cave exploration, mountain biking, rock climbing, rappelling, trekking, vulture-spotting, games, archery, story-telling and rappelling for adventure buffs and nature enthusiasts. The highlight of the trip are forays to the spots where *Sholay* was shot.

The one-day trip organised by Vanasiri to the Sholay Hills started with a bullock cart ride to the base of the Ramgiri Hills or Ramadevara Betta. The town gets its name from this hillock. We clambered up 350 steps leading to a Ram shrine and a fenced-in natural pond called Ramatheertha. En route, we stopped by an Anjaneya temple situated at the 250th step. While climbing up, Dharmaraj, our guide from Vanasiri pointed out high up, holes in the rock face, presumably the nesting site of the critically endangered long-billed vulture. Ramnagaram is the last remaining habitat of these vultures in South India where less than 15 birds have made their home. Ramnagaram and its surrounding environs provide excellent bird-watching opportunities and we spotted yellow-throated bulbuls. It also shelters bears, leopards, porcupines, jungle fowl, wild boar and snakes but we were not lucky enough to spot them.

While climbing up, Vanasiri members regaled us with stories associated with the area. "The interesting feature of the hilltop is the conspicuous absence of crows. The story behind this phenomenon is that Ram had cursed Kakasura for disturbing Sita," explained Ramachandra, one of the Vanasiri members. The hillock is popularly known as Sholay Gudda, since all locations made famous in the movie are visible from the top. A few rough trails also lead to higher rocky hills. We had to climb a little further to reach the top. The last

flight of steps seemed to be daunting at first glance but with railings to hold on to, we managed to reach the peak easily. The fabulous view from the hilltop is worth the arduous climb. We had a panoramic view of the small hills around with towering granite monoliths, the picturesque countryside, Saphtharishi Betta, which resembles seven idols from different angles, and moving vehicles on the Bangalore – Mysore highway.

The downhill trek was much easier as we took a detour through a scrub jungle. We strolled leisurely in the lap of nature with our resourceful guides sharing many interesting facts of the varied flora and fauna of the region. They had a story to tell of each plant. After the nature trail, we savoured the local hospitality. We were led to a thatched hut where a sumptuous fare of traditional home-cooked food awaited us.

After lunch we were all energised for the next installment of activity. We tried our hands at bow and arrow and catapult. This was followed by cave exploration, another much-sought after adventure. We realised that this activity is definitely not for the faint hearted as in some places, we had to literally crawl and cringe. The fun part of Ramnagaram that we had been waiting for, the Sholay Trails, was next on our list of activities. Before returning to the starting point, our guides escorted us to the place where Basanti of *Sholay* was forced to dance on broken bottles to keep Veeru alive, the Thakur's house, Gabbar's den, etc. They referred to the characters as if they hailed from the same hamlet. It was time for us to leave but we promised to return after the monsoon to camp under a starry sky.

FACT FILE

HOW TO GET THERE:

Road: Take the Bangalore- Mysore road until you see a huge board welcoming you to Ramnagaram. Continue on the mud road for about 5-km to the foot of the hill.

Rail: All Mysore-bound trains from Bangalore stop at Ramnagaram

Whom to contact: Vanasiri Team, Iruligarapodu, Ramadevarbetta, Ramnagaram, e-mail-kspramod83@rediffmail.com or call 09945810027 or 09632881174

Birth is death for India's women

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

THROUGH a series of 23 stark images, two British photographers, Mark Esplin and Andrew Ash, have reconstructed the story of the agonised Shanti Devi who died in January last year, minutes after giving birth to a premature baby girl. She had not eaten for three days prior to her delivery. In a previous pregnancy she had been sent from pillar to post to four different hospitals though she was carrying a dead foetus in her womb due to a miscarriage. This shocking tragedy happened in New Delhi, India's capital city.

The pictures narrated the trauma of Shanti Devi and her family as also the systemic barriers that contribute to India's maternal health crisis. You could see hospitals steeped in neglect and callousness, abstract images that depicted pregnant Shanti Devi's journey towards maternal death and finally portraits of a bereaved family torn asunder by the death of a mother and wife. Shanti Devi left behind two sons, six and eight years old and her baby girl.

Hosted by the Human Rights Law Network, (HRLN), the photography exhibition, "Mera Haque: Surviving Pregnancy in India," was a grim reminder of India's dubious standing as a country with the highest incidence of maternal death worldwide.

The display accompanied the premiere of a 15-minute documentary film and a panel discussion with prominent artistes, lawyers and social activists.

Even the number of images were significant, says Esplin, as Shanti lived in house no 23 in a crowded locality of Faridabad. There were alarming statistics on maternal deaths in the country on display.

Says Esplin: "Statistics can't explain the appalling systemic barriers that cause maternal mortality and morbidity to be so high. There are wider concerns. Ash and I did the rounds of medical institutions and sought to capture those barriers through our lens – be it the neglect and squalor of the hospitals or the appalling lack of infrastructure such as staff or blood banks."

ANDREW ASH



Shanti Devi's daughter has been adopted by Poonam

MARK ESPLIN



More women go to govt hospitals to deliver their babies. But the hospitals are in shambles.

MARK ESPLIN



Blood has become a sort of currency since hospitals are facing a shortage

ANDREW ASH



Ravi, youngest son of Shanti Devi, faces an uncertain future

"Some of the photographs were particularly challenging," says Esplin. "Small abstract pictures were taken from an auto rickshaw to convey movement. These were a metaphor for Shanti Devi's fateful journey to death."

Lastly, there were large portraits of family and community members affected by Shanti's premature demise – especially her tiny daughter Archana who has been adopted by Poonam and Ganga Mandal. There was also a poignant image of Ravi, Shanti's youngest son, who was sent to Bihar soon after her death and has just recently joined the family in Nangloi, a slum settlement in West Delhi. There were also images of Kishan Mandal, Shanti's husband, a daily wage labourer and her brother, Laxmi Mandal. With the backing of HRLN, the family has turned to the courts for accountability and a restoration of dignity.

However, as a panel discussion made it clear, there will continue to be many Shanti Devis in

India, unless decibel levels are sharply raised. The media, artistes, lawyers and social activists can help set change in motion, pointed out discussants – film star Sharmila Tagore, Shanta, a community activist, Dr Aparajita Gogoi, a noted health activist, Jayshree Satpute, a lawyer for HRLN and Sukti Dhital who manages the Reproductive Rights Unit at HRLN.

Citing shocking cases that have recently come to light, Sharmila Tagore said, "The government needs to change its focus from purely institutional delivery to safe delivery."

Shanta has been working as a community activist in Nangloi, Bhim Nagar, since 21 years. "My aim is to mobilise Below the Poverty Line (BPL) people in Bhim Nagar to challenge the status quo so that they get their food and health entitlements," she said. Shanta plays the role of a mediator between HRLN and the community, for whom she is a friend and guide.

Another vocal speaker was Aparajita, national coordinator of the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood, an advocacy grouping of around 1,500 organisations and individuals. She said lack of women's decision making powers and abject poverty were major reasons for maternal deaths. Citing a case which she and her team came across in Shivpuri village, Madhya Pradesh, she said a woman who was in labour for 48 hours could not be taken to hospital as advised by the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) only because her mother-in-law, sister-in-law and the pregnant woman herself were unable to take that decision since the male member of their family was absent. The tragic outcome was the woman's death.

In a groundbreaking judgment issued in June 2010, the government was ordered to pay compensation for Shanti's preventable death, and for the first time in history, maternal mortality was recognized as a human rights violation.

Hypnotic cinema



THE POPCORN ESSAYISTS

What movies do to writers

Edited: Jai Arjun Singh

Tranquebar

₹ 395

MOVIES are inspired by stories. Do writers get inspired by movies? They do, intensely. In this collection of pieces, 13 writers reflect on films that have lingered in their minds. Movies of all genres haunt writers – Hollywood blockbusters, horror, art, Hindi masala and the special effects film imbued with technical wizardry (like *Batman*). The essays are absorbing, the writing thoughtful, free-flowing.

Life imitates art. In *My Life as a Cabaret Dancer*, Manil Suri, writer and professor of maths at the University of Maryland, accepts an invite to a reading along with a catch – he must perform on stage an act he'd never take the risk of doing. Suri, dressed as a cabaret dancer, performs a Helen dance in Brooklyn square – and finds it liberating, fulfilling.

In *Writing my own Satya*, Amitava Kumar talks of how he went in search of the actor Manoj Bajpai, so overwhelmed was he by the film *Satya* and Bajpai's performance. He speaks of the film like it was part of his search for an evocative story. Kumar meets Bajpai. He thinks deeply of why the film stayed with him, connecting Bajpai's life to his own with its roots in Bihar, and finally turning the page on his past.

The halcyon days of film journalism in Mumbai in the 1970s are described by Namita Gokhale in *Super Days*. She writes of her life as publisher of *Super*, the film magazine born in an era of change when the ethereal heroines of the 1950s and 1960s were supplanted by the insouciant trio of Shabana Azmi, Parveen Babi and Zeenat Aman. The masala Hindi film was born with Manmohan Desai's *Amar, Akbar, Anthony*. The angry young man replaced the soulful hero filled with angst.

In *Monsters I have known*, Jai Arjun Singh takes us through his favourite horror films and analyses why weird stories mesmerize us, why we watch guns and gore. The chemistry of a hypnotic horror film is unique. It thrives on silence, strange sounds and a dark mood. Finesse spoils the horror film. Perhaps it is the only genre which can do with less of the techie stuff.

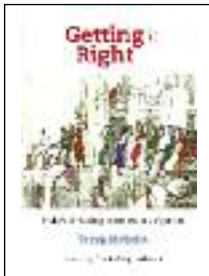
Hindi suspense has a devotee in Madhulika Liddle. In *Villains and Vamps and all Things Camp* she writes why she loved the Hindi suspense films of the 1950s and 1960s and the engaging role of the vamp and villain. The vamp, like the hero and heroine, would metamorphosis in the 1970s. The villain continues to be more or less typical.

Rajorshi Chakraborti in *Perchance to Dream*, writes about how cinema evokes the sensation of dreaming. The techie film recreates the reality of a dream through wizardry but it is a fleeting feeling. The writer looks at films which transported you into a dream state and their methods to achieve the surreal. There is the nightmarish plot of *Detour*, the light hearted buoyant dream of *Stolen Kisses*, and of course, Hindi escapism.

Read also Sumana Roy in *A Mechanical Love or Gaadi Bula Rahi Hai*, as he delves into childhood memories of watching Ritwik Ghatak's *Ajantrik*, the classic film about a man's love for his crusty old car and its eventual journey to the junkyard.

Movies depend on stories, on writers. The film director wants that story, those words. The writer desires the imagery, that realism on screen. It is an emotional relationship.

'Infrastructure has



GETTING IT RIGHT

India's Unfolding
Infrastructure

Agenda

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Civil Society News

New Delhi

PUTTING infrastructure in place is complex in any context and particularly so in an emerging economy. It involves marshalling people, finance, technology, regulation, rights, access, timing and natural resources. It calls for a sense of mission and purpose since invariably there is a lot of catching up required. Huge deficits have to be covered quickly and future requirements have to be met simultaneously.

There is also the need to be inclusive. Infrastructure in a poor country must work for everyone. It can't be designed to serve a few by pushing out the majority.

These issues become all the more intricate with the increasing involvement of private capital in the creation of infrastructure. Private investments have to be earned back and generate a profit. But what should be the wholesome meeting points of national priorities and market realities?

Vinayak Chatterjee's book, *Getting It Right: India's Unfolding Infrastructure Story*, is perhaps the only one of its kind on the sector. It is a collection of his columns which have been appearing in the *Business Standard*. These are insightful pieces on the unfolding challenges in the sector.

They make a good read, but more importantly they have a contemporary relevance. Chatterjee is primarily an entrepreneur. All of 20 years ago he saw the opportunity in India's infrastructure needs and nurtured Feedback Ventures as the foremost company offering consultancy and services. It is the rich experience of a frontrunner that goes into his practical and realistic writings and makes the book a valuable compendium. Vinayak Chatterjee spoke to *Civil Society*.

What does getting infrastructure 'right' really mean in the title of your book?

The title is a little subtle. You can interpret it either as "trying to get it right" or "getting it right." It depends on how you see it. Read with the subtitle, India's unfolding infrastructure agenda, I have tried to keep it in

the present context which means we are trying to get things right – like PPPs, concession agreements, models, privatization. With some we have succeeded, with some we haven't. I just thought I'd position the book as an ongoing exercise....

What is it that we are getting right?

The biggest consensus has been on the role of the private sector in infrastructure. It has been such a major paradigm shift. Not even the Left parties contest it... as a governing mantra. They may question the structure of a concession agreement but nobody questions the fact that as a nation we are going to build our infrastructure largely with the help of the private sector. With each Plan the involvement of the private sector keeps going up. The Tenth Five Year Plan had 15 to 20 per cent involvement of the private sector, the Eleventh Five Year Plan budgeted for 30 per cent and the Twelfth Five Year Plan says 50 per cent.

This whole thing of gradually giving public utilities to the private sector has happened without friction across the political spectrum. To my mind that is the biggest thing we have got right. The State has recognized that it is not its business to run public utilities. Since most of what public utilities do consists of tradable goods and services, the State might as well step back and provide a governance structure.

Some of that was inevitable considering the vast amounts of money required to bridge the infrastructure deficit. But what does getting infrastructure right really mean?

Currently there is this problem of defining infrastructure. When you define infrastructure today you get some sops. You get financing, viability gap funding, you get some income-tax breaks. Infrastructure is popular now as a phrase. Sector after sector wants to be declared infrastructure. So health care, tourism, education, real estate, hospitality... all these sectors want to be defined as infrastructure.

At a personal level and using CII as a platform I have suggested breaking infrastructure into five meaningful segments where you can target policy.

These are: Core infrastructure – roads, ports, airports, power, irrigation. Social infrastructure – health care, education, telecom. Urban infrastructure – cities, electricity distribution, water supply, roads, multi level car parks, transport terminals, bus terminals, large city railway terminal etc. Rural infrastructure – irrigation, roads, electrification, drinking water, sanitation, cold chain, *mandis* etc. Land intensive infrastructure – SEZs, new townships, EPZs, software technology parks, food parks etc.

14 official definitions!

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Deepak Parekh and Montek Singh Ahluwalia release *Getting It Right* as Vinayak Chatterjee looks on

But then the whole world seems to be under infrastructure.

Yeah. The definition of infrastructure is that first it has to be a public utility, which is not so for shoes and textiles. It is public goods which are largely based on lumpy investments and subject to oversight and regulation on pricing, distribution and service standards.

We should be clear in our minds that carriage is infrastructure and content is not. A gas pipeline is infrastructure but gas is not. A road is infrastructure but obviously trucks are not. Rail tracks, the signalling structure, stations are infrastructure but rolling stock is not, a port is infrastructure but ships are not.

This is an argument I believe in. It gives great clarity to what is infrastructure and what is not. So I would not give tax sops under the garb of infrastructure to people to buy ships.

There is another argument called universal intermediates which some economists, including Dr C. Rangarajan in the PM's advisory committee, use and I don't agree with it. He says there are certain products which are essential for the sinews of the nation like iron ore, steel, cement, etc. He calls these universal intermediates and he includes them in his definition of infrastructure. I have argued in my book and in various forums that universal economic intermediates are universal economic intermediates. They are not infrastructure because where do we stop then? Inputs into crops are not infrastructure. You can open and shut a factory, trade it, dismantle it, it is tradable. Why should it be called infrastructure?

In a chat with the Finance Minister I pointed out that this budget suddenly declared fertilizer as infrastructure. By no stretch of imagination, any-

where in the world, is fertilizer infrastructure – which means there are interests at work that stand to benefit from the definition of infrastructure.

In broad strokes what is it that we don't get right?

The biggest thing that we still have not got right is the role of the regulator. As the role of the private sector expands, you need independent economic regulators. I think we have still not soaked in that idea. In some sectors the regulator's position seems to be a sinecure for senior bureaucrats or an extension of the ministry. The concept of an independent regulator is central to the idea of both the public and the private sector behaving as per the rules of the game and providing accountable service standards for the consuming public. So the government, the private sector and the consumer, stand at three ends of the triangle. Right in the middle of the triangle is the regulator and it has to be truly independent.

An independent regulator does many things. There are successful models outside infrastructure where as a nation we have got it right. The Election Commission is, by and large, successful in conducting elections freely and fairly. If you take capital markets, SEBI and RBI are highly successful. The IRDA has a high degree of credibility. Very interestingly IRDA was recently formed and the word development is in its name.

In a developing country like ours, an economic regulator also has to do a balancing act between market expansion and the development of that particular market segment. In the West the criticism against the private sector is that it tends to buy up regulators. In India the reverse is true: the regulator is captured by the political-bureaucratic class.

Is that entirely true? Many people would argue that the political-bureaucrat class has been swallowed by the oligarchs.

See we need a new regulatory architecture because the current rules and regulations under which regulators are selected and funded make them accountable to the ministry and not Parliament. There are a series of design elements which lead to political-bureaucratic capture. We need completely different legislation which we have been asking for industry. The Planning Commission having done a deep study on it has agreed and so has the PMO, informally. There is a new bill which is ready.

As an entrepreneur you would be more comfortable if you had this kind of regulator?

Yes. I think a large section of society would feel comfortable about having independent regulators. I think the CAG is an institution we respect, the CVC is an institution we respect and the Supreme Court has reinforced that respect.

OK. What is the next thing that we need to get right?

I would say we need to come to a definition of infrastructure. As the sector matures let us come to our senses on what is infrastructure. Every sector, including retail, wants to be called infrastructure. There are 14 different official definitions of infrastructure, by RBI, finance ministry, income tax ... it can't be like this.

After that the issue really is land and environment. The problem is that the State, because it cannot handle something, abdicates its responsibility. The land acquisition bill which is before Parliament has an interesting definition. It says the State can invoke the principle of eminent domain to acquire land only for defence and infrastructure and anything else it may define as of critical public importance. First, we don't know what infrastructure is since it is not defined.

Now, land is needed for industry, roads, airports and whatever. The private sector can't be expected to go and acquire it on its own because it does not have the wherewithal to do so. It is the job of the State.

Instead of withdrawing, the State needs to act with clarity and purpose. We need the available land in the country to be zoned so that we know what is productive and fertile land, what is ecologically sensitive and so on. The State must set such land aside and not make it available to industry because of the displacement of people and loss of livelihoods that will be caused.

It is also the State's job to work with communities to give them the confidence to accept projects and ensure that they are adequately compensated and rehabilitated. What happens now is that the government bends over backwards to please industry in the haste to bring in investment and takes over land for industrialisation that it never should have.

Why we suffer

SAMITA RATHOR

SOUL VALUE

THE world we live in is vibrating with unnatural, unhealthy stimulus. The same stimulus is throbbing haphazardly in our physical body, creating a gateway to a short circuit in our ecological system. This is a draining process that in due course will completely wipe out our natural life force.

Here is a classic example: On Friday, 11 March, in Japan, a vicious tsunami triggered by one of the largest earthquakes ever washed its eastern shoreline taking away the lives of hundreds of innocent souls. This earthquake was worse than the one in Christchurch, New Zealand. The impact seems to have been the same. Just locations and intensities were different. These unnatural occurrences are caused by pressure on the earth's surface, just as an inflated balloon bursts when the air inside is excessive.

This may be a moment for all of us to reflect on nature.

Have we ever analyzed the nature of nature? What is nature? Does nature include just landscapes and seascapes? Are these calamities due to an imbalance in nature's harmony? Does nature not include human nature?

Nature is everything that was not made by man. That pretty much includes the entire universe and its inhabitants – from living to non-living things, from animals to elements like fire, water, earth, air, space and ether. If humans turn away from nature then are they not giving rise to an unnatural environmental structure and system?

Nothing stands a chance against nature's fury. A city built over decades can be swallowed by

nature in split seconds. Nature is synonymous with peace. Peace can prevail if nature is in synchronization. If life is in accordance with nature there will be no suffering and only peace.

"Nature, in the broadest sense, is equivalent to the natural world, physical world, or material world. Nature refers to the phenomena of the physical world, and also to life in general. It ranges in scale from the subatomic to the cosmic."

According to our ancient Vedic scriptures suffering can be caused by three natural reasons. Yoga philosophy says this suffering can be put to an end by taking refuge in absolute peace. That's why we chant the shanti mantra, Om shanti, shanti, shanti. Suffering in this world is three-fold and woven mutually into a flawless whole. Therefore the word shanti is recited three times in order to address peace in all three levels of suffering as explained below.

AADHIDAIVIKA: The Sanskrit word, aadhi means 'from the presence of' and daivika means 'divine' or supernatural being. The first recitation refers to suffering arising from conflict among forces that are normally beyond the knowledge and influence of beings on this planet. Adhidaivika suffering includes natural disasters like tsunamis, droughts, storms, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. But such examples also represent a deeper reality than the one we normally perceive with our senses – a reality in which the forces of nature themselves are

struggling for balance and harmony.

AADIBHAUTIKA: This is the second source of suffering. Bhautika means 'manifested beings' of all kinds. Suffering at this level is the result of painful interactions with others. In addition to interpersonal conflicts, adhibhautika pain includes interactions with animals. War is perhaps the most devastating example of this kind of pain, but unpleasant interactions with family, friends and co-workers are much more common experiences of such suffering.

AADHYAATMIKA: Aatmika means related to the 'self.' This is the third source of suffering which arises from within one's self. Physical and mental illness caused by one's own body and mind is aadhyatmika affliction.

These ancient principles are undisputable and logical.

If we do not respect nature, it will not respect us. There needs to be an abundance of positive, constructive and collective human vibrations/energies for us to be in harmony with ourselves. A world with peace and compassion is essential but that can only begin if we have peace within. The sole way to achieve this is by adapting to a lifestyle which is more inclined to simple and natural living. We are completely and totally responsible for the environment we live in.

Albert Einstein says, "Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

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LAKSHMAN ANAND

PRODUCTS

JINGLE PAINTINGS

PATA Chitras are religious paintings in bright colours. Each painting tells a story mostly gleaned from the Ramayana, Mahabharata or from a folk tale. Pata Chitras are painted in Orissa and West Bengal. In Naya village of Mednipur district of West Bengal, 250 families do this form of art. They are called Chitrakars. The paints are of vegetable dyes. It takes around 15 days to do a large size painting. Some are scrolls, some rectangular or square in shape.

The painter sings the story etched on the paper once he or she has completed the painting to explain it to his audience. Karuna Chitrakar says the paintings have become more popular over the years and very contemporary. Paintings today talk of communal harmony and ecological conservation. The style too has undergone subtle differences with some pictures being done in more somber hues. "We have better knowledge of changing styles and tastes since we now sell in cities. We cater to the middle-class and not rural folk," says Karuna Chitrakar.

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