

Civil Society



HOW TO KEEP A RIVER CLEAN

Can Kolkata's sewage-fed fisheries be replicated?

Engineer and ecologist Dhrubajyoti Ghosh



'GAMES ARE A CHANCE TO REDEFINE DELHI'

KT Ravindran, chairman of the Delhi Urban Art Commission, on plans for the city

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COVER STORY

HOW TO KEEP A RIVER CLEAN

Sewage from Kolkata flows through a system of ponds in the eastern fringes of Kolkata where it is cleansed and used to grow fish before it goes into the river.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

The wetlands of east Kolkata

I was introduced to the wetlands of east Kolkata when I chanced upon Dhrubajyoti Ghosh at the offices of the state planning board on Camac Street in 1983. As a rookie journalist, I was in search of stories. I had lots of time on my hands because *The Telegraph*, the paper I worked for, had been shut down, along with the rest of the Ananda Bazaar Group, by striking leftist unions.

During the 51 days of that strike I had several opportunities to visit the wetlands and the garbage gardens in the eastern fringes of the city. I had grown up in Kolkata but knew nothing of this remarkable resource recycling system through which waste came back as food to the city. I found sewage being cleansed through natural processes and used to cultivate fish. The nutrient-rich water was also used to irrigate paddy fields. Vegetables were grown on garbage.

It was a decades-old system created and kept alive by the innovative spirit of local people. With Dhruba as guide, I scaled garbage hills and explored the sewage-fed fisheries. I was always impressed by his willingness to get his knees dirty. He was clearly no ordinary government engineer.

I did a whole lot of stories on the wetlands to celebrate the first flush of my discovery as a hack. Over the years my understanding of the system has grown. Of course there have been many more visits, the most recent being some months ago with Dhruba now grey, diabetic, breathless and all of 61. But my respect for east Kolkata's traditional recycling systems has also come out of the modern search for sustainable, low-cost solutions.

I realise now how much ahead of the rest of the world Dhruba was in being able to recognise the science in the traditional management of the sewage-fed fisheries and assess the true worth of the system to Kolkata, a city falling apart then as it is today.

East Kolkata is now known across the world. It is most certainly better understood internationally than it is here in India. Someone I met at the World Bank's office in Delhi the other day told me that a professor at Berkeley had told him about east Kolkata and suggested that he take a look. The professor had been Dhruba's PhD guide. The World Bank, by the way, much maligned for its propagation of dams and so on, has been doling out money for the creation of low-cost tank networks in south India to solve water problems. Imagine the mighty Bank and humble tanks!

We have chosen to do a cover story on east Kolkata, Dhruba and so on with much reluctance because it is horrible to have to look back and revisit stories of opportunities missed. But the fact is east Kolkata is a good example of how we need to be innovative to find solutions to pollution and poverty. We felt we should do our bit to bring it to the attention of contemporary policy makers.

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www.civilsocietyonline.com
Printed and published by
Umesh Anand from A 53 D,
First Floor, Panchsheel
Vihar, Malviya Nagar, New
Delhi-17. Printed at Kaizen
Offset, 19 DSIDC
Scheme 3, Phase-2, Okhla
Industrial Area,
New Delhi-20.
Postal Registration No.
DL(S)-01/3255/2006-08.

Registered to post without
pre-payment U(SE)-
10/2007-08 at New Delhi
PSO
Registered with the
Registrar of Newspapers
of India under RNI No.:
DELENG/2003/11607

Total no of pages: 36

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



BRT debate

I read with interest and a great deal of sympathy, your article "Is Delhi Missing the Bus" in your May edition.

I am dismayed at the general lack of conceptual thinking that has gone into the project by planners. Being a foreign national, I have lived all of my life in Europe, North America and Singapore. I have recently relocated to Delhi. It became blindingly obvious to me that what may be considered best international practice in the rest of the world, may not work here.

I am astonished that Indian planners truly believed that putting bus lanes in the middle of the road in India was going to work in an environment where the public pay scant regard to traffic rules.

Just how did these planners think people would access and exit from bus stops, who inevitably, have to cross traffic lanes, causing even more congestion?

The blindingly obvious thing to do would have been to put the bus lanes on the inside lane of the road, closest to the pavement so that people could access and exit buses without having to cross several lanes of traffic.

Putting bus stops in the middle of the road in India is simply insane unless they are fenced off and a foot-bridge is provided to stream passengers to and from buses.

Planners need to assume that a general level of rule breaking will be a given and it is almost impossible to change people's habits in the short term.

Since you point out that most of the criticism has come from the upper middle classes, it would have been sensible to have created a website and advertised it on the side of construction barriers.

That way, those curious would have at least had a platform to find out what on earth was going on and engage in some sort of a debate.

LETTERS



The problem with infrastructure planning in metropolitan India in general is that most people just don't have a clue as to what is being proposed or planned.

This is partly due to mainstream media being hijacked by advertising, Bollywood gossip and cricket and amplified by lack of lateral thinking by planners to push the message out.

Ran Chakrabarti

They want to make Delhi like Singapore but can they make the people of Delhi behave like the people of Singapore?

Vikas

We talk about traffic jams caused by the BRT. I don't remember a single day when I did not spend at least 30 minutes at the Chirag Delhi crossing on my way to office before the BRT started. It was the same then as it is now.

Nitesh

Female foeticide

I would like to point out that for the medical profession killing the female foetus is a huge business. They are

making more than Rs 1000 crores. In the last 10 to 15 years over 80 lakh girls have been eliminated. I am a social activist working in Uttar Pradesh.

Sudha

There are childless couples who would be happy to adopt if adoption laws were not so stringent and unreasonable. We should have organizations where unwanted girl children could be left from where childless couples could adopt them.

Aparna

If I don't kill her today, she will kill me financially or someone else will kill her for dowry. This is the rationalization of the father of an unborn girl child. This is the mindset of rural and urban India.

Jyoti

By providing proper education and employment to women we can put an end to exploitation. Everybody knows the worth of an educated daughter. So lets improve the literacy rate.

Natasha Singh

Van Gujjars

The Van Gujjars should get full forest rights and Scheduled Tribe status. They must be allowed to follow their lifestyle. Their lives are more eco-friendly than ours. They should run the Rajaji National Park.

Amit

The Van Gujjars should have representation in the Tiger Task Force and get permission to run the Rajaji National Park.

Anisha

Afghan media

I liked Aunohita Mojumdar's article on the media in Afghanistan. If journalists are allowed to flourish, the government will get better feedback and become more connected with the people. People will have a vested interest

“ To me the effort to equate or consider Gangaji to any other river is an attack by the modern, scientific, economic culture on the traditional Indian culture, faith and ethos and has to be fought at that level. ”

Dr GD Agrawal

Scientist on hunger strike

“ I don't make a film just for one day's consumption. I'm not interested in that. I see to it that my films live long. There has to be a certain universality and timelessness about my films. They reflect issues of perennial value. ”

Adoor Gopalakrishnan

Film-maker

in a free media and democracy because they will see that their lives can change because of it.

Girish Sachdeva

I am deeply appreciative of your efforts to cover South Asia. Your reports from Pakistan and Afghanistan have been very interesting. It is very important that new and meaningful people to people links be established in South Asia. The media has an important role to play in this regard.

Unfortunately, Indian media coverage of South Asia has been declining steadily over the years. All we get is the knee-jerk story. It is pathetic the way we can only talk about terrorism and politics.

Your magazine has a great opportunity to reverse this situation. Please tell us about the good work being done in South Asian countries by the kind of change leaders that you cover so well. We need to know about how they are working to improve their countries.

Politicians across the subcontinent have by and large failed us. The real issues do not interest them. It is in the churning of civil society that a new leadership is being born. These are the voices of the future.

Navin Kumar

Leave Ganga alone says scientist on hunger strike

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

DISTINGUISHED scientist Dr GD Agrawal went on fast from June 13 to protest a spate of hydropower dams coming up on the Bhagirathi Ganga river, upstream of Uttarkashi in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand.

The 76-year-old scientist is deeply anguished at the treatment being meted out to the Ganga by the government. "The Bhagirathi Ganga is central to Hindu culture and religion but it is being treated like an ordinary river," he says.

Already long stretches of the river remain waterless because of the Maneri-Bhali dam built in the late seventies. There is also the massive Tehri Dam, constructed in the nineties despite bitter opposition from environmentalists and local people.

Now a whole lot of dams are being made between the Gangotri glacier and Uttarkashi. These will further reduce the flow of water in the Bhagirathi Ganga as it courses down to the plains. Dr Agrawal wants all such dams to be halted.

"I strongly believe that at least Bhagirathi upstream of Uttarkashi should be spared of any works that disturb its natural flow-regime, ecology, purity or piety and, after brooding over it for several months, I have decided to oppose such works with all the might I have," said Dr Agrawal in a letter to his friends.

"To me the effort to equate or consider Gangaji to any other river is an attack by the modern scientific, economic culture on the traditional Indian culture, faith and ethos and has to be fought at that level," he says.

Dr Agrawal is one of India's most admired environmental scientists. He was the first member-secretary of the Central Pollution Control Board, head of the department of civil and environmental engineering at IIT Kanpur and he is also a Ph. D from the University of Berkeley.

His decision of going on a fast unto death has highlighted the plight of the Ganga and caused serious concern within the voluntary sector. NGO leaders are worried about the impact such a fast will have on his health. They are also thinking about what should be done to make the government wake up to the state of the Ganga.

Dr Agrawal works as an honorary professor of environmental sciences at Mahatma Gandhi Chitrakoot Gramodaya Vishwavidyalaya, in

Chitrakoot in Madhya Pradesh. He is also director of Envirotech Instruments Pvt Ltd, a company he started with some of his students from IIT, Kanpur.

He is a devout Hindu who leads a spartan life. Even at his age, he sweeps his own floor, washes his own clothes and cooks his own food. He wears khadi and travels on a bicycle. His deepest values are simplicity and reverence for nature.

Envirotech and friends of Dr Agrawal have now written a letter to the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, asking him to halt the dams and 'preserve India's ecological future'.

"It is a matter of making a choice between a thousand megawatts of power and upholding the faith of billions of people," says the letter. Signatures are being collected online.

As it is, the Ganga, when it flows through the plains, is sullied by sewage and industrial waste. Now the onslaught is on the river's more pristine upper reaches. This whole Himalayan region is of great significance for Hindus yet the environment impact assessment (EIA) says no monument of historical, religious or archaeological value is affected.

Some of the arguments Dr Agrawal has made are:

The Ganga is not an ordinary river which can be harnessed for electricity, irrigation, water supply or pisciculture. It is a divine flow of energy, a sacred river which is worshipped by all Hindus.

The water of the Ganga is revered as Gangajal. It has self-purifying and health promoting qualities. These are due to the

presence of certain sediments and living matter in the upper reaches. Building of dams will destroy the flora and fauna found there and ruin the quality of Ganga water forever.

Detailed data has not been collected over a long enough period of time on the exact flow of water in the river, especially during a dry year. The Lohari Pala dam which is upstream has been shown to have less water than the downstream Pala Maneri dam. It is not possible for a downstream dam to have higher flow than an upstream one.

There are geological factors like earthquakes and landslides which have to be factored into dam design. The Gangotri glacier is receding. Making dams will change the character of the holy Ganga: its route, silt, flow. Dams will affect aquatic and terrestrial ecology, land-use, cultivated crops and over-all environment.



Dr GD Agrawal

'Games are



Civil Society News
New Delhi

KT Ravindran has been appointed Chairman of the Delhi Urban Art Commission (DUAC) at a time when the city is preparing for the Commonwealth Games in 2010. The previous team at the commission headed by the celebrated Charles Correa left over differences with the government regarding certain projects.

Ravindran, who has a long association with Delhi, is known to be sensitive to issues regarding the environment and heritage. He believes in inclusive cities with shared public spaces. He would like to help fashion a Delhi in which everyone and not just a chosen few have access to facilities.

Ravindran, architect and a teacher, believes the Commonwealth Games are a good opportunity to usher in new standards for the urban environment of Delhi. He thinks that without running into a wall, the commission can play an activist role in redefining Delhi. It can build a dialogue with citizens and serve as a hub for new ideas.

Edited excerpts from an interview to *Civil Society*:

You have come to head DUAC at a time when Delhi is preparing for the Commonwealth Games. Could you tell us something about this?

I am coming to the commission at a time when most decisions on the Commonwealth Games have already been taken as far as location and construction are concerned. Some decisions are with the commission. Whether we like it or not the Games are going to be there and they are of great consequence to the city. They will alter its landscape and provide an opportunity to infuse quality into the urban environment. I consider it of great significance and I want to prioritize the clearances so that it happens gracefully.

a chance to redefine Delhi'



nities on the street.

There is a sense that too much is being done too late as a result of which you have a very narrow window of opportunity and a huge

That's very true but you have to make a distinction between what are the core issues and what are the non-core issues. I'm not talking about those so-called mainstream interventionist areas, but the opportunity that presents itself to do a makeover of Delhi's monuments and centres of culture. The influx of people expected will be a huge small trade opportunity. There will be a big opportunity in relation to tourism. So the Games have the potential to be a cultural event. People who come to the Games will be looking for shopping, entertainment and fun in the evening.

I would like a higher participatory mode of development in which DUAC becomes responsive to what the people are asking for. A large number of letters come on public issues. They are usually written by people who are interested in those issues and have a personal agenda or whatever. However they also do pick up public issues. I am sitting down and answering those letters and ensuring those issues are taken up by the commission. By being more responsive to public opinion I think we can generate a flow.

How do we assess what a city really wants?

DUAC is a place where a large number of technical people are involved: architects, engineers, social scientists, historians. All these experts interact with the city and with each other. We want to become an activist forum.

Photographs: LAKSHMAN ANAND



KT Ravindran

'What we call the street is the most important public space in a city. Not just for vehicles to run fast but also for a very large number of people to walk and cycle to places.'

We would like to put simple infrastructure like street lighting in place so that people can walk without tripping or putting a foot in a puddle. Such things are not mainstream, but they need to be done. There is the ordinary citizen who has the right to public spaces in the city. What happened over the BRT corridor shows that though 80 to 90 per cent of the people are bus riders, cyclists and pedestrians, they are given totally marginalized positioning in the street profile so that automobiles can run around as they like.

If you look at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium it is a place where many different forms of transport are emerging. You have the ring railway coming from one side, the metro coming from another side and you have the BRT corridor. There are lots of facilities being built for the Games at the stadium and it has the potential to become a new kind of public space.

Do you sense great opportunities in DUAC?

Absolutely, it has to be part of the flow. The commission is open in its communications.

So, you would draw out public opinion.

We would like to do that. We want to focus on the idea of building the city through the prism of climate change. We want to see how the commission can bring about a change in the mindset of people who are involved on the technical side and take cognizance of the fact that 40 per cent of carbon emissions are generated by development activities.

I am sure historical buildings are something you would like to look at?

It is a concern very central to my own development and consciousness. I have been involved with INTACH since its inception. Every city has a personality and where

does that come from? It comes from its monuments, its environment and the link between the environment and monuments. That's where Delhi's spirit is located. We have to see that that spirit is not damaged.

Will it include for instance waterways?

Absolutely. Monuments are linked to a waterway and connected to a green spot. We are always looking at roads. Instead we should look at monuments and waterways. The commission had done this and we held an exhibition called Imagining Delhi. In this exhibition, the link between water, monuments and the city clearly came out. We also found that monuments are kept out of the city. They are protected and not consequential to what happens around them.

We would like to reconnect the city's daily development with the monuments. So we want to establish links between the natural environment, heritage, monuments and development activity. It's a large complex task but in principle that's what we would like to see happen.

We are also making a distinction between what we call the core Games projects and the non-core projects: things like connectivity, roads, flyovers as well as hotel projects. We are giving priority to all of them but we are giving more priority to the core projects such as stadia and connectivity between them. We are concerned about overall connectivity between the sites of the events and how the city is going to receive these connectivities during the Commonwealth Games because we cannot shut down the city.

The main geographic centre of the city is the road which connects north to south. It is also the road on which major sports venues are coming up. So the functioning of the Games and the city has to be packaged.

What long-term effects will this have on the city?

Well, considering the fact that large investments are being made in public spaces, the legacy of the Games should integrate with the normal functioning of the city. In many other cities, the Games have been used as an opportunity for a makeover of the entire city. In some cases, the Games have been used as a vehicle for providing low-cost housing and urban renewal. This has unfortunately not happened here as yet or if it is happening it is in a piecemeal and uncoordinated way. I would like to see, if permitted, how public spaces can be improved in a coordinated way.

What is the priority?

What we call the street is the most important public space in a city. Not just for vehicles to run fast but also for a very large number of people to walk and cycle to places of work or for shopping and so on. The street is actually a very, very active public space and we need to see we improve the opportu-

Activists rally against Lalit's murder

Parvinder Singh
Ranchi

THE killing of Lalit Mehta, who was campaigning to make the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) effective in Jharkhand, has spurred a larger civil society campaign against corruption and non-implementation of the scheme which guarantees 100 days of work to poor rural households.

Even as eminent social activists, including Swami Agnivesh, Magsaysay award winner Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey and CPI politburo member D Raja, gathered in the Jharkhand state capital, Ranchi, on June 10 to demand a CBI probe, the sense of outrage is giving way to an emerging resolve to dig deep for a fight for accountability and implementation of entitlements meant for the poor.

This mood was palpable during the mass rally held in Ranchi as marginalised people and concerned citizens, activists and organisations expressed their solidarity.

The rally was preceded by a candle light procession at Albert Ekka Chowk on the evening of June 7 and a two-day protest. Senior journalist Prabhash Joshi and Left leaders participated in the fast.

A state-wide platform 'Daman Evam Bhrashtachar Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti' (Campaign Committee against Repression and Corruption), launched after Lalit's killing, has been leading the agitation to continue the struggle for NREGA in the tribal dominated state and carry forward the spirit that the young engineering graduate represented.

Food is a life and death issue for millions in India and so is the struggle for securing it. This came to the fore when Lalit was murdered in cold blood on the night of May 14 at Kandaghathi in Chhatarpur, about 30-km from Ranchi.

Lalit was campaigning to make the NREGS which guarantees 100 days of employment, in Chhatarpur and Chainpur blocks – some of the world's most developmentally marginalised parts.

Two days after the engineer-turned-activist went missing, his body was exhumed from a police grave and identified on May 17.

"No state operates in this area. The cost of resisting the power of landlords is life," is how Lalit, a member of Vikas Sahyog Kendra (VSK), a long-term partner of ActionAid, described his work of rallying communities who had been pushed to the margins through debt, loss of land, crop failure and decades of discrimination.

He knew the dangers involved in acting against the wishes of powerful local money lenders, petty contractors and government officials.

At the time of his death, he was helping a team of volunteers to conduct a social audit in a bid to get government anti-poverty schemes providing food, work and nutrition implemented in Chainpur and Chhattarpur blocks of Palamau district.

Attempts had been made to dissuade the team from conducting their work, particularly in Chainpur Block. Lalit was killed just a day after the social audit began.

Local contractors and officials were unhappy with his work of exposing corruption and mobilising people to demand their rights.

In the last year the VSK team had made great strides. They sensitised gram panchayat members. The quality of leaders improved. Corruption was exposed and also money recovered.

Programmes for employment, pensions, and ration cards were got going. Mid-day meals for children and nutrition centres for mother and infant



Rally in Ranchi to protest the killing of Lalit Mehta

Photographs: LAKSHMAN ANAND



Poster of Lalit Mehta. The activists demanded a CBI inquiry

started. School enrolment increased and mortgaged land was taken back from money lenders.

One of the goals of VSK is to make accessible 100 days of employment for 16,000 families in 40 villages in the district.

Cases reported by the social audit exposed serious corruption. The muster roll for a community pond dug under the project listed 108 names as receiving employment but the investigation reveals that in reality only 18 villagers had been working.

In Cheeru village of Chhatarpur block, several names in the muster rolls were found to be fictitious. Since this region has a high level of illiteracy,

most people use thumb impressions as signatures. Villagers were surprised to find their hand written signatures on muster rolls.

"We have formally reported the matter to NREGA commissioner and advised him to take corrective measures to ensure proper implementation of the act," Jean Drèze, economist and activist who is in charge of monitoring, said.

Held two weeks after Lalit's murder, the hearing at the Government High School, Chhatarpur saw dozens of men and women from some of the poorest communities take to the stage narrating tales of mismanagement that have made the employment

in Ranchi



At the time of his death, Lalit Mehta was helping a team of volunteers conduct a social audit in a bid to get government anti-poverty schemes providing food, work and nutrition implemented.

scheme defunct in their areas.

Thousands of tribal, dalit and landless people, from the Chhatrapur and Chainpur blocks, looked on at officials. The testimonies of corruption related to fake muster rolls, forged signatures and fraudulent job applications.

A message from Chairperson of the ruling United Progressive Alliance, Sonia Gandhi was read out, stating that: "Lalit Mehta worked in the region for the right to food. I also have learnt he had been carrying out social audit on the NREGA implementation. Maybe his work became a threat for those involved in the irregularities, which ultimately led to his killing."

"This is one of the most painful incidents in our recent history. The murder was brutal, pre-meditated and was an act of terror to attempt to silence the voice of peaceful fighters for justice," said Babu Mathew, country director, ActionAid.

"If our work was not relevant we would not have been attacked in this manner," Professor Mathew added.

Parvinder Singh is a writer with ActionAid, New Delhi



Child reporters noting down what their village needs

Orissa kids get the hard facts out

Ranjan K Panda
Koraput (Orissa)

SUBHASANKET Das, a tribal boy from Dhenkanal district, spends a lot of his free time walking around his village. He does the rounds of the local health centre. He pops into the village school to ask teachers how more girls can be sent to school. He also tries to figure out what infrastructure his village really needs.

Subhasanket then writes down all his observations on postcards and sends them to the Koraput Farmer's Association (KFA) office. There an editorial board publishes his views in a magazine called *Ankurodgam*. When copies of this magazine reach decision-makers in the district, this child reporter has already made an impact.

"People take note of our problems," says 14-year-old Nila Chalan, a tribal girl who like Subhasanket is a child reporter.

Altogether some 1,500 children in Koraput and Dhenkanal districts, some of India's poorest regions, have become child reporters under a unique programme called the Child Reporter Initiative, supported by UNICEF.

"It's a question of questions," says Santakar, a local journalist who heads the programme which is also being supported by the Koraput Farmers' Association (KFA), the People's Group for Children's Development (PGCD) and the district administration.

The project aims at tapping the immense abilities of children to identify local development problems and opportunities. Village children observe, document, and disseminate local problems and issues. In doing so, children not only contribute to local development but to their own grooming as conscious and informed citizens.

This cadre of child reporters has been raised to advocate girls' education, school sanitation and child survival. Says the idealistic Nila: "Our thoughts become our words. Words turn into actions since people listen to us. Action becomes habit. And we want to acquire the habit of being part of local development."

"Development can be useful to society only when children are involved in its planning and implementation," says Subhasanket. "Unless we

are heard by adults, it will be difficult for them to plan programmes for us."

India's large youthful population needs to be listened to. "Though children are the focus of most of the development programmes, they hardly participate in the process of formulating development programmes," says Santakar. "Development schemes are designed and implemented for children without involving them directly or taking their inputs. As a result many development initiatives have turned out to be out of sync with children's needs and rights."

Child reporters have been writing about sanitation in school, animal-human conflicts in local areas and girl child attendance in school. Serious problems are being brought to light by the most innocent observations.

The district administration, political leaders, teachers and almost all officials now recognize the child reporters. "Their postcards have done wonders," says veteran educationist and tribal researcher Krushna Chandra Panigrahi. "They have corrected the midday meal distribution system, alerted health authorities and made their teachers attend classes regularly."

Flaunting her badge of child reporter, Nila says things have changed for her village thanks to this project. "We too have changed. From being typical village children we have become change agents. I want more children to be a part of this child reporter initiative. We are now directly contributing to local development."

Child reporters say it's their constant questioning which is spurring change.

"My parents say I ask lots of questions," says Subhasanket. "My elders say that children are meant to ask questions. In my district, which is known for bad things like poverty and underdevelopment, I feel like asking more questions. For children like me, it is better to know some questions than all the answers. We children ask innocent questions to bring out critical problems."

The child reporters are proud of their work in local development but they are not complacent about their success. In these under-developed districts, children are showing how accurate information and perceptive observations can lead to the right path of growth.

From shepherd to software engineer

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

BADRASEN Negi was a shepherd boy in a Himalayan village. Now he is a software engineer in the US thanks to a journey that began when Vidya, a Delhi-based NGO, helped him get through Class 10 under National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

Badrasen's first years in Delhi were spent as a servant in a household. Then, he found Vidya. When Hillary Clinton visited Vidya in 1995, he was seen saying to her on CNN that his ambition was to go back to his village to set up a school like Vidya.

News travels fast and a lady from Portland called the White House and inquired about the school. She called Vidya's chairperson, Rashmi Misra, and said she wanted to help Badrasen fulfill his goal.

Badrasen went to the US and finally graduated in computer science. Says Rashmi: "His example had a huge effect on his village and Vidya

students. In his village every child worships his success, the school system has improved and children are going to school. He proved to them that if you strive for a good education you can make your dreams come true."

Vidya's flagship programme is the Bal Vihar School. Beginning operations in 1984 in the greenrooms of the open air theatre of IIT Delhi, today Bal Vihar is situated in two locations—the Panchshila Park Rainbow Montessori School and in the afternoon at the Shri Ram School, Vasant Vihar. The Shri Ram School Aravali in DLF Gurgaon houses the Vidya Comfort Academy in the afternoon.

In addition, Bal Vihar offers a primary remedial programme under which underprivileged children are given an education from nursery up to Class 5. They get a mid-day meal and transport.

In all, Vidya reaches over 2,000 children between the ages of four and 16 on a daily basis in Delhi. Vidya offers



Badrasen Negi

its students an inclusive education. Take for instance, Amit, a physically challenged child of 16 who studies in Class 8 in open school. He has joined computer classes at the Megnatek Computer Academy (MCA). Vidya pays his computer fees and takes care of his basic needs such as a tricycle, wheelchair and extra tuition.

Underprivileged women are another target group for Vidya. A visit to the Vidya Udyog Kendra at Sainik Farms in south Delhi reveals women hard at work making stationery and gift items out of recycled paper and jute.

From Paro, who comes from the slum area of Madangir, one realises how even a small sum of money can create a ripple effect. Paro's husband is a labourer and she has four children. Though she gets only Rs 650 a month, it goes a long way for the family. Plus Vidya helps out by providing transport to women like her.

Another example is Lilawati from Dakshinipuri, who is 60 and a widow. She does embroidery work at Vidya and has learnt numerous other skills such as making paper bags. "I am fortunate to have got a job at my age."

Underprivileged women are another target group for Vidya. A visit to the Vidya Udyog Kendra reveals women hard at work making stationery, gifts from recycled material.

Badrasen went to the US and graduated in computer science. His example had a huge effect on his village and Vidya students. In his village every child worships his success.

My son, a painter, is very happy and supportive of me. Today, thanks to Vidya, I can even help my son when he needs money," she says.

Among the skills that women have picked up are stitching, embroidery, beauty treatment, candle making, glass and block painting.

Then there is Vidya's micro-enterprise project. Beginning with seven women around seven years ago in Munirka Gaon, today it is spread over nine centres in Delhi with over 1,000 individuals who have taken loans. The loans range from Rs 2,000 to Rs 10,000. Eligibility for loans requires the completion of courses in skill training. By equipping the women with skills, they can set up their own micro businesses. Once a business proposal has been received and a loan has been granted, recipients are mentored by field-workers and helped to run a business. For women who want an easier option, Vidya encourages the formation of cooperatives.

A relatively new area of operation is computer education. The Tata Consultancy Service (TCS) has launched an IT programme that teaches the illiterate to read in three months.

Vidya's focus is on women. In Vidya Mumbai, women are taught computers directly without a background of English at the NSVK (NSS Sanganak Vidya Kendra) centre.

Vidya continues to forge ahead with new and ambitious projects. Five acres have been taken on lease in S Block in DLF Phase III in Gurgaon. There will be two schools here—the Vidya school as well as the Vidya Comfort Academy (VCA). The VCA is to be a fast-track school for children who are good at their studies. Emphasis will be on mathematics and science subjects. In addition, soft skills will be taught so that the underprivileged young ones are on an equal footing with products from public schools.

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In additional fellowships are also awarded to print and photo journalists interested in covering issues of distress seasonal migration and food security, supported by the American Indian Foundation and the German Agro Action on Food Security.

The fellowship amounts to Rs. 1,00,000/- each. Women journalists and stringers from small local newspapers are encouraged to apply.

The last date for receipt of applications is October 1st, 2008.

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The Oceanic Library

Read at Bengal's Oceanic Library

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

THE Vivekananda Seva Kendra-o-Shishu Udyan (VSSU) in Ullon village is located near the bustling Laxmikantapur railway station in West Bengal's South 24-Parganas district.

On its sprawling grounds of 100 acres there is a home for destitute children, a micro-enterprise training centre and an administrative building. VSSU's newest addition is the Oceanic Library which has just been inaugurated. It has 4,000 books. The bright, sunny library is spreading joy among children. It also provides computer-training facilities and doubles up as a playground.

Set up in partnership with READ-Global, an international NGO that believes in spreading awareness through libraries, the Oceanic Library was partly financed by Senator Omar Rains, who is a Read Global member, with a donation of Rs 16 lakh. The rest of the money was donated by the local community VSSU works with.

The library is one of several projects undertaken by VSSU founder and CEO, Kapilananda Mondal. He has implemented several innovative schemes and is the leading light behind Ullon's development. Mondal has also managed to make his organisation, VSSU, sustainable and self-reliant.

He began with a micro-finance endeavour. "Once when I was taking a ride on a rickshaw, I asked the driver how much he earned on an average every day. I was told that the vehicle cost a mere Rs 2,000 and was rented from its owner. I realized that the rickshaw driver had to hand over a part of his daily earnings to the owner every evening. The man could have kept all his earnings provided he could own the rickshaw. But in rural West Bengal it is difficult to borrow from a bank because of all the formalities involved," explained Mondal. He decided to lend some money to the rickshaw driver and that was how he ventured into micro-finance in 1990.

VSSU had started work in Ullon in the areas of hygiene, tree-plantation and education in 1983. But

funds had always been a constraint. Mondal started giving loans to artisans and small-time businessmen, and collecting the money back to lend again. The collected money was kept in a nationalised bank, and the interest earned was used for village development. The loans were provided at interest rates higher than what was charged by the banks, but since the terms of lending were favourable, Mondal's micro finance venture became popular.

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However, VSSU had to shut shop two years after it started, owing to defaulters. After that, VSSU did away with the principle of lending money only to the impoverished. "When we re-started in 2001 we opened our doors to one and all, rich and poor alike," explains Mondal.

VSSU runs 21 pre-primary schools, provides livelihood training to villagers and runs Ashok Nilay, a home for destitute children. It has also grown trees on 140 km of the village. It employs teachers for its schools, personnel for its micro-banking operations and will now train and employ librarians to run its library. It has also been in the forefront of bringing in toilets and better sanitation



The library is bright and attractive



Children watch a cartoon film

in the village by lending interest-free loans for the purpose. In almost every project, VSSU ensures equal participation of the local community.

For instance, for its pre-primary schools, VSSU recruits teachers who are high school graduates and those with higher secondary qualifications so that local people can apply. VSSU pays part of the salary and for school stationery. The rest of the money, that is two-thirds of the total amount needed, is borne by the community.

Working in 374 villages covering nine blocks, through 15 branches, VSSU has so far collected Rs 35 crore since it started and lent out a total amount of Rs 30 crore. Unlike many other developmental organisations, VSSU is self-reliant. Last year it made a net annual profit of Rs 15 lakh. The social entrepreneurship displayed by Mondal won him the Ashoka Fellowship a few years ago. For the locals, it has meant personal development and progress in this nondescript region.

A library committee comprising members of the community, elected representatives and others will run the library. In fact, as Dr Antonia Neubauer, founder and head of Read-Global, points out, 'the library will be used to create awareness on matters of concern in the region.' Would READ-Global educate people in South 24-Parganas about the deleterious effects of global warming and rising sea levels that threaten to swallow large chunks of their land? "Yes, of course. But we want the demand to come from the community," said Neubauer. She is optimistic, though, that once the library succeeds in generating awareness and bridges the gap in the varying levels of literacy in South 24-Parganas, the full extent of damage being wrought rising sea levels will be better understood by the locals.

The building which houses Ashok Nilay is going to be used for a Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya from July. Mondal is rooting for an agricultural university or a B Ed college on the premises to cater to nearby villages. The government has granted permission for the B Ed college for which VSSU will provide land. Mondal is clearly a change leader in West Bengal.

When Pusa Sugandha outshone GM

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

WHEN government officials turned up at Bhanaj Gad village in Uttarakhand's Rudraprayag district to hardsell genetically modified (GM) seeds, they were waved away by farmers. No one was interested.

Villagers had already doubled their yield of paddy with a local rice variety called Pusa Sugandha. The seeds had needed less water. And the rice had grown double quick.

"Previously I could grow a little paddy to feed my family. Now, I've got rice to sell in the market," said Ami Chand, a small farmer with only 0.4 hectares.

This wondrous paddy boom was achieved by farmers with help from the Peoples' Science Institute (PSI), Dehradun. Scientists from PSI introduced a technique called System of Rice Intensification (SRI), originally developed by Father Henri de Laulanié, a French priest in Madagascar in the early 1980s.

"Water availability will be the limiting factor for all development goals in India. The biggest demand for water is from agriculture. Paddy is a water intensive crop. We wanted to do something in this regard," said Ravi Chopra, Director, PSI.

PSI adapted SRI technology to the ecology of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh and now 15,000 farmers in both states are reaping a golden harvest.

It was hard to trudge up to Meghadhar village in Tehri Garhwal district with the sun blazing down. Even at an altitude of 1550m, it was hot. Sulochana Devi 39, a marginal farmer with only 0.25 ha was full of enthusiasm as she excitedly talked about her harvest.

Her small field had just yielded 2,200 kg wheat, double of what she used to get earlier. She was all set to sow paddy, optimistic of good returns. "Earlier, it was difficult for us to get one square meal. Now we have enough to eat and sell in the market," said Sulochana, a mother of three.

"This technique is basically about following proper plant management and maintaining the right balance of nutrition, water, air and time," explained SP Chaturvedi of PSI who has helped fine tune SRI.

The method works like this: first, at the start of summer a nursery of rice plants is set up. Timing depends on altitude. For fields located between

1500 and 1800 m, the nursery is prepared between 25 May and 5 June. For fields located below 1200 m, the nursery is put in place between 25 June and 5 July.

Then, the plants are transplanted into the fields. At this stage, the crop intensification process starts formally. "Plants are sowed at a distance of 25 cm, while in traditional methods, they are sowed much

nearer, around 5-7 cm. This way, there is less competition for nutrients between plants," explains Chaturvedi.

Then, three rounds of de-weeding by machine take place, after intervals of 10-12 days. Between every de-weeding, liquid organic manures are applied. Farmers can make these with kitchen waste, milk and other bovine produce and agricultural waste.

Afterwards, moisture controlling of paddy fields starts. Every alternate day, the field with its standing crop is showered with water one day and left to dry the next day. When the plants flower, the field is filled with one inch water. Twenty-five days later, the crop is harvested. The ready crop can be harvested between 140 and 150 days at higher altitudes and 10 days earlier at lower altitudes.

PSI began its crop intensification technique with paddy. Now it has expanded to wheat. As both are major crops in the rabi and kharif seasons, farmers welcomed the new technique with open arms.

"Initially, farmers were evasive and not convinced that their crops can produce double the yield using less than half the water and manure," said Debashish Sen, Director, Centre for Participatory Watershed Development, an autonomous unit of PSI that has developed and promoted this technique.

So, PSI decided to approach farmers in the field areas of its partner organisations. It selected 25 villages, 13 in Uttarakhand and 12 in Himachal. In each selected village, scientists from PSI initially organised meetings with paddy farmers to motivate them to take up SRI cultivation. A series of meetings were conducted where the benefits and procedures of SRI were explained to villagers. Video shows were used as tools of communication on SRI cultivation. Then, farmers and resource persons of the partners were trained on bed preparation and transplantation.

Communication materials on SRI cultivation and preparation of organic solutions were also distributed to the NGO's partners. "This convinced our partners about the usefulness of the technique and they in turn convinced farmers in these villages. Then, there was no turning back," says Sen. He has reason to feel elated.

They began with 40 farmers in 2006. That number multiplied to 597 farmers and has now swelled to 15,000 farmers this year.

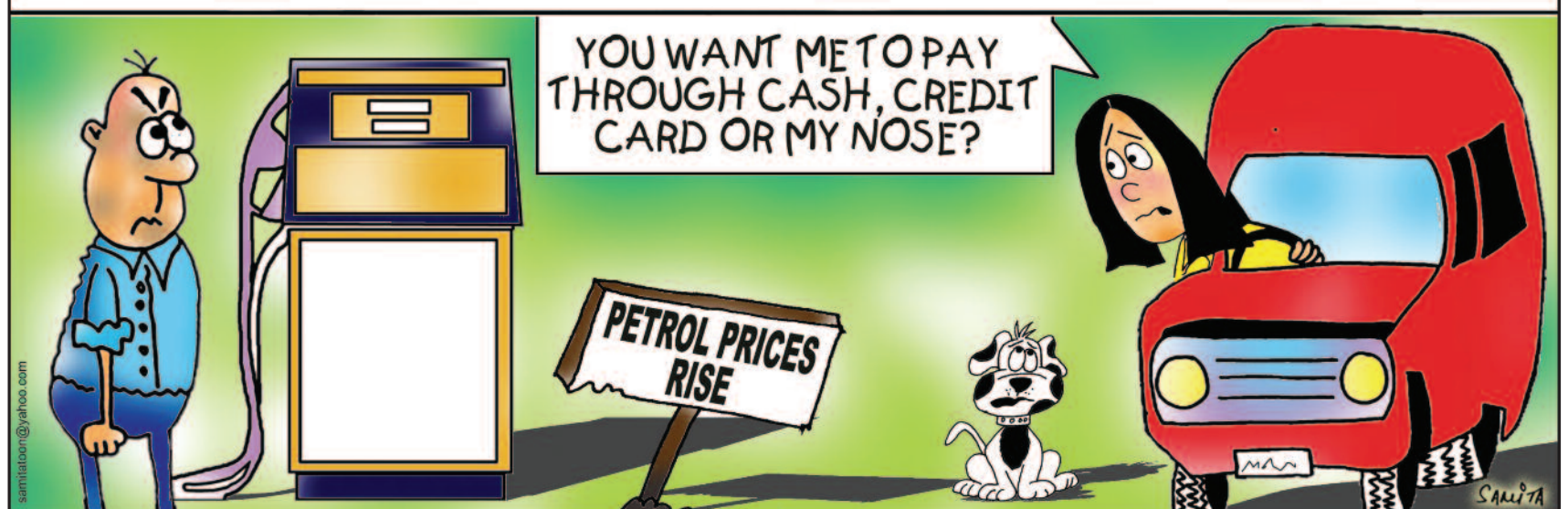
After paddy, PSI decided to try this technique on



Fields are yielding double the crop

Samita's World

by Samita Rathor



Repair tanks, save Bundelkhand

Bharat Dogra
Bundelkhand (UP)

THE bullock walked slowly towards the water tank. There was no water in it except for a muddy puddle at the bottom. As the bullock approached this small pool, its instincts appeared to give a warning. The water was too dirty and surrounded by a swamp which had emerged after the tank had lost all its water.

The bullock appeared to heed the warning and walked around the tank as if to see if water existed anywhere else. Disappointed, the bullock then returned to the pool it had spotted earlier and started drinking water slowly. To our horror we saw the bullock sink into the swamp.

This tragedy which I saw recently in Manikpur block of Chitrakut district of Bundelkhand has been happening elsewhere. There have been several cases of farm animals losing their lives after sinking into the muddy, swampy surroundings of tanks where they went to drink water.

In nearly a dozen villages we visited farmers said their animals have declined from 80 per cent to 40 per cent. Some animals left to fend for themselves may return if the rains are good this year but many others have perished. It is a heart-wrenching sight to see silently suffering animals searching vainly for a bit of water and grass.

Bundelkhand region is spread over 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP). Banda, Chitrakut, Mahoba, Hamirpur, Jhansi, Lalitpur and Jalaun are in UP and Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Panna, Datia, Damoh and Sagar are in MP. In varying degrees, these districts have suffered from low and untimely rainfall and other adverse weather conditions. The net result has been widespread crop failure, acute hunger, malnutrition and a famine of water.

Thurrat village is located in Jaitpur block of Mahoba district. While farming has become increasingly risky due to low and untimely rains, villagers say last year was particularly disastrous. Vast tracts had to be left unsown and even on the land which was cultivated the cost of seeds were barely recovered. Tulaiya, a farmer, says he got only 40 kg of gram though he had sown one quintal.

Work which became available under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) was inadequate. In the last few weeks, people have got no work at all. Most villagers survive on *roti* and salt. Often they can't even get this low nutrition diet. A schoolgirl showed us the extremely poor quality of vegetables served in the midday meal scheme. Elders complained that not only is the meal of poor quality, it is given in a way which badly hurts their dignity. Drinking water shortage is acute particularly in the Dalit basti. Several women started crying as they related their difficulties. Young people and in some cases entire families have left leaving elders in the family behind.

In Deepu Kolan, a village inhabited by Kol tribals in Manikpur block of Chitrakut district, villagers speak of hunger, drinking water shortage and denial of drought-relief money to small farmers. Still, the panchayat appears to be functioning and it is encouraging to know that a water tanker occasionally reaches this remote village. Work on

NREGS is scarce, but workers who have been employed say they get the full payment of Rs 100 per day, though the payment may be delayed.

Santosh Kumar Shukla who owns 25 acres of land in Supa village of Charkhari block, district Mahoba, has obviously seen prosperous days, but in recent times his crops have been ruined by drought and hailstones.

What is worse is that existing livelihoods have been deliberately destroyed. Take the case of the weavers of Jaitpur-Belatal area who spin the famous Jaitpur khadi. A few years ago, goons captured the local khadi office and plundered it so ruthlessly that debts accumulated and nearly 8,000 weavers, artisans and workers lost their livelihood. When we spoke to them in Darerpura basti in Belatal, people said that there were no stocks of grain with any family, looms were getting rusted and skilled weavers were being forced to migrate to distant places to toil as daily wage workers.

Likewise, thousands of livelihoods related to *paan* cultivation have been lost in the Mahoba region. Dheemar and Kewat families who earn by fishing and collecting aquatic crops like *singhara* and *kamalkakri* have lost their incomes since thousands of water tanks have dried up because they were not cleaned or deepened and their catchments were not protected.

In fact, it is the neglect of traditional water systems which has proved most costly for this region. Drought conditions have been exacerbated by relentless deforestation, destructive mining practices and thoughtless extension of water-intensive crops in times of water scarcity.

Many concerned citizens rightly ask why traditional water sources were neglected for so long. This region has huge, inter-connected tanks such as Vijay Sagar, Madan Sagar and Keerat Sagar. Similarly several ancient wells and other water sources were uncared for. Last year tank deepening work was marred with allegations of corruption and incompetence. The silt dug out of the tank bed was allowed to remain right there in big heaps till rain sent it back where it was in the first place. This year work on repairing was tanks started too late and is likely to be of little use.

The NREGS provides a great opportunity to take up the work of cleaning and repairing traditional water tanks in rural areas. But initially the scale of NREGS was too low and even when it was stepped up it has been sullied badly by corruption. So the actual number of beneficiaries is much lower compared to what is shown in official records. In some places old work is being shown as new work, while in other places a little shoveling is passed off as cleaning and deepening of tanks. The sad result is that these water sources will not be able to retain enough water when the rains come. The Itwaan-Paatin watershed work in Chitrakut district is a good example of excellent water conservation work, achieving a lot at a low cost. In Charkhari, mobilisation of voluntary labour helped to clean some tanks at almost no cost. In some hamlets of Rampura block of Jalaun district, a watershed project helped to protect livelihoods of Dalit farmers even in drought conditions. Such good examples need to be expanded hugely so that villages of Bundelkhand are blessed with water.



Stalks are higher providing more fodder

wheat in the 2006 rabi season on its research farm at Dehradun. Two varieties of wheat, PBW 396 and HD 2329 were grown in rows. In the field trials only organic compost was applied. The performances of the SRI plants in the research plots were closely monitored against that of wheat grown by broadcasting method.

As most farmers in Uttarakhand are small and marginal with only 0.4ha per household, food insecurity looms large. Many people migrate to the plains and their fields become fallow over a period of time. Now, farmers, who have used this technique, are tilling their fields once again. "I never thought I would come back from Delhi and start farming again. I'm getting enough paddy and wheat yields and I am earning well," said Mahavir Prasad, a small farmer in Bajira village, Tehri Garhwal district.

The stalk volume in the SRI method is much higher, providing more fodder for cattle. "Earlier, I was worried about what to feed my two cows and buffalo. Now, we've enough fodder to feed them," said a satisfied Ranjana Devi, a small farmer from village Machkandi, district Rudrapur.

Higher stalk has also resulted in higher amount of farmyard manure for fertilizing fields and may increase milk yields. Little wonder, many farmers are overjoyed. "Thanks to better feed we get almost double the amount of milk from our two cows," said a happy Rikeshwar Prasad, Meghadhar village, Tehri Garhwal district.

PSI is going to extend this technique to crops like rajamah, lobia, manduva, a coarse grain, and soyabean. Maize is being experimented with. Field trials are on.

Paddy plants do not lodge despite being much longer than traditional varieties. "The higher yield of food grains is because of this ability that we mastered in our labs," said Chaturvedi.

The government is responding. "Our aim was to help 10,000 farmers in three years adopt this method. Then, in the fourth year, we expected the government to respond. But, as we crossed this threshold earlier, the government has already reacted positively," said Chopra.

In all 13 districts of the state, District Agriculture Officers and their extension staff have approached PSI for training. The state government has released a grant of Rs 30 lakhs for 2008-09 to cover 3,000 farmers under the programme.



Some of the ponds which make up the network of sewage- fed fisheries in east Kolkata



A rich haul of fish

HOW PONDS

But can Kolkata's wetlands be replicated?

Umesh Anand
Kolkata/New Delhi

EACH day Indian rivers come under assault as cities big and small across the country disgorge sewage into them. The Yamuna has been reduced to a drain as it trickles past Delhi. The mighty Ganga is no better than a cesspool at many locations on its long course. The stories of a whole lot of other rivers are no better.

Since the eighties, huge sums of public money have been spent on trying to put an end to this pollution. Under dedicated action plans, sewage treatment plants have been set up, but they either have little efficiency or lie in complete disuse. Often, there just isn't the electricity to run them. Moreover, municipal administrations are so lacking in accountability that treatment plants really have no ownership.

However, for the past 70 years or so, in the eastern fringes of Kolkata, a network of ponds managed by local people has been able to achieve what government initiatives have not. Untreated sewage flows into the ponds and is cleansed at one-third the cost of a treatment plant. The sewage is used to grow fish, irrigate fields and finally, minus its original contaminants, it flows into the Kulti Gong.



Photographs: LAKSHMAN ANAND

KEEP A RIVER CLEAN

Kolkata's sewage, estimated at 750 million litres a day, goes through underground sewers to points from where it is pumped into outfall canals that take it into the eastern wetlands. These wetlands are an extension of Kolkata's drainage system beyond the sluice gates en route to the river.

The ponds here serve the dual purpose of naturally treating sewage and reusing waste. They have been globally recognised as a flourishing resource recycling system based on traditional knowledge and practices. The ponds provide a unique solution to concerns over urban ecological balance. They have a special position in a world that wakes up each day to new worries over energy, waste, livelihoods and food.

The system is scientific, but for decades it has worked on knowledge of its intricacies being passed on from one generation to the next.

When the sewage arrives in the pond network, it is kept standing in the sun, which results in biodegradation of the wastes through an algae-bacteria symbiosis. The local people have got this process right. They know to excavate the ponds to the correct depth, take in the right quantity of sewage and then judge when it is ready to be used for safely growing fish.

Pond design is important. So is the use of water hyacinth to absorb heavy metals in the sewage and serve as a buffer for the sides of the ponds.

When the managers of the ponds are through with purifying the sewage, the

biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), a measure of organic pollution, has been reduced by more than 80 per cent. Also, almost all coliform bacteria have been removed.

The wetlands consist of fisheries, paddy fields that use effluents from the fisheries and vegetable garbage gardens.

An average pond can produce as much as 5 tonnes of fish in a year. The species are Rohu, Catla, Mrigal and Tilapia. The ponds are believed to support 8,500 people directly. But they provide a much bigger service to Kolkata by ensuring a regular supply of fish to the city's markets, serving as a carbon sink with their greenery and water bodies and in addition they cleanse the city's sewage.

The wetlands were originally used for growing brackish water fish. But when the Baidyadhari, which brought in sea water, died it became necessary to find an alternative source of water. It was then that local people experimented with waste from Kolkata leading to a whole new expertise in growing fish.

This and more is known about the system because of the efforts of Dhrubajyoti Ghosh, an engineer-ecologist, who while employed in the West Bengal government in the eighties researched the system and showcased its benefits.

"For a planner, it is difficult to identify an alternative concept that can be less capital intensive than the Kolkata wetland system. It has been functioning for ages in harmony with nature," says Ghosh.

For the past 70 years or so, in the eastern fringes of Kolkata, a network of ponds managed by local people has been able to achieve what government initiatives have not. Untreated sewage flows into the ponds and is cleansed at one-third the cost of a treatment plant.

Describing Ghosh as "one of the world's leading ecologists," MS Swaminathan, the internationally famous agricultural expert, says: "In the east Kolkata wetlands, the local people have created the world's largest assembly of waste water fish ponds. This is an excellent demonstration of traditional ecological prudence which leads to converting waste into a valuable resource."

East Kolkata has found recognition in very diverse quarters. It is hailed by ecologists and environmentalists. It is included in a World Bank handbook on ecosystem management. The ponds are also collectively listed as a wetland to be preserved under the Ramsar Convention.

East Kolkata has found mention in the national environment policy. Recognition of the role played by its ponds in cleansing sewage also led them to be included in the Ganga Action Plan as a viable low-cost alternative technology. Three sites elsewhere in West Bengal were chosen for replication, in addition to some interest shown in Uttar Pradesh.

At each of these sites, Ghosh demonstrated that an east-Kolkata type system could work. The pollution load was reduced to levels required under the Ganga Action Plan. The ponds produced fish. And the cost of setting up the system was barely a third of what it would have been for a conventional sewage treatment plant.

But for all this validation, there has been little serious effort to examine how the east Kolkata system can be protected and perpetuated. No significant effort has been made to reinvent the system elsewhere in India as a workable solution to the problem of filthy rivers.

Can, for instance, ponds like the ones in Kolkata be made to work on the banks of the Yamuna in Delhi? Are they any good for the outfalls that serve rapidly expanding urban areas of Gurgaon in Haryana?

Possible hurdles could be cultural in nature. Not everyone eats fish and many actually turn up their noses at its smell. Then again, sewage is widely regarded as being dirty. Perhaps it is too much to expect communities to overnight acquire the decades-old conditioning of the people of east Kolkata.

There is also the problem of having enough land. Several thousand hectares would be needed. A natural gradient in the topography, too, is required. Kolkata slopes gently from the west to the east and the drainage system of the city follows this gradient.

Toxicity is another serious concern. With municipal administration becoming slack there is a growing danger of chemicals and other industrial wastes getting mixed up with the sewage. This has serious implications for the fish and agricultural produce from the wetlands. So far studies conducted in east Kolkata have shown that the contamination is not significant. Better urban management can ensure that industrial wastes do not mingle with the sewage.

Adaptations of the east Kolkata model are a serious option. A little innovation in government has been seen to work wonders. Educating communities and giving them the incentives to use innovative solutions can go a long way. This may be particularly so in times when communities feel oppressed by pollution and water shortages.

It is well known that farmers are ever-eager to take nutrient rich effluents from

sewage treatment plants, where and when they are in working condition. They realise they are taking cleansed sewage. So, a possible mental block against sewage as a resource isn't an insurmountable problem where a tradition, as the one in east Kolkata, may not already exist.

Similarly, state governments in regions far removed from the culture of eating fish have been encouraging fish cultivation with grand success, thereby providing local prosperity through small businesses and jobs and an important source of protein. Haryana is an example with a fish farmer in Karnal getting a national award for entrepreneurship.

Perhaps East Kolkata's biggest asset, which is its innate simplicity, is its real undoing. Policy-makers find it hard to make the transition from a regime of tenders and purchase orders to a lithe, people-based, low-cost system that is truly entrepreneurial in spirit and managed without government interventions.

The east Kolkata wetlands have been under attack in Kolkata itself for the past two decades despite the service they provide the city and their unique resource recycling role.

With Kolkata being congested and over-built, developers and land sharks have looked to the eastern periphery, which runs adjacent to the city, for expansion.

These are forces that have a huge influence over policy. The result has been the steady whittling away of the hinterland of the ponds over the years. Housing colonies, industrial estates, hotels, expanding roadways and so on have eaten into the east.

The entire resource recycling system, which includes agricultural fields, garbage gardens, channels and so on, now consists of some 8,500 hectares of which the ponds represent 4,000 hectares.

This is protected under the Ramsar Convention. But international protection on paper can mean a lot and nothing at all. In the absence of adequate local government and political recognition of the worth of the system, east Kolkata is foundering. Property developers keep attempting forays of one kind or the other into the wetlands with the state CPI (M)-led Left Front government looking the other way because of the interests involved.



The sewage channel leading to the fisheries



A bamboo filter for the sewage



A watchpost to keep out marauders

Fish pond owners are also constantly at the mercy of the municipal authorities over the availability of sewage, which must reach their ponds through designated channels. Maintenance of the channels is also required.

A big challenge is in maintaining continuity. The younger generation feels insecure about the future and is therefore an unwilling inheritor of the system. So far the science in managing the fish ponds has been passed on from one generation to the next. But the older people who know how the system works are fading out and the young are hesitant to come forward.

TWO SYSTEMS: In the conventional system of waste water treatment, reducing pollution is the sole objective. In the wetlands, the quality of the water released into the river is improved, but resource recovery is an integral part of the exercise. So while the wetlands help in keeping the river clean, they also seek to provide food and livelihoods.

The 5 tonnes of fish per hectare per year that a well-managed pond delivers is not insignificant. The fish goes back to the city of Kolkata as food. On the other hand in the conventional system, assuming that it works to optimum levels, only the sewage is treated before it flows into the river.

The key difference between the two systems is that one sees waste water as a pollutant and the other as a resource.

Since local people benefit from the traditional system, they develop a keen interest in making the system work. The farmer gets nutrient rich water for irrigation and fish production provides livelihoods. But a mechanically run treatment plant has few owners. So, when it shuts down, no one really cares.



Ducks play an important role

In the pond system, failure to perform will affect irrigation downstream. It is most likely farmers will protest at being deprived of their water. Then again, if the ponds are not properly maintained, fish production will suffer and the profits of the fish producers will be hit.

The wetlands of east Kolkata have been kept alive by people who depend upon them. If they have worked well it is because the community ensures that they do.

Another point is the flexibility of the traditional system. It can be expanded as you go along. On the other hand a sewage treatment plant is designed for the next 20 years and even after 10 years 30 per cent of the capacity of these plants is not being used.

LITTLE KNOWN: Little or nothing was known about east Kolkata till the eighties. It is only when Ghosh began studying the system and promoting it as a waste-as-resource example that awareness grew.

For most of Kolkata's residents, the city ended at the tanneries on the eastern fringes. The Dhapa square mile where vegetables are grown on garbage from the city, the sewage fed fisheries and the agricultural fields simply did not exist.

The Eastern Metropolitan Bypass, skirting Kolkata and providing easy access to the airport, brought the city closer. But even then east Kolkata was chiefly known for the strong smell of wastes that Kolkatans would get while driving past. There would also be mountains of garbage at the landfill sites -- a reminder of the pressures building on Kolkata's civic services.

Of the resource recycling system beyond, there was no awareness. There is slightly wider knowledge today of its working, but it is mostly



Dhrubajyoti Ghosh

In the conventional system reducing pollution is the sole objective. In the wetlands, the quality of the water released into the river is improved, but resource recovery is an integral part of the exercise.

academic. Ghosh's single-minded devotion to the system has resulted in some media coverage. However, the best stories were done in the eighties and coincided with Ghosh being able to bond with journalists sensitive to his ideas.

Thereafter, Ghosh, despite international recognition, got pushed around in government for coming in the way of interests who saw in east Kolkata a real estate opportunity. Likewise journalists willing to explore the fisheries and understand the science in them moved on.

There has been the odd effort in the courts to save the wetlands. Bringing them under the Ramsar Convention, of course, does the maximum to protect them. An outstanding documentary film by Jojo Karlekar and his team, the recipient of awards and once aired on Doordarshan, will preserve for posterity the life around the wetlands.

But for the average Kolkatan the city still ends at the Bypass and the housing colonies and offices and so on that have come up along it.

Getting to know the wetlands means leaving the bypass and taking the road to Bantala for instance. An hour down that road you will find expanses of fisheries. The air is fresh and free from the heavy diesel fumes that hang over Kolkata. On a clear day you can see the buildings of the city. Nevertheless the setting is entirely rural.



An abandoned mechanised sewage treatment plant.

The technology used here is not magic. Oxidation is one of the best methods of cleansing sewage. Ghosh considers it possible to replicate the system in any wetland. "Land won't be a problem if the wetlands are regarded as part of an agricultural system," he says.

Fishermen are out in their boats, bringing in a catch. There are others tending to nets or transferring fries from small ponds to big ones. There are machaan-like platforms for keeping watch over the ponds which get raided by marauders. Packs of dogs do guard duty all night and laze around during the day.

The area around the ponds is hugely fertile. Pond-managers grow vegetables in plenty and flowers too. Ducks are a part of this ecosystem. It is their job to get rid of snails that aren't good for the ponds.

NO MANAGEMENT PLAN: Ghosh believes that the wetlands continue to suffer from the lack of a management plan and the absence of ownership of the system in the municipal administration. "The danger is we don't have a management plan for the wetlands as yet even after five years of it being declared a Ramsar site. But governance is urgently needed," he says.

On the question of ownership, he says, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) often pleads inability in maintaining the height of waste water at nine feet at Bantala. The pumping department does not want to cooperate.

Ghosh argues that thanks to the wetlands the KMC saves Rs 600 crores, which it would have had to spend on setting up a sewage treatment plant. It should therefore exercise ownership over the wetlands and do its best to help them flourish.

"The technology used here is not magic. It is well understood and recognized by sanitation engineers. Oxidation is one of the best methods of cleansing sewage," he explains.

Ghosh considers it possible to replicate the system in any wetland area even if it is not as big an expanse as Kolkata's wetlands. "Land won't be a problem if the wetlands are regarded as part of an agricultural system," he says.

That is as much a solution as it is a problem. Initiatives that don't involve acquiring land and issuing contracts have few takers in the government.

But Ghosh believes that despite the neglect of east Kolkata in India, its moment in a new set of global priorities has arrived. "The fishermen of the wetlands are the forerunners of a contemporary world view of waste as resource pursued by leaders and thinkers of the modern-day environment movement," he says. And in a shrinking world, saving east Kolkata and replicating may well yet become an Indian priority.



Caption

Business

BEYOND PROFIT

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

Too old to earn, but have a house?

Reverse mortgage has become clearer

LAKSHMAN ANAND



S Sridhar, Chairman and Managing Director of the National Housing Bank

Civil Society News
New Delhi

DINESH Thakur, 65, owns a house in which he lives with his wife, Geeta, 60. Over time, the house has come to be worth a small fortune. But a year ago he found that his personal savings were dwindling rapidly. Incapable of earning and unwilling to sell the house and reluctant to take money from his son who lives abroad, Thakur didn't know quite what to do till his bank manager suggested he take a reverse mortgage on his house.

The reverse mortgage allows Thakur to get Rs 35,000 a month for the next 20 years. This is calculated on the value of his house and the rate of interest that the bank must levy on the money that it is giving him.

If he lives beyond the 20 years of the mortgage, the house will remain his though the money that comes to him will stop. If his wife outlives him within the 20 year period, she will get the Rs 35,000 each month. Beyond 20 years she will have the house but not the instalments.

In case Thakur is ready to settle for Rs 20,000 a month, he could continue to get monthly payments from the bank for beyond 20 years. Just in case the value of his property increases, he could renegotiate the mortgage for a higher amount.

Some FAQs

What is a reverse mortgage loan?

A reverse mortgage loan is given to a senior citizen who is someone above the age of 60. The loan is given against the mortgage of the senior citizen's house provided he/she is the owner of the house and its occupant. The loan does not have to be repaid during the lifetime of the senior citizen.

Are payments received under reverse mortgage taxable?

All payments received by the senior citizen are free of income tax under Section 10 (43) of the Income-Tax Act of 1961 as recently amended.

What are the advantages of a reverse mortgage loan?

It supplements income of the senior citizen who remains the owner of the house in his/her lifetime. The money can also be used for repairs/ renovation, medical needs, personal purposes. It only cannot be used for purchase of stocks and shares, real estate, trading.

(Further details are available with the National Housing Bank)

Finally, when Thakur and his wife are both no more, their son will be able to pay back the bank and inherit the house. If, however, the son does not do that the bank will sell the house, get back its money and pass the profit on to the son.

At any time during the 20 years, the Thakurs can pay off the bank if they find the money and want to terminate the mortgage.

Reverse mortgage as an instrument to help senior citizens was launched by the Union Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, two budgets ago. Since then it has been mired in doubts expressed by banks and housing finance institutions.

Lenders have wanted to know whether money given under reverse mortgage

(Continued on page 20)

(Continued from page 19)

makes the senior citizen liable for income-tax or not. Senior citizens have been equally eager to have complete clarity on this.

It has now been clarified in the recent Union budget that no tax on account of reverse mortgage needs to be paid by the senior citizen. The Income Tax Act has been amended to this effect.

Similarly, confusion over capital gains has been sorted out. Capital gains tax comes into play when the property is sold after the demise of the senior citizen. Now it is clear that the capital gains tax will be paid by those who benefit from the profits made from the sale. Invariably it will be the heirs. Or when there are no heirs, it will be the bank itself.

To put to rest any doubts about the validity of reverse mortgage, a notification is now due from the Union government. So far it has only been notified by the National Housing Bank (NHB), an apex institution which guides policy.

In the meantime 18 banks (see box for list) have pledged themselves to providing reverse mortgage.

But despite the clarifications, much needs to be done to make reverse mortgage a well implemented instrument. Senior citizens need counselling. Bankers at various levels require briefing on how reverse mortgage works.

The NHB has begun reaching out to banks. It has begun going to senior citizens with the help of NGOs. Helpage India, which deals specifically with the problems of the aged, is one such organisation. Its director, Mathew Cherian, says awareness camps are being organised across the country and there will soon be a helpline.

It is a process that has been set rolling, but there are 80 million elderly people in India with perhaps 30 million of them owners of property of some kind and eligible for reverse mortgage. Clearly a lot more needs to be done.

"Reverse mortgage will always be a niche product," explains S. Sridhar, chairman and managing director of NHB. "It will not occupy the main space in the financial world." Sridhar is a very senior banker who now brings considerable experience and zeal to his role at NHB to make India perhaps the only developing country to introduce reverse mortgage.

Nevertheless, Sridhar believes that the success of reverse mortgage will depend on it being seen not merely as a social measure to help the elderly. It should be recognised for the business opportunities that it opens up. "After all, interest is being charged," he points out.

For banks and housing institutions, Rs 5,000 crores of business is waiting to be booked. In addition, every elderly person with a real estate asset is a customer likely to make deposits and receive money. Yet these opportunities don't seem to have been properly understood.

Dinesh Thakur is one of the lucky elders who found a receptive banker. But even important lenders like HDFC have stayed away from reverse mortgage. When *Civil Society* visited the Capital Court office of HDFC in Delhi as a customer, the first response to our query was "what is that?" When we persisted, someone on the floor said there were several tax-related doubts about reverse mortgage. "There is no clarity on the product," we were told.

We then went in search of a senior executive and got to speak to her personal assistant. He said HDFC did not do reverse mortgage because several clarifications were due from the NHB. He even suggested that we use the Right to Information (RTI) Act to find out why NHB had not issued the clarifications.

At a branch of the State Bank of India (SBI), however, the manager was quite ready to discuss the opportunities for reverse mortgage. SBI has taken up the instrument. But she too had some niggling doubts about age limits and other such details. She searched without result for some literature on the guidelines.

The success of reverse mortgage evidently depends on educating and motivating bankers and helping the elderly connect with them.

To understand what can be done to make banks more responsive and assist the elderly understand better issues pertaining to interest rates, tenure, valuation and so on, we spoke at length to Sridhar of NHB. Here are edited extracts of that conversation.

What do you think worries bankers about reverse mortgage?

First of all it is a type of personal loan based on a limited recourse concept. That means the bank, if it wants its money back, can have recourse only to this property. It cannot access any other property. This is not what bankers are accustomed to. They normally try to get each and every kind of security in case something goes wrong. So here there is a risk that the bank is taking. That may be a strange thing to say now when property prices are high and rising. But who can say what might happen 20 years from now?

More than the risk is the concept that the bank will have only limited recourse to a person and the person will be dead. So it marks a departure from

the way home finance loans have been treated.

The second thing is that there is nothing like a specific repayment period for this loan. This is also a feature that is foreign to normal banking in which there is a very clear-cut repayment structure with due dates and things like that.

Is there an age limit?

There is an entry age (above 60) and there is a period for the loan amount. In case the senior citizen outlives the period, the flow of money will stop, but the bank cannot take back the property.

Is the cut-off age 75 or 80?

The mortgage is for 20 years. But the period will depend on what is a reasonable amount calculated on the value of the house and current interest rates. So there is nothing sacrosanct about this 20. Tomorrow if there is enough value in the house, then your 20 can become 25 years. Or if someone is willing to accept lower amounts of money annually the number of years can be more. You see there is X amount of money that has to be discounted over a period of time.

Then again if someone enters into a reverse mortgage at the age of 60 and he stops getting payments at the age of 80 but continues to live till the age of 95 ---- today people are living beyond 80 ---- the bank cannot demand repayment unless the property is not being maintained or there is some other issue.

So a banker has to show a lot of imagination?

Many conventional bankers will ask why they should do all this. So, it depends on how the average banker positions this product in relation to other business in hand. This could be an important reason for reverse mortgage being slow to take off.

Perhaps the challenge is to make this a mini movement in the banking sector.

Yeah, but in the market-oriented banking and financial system that we have in the country today any financial product will have to be finally picked up by the market. So, if there is a good demand from senior citizens I am very sure that the banks will fall over one another to book the business. Bankers are a fickle lot. They will go with what is popular in the market. Today auto loans are the flavour of the season, all of them will be running to give auto loans.

Would you agree that senior citizens certainly need help to understand the system better?

In the US you cannot provide reverse mortgage without professional counselling. We are also organising workshops in which we will involve the banks and concentrations of senior citizens. It will be an interactive session at which it is possible to clarify doubts. We already have it in Mumbai. We are going to have it in Delhi, Chandigarh, Pune and Hyderabad.

The idea is to create awareness of the product and bring senior citizens and the bankers together.

NGOs are well paced to facilitate this process. It is my belief that reverse mortgage can lead to a national movement in counselling on financial issues in a structured manner.

In our interactions with senior citizens many of them felt that the amount they get for a house, particularly if it is a small two bedroom flat somewhere, is not enough. Now the amount has to be small because of the low value of the property and the interest rate that has to be charged. The senior citizens felt that the bank should reduce the interest rate. But who will do that? It is currently not feasible. The government does not in the normal course direct banks to reduce the interest rate.

What about valuation? Banks would almost certainly like to discount as much as possible.

We have told the banks not to artificially discount and at the same time not to artificially overvalue.

Today banks and housing finance companies have some systems in place for valuation on the basis of which they provide housing loans. In the meantime, NHB is trying to formalise certain valuation standards. Not just for reverse mortgage but for overall collateral property valuation.

We are in touch with valuers' associations. Unfortunately, the valuers' associations in India are not that professional and well structured as they should be as are chartered accountants or some other professionals. But we have begun a dialogue between NHB and bankers and the valuers on what kind of systems they should have, what should be the methodologies, how can they be strengthened. Further on we would like to see how we can give some statutory teeth to it.

Where to go

Eighteen banks and two housing finance companies (HFCs) provide reverse mortgage loans to senior citizens. Here is the list:

1. Allahabad Bank
2. Bank of Baroda
3. Canara Bank
4. Central Bank of India
5. Corporation Bank
6. IDBI Bank
7. Indian Bank
8. Punjab and Sind Bank
9. Punjab National Bank
10. State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur
11. State Bank of Hyderabad
12. State Bank of India
13. State Bank of Mysore
14. State Bank of Travancore
15. UCO Bank
16. Union Bank of India
17. Vijaya Bank
18. Axis Bank

HFCs

1. Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd
2. LIC Housing Finance

BCF gets down to CSR training

There is a huge gap between rhetoric and practice

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Business and Community Foundation (BCF), a non-profit in Delhi, has designed a two-day training course in corporate social responsibility (CSR). BCF completes 10 years this July and it has been its mission to sensitise industry on social issues. The CSR training course won approval and appreciation from managers who enrolled for the first two-day session.

"CSR is often mistaken for charity. So we planned a training module wondering whether there would be takers," said Amita Joseph, BCF's director.

Senior managers did apply and now BCF plans to mainstream the course in partnership with the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT).

The two-day training module explained CSR in all its manifestations to candidates: fundamentals, laws, integration, outcomes. It discussed SEZs, mining, displacement and so on. The course also included current concerns on poverty: farmer suicides, water, hunger, homelessness and the poorest districts in India. There were sessions on disability, volunteering and employment as well.

Sitting in her small, neat office, **Amita Joseph** spoke to *Civil Society* about companies, CSR and the new training module.

Why a training course in CSR for companies?

There is a huge gap between rhetoric and practice in CSR. It is often due to ignorance, of not knowing what to do. A lot of companies continue with the old model of philanthropy and charity. There are companies where managers have been in the same job for several years. When they studied management, CSR was not a buzzword.

There is a big gap in knowledge which we thought we should bridge. We got several requests for training from public sector companies, private sector companies, university teachers, management institutes and the government. We found CSR was missing from management curricula. The University of Nottingham does have a one-year course but then for practicing managers that would mean leaving work for a year.

We spoke to management schools and IIFT came forward. We were very pleased with their responsiveness. We eventually prepared a two-day module, the first of its kind.

How was the response?

We were looking for just 20 interested people. We also wanted the course to pay for itself. We advertised the course on the Internet and selected publications. Altogether we received 40 inquiries. There were some inquiries from Pakistan and Sri Lanka as well. Finally, we got 37 candidates. Seven were from the NGO sector and 30 were fully paid candidates from companies. From our response sheets we find candidates were pleased with the course and gave it a good rating.

Some of the companies who sent candidates included ONGC, NTPC, SAIL, Lafarge, Ericsson, Neyveli Lignite, MMT, Mahindra and Mahindra, BILT and HSBC. We had candidates from the Planning Commission and Government of Punjab also.

But are companies really serious about CSR?

We find a great deal of seriousness especially among public sector companies. They free up senior department heads to attend courses like ours. ONGC flew in five of their people to attend the course. Books with relevant data were bought by company candidates. They were keen to understand more about the

debate on standards, inclusiveness, poverty and the 150 poorest districts in India where very few companies are willing to go and work except for a handful like Kinetic, Dr Reddy's.

Do you plan more training programmes?

We are hoping to mainstream the CSR course at management institutes. We spoke to the Birla Institute of Management and Technology and we will be introducing the course in all their management institutes. We are keen to introduce it in management institutes in places like Kanpur and Meerut since we want to rope in entrepreneurs who run industries in these places. We do

LAKSHMAN ANAND

want to look at global examples of CSR but most of all we need to contextualize it and evolve solutions that are very Indian.

How do you think companies can be influenced to do CSR programmes?

The 11th Five Year Plan had a sub-committee on CSR. We have given them eight of our recommendations out of which they have accepted four. We feel for CSR to catch on among companies peer recognition and awards do work. Secondly, there is a continuous need for civil society to question companies, for consumer groups to act as watchdogs and for groups like Toxics Link and CSE to do exposes and put pressure on companies. Thirdly, you need management schools to inculcate CSR and for companies to walk the talk. Fourthly, we feel regulation for the corporate sector and for NGOs is important. Just 600 NGOs have approached the Credibility Alliance for evaluation of standards.

What about money? How much do companies spend?

We recommend at least three to five per cent of profit after tax for CSR related programmes. Mahindra and Mahindra for instance spends around one per cent of profit after tax, or Rs 30 crores to Rs 40 crores on CSR. This will also open up funding and resources for NGOs who wish to work in partnership with companies.

But I would say how you make your money is equally important. You can't pollute the earth, deplete water, violate human rights and still expect to be seen as a responsible caring company. You have to meet occupational health standards also.

Who is going to do all this in a company?

There is a direct correlation between the guys at the top of a company and their responsiveness to consumers. You will find poor internal governance leads to company officials not listening to consumers. What is also important is who takes responsibility for CSR programmes.

In Mahindra and Mahindra, which has a good track record in CSR, it is senior managers who take these decisions.

Like I said there is a gap between promise and practice. CSR has to be deeper, more strategic and mainstream. Unfortunately, it's the bad guys who get the limelight often thanks to the public relations companies they hire.

NGOs and companies often have troubled relationships.

Partnerships between the two should be on an equal footing. For the NGOs it's important not to be funded 100 per cent by the company and thereby be totally dependent on it. I would say it doesn't pay to keep fighting. Dialogue is the way forward. Companies too are beginning to see the writing on the wall. Consumers are tiring of 'global brand loyalty' and it makes business sense to be good corporate citizens.



Amita Joseph, Director, BSF

"We feel for CSR to catch on among companies peer recognition and awards do work. There is a need for civil society to question companies and act as a watchdog."

Worldview

LATITUDE MATTERS

Everyone owns a shrinking planet. People count more than governments. Track change before it becomes news.

Saving moms, babies in Wakhan

Aunohita Mojumdar
Wakhan (Afghanistan)

WAKHAN is a remote and poor region in Afghanistan's Badakshan province. It has just one bumpy road which vanishes after taking you around one third of the way. There is no running water or electricity in villages here. In winter you get only three or four hours of sunshine. Temperatures can drop below minus thirty degrees Celsius in windswept Wakhan. A diesel stove is all that you can lay your hands on to keep warm.

Yet Alex Duncan lives here in Kipkut village with his wife and four children. He is a doctor, a general physician. Along with his co-worker, a Dutch woman doctor, Christel Bosman, he provides healthcare to Afghans reaching them by foot or on animal transport.

The motivation to be in Kipkut, says Duncan, is to see the death rate among women and children drop. As a family physician in Britain, his work would have been much more routine.

At 1,600 per 100,000 live births, Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates (MMR) anywhere in the world. And the province of Badakshan is much worse. It has the dubious distinction of having an MMR of 6,500 per 100,000. The reasons, says Bosman, are very basic: lack of prenatal care, simple gynaecological services and health facilities for delivery. Haemorrhages and obstructed labour are the most common cause of death for women along with anaemia due to malnutrition.

Badakshan is so remote and inaccessible that even the Taliban were unable to enter. And so it became a safe haven for the resistance movement led by Ahmad Shah Masood and his guerrillas, the Northern Alliance.

For sheltering Masood and his men, Badakshan paid a price. It was economically isolated. With arterial roads blocked, the province faced a virtual embargo. Its people were reduced to near starvation. The province became completely dependent on the ability of humanitarian agencies to deliver food.

Wakhan is bordered by Pakistan, Tajikistan and China. The Russian and British empires turned it into a 'corridor', a buffer zone between the two countries.

It used to be a bustling spot on the trade route when travel relied on camels, yaks and horses. But the arrival of motor transport isolated the region. A large portion is inaccessible on wheels. It has only half a road. Villages away from this road have to be reached on foot or animal transport.

At that height of 3,000 metres few vegetables grow. A 16-hour bone jerking drive will take you to Faizabad, the nearest city and the provincial capital. From there it's a two-day drive to Kabul or a flight with an uncertain schedule. The nearest petrol station is a 10-hour drive away. When motorised transport breaks down, auto parts have to be ferried from Faizabad or Kabul.

Dr Duncan has already been there four years and may be moving on soon. His eldest boy, nine-year-old Jacob, needs more than home schooling. On the day we arrived we bumped into Christel Bosman on the road, trekking up the mountain to see one of her patients. It was not difficult to identify her as there are few outsiders here.

The difference their efforts have made are clear to see. Regular weighing of infants under five makes it possible to intervene with nutritional advice, medical care or referral to a hospital. Now with Christel joining the mission, maternal mortality has got added emphasis.

The next day when we meet Christel, she is depressed. The patient she had gone to see did not survive. "She needed blood but the nearest blood bank is in Faizabad. Most people here do not know the risks associated with pregnancy



Dr Alex Duncan with his wife and children. Christel Bosman is third from left.

and childbirth and even if they do, there may not be a hospital they can go to."

Christel feels that she could have made a difference had she been called in earlier. By the time she was, the patient had lost too much blood from complications during childbirth. Increasing awareness of complications could make a difference to women because they could be referred early to better health facilities.

Christel is also unhappy since the departure of the Duncan family will probably mean she will have to relocate unless she can find another experienced doctor or nurse to volunteer as the medical mission would need at least two people.

The head of the province's public health department, Dr Abdul Momeen Jalali agrees. Interviewed in his office in Faizabad, Dr Jalali says health cannot be improved in isolation. "You also have to tackle poverty, illiteracy, the lack of roads and facilities."

Lack of education has meant that there are very few educated local people

(Continued on next page)

Farmers adapt to climate change

Shahjahan Siraj
Dhaka

ALTHOUGH illiterate Bangladeshi villagers don't know the lexicon of climate change, many are using local knowledge to innovate and adapt to the flooding it causes.

The people of Vobodaho and Kashoppur in the Jessore district of southwest Bangladesh are continuously innovating to develop new farming methods and alternative sources of income.

Unusual flooding has been causing tremendous suffering in three parts of Jessore district. Because of water logging caused by the Kopotakho River most of the crop land in this rural area is now underwater. Farmers cannot cultivate as they normally would.

Samsur Rahman Shaq, one affected farmer, has completely changed his farming methods. He now cultivates vegetables on *Dap chas* (floating gardens) and earns an income from duck rearing and fishing. Alternative farming methods are now popular in his area.

Rahman Shaq has become an expert on making floating gardens, and his wife on duck rearing.

"In this Chatga village, catastrophic flooding has been happening since 2000. Before, we never faced such serious floods. The first time we got flooded, we enjoyed huge catches of fish in the water. We never thought the water would stay here permanently. As the water did not return, huge water hyacinth started sprouting in this Kopotakho River."

Hyacinth covered the whole water surface. Boats could not run and the water became completely useless – even for fishing.

One day, villagers from neighboring Gupalgong showed Rahman Shaq and others in Chatga how to cultivate on the floating hyacinth *dap* (bed).

"At first we did not believe it was possible. But the first year itself, we were surprised to see excellent harvesting – particularly different types of vegetables without any pesticide and fertiliser on the floating garden. And the vegetables grown on the *dap* were tastier than normal vegetables. After this experience, floating cultivation became popular in this area. Now we don't have any hostility with the hyacinth," says Rahman.

But because Rahman Shaq's crop fields were now all underwater, he didn't have sufficient income. His wife, Anowara Begam, helped out. She is now rearing ducks confidently with a small investment.



Samsur Rahman Shaq has changed his farming methods. He now cultivates vegetables on floating gardens and earns an income from duck rearing and fishing.

Anowara Begam says: "Our family has been rearing ducks on a large scale since 2003. Samadan, an NGO, taught us how we could properly rear ducks. They gave us good species of ducklings. Before this flood we had 75 ducks but now we only have 35. Forty ducks were washed away during the flood. Now my husband doesn't have any specific income, but with the income from duck rearing we are running our family quite well."

The story of Rahman Shaq's family inspired other villagers whose fields were also under water. Before 2000 this family had been absolutely broke. After their land got flooded for three years they lost all their assets. Even their house was washed away.

There was no hope. But the floating garden and duck rearing have increased their confidence.

"Over the last ten years, the climate has abruptly changed here. Before, we could not understand the changes, but now we are facing so many difficulties and many new diseases," said Rahman Shaq.

While visiting his waterlogged land by boat, Rahman Shaq explained: "Even my forefathers can't remember

flooding on this scale. If I'd known growing up that there was such a high risk of flooding I would never have built a house here. Now half the year there's nothing we can do. We cannot cultivate but earlier we used to get three crops a year."

"Each year the water level is rising, and the duration of water logging is increasing. In 2000, our homes were flooded for 14 days. In 2003, it was for a month. I fear this year the flood waters will stay for six months. It is now expected that in the near future, we may be flooded for the whole year."

In this way the inhabitants on the bank of the Kopotakho River are living with and adapting to climate change. And they are using local knowledge in other ways to prepare for more disruptions.

To protect themselves from storms like Cyclone Sidr, house structures have been reinforced with the help of local NGOs. Rural dwellers are making preparations and adapting to face flooding each year. They try to make their homes as water-tight as possible. They put wood for cooking covered up in the roof or somewhere dry. They store dried foods to eat during floods.

Rahman Shaq's desire? "If we could make a fish farm in waterlogged water, that would be a good source of income," he says.

Shahjahan Siraj is founder of Machizo, a Dhaka-based multimedia and development organisation.

(Continued from previous page)

who can provide medical services.

The good news is that this trend is slowly being reversed. Badakshan now has a high enrolment of children in primary school, girls and boys, ahead of many other provinces in Afghanistan.

The first batch of trained midwives has already graduated. Their numbers are expected to increase each year. This is crucial. Doctors are extremely reluctant to work in this remote area. Some parts of the province, Jalali points out, are accessible only through Tajikistan. So an Afghan has to obtain a Tajik visa and go out of his country to enter it again. In fact those travelling to Wakhan for leisure usually enter through Tajikistan which has better roads and infrastructure.

Wakhan is the source of the Amu Darya or Oxus river. The river Panj, which is its origin, runs along the corridor. Most of Wakhan consists of high altitude valleys, all above 2,500 metres. Three mountain ranges, the Karakoram, Pamir and Hindukush, converge in Wakhan and on the southern side there are 38 peaks over 7,000 metres. The landscape with the river and mountains is stunning.

Though isolated, Badakshan is one of the safest and most friendly regions of Afghanistan. It has great potential as a tourist destination. A trickle of tourists is already vending its way there. To ensure tourism is eco friendly and that its benefits reach the local people, the Aga Khan Development Network has already begun training modules for them. If the area's isolation decreases slowly, economic benefits could flow and with more people coming there, health services could get a face lift.



Christel Bosman

Under the lid of privacy

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

It was late afternoon on a beautiful spring day, my first in the US, ages ago. Still in the nebulous haze of a 40 hour journey, begun in the Indian sub-continent, I saw what seemed like endless rows of cars parked in an open parking lot, and kept wondering where the people were. Having grown up in one of the most densely populated regions of the planet I wasn't used to urban areas devoid of masses of people.

Quarter of a century later, I am still wondering where all those people are.

Meanwhile I discovered that privacy was one of the most prized privileges of Occidental society. We often hear talk of Western 'individualism' vis-à-vis the 'communal' existence in non-European cultures. Even though its proponents take it back all the way to the Greeks, it is due more to the fairly recent industrial revolution and its effects than any inherent characteristic of the European cultures.

Geographic displacement disintegrates long existing communities faster than anything else. Communities, as a result, have shrunk to their fundamental component: the individual. The modern democracy (as opposed to the original Greek, or even American, where you had to be of a certain class, race and gender to be a voting citizen) is on the verge of finally extending its definition of citizenry to each and every individual within the State. The individual's place in society's scheme is permanently established.

While all this seems to be such a wonderful development in human affairs one wonders if a lot of the ills we see today have resulted from too much of a good thing. In secular nations such as France (as opposed to religious ones such as the US), morality is seen quite differently in the eyes of the law. For example, the seduction of a married patient by a doctor treating her in a professional capacity is punishable under American law; whereas in France it is treated merely as a private affair between consenting adults. The underlying implication is that in matters of personal morality the individual is not answerable to anyone, least of all, the State. Where the common reference of communal morality (such as religion) has disintegrated or is in conflict, such secular development may seem to be in the best interest of everyone. Until that is, someone like Josef Fritzel shows up.

There has been abundant global coverage of the 'unusual' case in Austria of Joseph Fritzel. In a nutshell, Fritzel was what in Austrian society would be seen as a typical neighbour. A family man. Seven children. No, make that two times seven. Like a Salman Rushie plot come to life here was a middle-class man living a supposedly mundane and humdrum life but at twice the speed.

Under the sordid details of incest, imprisonment and abuse lies the frame-

work of a society that has abandoned moral oversight. I make a broad and sweeping statement here. But when one sees what seems like pure unbridled social licence to pornographic sex and violence (often together) one wonders where it is going to end. The separation of work life and private life that is no longer an integral part of a larger communal life, has created a void that has been filled up with television and video games. For the very young the distinction between the cyber world and the real one becomes increasingly blurred. The further away from the community, the greater the licence to sex and violence. It would be interestingly to know if Fritzel was an aficionado of Dungeon Master (one of the leading video games with millions of fans across the world).

Anonymity is the key word. In the highly geographically mobile American society I realised how little social accountability there is. There was a time when as a member of a community you followed the mores and customs of the community simply because you would be banished if you rebelled too strongly against them.

Today, the pendulum seems to have swung the other way. In Philadelphia, I had an office on the 24th floor of a 30-storied fancy apartment building. One morning in 1991 I discovered in the local newspaper that a wealthy middle-aged man was arrested from the 23rd floor on charges of paedophilia. He had been seducing school-boys (apparently hundreds of them) for years, just a few metres away from where I worked everyday. I must have crossed paths with him and his victims many a time. Proximity, like for the bees in a hive, doesn't necessarily create communities. Industrialization has led us to the megapolis where millions are crammed together and the community is dying.

So I can understand why the neighbours and shopkeepers (housed in the same block as Fritzel) never knew for 24 years that he had prisoners in his self-constructed dungeon (all under the very eyes of the neighbourhood). More difficult to fathom is how such a sense of social privacy extends to one's own wife and family.

Psychologist will say that once we have tacitly accepted the social norm (in this case, one of privacy, even between spouses) we rearrange our own consciousness and behaviour to adjust to our environment. Thousands of case studies and literary works show partners who had blocked and frozen their own moral compass to turn a 'blind eye' to their spouse's crimes.

To a lesser degree all of us do so everyday. At work and in public. Live and let live! A good motto, when we have been socialised with compassion. Otherwise, surely a licence to crime and mere fodder for the consumer market. Josef Fritzel is more than anything else, a collective moral indictment on the state of our society. And for those in this globalizing world who still have a semblance of community left in their societies, beware. Don't go aping the West in all things. Content will surely follow form.

We often hear talk of Western 'individualism' vis-à-vis the 'communal' existence in non-European cultures. Even though its proponents take it back all the way to the Greeks, it is due more to the fairly recent industrial revolution and its effects.

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Perspectives

CATCHING TRENDS

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

India's indolent hydropower

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

GOVERNMENTS at the Centre and the states in India are in a hurry to take up as many big hydropower projects as possible. They say hydropower is cheap, clean, green and a renewable source of energy. From the Prime Minister and the President of India, down to lowly bureaucrats, all are sold on that one slogan. Unfortunately, ardent proponents of hydropower have not bothered to justify that slogan in a credible way. Let us realistically see the performance of hydropower projects in a few snapshots.

One way to assess the performance of big hydropower projects is to see how much power these are generating per mega watts (MW) installed capacity. As of March 31, India had a total installed capacity of 36468.25 MW from hydropower. This capacity generated at an average rate of 3.39 million units (MU) per MW installed capacity during 2007-08. If a 1 MW project runs for 100 per cent of the time in a year, it would typically produce 8.76 MU of power. In other words, in 2007-08, the hydropower projects generated power at full capacity for 38.7 per cent of the time. This performance is certainly lower than the expectations and perceptions of performance of these projects.

Now see how this performance has been changing over time. When we plot the per MW generation figures over the years, we see that this figure drops. For example, the generation in 2007-08 is 14.6 per cent lower than the per MW generation in 1994-95. This, when the 2007 monsoon rainfall was 105 per cent of the long period average.

In fact, the per MW generation figure has been consistently lower after the peak of 1994-95. In 2002-03, the per MW generation was 39.7 per cent lower than the peak figure. This should be shocking for anyone and lead to an assessment of why this is happening. But the authorities have not even bothered to do such an analysis.

Look at the generation performance in another way. When hydropower projects get techno-economic clearance, the clearance is based on claims that the project will generate certain power at 90 per cent dependability. Our analysis of the 208 (with total installed capacity of 30740.3 MW) of the 228 operating hydropower projects (for 20 stations we could not get the required data) in India as on March 31, 2007 shows that power generation at 184 of these projects (that is 88.5 per cent of the 208 projects for which we could get data) was below the design 90 per cent generation figure. The total installed capacity of these underperforming 184 projects is 25214 MW (over 82 per cent of the capacity we have assessed).

This analysis was based on generation figures for the hydropower projects



In 2002-03 the per MW generation was 39.7 per cent lower than the peak figure. This should be shocking for anyone and lead to an assessment.

from 1985-86 to 2007-08 obtained from the Central Electricity Authority. Shockingly, the actual 90 per cent dependable power generation achieved by 90 of these 184 projects is less than half of the design 90 per cent dependable power generation.

This extent of underperformance should be scandalous for anyone. This means that a lot of unviable projects and unviable capacities are being added, leading to huge social, environmental and economic impacts which were avoidable if the scrutiny of the projects was more stringent. When the projects underperform, unfortunately, there are no consequences for anyone and all the costs incurred are passed on to consumers.

Earlier this year, the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission proposed new tariff norms for hydropower projects so that when the project generates power below the design 90 per cent dependability figure, the returns to the project developers would drop. Those proposed new norms were to be applicable from April 1. Unfortunately, CERC announced on April 15 that the existing tariff regulations will continue to operate till further notice.

Look at the performance of big hydropower project in one more way. One of the major justifications for pushing hydropower projects is that they can provide peaking power. This is because a hydropower project can be switched off and on much more easily than thermal project and this advantage can be used by operating the hydropower project during hours of the day when the power demand is high. We have been asking the authorities to tell us how much of

the power generated by hydropower projects is during peaking hours. These agencies have accepted that they do not have this information! What this means is that the nation does not even know to what extent the advantage of hydropower projects in providing peaking power is used.

Here it would be interesting to quote what the CERC said on this subject: "In the course of proceedings for determination of tariff for Nathpa Jhakri HEP and Tehri HEP during the last three years, the Commission has noticed a tendency on the part of generating companies to avoid peaking operation, on one pretext or the other. It is clear that the generating companies prefer operation of their generating stations at a constant MW throughout the day, and are very reluctant to shut off

(Continued on page 26)

Charity under tax shadow

K SHIVAKUMAR

THE 2008 Finance Bill, which has amended the definition of 'charitable purposes' puts several voluntary organisations in a spot. So far, charity meant 'relief to the poor, education, medical relief, and advancement of any other object of general utility.' Such charitable organizations did not have to pay tax. But there were companies that exploited the phrase, 'advancement of any other object of general utility' to escape the tax net.

To ensure that only genuine charitable organizations took advantage of the tax free benefit, the government amended 'advancement of any other object of general utility' in this year's Budget.

The new clause says: "Provided that the advancement of any other object of general public utility shall not be a charitable purpose, if it involves the carrying on of any activity in the nature of trade, commerce or business..."

The Finance Minister at that time gave an assurance 'that genuine charitable organizations will not in any way be affected'. But re-reading the actual paragraph which streamlines the definition of charitable purpose, enough damage has been done. Genuine charitable/voluntary organizations which earn an income from their activities may have to face difficult times from respective Assessing Officers.

The Finance Minister took care of agriculturalists by introducing a new clause (26AAB) in Section 10 to provide exemption to any income of the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) and State Agriculture Marketing Boards (SAMB). In all other cases, the Finance Minister indicated that the Central Board of Direct Tax (CBDT) would issue an explanatory circular containing guidelines.

There is already a question mark hanging over whether a CBDT circular can override the law, whether a circular is capable of reducing the harshness of the clause, and whether the CBDT will publish detailed guidelines for identifying genuine charitable organizations.

A plain reading of the new clause manifests its unreasonableness, unfairness and uncharitable ness towards charities. If some of the Assessing Officers read between the lines, they can do havoc.

Under the new clause, the following examples will be construed as business activity:

- A charitable institution working for physically challenged persons in a rural area which involves itself in the manufacture of greeting cards and wooden furniture with the same persons and uses the money for part financing its activities.
- Distributing agricultural inputs to rural farmers and in turn collecting a very nominal fee for it.
- A *dharmasala* at a place of pilgrimage which charges a token amount for its upkeep and maintenance.
- Federations/ Self-Help Groups (SHGs) involved in micro-credit/micro enterprises.

The list is only illustrative, but there maybe other cases where genuine organizations which collect money fall under this category and have to pay income tax.

Any income that is given as tax goes to the government. A part of it goes back

to the village in the form of schemes/projects. The cost of taking the taxes up and then returning the taxes down to the beneficiary are enormous. As a result, the net amount that reaches the downtrodden will be less. The government, realizing this, has been allowing charitable organizations which pledge 100 per cent of their business income towards development purposes, exemption from tax.

These agencies take on the government's role and lessen its burden. The government too should lend a hand but unfortunately it is lending a harsh hand.

After the amendment, it will be practically impossible to conduct the affairs of charitable organizations in a smooth way. There is a very thin line demarcating the charitable act and the service act. This will cause problems in accounting and affect the organizations' programmes!

It is true that influential people and organizations should not misuse this tax shelter and evade taxes, thereby depriving the government of its dues. At the same time, really deserving candidates should not be denied this benefit either. There are better options available. For instance, the government could have amended the provisions of Sec.11,12 and 13 instead of Sec.2(15). There are even cases where Courts have agreed with the views of the deponent like *CIT vs. P.Iyya Nadar Charitable Trust (2006)* where the assessee lost the exemption.

The voluntary organizations try to aim for sustainability. It is part of their strategy.

Therefore they undertake many income generating activities. Such income generating activities have been exempted from tax irrespective of what the objectives of the NGO/charitable organization to become sustainable are. Now the exemption has been withdrawn. Unless there is a specific connection between the income generating activities of the voluntary organization and its objectives, it is not likely to get the exemption.

A World Bank Report discusses two important tests, which should be taken into consideration for extending tax exemption to organizations.

The first is the test of 'principal purposes' which looks at whether the principal activities and expenditure of the organization are for non-commercial purposes. They may be permitted provided (i) no profit or earnings are distributed to founders, members and so on and (ii) if the NGO is organized and operated principally for the purpose of conducting appropriate (not for profit) activities.

The second is the test for 'destination of incomes'. Here if the surplus earned from the activity of trade/business is committed for and actually utilized for the activities of NGO, the organization should be entitled to the advantages of tax exemption.

Genuine charitable organizations deserve encouragement from the government. But they are thought of mostly at the time of natural disasters and forgotten during Budget presentations. It is unfortunate that there was no strong network or lobby in the voluntary sector to take important issues to the Finance Minister.

The only hope for charitable organizations now is to start a dialogue with the CBDT and request that the explanatory circular should take care of the feelings of genuine organizations, protect their interests and permit them to use their surplus for charitable activities.

Charitable or voluntary organizations which earn an income from their activities may have to face difficult times.

India's indolent hydropower

(Continued from page 19)

the machines during off-peak hours and to run them up during peak-load hours, which is essential for the required peaking support to the grid." It is clear from this quote that even when it is possible and necessary, hydropower projects do not work as peaking stations and instead operate as base load stations. This negates the justification that is used to push big hydropower projects. There should be an investigation and meantime a moratorium on more large hydro projects.

Here we have not gone into other important issues related to large hydropower projects, for example, who gets the benefits, who pays the cost, the question of participation in planning, decision making, construction and operation, social, environmental aspects, emission of global warming methane from reservoirs etc.

It is also noteworthy that out of some 4,600 big dams in India, hardly 5 per cent have hydropower component. The potential of adding hydropower component at such locations should be assessed. If even 5 per cent of the remaining sites are

found to be feasible in this respect, we will be looking at adding huge hydropower capacity without incurring additional social or environmental costs and even financial costs will be lower than going in for a new project. Similarly, there is huge potential of small-mini-micro hydro and options of modernisation of *gharats*. All efforts should be done to optimise performance of existing large hydropower projects. If these options are properly taken up, it is possible that we may not need to go for most of the new large hydropower projects.

It is not surprising that agitations are going on in various forms all over the country against such projects, for example in Andhra Pradesh (Polavaram, Pulichintala), Arunachal Pradesh (Dibang), Himachal Pradesh (Allain Duhangan, Khab, Luhri, Swara Kuddu), Kerala (Athirapally), Madhya Pradesh (Indira Sagar, Maheshwar, Omkareshwar, Sardar Sarovar), Manipur (Thoubal, Tipaimukh), Sikkim (Panang), Uttaranchal (Bhagirathi Valley, Alaknanda Valley, Kotli Bhel), etc. This fire will spread, intensify and even get nasty if there are no systemic changes to address the crucial issues these struggles are raising.

The trouble is: who is listening? Can we expect Jairam Ramesh, the new Union Minister of State for Power to respond?

Tendulkar's audacious theatre

ANANDA LAL

THE passing away of Vijay Tendulkar, in his eightieth year, brings the curtain down not only on a luminous life and literary career, but also pushes closer to conclusion the final act of that play starring the most influential names of post-Independence original Indian drama. During the 1960s, Tendulkar and three others led the vanguard of new Indian playwriting in different languages, audaciously breaking the barriers of conventional theatre, thereby getting translated into the other major tongues, thus earning fame across the country.

The oldest in that club, Badal Sircar (born 1925), still soldiers on with his deliberately poor, stripped-down 'Third Theatre' in a room in a corner of Kolkata, despite his failing health. A third member and Sircar's exact contemporary, Mohan Rakesh, died prematurely in 1972 after single-handedly changing the



In his finest books Tendulkar combined the social conscience and incisive investigative skills demanded of journalism with the higher artistry of literature.

face of Hindi drama with his symbolic modernism. The youngest of the quartet, Girish Karnad (born 1938), complex as well as clever, remains as active as ever, his latest work premiering in June in Bangalore.

They became household names at one time, yet represented just the tip of the iceberg of contemporary Indian theatre, because although many very deserving authors attained high regard in their regional literatures and outside, they remained under the shadow of this Big Four, for various reasons. In Marathi, for instance, Tendulkar was the senior most among a trio that I once nicknamed TEA – Tendulkar, Elkunchwar, Alekar – the two others exceptional writers in their own right. Mahesh Elkunchwar (1939) is unsurpassed in his realistic depiction of domestic tensions; Satish Alekar a superbly ironic absurdist but, 21 years younger than Tendulkar, almost like a son to him. I don't think either will dispute that Tendulkar was greater in terms of literary output: 29 full-length plays, seven anthologies of one-act drama, a novel, four volumes of short stories, three books of essays, six collections of children's plays, assorted columns in the press. Unfortunately for the rest of India, most of this *oeuvre* has not been translated.

Writing about Tendulkar, the first thing that strikes me as worth mentioning is that he worked for a long period as a journalist. In his finest books, therefore, he combined the social conscience and incisive investigative skills demanded of that profession with the higher artistry of literature. As a matter of fact, many of his major plays pivot on a historical incident or news item through which he presents very tough choices of real life to his audience. Unlike most authors but like the ideal journalist, he never pulled his punches in writing: his plays uncover unpleasant realities. He told the hard, bitter truth that the majority of people try to avoid or sweep under the carpet, and consequently his writings embroiled him in all kinds of controversies about what literature should deal with and

from what it apparently should stay away.

His typical style emerged in *Shrimant*, as early as 1955, a decade before the radical changes ushered in by the 60s drama movement. Although constructed in the traditional manner, it brought into an affluent home a protagonist very unusual for its time – a never-do-well who becomes a union leader – along with his friend, a former prisoner, and an unmarried mother. Thus he smashed through the insulated walls of Marathi theatre, which normally glorified noble heroes. The very next year, while John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* took London by storm, Tendulkar independently created the Indian avatar of the Angry Young Man in *Manush Navache Bet* (An Island Called Man), with three workless urban educated young men, frustrated by the young nation's inability to provide them with

respectable jobs and accommodation. In two strokes, he demolished the mainstream Marathi medium of melodrama and tearjerkers that still survives, albeit on screen. In an essay a few years later he wrote something that sums up his motto: "Today real happiness has become so elusive that man is tempted to accept false happiness or create an illusion of happiness."

However, he had still not broken through nationally. That came with the brilliant *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* (1967), filmed by Satyadev Dubey, translated into English as *Silence! The Court Is in Session*, and now a text in several universities. Here, he brought a motley group together for a mock trial, which instead gradually takes the shape of an improvised play that turns into a witch-hunt in which they maliciously gang up on the isolated Miss Benare, a schoolteacher in their midst. It signifies the forcible imposition of middle-class morality upon free-minded individuals, specifically, women; Tendulkar describes the characters' faces as looking like those of animals stalking prey. This horror at man's inherent bestial streak against fellow men developed into three classic studies of human violence and malevolence: *Gidhade* (1970), *Sakharam Binder* (1972) and *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972).

The first of these depicted a foul-mouthed family as the vultures in its title, ripping each other apart, motivated by mercenary gain and property – indeed, worse than vultures, who at least don't feast on their own kind. *Sakharam Binder*, a drunken Brahmin who picks down and out women off the street to live with him, shocked viewers by his candid espousal of *demi-monde* relationships outside marriage. *Ghashiram Kotwal*, later filmed and even performed outside India in the face of bitter opposition from the Shiv Sena, showed the vengeful antihero taking over Pune under the Peshwas to begin his own reign of terror –

a historical allegory attacking the newly-formed Shiv Sena that had received encouragement from the Congress party, who conveniently dissociated itself from the dangerous Sena afterwards.

Each of these controversial plays caused scandals on stage, as the law cracked down on the troupes producing them, not just for "immorality" but, in the case of *Ghashiram*, for soiling Marathi pride and satirizing Pune Brahmins (Tendulkar had subverted the glorious *sangeet natak* tradition and used *kirtan* music to paint the community as weak and debauched). *Ghashiram* even caused its parent theatre group to split up, the old guard refusing to perform it, and dissenters forming a new company, the now-famous Theatre Academy of Pune, who bravely continued to stage it.

Three plays from the early 1980s also upset audiences, even though Tendulkar had become the presiding icon of Marathi theatre by then. *Mitrachi Goshta* (A Friend's Story, 1981) placed lesbianism on the mainstream stage, possibly for the first time in India. In *Kamala*, the same year, inspired by a news report, he had a journalist make a scoop by buying a woman in a village market, taking her home and becoming the talk of the town, while the woman (who now considers herself his purchased wife) and his own wife reflect different aspects of his exploitation of them. *Kanyadan* (1983) even infuriated the liberals and socialists, because in it a Dalit poet marries a Brahmin girl but starts abusing her physically.

Tendulkar's work in cinema is familiar to more readers owing to its wider reach, but in all fairness I think I should list some of the high points here. He scripted the screenplays of Shyam Benegal's *Nishant* and *Manthan*, Jabbar Patel's *Samna*, *Simhasan* and *Umbartha*, Govind Nihalani's *Akrosh* and *Ardh Satya*, and Amol Palekar's *Akriet*. Had he not had a career as a dramatist, such a resume in film would have been meritorious enough.

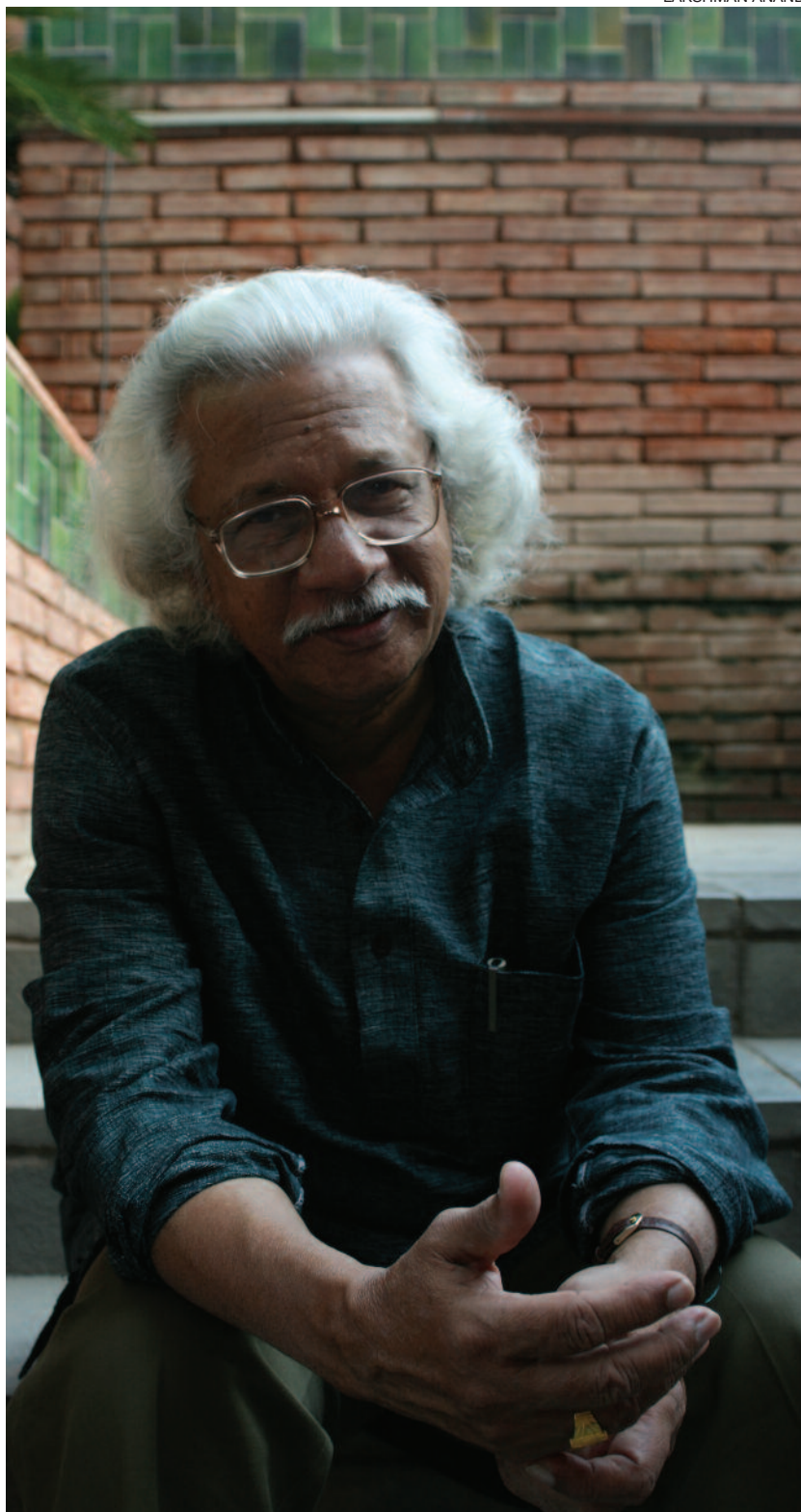
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Adoor and the lives of four women

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Adoor Gopalakrishnan

Madhu Gurung
New Delhi

I met Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Kerala's iconic film maker, at Delhi's stylish India Habitat Centre. Dressed in a kurta, he wears his white hair long and behind his glasses his smiling eyes are watchful. His most recent film, *Four Women* was being screened and I looked forward to seeing it.

The movie turned out to be a riveting tale about four women from different strata of society. A prostitute abandons her profession for love and is determined to eke out a decent living. A farm hand married to a small time shop keeper returns home on a customary visit. She is abandoned by her husband who evades any conversation and physical contact with her. A childless housewife gets a visitor who hints that he may be the answer to her childless state as he is the father of eight children. A spinster sees her siblings marry and leave home to raise their families. When her mother dies she goes to live with her younger sister but returns home after deciding to live alone.

Each story leaves you with wishful longing to know more, long after it ends. That is the magic of Adoor Gopalakrishnan. He can make a simple story pull at your heartstrings. It's the timelessness of these stories set in the early 60's in Kerala that still find resonance.

Speaking softly, Adoor recalls when Doordarshan approached him with the idea of making a film on the classic writer, Sivasankara Pillai Thakazhi, one of his favourite authors. Adoor sat for days reading and re-reading Thakazhi.

Eventually, he chose nine of the great writer's short stories. Four stories were made into *Four Women*. The rest will be made into another film titled, *One Woman Two Men*.

Adoor says: "What is interesting about *Four Women* is that each story looks independent and separate. I was faithful to Thakazhi and shot for over a year entirely in Kottanad. But within each story you have a certain growth in terms of time, awareness and conflict. This growth finally climaxes into a resolution. The sheer static electricity of being there together is what makes the film interesting. When you come out of the cinema hall you should get the feeling that you have seen a film about the woman – her condition, her being. That's the treatment."

The film has been very well received at international film festivals. "Women respond very naturally to this film. All over the world it had the same response. A nun called me and said she had a life like the elder sister in the film who was a spinster. I was very touched," says Adoor.

It couldn't be easy for a man to get under a woman's skin and understand her complex nuances, but Adoor does so with dexterity. Ask him and he smiles and says, "I was very close to my mother after my parents separated. I think I understand women."

At 67, Adoor wears his fame lightly. Born into a family who were patrons of Kathakali, Adoor remembers the time he was just eight and his teacher picked him to play the lead role of Gautam Buddha.

"Very strangely the play I did is remembered by a lot of people in my family, my cousins and uncles even to this day. That kind of approval was great and I began writing, acting and producing plays with my friends. My going into modern theatre was considered a part of the family tradition," says Adoor.

He published some of his plays and did theatre. After graduation he got a job with the National Sample Survey. He laughs and recalls how after two years he gave up the job.

"I wanted to specialise in theatre. It so happened that the Film and Television

(Continued on next page)

Tara sings, dances for SOS

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

TARA L Venkatesh looked radiant, almost ethereal on stage in her luminous green costume. At her concert in Delhi to raise money for SOS Children's Villages, Tara, a soprano singer, sang classics and Broadway hits with enviable ease. She danced too with graceful fluidity to a houseful audience.

Just 13 years old, Tara is one of India's youngest social activists. Her outfit, Music 4 Kids By Kids, sings to spread awareness and collect funds for children less fortunate.

Most of all Tara worries about the girl child. "I have come across many revealing statistics about the girl child and female infanticide. Even today 100 million girl children are killed globally every year, be it in the womb or as infants. In India, you just have to look at the dismal scenario in many states particularly in the north," says Tara.

She was inspired to sing for the underprivileged by the example of two former child singers, Charlotte Church and Chloe Agnew. "I thought it would be wonderful if children performed and sang for a cause," she says.

SOS Children's Villages is an NGO which provides loving homes to underprivileged, abandoned children. "I visited their villages in Chennai and Faridabad and wanted to help talented young ones accomplish their dreams. Some girls were expert basketball players and winners of local championships. There was also a girl who wanted to learn Bharat Natyam."

The talented danseuse she spotted was sent to Kalakshetra, Chennai, an institution Tara greatly admires since she has been visiting the place from the tender age of two, along with her grandfather R Venkataraman, former President of India, who has been chairperson of the institution.

A Class 7 student of the American Embassy School, Delhi, and part of the John Hopkin's University Talented Youth Program in the US, Tara is interested in science and math. She's passionate about dinosaurs and space and wants to become a "singing paleontologist in space."

When Tara was five years old she heard an opera for the first time. It grabbed her attention. Her grandparents are also great patrons of the arts and had exposed her to genres like opera, Indian classical music, jazz and fusion. "My grandfather calls me the oddball of the family since I was the only one to take to western classical music," says Tara smilingly.

At the age of eight, Tara held her first public performance in Delhi. She is a student of leading Indian soprano singer, Situ Singh Beuhler, as well as of Gerald Worth, artistic director of the 400-year-old Vienna Boy's Choir, Pandit Ravi Shankar and his academy and Bob Marks.

Her concert began with children from SOS singing the moving *Saraswati*



Tara L Venkatesh

Vandana. Tara then sang the soulful *Panis Angelicus*, a piece she first heard rendered by child artiste Charlotte Church when she was nine.

Then came *Ave Maria*, *Hail Mary*, a haunting paean to the sanctity of motherhood. This was Tara's favourite version of *Ave Maria*. It combined the famous *First Prelude* from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* by Bach with an original melody by French composer Charles Gounod. While Tara enjoyed all her classical numbers, she found the Italian song *La Pastorella*, a Rossini composition, "very challenging." The gripping fusion piece *Odi Vilayadu Pappa* set to a poem by the great Tamil writer Subramania Bharati centred on the theme of innocent children living in harmony. The Tamil poem was suggested by her grandfather, the music was set by Neil Nongkynrih, conductor of the Shillong Chamber Choir and arranged by Russian pianist Svetlana Radashkevich. Tara was joined by danseuse Chitkala, a student of Natya Tarangini, in a choreography by the talented Yamini Reddy. This unique experimental piece brought together the Kuchipudi classical style with Western classical music.

There was also a delightful performance by five to 10 year old children from the Ecole Francaise de Delhi. Superbly conducted by Gabriella Boda-Rechner, the young ones regaled the audience with their cute rendition of various songs. Tara says the children were so eager to contribute to SOS, that a box was set up at the auditorium to collect donations.

Tara's mother Lakshmi, founder trustee of Bharatiya Yuva Shakti describes her daughter as "single minded." "When Tara takes on anything, she immerses herself heart and soul in it—be it music, science or dinosaurs," she said.

(Continued from previous page)

Institute of India (FTII) started in Pune in 1961, and that very year they were advertising for the next year's course. I saw they were offering a screenplay writing and direction course. I passed it and was ranked first. I got the only scholarship which was Rs 75 a month. I was following a passion," says Adoor.

He grins sheepishly and admits he had not seen too many films before he joined. All that changed. He would now see four to five films a day and he 'discovered films at great speed.' Adoor was impressed and inspired by Satyajit Ray.

He returned to Kerala to make films, starting the Chitrlekha Film Company. "It was very difficult to find finance," he says. "It took seven years for me to make my first film *Swayamvaram*. We took a loan from the Film Finance Corporation. It was a bold step. When the film was released we could not find a distributor. Out of sheer necessity we decided to distribute it ourselves. In a week's time in most places the film was taken off as no one came to see it. It was a real setback for us. But the film went on to win the National Award for Best Film, Best Director, Best Cameraman and Best Actress, and that made big headlines."

It was only the second time that a Malayalam film was getting a National Award. That, Adoor recalls, helped. He re-released the film. And this time it was a big success. In two weeks he recovered his entire loan repaying it back in record time.

Adoor's third film, *Elippathayam*, won him the British Institute Award for the 'most original and imaginative film' in 1982. Adoor has won the International

Film Critics Prize six times for his films *Mukhamukham*, *Anantaram*, *Mathilukal*, *Vidheyam*, *Kathapurushan* and *Nizhalkkuthu*.

His movies have been shown at the Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Toronto, London and Rotterdam festivals, making him one of the best known Indian names in the international film circuit. He has also served on the jury of several prestigious film festivals.

Four Women is Adoor's tenth feature film. He has made over 30 documentaries and short films on subjects that have touched him deeply.

"Most of my films are made from my own stories, except three—*Four Women*, *Vidheyam* and *Mathilukal*, which were adaptations. Between films and even while making films I get preoccupied with ideas. Sometimes they bother me. I have a few subjects in an unstructured form in my mind and when I think of making a film, I mull over them, bring those ideas to my mind and start processing again. I don't make a film just for one day's consumption. I'm not interested in that. I see to it that my films live long. There has to be a certain universality and timelessness about my films. They reflect issues of perennial value."

For those who want to tread his path, Adoor says with wry humour: "We are open to several influences in life and we only take what we want. You have to have certain receptivity. What is important is to know what you want. One way to know your mind is by reading biographies, travelogues, fiction, even television and newspaper – any literature can show you a way. Unlike television which treats you like a consumer, an artist and a writer does not. They show you a path. But it's a path you have to choose yourself."

Auroville celebrates 40 years

AUROVILLE, the city of dawn, celebrates 40 years this year in its characteristic understated way. Located in Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, close to the azure waters of the Indian Ocean, the township retains its relevance.

Auroville is a universal town. People from anywhere in the world can come here to live in peace and harmony. The purpose of Auroville is to realise human unity in diversity. It is the first global experiment in bonding- with people and the natural world.

The town is based on the vision of Sri Aurobindo, the renowned yogi and philosopher and his spiritual disciple known as 'The Mother'. Auroville is home for about 3,000 people from 40 countries. It has a floating population of temporary residents, researchers and travellers as well.

The town was built on barren land. Today, it has acres of green. At the cen-



Sacred moments at dawn in Auroville

tre of Auroville lies the Peace Area, comprising of the Matri Mandir and its gardens, the amphitheatre and the Urn of Human Unity. Built in the shape of a lotus bud, the urn contains the soil of the 124 nations which took part in Auroville's inauguration ceremony on February 28, 1968.

It is here that Aurovillians, in special moments, gather to meditate. Twice a year, an early dawn fire flame lights up. The bonfire and events in Auroville's amphitheatre celebrate 40 years of this unique experiment where people from anywhere live and work together for a common cause.

Globalisation is bringing people together like never before to talk, work, forge bonds, and, maybe, build a better world. Auroville is a precursor of this trend for it signifies the unity of mankind. Can the whole planet become like Auroville? Green, creative and spiritual? Who knows.

Photographs: G PATTABIRAMAN



Ballet on climate change

LEAD India organized a lovely musical ballet, *Vasundhara*, to create awareness of climate change. "The consequences of climate change will be fully felt by our children," said Nitin Desai, president, LEAD India.

Using music, dance and poetry, *Vasundhara* depicted the wonders of nature and the havoc of industrialization and urbanization. A superb fusion of music and poetry, including Mozart and Tagore, formed the background score.

The destruction of natural resources, ozone layer depletion, acid rain, tsunamis, floods, droughts, and the greenhouse effect were artistical-



ly explained on stage. In one scene, a farmer watches in despair as his bullocks drop dead while they plough a parched piece of land.

Desai too has his favourite story:

"One of the best stories on the subject of climate change. I have heard from a rural farmer is 'Ab main mausam pad nahi sakta' (I cannot read the weather any longer)."

Vasundhara ended on a happy note with birds, animals, butterflies, a rainbow, deer and other animals returning and the waves of the sea gently lapping against the shore.

The ballet was performed by the Mohini troupe from Mount Sinai School in Ramnagar, Uttarakhand. The show was choreographed, directed and performed by Sharmila Ganguly, a classical Odissi dancer. Tom Alter recited the moving poem *Shabnam* (Morning Dew).

Smile on Wheels

THERE were smiles all around as Renuka Chowdhury, Minister of State for Women and Child Development, flagged off two mobile hospitals named Smile on Wheels. The vans will take health services to



Amnesty releases report

AMNESTY International released its annual report on the state of human rights worldwide in New Delhi on May 28.

Mukul Sharma, director of Amnesty India, highlighted recent trends in human rights violation such as targeting of civilians by armed forces, violence against women, attacks on journalists, lack of protection to refugees and denial of socio-economic rights to minorities.

People are still tortured in at least 81 countries, face unfair trials in 54 countries and cannot speak freely in 77 countries.

Sharma talked about violation of human rights in India.

These included denial of social, economic and cultural rights to minorities. Around 300 million people continue to live in poverty. There is also

massive forced displacement of people.

The report criticizes anti-terror laws in Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and Nagaland, and the Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh. The report cites the example of Dr Binayak Sen, a human rights activist who has been unlawfully detained in Chhattisgarh.

The Armed Forces Special Powers Act has not been repealed despite

widespread protests and the death penalty continues to exist in India.

Professor Mushirul Hasan, Vice Chancellor, Jamia Milia Islamia, Sadia Dehlvi, activist and author and Vinod Varshney, senior journalist were the chief guests.

Professor Hasan's speech dealt with the issue of countering terror and he said that the word 'terror' is freely used to describe all kinds of violence whether it is against civilians or the government or destruction of public property. These may not be acts of terror but an expression of socio-economic discontent.

Sadia Dehlvi said dowry harassment, female foeticide and rape was still very prevalent and women were the target of family vendettas. 'Not speaking out is as political an act as speaking out' she said.



the doorstep of slum dwellers in Delhi and Chennai.

"Smile has supplemented what the government has not been able to achieve, that is reach out to the poorest with healthcare services in remote areas," said the cheerful minister who wanted each van to have child helpline numbers.

The two mobile hospitals are part of Smile Foundation's efforts to provide healthcare to the underprivileged. The project is now two years old and is active in Uttarakhand, Orissa, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.

The mobile hospitals are well equipped and will provide OPD- curative services for common ailments, ante and postnatal services, immunization, pathological services, free distribution of iron, folic acid and vitamin A tablets etc.

In Chennai, Smile on Wheels will service Perungudi, Madipakkam, Sholinganallur, Perumpakkam, Uthandi. Contact: press@smilefoundationindia.org

Living

BODY & SOUL

Be different, look within. There is always more to life. Reach out to alternatives. Heritage, eco-tourism, green cures, traditional foods, buy from NGOs, spiritual talk, organic counter, where to donate, where to volunteer, web watch.

Wild time with apes in the wild

Susheela Nair
Sepilok (Malaysia)

AFTER a 15-minute drive from the east coast town of Sandakan in North Borneo, we reach the world's largest and oldest Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre at Sepilok. Sprawled over 43 sq km in the midst of a virgin rainforest the centre is the abode of the adorable orang-utan.

We trek along a plank walkway to a feeding platform for the orang-utans. As we walk, we marvel at the towering trees of the rainforest. When we looked closely at the foliage we spied some orang-utan nests. But we didn't stumble across the star of the rainforest.

At the feeding platform hordes of tourists waited in eager anticipation for the orang-utans. The jungle soon came alive with a cacophony of birdcalls. The apes with their young ones hopped from tree to tree, greeting tourists with their low hoots. A female orang-utan, with a tiny baby clinging to her, pranced into the feeding deck.

Watching these shy, ginger-furred giants of Borneo during feeding time is sheer joy. Their meal consists of milk and bananas. The food is served on large wooden platforms suspended by ropes from the branches of a towering tree. Other apes arrived sliding down a rope tethered to trees just in front of us. Some of them posed for cameras, while others entertained tourists with their acrobatics.

We watched amusedly the antics of the long-tailed macaques who joined the apes during feeding time, craving for an easy meal. When the forest ranger arrived with a bucket of milk and several bunches of bananas, he shooed away some of the uninvited macaques. Sometimes macaques can get aggressive when provoked but it is quite fascinating to watch them play. After a hearty breakfast, the orang-utans leapt onto the overhanging branches, and swinging arm over arm, disappeared into the jungle.

Known scientifically as *Pongo Pygmaeus*, orang-utans have long enthralled humans. I wondered whether it was because they share 96.4 per cent of our DNA! Orang-utans are found relaxing on treetops in the rainforest of Borneo and Sumatra but being gentle and shy by nature, sightings of orang-utan in the wild are not easy.

The drastic reduction of their population is attributed to the vast dwindling of their natural habitat—the rainforest. The main causes of this habitat loss are commercial logging, clearance for agriculture and conversion to plantations. When forest areas

(Continued on page 32)



Forest ranger feeding an orang-utan



Tourists stroll down to the feeding area for orang-utans

Photographs: SUSHEELA NAIR

For that perfect vision

GREEN CURES

Ask Dr GG



Dr GG Gangadharan is one of India's best known Ayurvedic physicians. Currently, he is deputy director of the Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) in Bangalore. In this column, Dr GG, as he is popularly known, answers queries from readers seeking effective alternative remedies.

I am suffering from conjunctivitis since the past three days. Although my condition is a little better my eye is still red and inflamed. I get conjunctivitis every year during the rainy season. Please tell me what is the best way to treat conjunctivitis and how can I prevent this disease from recurring every year?

Conjunctivitis is a seasonal disease and more common immediately after summer. The best medicine for this is the flower juice of Nandyarvattom (*Tabernaemontana coronaria*). The juice of the white flower is very cooling and gives instant relief for the irritation of the eyes. Do not take a head bath when you have conjunctivitis. To prevent conjunctivitis from recurring it is advisable to take one Ayurvedic purgation to clear the bowels before the onset of the monsoon. If conjunctivitis is around wash your eyes with a decoction of Thriphala, which is well filtered and lukewarm. Take fresh juice of gooseberry (*Amla*) for two weeks.

I am a 32-year-old working woman and I am a regular user of soft contact lenses. Although the lenses are more comfortable than spectacles my eyes get an allergy every few months. As a result, I have to discontinue use of lenses and apply several bottles of eye drops. Please tell me if there is any natural way to strengthen my eyes so that I don't acquire allergies.

Do dhara (pouring of liquid continuously) on both eyes with a decoction made of Thriphala. Do it every day. Whenever you drive or go out wear glasses. To strengthen your eyes internally take Thriphaladi Chooranam with

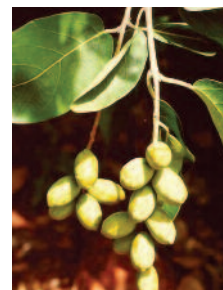
honey at night followed by a cup of milk. Do it for three months every year.

My 12-year-old son has weak eyesight. In the past four years his myopia has increased to minus six from minus two. I have tried to stop him from watching too much TV or sitting for long in front of the computer without much success. How can I prevent his eyesight from getting worse?

Give him one teaspoon of Mahathraiphala Gritham at night at bedtime followed by a cup of milk and apply Thriphaladi coconut oil on head half an hour before bath every day. Every year give him Nethra tharpanam (keeping the ghee in the eye making some boundaries around the eyes with a paste, so that the oil can stay in the eye socket, thus immersing the eyes in the ghee) with Thriphaladi Gritham for 30 minutes for 7 days.

My 78-year-old grandmother has weak eyesight. She is very myopic and can't read without her glasses also. But most of all she is very worried about getting cataract. Is there any preventive medicine for cataract, which I can give my grandmother?

An experienced doctor can give preventive medicine for cataract. There is one eye drop, which can prevent further growth/maturity of cataract. Please contact Dr. BG Gokulan, Mobile No. 09447163071 at Sudarshanam Nethra Chikitsalayam, Kerala.



Terminalia Chebula

I am a 17-year-old male student studying architecture in Delhi. I have developed a sty near my lower eyelid. Please could you suggest some eye drops or ointment to make it subside since it has grown quite large and is affecting my vision. Also, please tell me if the appearance of a sty is due to dust since I travel long distance to college.

It can be due to regular exposure to dust and particles. Clean your eyes every day. If you can make a paste of Hareethaki (*Terminalia chebula*) with lime juice, just apply it on the sty and leave it to dry. Do it for 14 days. Also sprinkle the decoction of Thriphala on your eyes with slight force. Use glasses whenever you go out.

E-mail: vaidya.ganga@frlht.org

Wild time with apes

(Continued from page 31)

are destroyed, the orang-utans are deprived of their home and source of food. Illegal commercial logging not only destroys the forest but also creates forcible encroachments into previously inaccessible areas and provides an easy route to poachers.

In 1963 the orang-utans became officially protected under the Fauna Conservation Ordinance, which, among other things, prohibits hunting, trading, or keeping them as pets. Barbara Harrison, wife of the curator of Sarawak Museum, then initiated the process of rescuing young orang-utans being kept locally as pets, and the idea grew of training these animals to fend for themselves so that they might re-adapt to life in the wild. In 1964, 43 sq km of virgin jungle was set aside as a forest reserve and sanctuary for these amiable creatures. Subsequently the Sepilok Rehabilitation Centre was established to return orphaned apes back to the wild as soon as they are ready.

When a young orang-utan is orphaned or kept as a pet, it becomes incapable of living in its natural habitat on its own. Much of its survival depends on acquiring skills, which the young orang-utan gets from its mother in its first five to six years of life.

At the Rehabilitation Centre, orphaned or pet orang-utans are trained to live an independent life in their natural habitat. The rehabilitation process starts as soon as the orang-utan is admitted to the centre with a thorough health examination, followed by a quarantine period to eliminate diseases from being transmitted. This process can be quite long, and includes a 'kindergarten,' enclosed and controlled areas, and in its last stage the forest reserve in Sepilok, where the orang-utans are free-roaming. In this sanctuary, orang-utans who have been abandoned by their mothers, or were formerly in captivity, are rehabilitated until fit enough to be returned to the wild. Some orang-utans have grown so fond of human company that they refuse to return to the wild. Other semi-wild orang-utans come to the sanctuary twice daily from the forest to feast on milk and bananas.

Our guide explained, "Young orang-utans spend time in the 'Nursery' learn-

ing skills to lead a life in the jungle such as the ability to find food, build nests, and even climb, skills they would learn from their mother. Once ready they move to the 'Outdoor Nursery' where their freedom is increased and their dependence on food and emotional support is decreased." Visitors can witness part of the process by visiting 'Platform A' where the natural forest diet of the orang-utans is supplemented with milk and fruit.

If you are adventurous, you can set out on various nature trails and walks within the reserve; from tropical highland rainforest, to lowland mangrove swamps where you can see a bewildering range of wildlife including wild orang-utans. Night walks are also organised to see nocturnal animals. Walks vary from 250 m to 5 km. Hiking trails lead through the forest and although animal sightings are not guaranteed, the diversity of tropical trees, bushes, and flowers make this an enriching excursion.

After the feeding of the orang-utans, we strolled back to the main Rehabilitation Centre to watch an interesting documentary on the habitats of these gentle primates and the efforts being made to integrate them into their natural environment. The short documentary film explained in detail the philosophy of the rehabilitation and the importance of the reserve of Sepilok. The Natural History Museum at the centre is well worth browsing through.

Despite legal protection in Sumatra and Borneo, the illegal black market pet trade continues. Orang-utans are often poached for their meat—their slow movements make them easy targets. There is a thriving market for parts of orang-utans, particularly skulls, in many Asian countries. The trade in body parts continues despite the efforts of the authorities to stop it.

Thanks to the aggressive enforcement of a national conservation programme by the Malaysian and Indonesian Wildlife Departments, orang-utans have been saved from extinction while their fragile environment continues to be challenged. Sepilok Orang-utan Appeal UK, an NGO, has also stepped in to ensure the survival of these endangered species by adopting projects. These include the building of an exercise enclosure for the young orphans, the release of three captive full grown males and two breeding females into a remote reserve, the provision of a Land Rover Defender to carry out rescue missions and the refurbishment of the indoor nursery and quarantine wards.

Contact: E-mail: info@sepilokjungleresort.com; Phone: 6089-531180

Help for tobacco junkies

Sejal Mahendru
New Delhi

NICOTINE is addictive so stubbing out cigarettes isn't very easy. Smoking is a death sentence, but smokers need a helping hand to be able to quit. **Dr Sajeela Maini**, a tobacco cessation specialist, runs a chain of Tobacco Cessation Clinics in Delhi region. We meet her at her clinic in Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, where she is a consultant. Dr Maini helps smokers to quit tobacco in a scientific manner. Eighty per cent of smokers who approach her for help manage to give up cigarettes. She has also started a 'Quit Tobacco Movement' for society.

Dr Maini tells you the cold truth about tobacco: it contains 4,800 chemical substances including carcinogens, nicotine, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, metals including lead, chromium, arsenic, radioactive elements, hydrocarbons and tar. It causes a range of illnesses: cancers, emphysema, cataract, asthma...

Better stub out your cigarette.

Dr Maini has a PhD in Health Psychology with tobacco cessation as her area of research. She has been spearheading the fight against tobacco for over a decade. She spoke to *Civil Society* about strategies adopted at her clinics to help people lead a smoke free life.

Why do people become addicted?

People become addicted to the nicotine present in tobacco. None of the other substances present in tobacco are addictive.

The dependence is on a physiological as well as a psychological level. The craving for nicotine reaches a peak after 72 hours and declines thereafter. There are certain medicines which reduce the urge for nicotine but they should only be taken under professional supervision.

How do you help the people who approach you to quit smoking?

Smoking cessation requires a structured intervention by a comprehensive tobacco cessation programme. In brief, this programme consists of seven to eight therapeutic sessions. Smoking is a mind-body addiction; therefore both the physiology and psychology of tobacco addiction have to be addressed.

Complementary follow up sessions once a month for three months are carried out to ensure complete abstinence. These ensure a success rate of 80 per cent.

How long does it take for a person to completely stop smoking cigarettes?

The cessation program consists of around eight sessions which cover a span of two weeks, at the end of which the person completely stops smoking.

The cessation process has to be sudden as immediate quitting is easiest. Reduction is a self defeating exercise. The cessation process has to be abrupt accompanied by family support and proper therapy for it to be successful.

What is the age group of the people who come to you for help?

The people who come to me belong to all ages, ranging from 12-year-olds to 80-year-olds, from upper, middle and lower classes. Both men and women join. Our cessation programmes are of two kinds:

Clinical: Where patients are treated individually.

Tobacco cessation workshops: Where we treat patients in groups of 30. The

Photographs: LAKSHMAN ANAND



Dr Sajeela Maini

The cessation programme consists of around eight sessions in the span of two weeks at the end of which the person completely stops smoking. The cessation process has to be sudden as it is easiest when quitting is done immediately.



workshop is a 10-hour long programme stretched over five days, where people are made to quit and are also counseled against relapsing.

How do you motivate people to stop smoking?

Mainly people seek professional help after their own attempts at quitting fail. Sometimes people are reluctant to accept the fact that they need to be treated. These people feel helpless and disheartened. To increase their self-respect, patients are given motivation enhancement therapy. They are also treated for their stress levels and for other physiological problems and diseases caused by smoking.

Family support is crucial, and two of our eight sessions focus on family therapy, especially with the spouse so that they understand the problem better and become more supportive.

After quitting how soon does the ex-smoker become as healthy as a non-smoker?

Well, that cannot be generalised as it depends on how long a person has been smoking, the extent of addiction, how much damage has been done and also on the person's health status. But in most cases the carbon monoxide level in the patient's blood decreases to normal in a week's time and there is an increase in the patient's energy level.

In case of a relapse, how can a person be helped?

If the person starts smoking again, he has to go through the same cessation process.

We counsel people to abstain from relapsing. The patients have to go through a relapse prevention therapy because smoking cigarettes leads to a permanent tolerance in the body. For example, if a person smoking 10 cigarettes a day quits and starts smoking again, his body will still be accustomed to 10 cigarettes a day. Therefore, an ex-smoker is just a puff away from becoming a smoker.

Is smoking only two or three cigarettes a day dangerous and addictive?

Absolutely.

Is it stressful to deal with people battling addiction?

Changing a person's mindset and bringing about a drastic change in the lifestyle of the people who come to me for help is difficult. I have to spend hours with each patient to help them quit. But it gives me pleasure when I see my patients quit smoking because not only does their own health improve, the life of the whole family changes for the better.

Is passive smoking as harmful as active smoking?

Yes, in fact it is even more harmful as the smoke coming out of the cigarette contains a greater number of carcinogens than the smoke which is inhaled.

Is there any message you would like to give our readers?

I would just like to say that life is beautiful-- don't let it go up in smoke. Please quit smoking for yourself and your loved ones.

Contact: sajeelamaini@rediffmail.com

Think better to stay healthy

SAMITA RATHOR

Buddham saranam gacchami
I go to the Buddha for refuge.

Dhammam saranam gacchami
I go to the Dhamma for refuge.

Sangham saranam gacchami
I go to the Sangha for refuge.

POSITIVE thinking is a mental attitude that admits into the mind, thoughts, words and images that favor the expansion, development and achievement of our complete well being. A positive mind anticipates happiness, joy, health and a successful outcome of every situation and action. Whatever the mind seeks, it finds.

"Whatever you think, that you will be. If you think yourself weak, weak you will be, if you think yourself strong, strong you will be," said Swami Vivekananda.

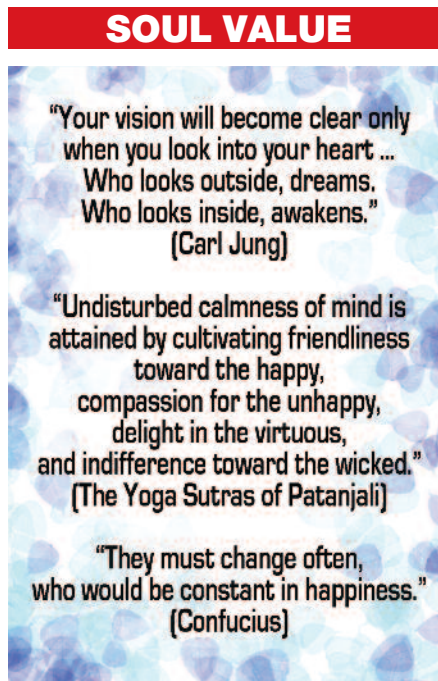
The Mandukya Upanishad defines the quality of positive thinking very simply: "We can choose what we want to hear, may what we choose be positive. We can see what we want to see, but may we see only what is propitious. May we praise and thank the positive and encouraging energies around us. May we enjoy the strong limbs and body given to us."

Our positive attitude is directly in proportion to the quality of spiritual growth we aspire to have at any given time. A spiritual person is in control of his emotions. A person in control of his emotions can only think positive.

Is it just our environment and the food we consume that can have negative effects on us? Experiencing emotions like jealousy, suppressed anger, frustration and arrogance can lead to secretion of dangerous internal toxins that can easily prove harmful to our physical/mental well being and quality of life, if not checked in time. A positive outlook has been proved scientifically also. If we want to progress in our lives on a physical, mental and spiritual level, altruism is the key.

The ability to be able to manage stressful conditions is essential. Those who have a negative attitude to life suffer from health problems too. We know there is a connection between the physical and mental, always. A detox of the emotional toxins may be worth a try.

An emotional detox can help us get rid of all those feelings that can easily poison our lives and take us away from the path of holistic well being. Researchers have proved that the activation of brain regions associated with negative emo-



tions appears to weaken not only our immune system, but all the other organs of the body. Negative emotions can cause damage at a cellular level too.

A few tips for positive thinking could refurbish your outlook on life. So increase your chances for a more constructive perspective with these guidelines:

- Become aware of negative thoughts as they take shape and uproot them before they become deep rooted.
- Address your problem and try and solve it. The mind is filled with emotions. Rule your mind; don't let your mind rule you.
- Seek the company of people who are positive thinkers.
- Positive and negative thinking are both contagious. All of us get influenced, in one way or another, by the people we meet. This happens instinctively and at a subconscious level, through thoughts and feelings transference and through body language. People sense our aura and are affected by our thoughts.
- Keep away from any negative energy or associations around you. Remember it is up to you to choose your environment and company.
- Though it may appear difficult, change is the only permanent thing. Be open to change.

- Do not hesitate to voice your feelings with yourself. It will make you aware of how you feel. And only if you are aware, can you solve the problem.
- Brooding does not help. Confront the situation that has upset you. Do not hold on. Let it out of your system.
- Use the past as a learning tool. Live in the present.
- Remember only you can make yourself feel inferior. So do not allow that. Be confident of yourself.
- If you are a spiritual person some methods of meditation can instantly help you empty your head and give you an instant emotional de-tox.
- Regular exercise, conscious breathing, healthy diet, adequate relaxation, meditation/contemplation counteract stress toxins.
- Be kind to your self. Only then can you be kind to others. Remember the law of cause and effect. What you give is what you get.

A positive attitude brings strength, energy and initiative. Positive and negative are directions. Which direction do you choose?

samitarathor@gmail.com

WHERE TO VOLUNTEER

CanSupport India

Kanak Durga Basti Vikas Kendra, Sector 12, R.K. Puram, Near DPS School, New Delhi-22
Tel: 26102851, 26102859, 26102869
E-mail: cansup_india@hotmail.com

Rahi

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

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

AID works for the environment, children, women's issues, education, and health. They also undertake fund raising.
Contact: Anuj Grover B-121, MIG Flats, Phase-IV, Ashok Vihar Delhi-110052 Phone: 9818248459
E-mail: anuj.grover@gmail.com

Youthreach

A volunteer team at Youthreach helps to match your skills and interests with the needs of their partner organisations. This exchange is monitored and facilitated from beginning to end by the volunteer team. The team also partners other non-profit

organisations that are working with children, women and the environment.
Contact: Preeti or Priyanjana at 11 Community Centre, Saket, New Delhi - 110 017
Phone/Fax: (011) 2653 3520/25/30
Email : yrd@youthreachindia.org

Deepalaya

They work with economically, socially deprived, physically and mentally challenged children. They believe in helping children become self reliant and lead a healthy life. Deepalaya works on education, health, skill training and income enhancement.
Contact: Deepalaya 46, Institutional Area, D Block Janakpuri, New Delhi - 110 058
Phone: 25548263, 25590347
Website: www.deepalaya.org

Mobile Crèches

Mobile Crèches pioneered intervention into the lives of migrant construction workers by introducing the mobile crèche where working parents can leave their children. They work in the following areas: health, education, community outreach, networking and advocacy, resource mobilisation and communication. You can volunteer by filling out a simple form online.
Contact: DIZ Area, Raja Bazaar, Sector IV New Delhi -110001
Phone: 91-11-23347635 / 23363271
Website: www.mobilecreches.org

The Arpana Trust

Arpana is a charitable, religious and spiritual organisation headquartered in Karnal, Haryana. They work with rural

communities in Himachal Pradesh and with slum dwellers in Delhi. Arpana is well known for its work on health. They have helped organise women into self-help groups. These SHGs make beautiful and intricate items which are marketed by Arpana.
For more details: Arpana Community Centre, NS-5, Munirka Marg Street F/9, Next to MTNL, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi-57.
Phone: (Office) 26151136 and (Res) 26154964

HelpAge India

HelpAge India needs volunteers from doctors to lay people in all our locations. Older people love to talk to younger people and need emotional support.

We require volunteers in Delhi and Chennai to survey older people staying alone in homes, who could use our Helpline for senior citizens. If you wish to volunteer please email Pawan Solanki, manager at pawan.s@helpageindia.org or write to Vikas, volunteer coordinator, HelpAge India.

Vidya

We work with the underprivileged sections of society primarily with children and women of urban slums. Our areas of focus are education, health awareness, micro enterprise, skill training, and youth management.
Contact : Mrs Mala Goyal
D- II 2442 Vasant Kunj
New Delhi - 110070
Phone Nos : 41740019, 46065056. , 98

WHERE TO DONATE

Indian Red Cross Society

The society provides relief, hospital services, maternity and child welfare, family welfare, nursing and community services.
Contact: Red Cross Bhavan, Golf Links, New Delhi-3 Phone: 24618915, 24617531

Child Relief and You (CRY)

CRY, a premier child rights organisation, believes that every child is entitled to survival, protection, development and participation. You can sponsor a child's education, healthcare, or a health worker and a teacher.
Website: www.cry.org

Vidya

We work with the underprivileged sections of society primarily with children and women of urban slums. Our areas of focus are education, health awareness, micro enterprise, skill training, and youth management.
You can give your valuable support by donating for a good cause through sponsorships or providing school building funds or supporting any specific programmes.
Contact : Mrs Asha Mirchandani
D- II 2442 Vasant Kunj, New Delhi - 110070
Phone Nos : 41740019, 46065606, 98 181 88449; website : www.vidya-india.org

HelpAge India

HelpAge India is involved in the care of the poor and disadvantaged elderly in 55 locations across the country. They organise primary health care at village and slum level through 53 mobile medical vans, care of the destitute elderly through Adopt a Gran programme with 222 voluntary agencies, Helplines and income generation for the elderly. Their recent programmes are in the tsunami affected regions and in Kashmir for the rehabilitation of the elderly affected by the earthquake disaster.

HelpAge serves more than a million elderly in India. If you wish to donate or adopt a granny, please donate online on our site www.helpageindia.org or send an email to helpage@nde.vsnl.net.in
Address: HelpAge India, C-14 Qutub Institutional Area, New Delhi- 110016
Chief Executive: Mathew Cherian - mathew.cherian@helpageindia.org

Bharatiya Academy

The Eco Development Foundation and the Soni Foundation Trust have set up the Bharatiya Academy which runs a school for underprivileged children and for children of defence employees serving on the border who are victims of violence and war. The school is located in Tashipur, Roorkee, Hardwar district and has 115 children on its rolls. The school requires money for buildings and sponsors for the children. Temporary buildings have been made by the Bengal Sappers regiment. Teachers are also required.
Contact: Soni Foundation Trust, F-2655 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana-122017
E-mail: kcjcodev@rediffmail.com
Phone: 0124-2360422

Smile Foundation

A national development agency with offices in New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore & Kolkata, is well known for its work with over one lakh children & youth through various projects with focus on Education, Health & Empowerment across 15 states of India. You can give your valuable support for our various programmes like - Twin e-Learning, Smile on Wheels, Individual Support Programme, Swabhimani, etc.
Visit us : www.smilefoundationindia.org
Contact : Smile Foundation, B-4/115, 1st Floor, Safderjung Enclave, New Delhi - 29
Phone: 41354565, 41354566
info@smilefoundationindia.org



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of values as enduring as the steel we make

26th August, 1907 was a momentous day in the history of our nation. It marked not just the formation of our company, The Tata Iron & Steel Company Limited, now Tata Steel, but the birth of the Indian Steel Industry. Since then, never losing sight of the values propounded by our Founder, Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, we continue to create wealth and well-being for the communities and the nations where we operate. Making business a tool to improve the quality of life, we follow the highest standard of corporate governance, delighting customers, reinforcing the trust all stakeholders repose on us, filling every member of the Tata Steel Family with pride.

On our hundredth year, we continue to enhance India's stature on the global stage and look forward to enriching more lives across more communities for another hundred years and more.

The first prospectus of the company



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