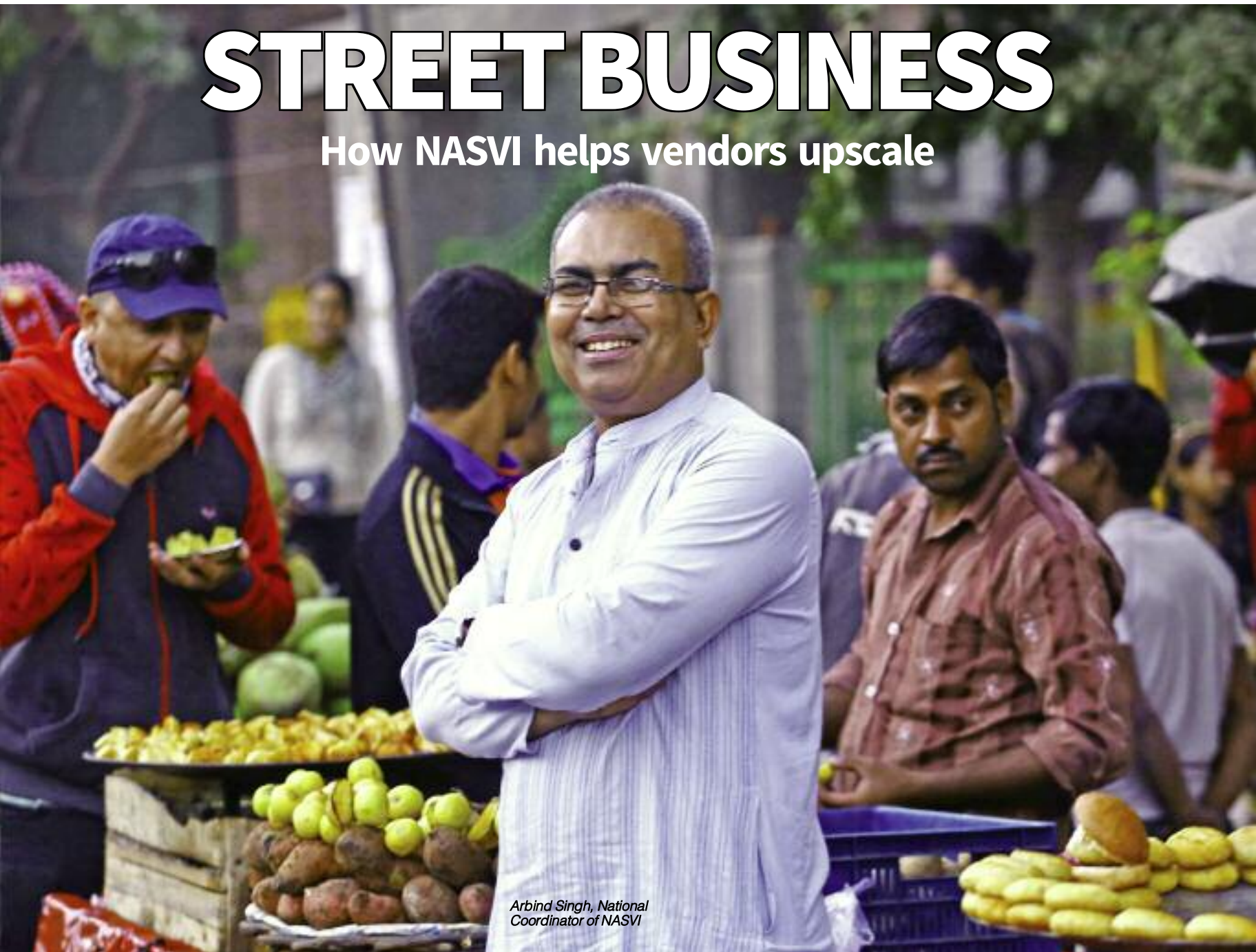


Civil Society

STREET BUSINESS

How NASVI helps vendors upscale



Arbind Singh, National Coordinator of NASVI

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COVER STORY

STREET BUSINESS

India has an estimated 10 million street vendors who earn a living selling wares and serving up meals. They are a uniquely plural and enterprising bunch. NASVI helps them upscale.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Give vendors their due

VENDORS work hard and brave many odds to earn a living. They deserve to be given their due as entrepreneurs. Small businesses like theirs are tough to run and have all the challenges of providing quality and value to customers. From their carts and stalls they derive incomes on which their families depend. It is estimated that there are 10 million vendors in the country. It would be impossible to replace so many livelihoods. Efforts to push them off the streets are misconceived and a violation of their rights. Vendors also add colour and diversity to our cities and towns with their range of wares and food items. They are essential to an urban mosaic.

It is fortunate that a central law passed in 2014 bestows recognition on vending. Credit for getting the law passed by Parliament must go to NASVI or the National Association of Street Vendors of India. NASVI showed extraordinary pragmatism in working with different political coalitions from 2008. Much, however, remains to be done to implement the law across cities. States were supposed to come up with policies and schemes, but only a few have done so. The vendors feel particularly disappointed with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which has done nothing for them after coming to power.

The way forward is to create zones and marketplaces where vendors can get infrastructure. This would free up pavements, protect livelihoods and keep alive the multiplicity that makes urban living interesting. It has been successfully done in Singapore and innumerable other world cities. Indian administrators should study these examples and speedily replicate them. Unfortunately, Indian cities suffer because of the elitist biases that define and govern them only for the rich when in reality they are home to the poor in millions.

Air pollution has been in the headlines for the same reasons that it was in the headlines 14 years ago when the Supreme Court ordered CNG for public transport in Delhi. Nothing seems to change. We have known all along that diesel emissions cause cancer, but the sale of diesel vehicles wasn't reined in. An odd-even number plates rule is being implemented for personal transport and sale of big diesel vehicles has been stopped. But are these the solutions? We should perhaps now seriously ask ourselves whether governance should be through knee jerk decisions. Are the courts, public-spirited and well-meaning as they undoubtedly are, the right places to thrash out such issues? Are judges equipped to take calls on complex choices involving technology, science, design, urban management and so on? Or should there be deeper studies and wider consultation with experts who have the knowledge to help define workable and sustainable strategies?

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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



We can create a network of such wonderful, responsible and highly skilled personalities from such schools. Let me know how I can help,
Sundara Rajan

Activist martyr

It is a measure of the growing insensitivity of the authorities that serious efforts were not made in time to save the life of leading social activist and former MLA Gurusharan Chabra. This social activist died after a 32-day protest fast to demand prohibition and a strong Lokayukta in Rajasthan.

Although he was elected an MLA from Suratgarh several years ago, Chabra was known more as a Gandhian social activist than a political leader. He was deeply troubled by the social disruption caused by the increasing sale and consumption of liquor even in remote villages. Earlier, he had gone on fast on this issue. The state government had assured him it would take strong anti-liquor steps. His colleagues say his latest fast was only for the implementation of promises that had been made by the previous UPA government.

In our democracy there is a well-established tradition that the government acts in time to save the lives of social activists and leaders who take up issues of public interest. It is a reflection of the state government's insensitivity that such efforts were not made in time. By the time some arrangements were made, it was too late. This happened despite the scene of the fast being Jaipur, the state capital.

Bharat Dogra

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LETTERS



ship. But I wonder why it was christened *Angry Indian Goddesses*. It is as if women can either be sluts or goddesses, not simply women.

Suresh Thapaliyal

diverse. Policies for agriculture by the Centre will have to be very broad-based so that each village can adjust it to suit their farmers.

Shilpa Sen

Odisha suicides

Biswajit Padhi's story on farmer suicides in Odisha was well-researched. It encapsulates all the issues that bedevil the agricultural sector. Agriculture does need radical change. But fixing it is complicated because farming relies on so many factors, from the weather and irrigation to markets and infrastructure.

Bipin Mahapatra

One teacher

I completely agree with Dileep Ranjekar's opinion expressed in his article, 'The single-teacher school.' I also sympathise with teachers. The system does not provide them enough resources and there are bureaucratic blocks. But I also see the brighter side. If a school with children in Classes 6, 7 and 8 functions with one teacher and if that teacher is so committed, then it speaks highly of the teacher.

The ecology of India is extremely

Women & cinema

Your cover story, 'The New Woman in Indian Cinema,' gave us a new perspective. In the past we did see serious films in which women weren't portrayed flippantly. Shyam Benegal's films, for instance, all had strong female characters. I think the new bunch of film makers, as you point out, are different. For one, many are women and, second, their themes bridge the rural-urban divide. That, to my mind, is an interesting trend.

Geetanjali Shah

It was great to read about how Bollywood, notorious for its anti-gender bias, is of late trying to balance its act. It is a case of too little, too late, I think.

Nevertheless, I really enjoyed *Angry Indian Goddesses*, the first Bollywood film that is devoid of male characters and focuses only on female comrades-

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DELHI COMES FULL CIRCLE

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FOURTEEN years after the Supreme Court intervened and succeeded in somewhat cleaning up New Delhi's air by ordering public transport to run on compressed natural gas (CNG), the Indian capital is being shunned as the most polluted city in the world.

How did this decline happen? How did Delhi's air go from being very bad to okay to very bad again? Cities that improve aren't known to slide back so easily, especially when it comes to something as basic as the air people breathe. In Delhi's case how were gas chamber conditions allowed to return?

The Supreme Court's orders 14 years ago were the result of protracted public interest litigation on fuel quality and emission standards. The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) and its iconic founder, Anil Agarwal, took on automobile manufacturers and refineries. CSE campaigned convincingly and air quality's impact on public health was front-page news for months together.

Pushed by the court, Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit's government hesitantly implemented the use of CNG instead of low-grade diesel for public transport. The result was that air quality improved and Delhi breathed a little easier. The once reluctant Chief Minister went on to receive green awards. After that, in the absence of a vision for a sustainable city and lack of technical expertise, almost nothing was done to consolidate the gains.

In recent months, the old debates have come back. The Supreme Court is once again holding hearings on how to clean up. Tests have shown that air quality is so poor and toxic that a whole generation of children in Delhi could be scarred for life. And it is not just at street level — in fact, no one is safe, not even the judges in their courtrooms where tests showed air quality is far beyond the safe limit!

Delhi's return to its gas chamber status, has been the result of little awakening in government and society. The number of personal cars, a growing number among them run on diesel, kept going up. With the exception of the Metro railway, nothing significant has been done about public transport. An attempt to have a bus rapid transit (BRT) system was left to founder in its implementation.

Heavily polluting trucks were allowed to run through the city till the National Green Tribunal (NGT) recently stepped in. Cars and two-wheelers continued to emit visible pollution but weren't penalised. Pollution Under Control certificates (PUCs) were reduced to a farce because vehicles far outnumbered testing booths — and even when tests are conducted there was little certainty about the results.

No political party has treated air pollution as a priority though it has a direct impact on public health. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) proved to be no better than the Congress and the BJP didn't seem to care at all. Despite its stated concern for the common man, AAP only took up air pollution when the courts have compelled it to act.

In a huge rush to appear on top of the problem,



Masks are becoming ubiquitous but are they enough to protect children

the AAP government, with little preparation, pushed through a plan for curbing the use of cars from 1 January by allowing those with odd and even numbers to ply on alternative days. It has also been decided to put 6,000 additional buses on the road.

As we go to press, not much is public about the scheme. Residents of the National Capital Region (NCR) brace themselves for the odd-even rule because they don't know what they will do in the absence of integrated public transport. In the past year, the AAP government, like the Congress one which preceded it, has shown no vision for public transportation. Instead, to please car owners, it dismantled the only BRT that existed, saying it was a failure.

CNG AS A SILVER BULLET

"CNG was treated as a silver bullet by the Sheila Dikshit government," says a senior officer who served in the transport department in those days. "Once CNG was brought in for public transport on the court's orders, the feeling was that nothing more needed to be done."

"No effort was made to bring in experts, design roads better, create spaces for non-motorised transport. There was no understanding of the requirements of public transport like an efficient bus service with last-mile connections," recalls the officer.

The result was that as Delhi and the NCR grew, steps weren't taken to balance the increase in private



Anand Vihar at 10:30 am:



transport with public transport. Nor were there disincentives for owning cars and SUVs, particularly diesel ones.

Says the officer: "There was no collection of data on the kind of trips being made in the city so as to put public infrastructure and services in place and have disincentives for the use of private vehicles. No

ON AIR POLLUTION

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA



The most polluted spot in Delhi — the most polluted city in the world



effort was made to understand the demand for parking. So, today when we go in for an odd-even rule for cars, we don't really know where to put buses to meet the needs of car owners."

AAP put the promotion of public transport in its manifesto. It also mentioned air pollution. But it did no more than that though pollution and transporta-

tion were so obviously problems it needed to spend time on. The AAP government hasn't done its homework and it doesn't have a long-term strategy for cutting down use of cars. Instead it is merely responding to the rap it is getting from the courts.

Anumita Roychowdhury, additional director at CSE, welcomes the odd-even initiative by the AAP government, saying an emergency requires drastic measures. "Owners of cars and SUVs have to understand that they cannot keep monopolising road space and causing pollution at the cost of public health," she says.

"If the burning of agricultural waste in the northern states can be made a punishable offence, I don't understand why someone driving a diesel SUV should be spared," says Roychowdhury.

Asked if she felt that a good measure like the odd-even rule might end up getting a bad name because of poor implementation, Roychowdhury said it was possible, but she would much rather give it a try than wait.

Roychowdhury doesn't know if the AAP government is into deeper consultations with experts and has the benefit of technical advice for the decisions it needs to take.

She feels momentum was lost after CNG was introduced years ago. The Sheila Dikshit government needed to have created disincentives for the use private transport by making it more expensive. Better social marketing was needed to promote

cycling, walking and the use of buses.

As a campaigner for public transport for many years, Roychowdhury believes that if people are pushed, they will make hard choices and find solutions.

"In Gurgaon there are large companies encouraging their employees to set up car pools and in the process reducing the number of vehicles coming to their offices. These are the ways forward. Car users in Delhi have to be made to realise that they must get into public transport and demand it from the government instead of sticking to their cars," says Roychowdhury.

KOLKATA STILL CHOKES

In the early 1980s, Dr Dipanker Chakraborti, a Reader in chemistry at that time and later head of the School of Environmental Sciences at Jadavpur University, began collecting air samples at busy intersections in Kolkata (then Calcutta). He would take the samples with him to Europe, when travelling on teaching assignments, and analyse them there. It wasn't possible to test the samples in sufficient detail in Kolkata in those days.

The results Dr Chakraborti got were very worrisome. He reported high levels of benzopyrene and heavy metals in Kolkata's air. The pollution was directly linked to automobile and generator emissions. The pollutants were similar to those being recorded now in Delhi.

Dr Chakraborti's findings were reported in *The Telegraph*, in those days a fledgling newspaper in Kolkata, and carried prominently on its front page. Dr Chakraborti warned that high levels of pollution would result in an increase in cancer cases. The stories written then were no different to the ones you read in Delhi newspapers now all of 30 years later.

Dr Chakraborti warned of the harm being done to public health. But the Left Front led by the CPI(M), then in power in West Bengal, paid little heed to either Dr Chakraborti's findings or the stories based on interviews with him. It showed no concern on pollution though it was clearly impacting public health and particularly reducing the quality of life of the poor.

Dr Chakraborti proved to be right. He gave up issuing warnings, but Kolkata has over the years witnessed a growing number of cancer cases, which can be directly linked to air pollution. Many pharmacies in the city have set up counters dedicated to dispensing cancer drugs — such is the demand.

Kolkata has learnt no lessons from this experience. It remains a hugely polluted city with severely congested roads and slow-moving traffic. It has many buses, but it doesn't need an environmental scientist to tell you how harmful the fumes from them are.

"No one listened to me," says Dr Chakraborti with a laugh. "It is because we ignore the basics. Remember, a human being needs two litres of water, one kg of food, but 22 kg of air daily!"

"The problem with air pollution is that it is slow poisoning. People think that nothing is happening to them but the reality is that their lives are being cut short," Dr Chakraborti explains. "A fruit seller on a pavement has a high probability of getting cancer in 15 or 16 years. People often tell me their children don't keep well and they don't understand why. Look at the air they breathe is what I tell them."

AWARENESS, GOVERNANCE

Delhi's problem, like Kolkata's, has been lack of awareness and governance. Incredibly, people tend to think they can get by without clean air to breathe. Governments have a responsibility to promote standards, make urban spaces inclusive and nurture sustainable living.

Most governments in India are sadly lacking in scientific and technical expertise. They end up responding to crises (like the one in Delhi) with kneejerk



A motocyclist pollutes blatantly



A traffic jam in south Delhi

measures that often lead nowhere.

A growing trend has been to expect citizens to find solutions. Unfortunately, voluntary efforts aren't a substitute for administrative measures.

Car-free days in Gurgaon, for instance, have received much attention. But barely half a kilometre from car-free zones, unregulated auto-rickshaws ply freely belching smoke. So do buses of the Haryana government. Neither the police nor the deputy commissioner has acted against them though the pollution is visible. Gurgaon's air pollution levels are now not much different from Delhi's.

Says Dr Dinesh Mohan formerly of IIT Delhi and involved in the design of Delhi's failed BRT, "The time has come for us as a society to think of improving our governance systems to include institutional mechanisms that make it possible for decisions to be based on well-considered evidence of facts that are arrived at in a more democratic manner."

"To solve the problems of pollution in Indian cities, we have to think of short-term and long-term solutions. For short-term ones, we can set up a technical task force comprising the best minds from here and abroad. They should examine evidence available from all Indian cities and international best practices and suggest doable action strategies within six months," says Dr Mohan.

"For long-term action we have no choice but to fund 10 or more research centres which work on these issues around the country for years. We need some dedicated researchers and thinkers to compete to provide us the most workable solutions. If we don't do this we'll keep discussing our problems on Twitter for years without any clean air."

Dr Mohan points out that the odd-even policy could end up reducing emissions in Delhi by as little as five per cent. "As of today, there are only two reliable scientific studies that inform us about the sources of particulate pollution (PM2.5) in Delhi. There are none for the less important cities around the country. Both estimate the contribution of vehicular emissions to be less than 20 per cent in Delhi. Other major contributors are power stations, brick kilns, construction, stationary generators and road dust. If these estimates are reasonable then the odd-even policy for private vehicles will reduce particulate emissions by less than 5 per cent. This is because freight and delivery vehicles contribute more than half the emissions, and the use of taxis, buses and autos will increase." ■

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



‘People don’t ask questions when you are transparent’

How the coal ministry was turned around in a year

AJIT KRISHNA



Anil Swarup: ‘We learnt as we went along’

Civil Society News
New Delhi

NOT many would have congratulated Anil Swarup when he took over as Secretary in the Ministry of Coal in October last year. Thanks to the famous coal block scam, the ministry’s reputation was as black as its coal. It was seen as a bottomless shaft of corruption and inefficiency and the only stories it seemed to yield were scandals.

But in the short time that Swarup has been in the job a whole lot has been changing. Bidding for mines has taken place online. Coal production has gone up. Power plants are getting supplies. Coal India has been acquiring new mines. Environmental issues are being addressed.

Swarup arrived in the coal ministry with a reputation for efficiency and transparency. An IAS officer of the UP cadre, he succeeded in implementing the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), a cashless and smartcard-based health insurance scheme that has benefitted 90 million of the very poor.

Swarup was subsequently inducted into the Cabinet Secretariat as an Additional Secretary to speed up stalled projects. With a Project Monitoring Group, Swarup got 215 projects rolling. Problems were discussed and decisions taken in real time on a portal. If a company had a problem or a ministry an opinion, it would be out in the open. He also reached out to decision makers at all levels in the states.

Civil Society spoke to Swarup about the upswing in the coal ministry and how it can serve as a model for better governance.

It seems the ministry has achieved a turnaround. How did this happen?

Actually around this time last year the ministry was going through a bit of a crisis. The Supreme Court had cancelled the allocation of 204 coal blocks. Anything and everything was being questioned. So that was the environment in those days.

Our immediate task was to see if those coal blocks could be auctioned in a transparent manner

and thereby obviate any questions that would arise. You have to be so brutally transparent that people find it futile to ask questions.

I had some experience of using IT for designing transparent processes both in the RSBY and the Project Monitoring Group (PMG) where we managed to create a file-less office.

What really helped was that we associated ourselves with some of the finest people in the country, in the bureaucracy, in agencies like SBICAP or in MSTC — a government corporation under the Ministry of Steel that uses IT applications for auctioning products. They were playing a small role but after interacting with them, we engaged them. These are the two agencies that determined the course of the auctions.

SBICAP worked on all the documentation and advised us how to go about it. The technology part was provided by MSTC. We got down to business. It was tough to begin with because everyone was looking at us.

How were the coal block auctions done?

It was very interesting. Initially, we looked up the telecom model because they had done an auction. Then we looked at other models. Ultimately what we evolved was a totally different model not prevalent anywhere in the world.

We went in for the forward option for the non-regulated sector, which is the non-power sector, and we went in for the reverse option for the power sector to ensure tariffs would not go up as a consequence of the auction.

The bidding on the reverse option was that whoever gave the lesser tariff would get the block. So the whole idea was to come up with a process that could stand the test of time, provide the best value and be transparent so that anyone could see what was going on.

In fact, it was a live auction. You could go to the portal and see the auction bids while it was actually happening in real time.

What was the learning from this? There must have been shortcomings too.

We learnt as we went along. We did commit mis-

Continued on page 10

‘What really helped was that we associated ourselves with some of the finest people in the country, in the bureaucracy, in agencies like SBICAP or in MSTC. These are the two agencies that determined the course of the auctions.’

Continued from page 9

takes. But we admitted those mistakes even before they were found out. For instance, we were looking at enabling people to make multiple bids for their different units. If there wasn't enough competition such a decision could have impacted the bidding process.

But we corrected it in time. Everything was transparently put on the portal before a decision was taken. So a lot of opinions, views and suggestions came in as we sat down to finalise various propositions. In that way we benefitted by interacting with several stakeholders. They gave us a lot of inputs so we could examine and modify what we were doing.

Is this a process you would recommend across departments?

It's already happening. The Ministry of Mines is replicating the kind of auctions we did with the

got 40 environmental clearances. Today the freight movement of coal is unprecedented. Last year, on average, there were 182 rakes for the evacuation of coal. In October we increased this number to 204 and now 225 to 230 rakes are available.

How come land acquisition for coal has been so uncontroversial?

Because the approach adopted is very different. A lot of negotiation happens on the spot. The acquisition of land by Coal India happens under the Coal Bearing Act. There is already provision for providing employment to a displaced person. For every two hectares, you provide employment to the owner of the land. So that is a huge incentive.

It isn't simple. There have been problems. But I have come across instances of people asking when their land will be acquired because the owner gets employed in Coal India.

'Last year, at this time, most power plants had an inventory reserve of just three to five days. Today, they have a reserve of 19 to 21 days. Imports have started coming down for four successive months resulting in a saving of more than ₹8,000 crore already.'

same agencies. We have set certain benchmarks and created certain protocols.

But you know, the real action has been in the production of coal. The problem in India was the shortage of coal. We are sitting on a reserve of three billion tonnes. Yet, ironically, we imported 200 million tonnes of coal last year. This is very unusual.

We thought, how can we ramp up coal production? Coal India was growing at the rate of between one and three per cent in the past five or six years on an average. Last year, there was a phenomenal jump. Coal production increased by 32 million tonnes over the previous year (2013-14).

This was more than the cumulative increase of coal production in the previous four years, which was 31 million tonnes. This year, we are growing at a record rate of nine per cent.

Last year, at this time, most power plants had an inventory reserve of just three to five days. Today, they have a reserve of 19 to 21 days. Imports have started coming down for four successive months, resulting in a saving of more than ₹8,000 crore already.

So increased coal production has impacted supply, saved foreign exchange and generated revenue for the states.

How did this happen?

According to our understanding, there were three major factors inhibiting coal production. One was land acquisition because you have to acquire land to expand an existing mine or set up a new one. Second, you have to get the environment and forest clearances. Third, you have to be able to evacuate the coal.

On all three fronts there was massive improvement. For example, while everyone was talking about the Land Acquisition Bill in Parliament, Coal India coolly acquired 2,500 hectares last year. They

We adopted a totally different approach to resolve issues. Here my experience as head of the PMG came handy.

We recognised that most of the problems exist in the states. So, instead of calling senior officers of the states to Delhi, we travelled to meet them. We discussed all issues threadbare. We conveyed to them the value that would accrue to the states if they helped us acquire land and excavate coal. They get a lot of royalty. Coal-rich states like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha are not well-off states and do need the revenue.

It is not as if everything has been hunky-dory. We have faced huge problems. But, compared to the past, we did manage to move things.

We came to an understanding with Coal India that we would manage their environmental clearances with the state and central ministries. You concentrate on increasing production, we told them.

Many officials and workers in Coal India do want to increase production and productivity. They felt frustrated because land was not becoming available, environmental clearances were delayed and there weren't enough rakes to transport coal. Once the external environment changed, they got the confidence to increase production.

In terms of land acquisition, what were the mechanisms used?

The state acquired the land. Coal India plays an active role in public hearings for land acquisition. When money has to be provided and employment, they do it quickly, without delay. There are disputes. But the point is to resolve those issues with an open mind.

Were the disputes over valuation of land?

No, the disputes were over providing employment. There were disputes by other stakeholders about the

quality and quantity of coal.

What were the valuations of land? How is land acquisition approached?

There is an officer and a mechanism that is laid down. Once the officer concludes this is the value of the land, we don't question it. We pay. As far as Coal India is concerned, money is not an issue. It has a huge multiplier effect if you keep mining.

What is the valuation being given?

As of now, it is four times the value of the land as determined by the authority. Employment is given to one person for every two hectares. Coal India is opening one new mine every month. Last year, we produced 494 million tonnes. We are now looking at producing one billion tonnes.

How were environmental clearances expedited?

We set up a coal-monitoring portal on the same lines as the PMG portal. I meet them once a month on a fixed day and time and we look at all the issues. We don't bypass any process. We simply expedite it. You can see everything on the portal.

Questions have been raised about the quality of coal. How are you handling this?

We are very focused on the quality of coal. I must confess our initial focus was on quantity, since we were woefully short. But now we have taken a slew of measures.

From 1 January 2016, all coal will be crushed before being transported. This will prevent stones from getting in. We will also have, from January, a separate mechanism for determining the quality of coal. Central government agencies will accredit private sector agencies to take samples and ascertain the quality of coal and on that basis pricing will be decided.

The third decision we have taken, and it has been pending for many years, is to set up washeries for coal. This has environmental impact and quality impact. By 1 October 2017 we will ensure every ounce of coal above G 10 grade will be washed and dispatched. We should be able to set up systems, infrastructure and logistics to ensure this happens.

What has changed in the actual functioning of the ministry?

I think officers in the ministry are now much more confident about doing what they want to do. They were initially a bit diffident because the environment within the ministry wasn't conducive to officers doing their best. It was very vitiated. We rebuilt their confidence through interactive sessions. We conveyed to them that there is protection if you do the right thing.

Your friends would not have liked to see you being transferred to the Ministry of Coal. What has the experience been like?

The experience has been extremely difficult and extremely enjoyable. The first five months were very tough but that was the beauty of it. We had to fight the demons of the past, the reputation this ministry had.

Was there political interference?

I was arguably sitting in the hottest seat in the country. I didn't get a single call to favour anybody. And that is saying a lot because anybody who is somebody has a stake in coal. ■

Srinagar angry over flood relief

BILAL BAHADUR



Residents have not been able to rebuild their homes damaged by the floods

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

The Kashmir Valley witnessed devastating floods in September 2014 but 15 months down the line, those affected are yet to come to terms with their losses. And the authorities have not helped them either. Anger is simmering among the people.

Hilal Ahmad, in his mid-forties, is living in his uncle's house as the floods devastated his house in Bonpora locality of Batmaloo area. His house was situated a kilometre from Lal Chowk, the most important commercial centre of the Valley.

"Our house was washed away. Since then we are in a state of shock. The state and central governments have virtually deceived us. We feel stranded between the devil and the deep sea," says Ahmed.

He describes how the family had to pool all resources to start re-construction of the house. The relief paid by the government so far has been meagre. He says this is the case with a majority of flood-hit people trying to reconstruct their homes.

"In the first few months we could not do anything and, as winter was approaching, we decided to wait to rebuild the damaged house. The construction got underway in April this year. Due to lack of finances we were forced to undertake it in phases. It may take a few more months for us to shift into it," says Ahmed.

Mohammad Aslam, a resident of Balgarden-Karan Nagar, says he had to pay a lakh of rupees for clearance of the rubble of his damaged house. He says he has received a paltry sum as relief from the state government so far.

"During the past 15 months I received ₹1,75,000 as compensation for my flood-damaged house. This is meagre, given the magnitude of the floods. We are not asking the government to compensate us fully,

but at least it can give us a reasonable amount," says Aslam.

It is unclear how much compensation will be paid. Even the officials of the revenue department do not know.

During his visit to Kashmir on 7 November, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced a development package of ₹80,000 crore for the state, with ₹2,000 crore earmarked for rehabilitation of flood-hit people and traders.

Around ₹1,200 crore has been kept for rehabilitation of people whose houses were damaged, while ₹800 crore has been earmarked for restoring the livelihoods of shopkeepers and traders.

According to the details of the relief package made available by the state government, ₹3 lakh will be given for fully damaged pucca houses, ₹1.50 lakh for fully damaged *kucha* houses, ₹1 lakh for severely damaged pucca houses, and ₹50,000 for severely

damaged *kucha* houses.

"For a fully damaged house, it is ₹3 lakh. Nobody has made it clear whether this ₹3 lakh is in addition to the amount already received or ₹3 lakh is the total amount that will be received," points out Imtiyaz Ahmad, a resident of Gaw Kadal.

Much to the disappointment of people whose houses suffered partial damage, the state government has omitted this category of flood-affected people.

Uninsured traders and petty shopkeepers have also raised a banner of revolt against the state government over its lackadaisical attitude in compensating their losses. Most of them have not received a penny from the government.

"The insured traders managed to compensate their losses from the insurance companies. We have been left high and dry. Despite completing all the formalities and securing clearances by the respective market committees, most of the uninsured traders are yet to receive government compensation," said Ansar Ali, an uninsured trader.

The Kashmir Economic Alliance (KEA), an amalgam of various trade-related bodies of Kashmir, has demanded that the Centre redesign the package. Otherwise, traders as well as other people, will be forced to protest on the streets. The Alliance is contemplating writing to the central government.

"The government seems intent on keeping the Kashmiri people suppressed in the post-floods scenario. For rehabilitation of traders ₹800 crore has been earmarked. The truth is that the floods destroyed Kashmir's economy to the tune of ₹1,00,000 crore. More than 50,000 shops were damaged. Yet nobody has come to the rescue of these people," said Mohammad Yaseen Khan, Chairman, KEA.

The Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCC&I) has expressed dismay that relief for the flood-affected has been clubbed with the government's flood management programme. Its president, Mushtaq Ahmad Wani, said the package has failed to consider the misery of people whose businesses were destroyed.

"With the other stakeholders, we will explore different options for seeking compensation. We will not rest until decent compensation is paid," said Wani.

The KCC&I Secretary General, Faiz Bakshi, pointed out that dredging is yet to be taken up by the government. This has led to apprehension among people as to what would happen to them if such a calamity strikes again.

"Much time has passed since the floods, but no dredging has taken place. And no action has been taken against the officials who acted irresponsibly, thus leading to the floods," said Bakshi.

The coalition government of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the state, headed by Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, has also drastically cut the official number of houses that suffered damage. It has said that around 70,000 structures suffered damage. The previous government had put the figure at around 300,000. ■

'During the past 15 months I received ₹1,75,000 as compensation for my flood-damaged house. This is meagre, given the magnitude of the floods. We are not asking the government to compensate us fully, but at least it can give a reasonable amount.'



Farmers need work but there is no sign of MGNREGA

Bundelkhand is demanding jobs

Bharat Dogra
Bundelkhand

IN recent years, efforts have been on to make the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh the pulses bowl of India. It was considered the ideal spot. But nature deemed otherwise. Inclement weather destroyed Bundelkhand's crop of pulses, paddy and millets this year. Both the *rabi* and *kharif* seasons were a disaster. Villagers, facing hunger and joblessness, are fleeing to towns and cities in search of work.

Kamlesh, a resident of Gudakalha village, was so desperate to leave that he got on to a bus with his family, ignoring his two-year-old child's illness. On the way, the child's health deteriorated and he died. The couple had to return to their village to perform the last rites.

Elderly parents are being left behind with no support. In Kathalpurva village, Tulsidas, an elderly man, was left alone with his wife when their children migrated to Punjab in search of work. When Tulsidas fell ill, his wife went to her parents' home to get money for his treatment. With no one to tend to him, the old man died. It took some time for the other villagers to realise he had died. They sent desperate messages to his son and finally collected donations to perform the last rites.

These two villages are in Naraini block but the story repeats itself in most of Bundelkhand.

Heavy and untimely rain along with hailstorms destroyed 80 per cent of the *rabi* crop just as it was ripening. Then, from May to November, drought conditions set in. Generally, it rains here for 50-60 days. But it rained for only 10-15 days. The water

table has dipped. The canals are virtually dry. Land near rivers and rivulets has low moisture retention due to indiscriminate sand mining.

The *kharif* crop is sown in July and harvested in October and November. Paddy is grown on 50 per cent of the land and the rest is devoted to *moong*, *urad*, *arhar*, *jowar* and *bajra*. Around 90 per cent of pulses and other crops were destroyed. The yield of paddy declined by two-thirds.

Conditions are so dry that farmers are not even attempting to sow for the next season. The time to sow for *rabi* is over.

Bundelkhand is mostly populated by small farmers, sharecroppers and landless agricultural workers. Their ability to stock foodgrain is very limited because they don't produce much. So they have to buy food at market rates. Villagers are queuing up outside banks for loans or approaching moneylenders. Impoverished families, who can't get money from either source, are selling their small plots. A large number of the landless is going to work in the abysmal conditions of brick kilns or as construction labour.

Since the food security law is yet to be implemented here, wheat and rice at the special rate of ₹1 and 2 per kg respectively is not available. About 20 per cent of families have BPL cards. They are able to buy 35 kg of foodgrain (15 kg wheat and 20 kg rice) from ration shops for a lump sum payment of ₹220.

But a typical six-member rural family needs about 150 kg of foodgrain a month for a wholly cereal-based diet. They would still need to buy 115 kg of foodgrain from the market at around ₹22 per kg. So the family needs ₹2,800 per month to buy just basic cereals.

If we add vegetables, oil and spices to the family's rice and wheat diet, the cost of food would rise to ₹4,500 per month. Totally, the average rural family of six requires ₹7,300 for a very basic diet that does not include milk, pulses and tea.

Around 90 per cent of rural households in Bundelkhand cannot afford to spend this kind of money just buying basic food.

A survey in Nibhi village revealed that almost all the children suffer from malnutrition. Anganwadis are not functioning well. For some months, the *panjiri* meant for adolescent girls has stopped. There is corruption among officials at higher levels and lower levels, say villagers, in providing provisions to anganwadis or for the midday meal in schools.

Animals, too, are facing starvation. There is an acute shortage of fodder. Dry fodder (*bhusa*) is selling at ₹700 per quintal. Unable to feed cattle, farmers are leaving them to roam around and fend for themselves.

There is no sign of any drought relief work. The rural employment guarantee scheme is yet to start. Villagers say they have applied for it, but there has been no response from the administration. Even wages for work they had done earlier for the job guarantee scheme have not been paid.

A few voluntary organisations have stepped in to provide relief. The Vidyadham Samiti, a grassroots voluntary group, has started 30 grain banks and 21 fodder banks.

They have also formed 21 Apada Prabandhak Samitis (APS) in 21 villages. These Samitis comprise six members, three women and three men who are selected by the village community. They draw up a disaster management plan and take up relief work. They look after the grain banks and fodder banks.

The grain banks were started with two quintals of grain but are now likely to have five quintals or so. The APS identifies the most needy and ensures they get grain first.

Those who obtain grain are expected to return it once they get a good harvest. But there is no pressure put on them. Wheat prices here have gone up to between ₹1,600 to ₹1,800 per quintal. It is of poor quality and not readily available.

The fodder bank has about 10 to 20 quintals of fodder. It is distributed more quickly. Fodder banks can help to save many animals.

However, what is most essential is that the government should begin the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme as quickly as possible.

The grim situation in Bundelkhand corroborates Yogendra Yadav's Swaraj Abhiyan which carried out a rapid survey of 1,206 households in 108 villages in Bundelkhand's seven districts. The findings, released in November, revealed that 92 per cent of households reported complete loss of their *moong dal* crop and 84 per cent households said they had lost their entire *arhar dal* crop.

The nutritional levels of families were found to be alarming. Around 86 per cent of households said they had cut down *dal* intake, 79 per cent said they ate *roti*/rice with salt or chutney, and 84 per cent said they had cut down on milk for their children. According to the survey, 38 per cent of villages had reported at least one death due to hunger or malnutrition. A famine-like situation prevails in Bundelkhand. ■

This report has been written under the Inclusive Media-UNDP Fellowship.

Unpaid tea workers languish

Tanushree Gangopadhyay
Darjeeling

HERE is disquiet brewing in the Dooars and Terai plains of Darjeeling district with tea estates in the throes of a crisis. Workers are dying of hunger and malnutrition since their wages have not been paid. The owners of these tea estates seem to have gone into hiding.

In early November Majnu Khalku, 65, a veteran tribal tea estate plucker, died at the closed Panighata tea estate. "We could not afford her medical treatment. Neither did we have enough food to feed her," lamented her daughter, Lalita Tirkhi.

She, along with five other tribal women workers, was on a relay hunger strike, demanding minimum wages, implementation of labour rights and reopening of the estate. "We have been denied wages. There are no health services. Neither do we get the rations we are entitled to," said Tirkhi.

Arun Khetri, 38, another permanent worker of Panighata, died at his home near Naxalbari in Siliguri district. His family did not have enough money to feed him adequately or to access medical services.

Dr Abhijit Mazumdar, president of the AICCTU-affiliated Terai Sangrami Cha Sramik Union, who visited his home with other union members, said that three workers of Panighata aged between 26 and 38, died of malnutrition in November.

Between 2000 and 2015, 1,400 tea estate workers have died on 17 tea estates, a majority of them in the Dooars. Low wages — just ₹90 per day — lack of clean drinking water, rations and sanitation facilities were listed as the causes.

"Most of them were skilled tea workers, descendants of migrant tribal indentured labour. They are either starving or suffering from malnutrition since they are denied their daily minimum wage of ₹120. Neither the management nor the government agrees that their deaths are due to starvation. Several tea estate owners have actually plundered the tea gardens with oppressive wage structures while others have fled," said Mazumdar.

Shankar Saraf, owner of Panighata, fled 50 days ago, alleged Pradip Pradhan, executive member of the Darjeeling Terai Dooars Plantation Labour Union. Saraf did not pay wages to the workers, says Pradhan. The estate has been closed for 11 years.

The well-known tea company, Duncans, owned by GP Goenka, is in charge of 16 estates. "Goenka too has fled," alleged Mazumdar. "He defaulted on paying provident fund, gratuity and other worker dues to around 30,000 permanent workers. He has siphoned funds to industries in other states."

"Neither the government nor the owners declare a lockout. At least that would enable us to take action," he added.

Workers are on relay hunger strike, demanding wages, arrears and 20 per cent bonus. Mazumdar says they have not been getting their monthly ration of 16 kg rice and wheat per family for nine months.

Tshering Dahal, Chief Coordinator of the Gurkha Jan Mukti Morcha, scoffs at the pathetic wages of ₹120 per worker. The prescribed minimum wage for

skilled work is ₹400, she points out. "Slavery prevails in the tea estates," she says. Dahal wants to take over the lease of the tea estate from Saraf and let workers run it.

"The owner did not pay us the Puja bonus," said Sheila Toppo, a tea worker. "Had he just paid us

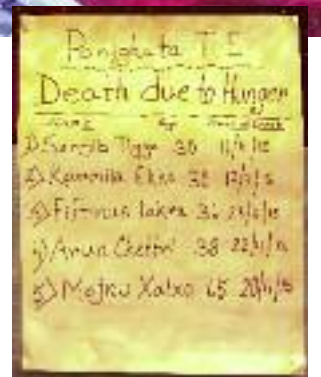
tonnes of tea were produced. This figure rose to 1.89 tonnes in 2014.

The auction price of a kg of CTC tea was ₹113 in 2010 and ₹139 in 2014. These estates cater to 80 per cent of the market. The Makaibari Tea Estate's premium tea sold at \$8,000 a kg recently at an auction.



Tea workers on hunger strike and, right, a list of those who died in November

Most tea workers had a Body Mass Index (BMI) below 18.5, some even below 14. According to World Health Organisation standards, a BMI of 18.5 would place workers in the category of 'famine-affected'.



₹3,000 like last year, we could have managed."

A health survey carried out by Dr Binayak Sen, pediatrician and vice-president of the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL), found that most tea workers had a Body Mass Index (BMI) below 18.5, some even below 14. According to World Health Organisation standards, a BMI of 18.5 would place workers in the category of 'famine-affected'.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) served a *suo motu* notice to the West Bengal government when media reports of the deaths of 1,000 workers due to malnutrition in three tea estates of the Dooars in Jalpaiguri district caught its attention.

The Tea Plantation Act, 1951, has specific provisions for tea workers which include minimum wages, housing, subsidised rations, fuel, and health and education facilities.

Mazumdar is categorical that the tea industry is making profits. He said that in 2010, 1.44 lakh

In Siliguri, officials are well aware of the condition of the tea workers. Deputy Commissioner Kallol Banerjee is emphatic that Goenka was arrested for defaulting on provident fund payments but secured conditional bail.

Saraf did not return after a meeting with union leaders. He has yet to sign an agreement. He apparently admitted that the Panighata management is moribund, that they have defaulted on wage payments and hence the workers were on strike over unpaid dues.

The government has given the tea estates on lease and Saraf took over the estate with liabilities, according to Banerjee. But talks with the unions on dues to be paid to workers broke down. The unions demanded a bonus of 20 per cent whereas Saraf offered 8.33 per cent. After that, he vanished. Banerjee pointed out that the industries department and the health department also had responsibilities towards the workers. ■

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA



Girls are trained in filmmaking

FAT girls are smart

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

WOMEN don't take to technology as quickly as men. They aren't always confident or nimble with smartphones, computers and various gizmos. Feminist Approach to Technology (FAT) is a pioneering organisation that helps girls from poor families to use technology. The girls are also encouraged to question patriarchy, discrimination and harassment. By the time they complete their stint with FAT the girls acquire the confidence and the technical skills to handle their lives.

"I got the idea of starting this organisation when I was a tech support person at CREA, a feminist human rights organisation," says Gayatri Buragohain, founder and executive director of FAT. Initially, she started developing websites for other NGOs and used the money to organise workshops for underprivileged women and girls in tech skills like computers at her home in Lajpat Nagar in New Delhi. FAT started in 2008 and the work expanded. A tech centre was set up for girls in the 14-25 age group in 2010.

Now FAT's Tech Centre at Lajpat Nagar has spawned the Young Women's Leadership Programme. The stepping stone is a basic computer course that has 60 girls, divided into three batches. The girls largely belong to low-income migrant families from Haryana, Bihar, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

But the centre is not just another computer learning hub to equip girls for the job market. It is also meant to foster activism and leadership. Often, other activists are roped in to hold discussions and workshops on subjects like rights, gender discrimination, patriarchy, feminism and decision making. The girls learn some basic English too.

Risha Samanta, programme associate, Tech



The FAT team: Faiza, Deepika, Durga, Risha, Jyoti, Varsha and Renu

Centre, says, "We link computer classes with feminist issues. When we are doing computer fundamentals, we connect it to the girls' everyday lives. How can they relate a computer to their bodies? How can they use the Notepad to describe a typical day in their lives? That sets off discussions about sexual rights and reproductive health, gender discrimination and inequality."

The girls also get to sharpen their mathematics and science skills through classes, field trips and videos that fuel their curiosity about these subjects. The aptly named Jugaad Lab is at the centre of this effort.

In the long run, the Tech Centre is the launching pad for a life-long transformation in the girls' lives. Once through with the initial course, many choose to be trained as Young Women Leaders and take part in FAT campaigns and programmes. FAT Young Women Leaders take particular pride in the Apna Haq (Our Right) and Todo Bandishen (Break the Chains) campaigns. For these projects, FAT collaborated with VOW Media so the girls could receive training in photography, filmmaking and radio work.

The workshops have culminated in photo-stories, radio shows and films by the girls. The Apna Haq documentary is about the hazards of community toilets for girls. Twenty-two year old Deepika Passi, a trainee at FAT who was part of the Apna Haq team, says, "The subject was critical because girls said that they were severely harassed by men when they went to use toilets. Also, they said that if they went to the jungle after the toilets closed at 10 pm they were likely to be raped." As a result of the campaign, cameras and streetlights have been put up at strategic points and chowkidars are stationed in the vicinity by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

The Todo Bandishen campaign against Early and Forced Marriage (EFM) is the outcome of much hard work by 31 young girls from FAT. We go to see a screening of the film at a Srinivaspuri *basti*, largely populated by Bihari migrants. With us is Renu Arya, a community mobiliser in the EFM project. The screening is followed by a discussion initiated by Arya.

The women, most of whom had been forced into early marriage, are only too eager to share their stories. Some are ambivalent, torn as they are between societal norms in their communities and the need to free their daughters from the dangers of early marriage.

"The campaigns that we do in the community help us to project the girls as leaders, change agents and decision makers of their lives," says Buragohain. "Second, the violence of harassment that they face whether at home or outside reduces for multiple reasons."

FAT's Young Women Leaders know this from first-hand experience. Durga Vishwas was under family pressure to get married ever since she was in high school. At every step of the way she faced taunts and indignity. She came to FAT for computer classes. Later, she started working as an intern in their office and began to put aside money for her education. That gave her bargaining power with her family and after a great deal of negotiation with them she completed school. Though she continues to face taunts from her elder brother, she has decided to go to college.

Renu Arya learnt the meaning of gender discrimination early on. Her brother was enrolled in a better school. Then he was encouraged to study engineering. She realised that she needed to break free and face her family head-on. So she began to earn money through tuitions and completed her education from an open school. She enrolled at FAT's Tech Centre in 2012 to fulfil her dream of picking up computer skills. She was also oriented to ideas of feminism and gender through workshops and discussions.

Many other girls from FAT too have broken out of the rigid constraints imposed on them. "Just computer skills open up so many doors. We don't train our girls to get jobs, we train them to be confident, aware women who can find solutions to their problems," says Buragohain.

FAT also runs other programmes: advocacy initiatives, a school intervention programme to promote Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and careers in STEM. There is also technical training for women and the We, Women in Technology (WeWIT) initiative to create a community of women who work in technical fields. ■

Child health sinks in slums

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A household survey carried out by CRY (Child Relief and You) in 15 slums of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru and Kolkata reveals alarming data on child health. Almost half the children surveyed, between one and six years of age, were found to be malnourished.

Surprisingly, Chennai had the most number of malnourished children with 62.2 per cent being underweight. In Kolkata, the figure was 49 per cent and in Mumbai 41 per cent. In Delhi, 50 per cent of children living in slums were found to be underweight. Bengaluru fared better at 33 per cent.

There has been some marginal improvement in stunting. In Delhi, 45 per cent of children suffer from stunting, a small improvement from National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data which showed 51 per cent in 2004-05. In Bengaluru, stunting has gone down to 17 per cent from 19.8 per cent.

Most of the households surveyed consisted of migrants who worked as daily wage labour and in the unorganised sectors of the city. The women go to work and have little time to care for their children.

Anganwadis that come under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) have emerged as the most critical space from where the health of children could be improved. But in Delhi and Bengaluru only 47 per cent of children are enrolled in anganwadis. In Kolkata, the figure is 60 per cent. Around 25 per cent of children are sent to private preschools.

According to CRY's survey, more than a third of the children in the five cities surveyed had not been de-wormed. In Delhi, half the children did not receive the Vitamin A and IFA (iron and folic acid) supplement and about a third had not been de-wormed.

The advantage for children who go to the anganwadi is that, unlike in preschools, they receive health services like de-worming, Vitamin A, and iron and folic acid tablets. For instance, 73 per cent children enrolled in anganwadis received the Vitamin A dose in the five cities compared to only 52 per cent in private preschools.

The anganwadi worker, by and large, monitors the growth of the child but she doesn't inform the parents about their child's health. So, though growth monitoring was done for 70 per cent of children, only 48 per cent of parents were informed. In Delhi, for instance, 60 per cent of parents did not even know that their child was malnourished. In



Half the children in Delhi's slums are malnourished

Bengaluru 74 per cent of parents said the anganwadi worker did not give them any feedback about their child.

Both parents and children were happy to go to the anganwadi. Though there is a lot of room for improvement, perceptions about the anganwadi were positive; 96 per cent of parents feel safe sending their children there and 82 per cent say it is a child-friendly space.

Only Chennai and Bengaluru were rated well for preschool education. The anganwadis in both cities were well-stocked with learning material and toys.

Some anganwadis provided hot, cooked food. In

ICDS and the anganwadi. Neither did they know the number and types of vaccinations needed for their child.

There is also need to rationalise the many schemes drawn up for child health and to ensure convergence between various government departments responsible for implementing them.

Also, training programmes for anganwadi workers could use inputs from CRY. The anganwadi worker measured the child's weight but not height, an essential marker of malnutrition. The worker was under-paid and under-skilled and she could be saddled with too many duties. "The anganwadi

Anganwadis that come under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) have emerged as the most critical space from where the health of children could be improved. But in Delhi and Bengaluru only 47 per cent of children are enrolled in anganwadis.

Delhi parents received dry rations.

Coverage of immunisation is not 100 per cent. Less than one-third of the children (about 31 per cent) in Delhi under the age of three received one dose of recommended vaccination. A gender imbalance is seen here with only 25 per cent of the girls receiving at least one dose, as compared to 39 per cent of the boys. In Bengaluru, 78 per cent of boys and 77 per cent of girls had been immunised. In Kolkata, 58 per cent of children under three had received one form of vaccination.

Soha Moitra, Regional Director (North) for CRY, said they had been trying to speak to officials about the findings of their report so that they could map a joint action plan with the government to combat child malnutrition in urban slums.

Moitra said the survey revealed that an awareness campaign to combat malnutrition with messages for parents and service providers was essential. Parents did not know their child was malnourished or what to do about it. They were unaware of the kind of services that should be provided by the

worker is expected to go from house to house. The population she is expected to cover is huge and her bandwidth limited. The health-seeking behaviour of the community needs to be strengthened," said Moitra.

In urban slums there is also no safety net for children. Most parents are migrants and don't always have documentation so their access to cheaper food through the public distribution system is limited. Only about 50 per cent of children are sent to anganwadis. "This probably means that there aren't enough anganwadis or parents are rejecting them because the quality of service is not good. The child suffers because anganwadis do provide supplementary nutrition, immunisation, iron and folic acid tablets and so on. The most critical years, 0-3, are lost," says Moitra. There is no regulation of crèches which infants are sent to either.

The ICDS, along with the food security law, is a comprehensive scheme, says Moitra. "But it isn't a law. The ICDS should be an entitlement guaranteed by law." ■



Women from Nizamuddin Basti cooked a range of traditional foods for visitors to their mela

Historic basti celebrates

Civil Society News
New Delhi

NIZAMUDDIN Basti, in the heart of Delhi, is where the famed *dargah* of the great Sufi saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya lies. The village that grew around it, sometime in the 12th century, is mostly bypassed. But slowly this historic spot, long in a state of urban decline, is regaining its identity.

“Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti is of great cultural significance. Ghalib, Amir Khusrau, the entire Sufi tradition has its roots here. The *qawali* was born in this village when Amir Khusrau sang to the saint,” says Ratish Nanda, Projects Director of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC).

The three-day Apni Basti Mela, now an annual event, is an expression of this urban village’s revival with its present-day residents. “Nizamuddin Basti had become a ghetto in the last four decades. The *mela* gives residents a chance to showcase 700 years of living heritage,” says Nanda. “It is an opportunity for people in Delhi, who would never otherwise make their way to Nizamuddin, to understand this culture and its spirit of tolerance. Misunderstandings grow when there is lack of interaction.”

Stalls at the *mela* display calligraphy, embroidery, classic tiles, kites, jewellery and more. A government schoolteacher beams with pride as she shows off recycled stuff made by her students. A group of girls stage a play and a boy strums a guitar as he sings a Hindi song. The women dig out age-old recipes and serve up foods their *basti* is renowned for: *biryani* and *kebabs*, *tikkas* and *naans*. There is vegetarian fare too served with chutneys and smiles.

“Culture connects people and bridges the class divide,” remarks Nanda. So the *mela* brings *burkha* and skirt, jeans and *salwar*, ponytail and beard together. Last year it attracted a population of

12,000 people including schoolchildren.

The young men of the *basti* offer heritage walks that take you through a maze of lanes, neat masjids, an ancient water tank and shops selling fragrant *attar*. There is the aroma of food and flowers and the rhythm of song. The imposing Chausanth Kambha with its majestic courtyard is the stage for soulful cultural performances as the sun dips.

Basti Nizamuddin’s turnaround began when the AKTC took it under its wing. For the trust restoring Humayun’s tomb also meant restoring its living heritage – the traditions, culture and built environment of the people who have lived near the tomb for generations.

AKTC’s Urban Renewal Initiative gave a facelift to Nizamuddin Basti. Among its many initiatives, the local government school was spruced up, a toilet facility built and a park replanted. Residents were offered small loans to renovate their derelict homes.

Most of all, the urban renewal project has empowered the women and youth. “There was malnutrition, poverty and maternal mortality was high. Less than one per cent of women had an income. People would call and ask if I could arrange a maid from the *basti* for them,” says Nanda. “Now all kinds of training have taken place. The women have become health workers and entrepreneurs. Some have done a masters in social work and some have gone to university in America.”

The women now manage the park, the gym and the toilet facility. They interact with the government school. Around 900 youngsters have undergone vocational training and got jobs. An English Access Micro-Scholarship Programme, launched by the US Embassy in December 2009, supports the teaching of English to 14-16 year olds for 100 children.

The Apni Basti Mela brings Nizamuddin into the limelight and gently reminds the city of its syncretist tradition. The *basti* isn’t self conscious of its appearance anymore. It is now a signpost in the city of Delhi. ■

Let access

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

DISABLED persons continue to find it difficult to get employed even though awareness about the challenges they face has grown manifold, said Javed Abidi at a ceremony to honour those who had managed to get ahead and do well for themselves.

Abidi is a wheelchair user himself, but zestfully serves as the honorary director of the National Centre for the Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP).

“There are hundreds of thousands of educated and skilled persons who just don’t get jobs because they are disabled,” Abidi regretted.

Perceptions of what disabled persons can achieve need to change. But going beyond negative attitudes, it is also necessary to promote universal access and institutionalise user-friendly infrastructure. A rethink is needed in society.

Successful disabled persons and companies that employ the disabled are recognised each year for the NCPEDP-Lemon Tree Helen Keller Awards.

Speakers at this year’s ceremony generally welcomed Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s ‘Accessible India Campaign’. But they emphasised that much needed to be achieved. The campaign served the purpose of concentrating effort and speeding up change, and it would help if government offices took the lead.

Ten awards were announced for Role Models under three categories:

INDIVIDUALS

Diethono Nakhro, disability awareness advocate in Kohima, Nagaland

Diethono Nakhro’s life seemed over when she sustained a spinal injury after a car accident in 2006. She has mobility impairment in both upper and lower limbs. Her struggle for rehabilitation was all the harder because, in Nagaland, like the rest of the Northeast, awareness and understanding of disability is virtually nil.

Her grit and determination enabled her to pick up the pieces of her life and become a crusader. She uses the local print media, social media and public functions to build discourse on disability besides awareness programmes in colleges to help students understand disability issues.

With activism slowly gathering momentum in Nagaland, the state government is being hauled up for its inertia in understanding or implementing the Disability Act. Nakhro has decided to use the RTI route to draw attention to the lack of accessibility in all government offices and demand government action.

“The only way that positive change can come about, where people living with disabilities are given the same opportunities as equal citizens, is when misconceptions and stereotyping are erased. This can only happen when disabled people are more visible. It is not an easy thing to do in our situation with practically nil accessibility everywhere. I have made this a personal mission,” she says.

be universal, starting with govt



After the ceremony: Javed Abidi, honorary director, NCPEDP, centre, with the award winners

Kanika Agarwal — Executive, v-shesh Learning Services in Mumbai

Agarwal, who is hearing impaired, is a postgraduate in analytical chemistry with merit from Mumbai University. She was the only person with disability from her college to get the TN Venkatesan Chemistry Scholarship for excellence in performance.

She is part of the core team of v-shesh Learning Services, an organisation that connects persons with disabilities to quality job resources in the private sector. Agarwal is involved with training and placement of persons with disabilities and in sensitising companies. Using her experience, the v-shesh team has developed a specialised curriculum for teaching English to the hearing impaired through a mix of visual learning techniques, sign language, constructive thinking and expression.

Nitin Goyal — head of asset control and projects, Nokia Networks and Solutions, Gurgaon

A paraplegic and wheelchair user for 20 years, Goyal launched SCI-India in 2002, the first national and online peer group for people with spinal injuries. As a volunteer and peer counsellor with the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre in New Delhi he supports people with new injuries to cope and rebuild their lives.

SUPPORTER OF EMPLOYMENT

Anita Narayan — Founder and Managing Trustee, EKansh Trust, Pune

EKansh Trust strives for the creation of a more inclusive society. “We are targetted towards the training and placement of persons with disabilities, sensitisation and awareness for all and outreach in slums and rural areas to prevent and detect disabilities and promote early intervention. We have man-

aged to change lakhs of mindsets through our work,” says Narayan.

Aparna Dass — Programme Manager, Livelihoods, American India Foundation, Gurgaon

Dass heads the Ability Based Livelihood Empowerment (ABLE) programme. Over 8,500 persons with disabilities across India have been skilled and over 4,000 such people have been supported for employment through ABLE. To promote employment of persons with disability, AIF in collaboration with Coca-Cola India, Being Human, CNN-IBN, The Hans Foundation and Swablamban has launched the VEER Campaign that brings together the private sector, NGOs, government and media on one platform to help with placements.

Ganesh Shivaram Hegde — Deputy Director (Livelihood), The Association of People with Disability, Bengaluru

Hegde leads the Horticulture Training Unit of the Association of People with Disability (APD). He is a pioneer who combines his expertise in horticulture and disability. His training unit has helped over 1,800 persons with disability find employment in gardening, horticulture, cookery, sustainable agriculture and allied fields. He runs APD’s livelihood programmes for gainful employment like horticulture, industrial training centre, job readiness programme and departments connected with them for mobilising youth with disabilities.

COMPANIES/NGOS

AMBA

Headquartered in Bengaluru, AMBA is a training and business house with a difference: its employ-

ees are adults with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. Founder Sugandha Sukrutaraj says, “Over the last 11 years we have put in place an ecosystem of learning and earning that is absolutely appropriate to the acumen of adults with moderate to severe intellectual disability.”

“Our target for 2020 is to train at least 600 AMBA Certified Partner Centres (ACPCs) that can in turn train and find jobs for at least 60,000 adults,” she adds.

ANZ Bengaluru Hub

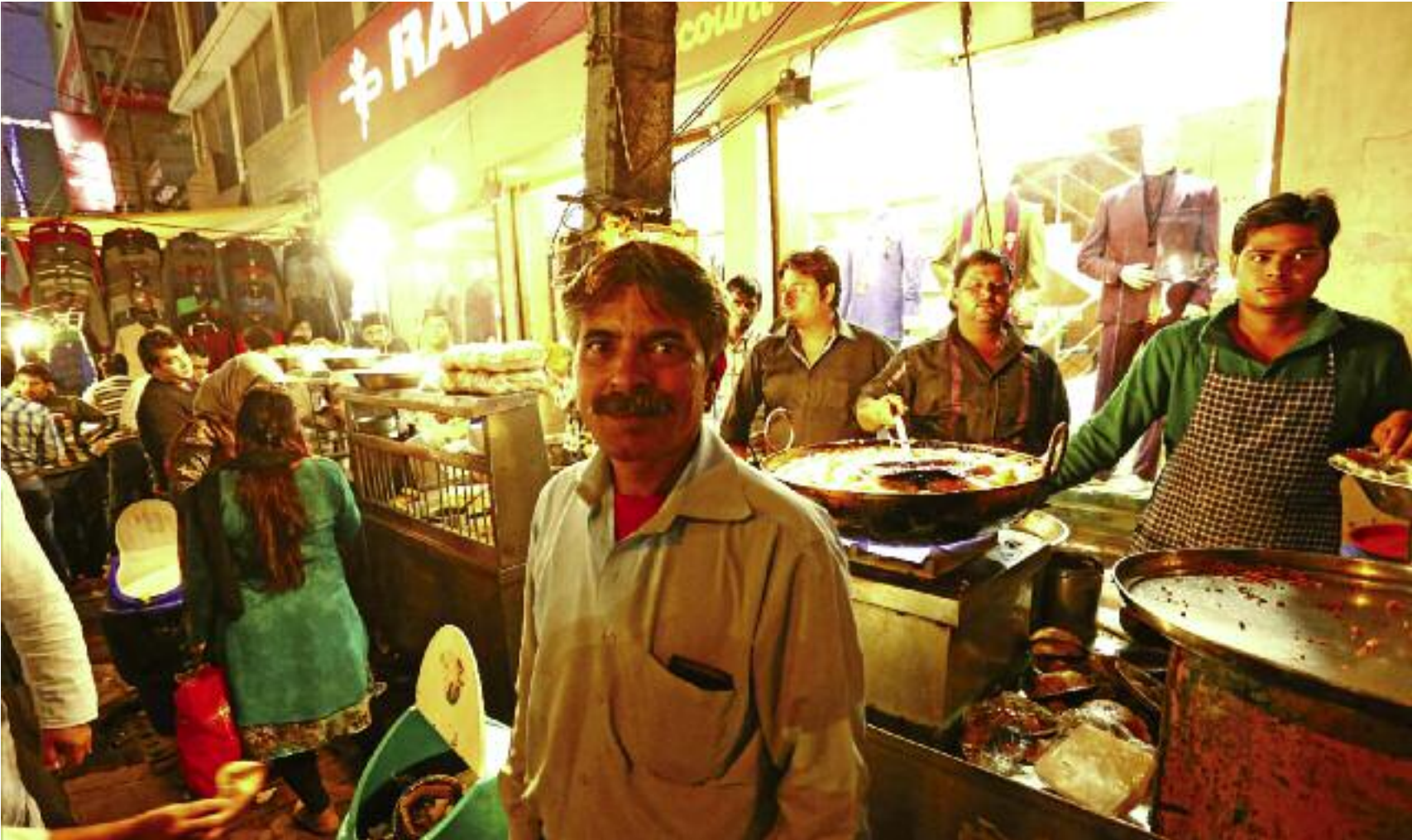
ANZ Bengaluru Hub follows international banking giant ANZ’s global corporate sustainability framework. The Bengaluru Hub began its focus on inclusion of persons with disability with a small pilot project of 12 people recruited in 2010. The organisation now employs 106 persons with disability.

Sounds of Silence Foundation

Based out of Mumbai, Delhi and Pune, the foundation’s mission is to overcome communication barriers for the hearing impaired. It aims to use mobile phones as a medium to communicate, empower and train the hearing impaired community and set up India’s first hearing impaired BPO. The foundation teaches computers, social media marketing and communication skills to the hearing impaired.

State Bank of India

The State Bank of India provides visually impaired clients the benefits of ATMs through over 8,600 special “talking machines with Braille key pads”. Ramps ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities. Other facilities are also available for differently abled persons. The bank also employs persons with disabilities. ■



Jamna Singh Yadav outside his Ram Ladoo stall where scenes for the film *Queen* were shot; And below: A dosa stall gets its messaging right



Civil Society News
New Delhi

IT is three in the afternoon and the area outside the Metro station in Laxmi Nagar is a hotspot of activity. This is east Delhi, chock-full and pulsating, with not an inch going spare. Commuters, shoppers and office-going types jostle for space on the pavement and slip road. On the carriageway, there are cars, buses, auto-rickshaws and two-wheelers locked in fierce competition.

In sync with this frenzy is a row of food stalls dishing out quick meals with practised speed. People stop, eat and go — happy to have refuelled so easily and cheaply. Not everyone is in a tearing hurry. A man and woman each pick up a plate of something and hang out over their parked motorcycle, pausing between mouthfuls for a happy, affectionate selfie. Two young girls, sisters perhaps, buy *dosas* and then seek out a place on the pavement to sit and eat. They are clearly mid-journey and weary. But, for most, it is a quick bite had standing, plates parked at stall level, earphones plugged in, backpacks strapped on, the odd briefcase placed near the feet.

STREET BUSINESS

How NASVI helps vendors upscale

There are an estimated 10 million street vendors across Indian cities and towns, and those selling food items account for a substantial percentage of them. Their meals and snacks, priced at very little, are what most ordinary folks rely on because they cannot afford the higher charges in restaurants. They are also easily accessible in public spaces and fast with fresh and hot servings.

Like all small businessmen, vendors build their reputations carefully. They hold on to locations and take pride in having repeat customers who come back because they are satisfied. A food stall somehow has to ensure that people who eat there don't fall sick. It is a tough act to pull off from a tiny cart. A bigger challenge is rent-seeking policemen and municipal officers, who cash in on the notion among urban elites that vendors are a nuisance and should be pushed out of cities.

For some years now, street vendors across India have been trying to get formal recognition and a better deal from municipal and state government authorities. They have banded together under the National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI). Persistent lobbying by NASVI resulted in convincing politicians to frame a national policy in 2004 which was improved upon in

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA



At the Street Food Festival in Delhi (above and below) vendors pay for their stalls and do brisk business



NASVI wants vendors to be seen as entrepreneurs who pay taxes and have locations from where they can function legitimately.

in Delhi. In Patna, he has acquired three handcarts and employs 14 people and 'DK Litti' is quite well-known.

NASVI also works to improve the standards of street food vendors. It promotes better hygiene and nutritional values. Vendors are encouraged to wear aprons with 'Safe Food' emblazoned on them. They learn the importance of wearing plastic caps and gloves. As part of image building, NASVI calls street food vendors 'roadside chefs'.

On the eve of this year's National Street Food Festival, NASVI held a workshop on cleanliness and hygiene for 500 roadside chefs. It was followed by a formal pledge by all vendors to change markets through best practices.

NASVI has teamed up with the Union Tourism Ministry to hold six-day training programmes for street food vendors at hotel management institutes across the country. Vendors get certificates and are paid ₹300 a day during the training to make up for the money lost while they are away from their stalls.

NASVI's goal is to institutionalise facilities for vendors. It wants vending to be recognised by the authorities as a service.

Despite a central law, it is common for vendors across cities to be hounded by the police and municipal authorities and forced to pay bribes. Shopkeepers who let them occupy pavement space take a part of their daily earnings unlawfully. Often, they simply want them removed and connive with the authorities to get rid of them.

NASVI would like to see vendors being given the status of entrepreneurs who have access to formal sources of finance, pay taxes to the municipal authorities and have locations from where they can function legitimately. The most common example cited is that of Singapore, where zones have been created so that vendors can go about their businesses legitimately.

"Municipal bodies are strapped for funds. This is a huge opportunity for them to formalise the functioning of vendors and collect a fee from them," says Arbind Singh, national coordinator of NASVI.

"Vendors have the right to livelihood. Invariably, they know no other way of earning money and supporting their families. It is not necessary that vendors' children become vendors. There are many vendors whose children

study and get jobs and whole families move up into the middle class. A vendor's son or daughter could well be in college and go on to get a white-collar job," says Arbind, who prefers to be called by his first name.

Arbind and others in the NASVI leadership imbue the organisation with a powerful pragmatism. The 2014 central Act on street vendors came as a result of this approach. NASVI was as successful in lobbying the BJP-led NDA government to get a policy passed in 2004 as it was later with the Congress-led UPA when it brought changes in the policy and then finally got an Act passed.

The central law is hugely advantageous to vendors. It spells out a basic governance structure around the essential rights of vendors. The states have something to go by while framing their policies on vending.

It stipulates the setting up of a Town Vending Committee (TVC) with wide representation from all sections of society. The municipal commissioner heads the TVC and there is a representative from the police. Vendors make up 40 per cent of the members. Local authorities can only act on the advice of the TVC. The law stipulates a survey of vendors every five years and issuing of certificates to vendors who function at specific locations. The police are not allowed to dis-

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Dolma Aunty from Sikkim is a hot favourite in Lajpat Nagar



Dinesh Kumar's litti chokha stall, DK Litti, is now famous

place vendors who have certificates. There are rules for relocation and seizing of goods. A judicial committee addresses grievances.

But getting the law implemented evenly across states is proving to be a challenge. "It is a good law, an empowering law which recognises the rights of vendors, but in India a good law is one thing and implementation is another. Implementation has been happening in bits and pieces. We don't learn from each other's experience," says Arbind.

The law requires states to frame rules and schemes in six months, but this has not been the case in all states. Odisha has conducted surveys, framed a good set of rules and created vending zones, including one especially for women. But other states have not done as well. Rajasthan is planning vending and no-vending zones in Jaipur. There is a women's market in Udaipur. In Bihar the government has hired NASVI to conduct surveys and help plan special zones. In Uttar Pradesh, contracts have been given out for surveys.

LET DOWN BY AAP

The biggest disappointment for NASVI is in Delhi, where vendors supported the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the belief that, once in power, it would frame rules, set up vending zones and come up with schemes that would protect them from harassment by low-level police functionaries and municipal staff.

"In the first phase of the Arvind Kejriwal government, because of his rhetoric on corruption, there was fear in the police. Kejriwal also came to our meetings and his language encouraged us," recalls Arbind.

"Our demand was recognition of the rights of hawkers and AAP put the promise to set up vending zones in its election manifesto. When it came to power we pressed for the framing of a scheme. We kept trying to meet Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia. Finally, when we met them and were given the scheme, we were very disappointed and protested in writing with-

in two hours of reading it," says Arbind unhappily.

NASVI found several outrageous clauses in the scheme. For instance, it stated that if a vendor kept a helper he would be fined ₹2,000 a day. It betrayed a lack of sensitivity and understanding of vendors' needs.

Explains Arbind: "Anyone is entitled to an assistant as long as the person is himself or herself doing vending. What if a vendor is disabled? How can you imagine that kind of fine being put on your own people? It is worse than apartheid, I think!"



Arvind Singh tries to reason with a shopkeeper in Lajpat Nagar after he pushed out a hawker, Ramesh Madan, from the pavement outside. Below: Ramesh Madan and his mother appeal to Arvind and Mohammad Salim, president of the local vendors' body



The scheme also took away the powers of the TVC and gave them to a person called a 'nodal officer'. Incredibly, the scheme disallowed cooking, which is accepted worldwide.

"When you are talking about the creation of vending zones and food streets, how can you imagine that cooking will not be allowed? We are not talking about the kind of cooking that is happening today. Right now, it is difficult to cook and serve from a small stall. But we are all for regulation. We are all for designated spaces where there is safety and cleanliness," says Arbind, lamenting a lack of vision on the part of the AAP government.

There were other problems. Vendors would have to carry their goods home at night — an impossible task for those who live in the suburbs but sell in the heart of the city.

"Someone who sells fruit on Lodhi Road and lives in Rohini cannot be expected to carry all the fruit home every night," says Arbind. "Then the scheme said vendors would not be allowed to make a noise. I said, if in a *mohalla* a vegetable vendor is not allowed to call out, how will he sell anything?"

The result is that the AAP government scheme has been a non-starter. In the absence of a scheme, the municipal authorities have nothing to go by and vendors continue to get the short end of the stick amid the uncertainty.



Yadav Chowmein Bhandar at Laxmi Nagar in east Delhi

The problem is in ending a system mired in rent seeking. One estimate has it that vendors in Mumbai are forced to fork out almost ₹2,000 crore a year in daily and weekly bribes. In Delhi, where there are an estimated 300,000 vendors, an average of even ₹150 a day works out to a tidy ₹1,600 crore a year.

“We have now been told that the AAP government will frame a new law. But I can’t understand this because a law already exists. There is no need for a law. What is required is a scheme based on the provisions of the central law,” says Arbind with exasperation.

OVERARCHING PROVISIONS

Even as it works at winning over state governments and municipal bodies, NASVI’s success has been in the overarching provisions it has succeeded in getting at the national level. In a sense, the heavy lifting has already been done.

NASVI has also got the National Urban Livelihoods Mission to mandate that five per cent of the funds it provides municipalities will have to be used for creating infrastructure for vendors. With such provisions, it would seem a question of time before local authorities see vendors’ demands in the context of livelihoods and rights.

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These are estimates but, given the large number of vendors, the amount will definitely be huge. The only reason such extortion continues is because vendors aren’t given a formal status. Being essentially at the mercy of local equations, they invariably have to play along.

The solution is in institutionalised efforts that can change the system once and for all. Till then, implementing a law can be very tough. Vendors who try to claim their rights have a rough time. We saw an example at the busy and prosperous Lajpat Nagar Market in south Delhi.

Ramesh Madan had a stall outside a shop in the market. He ran it for many years and paid the shopkeeper a fee every month even though he was on the pavement and the shopkeeper had no right to claim the money. When the central law was passed and Madan decided to stop paying the money, the shopkeeper had him removed. It doesn’t help Madan that he belongs to the local vendors’ union, which is affiliated to NASVI. He insists that he should get back the space he occupied for years because this is where his customers know they will find him.

The shopkeeper himself has violated all the rules and has illegally expanded his shop from a 35 sq ft space given to him by the municipality to 300 sq ft. He clearly has a deal with local officials.

When we visit the market, Arbind is dragged off by Madan to argue his case

with the shopkeeper. It is a futile exchange of words with the adamant shopkeeper telling Arbind he is welcome to take up the matter with the municipality.

A MOSAIC OF IDENTITIES

The vendors, their customers, diverse food preparations and other products are all part of an urban churning. It is a mosaic of multiple identities. There are stories within stories waiting to be discovered. The vendors are valiant entrepreneurs who have come to the city in search of livelihoods. They have learnt in simple ways to build their own brands and hang on to their customers. They try very hard.

At Laxmi Nagar, Chennai Haat is a stall that remembers Sir KTKP Iyanar, whoever he may have been. It uses ‘DOSA’ as the key word in big letters and ‘Idly’ and ‘Vada’ in smaller typeface. The men manning the stall are obviously Tamilians. Next to it is Yadav Chowmein Bhandar with a picture of Lord Krishna. In addition to the chow mein, it offers burgers and *samosas* — at prices ranging from ₹10 to ₹25. Also competing for attention is Kumar Pal Yadav Chaat Bhandar with *golguppas*, *tikkis*, *pav bhaji* and *papri chaat*.

In the heart of Lajpat Nagar Market, food vendors have brisk sales. This is paradise for the budget shopper looking for inexpensive clothes, footwear, handbags and so on. Shopping and eating go together. Women from middle-class homes out to make a nifty purchase or two need a snack to round off the outing.

So it is that Dolma Aunty’s *momos* and Chinese Platter have become famous. She is from Sikkim and the *momos*, which come piping hot, have an authentic touch to them. There is also Jamna Singh Yadav’s stall that serves Ram Ladoos — fried in good oil right there on the street and then doused in a chutney and covered with freshly cut onions. Yadav’s claim to fame goes beyond his Ram Ladoos. Scenes in the film *Queen* were shot here with Kangana Ranaut eating at his stall. The shooting of the film at his stall was a high point, but Yadav has earned his success over time as is apparent from the people lining up for his Ram Ladoos. Opposite him is a vendor with roasted sweet potato made into a spicy *chaat* and laced with tamarind.

Solving vendors’ problems means recognising their huge creativity and inventiveness. It means recognising them as entrepreneurs who are creating wealth and employment. NASVI has played an important role in promoting such an inclusive vision of Indian urban spaces. By empowering vendors and getting lawmakers to define their rights, it is prompting important changes in urban governance. ■

BUSINESS

ENTERPRISE | CSR | ICT | GREEN TECH

‘For a business innovation you need a social heart’

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHAT expectations should companies have when they go to the bottom of the pyramid (BoP)? Can they hope to bring in easy money with a few clever ideas or should they instead be thinking about relevant innovations and a sustained investment in consumers over the long term?

Ever since management guru C.K. Prahalad spun the theory that companies need to see the poor as consumers, there has been a lot of learning in managements. The learning has had more to do with failure than success because corporate decision-makers haven't been able to bridge social divides. They are worlds apart from the poor they hope to turn into their consumers.

Another reason for failure has been that the purpose of a BoP strategy has also been clouded in confusion. Should it be only about making money or is the idea to empower people along the way? It is a confusion that goes to the basics about the role of businesses.

It is now clear that the successful guys are those who treat the requirements of the rural poor with complete seriousness. They also have a strong social content in their strategies for coming up with processes and products that have BoP relevance.

Many companies have gone for advice to Pradeep Kashyap, founder of MART and a first-mover with ideas on rural marketing. MART recently held a conclave with the theme, "Business Model Innovation in BoP". As at most of MART's conclaves, it was packed with many interesting presentations.

Civil Society caught up with Kashyap at his office in Noida to talk about the challenges that companies face while entering rural markets, and the trends and patterns that are emerging.

It has been some time since the term 'bottom of the pyramid (BoP)' has been in currency. What has been the experience of companies keen to sell products to rural India?

The first learning is that there is no fortune at the bottom of the pyramid. The fortune is with the pyramid.

I feel that CK Prahalad did some good but he also did some damage by showing a pot of gold that never existed. The poor across the world are so poor that you cannot expect them to buy products made by multinational companies. You wouldn't want them to waste their precious earnings on a



AJIT KRISHNA

Pradeep Kashyap: 'I have always looked at the poor as producers'

‘Companies have now realised that there has to be a process of co-creation. So it's not about making money from the poor, but helping them to earn more and then going in to sell your products.’

fizzy drink when they don't have enough money to buy food.

But then marketing can lure anybody and that's what companies end up doing. Somehow BoP brought the focus on this segment as consumers.

I had been working for at least 15 years before Prahalad coined this term. And I have always looked at the poor as producers. You take the handloom sector, the handicraft sector, carpet weaving... the poor have always contributed to the GDP and not

consumed it.

By saying there is this fortune at the bottom of the pyramid, new companies rushed in and burnt their fingers. They also got a bad name because civil society and the NGO sector turned against this whole approach.

So my definition of BOP is this: people in rural India are as much producers as consumers because they add to the economy, even if what they are contributing is their labour.

Are companies beginning to understand that now?

Yes. They have now realised that there has to be a process of co-creation. So it's not about making money from the poor, but helping them to earn more and then going in to sell your products.

I think the best example of such an approach is the e-Choupal by ITC. The company first helped farmers sell their produce at a better price by eliminating middlemen and getting paid in cash on time. So the company helped to increase the prosperity of the farmers. And then it went in with FMCG products and asked if they would like to buy those. Some kind of loyalty got established because farmers became part of the ITC brand. This model works better.

Similarly, when we did Project Shakti with Unilever it was a win-for-all model. The women doubled their income and Unilever got deeper penetration of their products. For Unilever, reach was a challenge. Through the women they could go deeper. Banks benefitted because 60,000 women approached the banks for loans to buy Unilever products and get into this business. State governments benefitted because 60,000 women became self-employed so you also created livelihoods.

Does there have to be a strong ethical component in the BOP concept?

Yes. Companies have become more transparent in their dealings with the poor. The terms of trade between them have become more fair. They are now working for the uplift and good of society. For example, Unilever trained 60,000 women from their own profits to become entrepreneurs. They have invested in them. The earlier guys just wanted to go there, grab money and come back.

What are the innovative products or services that have emerged from this interface between companies and the rural market?

The innovation that is happening in BoP is at three levels: the product, processes and the business model itself.

Earlier, innovation was seen as product innovation. Globally, 95 per cent of R&D is spent on developing new products. They have done to death products.

But the world has hardly done any process innovation. There is a lot of wealth lying locked in processes. The challenge is to unlock it. That's why more companies are looking at processes.

In Project Shakti there is no new product: they are selling the same soaps and shampoos, whether in single-serve packets or economy packs. The innovation is in the process of delivery. Unilever did not have a viable business model. The cost of reach is high as you go deeper into remote villages and the returns are very low.

The same is true of ITC. They have changed processes. The products that they are procuring

from farmers or selling to them are the same. But the process is completely transparent, unlike what happens in the *mandi*.

Has there been any innovation at all in products?

We have a 400-million male population out of which 200 million is in the shaving category — more than the shaving population of Europe and the US combined. Gillette saw this as a huge business opportunity. They brought their teams from the US and developed a two-blade razor with a lighter handle. The end product was 50 per cent cheaper than their three-blade razor. They intro-



ITC's e-Choupal helped to increase the prosperity of farmers

duced it with a big bang, thinking it would be a big success. But it failed miserably in the market.

The reason was that men in rural India don't shave in their bathrooms because there is only one bathroom and five or six members of the family need to use it. So the man sits and shaves outside the bathroom without a mirror. He feels his chin to see if his bristles are gone. He never has a clean shave and that's not important to him. What is important to him is that he shouldn't get nicked.

The men don't shave every day. They shave maybe once in three or four days when they go to the bazaar or the nearby town. By then their bristles have become longer. So the area between the two blades gets clogged and since he doesn't use running water it can't be cleaned.

Gillette's two-blade razor failed because it did not fit the conditions of usage. They have now gone back to the single-blade razor and adjusted the angle of the handle so that it does not nick. That's now sold in millions. It's called the Gillette Guard. It's done exceptionally well because they have understood what the rural man wants.

All of us think we know everything about (poor) people in rural areas. We design products in our R&D labs and then we go and test them in rural areas. We don't understand their reality. Washing machines haven't done well in rural India because there is no running water.

Numerous water filters were also invented. Tata Chemicals had one, for instance. How have these done?

The Tata Swach is the most talked about brand of filters. It's also a case study in Harvard. But I don't think they have sold any great number. It is a highly hyped-up product.

There are many barriers that engineers haven't understood. The first is the macho image. You go into a village and tell the man that the water in his water source has bacteria. He will say, my elders drank from this well. My grandfather lived till 80, my father till 70. So what will bacteria do to me?

You have to tackle such biases. If your communication doesn't address these issues (the product will be) a non-starter.

I call it the 3 Ps of innovation: product, processes and people. You have to understand your clients as people. Your internal teams have to be committed and empathise with the people. If you just go in as an engineer you won't be able to find the best solution because your heart is not in it.

Innovation happens in a business mind with a social heart.

Have there been any outright winners?

Maggi. It's a runaway success. You go into any village and you will find Maggi hanging in the *kirana* shop. What's happened is that Maggi is not for grown-ups in villages.

It's an indulgence product, an aspirational product for children. My counterparts in the city have Maggi so I want to have Maggi. They have hinged their whole communication on aspiration.

So it is the aspirational product that does well?

See, five years ago we did a study with children aged 9-12 and between six and nine in Punjab, UP and Andhra Pradesh. We asked them if they knew about mobile phones. They said yes. We asked them which brands they knew of. They said Apple, Samsung and Nokia. They hadn't heard of Micromax, an Indian brand. We asked them about biscuit brands. An eight-year-old girl said Oreo. Now Oreo is an up-market brand produced by Cadbury's that had not been introduced in rural areas. Had she eaten it? She said no but she knew the ad and she sang it unselfconsciously in front of all of us.

Companies have to really study the market before getting in...

We have worked with the best brands in this country. They approach us for research, saying they want to promote their products in rural areas. My precondition is: you will have to travel with me because this research is for you, not for me. But they will not travel. You give them some insights and they say, Oh, this is so sexy! We will market accordingly.

Products are not made or sold through one insight. You have to understand the whole system. But marketers have become so damn lazy they don't want to go into the field. ■

Honge is the new bio-fuel

Preeti E. Ramanathan
Bengaluru

THE honge tree (*Pongamia pinnata*) is staging a revival of sorts in Hadonahalli village and its surrounding region of Doddaballapur, a rain-fed area in rural Bengaluru. The tree is making a comeback as a yielder of bio-fuel on a par with jatropha and as a fertiliser. And its oil cake is becoming a bestseller.

In the old days, oil extracted from its seeds was used for lamps, soap and as a lubricant until electricity and alternative oils for soap changed all that. The tree then fell out of favour.

Its status has been restored, thanks mainly to a Rural Bio-fuel Extraction Plant set up by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) in Doddaballapur taluk, a kilometre from Hadonahalli village. The tree is being planted in several villages along with jatropha and ipe.

KVK trained Bache Gowda, a local farm worker with no formal schooling, to clean and dehusk the honge tree oil seed and operate the oil expeller unit.

Pointing to a clump of jatropha, honge and the ipe trees, Bache Gowda says with pride, "All these trees have been planted by us. I have even received training at Mysore for identifying and taking care of them."

The local enterprise, funded by the Karnataka State Bio-fuel Development Board, has brought the honge tree back into the farm community's life. The Board funds are channelled through the University of Agricultural Sciences in Bengaluru to the KVK.

In 2007, a local charity donated 10,000 sq ft of land to set up the expeller project as its vision was to benefit local farmers. The staff has been hired and trained by the Karnataka State Bio-fuel Development Board and they work in close coordination with the KVK.

The honge oil seeds are sourced from farmers from the nearby *hoblis* of Tubagere, Belavangala, Madhure and Kasaba. "They even get paid for the seeds," says Yogananda, the manager of the unit, who is in his early thirties and a science graduate. "Before we started the unit about six years ago, the seeds were considered a waste product. Now, due to the revenue from sale of seeds, the trees are seen as revenue generating by farmers," he says.

The unit pays farmers ₹28 per kg for the seeds. Encouraged, the farmers plant honge trees along the borders of their farms. "We do try to get them to plant trees as their main crop. But our goal is to help the poorer sections. We have relationships with marginal farmers. As it takes anywhere from three to four years for the tree to bear fruit, farmers with small holdings are wary of the wait and find it difficult to manage without an alternative income for those years," explains Yogananda.

The oil seeds are harvested in spring. "The seeds are available from March till June. But the farmers are willing to store the seeds for us. We ask them to deliver the seeds whenever we are able to crush them," says Yogananda. The unit therefore does not need a storage facility or transport arrangements.

Over 40 villages have been approached by KVK. Every farmer is given ₹35 from MGNREGA funds



A Rural Bio-Fuel Extraction Plant has been set up by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Doddaballapur taluk

as planting costs for each tree. The Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Stree Shakti groups in villages

are also approached for promoting planting of honge trees and expanding their sourcing base.

Manjunath, who has a degree in home science, has been specially hired to train the SHG members on how to start home-based enterprises for processing millets like *ragi* to increase their income.

This activity runs parallel to the other agricultural extension activities of the KVK office. "We receive continuous training on managing the oil expelling unit and on connecting with the community around us," affirm the team members.

The unit also produces an oil cake from the crushed seeds which is in great demand among farmers. "Although other private oil expeller units sell the oil seed cake at a 20 per cent discount to us, the farmers buy our oil cake as it has a higher oil content and they trust the integrity of our product," says Yogananda.

"The cake is even used as a pest repellent by horticulturists in the vicinity. Farmers are able to bring down their chemical pesticide costs if they add the oil cakes as part of their input mix," he adds.

The enthusiastic team at the honge tree seed expeller unit in Hadonahalli village wishes it could crush more seeds and expand production. However, this micro unit which is capable of crushing 100 kg an hour does less than 200 kg a day as they get electricity supply for only two hours daily from 6-9 am. The staff comes to work at these irregular hours as there would be no production if they did not do so. "If we had regular power we would be producing about 400-500 kg of oil cakes a day," sighs the manager.

The honge tree is part of a national bio-fuel campaign. The unit's monthly output of about 500 litres of bio-fuel is bought by the KVK. The oil is blended with regular diesel and people living at a radius of 25 km from the unit buy the oil.

"The norm is to blend 20 per cent but in reality up to 50 per cent of the seed oil can be blended with diesel. We have tried it on our vehicles," affirms Yogananda. ■



INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

The teacher's low status



DILEEP RANJEKAR

BACK TO SCHOOL

I was recently in an elementary school that is situated in a semi-rural area. It has a team of eight teachers, including the head teacher and a music teacher who loves teaching music to the children. Sitting around a table in the head teacher's room, several issues got discussed and I asked my customary question on what their challenges were.

There was a pleasant smile on everyone's face —

indicating 'We don't really want to talk of our difficulties'. However, the head teacher relented. He asked one of the teachers to get the census booklet that the government has mandated the teachers fill in after interviewing the citizens.

One of the teachers explained: it was a more than voluminous census questionnaire and each teacher was required to interview a minimum of 200 persons during the next two months. Each interview takes about 45 minutes.

Thus, 200 interviews involved investment of 150 hours per teacher — translating into about 20 working days. Teachers of all government schools are required to do this. You can imagine what happens to the over 20 per cent single-teacher schools. The teachers also informed me that some of the other activities that they participate in from time to time are the State Household Survey, polio vaccination, tree surveys, cattle surveys and so on.

I was rather taken aback because just two weeks

earlier, in the CAGE (Central Advisory Board of Education) sub-committee meeting on "How to Improve the Quality of Government Schools" I had told one of the Principal Secretaries of Education that this 'bogey' of teachers having a lot of non-academic work was not true since research has established that the non-academic workload is at best five to seven per cent of their time. And here I was, confronted with the reality of a much higher component of non-academic work. I do agree that many of these are periodic and are in addition to the election duties that the teachers are required to perform.

I explained to the teachers in this school that much of this is because the government trusts teachers and they are the only credible resource present in the remotest of habitations.

The other issue raised by the teachers was of the excessive supervision and work required for serving

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LAKSHMAN ANAND



Government schoolteachers are saddled with a lot of extraneous duties

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the cooked mid-day meal to each child. Across schools in India, the teachers make a point that the focus on the mid-day meals is so high that visiting education functionaries don't really discuss the learning of the children and academic processes in the school. The head teacher said that no action can be expected if learning is not happening in the school, but if the meals are not served for any reason the school can expect punishment.

The head teacher in this particular school described how much time was spent each day on buying vegetables, groceries and other related material. In fact, reimbursements for the material bought are often delayed by 30-45 days and the head teacher ends up spending his own money for buying groceries and vegetables for the meals of close to 200 children in the school. You can imagine the investment he has to make. This is neither recognised by the system, nor is any solution evolved to solve this problem.

The primary purpose of education is all-round development of the children. In a formal schooling system, the school and the classroom are the crucibles of learning that facilitate child development. And the teacher is the real kingpin in the process of development. However, in the overall school education system, they are often accorded the least importance or attention.

As a result, no attempts are made to create enabling conditions for them. Often, derogatory references are made by education functionaries and society in general such as "teachers don't go to the school, teachers don't teach and teachers know nothing". My colleagues and I spend a significant part of our time each month visiting schools and participating in interactions with teachers and we do not find these insinuations a reality. If at all such things are true, they are consistent with the "normal distribution curve" in any employee group. On the other hand, we find that most teachers, despite several disabling conditions,



maintain their motivation.

There are teachers who travel more than 75 kilometres from their home each day to reach the school, investing two to three hours — depending on the road conditions — and braving rain, heat and cold. In many states, teachers have to cross political and bureaucratic hurdles right from their appointment, to transfer to a location of preference. There are several schools where a lone teacher manages the entire school and cannot attend to any personal emergencies. There are many schools where teachers have no seating place and no toilets to use.

In meetings at block and district level where teachers are invited to participate, no thought goes into how they will travel, where they will eat, where they will stay, and so on. The teachers put up with all this silently and are resigned to such poor conditions of work. Further, the officials do not hesitate in scolding teachers and humiliating them without any thought of what it would do to their morale. Ironically, in the same workshops they could be discussing issues such as how to make the classroom process "joyful and non-threatening" and the like.

If we truly care for 'teacher motivation' the first thing we must do is thoroughly and meaningfully prepare our teachers for meeting complex situations in the classroom. Develop in them the entire perspective of education and the purpose of their role in child development. Align them to the importance of their role in the development of society in general. Equip them with content knowledge. Develop in them the pedagogical approaches most suitable in understanding individual children and evolving appropriate strategies in dealing with each child effectively.

If we truly care for teacher motivation we would make school infrastructure the most enabling place for child development with at least one classroom per grade and one teacher per classroom. We would provide adequate budgets and resources for necessary teaching-learning materials in each classroom. We would provide the autonomy to teachers to use learning processes that are most appropriate to the given set of children — factoring in local practices, culture and environment.

If we truly care for teacher motivation, we would support 'Teacher Professional Development' in every possible manner — including strengthening the institutions that are created to support schools from the outside. We would carefully facilitate the culture of self-development by teachers. We would provide them spaces — physical and virtual — to explore self-development with high-quality facilitative processes.

Simply keeping on revising teacher salaries periodically will not necessarily motivate them. Global research has established that compensation is just a hygiene factor. Teachers, like all other professionals, want competence-enabling, autonomy and recognition for their work.

If we are not willing to seriously address these factors, teacher motivation will remain hollow talk and good 'time pass' for people to discuss in education fora. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation.

CONFERENCE ON BUSINESS AND PUBLIC POLICY

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Annual 'Conference on Business and Public Policy' invites academic papers from scholars in any discipline on topics pertaining to Development Policy and Practice.

This conference at the Integral University is being organised in partnership with Aequitas Consulting, Digital Empowerment Foundation, EnH Foundation, Fifth Estate, ICEC, NSDC, OMC, USIPI and WADHWANI Foundations.

The conference serves as a platform to bring together voices from academic, business, civil society and policymaking circles to create awareness regarding the nuances of development practice.

The papers would serve as learning tools for practitioners and students of economics, public policy, administration, management and all social sciences.

CONTENT

Authors are encouraged to contribute their original research to the journal by submitting papers that fall under any relevant categories.

These may be in the form of research findings, projects, literature surveys, review works, case studies, theoretical or empirical research articles, book reviews, analysis and editorials.

KEY DATES

Send in a short abstract of your paper (150-200 words) to tpplucknow@gmail.com by 10 January 2016.

Submitted abstracts will be reviewed by subject experts on the basis of originality, timeliness, relevance, and readability.

If your abstract is accepted by 20 January, you will be expected to send in your paper by 5 March 2016.

Gaps in sand mining law



KANCHI KOHLI

THE mining of sand and gravel has emerged as a major regulatory concern in the last decade, especially because of the global construction boom and the spread of urbanisation. The removal of sand, which was earlier only for low-scale, household purposes or as a management exercise to prevent flooding, is now one of the most unregulated mining sectors in India, controlled by a 'sand mafia'.

Actions of government functionaries to control illegalities have been marred by serious controversies. The courts have responded to litigation with clear orders that no mining should be allowed unless environmental approval has been obtained after impact assessment. Since many of these operations are 'small-scale', there have been suggestions that they be studied for impact and approved in clusters.

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) issued a draft notification to regulate sand mining on 22 September 2015. The extraction of sand from riverbeds is clarified in this notification to be mining of minor minerals which are used in the cement industry and the production of glass, among other uses.

This activity is then further classified as a B2 activity as per the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification of 2006. This notification categorised all activities requiring environment clearance as A or B, with the first to be processed at the ministry level and the second by new institutions to be set up in every state. The notification also allowed further categorisation of activities as B1 or B2, with state-level institutions having the power to decide which activity could be regarded as B2 (not requiring a full EIA).

The building and construction industry was stated upfront to be a B2 sector with no EIAs required, just a more detailed submission on project location and its impact. So sand mining, which is largely feeding this industry, is B2 as well.

CLUSTER APPROACH

After acknowledging that most sand mining takes place in clusters, the draft notification proposes a procedure for environment approvals. For sand mining activities being carried out in clusters of 5 ha and above, it has a graded approval process including public consultation of every cluster before appraisal. For a cluster of mines under 5 ha, the approval is at the district level. For clusters between 5 and 50 ha, approval is with the designated State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA). For areas above 50 ha, the approval process lies with the MoEFCC and its expert committees.

But the draft notification does not mention whether these clusters are small mines being operated by a single owner or multiple owners. This has



Citizens need to be involved in assessing the impact of sand mining and ensuring compliance

a huge bearing on how procedural accountability and legal compliance would be attributed. Further, the draft notification gives mine-owners the option of seeking environmental approval both at individual and cluster level. While an EIA would need to be done at cluster level, the environment clearance could be issued to an individual leaseholder.

Finally, a public consultation is also to be held at the cluster level. But whose responsibility would it be to coordinate with the regulatory agencies for carrying out this public consultation process? Would it be the single leaseholder or a cluster of leaseholders?

DISTRICT POWERS

The draft notification proposes a huge role for District Level Environment Impact Assessment Authorities (DEIAA) and District Expert Appraisal Committees (DEAC) for approvals and for monitoring post-approval compliance. But much remains to be clarified.

For instance, how will the DEIAA and DEAC determine that the same mine operator is not breaking up his sand mining operations into smaller units to get district-level approvals? A robust mechanism seeking local or block-level inputs would be critical.

There are also concerns about how the central government will constitute such district-level institutions. It would be critical for the Centre to collaborate with state governments and the district administration. This is also an opportunity to invite public nominations and include this in the process of institution building. It would be seen as good practice when regulatory expert committees are being set up at state and national levels too.

Finally, there is the old issue of what qualifications experts in such bodies should have. The criteria of DEIAA and DEAC appointments should not be limited to a person having a 'degree'. These institutions would benefit from the experience and knowledge of people in human rights, ecology, farming, river restoration and other such public works even without a formal degree.

EXEMPTIONS

The draft notification also permits exemption from environmental approval if sand mining is required for community works like desilting of village ponds or tanks, construction of village roads, bunds undertaken under MGNREGA and other government-sponsored schemes. Ironically, construction of village roads under such schemes can involve substantial extraction of sand.

Many of these roads are no longer small village roads but could form part of important road corridors and highways. An impact assessment procedure will only help mitigate impact and find the least harmful options if such roads are linked with basic services. Such blanket exemptions defeat the spirit of laws that are meant to regulate social and environmental impact.

The proposed changes to the EIA notification are yet another lost opportunity to involve citizens in carrying out district-level surveys on the impact of sand mining and ensuring compliance with environment regulation, including conditions of approval. The onus of carrying out these surveys is on the DEIAA along with other designated government departments.

There is no scope for seeking public inputs in the preparation of this report or for including public comments or inputs. This is especially critical as the proposed survey format does not have scope to record the number of villages, people dependent on the river where mining is taking place and who is already being impacted or is likely to be. Neither does it have scope to record specific details of flora or fauna (especially rare, threatened or endangered) that is either already being impacted or is likely to be.

Not only do the mechanisms proposed seem hurried and requiring clarity, the increasing demand for this raw material from the construction and real estate sector is a burning issue not being addressed by regulatory agencies. ■

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India's river warriors



HIMANSHU THAKKAR

IT is an undeniable reality that our governments and society do not understand or appreciate the role that rivers play in our social, cultural, economic, ecological or aesthetic life. The state of India's degraded and degrading rivers, in spite of all the noise of conservation, protection and rejuvena-

emphasis has been on inspirational efforts and initiatives (campaigns, advocacy, legal discourse) and sustained passion to conserve rivers.

The first Bhagirath Prayas Samman was conferred at a glittering ceremony during India Rivers Week 2014 on 27 November at WWF-India on two individuals — Akhil Gogoi for his dedicated, valiant and untiring efforts to safeguard the integrity of the Subansiri river in Assam and Dr Latha Anantha for her efforts to restore the Chalakudy river in Kerala. An organisation, the Koel Karo Jan Sangathan for the Koel and Karo rivers in Jharkhand, was also honoured. Supreme Court Justice Madan Lokur presented the awards.

The Organising Committee decided to continue

district of Arunachal Pradesh. The land with seven rivers, home to the ethnic Monpa tribe, was of late being threatened by 15 proposed hydropower dams to develop 3,500 MW, the chief ones being the 600 MW Tawang 1, the 800 MW Tawang 2 and the 780 MW Nyamjangchhu projects.

Project clearances had been expedited at the cost of the social, cultural and environmental needs of the people and without any informed participation of the people. Buddhist lamas led the protests against the destructive projects under the SMRF to protect the river at great risk and repression. Lobsang Gyatso, General Secretary of SMRF, received the award on behalf of the federation.

The Sambhaav Trust received the award for their work in reviving the Nanduwal river in Alwar district of Rajasthan. A group of 17 villages decided to focus on conservation of forests, land, water and livestock, and through this effort rejuvenated the 22-km Nanduwal river, which was once dry. The work is ongoing for the last five years and is being sustained through the energy and enthusiasm of the people, without any funding. All decisions about the use of this collective resource are taken collectively.

Sachidanand Bharati of the Doodhatoli Lok Vikas Sansthan in Uttarakhand was awarded for his dedicated work in rejuvenating the Gad Ganga. Bharati, an eminent environmental crusader, organised women into groups of green police, the Mahila Mangal Dals. With three of his friends he formed the Doodhatoli Lok Vikas Sansthan which worked with the women to protect forests.

Bharati is a schoolteacher, based in Ufrainkhaal village in Pauri Garhwal district. His work involved harvesting rainwater through traditional structures, preventing soil erosion and regenerating forests on which the people of this region depend for their livelihood. The Gad Ganga river was revived with people's knowledge of traditional water management systems through construction of over 20,000 *chaals* and *khaals*.

Emmanuel Theophilus was awarded for his work in protecting the integrity of the Mahakali river in Uttarakhand. He had recently gone on an epic voyage along the Ganga, travelling nearly 2,000 kilometres of the river. He has worked on a report for SANDRP titled, "Headwater Extinctions", which looks at the impact of hydropower dams in the Upper Ganga and Beas basins on fish and riverine ecosystems.

Each of the recipients talked about their work and their emotions on being conferred the award in their brief acceptance speeches. Bharati invited all to come and see their work.

The India Rivers Week organisers would like to take the legacy of the Bhagirath Prayas Samman forward by honouring exemplary efforts for the cause of our rivers in the years to come.

But this can only be possible with help from all sections of society providing suggestions and inputs. Please do write in with your recommendations and nominations for future awards. ■

Himanshu Thakkar is with South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) Email: ht.sandrp@gmail.com



Emmanuel Theophilus, Lobsang Gyatso, Sachidanand Bharati and a representative of the Sambhaav Trust

tion over all these years, is possibly the biggest evidence of neglect.

In this bleak scenario, India Rivers Week was observed in November last year and again on 28 November this year to highlight the immense value that rivers hold for us and to push for a better state of our rivers.

It is also true that there are many individuals and institutes from government and non-government organisations, from media and academic circles, who are relentlessly working for the cause of rivers, some with success, many even without.

The Organising Committee of India Rivers Day 2014, comprising Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan, PEACE Institute, WWF-India, INTACH, Toxics Link and SANDRP, and chaired by the late Ramaswamy Iyer, decided to select some notable efforts and acknowledge their contribution through an award — the Bhagirath Prayas Samman.

Thus the Bhagirath Prayas Samman was constituted in 2014 to honour outstanding, sustained efforts and contributions of 'river warriors' towards the protection and conservation of rivers. The

the practice of giving the Bhagirath Prayas Samman Awards this year.

Nominations were invited from about 100 individuals and organisations working on river-related issues all over India, based on a set of criteria, including essential and desirable qualifications. A five-member jury, headed by well-known water expert and author Anupam Mishra of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, selected this year's winners based on their work for protecting and rejuvenating rivers.

Kapil Mishra, the Delhi government's water minister, gave away the 2015 Bhagirath Prayas Samman awards to the winners at a well-attended India Rivers Day function at INTACH in Delhi. A 1.5-minute audio-visual about the work of each recipient was screened before presenting the award — a plaque, a citation, a shawl and a cheque of ₹60,000.

The 2015 Bhagirath Prayas Samman awards were conferred on the following extraordinary individuals and organisations:

The Save Mon Region Federation (SMRF) for their exemplary work in safeguarding the integrity of the Tawang and Nyamjangchhu rivers in Tawang

LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA



An Off-Day Game: Five friends plan a day long drinking binge amidst the hubbub of an election

New films, new stories

Malayalam cinema back in the limelight

Saibal Chatterjee
Thiruvananthapuram

JAYARAJ is no neophyte. The 55-year-old is one of Kerala's most consistent film directors. He has been delivering critical and commercial winners for 25 years now.

His new film, *Ottal (The Trap)*, an evocative portrait of life and nature tempered with an acute, poignant awareness of all that is amiss in the world we live in, is proof that Jayaraj has lost none of his creative chutzpah.

Ottal, an adaptation of Anton Chekhov's 19th century short story 'Vanka', made a clean sweep of the jury and audience awards at the recently held 20th International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK).

"It is timelessness that makes a literary work a classic. Such a story could be placed in any social or cultural setting and it would still be relevant," the director says, explaining why he opted for the watery landscape of Kuttanad for the story of childhood defiled.

Earlier this year, *Ottal* won the National Award for the year's best film in the environment conservation category. But Jayaraj asserts that the film "is not only about drawing attention to an ecological threat".

He is right. *Ottal* explores the bond that an eight-year-old orphan has with his grandfather — and nature. The film is a touching account of how the protagonist, who works on a duck farm and revels in the freedom that childhood allows, eventually falls into a trap that he cannot break free from.

Nationally, Jayaraj has been a force to reckon with since 2000, the year he won the Golden Peacock at the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) for *Karunam* and the best film National Award for *Shantham*.

But does the world at large know of him and his work quite as well as it should? The answer is no.

Jayaraj's immensely successful career has in that sense mirrored the fate of Malayalam cinema of the last decade-and-a-half. While it has continued to be visible at the National Awards and at IFFI, it has largely stayed off the global radar.

Shaji N. Karun is the last of the Malayali directors to follow in the footsteps of G. Aravindan and Adoor Gopalakrishnan and make his presence felt

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in the world's major film festivals.

His all-conquering *Piravi* won the Camera d'Or — Special Mention at the 1989 Cannes Film Festival and the Grand Jury Prize at the Locarno International Film Festival.

In 1994, Shaji's *Swaham* made it to the main competition in Cannes, while his *Vanaprastham* (1999) was screened in the Un Certain Regard section of the world's premier film festival.

Since then Kerala has drawn a blank in Cannes, Venice, Berlin and Toronto. But the tide is beginning to turn, riding on a new breed of filmmakers in the state. The end of Malayalam cinema's protracted insularity may be nigh.

While *Ottal* pipped several strong international contenders to win IFFK's Suvarna Chakoram (Golden Crow Pheasant) trophy, several other Malayalam films in the festival's 2015 lineup provided a foretaste of what lies ahead for one of India's most cinema-literate states.

Indeed, winds of change are sweeping through Malayalam cinema. A talented crop of filmmakers is drawing inspiration from the past to make their way towards the future.

This isn't merely a case of one generation of filmmakers taking over from another. There is much more to the transition that is currently unfolding in Kerala, where active film societies breed constant visual and narrative experimentation.

At the 20th IFFK, three filmmakers — Sanal Kumar Sasidharan, 38, Salim Ahamed, 45, and Sidhartha Siva, 30 — stood out in the Malayalam Cinema Today section.

Sasidharan is a product of the state's thriving film society movement; Ahamed was a travel consultant and television channel creative director before making his first film; and Siva is the son of an acclaimed filmmaker, Kaviyoor Sivaprasad.

The films that each of these three men makes reflects his background. Sasidharan is given to formal and narrative experimentation. Ahamed tells stories culled from his immediate social environs. And Siva banks upon established cinematic tropes to address the questions the world around him poses.

Sasidharan's crowd-funded debut film, *Oralpokkam* (*Six Feet High*), which drew a link between reckless urban lifestyles and 2012's disastrous deluge in Uttarakhand, premiered at IFFK last year. It earned instant applause.

Oralpokkam, denied conventional distribution, crisscrossed the state in a *cinemavandi* (film vehicle) and had 100-plus screenings in colleges, libraries, markets, roadsides and any other public spaces that were available for setting up a projector and a screen.

The experiment harked back to that initiated by Malayali avant-garde filmmaker John Abraham's Odessa Collective, which in the 1970s and 1980s took the late director's *A Donkey in a Brahmin Village* and *Amma Ariyan* to viewers around the state.

Sasidharan's sophomore effort, *Ozhivu Divasathe Kali* (*An Off-Day Game*), a disturbing study of a society riven by the implacable divides of caste and class, was also picked by selectors for the 20th IFFK.

In style and substance, *An Off-Day Game* is a world apart from *Six Feet High*.

Kicking off amid a real-life by-election filmed cinema verite style, *An Off-Day Game*, adapted from a story by writer Unni R., veers off to an isolated loca-



Ain: a drama about a likeable and aimless Muslim youngster



Sanal Kumar Sasidharan



Salim Ahamed



Sidhartha Siva



Valiya Chirakulla Pakshikal: a film on the deadly spraying of endosulfan in Kasargod



Ottal explores the bond of an orphan with his grandfather and nature

tion where five friends plan a day-long drinking binge to get away from the political hubbub.

As the day progresses and tongues loosen, the sloshed men have a go at each other. What begins as playful banter steadily takes on deadly serious overtones as dormant hostilities bubble to the surface and trigger a shocking finale.

Structured as a series of long takes, with the last one running all of 53 minutes, which is half the film's duration, *An Off-Day Game* is an unflinching look at troubling male attitudes and class and caste prejudices so deeply entrenched that they are taken for granted.

"We went in without a formal screenplay," says Sasidharan. "The actors improvised their lines as the camera rolled and the scenes unfolded."

Sasidharan says: "We were together on location for 10 days and the actors interacted constantly with each other. The long climax was shot on the very last day after they had warmed up completely."

With the exception of theatre actress Abhija, who plays a woman hired to cook for the men, the actors

are all amateurs who are given the latitude to speak their own lines.

"I could not have made the film had the writer not given me the freedom to do what I wanted with his story," says Sasidharan, who attended the Film Bazaar in Goa this year (November 21-24) to make connections with international festival programmers and sales agents.

An Off-Day Game, which won IFFK's Fipresci Award for the best Malayalam film, deserves all the global exposure it can get.

It is one of the most powerful Indian films of recent times. It could, with a little help from the right quarters, put Malayalam cinema back on the world map.

It could achieve the kind of traction that Marathi films like *Killa* and *Court* and Hindi independent titles such as *Titli* and *Masaan* have enjoyed in recent times.

Salim Ahamed took recourse to his own set of innovations for *Pathemari* (*Sailing Boat*), his biggest film to date in terms of scale and ambition. It is a



Jayaraj's film *Ottal* made a clean sweep of the jury and audience awards at the IFFK

period drama that focusses on the travails of the Gulf Malayali.

Pathemari tells the tale of a migrant Everyman (played by megastar Mammooty) grappling with untold hardships in an alien land as he toils to give his family back home a better life.

Every time he comes home on vacation, the weary man wants to stay back for good but he is forced by circumstances to return.

Ahamed burst on to the Indian cinema scene in 2011 with *Adaminte Makan Abu* (*Abu, Son of Adam*), a film that bagged the National Award for the best film.

He followed it up two years later with another acclaimed film, *Kunjanathante Kada* (*Kunjanathan's Shop*), featuring Mammooty as a shopkeeper who refuses to vacate his small premises when the government draws up a plan to build a road through a small town.

Pathemari, Ahamed's third film, recounts the 50-year history of Malayali migration to the Gulf. "The exodus began in the 1960s and many of the early migrants are still alive. We spoke to some of them to frame the story of *Pathemari*," says Ahamed.

The film, which tasted box-office success when it was released earlier this year, bridges the gap between art and commerce in a way that few Malayalam films manage to do these days.

Kunjanathante Kada, despite the presence of Mammooty in the cast, did not enjoy as much commercial traction as *Pathemari*, which strikes a fine balance between restrained drama and social realism.

Pathemari was filmed over a period of one year and six separate schedules, with each depicting a different time frame. That apart, Ahamed used four separate houses to stand in for the same abode, but at different points in the lives of the inmates.

Sidhartha Siva was in IFFK with his third film, *Ain* (*The Eye*). It is a drama about a likeable but naïve and aimless Muslim youngster in north Kerala who does odd jobs, including that of a butcher, to survive.

Among other things, he is drawn by the blurry videos of ISIS executions that his friends share with him.

He witnesses a gruesome political murder and is

forced to flee to Mangalore to get out of harm's way. There, he chances upon a young widow, Saira, whose plight teaches him to see life and its challenges in a new light.

Siva's maiden venture, *101 Chodyangal* (2012), besides bagging the National Award for the best debut film, won the audience award at the 18th IFFK. It views industrial unrest, retrenchment and the education system through the eyes of an inquisitive schoolboy.

His second film, *Zahir*, a dark exploration of sexual violence and its chilling effect on its victims, travelled to the Busan International Film Festival in South Korea.

The critical acclaim garnered by these films is significant in the light of the fact that Malayalam cinema, once regarded as a force to reckon with, needs to claw back into the global spotlight and revive the glory days of John Abraham and G. Aravindan.

With the internationally celebrated Adoor Gopalakrishnan slowing down, Malayalam cinema has lost some of its momentum. Says columnist and Gopalakrishnan's long-time assistant director, Meera Sahib: "A large majority of films in Kerala are today made not by the directors but by the stars."

Many of the directors who appeared on the scene after Gopalakrishnan made a name for himself — the likes of MP Sukumaran Nair, KR Mohanan, Lenin Rajendran, TV Chandran and Shyamaprasad — continue to labour on. But the superstars, notably Mohanlal and Mammooty, call the shots in the Kerala film industry.

This isn't merely a case of one generation of filmmakers taking over from another. There is much more to the transition that is currently unfolding in Kerala.

The Kerala State Film Development Corporation (KSFD) has state-run theatres in every major town of Kerala and these are used to screen small, independent films that cannot break into the mainstream exhibition system. But the support extended by these halls has proven inadequate.

Many allege that the network of distributors and exhibitors in the state today is a mafia. "In the 1970s," Meera Sahib recalls, "Adoor's *Kodiyettam* ran for 115 days in a Trivandrum theatre. That is unimaginable today."

Says Jayaraj: "Despite the critical acclaim and national and Kerala state awards that the film won, *Ottal* managed to get only two screenings at KSFD theatres."

Pretty much the same fate has befallen Dr. Biju's critically lauded *Valiya Chirakulla Pakshikal* (*Birds with Large Wings*), a film that documents the ill effects that the spraying of endosulfan on cashew plantations has had on the people and environment of Kasargod.

When screened at IFFK, it drew full houses, but the popular response to its public screenings — the film was commercially released on the very day that the festival opened — was dampening.

The plight of *Ain* was only marginally better. The film managed only four shows a day in a couple of KSFD theatres because its release coincided with that of the big-budget Tamil adventure fantasy, *Puli*. So the private theatres in the state were not interested in blocking screens for *Ain*.

Siva, in a sarcastic Facebook post, took a swipe at the system by thanking those who had managed to catch his film in the limited period that it was allowed to run in the theatres.

As things stand, alternative methods and approaches are the only way forward. Sasidharan has tried it out with some success. And so has Sajin Baabu, whose first film, *Asthavayam Vare* (*Unto the Dusk*), impressed audiences at last year's IFFK. The young director's second film is now in pre-production.

With the advent of rebels like Sasidharan, Ahamed, Siva and Baabu, true-blue cinematic auteurs are beginning to find their feet again. Creating and expanding the ground to run on will be the big challenge up ahead. ■

The story of public sector banks

Subir Roy
Kolkata

IT is in the course of a remarkable career that DN Ghosh has served in the civil service, public sector and private sector. He played a key role in seeing through bank nationalisation and setting up the new department of banking thereafter. Then, as Chairman of the State Bank of India (SBI), he set it on a new course. Finally, in his post-retirement years, he took to the private sector with aplomb, as a combative Chairman of Larsen & Toubro and a builder of several institutions. At 87, he is still active, as Chairman of Peerless Hospital, trying to give private healthcare a different shape. He spoke to *Civil Society* about his book and the changing times it reflects.

Was there any special provocation that made you pen your memoirs?

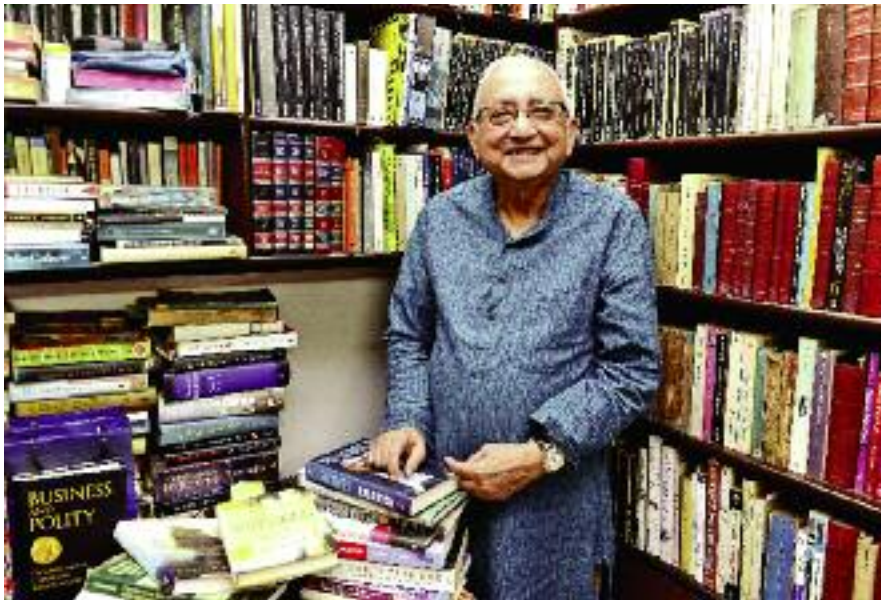
I did it with a sense of responsibility which came from the sad feeling that arose when I found that the official history of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has just three sentences on the bank nationalisation of 1969, the major event in Indian banking in the post-Independence era. I then decided to tell the story. It now covers 13 chapters in my book! I have brought out in detail what was hitherto not known. In our country, we are not good at writing the history of institutions we create. But that is necessary and for it we need two things — an archival policy in both the public and private sectors, and as many memoirs as possible by the key players. I don't mean a self-serving account of the role the person played but an honest and transparent account of what took place behind the scenes.

What does being honest and transparent in memoirs entail?

Take the case of R.K. Talwar, the revered Chairman of the State Bank of India who played such an important role in shaping it. While acknowledging this, it was also necessary to note how he had made endless personal trips to Puducherry to meet the Mother and the unfavourable publicity that was created when this became known. Also the fact that when bank nationalisation came he had no thoughts on what kind of role the SBI could play in the new context. In fact, the leadership role that the SBI took in relation to the development of public sector banks as a whole was thrust on it by the new banking department.

Can you highlight the key elements of the early period of nationalisation that you have revealed?

There are three elements in it. One, the actual dramatic process of legislating the nationalisation of 14 banks, beginning with preparing the ordinance which came 24 hours before the Bill. Two, how the legislation had to be modified in the light of the Supreme Court's review of it, creating a small sense of personal vindication. If the sense of us who had done the spadework had prevailed, the modifications would have been unnecessary. Three, the way the new banking policy evolved — taking forward the act of nationalisation. It is remarkable how a half-baked idea of Asok Mitra led to the differential rate



DN Ghosh at his home in Kolkata

of interest scheme and the political need to come up with something just before the Faridabad session of the Congress led to a buried idea of D.R. Gadgil being dug up to emerge as the lead bank programme.

If you had to face the issue of bank nationalisation today, would you still go for it?

It depends on the historical context. There was economic stagnation in India for a decade and tremendous unmet demand for bank credit. The number of borrowal accounts actually went down over the Sixties. It was the cooperative sector that carried the can for agricultural lending and the RBI became the lender of the first resort, footing nearly 75 per cent of the bill for cooperative financing. Commercial banks were nowhere in the picture. Two-thirds of their lending was to trade and the RBI was trying to get them to lend more to industry. When the Green Revolution came in the late Sixties the need for financing agriculture became even greater so as to procure fertilisers, buy tractors, agricultural implements, etc. There was an ideological divide with commercial banks not seeing themselves as a source of agriculture finance. There was a critical need to correct the imbalance of credit distribution which bank nationalisation addressed. But I would not recommend the same action in today's context.



No Regrets
D.N. Ghosh
Rupa Publications
₹ 695

What is your sense of how nationalised banks are being run today?

Just after bank nationalisation there was tremendous pressure to change all the chairmen which we in the banking department resisted. We were for individual banks developing according to their own ethos which we felt should survive. But things have changed today. I feel public sector banks are an instrument which the State should have for use in case of national need; for example, at a time of war or currency crisis or national emergency. But you need to avoid day-to-day interference. I

PRASANTA BISWAS

worked for bank nationalisation but, as the book will tell you, as Chairman of SBI, I resisted attempts by Janardhan Poojary when he was minister for banking to make the bank serve his political agenda.

How do you look back at what was perhaps the most dramatic episode in your encounter with the private sector when, as Chairman of Larsen & Toubro, you had a run-in with the Ambanis?

All I can do is tell you what an official of L&T called to say after he read the book. He had made photocopies of the relevant parts and distributed it to his current colleagues. He told me, "We always talk about this period. We at L&T

are what we are today because of the foundation you laid." I am not surprised as he was the one who, at that time, when the AGM was in progress and there was a deafening concentrated noise shouting me down, came forward and gave an impassioned speech asking why there was a move to disturb the Chairman. After that all the noise died down.

What was the most memorable thing that happened in the State Bank of India during your chairmanship?

I found efficiency of banking transactions was low and perfunctory moves on computerisation were taking us nowhere. Frustrated, I decided to open negotiations with our own federation. They were protracted but positive in their approach. Eventually, in return for a free hand in the management on computerisation, they asked for an advance increment to carry their members with them. We agreed. But the bank had to make a reference to the government before signing the agreement. One increment was a small price to pay for the revolutionary changes that would follow computerisation. But if I sought the government's prior approval, the agreement would be a dead letter. However, once the agreement became a *fait accompli*, the government would find retraction impossible. I decided the risk was worth taking and we signed the agreement. It was finally executed after my tenure but the SBI had to go through fire before things settled down. ■

SUSHEELA NAIR



The fishing harbour at Bhatkal

Drive down the Karavalli coast

Susheela Nair
Karavalli

IF you are aspiring for a sun-soaked holiday this winter, follow the sapphire route on National Highway 17 along Karnataka's Karavalli coast, home to India's best beach and temple country. Flanked by the soaring Western Ghats on the east and pounded by the Arabian Sea on the west, the Karavalli is one of the most picturesque routes in the south.

What makes this coastal sojourn unique is the perennial sight of the deep blue sea. Karavalli's medley of a myriad sights and experiences includes palm-fringed beaches, lush green fields swaying in the gentle breeze, forests and rivers, and tile-roof houses, all with the distant roar of the Arabian Sea for company.

You can experience solitude on a quiet beach or the thrills of snorkelling and scuba diving; watch dolphins cavorting in the high seas; or explore bustling temple towns echoing with evening prayers in coastal Karnataka.

You can embark on your 320-km coastal sojourn from Mangalore in the south and end with Karwar in the north.

Ensnconed on the estuary of the Netravati and Gurgur rivers, this coastal town has plentiful treats such as the ancient Mangaladevi temple, the 11th-century Kadri Manjunatha Temple enshrining the exquisite bronze images of Lokeshwara of AD 968, cobra statues and the seven-headed Adishesan, the St Aloysius Church, the impressive Shreemanthi Bai Memorial Government Museum, the Sultan's Battery, and more. Among the more remarkable

mosques are the ancient Jumma Masjid and the Idgah Mosque.

After having your fill of the city sights, head out to Ullal Beach, also known for the 19th-century *dargah* with onion domes housing the tomb of the saint, Syed Mohammed Shareeful Madani. Close by is Someshwar Beach with the Shiva Temple overlooking a rocky promontory.

While driving down to Udupi, you can stop by Kaup, the next halt on the coastal itinerary. Kaup (known locally as Kapu) has a ruined fort, some temples, Jain *basadis* in ruins and an old, 100-foot lighthouse. For a break in the coastal journey, stop by the Vaishnavite pilgrimage town of Udupi, renowned for its Krishna Temple and various *mutts*. It is one of the seven sacred sites of the Tulu region. At the centre is Car Street, with the Krishna Temple and eight monasteries.

From Udupi, it is a pleasant four-kilometre drive to Malpe where you can visit its picturesque beach, natural harbour, the Balarama Temple and Malpe's oldest tile factory, set up by the Basel Mission. From Malpe harbour, take a 30-minute boat ride to St. Mary's Islands to see the unique basalt rock formations protruding out of the Arabian Sea.

As you drive up north along the coastal road to Maravanthe, 50 km from Udupi en route is Kundapur, a small port with a 16th-century Portuguese fort and lovely beaches. The road lies between two stretches of water – of the sea and the Suparnika river — with the picturesque Kodachadri Hills in the background. The next halt on the coastal itinerary is Ottinane, a few kilometres beyond Baindur on the highway. The hillock offers a stunning view of the confluence of the Arabian

Sea and the Baindur river.

You can stop by Bhatkal, 16 km before Murudeshwar, to explore the erstwhile trading port of the Vijayanagar Empire and the two interesting temples — the Jain Chadranatha Basadi and a 17th-century Vijayanagar temple with animal carvings typical of the Vijayanagar artisans — and the 42 mosques. From the lighthouse get a fabulous view of the fishing wharf and endless stretches of virgin beaches.

From Bhatkal, Murudeshwar is just a 14-km drive. Located on the main Mangalore-Karwar highway, Murudeshwar's principal allure for visitors are its beaches, the tallest Shiva statue in India and the Shiva Temple built with Chalukya and Kadamba sculptures in the Dravidian style of architecture. If you want to experience the marvellous underwater world, head to Nethrani Island to indulge in scuba diving and snorkeling.

If you prefer a beach with a religious flavour, head to Gokarna, a favourite with Hindu pilgrims, Sanskrit pandits, and an alternative hideaway for the beach buffs of Goa. The drive up the winding path leading to Gokarna is enchanting. A charming little town with temples, a wide expanse of beach, two principal streets and clusters of traditional tile-roofed brick houses,

Gokarna is also an important centre of Sanskrit learning. It is home to the ancient temple of Mahabaleshwara with its Atmalinga, the Venkatramana Temple, the Ganapati Temple, and the Koti Theertha, a large temple tank where pilgrims perform their ablutions. Om beach, one of Gokarna's five famed beaches, takes the shape of an 'Om'. A promontory breaks from the coastline, dividing the beach into two semi-circular halves resembling the letter 'Om'. The other beaches, wedged between gigantic cliffs that protrude like delicate fingers into the sea, are Gokarna, Kudle, Half Moon, and Paradise.

Culminate your coastal sojourn at Karwar. Apart from the excellent harbour, Tagore Beach, and the usually deserted Binaga and Arga Beaches, Karwar bay has much more to offer. The Sadashivgad Hill Fort with a Durga Temple, the unique octagonal Roman Catholic church in Kadwad village, the 300-year-old Venkatrama Temple with ochre paintings, and the Naganatha Temple, where an ant hill is worshipped, and the famous *dargah* of Pir Shan Shamsuddin Kharobat, a Baghdadi saint, are some of the must-see attractions. A short boat ride away you'll find the excellent Devbagh Beach Resort and five idyllic islands.

Try Karavalli's excellent cuisine which includes *patrode*, a special dish prepared by steaming stuffed colocasia leaves, *kori roti* and chicken curry and the *kane* fry (ladyfish), various rice-based dishes and pancakes which are perennial favourites. Don't miss the ubiquitous *masala dosa* which has its origins in Udupi, and a whole school of South Indian cuisine which takes its name from this town. Travelling down the coast, these are some of the delights that spike your experience of the sand and sea. ■

FACT FILE

Route: Mangalore-Ullal-Kaup-Malpe-Udupi-St. Mary's Island-Manipal-Kundapur-Maravanthe-Ottinane-Bhatkal-Murudeshwar-Gokarna-Karwar.

Accommodation options: All categories of accommodation and eateries are available.

Best season is from September to February.

Jutti joy

SATYA Narain Dayal from Patiala has received a national award for his *tilla juttis*. The *jutti* is North India's famed slipper. The traditional one had an upturned toe. But in recent years these slippers have undergone a sea change. They have become stylish and comfy. *Juttis* are now made in many shapes, sizes, colours and designs and you can buy a pair to match your outfit.

In winter *juttis* can keep your feet warm. They are easy to slip into even with thick socks. Dayal has also invented *juttis* with a strap at the back that can be tucked under the sole of the slipper. He calls it the 'backless' *jutti*.

He says *juttis* have been popularised by the Hindi and Punjabi film industries.

The leading lady invariably wears a designer pair to match her *salwar-kurta* outfit. The slippers are often embroidered with gold and silver threads so they are in demand during the wedding season, says Dayal. He also exports his slippers to countries in the Gulf.

Dayal says women in villages near Patiala embroider these slippers and the soles are made by men. The slippers are made wholly of leather. They are waterproof and washable and reasonably priced. Dayal took part in Dilli Haat's exhibition on master craftsmen in December and his stall attracted several buyers. ■



PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA

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Art house

AAKRITI Art Creations comprises a group of talented artists brought together by Suman Sonthalia, a national award winner in Warli art. Aakriti manufactures products made of clay, wood and terracotta. Each product is painted with a variety of tribal art forms – Madhubani from Bihar, Warli from Maharashtra and Dhokra from Chhattisgarh. Mostly household and decorative products are made. There are lampshades and lamps, vases, wall clocks, *masala* boxes, tableware, photo-frames, lanterns, trays and coasters. For as little as ₹1,500 you can get your nameplate specially made for your front door. All of Aakriti's products are very neat and painted in delicate colours and designs.

Aakriti has a workshop in Ghaziabad. The basic designs are outsourced to potters in the locality and those who do wood work. Needy women from slums have been formed into self-help groups and trained to paint. Around 100 people now work for this group of artists. You can buy Aakriti's products from their website. ■

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