

Civil Society



IS AAP THE FUTURE?



‘NO ROOM FOR COMPLACENCY ON NUTRITION’

Dr Srinath Reddy on new data and the need to know more

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IS AAP THE FUTURE?

An innovative campaign has given the young party a record mandate. But whether it will change politics forever and raise the bar for other parties will depend on what it does in government.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

AAP, them and us

THE landslide victory of the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi should be celebrated because it has shown the established parties how badly they can be dumped by voters. Availability of alternatives and exercise of choice keep democracy ticking. What we have witnessed in Delhi is an “AAP and them” situation. People were fed up with the older parties and AAP was in the right place at the right time and saying the right things. Now comes the difficult part. AAP will have to stop playing the perfect suitor and learn to perform in office.

The AAP government has its work cut out for it. Education, healthcare, transportation, pollution, water, housing.... The government will be judged by its vision, its ability to fashion a blueprint for a modern and inclusive city. It will be known by the choices it makes. For instance, is it a good thing to do away with environmental clearances or to make the pollution board work smarter and harder? Should a new thermal power plant be planned or renewable energy encouraged? Should water be given free or priced — its quality improved and supply regulated? Is it enough to have more hospitals or should we also take the longer road to better health with cleanliness, sewer connections, toilets and housing?

AAP will be called upon to put its popularity to test by carrying people along on decisions which aren't popular but needed. Both rich and poor have elected AAP and so with it rests the responsibility of ensuring equal access through better understanding. AAP should build the social bridges we lack and in doing so strengthen and deepen democracy. It is uniquely placed to promote fraternity and, though in politics, expectations are that it will go beyond the narrow gains of politics.

Our opening interview with Dr Srinath Reddy looks at India's nutrition figures. Has the number of malnourished children actually gone down as much as a survey suggests? Or are we being bedevilled here by data that does not tell us enough? The lack of quality and timely data across sectors remains a serious problem in India. In healthcare, not knowing where we stand is costly in terms of the health of future generations. India's poor scorecard on nutrition is particularly worrisome and leaves no room for complacency.

With all the talk about garbage removal and cleanliness, we thought we would take a look at waste-to-energy initiatives. A business coming up in Bengaluru will collect organic wastes from hotels and restaurants and convert it into compressed biogas. It will reduce the pressure on the city's landfill sites. A greater use of waste for energy is called for. There is scope to learn from other countries like Sweden and Finland, which have successfully cleaned up their cities and dealt with pollution. The concern over garbage in India should go beyond wielding brooms to civic management systems that do away with centralised disposal. It will lead to cleaner streets and a reduction in the use of landfills.

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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



class has viewed such migration as a problem. The problem really is the lack of cheap rented accommodation. Low-cost housing, inexpensive courses for skill development and more job opportunities can help migration and keep the city tidier.

Mishima Dubey

Coal ordinance

This is with reference to Rajiv Kumar's article on the flaws of the coal ordinance. Hopefully, these and other concerns will be addressed in the Bill to replace the ordinance, after due consultations with stakeholders.

Ravindra Mathur

Impact

I subscribed to your magazine last year after picking it up from a friend's place to read while waiting for him. You are doing great work. All my clients are from the US and UK. I work with them day and night. The difference your magazine has made is that today I look at people and our society in a different way. Whatever work I do internationally, your magazine keeps me grounded and closer to our Indian society. Thanks for doing a wonderful job.

Yogesh Gupta

Sheroes Café

Your photo feature, 'Coffee for the spirit', was such an inspiring story. Many thanks to the reporter-photographer and to *Civil Society* for highlighting meaningful and important stories like this one.

Deepti

LETTERS



light the enterprising Kunbi people and the sad situation they live in. They must surely be provided basic facilities. It is shocking that they need to walk 20-50 km to catch a bus or visit a hospital in this day and age.

Melroy Fernandes

It is good that tubers are getting the attention they deserve. Some tubers can even be cultivated in grow bags. By using this method I have cultivated elephant foot yam and greater yams (*Dioscorea alata*). Research institutions are working in a closed-door manner.

They should be much more open to public participation and have a contact centre where people can come and interact with them.

Dr KS Bhat

Wonderful story. Can anyone promote Joida's tubers across the country? For the benefit of the Kunbi community?

Raghu Ram

Very interesting to learn that there is still great potential in rural and tribal agriculture in India, waiting to be tapped. The Kunbis can be properly guided by our scientists to earn more from value-added products derived from their tubers.

Dr KH Pujari

Urban migration

Your interview with Prof. Amitabh Kundu on the downside of rural to urban migration slowing down was an eye-opener. For long, the middle

Tuber trail

Your cover story, 'On the tuber trail', was very informative. It told us a lot about tubers and their uses. But the striking reality of the story is the neglect of our rural folk by successive governments. Not only is this pathetic, it is the tragedy of our country. Governments spend so much on urban dwellers, unwanted projects, installation of statues and so on but they have no funds to provide even basic necessities to hamlets like Joida. The Kunbis do a lot of hard work and manage to earn a skimpy livelihood. I sincerely hope they receive the right guidance, do not get lured by the prospect of high prices and then fall prey to pesticides and chemical fertilisers to make their tubers look attractive.

MS Rao

Thanks very much for bringing to

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'Even with better nutrition

AJIT KRISHNA

INTERVIEW

Dr Srinath Reddy

Civil Society News
New Delhi

INDIA's inability to radically improve its health indicators for women and children has been of deep concern. But new data in the Global Nutrition Report released on 4 February indicates positive trends.

The report says stunting of children below five years of age has reduced from 47.9 per cent to 38.8 per cent in eight years. In Maharashtra stunting has gone from 36.5 to 24 per cent in seven years. The nationwide figure for underweight children under three is 27 per cent, down from 43 per cent. Exclusive breastfeeding has gone up from 46.4 per cent to 71.6 per cent.

The report was released by the International Food Policy Research institute (IFPRI) and quotes data from a 2013-2014 Rapid Survey on Children by the Ministry of Women and Child Development with UNICEF of all 29 states in India. The UN has also cited the data in a recent report.

So, is a turnaround finally happening? Or is there much more that needs to be known about the figures before celebrations begin? An accurate picture can emerge only when the disaggregated data are made available and there are no signs of that just yet.

Civil Society spoke to Dr Srinath Reddy, President of the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), on how he sees the new figures.

What new information do we get on the status of nutrition from this report?

As far as India is concerned we have information from multiple sources, some of which has been captured in the Global Nutrition Report. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) of 2007 vintage said that 43 per cent of Indian children under five were underweight and that no substantial improvement had taken place. Thirteen states were actually doing worse.

In 2011, the Nandi Foundation carried out the Hungama survey which came up with similar findings. The then Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, described malnutrition as a 'national shame'. These are the data currently available in the public domain.

In Maharashtra, a separate survey showed a fairly substantial improvement in levels of malnutrition over the last seven or eight years. Odisha also showed improvement. But at the national level we do not have data comparable to the NFHS survey. The next round of the NFHS is currently on.

The results of the Rapid Survey on Children undertaken by UNICEF and the Ministry of Women and Child Development (quoted in the Global Nutrition Report) are not in the public domain as yet.

The Rapid Survey says we have come down to 27 per cent (from 43 per cent). If that is so, it is cause



Dr Srinath Reddy: 'Even 27 per cent of underweight children is much too high'

'In Maharashtra, a survey showed fairly substantial improvement in levels of malnutrition over the last 7-8 years. Odisha also showed improvement.'

for celebration.

A report released by the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on 4 February under the auspices of UNDP quotes 27 per cent too. The figure is not from the Government of India (GoI), but has been officially released by UNICEF. If UNDP is quoting it from a sister agency, then one has to take it as reasonably authenticated from the survey results. Whether they are fully valid depends on the methodology of the survey which has to be shared. But if that is so then there has been a fair amount of improvement.

What implications does this have on our strategy

to combat malnutrition?

Even 27 per cent is far too high, compared to countries in our neighbourhood and in sub-Saharan African countries. The NFHS data states about 25 per cent of India's children are born with low birth weight. By the age of three, 43 per cent are underweight and 66 per cent are anaemic.

But in terms of this report and what it tells us, you are happy that the figures have improved?

Well, they need to be verified. First, we have to see whether the survey methods are comparable. One of the big messages that came out of the Global Nutrition Report is that people know there are

we can't be complacent'

problems and there are solutions. But people are unaware of what the dimensions of the problem are and what the impact of programmes is in the absence of data. Therefore, you need more representative and valid data.

How uniform is data across the country?

I think that question should be put to the people who did the study. Unless the data is in the public domain, one cannot really comment on it. UNICEF swears by it. The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development, who commissioned the study, is at the moment reluctant to release the data. So there is no ownership of the data within the ministry now.

We need the data in the public domain to critique it. Otherwise, the data will get disseminated, anyway, by word of mouth and then we will feel we have achieved a lot by reducing it from 43 per cent to 27 per cent.

If the data is genuine we can feel satisfied but not complacent. Let's not befool ourselves into believing we have done something wonderful when the problem is still of a very high magnitude. We need this data in the public domain to scrutinise it, for critical appraisal and appropriate interpretation to guide policy and programmes.

It is not easy to do a representative study in a country of 1.2 billion people. The Hungama study was supposed to be a representative study but no study can be.

As public health policy persons, we want disaggregated data since we want to know what is happening in each region, income, class, gender, caste.

All of these are important but the moment you start getting into smaller and smaller cells, obviously the confidence intervals across those cells in statistical terms grows. Therefore, the precision of estimates actually diminishes.

You are unsure what you are dealing with. We are talking about 27 per cent but what is happening in each of the states, at least in terms of gender if not of social class? These are some questions we need to be asking.

The other big question is that the NFHS is done every seven years. Of what use is it then? We need much more frequently done surveys. We need real time data collection.

How can we collect data so fast?

That problem can be easily solved. We boast of our IT strength. If our primary health services were fairly good, if children were being followed up by *anganwadi* workers, is it so difficult to get data for a three-year-old or five-year-old? And with our IT capability, should it not be real time data transmission?

That again shows the weaknesses of our health system, especially our inadequate primary health services which are meant to provide services and gather information with ease. There is disconnect between programmes with ministries at different levels. The National Rural Health Mission is with the health ministry and child nutrition with the Union Ministry for Women and Child Development. There is no integration of functions.

How much does the government facilitate objective evaluation of its own programmes?

One of the major problems in the past has been the reluctance of the government to seriously and systematically evaluate its programmes. It has been undertaken patchily by some academic research groups, or by funding agencies. Partly, government agencies are reluctant because they believe most of this evaluation is unrealistic or too late in the day. Partly, they feel evaluation of the reality of the ground situation is not understood by academics who parachute in to do an evaluation. They also feel the evaluation is done after the programme has

'The other big question is that the NFHS is done every seven years. Of what use is it then? We need frequently done surveys. We need real time data collection.'

been computed or substantially advanced so all this criticism comes too late in the day.

So how should the government go about doing evaluation?

There are solutions. First, we do require well-structured evaluation to be decided ahead, even as the programme is starting to be rolled out so that we know the metrics that are needed.

We also need to take into consideration the variables in the field and consider how we adjust for all of those in terms of evaluation of the programme. A robust evaluation design can easily be designed. It need not be complicated and it certainly should not have exhaustive questionnaires. It should have process indicators and outcome indicators. Often we get satisfied with process indicators — so many activities have been conducted — but we don't look at the outcome. Outcome is much more important.

We need two types of evaluation, what is called embedded evaluation. Mobilise technically competent teams from medical colleges, universities, or institutions and link them to the programme. They can conduct online evaluation alongside programme managers who have been trained in evaluation methodology.

You can then do mid-course correction as you move along.

The challenge is objectivity. An independent agency can be brought in to also evaluate the programme. That way you get the correct picture.

How important is it for the government to evaluate its programmes?

The complaint earlier in the Planning Commission, and I am sure the NITI Aayog will look into this, was that government programmes were not being properly evaluated. After all, so much money was going into them. Yet they have not been achieving the desired

outcomes. What is going wrong? Where is it going wrong? These are questions that should be asked.

On the other hand, there are states that are achieving results. What is it that they are doing right? There is good learning either way so evaluation is absolutely critical.

Now we know that health system evaluation is not just about throwing questions at the wind. It's mixed methods research. You have to undertake quantitative surveys and qualitative research that engages multiple stakeholders: the beneficiaries, the intermediaries, the implementation, policymakers and programme managers. You have to gather multiple sources of information and put it together to say how the programme functioned, what its outcomes were and where the barriers were.

This knowledge is advancing rapidly. An implementation science consisting of measurement and evaluation is coming into its own. A whole new field of turning knowledge into action is taking shape.

Has there been any government investment in evaluation?

We need scale and excellence and not trickles of information. We run a training programme on evaluation and measurement with the University of North Carolina. We train people in India and South Asia. We do need a much greater build-up of this competency in academic institutions and within health systems.

There is no reason why a health systems manager should not understand the dynamics of monitoring and evaluation.

How much of this deficiency is due to lack of human resources?

That is a big problem. The teaching colleges, barring a few, have deteriorated. The standard of education, even in universities, has fallen. The nutrition departments in most universities produce mostly dietitians who do dietary consulting for individual clients, rather than produce good nutrition science that can be built into policy. So this link is not happening. We need to set right our course coordinates in existing institutions.

But one of the biggest missing elements is the lack of multi-disciplinaries or trans-disciplinaries. In medical colleges, what passes off as health training is doctors teaching doctors. You don't have nutritionists, health economists, social behaviour scientists, management experts and sometimes you don't have people with in-depth knowledge of epidemiology.

If the medical council insists on doctors being only employed as faculty and only doctors being trained as post-graduate students, you are not going to get multi-disciplinary. There are no cross appointments in universities. In the absence of multi-disciplinaries you will not get good programme science, implementation research, or monitoring and evaluation systems.

Universities should break the mould and think more in terms of multi-disciplinaries and problem-solving research. After all, they have a societal obligation that they should fulfil. They need to identify major challenges to our development and say, okay, we will find solutions. ■

Primary health gets cheaper in

Subir Roy
Kolkata

THE Rural Health Care Foundation (RHCF), which runs 10 primary healthcare centres — five each in urban and rural areas in West Bengal — differs from many efforts to help the poor get healthcare in one crucial way. It is financially almost self-supporting. If the holy grail you are looking for is a business model for delivering healthcare to the poor in an almost (though not entirely) self-financing way then this is probably the closest you can get.

In a rural centre, an allopathy patient pays ₹60 (for homoeopathy it is ₹40) to register and gets diagnosis, largely through clinical examination, and free medicine for a week. In an urban centre, the patient pays ₹20 onwards as there are sponsors who chip in financially. Anant Nevatia, 50, president of the board of trustees for the foundation, recalls the answer he gave to an overseas audience which asked him to outline his vision: “Go out of business. We would not be trying to deliver healthcare to the poor if the government were doing its job well.”

Last year RHCF treated 860,000 people, among whom 530,000 were general allopathy patients and 70,000 general homoeopathy patients; 200,000 received ophthalmic care and 60,000 dental care. The centres together spent ₹98 lakh and earned an income from patients of ₹94 lakh. So that is a working expenses deficit of just four per cent.

The foundation's rural health centre has four doctors and six support staff and runs six days a week. Urban centres are served by part-time doctors. As to how he is able to motivate doctors to work at less than they would earn through private practice, Nevatia says, “I don't get good doctors, I get doctors. I just say they are MBBS.” Good doctor or bad, a rural health centre gets an average of 800 patients per day and an urban centre 200. Overall, 60 per cent are repeat patients.

While the poor pay most of the cost of consultation, the ultimate takeaway for them is the free medicine. The foundation stocks around 160 medicines (the national list of essential medicines consists of 348). How the foundation manages to provide this is the most fascinating part of its story and in narrating this Nevatia comes out with rare insights on the way the modern pharmaceutical industry works.

The foundation is able to get crucial generic medicines at 40-80 per cent discount. A 2013 Indian Institute of Management, Bengaluru case study on the foundation gives the following prices for key medicine packs of 10 tablets each — Ciprofloxacin (a widely used antibiotic) 500 mg, retail price ₹97, Jan Aushadhi (Government of India low-cost stores) price ₹21.50, bulk purchase price ₹13, near-expiry purchase price ₹6.50; paracetamol 500 mg, retail price ₹13.56, Jan Aushadhi price ₹2.45, bulk purchase price ₹2.10, near-expiry purchase price ₹1.

Pharmaceutical companies are naturally willing to sell medicines at a massive discount near the expiry date as post-expiry they will have to be destroyed. RHCF is able to distribute them quickly as patients queue before their centres every day and



Patients line up at Rural Health Care Foundation's centre in Kolkata

the medicines, which constitute seven days' supply, are consumed immediately as that is the only medicine the poor can get.

Another reason why pharma companies are willing to sell medicines dirt-cheap close to expiry is that there is a cost to having to take back expired medicines through the distribution chain and an additional cost to destroy them. “If pharma can come forward and say, under CSR we will donate all medicines with six months' life then the problem of sourcing medicines for the poor in the country will be solved,” Nevatia asserts dramatically.

Medicines are bought dirt-cheap from pharma companies close to expiry date so patients end up paying very little for essential drugs.

But what is most fascinating is his take on the expiry date for medicines. These, he says, have been going down over the last few decades because of the deliberate marketing policy of pharmaceutical companies. He refers to a US Food and Drug Administration analysis of some medicines recovered from a World War II camp which found that they had retained 90 per cent of their efficacy even after 50 years. The medicines that the foundation distributes obviously work or the patients would not be coming back, not with the local quacks waiting to pounce on any adverse development involving the care delivered by the foundation.

What RHCF has to be careful about is not procuring spurious or sub-standard medicines in the first place. And they do exist in India. It has shortlisted around 50 manufacturers of generics whose quality is known to be sound and Nevatia is ready with a list of geographies in the country whose manufacturers are to be avoided. Perhaps inevitably, they are all part of the BIMARU states.

Doctors at the foundation's centre rely mostly on their own clinical skills to arrive at their diagnosis. For unavoidable diagnostic tests, the foundation has arrangements with some local diagnostic laboratories which are able to give a discount “as we do not charge a commission for referring patients to them. This can work out to 40-80 per cent of rates ordinarily charged,” says Nevatia.

For cataract operations the foundation sends its patients (around 150 a month) to two hospitals run by the Rotary chain near the foundation's centres. The job of selecting the patients and preparing them for the operation, including conducting the diagnostic tests, is done by the foundation. The operation and post-operative care is provided by the Rotary hospitals.

The foundation does not refer patients to private centres for secondary or tertiary care as, in Nevatia's view, there are hardly any willing to offer care for less than what they seek to charge commercially. He also does not want the foundation to become a ‘catchment area’ for patients for the private sector.

Anant and younger brother Arun started on this journey in 2007 with a one-day clinic in Mayapur in Nadia district. Soon it became a weekly and then a weekend clinic. Arun, who started RHCF in 2009, passed away a couple of years ago. Anant, who was a builder, sold his business in 2006, created a corpus and is now continuing the work.

Kolkata

PRASANTA BISWAS

AJIT KRISHNA



Anant Nevatia

He is a bit cagey about expansion and has clear ideas on how to go forward. "We are expanding by replication," guided in no small way by the experiences of other NGOs who tried to offer more comprehensive healthcare and came to grief.

The five urban centres have all come up in the last couple of years. One urban centre is sponsored by NK Realtors and another by Sirri Saqti Foundation. The last rural centre has been sponsored by the Manyavar group. There is now a plan to start a diagnostic facility by securing the capital cost for radiology equipment from corporate CSR spending.

Centres are run out of rented premises and staff, including doctors, paid professionally, the whole idea being to develop a sustainable and largely self-financing model for offering primary healthcare to the poor. Hence the decision to expand very slowly until recently. But the pace has picked up in the last two years and there are plans to double the number of centres, that is, open another 10 in the next two years.

Also, the cardinal issue in expanding is to weigh the time and effort it takes to open a centre against the likely impact it will have. The one riddle that the foundation has been unable to crack is how to choose a good location for a centre. Some of them have long queues while some others have had to be closed down. A 50-km-radius survey is done before choosing a location and being near a railway station sometimes helps, though not always. There are some inscrutable local factors for success; unravelling them is critical for robust expansion.

The Zakaria Street centre in the heart of the traditional business district of central Kolkata has a long queue of about 50 patients at five minutes before the evening opening time of 6 pm. They are poor but not absolutely poor (you have to afford the ₹25 needed to register). Many are Muslim women and there is the odd head-load worker. The genial-looking middle-aged doctor comes punctually at six. During the day he works for a well-known private city utility. This is additional work for him. The place looks clean and functional. I leave as he starts examining his first patients. What if all primary health centres in the country were like this! ■

Adivasis bear the brunt in Assam

Sanjay Singh

New Delhi

THE report of a fact-finding team on the recent militant violence against Adivasis in Assam was released on 9 February at Constitution Club in New Delhi. The team, comprising well-known activist Harsh Mander as well as journalists Seema Mustafa and Sukumar Muralidharan, visited villages scarred by ethnic violence in Sonitpur and Kokrajhar districts in the Bodo Autonomous Region of Assam from 10-12 January.

On 23 December, armed militants in military fatigue with their faces covered walked into remote Adivasi hamlets in five locations in Sonitpur, Kokrajhar and Chirang districts. They gunned down more than 70 people, including 18 children and 21 women. In retaliation, five Bodos were killed the following day.

When the Adivasis led a protest march soon after, they were fired on by the police. Three Adivasis were killed. The displaced Adivasis, desperately poor and defenceless, are now living a precarious existence in ramshackle camps with no facilities.

The fact-finding team found that the number of displaced people was much higher than estimated. Kokrajhar was the worst affected, with 197,189 people having fled their homes. It is estimated around 300,000 people fled their villages in Kokrajhar, Aksha, Udalgiri and Chirang districts.

When the fact-finding team met the Kokrajhar Deputy Commissioner on 10 January, the number had begun to shrink. Of the initial displacement of 200,000, about 71,000 remained in camps within his jurisdiction. The maximum number of displaced people are Adivasis.

In Biswanath Chariali village, where the largest number of killings occurred, the team had to walk for around 5 km since there was no road connecting the village. Eyewitnesses of the massacre told the team that the killers danced in celebration after the slaughter, without any fear of being caught by the police.

People in the makeshift camps are battling trauma, fear and the weather.

An estimated 9,011 Adivasis are living in the Saralpura camp in Kokrajhar district. In Shantipur village, where 12 people were killed by militants, large stretches of freshly sown agricultural land were laid waste.

The camps are in a dismal state. Most huts have been built on short bamboo poles no more than three feet high. They have single sheets of plastic or tarpaulin as roofs. Medical units were not in sight. Supplies

were not readily available. Most relief material had been provided by local civil society organisations and unions.

However, the team observed a decided difference in the Bodo camps. Their tents were higher and had two layers of roofing. A fully equipped medical van of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) arrived when the team was on-site. The camps also have better security arrangements than the ones for the Adivasis.

The team found that the affected people were impoverished. They owned almost nothing and had no titles to the small paddy plots which they had cleared and cultivated. Among them were people who had migrated to areas as far as Gujarat, Chennai and Gurgaon to work as construction workers and domestic helps.

The region suffers from chronic underdevelopment. Whether it is Right To Education (RTE) or MGNREGA, nothing in the name of development had reached the region. The nearest school and ration shop are seven km away, says the report.

The report has raised various possibilities about the identity of the attackers. They could belong to the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), Songbjit or Diamary faction, or other underground groups engaged in derailing the upcoming elections to the Bodoland Territorial Council.

The fact-finding team has recommended

- Immediate improvement in the facilities and services provided in the camps and observance of statutory standards of relief and rehabilitation.
- Security must be ensured by the administration of the displaced communities and there should be genuine disarmament of all non-State groups in the region.
- Transfer of all criminal cases connected with the attacks to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).
- Immediate rehabilitation. Assistance for the displaced people to rebuild their houses even if they are at the old locations. Social workers can assist.
- Mapping of the area so that the benefits of development schemes like MGNREGA, RTE and ICDS centres reach the people.
- The report suggests that the government consider the long-term demand of the Adivasis for Scheduled Tribe status in the state and extension of the Forest Rights Act to them.
- Lastly, the government must address the huge development deficit in the area. ■

CONFLICT ZONE

Wetland in eye of storm

Akshay Azad
Jammu

THE Gharana Wetland Reserve, located near the India-Pakistan border in Jammu's RS Pura sector, has been in the news for the bullets it received recently from across the border. What has not been broadcast is that Gharana also welcomed more than 2,000 migratory birds from all over the world this year.

The reserve, spread over 80 hectares, attracts as many as 90 species of birds, including the common

He says the Gharana wetland has very little land and the Revenue Department is now claiming that the villagers have encroached on it. "The Reserve is Shamlat Deh land in revenue records but it was created due to erosion of our fields. Earlier, plenty of ground water was available. But with water levels declining, villagers began cultivating a major portion of the wetland. They are making a living from that land. Now the department is saying that they will develop the Gharana Wetland Reserve and for that they need around 200 acres. The farmers will lose this land, so they are against the development



CHARKHA

The Gharana Wetland Reserve welcomed 2,000 birds this winter but its expansion is opposed by local villagers

teal, northern pintail, northern shoveler, ruddy shelduck, gadwall, lesser whistling duck, purple swamp hen and many more from mid-November to end-February. In 1978 it was notified by the Wildlife Department as a Wetland Conservation Reserve under the JK Wildlife Protection Act.

The department now wants to expand the Gharana Wetland Reserve to 200 acres. However, the idea isn't going down well with local farmers whose crops are being destroyed by Gharana's winged beauties.

Out of the 200 households living here, the majority belong to farmers and this land is their only source of livelihood. "Earlier, only local birds would camp at the Gharana wetland in winter. They stayed away from our crops. Trouble started when these *rajhans* (bar-headed geese) migrated here 10 years ago. Their time of arrival coincides with the growth of the tender shoots of our wheat crop which is attacked by these vegetarian birds," says Soma Ram, *nambardar* of the village. "These bar-headed geese generally feed in flocks and destroy our wheat crop with their feet."

of the area since land is their only source of income," he said.

"Every year, we spend a lot of time and money on cultivation," says Jagdish Raj, 35, who owns four acres. "Then these bar-headed geese destroy our crops in minutes. The department is so concerned about the birds. But it never pays us compensation for our ruined crops each year."

He adds, "We have little money. This land will be bought by rich industrialists and outsiders once the reserve is developed. They will get tenders for various contracts. What will the villagers get? They will lose their land in return for some meagre compensation."

Youngsters in the village openly say that every year they collect money from the entire village to buy crackers to frighten the birds away from their fields. "The lanes of our village are still pebbled but we are happy. We do not want development at the cost of our land being taken away," said a youth in the village. "Our land is very fertile and produces the world-famous Basmati rice."

Officials of the Wildlife Department posted at Gharana say a large portion of the wetland has been

encroached upon by villagers. "If we ask them to vacate the land, we will only invite their ire. The area of the wetland is 0.75 km as per revenue records. The state government had proposed to demarcate around 200 acres at Gharana way back in 1978, but this demarcation has not been done even after 35 years," say the officials.

Some villagers are ready to strike a land for land bargain. "The government has land in the nearby village of Charkroi. If that land is given to farmers in exchange, the face-off between the department and villagers can easily be averted," some of them said.

Officials agree that the wetland has shrunk partly due to soil erosion. Water levels have declined, soil has accumulated and stretches of land have emerged on all sides of the wetland, making it easy for farmers to cultivate it and claim it as their own.

Officials also said that compensation is given to farmers in other parts of the country under the Integrated Wildlife Habitat Management Scheme. The villagers retorted that no compensation has ever been paid to them.

"We have some other wetlands, like the Nanga Wetland Reserve (1.21sq km) in Ramgarh sector and the Sangral Wetland Reserve (0.68 sq km) in Abdullian sector, Kukdian, all on the verge of extinction due to lack of demarcation," say the officials.

Ashima Anthal, a research scholar with the Department of Zoology, Jammu University, is studying the wildlife diversity in water bodies including Mansar, Surinsar and Gharana. She says that Gharana is the main supporting water body for various migratory and domestic birds.

"The farmers are against the development of the Gharana Wetland Reserve as they complain of crop damage by birds. But we need to properly study the damage actually caused by the birds," she says. A comprehensive study for the development of the Gharana wetland is essential, she feels.

Pointing to the dangers of unplanned development, Anthal cited the example of Mansar Lake in Samba district which was developed by the Mansar Development Authority (MDA). "The MDA emphasised the development of Mansar Lake and turned it into a buzzing tourist destination. Earlier, around 15 species of birds would visit the lake in winter. But after the banks of the lake were cemented, the habitat for birds diminished. At present, only four or five species of birds visit the Mansar Lake," she said.

In Gharana, she said, the number of domestic and migratory birds has been increasing every year. "The need of the hour is to develop the region so that its environment is conducive for the birds," she says.

Tahir Shawal, a former wildlife warden, says that the Gharana wetland does cater to the needs of several species of migratory and domestic birds, but it is essential to demarcate the area.

"Only a slushy pond of a few metres is left at Gharana. Actually, as per revenue records, it comprises 1,600 *kanals* and is actually government property," he says.

Shawal feels that farmers should be given land in compensation elsewhere if their land is to be acquired for expanding the Gharana Wetland Reserve. The farmers had agreed to this proposal two years ago but the matter is still pending.

"Local people should be taken on board for the development of the area. They should also be taken into confidence. It should be explained to them how the development of Gharana will benefit them as well," he said. ■

Charkha Features



A class in progress at the school run by Deepalaya in Sanjay Colony

Deepalaya schools face closure

Sanjay Singh
New Delhi

THE narrow, dingy lanes of Sanjay Colony slum in Okhla in southeast Delhi, lead to a Deepalaya school. A two-storied, small but beautifully built building, it has been imparting education to the slum's children since its foundation in 1992.

Now, it faces the threat of closure anytime. The reason: none other than the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009, lauded as a landmark in ensuring the right to education of every Indian child.

The Deepalaya school is not recognised by the Delhi state government because it does not own the land on which it stands. The RTE Act says unrecognised schools are illegal and have to be shut down. The land is owned by the Slum Board.

"We are imparting quality education to the children. The land issue remains but it is not easy for an organisation like ours to follow the guidelines on classroom sizes and implement the Sixth Pay Commission. It increases our economic cost of operation. The government needs to understand this. The technicalities involved under the RTE Act make our work more difficult," says Shikha Pal, Manager, Education, of Deepalaya Schools.

This school is not the only one facing the brunt of the RTE Act. Three schools run by Deepalaya in Delhi and thousands of others across the country are facing closure. India Institute has begun a signature campaign to save these schools.

At Deepalaya schools, the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) cur-

riculum is followed and students appear for exams through the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). The classrooms are equipped with all basic facilities. The schools have a lot to offer: smart-board classrooms, computer classrooms, libraries and music rooms.

The 25-room school in Sanjay Colony once boasted of 600 plus students. Now the school has around 120 students and is functioning only as a tuition centre.

The sharp fall happened after the date of compliance with the RTE Act came around last April. Lower and Upper Kindergarten and Class 1 are the only classes being held now. The RTE Act is applicable to children who are 6 to 14 years old. Therefore, the school operates for children below that age.

"We were considering a shutdown. However, the parents of the children insisted we stay on and said some solution would be found. There is only one school in the locality, a primary school run by the municipal corporation and the children of Deepalaya are far ahead in terms of education. The parents realise this," explains Pal. Around 10,000 households live in this slum.

The school's students have performed well in inter-school competitions, winning awards; 19 of them studied in the US on scholarships from the American Centre and now work with zeal to transform the lives of other poor children.

Samli Das, who teaches numbers to the Lower KG children, is also a dance, music and computer teacher for the higher classes. She has been teaching at Deepalaya for 16 years. "They learn, they paint,

they dance and play music. They happily come to school and go home. If the closure happens, it will be the most unfortunate event for these children. The exposure, the opportunities we provide them will be hard to replace in the government school nearby," she says.

Reflecting on her long association with Deepalaya, she says, "In all these years, I have developed an emotional bond with these children. It's fine if they leave after completing schooling but a scenario like this is very disturbing for me."

In the class for speech and hearing impaired students, Kavita is teaching the children to write the names of their classmates on the board. The exercise is significant – writing is the strongest way of expression for them. They will be given voice training in the afternoon, singly.

In the class for special children, three-year-old Ashish continues his physiotherapy. The instructor is teaching him to say, "Hello." He may not be able to do things like normal children do, but the instructor will be more than happy if he is able to do his daily chores by himself.

The children at Deepalaya are familiar with computer tools. Aditya Pandey, 4, is learning to paint on the computer. As he paints a flower, his instructor, Gaurav, watches closely.

The flower he has painted is for hope — hope that India Institute and other human rights organisations are keeping alive on behalf of Deepalaya. They have written to the Education Department and are planning to file a Public Interest Litigation (PIL). If their efforts bear fruit, then Aditya's flower may bloom in real terms. ■

WHEN HOME IS SCHOOL AND CLASS IS FUN

Ravleen Kaur
New Delhi

IN January, the annual ordeal of nursery admissions begins in Delhi. Parents trudge from school to school, clutching forms, with bewildered little children in tow. The media is full of news about judicial guidelines on admissions, donations, fees and the daily drama of interviews.

The school that one's child goes to has become a matter of prestige and thus a cause of infinite stress for parents. But some families are opting out by not sending their children to school. They are choosing to homeschool their children, a trend that is slowly growing among parents.

Their main contention is: learning cannot happen in controlled scenarios as every child is unique and talent is manifested best when it is naturally cultivated, not enforced.

The child follows a curriculum at home in a structured or relaxed manner. Learning is described as unschooling or child-led learning. The child is to learn all aspects of life, not just academics. Every homeschooling family has a unique way of learning but a common motivation—unhappiness with the existing school scenario.

Smriti and Dinesh Pateria, who live in Gurgaon with their five-year-old twins, Khushhaal and Khushhali, and eight-year-old daughter, Dori, are one such family. They decided not to send their children to school even before their first child was born. "My nephew stayed with us during his initial school days. I took an active interest in his education. But I found that the teacher did not take it well if he learnt or wrote things in a manner that she had not taught. Also, assignments difficult for kids his age were imposed and mostly parents ended up doing them. All this was exasperating," says Smriti.

The twins wake up at 9 am or 10 am and get busy playing. It could be the age-old kitchen set to cutting newspapers to playing computer games. If they feel like it, they practise an alphabet or two. Khushhali has recently started going for Kathak classes along with Dori who also takes drawing classes and music lessons at home.

The first question generally posed to these kids is: "Which school do you go to?" and Khushhali promptly replies, "I go for the dance class." Dori shows her quilling skills with aplomb. She says she does not want to be tied down by class timings when engaged in an activity. Khushhaal remarks that there is too much writing in school and he doesn't like that.

"Most children begin by writing alphabets upside down. My kids did that too. Had they been in school, the teacher would have termed them dyslex-

ic or slow-learners and my entire effort would have been focussed on getting them to write alphabets correctly rather than other, more meaningful things in life. I refused to do that and decided to give them their space and time to learn," she said.

Dori learnt to write properly when she was seven and developed an interest in cursive writing. Their home is full of art and craft work by her. Recently, a neighbour's child was instructed to make an Origami item in school and Dori went to help. "Dori made a paper sparrow and the mother stuck it in her daughter's craft book as it is, without even trying to get her daughter to learn the skill. This is what schools expect from children, not the process of learning but the result," said Smriti.

In East Delhi's Patparganj area, 13-year-old Ayushi Pandey has just finished writing her debut novel, a science fiction one, and almost the entire syllabus for Classes 9 and 10. Unlike most teenagers who are fixated to their smartphones or locked up inside their rooms when elderly people visit, she likes to talk to people of all age groups. "I was in Class 3 when this idea of home schooling came up. I was so excited about the amount of time I would get to do what I want—dance, play the guitar and even study when I want. I kept badgering my parents until they actually said yes," says Ayushi, who also learns music and blogs frequently.

The idea came to Sanjeev, an ex-IAS officer, and Ritu Pandey, a clinical psychologist, after a random conversation with friends about not being able to spend quality time with their children. "The only word that dominates our lives when children go to school is 'phataphat'," said Ritu. "Our general timetable is: wake up fast, get ready fast, hurry to school, come back, have a quick lunch, rush for hobby classes, come back, eat dinner quickly, sleep in time, wake up for school.... Even the half-hour spent with the child between school and hobby classes is perfunctory because most parents just want to know if everything was alright in school. The schooling system has even schooled our thoughts so that it has become difficult to think freely."

"I want to be an astro-physicist. I can now explore as much as I want in physics rather than forcibly learn chemistry which I don't like as much. Recently, I spent a lot of time sketching for my novel and I enjoyed it thoroughly. I don't think going to a school would have left me with enough energy to do all this," said Ayushi.



Sanjeev Pandey with daughter Ayushi and wife Ritu in their home



Ayushi has written a novel, plays guitar, dances and studies hard

Apart from studying school curricula at home, there are parents 'unschooling' their children. Udaipur-based Manish and Vidhi Jain, who also run a non-profit, Shikshantar, never enforced reading or writing on their 12-year-old daughter, Kanku.

"When we got married, we were very clear about not sending our children to school. And Shikshantar happened mainly because we wanted to create a space where different knowledge systems could be appreciated. Being able to read and write is not the only kind of learning. We introduced words and numbers to Kanku only when she felt the need to learn them at eight. She still can't read perfectly but I am sure when she does take to reading, it will be a beautiful natural process because she will do it of her own will rather than as an enforced practice. Kids need to understand that teachers are there all around them and not just in schools," said Vidhi.

ISOLATION?

But homeschooling parents face questions about the socialisation of their children. "Going to school is so important to learn skills one can only acquire

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA



(NIOS), which holds exams for Class 12. According to newspaper reports, prestigious universities abroad like Stanford, Yale and Harvard encourage homeschooled children as they have an edge in the interests they passionately follow. “On the website of Swaraj University that encourages alternative learning, we have put up a list of more than 200 companies who are happy to hire people without a degree,” said Vidhi Jain.

A person’s qualities and character are as important as academics when it comes to choosing a career, feels Viswan. “Let’s say a child is studying to become a doctor and he even clears his MBBS entrance with a good rank. But if he is short-tempered and impatient, one can imagine what sort of surgery he will perform,” said Viswan.

However, there is a downside to homeschooling, feels Viswan. Homeschooled children find it difficult to deal with the mean world. “As homeschoolers, we remove our children from unwanted situations, like unnecessary competition in school, rather than getting them to face it. As a result, they do feel rattled at times when somebody cheats them,” she said. “Also, sometimes, we don’t get a break at all.” Most parents agree that homeschooling requires at least one parent to spend dedicated time with the children and the active involvement of both, which becomes tough if they have jobs.

SCHOOL OPTION

Viswan’s elder son, who is 14, can play six musical instruments and has a flair for poetry and painting. He recently started going to school because his parents felt he lacked discipline. “We were shifting houses and could not really give him much time. But I feel bad now. He has not touched his musical instruments for the eight months that he is going to school as he has no time for anything but school and assignments. Sometimes, I wish he was back to homeschooling so that his creativity would not be suppressed,” she said.

Ghaziabad-based Suma Iyer sent her daughter,

Aarushi, to school after she was homeschooled for seven years. “She did go to kindergarten. One day she came back and told me that her teacher said that if she writes on her desk she will make her clean it with her skirt. I felt really disgusted and confronted the teacher. Then I put her in a Canadian certified school which I thought would be better. I even

joined there as a teacher. But I used to see these young kids standing in the queue, with their shorts pulled down, waiting to go to the toilet. I thought how vulnerable they are. I wondered, what is the need for such young kids to go to school at all when they are not even interested in books but just play. So I decided to keep my daughter out of school and just teach her the basics till she was old enough to express herself properly,” she said.

When Iyer began this experiment, she had no information about any homeschooling support group and thus faced a lot of opposition from her family. “Along the way, I got to know about Swashikshan, the homeschoolers’ network of India and got more confident about homeschooling. At seven, Aarushi was ready to be on her own so I admitted her to a nearby school,” she said.

Swashikshan was launched in July 2012 by a group of unschooling families. Urmila Samson, a founder-member, who is unschooling her three children, said in her inaugural address posted on the group’s website that homeschooling is a “movement away from a system that no longer serves us, taking full responsibility for our own and our children’s learning journeys”.

As for Smriti Pateria, her daily life is full of experiments which her kids want to undertake. “Last year, all three of them wanted to learn swimming. We had to pay a lumpsum for three months for them. My son refused to even get into the pool. But I am happier spending on these experiments as compared to a school which would tie us down for the entire year and push me out of their learning journey. After all, it is about a life well lived and not wasting time in aspirations and competitions.” ■

‘I was in Class 3 when this idea of homeschooling came up. I was so excited about the amount of time I would get to do what I want— dance, play the guitar...’

in a group. The child learns to deal with peer pressure. Sooner or later, children grow up and need mainstream jobs. Homeschooling isolates the child and deprives him of much-needed friends,” said Daisy Chawla, a mother of two.

Homeschooling parents, however, disagree. According to some, socialisation is the least of their problems. Bengaluru-based Sandhya Viswan has two sons who were homeschooled for quite a few years. The elder son went to school only last year. “In fact, they interact with people of all ages and since they have not been bullied are quite comfortable asking everybody questions,” she said.

Parents say it isn’t difficult to place their children back in mainstream education. There is the government’s National Institute of Open Schooling

SAMITA’S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



What 3 women can teach

Bharat Dogra
Jaipur

LAKSHMAN ANAND

LACK of education has never deterred Kamla Devi, the Dalit sarpanch of Tilonia village in Kishangarh block of Ajmer district, from becoming a success story. She has planted nearly 15,000 trees of 28 indigenous species in her village, making it green and prosperous.

Like her, there are many women without an education, who have contested and won panchayat elections. They have gone on to work with great passion and bring inclusive development to their villages.

But a recent ordinance of the Rajasthan government pours cold water on their efforts. It has disqualified women who have not gone to school from contesting panchayat elections. The ordinance fixed education upto Class 8 as the minimum qualification for the post of sarpanch. For Scheduled Areas, the person should have studied until Class 5. For contesting zila parishad and panchayat samiti polls, the educational qualification is Class 10 pass.

The odd part is that such rules do not apply to those contesting Assembly elections. So you can become an MLA if you didn't go to school, but not a sarpanch.

No one disputes that being literate is an asset. But uneducated women have been helped by fellow villagers and their own wisdom. They have also upturned the status quo.

In Tilonia, for instance, a single family dominated the panchayat for nearly 50 years. Five years ago, a new leadership got a chance to emerge when the post of sarpanch was reserved for Dalit women candidates. The dominant family did try to sneak in a proxy candidate but their efforts failed. Instead, Kamla was elected. She got solid support from women and the youth, and won with an impressive margin of 1,070 votes.

Before contesting the post, she had been elected a member of the panchayat samiti. She has a reputation for honesty and commitment to her electoral promises. Kamla had promised a school would be started in a locality where it was needed. When construction was delayed, she ensured the school functioned from her own home until the building was completed.

After her election as sarpanch, she made sure MGNREGA was implemented efficiently. She got village roads and ponds built and pastures protected. An Information Centre and Panchayat Office were also built.

Kamla faced her biggest challenge when she tried to remove encroachments by powerful persons on the village's common land to plant trees. The upper caste villagers threatened her. But she stood her ground and removed the encroachments without calling the police.

Jeevan Ram, a ward panch who backed her, says, "This effort was wholeheartedly supported by poorer women, especially Dalit women who got employment under MGNREGA. They realised their goats and other animals would be able to get fodder if trees were planted on common land."



Naurati Bai, the hardworking sarpanch of Hamara and (inset) Kamla Devi, the gutsy sarpanch of Tilonia

Ganga Gujjar, a local woman, says, "Encroachments were only for private gain. But these trees are for everyone. I fully supported Kamla. She has been a great sarpanch for our village."

Kamla says they formed two self-help groups to support the tree planting work — the Shiv Vatika group and the Jai Bhavani Nursery group. Women also contributed their small savings. Tilonia village is now being seen as a model of using existing government schemes efficiently.

Naurati Bai, the Dalit sarpanch of Harmara, also faced the problem of encroachments on village land by the powerful. But she took it on and succeeded. The removal of encroachments helped ease the flow of water to a tank and Muslim families could finally access their burial ground.

Naurati also revealed her grit in her fight against corruption. She made sure people indulging in corruption were punished. But Naurati and her family were threatened. Attempts were made to humiliate her daughter-in-law. The tension had an adverse impact on Naurati's health.

Despite these problems, Naurati speeded up development work. She ensured the implementation of MGNREGA and got 11 link roads constructed. A supporting wall of the tank was also constructed. Housing for the poor under the Indira Awas Yojana progressed well and so did work relating to pensions. She got an Information Centre and Panchayat Office constructed at low cost, spending less than the allotted budget.

In a single year, work worth about ₹80 lakh was done in the panchayat and wages of about ₹50 lakh were distributed. This helped to reduce dependence on migrant labour. Naurati has received national-level recognition for her work as a panchayat leader.

Rukmani Devi Salvi, the sarpanch of Vijayapura panchayat in Devgarh block of Rajsamand district, is an outstanding example of a Dalit woman who has made a real contribution to village development. Her efforts have attracted national attention.

She started with the odds stacked against her. She

stood for election from a general women's seat, open to all castes. Four candidates from rich families were willing to spend lakhs of rupees on election expenses. They tried to entice voters in various ways. But Rukmani publicly announced that her election expenses would not exceed ₹3,000. In fact, she spent only ₹2,200. She said publicly that she would not give a single rupee or offer even a cup of tea to any voter. But she promised that for the next five years she would work with complete honesty and transparency.

Narrow caste politics was also used against her. Rukmani's husband, Kaluram, was the sarpanch earlier. To remove caste discrimination, he had insisted that the work of providing drinking water would be given to Dalit women on a rotational basis. Upper caste villagers had opposed this bitterly. Now, at election time, the upper castes made this their main campaign issue against Rukmani.

But the women rallied behind her. They responded to Rukmani's call for an honest and transparent panchayat. Thanks mainly to the support of women voters, she was able to get elected.

Not just gram sabha but ward sabha meetings were held regularly. Village committees like those relating to social audits are functioning. Efforts were made to protect the legal status of the panchayat so that it is not gobbled by an expanding urban municipality. Rukmani benefited from the close cooperation of a deputy sarpanch and Shakuntala, a ward member.

Under Rukmani's leadership, in Vijayapura panchayat, workers get full 100 days of employment under MGNREGA at the minimum wage of ₹119. Care is taken to ensure that adequate assets are created by meticulous measurement of all work. As a result, work is completed on time. Complete transparency has been observed in all transactions. This panchayat was willing to share all information on bills, vouchers, muster rolls and so on. A system of transparency and working according to rules and norms has been well-established. Innovations introduced here have been widely discussed and emulated. All these three women completed their five-year tenures as sarpanch in 2015. ■

PHOTO FEATURE

Ajit Krishna

Killer coal

I wonder whom Neelima would have voted for? If she was alive, that is. She got buried under a heap of coal under the defunct Indraprastha Power Plant, in central Delhi, while digging for coal waste. Her relative showed me her Voter Identity Card when I asked for her picture.

On 28 January, campaigning by political parties was in full swing. With only a few days left for voting, people were promised the moon. Leaders were busy in a guerrilla blame game. The media was predicting the results. Every Delhiite wanted to see a live debate on the hottest issues of the Delhi elections. One of them was unauthorised colonies.

Residents of the Anna Nagar JJ cluster near Indraprastha Estate must have also been wondering which political party would serve their interests. Perhaps the women were discussing whom to vote for while digging up coal waste. Suddenly a heap of coal above them collapsed. Two women, Neelima, 35, and Manisha, 19, never returned home. Vijaya, 25, is undergoing treatment. Her body is paralysed waist downwards.

“Why have you come now? Can you bring them back? Can you get us some help?” These were the questions they asked that night as I took pictures of Neelima’s dimly lit room. Her grandmother was crying next to a grate of burning coal, collected by Neelima a day before. They say they used the coal waste from the power plant for domestic purposes. It saved them a little money. The power plant is closed and the coal is just lying there. They did not consider that to be stealing.

The morning after the women died, newspaper reports said that two women died while stealing coal. They sneaked in, they were digging up coal and they died in the process. True?

“We are not thieves. Do we look like thieves? Listen to us. Neelima was so fat, she could not run. Would she go to steal? Coal is not gold or silver.” They had tears in their eyes but for a different reason. They had lost their loved ones and they had died branded thieves.

“Words once spoken cannot be taken back. Millions of people read today that my sister, Manisha, was a thief,” said her relative. He was not crying. He looked straight into my eyes and left.

On 7 February, the people of Anna Nagar JJ voted — like they do every time. They posed for the camera, showing their inked fingers. They always vote, they insisted, since they hope the government will one day listen to them and improve their living conditions.

The results have been declared. The political scenario has changed. It’s business as usual for Delhi. People go about leading their humdrum lives. But Manisha’s mother only knows one thing. “Sir, she came home on Tuesday but she didn’t on Wednesday.” ■



Relatives mourn the loss of the two women and their reputation



Neelima's Voter Identity Card



A sense of despair grips the people here



Residents of Anna Nagar JJ Cluster vote every time, hoping to be heard some day

Pashmina on home turf

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

KASHMIR, reputed for its art and crafts, has over the past decades witnessed a slide due to varying reasons. One such art that has declined is shawl making. However, now there is a ray of hope for weavers.

The incumbent dispensation of Jammu & Kashmir, (J&K), led by Governor NN Vohra, has directed the Small Scale Industries Corporation (SICOP) to procure raw pashmina wool from Ladakh. It can then be purchased by weavers and spinners for making pashmina shawls. This is expected to revive the glorious industry of pashmina shawls in the state.

The government order came after pashmina weavers objected to the proposal to auction raw pashmina outside the state. They said it should rightly remain in the state and be auctioned here.

“The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) issued a notice in the local newspapers that they are going to auction raw pashmina outside the state. The LAHDC had almost clinched the deal and their contention was that this step would safeguard the interests of the pashmina farmers. But this was detrimental to the interests of pashmina weavers and spinners,” said Rauf Ahmad Qureshi, President, Kashmir Pashmina Kaarigar Union (KPKU).

KPKU sought the attention of the administration so that things could be done in tune with the interests of the weavers and spinners. It demanded an immediate roll-back of the order under which the raw pashmina would be auctioned outside the state



BILAL BAHADUR

and it was decided that the auction would be held in Jammu.

“About four months ago, the Financial Commissioner, Industries & Commerce, Jammu & Kashmir, Khurshid Ahmad Ganie, asked SICOP to compile a comprehensive report about the procurement of pashmina from Ladakh. SICOP failed to do so and in the meantime LAHDC took the raw pashmina to Delhi for auctioning,” said Qureshi.

The KPKU president said the auction took place in January with the rate of raw Pashmina ranging

between ₹2,800-3,450 per kg, which was affordable for the weavers and spinners. He said the authorities have promised a subsidy for the weavers and spinners as and when they take part in auctions in future.

“It has to be ensured that only weavers and spinners are allowed to take part in the auctioning of raw pashmina in future. The exporters and dealers can afford to pay handsomely for raw pashmina and they should not be allowed to take part in the auction,” said Qureshi.

He emphasised that the government order that only

Protests loom in Gujarat

Tanushree Gangopadhyay
Ahmedabad

GUJARAT is simmering with discontent in the countryside. Farmers are protesting against land acquisition, there is an agitation against a nuclear plant in Mithi Viridi and tribals in Sadhu Tekri don't want the massive Statue of Unity perched on their burial ground.

On 11 January, farmers held a rally in Gandhinagar to protest against the ordinance that made changes to the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013.

Each farmers' organisation is to submit a memorandum to the revenue officer in its *tehsil* addressed to the Prime Minister, demanding withdrawal of the ordinance.

Activists who went to join the farmers' rally say they were prevented from doing so. Gautam Thacker, general secretary of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), was picked up by the police



along with Indu Kumar Jani, editor of *Naya Marg*, and Professor Rohit Shukla.

Persis Ginwala, an activist, was arrested at Adalaj, close to where the rally was to commence, along with Sagar Rabari, general secretary of the Gujarat Khedut Samaj. The authorities also clamped down on some farmers who were on their

way to the rally. “The police was smart enough to round up farmers from their villages to stop any assembly,” said Rabari.

Jeram Gamit, a tribal leader in the Dangs, was rounded up under the Prevention of Anti-Social Activities (PASA) Act on 1 February. He was involved in mining of blackstone and has been sent to the prison in Baroda. PASA leaves no scope for appeal for 90 days. Sugarcane farmers in south Gujarat protested at Bardoli near Surat on 1 February. “We protested against the Income Tax department imposing ₹3,200 crore as tax on us from 2006-07 until 2013-14,” said Jayesh Patel, secretary of the Khedut Samaj.

Most sugarcane farmers sell cane to 12 sugar factories in south Gujarat. “If this continues farmers will be doomed,” he said.

The Samaj has submitted 14 demands to the government, including a hike in prices. Farmers emphasised that the Minimum Support Price given to cotton and groundnut could not be equated with sugar-

weavers and spinners can take part needs to be implemented in letter and spirit. Only registered handicraft dealers can avail of benefits from the auction process.

"In the past, exporters or dealers would get the raw pashmina and then they would give it to the weavers to make shawls. Now, the weavers and spinners will get the material themselves and they can make shawls according to customers' choice. This will end exploitation by the dealers and exporters," said the KPKU president.

As of date, SICOP has procured 8,090 kg of raw pashmina yarn and after de-hiding this will yield around 2,700 kg of pure pashmina yarn. The KPKU has already talked to some of the machine owners for the de-hiding and received positive responses.

"The present stock of raw pashmina procured and then auctioned by SICOP can fulfil the needs of around 150 weavers of the Kashmir Valley. This is nothing since there are 20,000 weavers in the Valley. There is need for continual funding for SICOP so that more and more procurement of raw pashmina takes place," said Qureshi.

The KPKU President said that SICOP should procure at least 45,000 kg of raw pashmina annually so that it meets the needs of the weavers and spinners across the Valley.

"There is no originality of shawls at this time as machine-made shawls are being sold in the market as original pashmina shawls. If this step succeeds, Kashmir will regain its glory in shawl making. We can earn tremendous foreign exchange," pointed out Qureshi.

The KPKU president also urged implementation of the Handloom Protection Act of 1985, according to which there is a complete ban on production of machine-made shawls in the state. Non-implementation of the Act has given a free hand to anti-social elements in society who are busy selling machine-made shawls as original shawls in both the national and international markets.

In the meantime, the state administration has started the process of lifting the raw pashmina from Leh to Srinagar. The decision to airlift the raw pashmina has already been taken and the Deputy Registrar, Co-operative Societies, has been directed to make arrangements. ■

cane. "We will be crushed if the government imposes such a drastic difference in prices," said Somjibhai, a farmer.

The farmers intend to continue their protest until the Parliament session ends in May. Their demands include a fair agriculture policy, stalling the de-commanding of the Narmada waters to prevent water being diverted to industry, crop insurance by August, power for 12 hours daily and revival of 300,000 power connections.

The state government's clearance of the nuclear project in Mithi Viridi, on the coast near Bhavnagar despite it being a CRZ area, has enraged local people and environmentalists. Rohit Prajapati of the Pariyavaran Suraksha Samiti, and his colleagues are very anxious. "Fukushima could surely be repeated here," he warned. Westinghouse, an American company, is keen to start work on the plant along with the Indian government.

Sardar Patel's 597-foot Statue of Unity on Sadhu Tekri is another bone of contention. The statue has been commissioned for building to a company at a total cost of ₹2,063 crore. The Gujarat government has paid an advance of ₹100 crore. "Defiling our sacred place could bring in bad omens," warned Ramesh Tadvi, a tribal leader. They also pointed out that Kevadiya is a seismic zone.

Other protests coming up are the Dedicated Infrastructure Corridor, which, it is said, will acquire 13.8 per cent of Gujarat's land. Earmarking land for seven mega cities, nine mega industrial zones, three ports and six airports could plunge the state government into a cauldron of protests. ■

An app to help Dalits

Sanjay Singh
New Delhi

TO monitor and track atrocities against Dalits and Adivasis across India, a new web-based tool called Atrocity Tracking and Monitoring (ATM) system, was launched on 12 February. The National Dalit Movement for Justice (NDMJ), an organisation headed by Dalits, has developed the ATM system. It works by generating SMS alerts and emails to staff of the ATM web page for immediate action.

The ATM system gets activated when any person, across the country, reports an atrocity through SMS by typing the keyword NCSPOA, the abbreviation for the National Coalition for Strengthening Prevention of Atrocities Act and sending it to 9898915455, a toll free number. The SMS will be received by the state-level partner organisations of NDMJ for further action.

The state-level partner organisations will validate the case and, after confirmation, the registered user or organisation can send the SMS and email of the case to the staff of the ATM web page. The case will then be sent to government officials for speeding up the legal process.

Meanwhile, the state-level partners and trained Human Right Defenders (HRDs) will upload information related to the case on the ATM website and begin the process of tracking and monitoring the case. At any point of time during the case proceedings, the complainant can track the status of the case on the website and get access to all case-related documents like the First Information Reports (FIRs), counter FIRs, bail status, compensation status etc.

Training of HRDs is an important aspect

for the ATM system to work efficiently. "Training of the HRDs is our next step. We are organising a training programme in March for the HRDs registered with us. After training, a lot of time and paper work can be saved. The manual record of each case is difficult to maintain. Also, not everyone can have access to our manual records. The technical expertise of the HRDs will help in the

speedy trial of the case and timely justice for the victims," says Dr. VA Ramesh Nathan, General Secretary, NDMJ.

The constant updating of the cases will also help track the investigation, detect false counter FIRs and catch attempts to dilute the case.

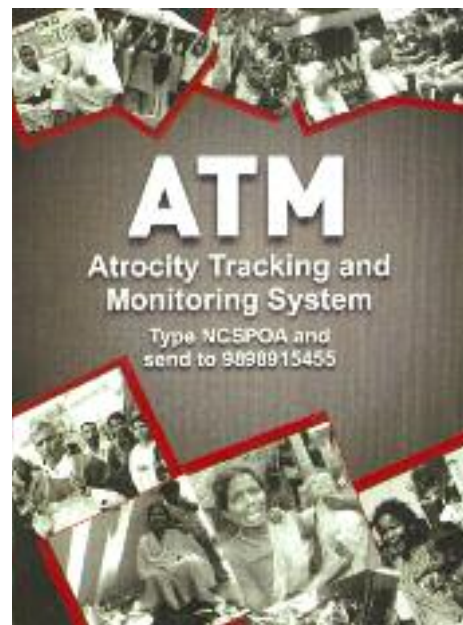
The acquittal rate of perpetrators of such crimes remains high. Tracking and monitoring cases online can also bring down the incidence of such crimes.

The NDMJ has partner organisations across states which will follow the particulars of such cases in the locality.

"We have 25 partner organisations across 15 states of India. We are trying to increase this number. Around

1,067 cases have been uploaded on our website so far, and anyone can access all these cases. In future, we will try to ensure that each and every atrocity against Dalits gets tracked and monitored," says Usama Khwaja of NDMJ, while tracking one such case of atrocity on the ATM's website.

"We aim to work closely with the Human Rights Commissions, Commissions for SCs/STs, National Crime Bureau and our state-level organisations are working with the same idea. We will share our database with them to ensure the effective implementation of the law on prevention of atrocities against scheduled castes and tribes," says Ramesh Nathan. ■



The ATM system gets activated when any person, across the country, reports an atrocity through SMS by typing the keyword NCSPOA.

IS AAP THE FUTURE?

It can change politics if it leads with ideas and goes beyond slogans

Umesh Anand
New Delhi

A little over two years after it was launched, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has earned a popular mandate that breaks all records. Arvind Kejriwal told a sea of supporters at his public swearing-in that such a stunning verdict for a young political party could only be the hand of God — the desire of a superior force to bring big change in India.

The victory also seems providential because the party was all but given up for being politically finished. It had frittered away goodwill after it formed a minority government in Delhi and quit in just 49 days in 2014. This was followed by a punishing rout in the Lok Sabha elections. The AAP story, it seemed, was over. Yet, miraculously, it bounced back.

But, divine intervention aside, closer to the ground, AAP's resurrection is the result of courage and hard work. AAP workers and leaders have changed the rules of the game by owning their mistakes. Politicians aren't known to do that. They have been listening to voters, making themselves accessible and raising issues like water, housing, transportation, healthcare, electricity charges, school education and pollution. No other party has been so relevant or convincing or persistent.

In crucial ways, AAP seems to have redefined how a political party will have to connect with voters. It has made funding transparent, brought professionals into politics and defined inclusive goals for raising standards of living. In status conscious Delhi, AAP seeks to bring everyone on board on equal terms. All this is new and refreshing.

Is AAP, therefore, the future? Has it raised the bar for what people will expect of political parties? Much will depend on the performance of AAP in office. It needs to meet the standards of openness and accountability that AAP has professed in its campaign. AAP will also have to set itself apart with a vision for a modern and inclusive India. It will be expected to lead with ideas and go beyond

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Arvind Kejriwal with his first young team in Sundernagari. Right: Civil Society's first issue



Victory and celebrations: Arvind Kejriwal with wife Sunita and AAP leaders

slogans. It will have to carry forward the trust it has built with its voters.

The determination of AAP cadres to revive the party and shake off failure has undoubtedly come from Kejriwal himself. Before becoming a politician he spent a decade taking up causes and plunging into campaigns and clashing with local authorities. He failed more often than he succeeded, but he hung in as activists often do because they believe in themselves.

It won't be remembered now, but in the early days Kejriwal sat with a table outside the passport office to help people use RTI to track their applications. He led an agitation against ration shop owners who siphoned off supplies. He reached out to the middle class on electricity bills.

There was public hearing after public hearing, often in remote and rundown corners of Delhi where politicians wouldn't go because they knew the votes would come one way or the other. Kejriwal, a revenue service officer on long leave, was there as an activist with a young team, which soon came to include Manish Sisodia, now his Deputy Chief Minister. They were supported by other, more experienced, campaigners — Shankar, Aruna Roy, Shekhar Singh, Jean Dreze, Nikhil Dey and many others.

Civil Society had a ringside view of these develop-



ments. It was the only magazine consistently reporting those efforts to strengthen RTI and make governance accountable. Our first issue of *Civil Society* 11 years ago, in September 2003, had Arvind Kejriwal on the cover with the heading: TAXMAN'S BURDEN.

The slogan, '*Apna paisa apna hisab*', came from the grassroots in Rajasthan, but resonated in Sundernagari, where Kejriwal and his NGO, Parivartan, had based themselves. Soon, samples of road material were being checked and civic assets audited. Contractors were being exposed at public hearings for getting payments for work they hadn't done.

But for all the energy that was poured into these efforts success was minimal. People related to the issues, but a system mired in corruption and privilege always seemed to prevail.

Multiple reversals at the local level perhaps taught Kejriwal the importance of scale. He achieved it with Anna Hazare and the campaign for a Lok Pal. High-decibel exposure of corruption, Anna's personal credibility and the selling of the Lok Pal idea as a silver bullet solution galvanised public attention nationally. And as TV channels and newspapers provided saturation coverage of this upsurge, a political role for Kejriwal was just a hop, step and jump away.

When AAP was formed it was with the sum total of these experiences. The origin of many of its methods can be traced to social movements. So also its core values of transparency, accountability and participation. AAP's popular appeal is

clearly linked to its roots in the anti-corruption efforts of civil society groups beginning with Sundernagari and ending with the Lok Pal blockbuster.

There are many expectations of AAP now that it is in office. To demand that it deliver on all counts would be unrealistic and even unfair, given the record of previous governments in Delhi.

But the one count on which it cannot afford to fall short is the activist spirit which brought the party to power. Consultations with citizens worked well in its favour. The Delhi Dialogues and neighbourhood meetings were refreshingly different. AAP now has the responsibility of running an open government with the participation of citizens.

"This is an opportunity and a challenge to fashion a real example of a transparent, accountable and participatory government. AAP has certainly received a strong mandate to do so," says Aruna Roy of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS).

Kejriwal was closely associated with the MKSS in his early years and drew on its methods. He regarded Roy, a veteran campaigner for RTI, as a mentor. They have differed later on ways of combating corruption, strategy and choices.

"There are many things AAP could do immediately," explains Roy. "It could ensure that all expenditure in every department and office is put online in real time. The party could make sure that the decision-making process and policies are opened to public participation and all meetings in government are carefully



AAP volunteers went from street to street, home to home, with their brooms and white caps. They had a distinct identity.



The AAP campaign was youthful, cheerful.

recorded, with minutes out in the public domain in real time. It could allow for participatory budgeting and planning, and ensure that all expenditures and beneficiary selections are subject to social audits."

"AAP can reach out to the vast range and depth of expertise that exists in the social sector on water, electricity, housing, health, urban poverty and anti-corruption issues," says Roy. "Most people and organisations would readily contribute their time and energy to help build a better and more inclusive form of development."

VENDORS' HOPES

AAP's influence in the unorganised sector can be judged from the response of street vendors. They look forward to special zones where they can have their stalls. AAP included vendor certification in its manifesto. But it was after Kejriwal addressed them that they were completely won over and voted in large numbers for AAP.

"AAP comes as a ray of hope for the unorganised sector in Delhi for which nothing has been done all these years," says Arbind Singh of the National Association of Street Vendors in India (NASVI). "There are no provisions for healthcare, insurance and affordable housing for construction workers, vendors, domestic servants or drivers. There is harassment by the police. On the other hand the unorganised sector provides a whole range of services."

"AAP's votes have come not just from the poor, but also from the middle class and the rich. It is uniquely positioned to be a bridge and create better awareness," says Singh. "The neglect of the unorganised sector is not the result of some class struggle, but because of lack of understanding. AAP can change things."

HOMES, LIVELIHOODS

Dunu Roy of the Hazards Centre has been working on issues of the urban poor and has often come to the rescue of people facing eviction in Delhi and getting dumped in resettlement colonies like Bawana.

"The vote of the poor went to AAP because none of the expectations with regard to housing and livelihoods were met by the Congress in the 15 years it was in power. The BJP, on the other hand, was seen as being pro-rich," says Roy.

He believes that people are looking to AAP for the basic security to pursue their livelihoods. "They aren't asking for jobs. People come to the city in search of work. They settle where they do because it is affordable and near work. These are choices that are made within the constraints of the system," says Roy.

"The expectations from the AAP government are access to finance, work insurance in terms of a basic minimum wage and security from evictions," says Roy. "People also need an identity. If it can't be where they live it should be where they

work. But an identity is essential so that their rights as citizens are recognised."

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Ratish Nanda, an architect, has led the Aga Khan Foundation's urban renewal project in the Nizamuddin Bustee, the cradle of Hindustani culture. Monuments like Humayun's tomb have been brilliantly restored and at the same time infrastructure and access to services in the Nizamuddin slum have been improved.

Nanda says it would be good if the AAP government promoted community ownership of civic assets as has been successfully done through the Nizamuddin project. He laments the "engineering approach" to city development with its emphasis on flyovers and large infrastructure projects. "It doesn't work and only leads to commissions," he says.

"For too long we have looked at Delhi as the capital. What about Delhi the city with its own heritage and culture? We need to showcase Delhi's diversity. The state archaeological department looks after just 22 buildings in Delhi," Nanda says. "We have to promote local awareness, pride and ownership. Conservation of heritage zones has so far been penalty driven. Instead we need to give people incentives to preserve heritage. Community ownership works. In Nizamuddin we handed over toilets, parks and schools to the community and there were improvements because people became interested in their upkeep."

CLEAN UP FOR HEALTHCARE

Dr Ravikant Singh of Doctors For You says it is significant that AAP has promised more hospitals and primary health centres. But in public health terms it is equally important to provide sewer lines, toilets, clean drinking water and clearance of garbage. A hygienic environment translates into better public health. Awareness campaigns are needed and AAP with its cadre base can reach out, he says.

Dr Ravikant points out that though Delhi is the capital, 20 per cent of deliveries continue to be at home. In the slum areas the figure goes up to 50 per cent.

"It is shameful that we don't have 100 per cent institutional deliveries in Delhi. A special scheme could be launched to offer incentives for institutional deliveries," says Dr Ravikant. "With every primary health centre there should be a sub-centre with a nurse to do vaccinations and make home visits to check on the health of families. If there are going to be more hospitals, many more doctors will be needed. In Maharashtra it is mandatory to spend one year in the government health service. In Delhi it should be two years. Salaries are good and it is anyway a city posting."

Dr Ravikant suggests special OPDs for chronic ailments. Diabetes and hypertension are widespread in urban slum areas. So is tuberculosis. Better public health facilities will mean investments in infrastructure and human resources.

AJIT KRISHNA



The AAP government should prepare to double its spending on health.

CLEAN AIR

Dealing with environmental issues will be a test of AAP's inclusiveness. It is the only party to formally accept that air pollution is a problem that needs to be fixed.

"With AAP, the language of politics around pollution has changed," says Anumita Roychowdhury, Executive Director of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). "This is very welcome. It addresses the need for public transport for the poor and raises your expectations that such changes will be on a meaningful scale, not mere beautification. What we need is a functional network for people to walk, cycle, catch buses, take the metro and drive."

"The expectation from AAP is that its government put in place a clear action plan on vehicular traffic that can be monitored so that the city is able to move to cleaner standards," says Roychowdhury.

She feels the need for a smog alert system to inform people on a daily basis about the levels of pollution. When there are smog episodes, there should be emergency measures such as discouraging people from using personal vehicles and ensuring that garbage is not burnt.

An integrated transport system is required to bring down vehicular emissions. In the short and medium term the government should increase the frequency and reliability of buses and extend the routes on which they ply.

A master plan should be prepared so that road space can be used for cycling and walking.

A parking policy could restrict the use of private vehicles. It should seek to manage demand and curtail supply of parking spaces with high charges for authorised parking and stiff penalties for illegal parking.

HOLISTIC APPROACH

"Modernity is about collective solutions," says Chandra Bhushan, Deputy Director General, CSE. "AAP should look at the city's problems in a holistic manner rather than go in for piecemeal solutions that will get it into trouble over the long term."

"In transportation solutions should be end to end. Transportation is linked to where people live and work. It is about economics and land use. So, AAP will have to make a choice: does it want to spend on roads and flyovers or does it want to invest in public transport?"

"Similarly, on water it has to decide whether it wants to provide clean drinking water for all or whether it wants to supply unclean drinking water free to the poor," says Bhushan. "The way to go would be to regulate, cut losses and ensure quality. The poor should get a subsidy and the rich should pay more." ■

2004 THE FIGHT FOR RATION SHOPS THAT WORKED



LAKSHMAN ANAND

2006 THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION CAMPAIGN



LAKSHMAN ANAND

2011 THE INDIA AGAINST CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN



LAKSHMAN ANAND

2013 THE FIGHT FOR A LOKPAL



AJIT KRISHNA

BUSINESS

ENTERPRISE | CSR | ICT | GREEN TECH

It's waste, it's energy

The possibilities with garbage

Civil Society News

New Delhi

BEGINNING in April, 250 tonnes of solid wastes are slated to vanish each day in Bengaluru and come back in cylinders as compressed biogas at roughly the subsidised price of LPG.

It is a unique initiative for converting municipal solid waste into energy. It has been made possible by a tripartite agreement between the municipality, the hotel association of Bengaluru and a company called Nobel Exchange Environmental Solutions or NEX.

If they succeed, the model will most likely be scaled up to meet the need of dealing with the 3,000 to 5,000 tonnes of wastes that Bengaluru generates in a day. It could also be the solution that other cities are looking for to deal with their own escalating garbage problems.

Several things will be on test. First is technology: conversion of waste into biogas and putting it into cylinders. Second is the collaboration itself in which the municipality works with a private sector innovator. Third is the privatising of collection and segregation mechanisms — the hotels will be paying for this so the polluter pays principle is also being validated.

Success could have multiple spin-offs. It could encourage municipalities to innovate with structured managerial solutions for dealing with waste. They would be encouraged to explore newer, market-oriented options. It may also help municipalities to facilitate investments in the technologies that use waste to generate power and provide heating and cooling.

NEX is a new-age company. It calls itself India's first producer of clean energy from municipal solid waste. Six months after the Bengaluru project gets started, a similar one using 500 tonnes of municipal waste a day will be ready in Pune. NEX has also been talking to other municipal administrations in Mumbai, Surat and Chennai.

In Bengaluru, civil society activists working on garbage suggested that the municipality consider the idea. The corporation's expert committee on solid waste then said it was worth a shot. There were bureaucratic hurdles to be crossed and conditions to be sorted out. Finally, NEX structured an agreement with the Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagar Palike and the Bruhat Bangalore Hotel Association.

The waste will come from the city's hotels. The



The NEX model: conversion of waste into biogas



Nuriel Pezarkar

NEX is a new-age company. It calls itself India's first producer of clean energy from municipal solid waste. In Bengaluru it will be converting 250 tonnes of organic waste into compressed biogas, selling it in cylinders.

corporation has given land for the plant. NEX will handle collection, transportation and segregation. It will convert the organic waste to biogas, put it in cylinders and offer it back to the hotels as a replacement for LPG.

The numbers are worth looking at. NEX gets five acres for 30 years for its plant from the municipality. But the municipality then doesn't have to go hunting for 8.5 acres a year to use as landfill for the municipal waste. Over 30 years 250 acres would be needed for landfills. The municipality also saves Rs 27 crore a year on the transportation and disposal of waste — over 30 years that is ₹810 crore without accounting for inflation.

The Bengaluru project is based on the polluter pays principle. The hotels pay NEX to have their garbage removed and in the process ensure a cleaner city.

THE PUNE MODEL

NEX's Pune project is modelled slightly differently though the assumptions and the goals are the same. The city administration had floated a global tender and NEX bid along with German and Japanese companies.

Unlike in Bengaluru, NEX in Pune is using five acres of its own land. It is this that actually gave the company an edge over the other bidders. Another difference is that the Pune municipality will take the responsibility of collecting the organic waste from hotels and other bulk sources and delivering them to the NEX plant.

In Bengaluru, NEX has invested ₹56 crore, but in Pune it has had to put in ₹65 crore. The industrial land it has bought is, of course, an appreciating asset. Both projects are expected to generate about

₹100 crore a year in revenue as operations stabilise over the next couple of years. The profit margin would be 18 to 20 per cent.

“The biggest opportunity is in government,” says Nuriel Pezarkar, CEO and founder of NEX. “If the government participates even in a small way you get scale.”

Pezarkar, who is 44, spends a lot of his time these days between Bengaluru and Pune. His background is in the healthcare and hygiene business. He is said to have played a key role in establishing Kimberly-Clark in India.

The healthcare and hygiene experience makes him particularly aware of the opportunities in cleanliness. As a marketing person he is also keen to carry people along rather than speak down to them. This works well when it comes to a social problem like garbage.

“There are limits to the *danda*,” he says. “We need inclusive solutions. Hotels, restaurants and industrial polluters in general must feel they are a part of the solution. They must feel they are playing a role in making the city liveable,” he explains.

In Bengaluru, NEX will be giving green certificates to hotels that give their garbage. It will also be giving green certificates to hotels that buy the cylinders of compressed natural gas that NEX will be producing from the garbage.

“It is one thing to incentivise and another to inculcate a sense of pride,” Pezarkar says.

NEX for him is a “responsible social business with a social and environmental sense — it gives more than it takes.”

The clock ticks for cities in India. Each year some 50 million tonnes of solid municipal waste come out of homes and commercial establishments. As the urban economy grows so does its garbage — piling up on streets before being ferried to landfills. Such is the challenge of cleaning up that it is common to have mounds fester for days together in neighbourhoods, even posh ones. Landfills, too, have run out of capacity and turned into hillocks.

Pezarkar estimates that more than 50 per cent of municipal solid waste is organic — invariably food leftovers, vegetable peel and so on which no one wants to touch. It is only from recyclables that money is made. NEX’s special relevance comes from using the organic waste to produce biogas.

But, clearly, multiple solutions on a large scale are needed and soon. Using organic municipal waste to generate power and steam to provide heating/cooling is also one way to go.

Elsewhere in the world cities have cleaned up and dealt with a waste problem by using it to generate power. In Stockholm, for instance, a waste-to-energy plant in the heart of the city uses the city’s waste and meets its power and heating needs.

But in India, despite its mounting garbage problem, there is just one plant and it is located in a Delhi neighbourhood. There is another being set up at the Ghazipur landfill on the eastern fringes of Delhi.

The first plant has outdated technology. The second has invested in newer technologies to reduce emissions, but the bigger framework within which waste-to-energy can succeed is missing.

Issues of collection, segregation, supply and location have not been adequately dealt with. Merely burning waste to generate power is not viable and actually leads to problems with emissions.

“India should learn from elsewhere,” says Chandra Bhushan, Additional Director of the



Landfills are not a solution to an escalating garbage problem

‘The basis for generating energy from waste is efficient municipal management. For any programme to be successful, we need less polluting, high energy value organic waste. The rest has to be recycled.’

Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in New Delhi. “We must see how the rest of the world has successfully used waste for generating energy. We also must build capacity — technology, manpower and institutions.”

Bhushan points out that the Scandinavian countries and Germany, where there are highly efficient energy plants, have shown that segregation of waste is essential. “We, on the other hand, do not segregate our waste. No technology can compensate for the lack of segregation.”

The highest environmental standards are required. The standards should be stringent but it should also be possible to monitor them. For instance, India has very high standards for dioxins and furan but we do not have the labs that can monitor these norms.

“Robust business models are needed for waste-to-energy plants. They need to be assured of supply of the right kind of waste and purchase of power and regulation,” says Bhushan.

“The basis for generating energy from waste is efficient municipal management. Burn it all is a bad strategy,” explains Bhushan. “For any waste-to-energy programme to be successful, we need less polluting, high energy value organic waste. The rest has to be recycled.”

Where power is generated from waste, the dependence on landfills correspondingly declines — which is a huge environmental benefit. However, a vision is required. Important choices have to be made.

In India, currently the attempt is to only generate power from waste when it would be much more efficient to have cooling and heating as well. This would involve scrubbing of flue gasses and fewer emissions.

Fortum is a giant energy company from Finland, which also runs waste-to-energy plants. It has come to India recently and is focussed on solar energy and combined heat and power generation for industry. What would it take to get an energy company

the size of Fortum to generate power from municipal waste?

While doing our homework on waste-to-energy we spoke sometime last year to Kosti Rautiainen, Vice President of Fortum, then based in the company’s Gurgaon office. Rautiainen has since left Fortum.

A technical expert, Rautiainen explained to us in some detail the need for advanced technologies, planning and an efficient business model for making large investments viable.

A waste-based plant set up by Fortum at Klaipeda in Lithuania, for instance, produces power and heating. It uses the latest technologies and so has 95 per cent efficiency. All the energy is used from the waste.

The plant is based on a 20-year agreement with the municipality so that it is assured of the quality of the waste it requires and purchase of power and heating. Fortum relies on three streams of revenue: from generating power, from heating and cooling and from handling waste.

Planning is essential for several reasons. First, the supply of waste and purchase of power and heating plus cooling have to be guaranteed. Then, again, retrofitting is virtually impossible. So, giving Gurgaon a waste-to-energy plant now would be just too expensive. Also, no one size fits all locations. The calorific content of waste will vary. In India, for instance, it is said the calorific content of municipal solid waste is low and so a system has to be designed for it.

The social and ecological benefits from a waste-to-energy plant far outweigh the cost of setting it up. Not only is the disposal of garbage regulated, but the use of landfills goes down dramatically over a few years.

The plant in the heart of Stockholm has emissions, but they are well within limits. Sweden and Finland, Rautiainen observed, were as heavily polluted as India is today, but learnt to deal with their environmental problems. ■

From garbage to flowers

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHEN it was decided to set up a waste-to-energy plant at the Ghazipur landfill site in Delhi, it became a challenge to take care of the earnings of 300 families that sort through the garbage each day.

The wastepickers separate the recyclables like glass bottles, pieces of metal and plastics, and sell them to wholesale dealers. It is the only work they know and with a power plant coming up the landfill would soon be out of bounds for them.

The plant is designed to generate 12 MW from 1,300 tonnes of the estimated 2,500 tonnes of waste that reach the landfill each day. It is being set up by

began, it was decided to set up a producer company called the Gulmeher Green Producer Company Ltd. (GGPCL). The aim was to help the wastepickers sell their products through a company of which they would be shareholders.

Suresh Khanduri, a member of IDS and programme director of GGPCL, says, "We conducted surveys and found out that the Ghazipur flower market produces a huge amount of waste flowers every day. They do not have a cold storage; therefore the flowers that are not sold at the end of the day are just thrown away. Our team collects around 10 kg of waste flowers from the market every day. We salvage the flowers, bring them to our workshop, dry and recycle them."

"We make a wide range of products from recycled

paying ₹1,000 in three monthly instalments to purchase a share. For instance, Manni, 27, holds a share of GGPCL. "I have been working here for the last eight months. I was explained the advantages of owning company shares by the coordinators here. It was a little hard to grasp, and I am still learning about shares and partnerships, but I am proud to say that I am a shareholder of a company," she says.

To support the workers of GGPCL and the members of the wastepickers' community, IL&FS has set up services like a mini bank, crèche and tuition classes for children as well as adults.

"We have tied up with the State Bank of India," says Khanduri. "The mini bank is accessed by the wastepickers as well as workers from other colonies nearby. Under the Jan Dhan Yojana scheme, around 1,300 savings accounts have been opened in the past three months. We are also aiming to implement the National Pension Scheme here soon."

"The bank has been really helpful for us. The bigger banks would not entertain us, so we had to keep all our savings with us, under our beds and similar places. It often happened that we would lose everything in case of a fire or any other disaster. Having a bank account helps. I can transfer money to my relatives living in Bihar," says Ranjit, a wastepicker.

According to Khanduri, the women don't want to work away from their homes because they cannot leave their little children behind in their homes, where there is no security or restriction. The Gulmeher crèche addresses that issue. Neha, a teacher at the crèche says, "We admit children up to the age of five. Right now, we have 30 children with us, to whom we provide fun learning classes and meals. The women who work here at GGPCL know that their children are being taken care of."

GGPCL has also tied up with Delhi-based manufacturer Aakar Innovations to set up a low-cost sanitary napkin production unit at the company workshop itself. "Aakar has provided us four machines on which our workers can make sanitary napkins," says Khanduri. "We have employed an additional group of 15 women in this unit and it will be fully functional when the testing and training are over."

There are about 45 women who have found alternative employment through Gulmeher. Another 70 are employed at the waste-to-energy plant. But there are some 700 adults in the 300 families of wastepickers. Alternative employment, therefore, remains a challenge.

Pramila, 32, a wastepicker from the same community, says that most women didn't want to do the work of an artisan. She says, "I attended their training sessions but found the craft difficult to grasp. I am happier working at the dump."

"They only hire women. They don't have much work for us male workers there so we prefer the landfill site," says Ali, 26. When asked what he will do when the power plant begins working and access to the dumping ground is restricted, he says, "We are migrants. Most of us are from West Bengal and Bihar. Our community has been living here for the last 10 years. If we don't find a livelihood option here, we will shift near other landfill sites and find work there." ■

AJIT KRISHNA



Women produce sanitary napkins, calendars, greeting cards, candles

Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services Ltd (IL&FS) through a special purpose vehicle with the government of Delhi called the East Delhi Waste Processing Co. Ltd.

The Social Inclusion Group in IL&FS decided to try and provide alternative employment to the wastepickers. Initially, it provided training in skills like masonry, carpentry and machine operations. But when the time came to take up jobs in workshops and factories in Noida, nobody came forward. The wastepickers were insecure leaving Ghazipur and the life they knew.

An IL&FS spokesperson explained, "They don't want to relocate to other places, nor can they think of any profession that doesn't involve waste. So we thought of creating an alternative livelihood opportunity using waste."

To be more effective, IL&FS teamed up in May 2013 with the Uttarakhand-based Institute for Development Support (IDS), an NGO. Together they began exploring possibilities. The National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) was brought in to train women among the wastepickers in arts and crafts.

In February 2014, nine months after the training

flowers and paper, like calendars, greeting cards, gift baskets, candles and office supplies like pen stands, files and such," says Vidwata Singh, chief designer of GGPCL.

"It was a little tough in the initial days, when we started training them in handicrafts," says Singh. "They didn't have a developed aesthetic sense and the products would eventually turn out to be unbalanced in proportions. Or there would be thumb stains and we would have to discard them. But with training skills have been developed. Now, there are women who are making intricate designs with ease. We have trained around 90 women and of them 20 women are working here full-time."

The women are paid on the basis of the number of units they make in a day. "The payment rate varies from product to product. For instance, the payment is ₹20 for each greeting card, ₹50 for each calendar and so on," says Khanduri. "On an average, an artisan earns around ₹6,000 each month here, which is much more than what they could have earned as wastepickers. In the peak months, for example, during last Diwali, our top performers have earned around ₹10,000 in a month."

Women become shareholders of the company by

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

Niti Aayog's first steps

AJIT KRISHNA



RAJIV KUMAR

INDIA FIRST

THE National Institute for Transformation of India (NITI) Aayog was formally launched on 8 February with the first meeting of its Governing Council (GC).

The GC effectively replaces the National Development Council, and is made up of all the chief ministers, relevant ministers from the Central Cabinet, vice-chairman and members of the NITI Aayog and presided over by the Prime Minister. In its composition, therefore, the NITI Aayog reflects its predecessor, the Planning Commission. The difference from the past could well be in the exhortation by its Chairman, the Prime Minister, for it to work as Team India and pursue the model of cooperative, competitive federalism.

The GC has tasked the NITI Aayog with carrying out a mid-term review of the 12th Plan. Does this imply that the NDA government has in effect adopted the 12th Plan prepared under the supervision of Dr Manmohan Singh and Montek Singh Ahluwalia? After the adoption of the Aadhar scheme, continuing with senior officers and flagship schemes of the UPA government, this would be yet another example of the Prime Minister's preference for continuity and changing slowly. Such an approach has both its downside and upside risks. On the downside, the approach could make current policy hostage to past practices and inertia. Its obvious upside is to minimise transition costs and demonstrate policy continuity. I would have preferred a clean break with the past.

Three sub-groups and two task forces have been constituted under the NITI Aayog's aegis. The first sub-group of chief ministers will study the 66 Centrally Sponsored Schemes and recommend their rationalisation. The second will recommend how the NITI Aayog can promote skill development and the creation of skilled manpower within states. The third will decide on institutional mechanisms to be evolved and identify technological inputs for ensuring that the commitment to Swachh Bharat becomes a part of our life in perpetuity. The first task force will focus on poverty alleviation and the other will focus on the future development of agriculture in states and how the Centre can assist particular states in this regard. The mandate, as given by the GC, implies that henceforth the function of devolving 'plan funds' to the states will be taken away from the NITI Aayog and handed over pre-



The NITI Aayog is likely to serve as a think-tank

In the absence of any financial leverage will NITI Aayog receive cooperation from state govts especially those led by the opposition?

sumably to the Finance Ministry, acting as per the awards by successive Finance Commissions.

That the NITI Aayog will serve as the think-tank of the government was evident from the fact that, prior to its formal launch, the PM had used it as a forum for an interaction on 6 February with selected economists and experts (including yours truly) for eliciting suggestions on the forthcoming budget and addressing other important medium-term challenges. The interaction was the first of its kind. The NITI Aayog's earlier avatar, the Planning Commission, was never used, at least in my memory, by the PM to interact with external experts. Hopefully, this practice will be institutionalised for the NITI Aayog to serve as a bridge between the government and think-tanks and researchers. This would serve the important function of making the government less knowledge-proof going forward.

We could also expect the emergence of a strong working relationship between the PMO and the NITI Aayog. Given the lack of statutory authority and the absence of clearly articulated rules of business for the new body, this will be critical. As one

foreign observer quipped, Professor Arvind Panagariya could hardly be expected to give up his University of Columbia professorship for anything short of regular and intensive interaction with the PM and his senior officials. Even with a strong bond between the PMO and the NITI Aayog, it will still be necessary to write down the rules of business for the Aayog, to make it an effective instrument for inter-ministerial and inter-government coordination. These business rules provide the necessary framework for a government agency such as the NITI Aayog to play an effective role in the complex governance space both at the Centre and the States.

From developments so far, would it be fair to surmise that the NITI Aayog will certainly have a significantly curtailed mandate compared to its earlier incarnation? Several questions arise. In the absence of any financial leverage over them, will the NITI Aayog receive the necessary cooperation from state governments, especially those led by opposition parties? Will other Central ministries, departments and agencies, find it worth their while to coordinate their policies and programmes with the NITI Aayog? For example, will the Ministry of Skills Development and the National Skills Development Authority find it useful to do so? Was there indeed any need to charge the the NITI Aayog with skills formation in the states when two extant organisations were already mandated to do so? The same is true for its role in the PM's favourite Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, which is the joint responsibility of the Ministries of Health and Rural Development.

My fear is that, given the lack of statutory author-

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Resist and persist



KANCHI KOHLI

AFTER being on the road for close to 12 hours, we heard some uncomfortable sounds. The tyre of our hardy jeep had burst perhaps half an hour earlier but we had continued to zip at high speed till we were finally warned to stop. It was dusk and the forests were beginning to come alive. On the road we could see a few pedestrians and small vehicles. Hundreds of trucks carrying iron ore would soon begin trundling down cutting through the dense tree cover to head for their destination.

We hopped out of the vehicle, some eight of us. It was going to be a while before the rusty bolts of the existing tyre could be removed and mended so that we could resume our journey. As we were jostling with the tyre, we began to converse reflectively. What started as a casual discussion about how sometimes the most tried-out solutions get jammed like our tyre, evolved into a deeper analysis of social conflicts in the country. Who gives up first and tires out last often determines what shape power struggles around decision-making and resource-based livelihoods take.

Then we began to get specific. Just a few weeks ago 20 *gram sabhas* from ecologically fragile and biodiversity rich Hasdeo Arand and Dharamjaigarh forest area in Surguja, Korba and Raigarh districts of Chhattisgarh had unanimously passed resolutions against the initiation of coal mining in their areas. This was soon after the government had passed the Coal Ordinance through which auctioning of coal blocks cancelled by the Supreme Court's verdict in August and September 2014 would be resumed.

It seemed the *gram sabhas* were forewarning the government. Representatives from those villages visited Delhi with copies of their resolution in mid

January. They said they were requesting and alerting government agencies. The forests in which mining would be allowed are important for wildlife and support a range of thriving livelihoods. Why auction, they asked, when you know that local village assemblies will exercise their constitutional right to reject mining operations?

It was getting cold, and one of us spotted a small teashop across the road. We readily walked in. What better way to pass the time than a cup of tea, local biscuits and an intense conversation with a bunch of individuals entangled in these debates? We continued to reflect on stories of persistence and resistance.

What has become of the 10-year movement



Protest against POSCO in Odisha

against setting up a steel plant and port in Odisha by POSCO, I was asked? The company is still around, striking new partnerships, pushing for its mining operations, trying to set in motion land acquisition and so on, I recalled. We then began discussing whether the deal the company had signed with the Adani group to set up their new container terminal in Abbot Point in Australia would buttress its business prospects in India. A colleague asked whether this would get POSCO closer to the powers that be since the Adani group is stated to have some traction there. We exchanged glances and knowing smiles.

At the same time there is a continuous flow of

news about resistance from Jagatsinghpur where a 10-year struggle continues and from Sundargarh where iron ore mines are supposed to be leased out to a company in a likely partnership with the Odisha Mining Corporation.

The jeep was finally ready to take us into town. Each of us took back bits of the conversation, I suppose. It all came back to me as I sat in the National Green Tribunal a couple of days later to see a long-standing review petition against a 300 MW thermal power plant of OPG Power Gujarat Ltd dismissed. The tribunal's judgment had gone against the petitioners in July 2013 when their appeal had been dismissed after several twists and turns in the case first filed in 2010.

The petitioners did not want to give up because they were clear that the company does not intend to restrict its operations to 300 MW and will soon be expanding substantially to take over productive fishing harbours. The ecologically fragile inter-tidal area in Gujarat's Kutch district is once again poised at a critical juncture. Undeterred by this setback, the fishing community has begun gathering its strength to persist with legal options and resist the company's expansion on the ground.

They know that the company has already signed an MoU with the government to expand power production to 2,600 MW, after giving assurances to the people that they would not do anything that would harm their livelihoods.

But, no one is fooled anymore. People have seen neighbouring harbours impacted by other power plants that take in seawater and release hot water.

Despite six years of opposition by the people, the company remains grounded in the area, trying to restart operations of its 300 MW power plant.

Who tires first, I thought to myself once again. In this continuous jostle of power and people, courts and judgments, decisions and resolutions, so many small and big battles are being fought. Each, in its own way, will not just transform landscapes but will leave behind a telling tale of whose resistance won and whose persistence lost. ■

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ity and the absence of well-defined rules of business, it could continue to be perceived as a fifth wheel by both state government and central government agencies. Its role in government policy formulation would then be restricted to the personal access that the vice-chairman and two full-time members enjoy with the PM and his Cabinet colleagues. This would surely be more difficult with state governments, which are not beholden to the Centre and in any case further removed. I am left wondering at the

rational and strategic approach that has underpinned the design and mandate of the NITI Aayog.

Would it not have been useful to give the NITI Aayog a clear mandate to interact with private sector specialists and civil society think-tanks and act as a conduit for bringing their inputs into government operations? Would it not have been more useful if the NITI Aayog could lead the effort for India to improve its ranking in global competitiveness indices? That would have given it a different orientation and made it part of much-needed efforts to integrate the Indian

economy more competitively and effectively in global supply chains and production networks.

As it stands today, the NITI Aayog seems like a paler version of its predecessor with similar domestic orientation and lack of statutory authority to ensure compliance from any quarter. Let's hope this will change as lessons are learnt and the NITI Aayog finds its moorings with strong support from its Chairman, the Prime Minister. ■

Rajiv Kumar is Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research, and Founder-Director, Pehle India Foundation.

A class of equals



DILEEP RANJEKAR

BACK TO SCHOOL

ABOUT two years ago, in a relatively remote town in Maharashtra, while addressing some 250 college students, I asked them, “how many of you are proud of being Indian?” Many hands went up. A small group of students did not raise their hands. I asked the majority group why they felt proud of being Indian. They came up with several reasons such as “our culture, our heritage, our diversity, our tolerant society, democracy and so on.”

Then I turned to the smaller group that did not raise its hands and asked their reasons for not feeling proud of being Indians. Their reasons were, “the widespread corruption, the atrocities regularly committed against girls, the minority communities and the Dalits, the severe inequities among socio-economic groups, the urban-rural divide, gender discrimination and so on.”

A debate ensued between the two groups. At the end of the debate many students who were “proud of being Indian” changed their views. They realised that the many reasons that they felt proud of were not valid, that over a period of time, they had just become empty words, that in reality, we have become a society that blatantly promotes, tolerates and ignores the inequity around us.

All kinds of inequity prevail in our society. It is caste-based, religion-based, minority-group based, gender-based and urban-rural oriented.

In educational institutions such as schools and colleges, young, impressionable minds are major victims of such inequity. In some cases, even teachers from the minority community and backward categories are victims of it. The discrimination is palpable — it is in the seating arrangements, in the mid-day meal distribution, in the way children are profiled and are referred to. It is also in the way parents treat their male and female children — in terms of food distribution, enrolment of children, dropping out of children, not allowing girls to go to the school once they attain puberty and the way girls are forced into child marriage. The education and literacy statistics for girls, rural children and Scheduled Caste (SC) children is upto 25 percentage points adverse as compared to boys, urban children and forward category children, respectively.

On one of my visits to a government school, I was with the children of Class

3. The children were enthusiastically showing me their notebooks. I was taken aback when the teacher slapped a child who pushed another child while forcefully shoving his notebook into my hand. I asked the teacher — why did he slap the child? The teacher explained that the child had told me in Kannada not to take the other child’s notebook since he was a ‘Scheduled Caste child’.

Who introduced the concept of a ‘Scheduled Caste’ child in the mind of a Class 3 student? Obviously, the sources could be many — his parents, the neighbours, other children, the teacher or his observant mind! In a small town the separation of Dalits and the Scheduled Castes is rather more pronounced because they often live a ‘ghetto-like’ life. As a practice they often live outside the boundaries of the village. Even the watering points are segregated, based on caste and community.

Why does this social order exist after 65 years of the Indian Constitution? There could be several explanations such as discrimination being deep rooted in our social psyche for centuries, exploitation of the worse kind (of such social psyche) by the political system for electoral gains, non-implementation of hundreds of government programmes that were designed to create affirmative action towards underprivileged groups and to specifically serve their interests and so on.

The sensitivity to equity must begin at home, by parents and neighbourhoods, and in schools that have the specific responsibility to develop our children in a certain way to become responsible social citizens who understand our Constitutional values. Some specific areas are:

Early childhood education: The inequity begins with a vast majority of children, especially in rural areas not having any exposure to early childhood education as compared to their urban counterparts who get some kind of exposure to such education. As such, they are better prepared to enter Class 1.

Many of them can even read, write and count. But the children who don’t have such exposure begin learning reading and writing after entering school. As such, they are comparatively ill-prepared and therefore disadvantaged.

Parental support: I entered Class 1 rather late, at the age of seven, without any exposure to formal early childhood education since I refused to attend such education. However, when I entered Class 1, I was able to fluently read and write. That was possible only because of the home environment and parental support. In the case of children whose parents are illiterate or semi-literate, such support is just not possible. This creates an inherent disadvantage for children. When blind comparisons are made between private and public schools, it is often forgotten that the public schools have to deal with this handicap.

Preparing teachers to sensitively deal with inequity: People familiar with schools know several insensitivities are perpetrated on children in school. Children from upper castes are told by their parents not to mix with those from the lower caste. At times, teachers (especially from the upper caste) unknowingly create walls with not only socially but also economically backward class children. There are several implications of such humiliating experiences on various groups of children. Some lose their confidence permanently. Some become deeply resentful and permanently antagonistic. Since teachers probably have the highest influence in the classroom, they can send powerful messages to children. We have to develop deeper sensitivity among teachers for inclusive pedagogical practices.

Build a conducive school culture: School leaders can make or break a school. They can build a powerful equity culture in school through several practices and activities that are naturally woven in the overall ethos of the school. This could include the school assembly practices, monthly events, school gatherings, annual day functions and national festivals that are celebrated in the school. For this the school leader has to be deeply sensitive about social issues. I remember, in one of the schools the principal once called a student along with his father and introduced them to me. “He is the son of our sweeper and is doing well in the school”, said the principal. I was shocked by his insensitivity and condescending attitude. Merely being well-meaning is not enough. The school must be aware of the implications of every action they take and statement they make.

The real question is: if the education system itself suffers from so many inequities, how would it achieve one of its most powerful goals — of building an equitable society? ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation



The loving link



MATHEW CHERIAN

GREY LINES

IN Indian cities, the number of elderly without children feeling insecure and seeking help has been rising. Police records reveal that in Delhi this number has jumped three times in the last 18 months. The source of anxiety and fear are local goons, builders and even their own children — by trusting them many parents have come to grief. The Mumbai Police helpline for senior citizens receives over 80 calls a day. In Hyderabad, constables do the rounds with newspaper hawkers each morning to keep a tab on the elderly.

In Bengaluru and Chennai, where HelpAge India runs helplines for the elderly, the police are busy locating senior citizens living alone on account of increasing attacks on them. Delhi and Kolkata have now launched police verification schemes for domestic helps working with the elderly. In Chennai, the police have introduced bicycle patrolling in the evenings while in Pune they visit the elderly once a week to lend an 'empathetic ear'. However, the culture of empathy is yet to permeate the rank and file and looking after older people in this manner is a formidable challenge.

The helpline set up by HelpAge gets hundreds of calls from senior citizens suffering serious neglect and rejection by their abusive, unaccommodating children. The elder abuse report from HelpAge also indicates that one in three elderly persons living in cities faces abuse at the hands of their own children. The abuser is mostly the son in the family and not the daughter-in-law, as commonly perceived.

Older people living in rural and remote areas are combating poverty and marginalisation and difficult social conditions. Those living in slums are economically most deprived and socially marginalised, constituting a large segment of the urban poor. Children from rural areas are migrating to the cities, leaving their parents behind. In many villages in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, families regularly migrate to Punjab and Haryana, and other areas for work. Older parents are thus left alone in their homes with nobody to care for them.

We have been looking at ways to improve inter-generational solidarity. There are several instances of facilitating mutual contact between the two generations fairly successfully. Contact within the family units has proved even better, resulting in more

positive attitudes towards the elderly.

Likewise, Corbin et al (1989) have reported that a seven-day interaction programme promoting visits to the elderly in the fifth grade curriculum with special focus on art, dance, music, poetry, history and language generated a more positive attitude among children about elders. The authors observed that the attitudes were maintained for almost a year after the programme. According to gerontologist Olejnik and Larue, in similar programmes, adolescents' attitude towards older people became less negative. It is observed that in families where children and their grandparents live together, the quality of their communication and consequent emotional bonding benefits both.



Bridging the generation gap helps the old and the young

The helpline set up by HelpAge gets hundreds of calls from senior citizens suffering serious neglect and rejection by their abusive children.

In this context, Glass and Knot (1982) have suggested three important ways through which children's attitude could be changed, that is:

- Through discussion with peers
- Through direct experience with attitude objects
- Through increased information and knowledge

There were activities in the classroom focusing on students' awareness of the elderly and the process of ageing, role play simulation exercises and so on. In one 90-minute session, senior citizens visited the school, in the second session the children visited the seniors' centre, and in the third session small gifts were exchanged followed by mutual interaction. The fourth session was devoted to painting and music. The fifth was a reminiscing group activity to discover activities and values each group had in common with the other. Topics of interaction were pets, lack of independence, good times, and so on.

The sixth session was a performance by Ripe and

Ready Players in which seniors sang on various aspects of ageing with other seniors and students as audience. This was followed by small group discussions on various aspects of ageing and staying active. The seventh session, titled 'Informal Sharing', was devoted to experience-sharing to "deepen their friendship and knowledge about each other". The eighth session — Farewell Picnic — was used to end the programme of mutual learning and knowing in which the students' parents joined in and talked about their experience of the programme.

HelpAge has been using all, and in some cases some, of these models based on availability of time in our classroom programme in schools to see that

children and grandparents remain in touch. Very often, this interaction sensitises both generations and we hope in future children will take care of their parents and evolve a more caring India. It also provides an opportunity for children to do social service at a young age and will be a stepping stone for the future.

How does all this sum up for the future? One of the best geriatricians in the country, Dr AB Dey at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, says, "The body has to break down and it is a natural process but I have seen that grandparents who are with their grandchildren are much healthier and happier than others with nobody around." It is a testimony of the strength of intergenerational love, which is pure.

The census reveals that India's elderly constitute more than 100 million, but living arrangements have shown a reduction in numbers within the family. Across India, elderly parents are not living with their grandchildren. In the changing scenario, we need to create new systems

for care for the elderly.

Initially, it was felt the responsibility of looking after the elderly was the family's. The UPA government passed a law, the Maintenance of Parents Bill, 2007, and indicated that in case of complaints by parents the son or daughter could be penalised. In one stroke, the State passed on its responsibility to the family, washing its hands off. There is no sustained State effort to take care of the elderly. The very same Bill indicated that there will be one old age home for indigent elderly in every district. Till date, not a single such home has come up in any district of the country. There were to be tribunals in every district but they have been set up only in the metros.

It is high time the government implements measures to protect the elderly and instil the values of inter-generational love, for when love is lost between parents and children then all is lost to lucre. We need to wake up as a nation before it is too late. ■

Mathew Cherian is CEO of HelpAge India

Remember Auschwitz

Night Will Fall releases 70 years later

Amit Dasgupta
Visakhapatnam

The train arrived in the middle of the night, so we were greeted by very bright lights shining down on us. We were greeted by soldiers, SS men, as well as women. We were greeted by dogs and whips, by shouting and screaming, orders to try to empty the train, by confusion....There is no way to describe your first coming to Auschwitz.

– Fritzie Weiss Fritzshall, freed inmate

And they said, "From now on you do not answer by your name. Your name is your number." And the delusion, the disappointment, the discouragement that I felt. I felt like I was not a human person anymore.

– Lilly Appelbaum Lublin Malnik, freed inmate

27 January 1945: For the past 70 years, this date has been commemorated as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. It is estimated that around 1.1 million people, mostly Jews from across Europe, but also the elderly, the infirm, homosexuals, political opponents, prisoners of war and gypsies were killed through gas chambers, summary executions, forced labour, systematic starvation and medical experiments.

Rudolf Hoess, in a sworn affidavit at the war crimes trials, confessed: "At least 2.5 million victims were executed and exterminated by gassing and burning, and at least another half million succumbed to starvation and disease." It was argued that Hoess exaggerated the figure. He was hanged on 16 April 1947 following a trial in Warsaw.



Auschwitz was not the only concentration camp. There were countless others: Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen, Sachsenhausen, Treblinka, to name a few. Over the months that followed, the horrors were carefully documented through photographs, film footage and personal interviews.

This year, 70 years after it was first made, HBO released *Night Will Fall*, a documentary produced by Sidney Bernstein and Alfred Hitchcock. Seventy years

ago, as Europe sought to rebuild itself and put aside past enmities, it felt it would be inappropriate to release the film because the disturbing images would once again trigger unhappy memories of those cruel and merciless years under Nazi Germany.

Yet, the world needs to recall that past, to reflect, to learn.

In 1945, the Winter Offensive had begun. In January, Soviet troops were already in Poland and were remorselessly pushing towards Auschwitz that lay 37 miles west of Krakow. The Germans knew that before long, the Russian troops would occupy Poland.

Soon the world would get to know what the Nazis had been doing all across Europe in their concentration and extermination camps. It was at Auschwitz that the horrors had taken place

on an unprecedented scale. Believing they could suppress what truly happened, the SS started evacuating Auschwitz: there was Auschwitz 1, which was the original camp, Auschwitz 2, which was primarily an extermination camp, Auschwitz 3, which was referred to as a 'labour camp'; and 45 other satellite camps. The majority of the inmates were taken west on the death march to Germany. Many were too weak to walk and were shot, their bodies left to rot

Continued on page 30



Stills from the film: The images caught on camera were considered too disturbing to be released then

Continued from page 29

where they had fallen. Orders were issued that those who remained in the camps, because they were too frail to even stand up, were to be shot by the SS. In the confusion that followed the evacuation, many were left alive. Many others were simply burnt alive.

Realising that the war was lost and that Russian troops would be in Auschwitz before long, Hoess, who was commandant at Auschwitz, ordered that evidence of the mass murders should be concealed. Files were destroyed, gas chambers burnt, the dead buried hastily in mass graves. But it was not enough



Several buildings were still burning with large numbers of dead prisoners, their bodies still smouldering.



to hide from the world the terrible crimes that had been committed.

Soviet troops entered Auschwitz on 27 January 1945. Several buildings were still burning with large numbers of dead prisoners, their bodies still smouldering. The stench of burning flesh was everywhere. Those alive initially stared with vacant eyes at their liberators. Then they started to weep and laugh. Eva Mores Kor, a 10-year-old survivor, recalls that extraordinary day, and says, "We ran up to them, and they gave us hugs, cookies and chocolate. Being so alone a hug meant more than anyone could imagine because that replaced the human worth we were starving for. We were not only starved for food, we were starved for human kindness."

Night Will Fall provides footage as taken by Russian and allied troops and journalists of what they saw in the several camps they liberated, as they swept across occupied Europe and overran Nazi Germany. Naked emaciated bodies that resembled

sticks with flesh hanging on them, eyes that were hollow and listless, bodies piled high one on top of the other in carts, bodies dangling like macabre puppets on the shoulders of those who carried them to mass graves, bodies dragged across the floor held by one hand as the contorted death face stares blankly at the camera lens. People watched the documentary film with horror.

This year's commemoration saw fewer survivors. A decade ago, around 2,000 survivors had travelled to Auschwitz to remember, to weep and to mourn. This year saw under 300 survivors, many of whom are 100 years old, some even older.

In a few years from now, there will be no more survivors left. This raises many questions. Who will remember what happened? Can memory be kept alive? There are also questions on how much longer German youngsters need to feel apologetic and ashamed for being descendants of the Nazis. Or why the commemoration is not for the gypsies, the homosexuals and many non-Jews, who were also exterminated. Who remembers the over two million Armenians, who were massacred by the Turks, in what came to be known as 'the first genocide of the 20th century'? But, most important of all, is Israel doing to Palestine what the Nazis did to them?

This year, Sir Anish Kapoor installed 70 giant candles around the UK to commemorate the anniversary. Kapoor, whose mother is Jewish, grew up in Israel. He is an outspoken critic of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory and the erection of the West Bank barrier. In August 2014, over 300 holocaust survivors criticised Tel Aviv's policies towards Palestinians. They called it 'the on-going genocide of the Palestinian people', invoking the term 'genocide' that had been used to characterise Nazi atrocities during the Holocaust years.

In Europe, where freedom of expression is fiercely guarded, the dastardly attack on the weekly satirical newspaper, *Charlie Hebdo*, which published cartoons caricaturing Prophet Muhammad, triggered grief and the '*Je Suis Charlie*' sentiment all across Europe. However, even today, in Europe, which believes in freedom of expression as a constitutional right and obligation, anti-Jewish statements continue to be illegal. It bears recalling that *Charlie Hebdo* fired 80-year-old cartoonist Maurice Senet, who had worked with them for 20 years, for caricaturing the Jewish origins of the girlfriend of French President Nicholas Sarkozy's son.

As the world remembers Auschwitz and the several other death camps of the Nazi era, it is worth pausing and recalling what a commentator said, "Unless the world learns the lesson these pictures teach, night will fall." Humanity will have forsaken humanity. ■

Amit Dasgupta is the author of the recently published book, *Lessons from Ruslana: In Search of Transformative Thinking*, HarperCollins, 2015. He can be reached at amit.dasgupta2015@yahoo.com



The National Music and Dance Festival in the backdrop of the

In Sirpur 3

Susheela Nair
Sirpur

As we reached the idyllic hamlet of Sirpur on a wintry evening, a kaleidoscope of colour and a medley of music greeted us. The third edition of the National Music and Dance Festival, organised by the Chhattisgarh Tourism Board, was in full swing. Renowned national and international artistes were sharing the platform with their tribal counterparts.

Set against the backdrop of the Lakshman Temple, the three-day mega event played host to Kathak exponent Pandit Birju Maharaj, Grammy Award-winner Pete Lockett, santoor maestro Rahul Sharma, taiko drummer Leonard Eto, singer Anuradha Paudwal and other reputed artistes.

But the highlight of this cultural festival was the amalgamation of sounds created by tribal percussionists with percussionist Lockett. It seemed quite apt to celebrate the country's diverse music and dance forms in Sirpur, the old capital of Dakshina Kosala, along the banks of the mighty Mahanadi.

Sirpur is a treasure trove of archaeological ruins, ancient Hindu temples, Jain and Buddhist *viharas* and monuments. No wonder it is called an open-air museum. Its fame spread far and wide when Chinese scholar, pilgrim and traveller Hiuen Tsang visited Sirpur and extolled its archaeological finds in his writings. Sirpur's ruins have elicited superlative praise from personages like the Dalai Lama. As with most pilgrim centres in India, Sirpur also has a Rama-Sita connection. Local tradition mentions Savaripura as the original name of Sirpur because Shabari, a female mendicant, offered a fruit to Lord Rama here.

We started our monument-hopping in Sirpur



Lakshman Temple



Famed Kathak dancer, Birju Maharaj

days of music, dance

with the towering Lakshman Temple and spent two days soaking in the atmosphere of the shrine. Sirpur's glorious history shot into the limelight in 1872, when Alexander Cunningham, the founder and first director of the Archaeological Survey of India, discovered this temple.

Perched on a six-foot-high platform, it is one of the finest brick temples of the country. The temple's high, corbelled roof with its intricately sculpted *shikhara*, a beautifully adorned massive stone door, exquisite carvings and precise construction with

awe-inspiring symmetry took our breath away. This 'Panchrath'-type temple has a *mandapa* (shelter), *anraala* (passage) and *garbha griha* (sanctum sanctorum). Made solely of brick, it conforms to ancient architectural principles. We clambered up the stairs and gazed in wonder at the central lintel adorned with carvings of Vishnu's avatars and the series of panels in the main doorway chiselled with delicate figures.

It is said to be the only temple in India dedicated to Lakshman, the younger brother of Lord Rama.

SUSHEELA NAIR



The Lakshman Temple in Sirpur is the only one dedicated to him

Legend has it that Sita was sheltered here by Maharishi Balmiki. A white signboard near the temple's entrance informs visitors that the brick temple was built in the eighth century by Vasata, the daughter of King Suryavarma of Magadh and the mother of Mahashivagupta, who ruled over Mahakosala, of which Sirpur was the capital. The museum on the same premises is worth a peek.

We discovered that Sirpur is full of surprises. It is a place to be experienced rather than described. According to archaeologist Dr AK Sharma, the principles of *vaastu shastra* seem to have been the touchstone for builders in ancient Sirpur. There is not a single structure which has not followed the principles of this ancient form of building.

The ruins of many temples and Buddhist *viharas* dating back to the 10th century have been excavated in this area. The most imposing is the Surang Tila that was unearthed in 2005. This huge triple pyramidal structure is amazing, with a flight of steep, white stone steps, which lean peculiarly inwards and lead to a stone platform, almost five metres above the ground. The unique design of the staircase may have been caused by an earthquake in the past. On the top are five small shrines, some dedicated to Shiva and others to Vishnu. The pillars and wall slabs depict men and women in amorous postures. There are sculptures on all the pillars, most of which are half-destroyed now.

We saw more lovers in stone at the nearby Tivaradeva Vihar ruins. This mound was discovered around the same time as Surang Tila and was a Buddhist monastery. The entrance is ornamentally decorated with sculptures of *nayaks-nayikas* and amorous couples, the *mithunas*. It is believed that the king who oversaw the construction of this *vihara* in the sixth century, had two wives and they were always trying to outdo each other to entice him. So, the artists were asked to chisel these love games on stone. Inside, a big stone statue of Lord Buddha with a serene expression caught our attention. More maimed figurines, ancient weapons and remains of pottery line the edge of the brick courtyard.

Close to the Lakshman Temple lie the shattered remains of the Ram Temple without its pinnacle. Located on the banks of the Mahanadi, the Gandeshwar Temple dedicated to Lord Shiva is equally interesting. It sits amidst several Sati pillars and other shrines faithful to the Jain, Buddhist and Hindu styles and traditions of architecture. Tracking through temples and ruins, we explored another interesting place — Baleshwar Mahadev temple flanked by a pair of Shiva temples, presumably built by a king for his two wives. What intrigued me was the star-shaped sanctum.

We wound up our sightseeing by visiting a sprawling marketplace just off the riverbank. The market has an underground granary, hospital, temples, safes for keeping the money earned, spaces for individual traders and Ayurvedic baths! Exulting over this archaeological wonder, I was reminded of Hampi's bazaars. ■

FACT FILE

GETTING THERE

By Air & Rail: The nearest airport and station are at Raipur (85 km).

By Road: Regular buses ply from Raipur and Mahasamund.

WHERE TO STAY: Hiuen Tsang Tourist Resort, Sirpur.

CONTACT: Chhattisgarh Tourism Board, Raipur (+91-771 422 4600).

‘Women are still soft power’

Civil Society News
New Delhi

MORE women work than before. They are in politics, business, the arts, education, healthcare, government and a lot else. They contribute to the economy in a myriad ways. But what does empowerment mean to the woman of today?

Every year, the India International Centre's (IIC) journal, known cryptically as the 'IIC Quarterly' brings out a special volume on a particular theme. In partnership with well-known publishing house Sage, IIC has published one of its special volumes into a book. It is titled *Interrogating Women's Leadership & Empowerment*.

Academicians, journalists, feminists, lawyers, bureaucrats, those in the arts and so on have contributed to the book. This *jugalbandi* of writers, each with their own perspective on women's empowerment, makes the book interesting. The book is academic, yes, but also very readable.

Devaki Jain, pioneer in women's studies, outlines the women's movement in India. Rehana Jhabvala of SEWA writes on creating women leaders in each *mohalla*. J. Devika takes a critical look at women leaders in Kerala's *panchayats*, and Pushpa Sundar writes an analysis of women in the corporate sector. There are articles on women actors in the early days of the Bombay film industry, women who shine in the arts and more.

While some papers do step back in time, the issues discussed are contemporary: women's participation in politics, freedom, decision-making, equal access to health and education and so on.

Omita Goyal, Chief Editor of the *IIC Quarterly*, has years of experience working with Sage and later at Routledge as publishing director. She spoke to *Civil Society* about putting together the book and why it should be read.

Was the objective of the book to get a fresh perspective on women's leadership and empowerment?

Yes, and to get away from the very academic sort of writing. At one level we do need to have much more literature on women's empowerment and development issues. At the same time, I did some research and found that I did not come across this kind of collection. If you notice, we don't have very heavily footnoted references and yet each author substantiates his or her argument. The effort was to move away from strict academia and still remain scholarly.

How did you choose your writers?

It was very difficult. But then I have the advantage of being in the publishing business for 28 years. These are people whom I have interacted with over the years. Some of the writers are hardcore academics but they do have different interests. So Gopal Guru is an academic but he has written a paper on Dalit



Omita Goyal: 'Academic writing needs to be readable'

women ("Labouring Intellectuals: The Conceptual World of Dalit Women") which is readable and unusual. It is about how Dalit women, who are illiterate, find a way of expressing themselves.

The idea behind the *IIC Quarterly* is to make it accessible to readers who may not be academically inclined and to keep the journal general so that there is something for everyone. Even though this was a special issue on one theme the other two issues we bring out are general — so I could have an article on architecture and another on economic reforms. Of course, you will find variation in the style of writing, and length of the articles.

Is there a noticeable trend of doing research that is academic but readable?

Yes. The post-modern style of writing with heavy jargon is becoming outdated. This kind of writing is not simplistic but simple. I don't think academia has done badly by this shift and so I am in favour of it.

Does this help academics to communicate better?

Definitely. It would help them communicate not just with media but with their own students too. We do need to strengthen our theory and research. But

AJIT KRISHNA

communication is important. You can have pure academic research but it is equally important to have research that is accessible, especially in the social sciences. These have expanded their boundaries so much. Today if you want to communicate with an economist as a sociologist you have to modify what you have been trained in. Similarly, economists have to be more accessible in their writing.

Has the perspective on women's empowerment changed over the years?

When I began there was very little on women and gender studies. Even in the university where I graduated in 1984-85, we didn't have gender studies. It came in later and even then it was mostly women-oriented. There were hardly any men who were interested in writing on gender as a discipline.

I think it is from the 1990s that gender studies became an important discipline. The women's movement became more consolidated in the 1990s as some chapters in the

book show. You had people from law and education coming together to work for women's rights.

Today there is much more interest and literature being generated. It is no longer just about the women's movement. A lot of literature is now saying, let's talk about gender and sex, so that we bridge this gap between the man and the woman. Why should we need to sensitise the men? It's a question of recognition, not sensitisation.

You have quite a few male writers in the book.

It was a conscious decision. There was no hesitation among any of the writers. Earlier, when I was working at Sage, I found that even top professors did not take gender studies seriously. Now there is a lot of interest.

So has that resulted in a more holistic view of gender relations?

We are trying but it's not necessarily working that way. If you look at the grassroots you have much more women representatives in *panchayats* but they are still the 'soft power' there as depicted by J. Devika in her paper on women leaders in Kerala's *panchayats*.

They are not actually proxies for the men any more. Women *panchayat* leaders are becoming more empowered and, at the same time, taking a step back. I mean, we do live in a patriarchal socie-

Continued on page 33



**INTERROGATING
WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP &
EMPOWERMENT**

Edited: Omita
Goyal

₹ 895
Sage

RANDOM SHELF HELP

A quick selection from the many books that turn up for review



MY HALF OF THE SKY

Indrani Raimedhi
Sage ₹ 695

Indrani Raimedhi, the author of this book, is a features editor with the *Assam Tribune* and won the Kunjabala Devi Award for investigative reporting on women's issues in 2004. Here she profiles 12 women from the north-east, all great achievers who have become role models in society.

Written journalistically, the profiles are engaging and reflect contemporary concerns. All 12 women are well chosen and come from diverse backgrounds. The reader is struck by their strength of character and deep belief in what they were trying to achieve.

There is Mary Kom, India's famed boxer, now known nationally because of the film made on her life. Raimedhi's brief profile, 'Pulling no punches,' outlines Mary Kom's gritty climb to fame from a gawky 18-year-old determined to be a successful boxer, an odd choice for a rustic girl.

In 'Silencing the Whispers,' Raimedhi writes about Birubala Rabha. A simple woman from a village in Goalpara on the Assam-Meghalaya border, she decided to fight a brave and lonely battle against witch-hunting. This is an endemic practice in remote villages where villagers rely on *ojhas* for medical care. Many *ojhas* are just quacks. When their medicines don't work, they blame hapless women and declare them witches.

Another amazing profile is, 'Betrayed by Love.' This is the story of Jahnabi Goswami. Her family, unknowingly, marries her to a man with HIV/AIDS. He dies a few years later. Her in-laws throw her out along with her baby daughter. Jahnabi contracts HIV. With great courage she rebuilds her life. She announces that she is an HIV person, the first woman victim in the northeast to do so. She sets up the Assam Network of Positive People.

Raimedhi's 12 profiles give the reader a picture of the northeast and its social issues, as seen through the eyes of a compassionate group of activist women. ■



RED HANDED 20 CRIMINAL CASES THAT SHOOK INDIA

Souvik Bhadra & Pingal Khan
Rupa ₹ 295

India is often rocked by sensational crimes that have the nation hooked. In this book, two advocates, Souvik Bhadra and Pingal Khan, graduates from the National University of Juridical Sciences in Kolkata, sift fact from fiction to tell the reader the

exact chain of events, clinically.

The problem, they say, is 'media by trial.' Television, especially, accords prime time to sensational crime. Reporters go about unravelling each and every aspect of the dark deed, including the alleged criminal's personal life. His reputation is left in tatters. The speculation, gossip and blah that follow tend to cloud public opinion which then drifts into the courtroom.

But, in some cases, the media has played an invaluable role in ensuring justice is done. The Priyadarshini Mattoo case, the Nitish Kataria case and the Jessica Lal case are three examples. The book also includes the Best Bakery case, the Jain Hawala case, the Vishaka case, the Charles Sobhraj murders and the Nithari killings.

Each chapter is a wrap-up of one case. It tells the reader what happened, the evidence, the judgments, the holes, if any, and the personal opinion of the authors. The book educates readers in a simple way on the criminal justice system. For those interested in crime, media and society this is a good book to have. ■



NURTURING FAMILIES AROUND THE WORLD

Edited by: Catherine Bernard,
John J. Shea
Sage ₹ 550

All over the world, the family is under threat. War and internal conflict start a chain of disasters that break up homes. Changing lifestyles can be ruinous too. If the family is in trouble, society is in trouble. The upside is that the institution of marriage, under attack for long, is making a quiet comeback.

'Nurturing Families Around the World,' examines why the family is under siege and what can be done to reinvent the family so that it keeps pace with changing times. Child rearing today is often the combined responsibility of the crèche, the school, and the single parent.

The volume is in three parts: The first talks about the value and strengths of the family. The importance of the family in shaping the community and the nation is well outlined.

The second part is on the turbulent times in which the family finds itself — with globalisation, changing lifestyles, conflict, political upheaval, environmental disaster and so on.

The last section dissects different types of families and the crises they face of love, education and gender rights. The family of the future will be more imbued with feminine values and the woman will be the man of the home, concludes the book. ■

Continued from page 32

ty. I don't know if we will reach an ideal situation where women are fully empowered. Look at the increasing violence against women.

Which were the papers that really struck you?

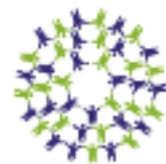
That would be hard to say. What we didn't include in the book but did publish in the IIC journal is a photo-essay by Sarvesh, a Hindi-speaking, photog-

rapher who married young and was brutalised by her husband. One day somebody gave her a camera and she just took off from there. She left her husband despite her family's reservations. Today, she is independent, works as a photographer and exhibits her work — an example of women's empowerment. Her photo essay of women, their lives and their work, evoked a lot of comment. We couldn't include it in the book because of the expense.

PEACE REFLECTIONS

HUZAIFA KHORAKIWALA

Put it back



IT is every man's obligation to put back into the world at least the equivalent of what he takes out of it, said Albert Einstein, the Nobel laureate scientist and discoverer of the theory of relativity.

There is a wonderful mythical law of nature that the three things we crave most in life — happiness, freedom and peace of mind — are always attained by giving them to someone else. And it is a pity that we don't experience it to appreciate it.

It is small wonder then that the richest persons in the world today, for example, Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, not only have given away substantial portions of their net worth to charities, but have also advocated philanthropy amongst other industrial leaders across the globe.

Giving is spiritual. Giving represents lightness. Giving lightens. Giving raises man to higher levels of nobility and distinction.

Giving blots out sins. Giving improves health and destroys disease. It increases livelihood and sustenance. Giving reduces calamities and suffering.

Giving can be through money, knowledge, time, effort, love and hope. The more you give, the more you get. This is an established law in God's generous kingdom.

The highest forms of giving are without expecting in return, giving quickly, not thinking about it much, not reminding the recipient of your favour of giving and not expecting praise.

If you have nothing to give materially, give yourself in terms of knowledge, values, virtues, beliefs and practices. Giving of knowledge is acknowledged by Indian scriptures as the noblest of the acts of giving.

The act of giving is surrounded by blessings all over. A feeling of tranquil bliss descends on the giver. Giving energises.

Indeed, a life of giving is the only life worth living. We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. ■

Anyone else?

I would choose Gopal's piece on Dalit women, Ashish Khokar on Rukmini Arundale and women's leadership in the arts, Sarah Niazi on women performers in the early Bombay film industry, Kumud Diwan Jha on India's women singers and Satish Agnihotri's very well-thought out and structured essay on what exactly we mean by empowerment. ■

Arty brass

IF you want a beautiful door for your apartment or house, ask Ram Avtar Sharma. An artisan from Jaipur, he makes unusual doors with *tarkashi* inlay work for architects and interior designers. His stall at Dilli Haat displayed samples of his deftness. There were small pieces of artistic knickknacks like boxes, bangles and artifacts made with wood and brass.

There were some cute wooden elephants and tortoises too.

He was also selling pretty key-holders with miniature paintings embossed on them. "After painting the miniature we sprinkle crushed gems to brighten it up," explains



Sharma. He has a showroom in Jaipur and says tourism has helped sales hugely. But he says he can't export his *tarkashi* products. "Tarkashi takes a lot of time since it is handcrafted. It is difficult for us to meet export deadlines. Also, we can't manufacture standardized products. Every piece is unusual," he says. His father, Ramswaroop Sharma, is a national award winner for *tarkashi* work. ■

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Smart stuff

ACTION for Autism's Aadhaar Vocational Centre helps young autistic adults, above the age of 18 to be independent, creative and sociable. Courses include craft, baking and stitching.

Young interns who opt for craft produce a range of products. There are colourful durries, mufflers, scarves, notebooks, door chimes, key-rings, coin purses, trendy jute bags, mobile phone covers, jewellery and so on. *Rakhis*, *diyas* and Christmas decorations are also made.

These products are sold directly to consumers and institutions or at exhibitions and melas. The entire revenue generated is ploughed back into purchasing raw materials for fresh production and paying a stipend to the young adults who work there.

Interns are encouraged to interact and make friends. They go together to see movies or to a café, a *mela* or on a day trip to another city. Such activities help young autistic adults to be independent and strong and deal with the rest of the world – on their own terms. ■

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Introducing Tablets for better education

SST has started using tablets in schools to help children improve their learning levels. This has attracted many children coming to the schools.

S. Latha, a girl student studying in class 4 of Panchayat union primary school, Thirukkurungudi village, Tirunelveli district was irregular in attending school. Therefore she was not able to keep up with the rest of the students in class. After introduction of tablets, she enjoys coming to the school and uses tablet every day. She finds the school interesting. She is no longer a slow learner. She is one among the best students in the class.

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