

Civil Society

GROWING UP WITH RISHTA

In Jharkhand, an innovative project helps teenagers discover themselves



ROUSING EVENING FOR HALL OF FAME

Pages 6-7

AAP WANTS TO GOVERN

Pages 8-9.....

₹1 DRIVE FOR SCHOOL

Pages 10-11.....

THE MALE FEMINIST

Pages 12-13.....

A SOLAR MODEL

Pages 22-23.....

KILLING THE GANGA

Pages 25-26.....

NORTH VIBES WITH NE

Pages 29-30.....

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The Godrej logo is written in a stylized, cursive font. The letters are filled with a gradient of colors, transitioning from green at the top to purple at the bottom.

CONTENTS



COVER STORY

GROWING UP WITH RISHTA

Teenagers in the villages near Jamshedpur in Jharkhand go beyond education to discover themselves and be community leaders through a project called Rishta.

18

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: PRASANTA BISWAS

The migrant's search for work.....	14
Wonder world at Kathputli.....	14-15
A bleak winter for J&K.....	16
'We've fixed milk fudging'.....	24
Villages get grazing land.....	27
Looking beyond the Taj.....	28
In search of Shere Khan.....	31
'Media is simplistic on environment'.....	32-33
Holy Cow & Broom boom.....	34

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Empowering the young

AS the country gets ready with programmes for imparting skills to young people so that they can be employable, it is also important to consider what is needed to give them the self-assurance to face a rapidly changing world. The emotional quotient of youngsters deserves as much attention as vocational training and education. Are they ready to face the world even as the world turns up at their doors because of a growing economy?

The Rishta project in Jharkhand has been in our sights ever since Dr PC Mohapatra, who leads Tata Steel's health and family welfare initiatives, passionately told us about it in Jamshedpur a couple of years ago. We finally offer it to our readers as a cover story.

The Rishta project reaches out to adolescents in the predominantly tribal areas around Jamshedpur. It imparts to them sex education and helps them understand the changes their bodies are going through, but more importantly it does so by bringing young boys and girls together so that they can understand each other better.

Among the Rishta youngsters there are those who have emotional problems. There are others who have been exposed to substance abuse. Some have disturbed home environments. But, above all, like adolescents anywhere, they crave understanding and an opportunity to open up. It is through this process that they discover their strengths and shape their personalities. Over time, Rishta has touched the lives of many young people. Some of them have gone on to assume leadership roles at the local level. Since the project has been around for a while, there is a lot of learning.

As CSR initiatives go, the Rishta project is a brave effort to negotiate tricky ground. It goes beyond formal education to address the softer needs of the young and through them the larger community. It gives the young self-confidence and brings changes in thinking and attitudes that have far-reaching implications. It promotes empowerment of young women and bridges the gender divide by bringing boys and girls together at a sensitive time in their lives. That this effort should take place in rural areas far from the apparent sophistications of the city is to be welcomed.

For those of us who grew up in Calcutta when it was the city of endless power cuts, it is good news that there are finally innovations in power generation being attempted there. We bring you in our business section a story on efforts to develop solar power in a distributed model and make it possible to feed it into the grid. Initiatives in alternative energy are finally getting the focussed attention they deserve. Solar's role will undoubtedly grow with each effort along the way sorting out the glitches.

A heart-warming story comes from Kerala where Edward D'Souza, the "In-charge Headmaster", has revived a government school by collecting one-rupee donations. The village of Odilnala in Kattadabailu finally has a school it is proud of, thanks to D'Souza. Such school stories only underline the need for motivating and training teachers at the grassroots and giving them the freedom and funds to innovate. We need to take our teachers more seriously.

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Bharathon

Your cover story, Bharathon, on Raj Vadgama's epic run was most inspiring. Travelling through India by road is a great learning experience. You meet an amazing variety of people. The landscape, culture, food seem to change with every twist and turn. Yet there is commonality. Imagine how much more running on the road can teach you. I think Vadgama's 'One India Run' is truly a nationalistic idea.

Jatin Kochhar

I am not an ultramarathoner. I have run not a centimetre more than 42.2 km anytime till now. I know how it kills to run 42.2 km. It renders you immobile for one full week after that. Raj runs double that distance, hold your breath, every day! More than the running, the daunting task is the logistics. And he manages both. I have known Raj for the last four years. I have enjoyed some of his Xtreme Sports sessions. He is sportive, jovial and down-to-earth. He is a celebrity in the world of running. I am proud to have rubbed shoulders with him.

Anand Anantharaman

Raj Vadgama's run is a unique feat by any Indian and a matter of pride for us. We wish Raj all the best. His message is very clear and loud and we hope people will certainly see, listen and follow him.

John Denis Horo

Small hospitals

With reference to your interview with Santosh Mathew, director of Emmanuel Hospitals, I would like to say that, in the absence of government medical facilities, rural hospitals with a good reputation can be

used for government-sponsored health schemes.

Ashish

When government health infrastructure is practically non-existent in rural areas, why not make it easy for doctors and non-profits to set up medical facilities in villages? The government can provide health insurance to the poor. There is also great need to train medical staff, including Ashas, to provide services. Private players can be roped into doing this.

Dr Shanta Maheshwari

Government schools

With reference to the report, 'NGOs to run some government schools', the very fact that some of the foundations mentioned as evincing interest in the municipal corporation's proposal have been pushing the state to permit private players to open schools for profit-making is enough to raise an alarm. We must not forget that primary education is one of the statutory responsibilities of the corporation. If the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) outsources primary education, does it not strike at the very reason for its existence?

Second, the statement by the chair-

person of the Education Committee that schools with 50 children or less is a common scenario in SDMC schools does not do justice to the facts. Moreover, education as a right and public good cannot be looked at in terms of financial viability. The law, too, does not allow the SDMC to lay down a minimum figure of enrolment in a school.

The SDMC should institute a policy of strengthening its education department in association with universities and the SCERT so that all its schools and students get equal and sound attention unsullied by any vested interests.

Firoz Ahmed

APNA scheme

Narinder Bedi's article, 'Andhra Pradesh's APNA job scheme', was an encouraging analysis for supporters of the employment guarantee scheme. Partnerships between NGOs, the government and village communities invariably succeed. The article has implications for good governance.

Kshitij Mehtab

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PACKED HABITAT AMPHI

Civil Society News
New Delhi

ENTRANTS to the Civil Society Hall of Fame 2014 from all over the country were felicitated at the amphitheatre of the India Habitat Centre on Lodi Road in New Delhi on 1 November.

An audience of more than 700 people from different walks of life attended the ceremony and celebrated the changemakers and their work.

The Hall of Fame stories were showcased in the Special 11th Anniversary Issue of *Civil Society*. But seeing and hearing the change makers was an overwhelming experience.

There was spontaneous applause as the stories unfolded. It is one thing to read about Savitri Gaur, but when she speaks as the Chairperson of the Samridhi Mahila Crop Producers' Company the impact is electric. Savitri's journey from being a poor farmer in Rajasthan to setting up a company with other women is a fascinating account of financial inclusion and empowerment. Padam Jain and Himanshu Bais of Srijan were the activists who worked to bring about this transformation.

Poorna, a student of the Social Welfare Schools in Telangana, also had the audience moved when she spoke of the 10 commandments that children from backward communities are taught at the schools. Poorna is just 13, but she has climbed Everest. When she spoke it was with the confidence that comes from overcoming difficult challenges. With Poorna was Anand, 18, who climbed Everest with her. Both youngsters had come to Delhi for the Hall of Fame event with Praveen Kumar, an IPS officer who opted to be Secretary of the Social Welfare Schools and has taken them to new heights.

Dr Ravikant Singh of Doctors For You, Shankar Singh of the MKSS and the People's Pastors – Rev. Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh and Rev. Moody Allan Wood Lyngkholi – were also feted.

Dr Singh explained the work of Doctors For You. Shankar's speech was laced with his trademark satire. Rev. Pyrtuh spoke with passion on the need for transparency in the Church. "I pray, I preach and I protest," he said about the role he and his fellow priests had played in getting the Presbyterian Church in Meghalaya to annul an agreement with a private university.

The Hall of Fame ceremony has come to be known for its simplicity. It allows citizens to felicitate citizens. The evening begins with a quick presentation on *Civil Society* magazine's brand of journalism, followed by a brief welcome by the founders, Rita and Umesh Anand.

This year's keynote address was delivered by Anupam Mishra of the Gandhi Peace Foundation. Anupamji is an authority on India's traditional water systems. He spoke on 'Make For India'. Entrants to the Hall of Fame, he said, had worked quietly and selflessly to make India stronger.

With his characteristic wit, Anupamji said the world has recently been grappling with the Ebola virus, but India has for long been afflicted by the 'Main Bola' or 'I told you so' virus. The entrants to the Hall of Fame, however, were not part of this one-upmanship. They were working for India and not victims of 'Main Bola'.

Aruna Roy presided and gave away the citations as she has done in previous years. "It's a great privilege and honour to be a part of the Hall of Fame every year. It emphasises that we need an independent voice in the media," she said. "We need people who can report without self-interest. It is important that people whose voices are never heard, get heard."

The felicitation ceremony was followed by the Everyone Is Someone concert by Indian Ocean. As a band, Indian Ocean comes out of social movements and resonates *Civil Society* magazine's values.

The Civil Society Hall of Fame is in its sixth year. It is held by *Civil Society* magazine in association with the Azim Premji Foundation. One cannot apply to be a part of the Hall of Fame, neither can one be nominated. A nationwide selection process is carried out over the year and people are identified on the basis of the work they do. A long list then goes to a jury. This year's jury was: Nasser Munjee, Aruna Roy, Darshan Shankar, Vir Chopra and Dr DPS Toor. ■



Padam Jain and the women of Bundi receive their citations from Aruna Roy



Anupam Mishra



Dr Ravikant Singh



Sheetal Mehra, MC for the evening



Dr Ravikant Singh, founder of Doctors For You, receiving the



Aruna Roy congratulates Rev. Pyrtuh and Rev. Lyngkholi

CHEERS HALL OF FAME

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA



The Habitat amphitheatre was packed to capacity



citation Praveen Kumar, Poorna and Anand with Aruna Roy



Indian Ocean performs at the Everyone is Someone concert



Shankar Singh of the MKSS receives the citation from old comrade Aruna



The audience clapped and cheered

AAP's message is it can govern, seeks out women, young

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

THE Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has swung into election mode with its focus on governance so as to win back the trust of Delhi voters, particularly of the middle class.

AAP wants to live down its record of having quit office after just 49 days in power in 2013. It is eager to be seen as capable of addressing the challenges of development and better administration. Its reputation as a party given to street protests is also something it would like to jettison.

In its search for an image makeover, AAP is holding Delhi Dialogues at which it is hearing the concerns of voters even as the party goes about framing its manifesto.

The first Delhi Dialogue on 16 November at Jantar Mantar was on issues concerning the young. Around 5,000 people were present, most of them ferried to the venue in buses. Not more than 20 per cent of the audience seemed to be young people. There was also little "dialogue" with AAP leaders delivering speeches from the stage.

But AAP's promises of free wi-fi, skill training, student loans and better sports facilities accessible to all are clearly targeted at young voters who have in the past been an important part of the AAP support base.

The next Delhi Dialogue will be on the safety of women in Delhi as AAP reaches out to women voters. It will be followed by more dialogues.

According to Yogendra Yadav, national coordinator, and one of the most respected AAP leaders, there is "a section of society" that thinks that the party is not too serious about governance.

"There is a question in people's minds. They believe that AAP is brave and honest. They believe that AAP can take on the big and the powerful. But can it be trusted with governance on a day-to-day basis for a long term?" says Yadav.

"Even if that is a question in the minds of a minor portion of the people, we want to address the question fully. That is why we are foregrounding our governance agenda. We are spelling it out. We are inviting debate. We are making announcements and we invite the media to scrutinise it," says Yadav.

"In weeks to come, you will find us coming out with more details on governance through mobiles and Internet. Through the Dialogues, we are releasing our agendas one by one. We are spelling out

everything. We are releasing our manifestos on various themes and giving each message a week's time to sink in," says Yadav. "If anyone thinks that this is a political party talking through its hat, we want it to be known that we have planned out each and every thing carefully. Jan Lokpal and anti-corruption remain our flagship promises but we have expanded our agenda beyond that."

The Delhi Dialogues are meant to emphasise the new image through hoardings, social media and the event itself. But an interaction with 5,000 people has inherent limitations and challenges.

While the crowd was asked to put questions on a piece of paper, ultimately AAP leaders were talking down from the stage. But AAP's message was clear – the party was reaching out.

Yadav agrees that two-way communication was missing from the first Delhi Dialogue. "When you are dealing with a crowd of 10,000, it becomes difficult to set up a proper communication process. Our colleagues will take care of it from the next dialogue and a system will be created which would address this problem."

Asked if young people were present in adequate numbers, considering that the dialogue was meant to be on issues concerning them, Yadav said: "According to me, the youth were present. But we didn't prevent others from coming in as well," says Yadav. "Our next dialogue will be on women's security and we welcome men to join in as well. Women's security is as much a concern for men as for women. There would be a problem if no women turned up. Otherwise, I don't see a problem in others being present at the dialogue."

The party has released a list of 22 candidates who will be contesting from various constituencies in the upcoming elections. Former Transport and Urban Development Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj is one of them. According to him, AAP has a more channellised organisational structure as it faces elections this year.

Says Bhardwaj, "We have worked a lot on our organisation. Till the Lok Sabha elections, we were a little weak on our conventional organisational system, but we have invested a lot of time and attention in grassroots organisations, in making formal structures, so that decisions flow through proper hierarchy. We have fixed responsibility and accountability."

"Last year, we were introducing our party. We were focussing on letting people know what our party symbol was and what it stood for. Now they know about AAP and the jhaadu. It is a little easier

AAP's promises of free wi-fi, skill training, student loans and better sports facilities are clearly targeted at young voters.



Arvind Kejriwal addresses the first Delhi Dialogue



Yogendra Yadav: 'Some people think we can't govern'



Bandana Kumari, women's wing coordinator

for us that way," says Bhardwaj.

"Last time we were getting introduced to the electoral process. We didn't know what is a polling booth or a polling station. We were figuring out how to manage a booth and understand the voting pattern. Now, we have the experience of two consecutive elections. So we are more mature in terms

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA



AAP's electoral candidate from the Shalimar Bagh constituency, says, "Our argument is simple. You have seen what we have done during our brief period in power. Imagine how much we could do in five years. We were not in a majority last time and yet we formed the government. We faced a lot of resistance from the other parties and hence we couldn't pass the Lokpal Bill and so we had to resign. However, we tell our voters to bring us to power with the majority of votes and we will definitely deliver."

The women's wing of AAP started off as the Mahila Suraksha Dal, which has been with the party since the Ramlila Maidan protests. "We recently decided to convert it into a properly organised women's wing for the party," says Kumari. "We have divided the 70 constituencies of Delhi into 14 districts, with each district having five constituencies. Each will be headed by a coordinator."

There are 3,500 active members of the Delhi women's wing. "Our aim is to reach out to each and every woman and solve any problem she might be facing," says Kumari. "We hold regular meetings at ward level to listen to their problems. They come to us with problems like unavailability of toilets. Other than that, many women want to earn by setting up small businesses. We help them with guidance and assistance. Women's security is obviously our primary area of concern."

The women's wing comprises women from all social strata. "We have housewives as well as students and working professionals in our teams. We have women from slums working side by side with women and social workers from more posh areas of Delhi," says Kumari. "The diversity of our volunteers helps address each and every issue that comes before us with proper efficiency."

AAP is also making its presence felt in colleges through the Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Samiti (CYSS). Sarita Singh (28), President, CYSS, says, "We were a part of the Yuva Manch in India Against Corruption (IAC). Later on, we became CYSS. AAP officially made us a member body on 27 September this year."

"AAP cannot go into colleges and conduct campaigns. We do it on behalf of the party," says Sarita. "We reach out to students with our pledge form, which they can fill up to be part of CYSS. The pledge form consists of five points. If an individual signs the pledge, he stands against corruption, communalism, casteism, dowry and drug addiction. So, in a way, taking that pledge not only makes a student a member of our team but also a better person."

CYSS has offices in Delhi University, Ambedkar University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Indraprastha University and covers most engineering and medical colleges. "We have a total of 20,000 members in all universities and around 3,500 active office-bearers."

Gaurav Singh, Secretary, Delhi University (DU), says, "In DU, we have 15 vice-presidents who look after three to five colleges each. Out of the total 72 DU colleges, we have a presence in 50 major colleges, like St. Stephens, Hindu, Kirorimal, Lady Shri Ram and many others. We have also set up representatives in 25 colleges."

"We distribute pamphlets and pledge forms, put up posters and meet the students individually and talk to them," says Sarita. "We are also launching the Vacation For Nation campaign in colleges in which students can campaign for the party during their vacation period, which will be starting soon." ■



Sarita Singh, President of the Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Samiti

of electoral politics. Our core strategy is the same - having person-to-person contact. Our volunteers are again our core asset."

Bhardwaj agrees that the biggest challenge for AAP would be to win back the trust of the middle-class voters. "The 49-days of AAP government, whatever you may call it, was not a corrupt govern-

ment," says Bhardwaj. "On day one, we started delivering what we had promised. There was a visible change. We had put a stop to bribery at the municipal level and on the streets. There is credibility to what we say and we will use our 49-day performance to win the voter's trust."

Bandana Kumari, women's wing coordinator and

With one-rupee donations

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

ELEVEN years ago, Edward D'Souza, a government schoolteacher, was transferred to Kattadabailu Upper Primary School in Odilnala, a very backward village in Karnataka. The school was in terrible shape. The building looked like it would collapse. Every day, he had to walk 8 km through a shrubby area, chasing away dogs, snakes and monkeys. The school had seven classes and he had just one teacher. Nobody would have been surprised if he had quietly run away.

The school's two small buildings, constructed decades ago, had no toilets, no water and no playground. "The building resembled a godown. The village community and the parents were disconnected from the school. It was on the verge of closing down," recalls K Viththala Shetty, former president of the School Monitoring and Development Committee (SMDC).

With no public transport for 4 to 6 km, Odilnala was isolated. Most families who sent their children to the school were poor farm labourers who belonged to backward classes. This rundown school was their only hope of getting their children an education.

D'Souza is a dedicated and hardworking teacher. Instead of trying to quickly get a transfer, D'Souza decided to stay and rebuild the school from scratch. With his vision, patience and hard work, he successfully brought about a big change in the school. He began with no funds and no support. Yet, he managed to rebuild the school from scratch and today it provides poor children from backward communities a quality education.

In fact, Kattadabailu Upper Primary School has received cluster and taluk-level awards and D'Souza was awarded the District Level Best Teacher Award in 2008. He has also received the State Level Best Teacher Award instituted by the SDMC in 2009.

Just one rupee

D'Souza began by visiting each child's parents and impressing upon them the importance of education.

But he desperately needed money to get the school in shape. Many of his students didn't have



Edward D'Souza with his students at the school's morning assembly

the resources to buy uniforms or books. D'Souza approached the state education department, the local Member of Parliament (MP) and Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) for funds. But he got no response. One day, while mulling over his problem, an idea struck him.

He convened a meeting of parents and well-wishers. "Look, I know that none of you is rich. So I am suggesting a small, workable idea. If I give you a coin box, can each of you just put a one-rupee coin into it every day and donate it to the school? We can provide books and facilities to students with this money."

The response was not at all encouraging. Many felt that the money would be misused. So D'Souza came up with a foolproof accounting system. He would visit homes every month, count the coins and note down the amount taken on a sheet of paper with the signature of the donor and receiver. The donor would keep this 'passbook'. People agreed this was a workable idea. The project was named Swarnanidhi.

He began with no funds and no support. Yet, he managed to rebuild the school from scratch and today it provides poor children from backward communities a quality education.



Edward D'Souza with the coin box and passbook

Seventy-eight coin boxes were distributed in the village. The media got interested. D'Souza then went to towns nearby and distributed another 100 boxes. In three years, his coin boxes yielded ₹3,33,333. D'Souza contributed ₹11 per day from his own pocket.

Every year, all his students receive books free of cost at a total expense of ₹15,000. Three students who get the highest marks in Class 10 are awarded ₹1,000 each. And three students who opt for professional courses are given ₹5,000 each. A seven-member committee oversees Swarnanidhi activities.

"Though the incentives are small, the money encourages poor students to continue their education. It's a token of society's concern for our younger generation," says Vasudeva Rao, president of the committee. After paying about ₹1 lakh from the interest so far, ₹3.7 lakh remains in Swarnanidhi's deposit in the bank.

Inspired by the school's efforts, the education department, the MP and the Shri Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project responded and sanctioned money for the school's infrastructure. Within seven years, a staff room, additional classrooms, a kitchen, compound wall, a room for midday meals, a meeting room and so on were built at a cost of ₹55 lakh. Around ₹40 lakh came from government sources.

Every month, the school holds a social programme. It could be a legal awareness programme, an eye camp or a function to honour retired army personnel of the taluk. "At least 10 old men suffering from cataract who would not have had access to medical treatment now have clear vision," says D'Souza.

In fact, D'Souza is not the headmaster but the 'in-charge headmaster' of the school. In the staff room, he never sits on the chair earmarked for the headmaster.

He and his three co-teachers have also improved the quality of education. The school has 94 students. Most of them walk an average of 2 km to reach the

village gets dream school

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE



Children march into their classrooms



Edward D'Souza with his staff, including two cooks (in aprons) who prepare the midday meal

school. A few children walk 12 km every day to school and back. With great difficulty, the school has had a guest teacher post sanctioned but only for a year. To cope with the teaching load, the school has employed an honorary teacher, Bhagirathi, who is given a stipend ₹2,200 every month. Around 30-40 parents pool money to pay Bhagirathi's salary.

The makeover

Students come to school in uniforms. During assembly, students read the day's news, a proverb and the introduction of a book. The campus is kept very clean. The use of plastic is discouraged in school and at home. Students are told to bring plastic waste from home to the school. This is put into

a gunny bag. Every six months, the local panchayat office sends a vehicle to dispose of it. "Whether parents pay on time or not," explains D'Souza, "we pay our teachers on the first of every month. At the end of the year, if there is a deficit, we approach the parents. They generally don't say no."

School Day is now celebrated in a big way and involves the village community. "We smear cowdung on the floor, our students perform dramas and all visitors are served food," explains another teacher. Next year, the students will go on a three-day tour. For most of them this is their only opportunity to see new places.

Two cooks, Jayanthi and Deekamma, who prepare the midday meal, have been widows for many years.

This is a temporary job and they don't get paid during the two-month school vacation. They earn around ₹1,000 per month. D'Souza told them: "I know your salary is very low. But if you give me ₹250 every month, I will see to it that you get paid for those two months." Both of them agreed. They have now saved ₹18,000 each. "We would like to add some money to their deposit so that by the time they retire they get a tidy sum as interest every month," says D'Souza.

The school will celebrate its diamond jubilee in 2019-20. Efforts are on to support one more teacher with school funds. A lucky dip is organised on School Day for which coupons priced at ₹5 are sold. So far ₹1,06,000 has been collected. D'Souza hopes to reach his target of ₹2,22,222 by 2019-2020 and use this money to employ an honorary teacher.

Track record

Kattadabailu is D'Souza's second challenge. His first posting was in Saralikatte in the same taluk, another very backward area with a predominantly Muslim population. There were only two teachers for 328 students. When he took charge, the parents were indifferent to the school. Girls were not enrolled. D'Souza, then a bachelor, made the school his first home. Every day he would visit homes and persuade the parents to send their girls to school. "After two years of hard work, things began to change," he recalls.

During his tenure he spent ₹15 lakh fixing the school. Villagers contributed another ₹5 lakh. "I got a lot of affection from the community. Even today they invite me if there is a birth or marriage in their households," he says.

Bhagirathi, the honorary teacher at Kattadabailu School for the past six years, was earlier teaching in an English-medium school. "This government school educates the children so well. There are moral lessons and discipline. In fact, I have admitted both my children here though initially I was planning to send them to an English-medium school," she says.

Naveenkumar K, another teacher here for six years, takes three buses to reach the school from Puttur. "We are like members of a family," he says proudly. "Though getting here needs a lot of time and effort, I like the atmosphere. I would not like to go to another school."

Shwetha Prabhu, an ex-student of this school, went for Class 12 to another school, the Alva's High School in Moodabidri. Her father, Ramesh Prabhu, a tailor at Belthangady, says of her old school, "This school doesn't give importance to education alone. My daughter was a key artiste in *Yakshagana*. Yet she didn't lag behind in studies. The headmaster helped her to get a free seat at Alva's High School. For him school is far more important than his own home and family."

"If social evils like corruption, harassment of women, theft, cheating have to vanish, we need to develop good humanitarian values in children and make them responsible citizens of the country," says D'Souza. "My students may not become celebrities but my dream is that they hold my country's dignity in high esteem." ■

Email Edward D'Souza at gupskattadabailu@gmail.com

‘Men need to realise they are

INTERVIEW

Kamla Bhasin

Civil Society News
New Delhi

MOST feminists in India have tended to see men as adversaries. They have fought with passion for women's rights. NGOs have reached out to women in rural areas and slums. These efforts have resulted in greater awareness of women's rights. There are now stringent laws and policies in place. But violence against women continues and so does preference for a male child.

The solution seems to be in having more men involved in achieving gender equality. Globally, male feminism is on the rise. An indication of this trend was the second MenEngage international conference that took place at Delhi's India Habitat Centre over 10-13 November. Delegates from all over the world discussed strategies to involve men in birthing, fathering, household duties and in being equal partners in marriage. There were also sessions on changing the way men think of masculinity.

A report was released, "Masculinity, Intimate Partner Violence and Son Preference in India". The study, by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) and UNFPA, covered a sample of 10,000 men across seven states in India – Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

It revealed that 60 per cent of men admitted to violence against their wives. Fifty-two per cent of women reported experiencing violence. Men who experienced economic stress were more likely to be violent with their partners. Only 15 per cent of men involved the wife in making decisions concerning the family.

A majority of men (67 per cent) and women (47 per cent) wanted an equal number of male and female children. More women (81 per cent) than men (76 per cent) considered it very important to have at least one son.

Men who were educated and had higher incomes were more likely to value gender equality and tended to exercise less control over their partners.

Kamla Bhasin, a feminist from the NGO sector, is the founder of Jagori, a women's rights group. She spoke to *Civil Society* about the significance of the UNFPA-ICRW report and why, despite the feminist movement, gender rights remain on paper.

What are the implications of this report?

Our Constitution states clearly that men and women are equal and discrimination is not allowed. So you see the gap between the values in the Constitution and the values of the society we live in. The 60 per cent of men in the study who admit to violence against women are violating the Constitution.

The other finding was that only 52 per cent of women said that violence is done to them. Women seem to be ashamed of living with violence. The



Kamla Bhasin: 'We can't remove patriarchy unless economic policies change'

‘Our tragedy has been that we have been to villages, to slums, basically to the poor. We have done no work with the middle class. How do we work with them.’

men are, perhaps, unashamed to admit that they inflict violence. What is tragic is that, until now, government figures stated that 40 per cent of husbands beat their wives. This study was undertaken in six states where masculinity and patriarchy are much stronger and it revealed that 60 per cent of men beat their wives.

We keep talking about Asian values, Indian values. Now this is the Indian family.

So the study is a mirror of the Indian family?

Absolutely. Maybe the figure can vary by, say, 5 per cent but even the Government of India accepted the 40 per cent figure a long time ago.

The corresponding worrying figure is the child sex ratio. It is continuously going down. Now that is

an extreme form where you go to the extent of murdering your daughter in the womb. How can that family be together after that murder? For the sake of a few thousand rupees a doctor and his team commit this crime. According to data, 35 million girls are missing in India because they have been killed by patriarchy.

You have more people in the middle class. Statistically, more people are being educated. But you say the increase in violence and the sex ratio have only got worse. Why?

The reason is that this paradigm of economic development values only profit, unlimited profit and greed. Once profit becomes your goal then there is no other value, of non-violence, of love. You want what represents strength, like boys. We are still patriarchal.

But the Indian state has implemented so many laws, schemes and policies for women's empowerment. So, according to you, why has nothing worked?

This is all due to neoliberal globalisation and our economic policies. China wanted to control its population. They had a one-child policy and that one child had to be a boy. Here we don't have a one-child policy but the middle class doesn't want more than two children. So how can you have two girls?

messed up by patriarchy'

AJIT KRISHNA



villages, to slums, basically to the poor. We have done no work with the middle class. How do we work with them, they are the most individualistic. They are never going to listen to us. All the work Jagori has done for the past 30 years is with the working class. If a woman in a slum is beaten, she will shout openly. But a middle class woman will want to keep things quiet, within the family.

But the middle class becomes a role model for the poor.

Yes, but look where they are headed.

What is the kind of activism you would like to see by the state and by NGOs?

All political parties, the BJP, the Congress and the Communist parties, follow the same economic paradigm of neoliberalism when they come to power. We can't remove patriarchy unless economic policies change.

So, is male feminism a growing movement?

Definitely.

What are the good examples at this conference of men getting involved in gender rights?

There are many. I, for instance, have been doing workshops in South Asia, in Bangladesh with NGOs, in the Maldives with Members of Parliament and with police officers.

In Himachal Pradesh, Jagori is working in over 150 villages, with adolescent girls and boys, talking about these issues. Two weeks ago we sent a dancer to Chandigarh to denigrate masculinity through a performance. Tomorrow, a troupe of male dancers from Punjab will do a sensitive dance at the closing ceremony of the conference.

Why would men get involved if, as you say, they have all the power in Indian society?

If there were only patriarchy, then all men would be powerful. But there is class and caste. So 50 per cent of men are powerless. Dalits are about 40 per cent of the population. They are also powerless.

Men who work as drivers, domestic workers, waiters and in other low-paid jobs realise how painful it is to be without power, to be insulted. I joined Manas, a mental health organisation, in training 100,000 auto-rickshaw drivers in Delhi. We have finished training 40,000.

What is this training about?

The auto-rickshaw drivers have to come (to the licence office) once a year for renewal of their certificates. We requested them to give us one hour of their time. They eventually agreed. During that time we spoke to their sense of humanness. We said rape is increasing in Delhi and you people are the ones mostly on the road. Around 50 per cent of them had migrated to Delhi to earn a living. I told them, Delhi is giving you mobility, you are giving Delhi mobility. So please save the girls. If things continue like this, tourism will suffer and so will your business. If girls don't come out, your earnings will decline.

Then I am part of the One Billion Rising campaign. This is the biggest campaign in the world with 207 countries and I am the South Asian coordinator.

In Western countries because of male insensitivity, 50 per cent of marriages end in divorce. So if we want to save the family, the marriage, the community, and male humanness, we have to remove violence. Once men understand that they are also messed up by patriarchy, it will mean freedom for all. Equal rights in the family means four capable people rather than two.

Are men seeing the benefit of what you are saying?


Definitely. Yesterday an American professor presented research on families where men are doing household work. What is the impact? Those men are happier because they are spending more time with their children. Their children are doing better in class. Their children are happier because there is no violence. The wives are happier.

But liberation is never individual. It is related to structure. So you have to deal with structures of caste, class, corporate globalisation and neoliberalism, if you want meaningful change. ■

You can have two boys, though.

So how do you get the men involved in gender rights, then?

The only way we can do that is by doing what we are doing: organising, starting NGOs, going to communities. Our tragedy has been that we have been to



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The migrant's search for work

Tanushree Gangopadhyay
Ahmedabad

A report on labour migration, recently released by Aajeevika Bureau's Centre for Labour Studies, Udaipur, is brimming with data and research that could help governments and NGOs mitigate the plight of migrant workers.

Aajeevika's report, "2014: Their Own Country: A Profile of Labour Migration From Rajasthan", has been brought out in partnership with UNESCO and the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust.

The report states that as much as 10 per cent of Rajasthan's population migrates seasonally for better employment opportunities. The youth, between 18 and 32, comprises 67 per cent of migrants while 54 per cent are from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST). Women comprise 12 per cent of inter-state migrants. Rajasthan is the largest state in west India.

Gujarat accounts for 51 per cent of inter-state migration. Mostly tribals from Udaipur and Dungarpur in south Rajasthan migrate to Ahmedabad and north Gujarat to work on construction sites, in industries, on farms, as head loaders, domestic workers and in the hospitality sector.

Maharashtra is the second most popular destination. Rajasthan's migrants travel to Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Surat in search of work. Within the state, Jaipur and Jodhpur attract the most migrant labour.

The migrants enter the labour market at a very young age. Sometimes they are below 18. They work extremely hard under very harsh conditions. This affects their health. So by the time they are 40 they are compelled to go home and retire. In the absence of any work in their villages, migrant workers are forced to live in penury. Many of them contract tuberculosis and heart disease.

Fifty per cent of migrant labour comprises unskilled workers. Seventy-eight per cent are single males. Around 20 per cent migrate with their families. Ninety-two per cent of the labour force is illiterate and earns, on an average, a daily wage of ₹135. Their monthly earnings average ₹5,060. For 83 per cent of the labour force, migration is the only way they can earn an income, says the report.

Migrants who work on construction sites, in industries, as domestic workers, as head loaders and in the hospitality sector earn, on an average, a daily wage of ₹242. In these sectors their wages are variable.

Employers and labour contractors flout laws and the State Labour Department takes no action. There is an Inter State Migrant Workers Act, but it is practically obsolete.

As a result, migrant workers are often denied proper wages, tenure, identity cards, political rights, access to rations, housing and so on. Sixty-three per cent don't have bank accounts and 29 per cent do not have an identity card. Sixty-eight per cent face labour disputes at work which go unreported. Very

often, they end up in jail. Often, many land in debt.

There are some interesting aspects in the report. For instance, Rajasthan's migrant labour has specific skills. Women from Baran migrate with their families to work as magicians. The Mogiya community from south Rajasthan makes and sells statues made of plaster of Paris. Most head loaders and *hamals* (porters) are from Barmer. Food vendors in Mumbai are generally from Chittor. *Halwais* (sweetmakers) from Bikaner are in demand in Kolkata. In Indore, most *namkeen* (savoury) makers are from southeast Rajasthan. Tractors in many states are driven by migrants from west Rajasthan, said Dr Santosh Poonia who travelled extensively to research the plight of migrants for the report.

"Migration from Rajasthan has been a continuous process for centuries. But what is happening today is distress migration," said ML Mehta, chairman of the Rajasthan Skills Livelihood Development Corporation.

Cases of migrants being ruthlessly exploited are common, especially among brick kiln workers. Take Indra Kumar, a Dalit from Uttar Pradesh's Chitrakoot district. He migrated to a brick kiln in Mandal *tehsil* with his family of four children in 2011. He had taken an advance of ₹3,000. Kumar's family was paid a monthly stipend of ₹2,400 for food. His wage was negotiated at ₹200 per 1,000 bricks. Kumar's family made 1.20 lakh bricks in six months. But his wife fell ill and he had to return home. His employer calculated his wages at ₹100 per 1,000 bricks rather than at ₹200. This means that Kumar was paid ₹5,000 less.

Aajeevika Bureau recommended that Rajasthan set up an empowered authority called the Migrants and Unorganised Labour Protection Committee that would be responsible for regulation, vigilance and welfare activities regarding migrant workers.

An Inter-State Coordination Committee consisting of representatives from Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra should be formed to monitor the living conditions of migrant workers and create systems so that entitlements such as food security, healthcare and financial services become portable.

UNESCO has backed the inter-state migration mechanism, said Marina Faetanini, Programme Specialist, Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO.

The Sir Dorabji Tata Trust is working with migrants in Mumbai to get them identity cards and shelter. Suggestions were made that local self-government institutions should be held responsible for the health of workers. In Mumbai, the negative media portrayal of migrants was cause for concern.

Aajeevika has been working to put in place labour-friendly mechanisms. They have issued 90,000 identity cards to migrants since 2007. Rajasthan has simplified the registration of identity cards. The card has simply to be verified by the sarpanch of the village where the migrant worker lives. The Rajasthan government started Swalamban, a contributory pension scheme, in 2010. Welfare measures exist, but migrant workers are not aware of them. ■



WONDER

AT FIRST glance, Kathputli looks like any other slum with its narrow lanes, open drains and dilapidated homes. But take a walk and you will bump into a whole new world of *bhopas* (musicians), *masihats* (magicians), *langas* (singers), *behroopias*, (actors) *nats*, (acrobats) and *kathputli* (puppeteers) artistes. Twelve traditional art forms flourish here. The world's largest community of street performers lives in Kathputli *basti* in west Delhi.

In the era of multiplexes, you can still find a bioscope. Animated characters from popular TV serials and comics are replicated as handmade puppets and muppets. Magic is science here. Girls just three feet tall walk on ropes suspended in the air with poles. A six-foot man balances

PHOTO FEATURE / Ajit Krishna



WORLD AT KATHPUTLI

himself on a bamboo pole 10 feet tall. Saunter along and you will spot a man dressed as Lord Shiva sipping tea at a shack.

Around 3,000 families live in a jumble of housing here. "Look, this is our house and it looks like this," says Husain, an elderly magician, unapologetically. "If we move into flats, we will become westernised. We will lose our attraction."

There's been a rebellion of sorts brewing here. The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) wants residents of Kathputli to move to a transit camp for two or three years under its 'In Situ Rehabilitation Scheme'. DDA will, meanwhile, construct apartments in a multistoried building for them.

But Kathputli's residents don't want to live in flats. Their livelihood doesn't permit it. "Who doesn't want

to live in a flat? But we can't," says Sunil firmly. He has large props that cannot be accommodated in an apartment. "We just can't be rehabilitated like any other slum," murmurs Mukesh, another resident. Every family needs space for their traditional wares and there is fear that they may lose their identity.

Dilip Bhatt, *pradhan* of the colony, says DDA's attitude adds to their worries. He alleges that DDA did not respond to 26 problems in the transit camp pointed out in a submission by a five-member Kathputli inspection team. "DDA has sold this land on which our colony stands to Raheja Developers for just ₹6.11 crore. We are ready to pay this amount. They should allow us to redesign our colony according to our lifestyle."

Kathputli colony is several decades old. It isn't

just another slum. It is unique and requires innovative and community-friendly urban planning so that the culture of street performers doesn't die out. Kathputli is part of Delhi's cultural landscape.

There is scope to convert the colony into a wonderful tourist attraction. The slum requires infrastructure – a drainage system, water supply, regular electricity, paved lanes and garbage collection. The residents of Kathputli should be helped to renovate their homes, perhaps painting them in bright colours. Or they can be helped with designs for small homes. They need shops to sell their products and open spaces for performances. In an apartment block, they will struggle to preserve their livelihood. But, on the ground, they can add to Delhi's ancient heritage. ■

CONFLICT ZONE

A bleak winter

WINTER is setting in early this year in the mountains. It couldn't have been a harsher year for the people of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) who are facing a tough question amidst the hurried preparations for elections later this year: are they adequately prepared for the challenging winter this time?

Winters have never been easy for the people residing in the mountainous districts of the state, known for its daunting geography and inaccessibility. But this year, after the floods that severely affected parts of the state, causing unprecedented devastation and claiming the lives of people and livestock, it is going to be a new challenge altogether.

Two hundred and fifty km from Jammu lies the border district of Poonch, always in the news for ceasefire violations. Tucked away in the mighty Pir Panjal mountains, Poonch is one of the most backward districts of the state with its rural population still living without access to even basic amenities. The floods have pushed them back by a few decades more. The challenges ahead have snatched their peace of mind – a peaceful winter ahead looks unlikely.

Husan Jaan, 50, of Khanetar village, about 10 km from Poonch town, had recently completed construction of her house – timed in preparation for the winter ahead. But the floods have left her and her family devastated, completely unprepared for the season ahead.

"We invested ₹5-6 lakh to build this house after I came home in June this year. The floods have left the entire house with cracks all over," says Husan Jaan's son, Sadaqat Hussain, who works with the Border Security Force and is currently posted in Punjab. Although they have managed to repair the cracks temporarily, they live in fear of further damage during snowfall.

"We have been living at our relative's place ever since our house was damaged," says Shenaz Bi, 35. Her husband works for the Army and is posted in Assam. The sight of her house is disheartening.

There are cracks all over.

Almost every house in Khanetar has a similar problem. "The winter is going to be harsh and when it snows it is going to be even more difficult," adds Chowdhary Abdul Latif, former sarpanch of the village.

Places like Mandi, Loran, Surankote, Khanetar, Shahpur, Sawjian and Buffliaz experience snowfall every year. When snow enters cracks left unfilled, the moisture, water, snow and ice penetrate the walls. The snow and ice further expand the walls of the crack, which is hazardous and can lead to sliding.

Asked whether Poonch is ready for the harsh winter, MH Malik, Deputy Commissioner, responded with, "We are very well prepared for the winter, but our prime concern is areas like Mandi and Surankote since they experience quite heavy snowfall."

He added, "It is not just the cracks that are worrisome. The weight of the snow on the roofs of these fragile houses may pose a greater threat."

Surankote *tehsil*, one of the worst affected by the floods, is 27 km to the east of Poonch town and approximately 221 km from Jammu; 1,230 houses were damaged partially or fully in Surankote alone. "It always snows in Surankote, but the snowfall this year can be life-threatening," says the Chowdhary Aslam Hussain, sarpanch of Murrah in Surankote *tehsil*.

"The floods have already created havoc this year but with regard to the preparations for winter and snowfall, the government has not taken any initiatives as yet," he adds.

According to the National Institute of Disaster Management, the state is prone to flash floods and natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, landslides, avalanches, high velocity winds and snowstorms.

The Union Home Ministry says this year's floods hit several villages across the state and 390 were submerged. Other sources peg the figure at 2,600 affected villages, of which 390 were submerged; 1,225 villages were partially affected and 1,000 villages wholly affected in Jammu division. Many

parts of Srinagar, including the BSF HQ in Sanant Nagar and the Army Cantonment in Badam Bagh, were inundated, and vital roads were submerged.

The state government approved a three-tier Disaster Management Policy in February 2012 to put in place a proper mechanism for rescue, relief and rehabilitation of disaster victims. But, according to sources, it could not create a separate department which would deal only with disasters. Sources say that disaster management in J&K is not managed by an autonomous body, but by respective divisional commissioners or deputy commissioners of the district.

The Centre for Science and Environment sees this disaster as another manifestation of an extreme weather event, induced by climate change. The J&K disaster was caused by an event classified in the 'very heavy rainfall' category. The fear is that due to climate change, this can become the new normal.

The immediate focus in J&K should be strong and well-planned disaster management teams and effective weather forecasts. The Prime Minister visited the state on Diwali and announced an additional relief package of ₹745 crore for rebuilding of damaged homes and hospitals. He had immediately announced a relief package of ₹1,000 crore after the floods. It is close to two months already, but when this money will reach deserving hands remains an unanswered question. ■

Charkha Features



Homes have cracked walls and leaky roofs

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR





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GROWING UP WITH

PICTURES BY PRASANTA BISWAS



A lively game of snakes and ladders teaches teenagers about reproductive health

In Jharkhand, an innovative project for teenagers

Subir Roy
Jamshedpur

LAKKHI Muni Hansda is 22, a graduate, and is looking for a job while earning a bit by offering private tuition. She has not yet got married. She does considerable social work for her village such as taking women to the local hospital for sterilisation and helping clean drains so that they don't become breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

A big slice of her life is being part of the seven-member Nukkad Natak (street play) group that helps spread socially useful messages. Hansda has received the Bhanumati Neelkanth award instituted by leading citizens of Jamshedpur to recognise the work of people like her.

Hansda may be a self-assured young woman, but she is hardly representative of most girls in Jharkhand. They are married off early and become mothers by 18 – which robs them of their childhood as well as affects their health.

Hansda would have been like them if she hadn't, at the age of 15, come into contact with Rishta – an initiative that helps adolescents understand the changes in their bodies and develop life skills.

A peer educator from Rishta persuaded her mother and neighbours to let Hansda join the programme. So impactful was the initiation that from then on the family needed no more convincing when a chance came for her to join a

Rishta leadership training programme for the young. This experience enhanced her self-confidence greatly and slowly she began to communicate the messages she had received from Rishta peer educators.

In a prudish society it takes self-confidence and purposefulness to talk about sex in an organised way. The initial barriers are enormous as sex-related issues are rarely discussed openly.

Dr PC Mohapatra, head of family initiatives and health administrator at the Tata Steel Family Initiative Foundation, recalls that in 2002 the US-based David and Lucile Packard Foundation was looking for a partner for a project to address the needs of adolescents (they make up a fifth of India's population and are vulnerable in their own way). The foundation chose Tata Steel and the partners then decided the details of the initiative and locations. Thus was born Rishta or the Regional Initiative for Safe Sexual Health by Today's Adolescents.

Rishta was formally launched in 2004 and is currently in its third phase. In the eight years (2004-12) of the first two phases, it has covered nearly 1,000 villages in the districts of East Singhbhum and Seraikela-Kharsawan of Jharkhand. In the third phase of three years (2012-15), over 700 villages in five districts of Jharkhand (including the two covered in the first two phases) and two districts of adjoining Odisha will be covered. In its first two phases, the project touched the lives of 40,000 youngsters and the aim is to take that figure to 65,000 by the end of the third phase.

RISHTA



Lakshi Muni Hansda with her award

Other than the two prime movers, there have also been seven local NGO implementing partners in the first two phases. In the third phase, the number of partners has gone up to eight with the advent of another corporate partner, Tata Motors. The aim is to get more companies interested over time by making Rishta a model which can be replicated by them and, as companies come in, the US foundation is withdrawing. Tata Steel provides 67 per cent of the funding and the US foundation 33 per cent. The three phases together have had a budget of \$4 million with a \$1.3 million tag for the current third phase. Rishta has 20 full-time employees.

Informed awareness

The project seeks to create informed awareness among adolescents about the physical and psychological changes that they are undergoing so that they can take a rational view of them and cope with them effectively. This includes new developments that can create uncertainties in an adolescent's mind such as nocturnal emission and masturbation. There are also myths which have to be demolished like the so-called "unclean" period for girls. A key element is educating youngsters about the physiological details of their sexual and reproductive systems and making them aware of the consequences of their actions – how babies are conceived and sex determined. Girls are educated about menstrual cycles and hygiene.

Then come the socially important aspects for all adolescents – safe sex and the need to protect oneself from sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. Perhaps the most critical is making youngsters aware of the need for girls not to marry too early, the ravages of early pregnancies and use of contraceptives.

How does Rishta work? It begins by building capacity among partners and government officials and then conducts a baseline survey to find out how things stand at the outset. Then it forms clusters of villages and adolescent groups to work with. This is followed by the crucial step of training peer educators to spread the main message of Rishta. (While putting them through a four-day residential training, they are also cautioned not to lose track of their studies.) Once a critical mass of youngsters has absorbed the message carried by the peer educators, the need to focus on the youngsters is addressed by forming a youth resource centre. There are now 126 of them.

At the next stage, Rishta effectively outgrows itself. Going beyond adolescent sexual mentoring, it focuses on developing the youngsters' vocational skills, inculcating leadership skills in them and also growing their sports skills like archery. Then comes the getting together of groups of youth resource centres into block-level forums (there are six of them) and finally the forming of district-level forums. (The two anchor districts, East Singhbhum and Seraikela-Kharsawan, have district-level forums.) By the time this happens, the youngsters have built bridges with the administration at the grassroots level and started interacting with panchayat members so that they can impact local policy and spending.

Three phases

In the first phase Rishta did not involve either the local religious leaders or those family members who help youngsters take key decisions, like the mother or mother-in-law. But thereafter it decided to bring them into focus as the message went down better with their help. At youth resource centres, which came up during the second phase, youngsters meet every afternoon and help one another in many ways like career counselling and taking health decisions. They also mobilise action groups to take villagers to cataract operation camps and family planning centres. Through this, leadership capabilities develop. Critically, boys and girls learn to mix with each other and communicate easily.

The third phase is all about scaling up by using the learning experience of the first two phases. It will document the learning from the first two phases to facilitate the scaling up.

Both the Union government and the state of Jharkhand are now aware that adolescents exist and need help, says Biren Bhuta, chief of corporate social responsibility at Tata Steel. "The central programme is called RMCH+A, an A has been added," referring to the reproductive maternal newborn child and adolescent health strategy. And the Jharkhand government has designated Friday a youth day during which government health centres will focus on adolescents.

While Rishta has been around for a decade, what is fascinating is how it has evolved. "It began as a focussed effort to address the sex information needs of adolescents but has gone on to much more", says Bhuta. "There are very good early signs of youth empowerment by building the confidence and leadership abilities of the young." The Rishta programme begins with identifying progressive youth to be employed as paid adolescent health staff. They help identify peer educators (in the 12-15 and 15-19 age groups) and train them. These are the ones who reach out to adolescents. The next step, when there is a critical mass, is to organise a youth resource centre. Then comes the tier above, the block-level forum and, finally, the district-level forum.

The forums are for taking up local issues, which helps build rapport with the community. More specifically, they try to act as a force to ensure that youth programme funds are channelled properly. The way things are going, the youngsters are thinking of registering the district-level forum as a society so that through it they can target government work. They have met the deputy commissioner who has acknowledged that the government is yet to deliver effectively on youth programmes and so can make use of a delivery arm.

As Rishta offers help to the youth beyond specific adolescent needs, it is



Dr PC Mohapatra



Dr Tejinder Pal Kaur

acquiring the expanded role of coordinating between the youth, community and government and is getting to evolve as a multipurpose, multi-agency collaboration with the ability to scale up. It is working with several government departments – health, family welfare, sports and youth development.

In engaging with the world around them, the youngsters have even secured a foothold in local government. Twenty-one of them have stood for panchayat elections and 14 have won. Those who have been elected have given strong support to Rishta from within the establishment.

Tejinder Pal Kaur, senior medical officer, family initiatives and health, Tata Steel, has been with Rishta since 2008 and has become quite emotionally involved, developing a strong bond with many of the successful youngsters. This has helped her negotiate the many roadblocks that have come up in the way of the project.

The tough parts

Reaching out to adolescents who are working is difficult, particularly when they are migrants. Among locals, even if a daughter-in-law wants to listen in to Rishta, the in-laws sometimes do not allow it. It is also challenging to get through to unwed girls who become pregnant and try to hush things up, sometimes with serious health setbacks. In schools, teachers are reluctant to let Rishta start its communications exercise, fearing that a new burden will fall on the teachers. Traditional birth attendants and rural medical practitioners are often initially wary of Rishta's efforts to connect youngsters with proper medical care as they see in this a threat to their space.

Things are particularly difficult in Muslim-dominated areas where boys and girls have to be addressed separately when the whole idea is that they have to learn to interact easily.

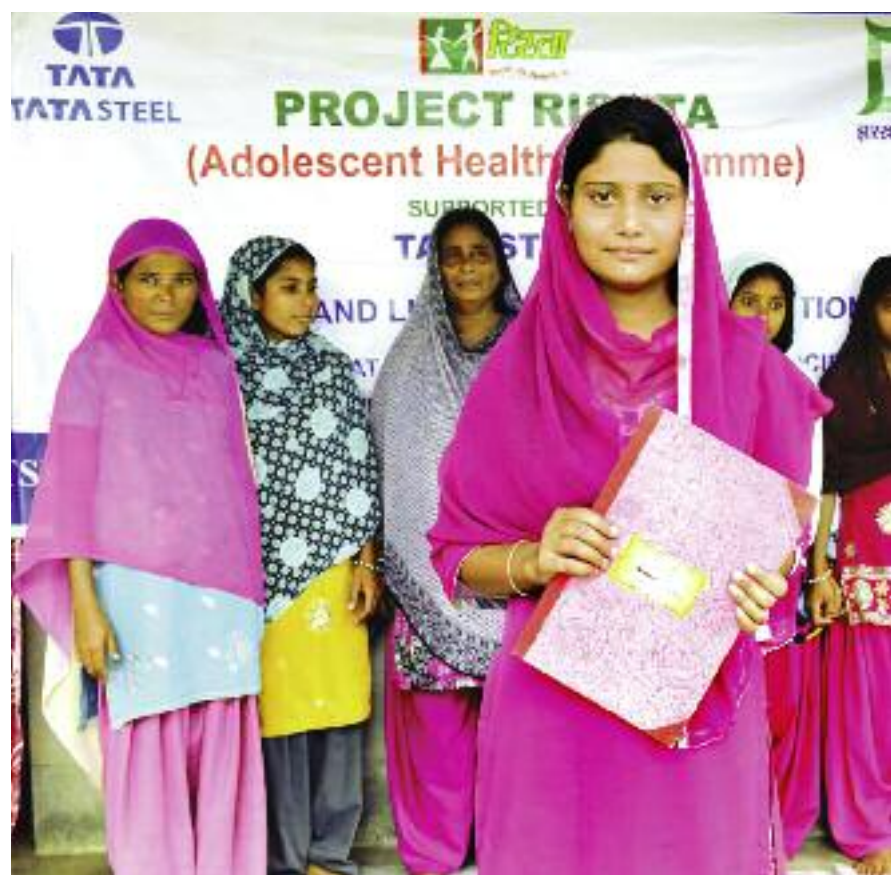
But there are sparkling success stories from the Muslim community as well. Heena Kausar is an example. In 2008 she became the first girl in her village to clear the matriculation exam.

When we visited her home, she was away for her BA second year examination. She is now 21 and the most educated girl in her village.

The conservative village had to be convinced over time. "We had to come here with all our teaching paraphernalia to hold outreach sessions," recalls Dr Kaur. "Now the village has a school and a *madrassa* and all the children go to school."

"Heena also has status in the village because she knows so many people in the world outside through Rishta. If, for example, someone needs a supply of seeds, she picks up the phone and speaks to those at the Tata Steel's rural development department and they oblige. They spoil her," Dr Kaur cheerfully admits.

What is the impact of Rishta? A 2010 study in the project area by an independent entity brings out a remarkable contrast. There is a sharp difference in the age of marriage for both boys and girls between those in the project area and elsewhere. After three years of intervention, in the project area only 23 per



Heena Kausar is now a social worker and very respected in her village

cent of the girls got married before the age of 18. This compares very favourably with Jharkhand's figure of 63.2 per cent and the national figure of 47.4 per cent (both statistics from the third National Family Health Survey). It is the same story with boys. In the project area, only 11 per cent of them married before reaching 21. But for Jharkhand the figure is 47 per cent and the national figure is 32.3 per cent. So the problem of early marriage, from which a lot of issues affecting maternal and child health arise, has been substantially addressed in the project area.

The youth resource centre in Murkum is housed in a panchayat community centre managed by the district-level forum of Rishta and is a part of the adolescent initiative of the government. It is quite literally a space which the young can call their own, a place where they can interact with each other. A group of boys and girls in their teens have taken leave from school to come and meet us, and

'Only hard work pays'

The shop by the highway just outside Jamshedpur has a signboard that reads: *Santhal Pargana 2 - Mobile repair and service - All types of mobile recharge and dish TV recharge done here, Note - Computer formatting also done here. Prop. Bablu Mardi, Chota Gamaria.*

Mardi, 24, is short and would not stand out in a crowd. He first began working as a labourer in sand mining and then shifted to learning the work of cellphone and computer repairing. He passed the matriculation exam in 2009 and the next year got the idea of starting his own shop. Last year, he got married to an 18-



Bablu Mardi, a former labourer, now runs his own mobile and computer repair shop

year-old girl. When youngsters ask him how he made it, he replies, "*Mehanat* (hard work)."

His mother singlehandedly brought him up, along with his five sisters. One of them is married while the others are still

studying. He has a take-home income of ₹8,000-9,000, after paying ₹1,200 as rent for the shop, and now runs the family.

He recalls that when he joined Rishta in 2008, "I knew nothing." There he "made good friends and

got good ideas". Two defining events in his association with Rishta were attending a three-day leadership training programme and then a 10-day outdoor programme that took him to Uttarkashi where Bachendri Pal of Everest fame runs her academy. There he learned how to face unexpected adversity and cope with it.

A number of Mardi's contemporaries do nothing in particular. It is clear that he acquired some critical inputs from Rishta which set him on the right path.

Krorepati Mahato

Krorepati Mahato is an invaluable asset, Rishta seniors



Lakkhi Muni Hansda is now a peer educator creating health awareness among women

while they wait they talk with each other freely. On the walls are posters, all done by the young people, conveying messages on AIDS and the value of herbal plants like *neem*, *kalmadh*, *sanchiyari* and *tulsi*.

There we meet Mukesh who has a four-year connection with Rishta and was introduced to it through the adolescent health worker. His initial doubts about the usefulness of associating with Rishta gave way to getting trained to become a peer educator so as to pass on its message. Soon he was also helping out fellow youngsters on other general matters like how to make an application. This eventually led to the formation of the youth resource centre.

Training works

Gurupada Mandal's story runs along similar lines and goes further. Initially, elders around him were sceptical. But the watershed for him was a three-day train-

like to say with a smile, implying how well he has been named. He recalls that initially he knew nothing about the adolescent changes taking place in him, then slowly he understood himself. When he first started associating with Rishta, the villagers didn't take the group seriously. So its members took relatives to the youth resource centre and showed them what they were up to. The aim was to convince them and through them some village elders.

The big initiative Mahato took was to organise the seven-member street theatre group, Nukkad Natak, which stages performances to spread the message of Rishta. Once the theatre group got going, he sought time from *mela* committees to perform during *melas* to spread not just the Rishta message but also

campaign on important local issues like ways to prevent the spread of malaria. After being with Rishta for some time, he began taking classes for children. And when, after a time, he was persuaded to take some money for this effort, he spent it on buying teaching aids.

Mahato and his friends have now won over even the village *mukhiya* by helping out with projects for roads, schools and electrification. They first got a village road built with *shramdaan*, then got it metalled. All members of the district forum earn their place by securing the attention of the *mukhiya*. When he gets funding, he asks them: What can be done, who can do it? Mahato says with undisguised pride, "Nowadays, when political workers come to the village, they meet us."

There is a sharp difference in the age of marriage for both boys and girls in the project area and elsewhere. After three years of intervention, in the project area only 23 per cent of the girls got married before the age of 18.

ing programme as part of a youth conference. The training gave him great self-confidence. He joined the outdoor leadership programme of Tata Steel and went on to participate in a Moral Re-Armament (MRA) training programme in Pune. From MRA he learnt a lot like how to discover oneself through introspection and identify personal goals. He has now become the district-level president.

The story of Suraj Mahato is a bit different. When he was in Class 8, he succumbed to substance abuse. Then, on meeting the Rishta boys and joining their training programme, he realised how the drugs he was taking were damaging his health. Over time he has been able to kick the habit. The story of two other youth is closer to the bone. They became a part of a drug trafficking chain and when they realised it was vital to get out, they found it was not easy. They needed strong mentoring over many sessions and Tata Steel Rural Service officials were available to them any time of the day when they wanted to pick up the phone and talk. "At one stage we were scared about the safety of our staff," Dr Kaur recalls. Now jobs have been found for them and they have been relocated to another city.

When 20-year-old Poonam Murmu, who bubbles with enthusiasm and speaks at machinegun speed, joined Rishta in 2008 she was 15, being taken there first by a *didi* (peer educator). Initially the villagers discouraged her, saying, Why go there, what do you get? What she has got is, among others, the Bhanumati Neelkanth award. The villagers were so happy to see her picture in the papers for getting the award. "Rishta has given me an identity," she says.

When she was 16, her marriage had been finalised by her relatives. A group of youngsters who had been exposed to the Rishta message talked her relatives out of the marriage idea. One big thing for her was joining the Nukkad Natak (street play) group organised by Kropati Mahato to spread the Rishta message and also disseminate information on issues like malaria. Today her aim is to go on with her studies and then seek a job, armed with a degree.

In a way Rishta has just about got started. It has moved out of its comfort zone, both conceptually and physically (away from home base Jharkhand and into Odisha). As for the future, Dr Kaur says simply, "We have triggered aspirations." Defining boundaries for them is neither necessary nor possible. ■



Avijit Ghosh with the rooftop solar panels installed at the SIRSA apartment complex and guest house

Solar model rises in Kolkata

Rooftop generation gets boost

Subir Roy
Kolkata

THE solar energy scene in the country is changing rapidly as technology gets standardised and hardware prices crash. Global suppliers of large solar power capacities have just participated in tenders floated by two states, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, quoting rates as low as ₹6-7 per unit. This is near to the grid parity price for power generated from imported coal.

Encouragingly, change is also taking place at the grassroots and at the bottom of the league. West Bengal is one of the laggards in terms of renewable energy. Only 2 per cent of its installed energy capacity comes from renewable energy, compared to 39

per cent for Tamil Nadu and 21 per cent for Karnataka.

The state is contemplating two measures to boost use of renewable energy. Currently power distributors in the state have to source 4 per cent of their energy supplies from renewable avenues, with 0.1 per cent mandated from solar power. Not only is this 4 per cent, fixed by the state regulator, much lower than the national norm of 10 per cent, there is no penalty for not meeting the norm. This is likely to change.

Further, West Bengal may, on its own, offer an additional 20 per cent generation subsidy, over and above the 30 per cent capital cost subsidy given by the Centre, says TK Hazra, director-in-charge of the West Bengal Renewable Energy Development

Agency (WBREDA).

If this happens, a quiet grassroots revolution, already taking place, can gain momentum. Rooftop grid connecting solar photovoltaic power capacity, involved with WBREDA (some private firms have set up capacity on their own), now totals 688 KW. In a couple of years, by 2015-16, this is likely to go up to almost 5 MW. What is more, solar power in the state is likely to achieve grid parity (costing the same as coal-based power in the transmission network) in under five years.

Thus, despite the uncertainty over a high-level political decision like 20 per cent subsidy or a regulatory decision like imposing of penalty for non-performing power distributors, a workable standardised model has emerged for putting up a small

(at least 5 KW capacity) or bigger solar power plant on a home owner's or apartment block's roof.

WBREDA set out on its journey in 2010 and its early projects were at the Raj Bhavan in the heart of Kolkata, besides several schools and colleges. Now, a fairly large 150 KW capacity solar power plant is coming up atop the Ramakrishna Vidyamandir at Belur near the city.

One of the best success stories is of the SIRSA apartment complex and guest house of the Central Glass and Ceramic Research Institute (CGCRI), a CSIR laboratory in the city. Earlier this year, their 37.5 KW peak power capacity rooftop solar power plant, set up at a cost of ₹37.5 lakh, started running, says Avijit Ghosh, engineer and energy auditor who has shepherded the project. It has been generating roughly 4,000 units of power a month, which has literally halved the electricity SIRSA consumes from the grid.

In this period (mid-February to October), they have sold 1,500 units of excess power generated to CESC, the city's power distribution licensee. Storing the excess power generated during midday sunlight by installing batteries is very costly. So the viability of small rooftop projects lies in being able to sell your excess power to the local power distributor. This has become possible by getting into an agreement with CESC that it will charge only for the net power consumed – total power supplied to the customer minus what it supplies to the grid during peak sunlight hours.

This agreement is a breakthrough and the fact that CESC is willing to enter into such an arrangement with any rooftop solar power producer paves the way for a visual change over time of the Kolkata



TK Hazra, director-in-charge of WBREDA

A workable standardised model has emerged for putting up a small (at least 5 KW capacity) or bigger solar power plant on a home owner's or apartment's roof.

skyline. With time, many large rooftops or large collections of them (apartment complexes) will 'disappear', that is, be covered by a maze of solar power panels.

CGCRI first thought up the proposal in 2011, modified it the next year, sought the approval of the Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (which has to foot the 30 per cent capital cost subsidy) and issued the tender in 2013. WBREDA, which handholds all such projects (its guidance is needed to secure the central subsidy) is in the happy position of saying that it has a clear idea of the latest standardised technology, its vendors and how to structure the tender for its acquisition, including in

it a five-year maintenance provision and also space for insurance cover for the structures against natural calamities. (A cyclone, common in eastern India, can cause immense damage.)

Since the role of the power distributor – its willingness to take back excess solar power generated during daytime is crucial – is so important, where does CESC stand? It is businesslike without being overexcited or overenthusiastic. It sees itself as a facilitator, leaving the developmental role to WBREDA. It has to make sure of the technical parameters as solar power is of variable quality. Once the technical aspects of grid connectivity are sorted out, CESC is ready to offer net metering, charging the customer for net energy consumed.

Since these are early days in business terms, CESC does not see itself as promoting rooftop solar power. Penetration of such capacity is low. At the other end of the spectrum is a country like Germany where solar power generation is so extensive

that at midday on a sunny day the power distributor takes more power than it supplies.

"When we see penetration approaching such levels we will develop a business model," says an official who declined to be identified as he is not authorised to speak. It is also natural that a power distributor's urge to promote rooftop solar power generation will not be strong so long as non-fulfilment of the mandated blend of renewable power will not attract penalties.

What does the future hold? First, there is a change in the norm for central subsidy. From 30 per cent of project cost it is a specific rate, ₹24 per watt. That is, if for a relatively low capacity set-up, a kilowatt of capacity costs ₹90,000 – ₹1,00,000, the subsidy will be ₹24,000. So the subsidy can work out to 26.6 per cent. This fall is inevitable, say experts. As hardware costs come down, as they are currently doing, the need and rationale for subsidy will reduce. The day when solar power will be able to stand on its own feet, without a subsidy crutch, is not far off.

How fast technology and costs are changing can be gleaned from the experience of CGCRI people over SIRSA. When they first firmed up their project they thought they would get back their investment in 7.5 years, now it is 5.5. This prompts a disturbing thought. You set up a solar power facility, comfortable in the knowledge that the life of a solar power panel is 25 years but find at the end of five years that your technology is dated.

"This is the way of technology. You buy a top-of-the-line cellphone today and find in three or four years that the latest models have left it far behind," says Hazra. The technology for photovoltaic cells which make up solar power panels appears to be revalidating Moore's law which says the power of semiconductors (number of transistors in a given area) doubles every 18 months. Solar cells are made up of the same kind of semiconductors like silicon as microelectronics. ■



View of the SIRSA apartment block's roof

'We've fixed milk fudging'

Instant value as farmers, dairies come closer

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

BARELY five minutes after pouring in milk at the collection centre, thousands of small dairy farmers in south India get an SMS. It's from the bank, informing them about the amount that has been credited to their accounts as payment for the milk collected.

So, instead of waiting for weeks, farmers get paid instantly. A cloud-based technology called Beyond Measurements Dairy, offered by ThoughtFocus, a global software and IT company, is making this possible.

The technology transmits data from the milk collection centre directly to the dairy company. The data includes the quality and quantity of milk given by every single milk producer. Moreover, the technology ensures that the data is tamper-proof.

The farmer gets paid according to the quality and quantity of milk handed over at the collection centre. This makes it possible for the dairy company to step in if any lacuna is detected.

The company thereby gets good quality milk and the producer is paid fairly and instantly. An offshoot is financial inclusion. Each milk producer is helped to open a bank account. The technology offered is therefore an integrated dairy solution.

Civil Society spoke to Avinash Dongre, Practice Head of ThoughtFocus, about the functioning and advantages of this technology.

Is it the first time that Beyond Measurements Dairy technology is being used by the dairy industry in India?

Yes. Interestingly, the technology adaptations in dairy have been phenomenal. Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solutions have been in use for quite some time and they rely on data feed. Also, there were PC-based solutions such as automatic milk collection units. All these are standalone systems. Also, each new system comes at a considerable investment.

What we do is to help dairy companies get reliable data in real time to facilitate meaningful insights – most importantly, at an affordable cost. That's what we enable. Our solutions reduce the IT infrastructure costs at the remote centre by 80 per cent and, more important, make the data tamper-proof. So the companies now get tamper-free data at 20 per cent of the cost.

On 26 January, 2012, when India celebrated its 62nd Republic Day, ThoughtFocus installed its first



Avinash Dongre

dairy solution for a private dairy in Bengaluru to monitor the dairy's collection network. Since then, ThoughtFocus has monitored the collection of more than 250 million litres of milk.

Where has your technology been adopted?

ThoughtFocus is working with private and cooperative dairies mainly in south India. The biggest adaptation is for a Tamil Nadu-based private dairy where our solution is being deployed in 5,000

villages, touching over one million producers.

We work with private dairies in the districts of Tumkur, Kolar and Mandya in Karnataka. We also work with milk unions in a few northern and southern districts in Karnataka.

The dairies where Beyond Measurements Dairy technology has been deployed are in Kolar, Tumkur, Bijapur, Mandya, Salem, Thalaivasal, and Dharmapuri. Also, AAVIN (Tamil Nadu Cooperative Milk Producers' Federation) and Hatsun Agro Pvt Ltd. are our clients.

How did dairy farmers react to your technology? How did you train them?

We made that easy and limited. How much training do we need to use a chat application or a game on a phone? Once the farmers are convinced that the technology is there to help and not to exploit, training is the easiest part. The role of our customers in this exercise is also very important.

The main benefit of your technology is that farmers get paid for their produce and not for the collection centre's aggregated milk quality. Does this increase the farmer's earnings?

Well, we have to look at that in multiple ways. The first, obviously, is higher returns. Their earnings increase by a few hundred in a month. In a micro economy, this is substantial.

The other important thing is that farmers can now have an understanding of what they produce. Previously, they would only get to know the volume of their produce. With additional quality information, they can take corrective action.

Moreover, this is a community movement. Fairness in payment will promote fairness in supply. The minimum we can start with is to pay the farmer a deserved price.

You claim that with field information readily

available, dairy companies can take immediate corrective action if needed. Can you explain?

A milk producer is known to be supplying 250 litres. One day, he supplies 220 litres. Immediate intervention is possible with our solution. It helps the company to engage with the producer closely. The personal attention which they can now provide helps build loyalty.

The system also detects trends in data. So if there is wilful data-tampering favouring one individual, it can easily be traced.

The companies can analyse in real time shift-to-shift variations for centres and milk producers.

Immediate intervention is important for a good process. We enable that.

How have dairy companies benefitted? Has your technology increased their profits?

Most of the dairies had no solution. Implementing our technology is bringing the dairy company closer to milk producers. There is trust being built between the two. A few dairies which deployed PC-based solutions are converting to our Beyond Measurements Dairy cloud-based solutions.

Our solutions avoid data manipulation and there is zero downtime in sharing the data. Moreover, we are virus-free. Also, the solution is developed in such a way that all the data is encrypted, removing all manual intervention.

Apart from the income farmers receive, our technology helps build trust, value and improve yield per cattle. It helps the entire ecosystem.

Farmers are now getting true value for what they produce. Unlike the traditional way, where the farmers were paid on average quality, Beyond Measurement Dairy solution enables the farmer to realise true value for what they produce, because the quality of their produce can now be measured at farmer level and instantly delivered to the central office.

Since the dairy companies now have better control over quality, they can pass on additional benefits to the farmers. The dairy company can also reward the best performer and help others to perform better.

How practical and affordable are your herd and cattle management solutions?

We have similar solutions for herd and cattle management. We are thinking of offering this at less than the cost of a one-day meal. Our herd management solution is a comprehensive tool for tracking the lifecycles of livestock.

ThoughtFocus is the first technology in India to provide solutions allowing dairy owners to make instant payment to milk producers with alerts being sent to them on their mobiles. This is building trust and loyalty between both dairy owners and producers. Real-time data is enabling dairy owners to engage with milk producers to come up with solutions. ■

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

Dams will kill the Ganga

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

IN a shocking development, the Consortium of Indian Institutes of Technology (IITC) has submitted a report that is a shot in the arm for the hydropower lobby in the Ganga basin of Uttarakhand. The IITC report is being used by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF & CC) to push ahead with 24 hydropower projects in Uttarakhand that were recommended to be cancelled by two official expert reports, both commissioned following orders of the Supreme Court (SC). It seems the authors of the IITC report are jeopardising the formidable reputation of the IITs and other institutes that are part of IITC.

Sounds ridiculous? Read on.

The first expert report was by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII). It was commissioned by the MoEF & CC to assess the cumulative impact of some 70 hydropower projects in the Alaknanda-Bhagirathi basin in Uttarakhand. The WII was commissioned to do this study following an earlier SC order. Its report of April 2012 said that 24 projects should be dropped due to their irreversible and long-term impact on aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity.

But the MoEF & CC refused to take action.

The Supreme Court directions dated 13 August, after the Uttarakhand flood disaster of June 2013, also stated that the “MoEF is directed to examine, as noticed by WII in its report, as to whether the proposed 24 projects are causing significant impact on the biodiversity of the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi river basins.”

But the MoEF & CC did not want to do any such examination.

Since the MoEF & CC was setting up an Expert Body (EB) to examine the role of hydropower projects in the Uttarakhand disaster as per directions of the same SC order, the ministry included examination of the 24 projects in the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Expert Body.

The Expert Body's ToR was even wider than that of the WII study and the expertise available with it was also greater. The Expert Body's report (by 11 out of 13 members) submitted to the MoEF & CC in April 2014 concluded that 23 out of the 24 projects in the WII list should be dropped and even the 24th project, namely the Kotli Bhel 1A, should go ahead only after significant modifications. Thus, essentially, the Expert Body too endorsed the WII recommendation.

The WII recommendations were peer reviewed by a renowned biodiversity expert, Dr Brij Gopal. The Central Water Commission representative at the second meeting of the Expert Body sought the report. Dr Brij Gopal too endorsed WII's recom-



PANSUL MEHTA

The town of Devprayag is threatened by the Kotli Bhel hydropower project

It seems inappropriate for the IITC to sit in judgment over the recommendations of an expert body on a subject in which it has no expertise.

mendation that the 24 projects should be dropped.

The MoEF & CC still did not want to take action on the 24 projects.

So, using the dissenting report by two government agencies that were largely toeing the official position in the Expert Body, the MoEF & CC suggested to the SC on 7 May that it wanted to set up another committee. Seeing no validity in this, the SC rejected the MoEF & CC suggestion and asked it to take a stand. The SC then put a stay on any further work on these 24 projects.

Still not ready to take a stand, the MoEF & CC, using the excuse that since the IITC was already working on the Ganga River Basin Management Plan (GRBMP) for the ministry since 2010, gave the task of reconciling the Expert Body's report to IITC. This task was not part of GRBMP's work, but given to IITC through a fresh ToR.

Despite repeated orders, the SC did not get the required response from the MoEF&CC. The judges then rightly remarked that the ministry was behav-

ing like Kumbhakaran and Rip Van Winkle.

On 9 October, the MoEF & CC submitted an affidavit to the SC, relying entirely on a report from the IITC that certified with some vaguely defined criteria that all 24 projects could go ahead! This is exactly what the MoEF & CC and the hydropower lobby wanted. The IITC report was unprofessional, inadequate, unwarranted and inconsistent. Besides, IITC did not even have the mandate to submit such a report. Let us see how.

The IITC report was authored by eight persons. A perusal of the available information on the professional background of these persons shows that none of them have expertise on the aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity of the Bhagirathi-Alaknanda basin to decide on the appropriateness of the WII recommendations. Hence, at the outset, it seems inappropriate for the IITC to sit in judgement over the recommendations of an expert body on a subject in which it has no expertise.

The IITC team has also contradicted the Expert Body's recommendations, again without having the expertise that was available to the Expert Body. It is thus inappropriate for the IITC to comment on the recommendations of the Expert Body which had two biodiversity experts from the Forest Research Institute and WII, besides experts from Uttarakhand in various other disciplines. IITC is thus being unprofessional.

The IITC report essentially says that all 24 projects can go ahead if they satisfy three criteria: *aviral dhara*, environmental flows and longitudinal connectivity. The first thing that strikes one about these

Continued on page 26

Continued from page 25

three terms is that they are all vaguely defined and can have flexible interpretations. They are also interconnected and not necessarily independent of each other. Most important, they do not take care of the issues based on which the two expert reports said that 23 projects should be dropped and even

ardous zones and projects increasing the disaster potential of the area, among many others.

Moreover, in Table 4.2 of their 'Interim GRBMP' of September 2013, the IITC provides a larger set of criteria for deciding permissibility of dams and barrages in the Ganga Basin, which include criteria like threat to terrestrial biodiversity, rare, endangered

fore, be kept out of Cumulative Environmental Impact Assessment (CEIA) for their approval."

This shows that the IITC is overruling the recommendation of the WII and Expert Body on the criteria of terrestrial biodiversity, geological stability and so on, without providing any reasoning. This also shows their pro hydro bias. Second, the IITC contends that the adverse environment impacts of such projects on the Ganga river system are expected to be negligible, without providing any basis. Third, suggesting that all such projects may be kept out of the CEIA shows poor understanding of impact assessments by the authors of the IITC report.

The WII and the EB reports recommended dropping 24 HEPs based on cumulative impact assessment of all the operating, under-construction and planned projects in the Bhagirathi-Alaknanda river basins. The conclusions arrived at based on cumulative impact assessment cannot and should not be sought to be addressed by looking at project-specific actions as the MOEF & CC affidavit and the IITC report are suggesting.

Did the Project Management Board allow the IITC to do this report? The IITC task of GRBMP is being overseen by a Project Management Board (PMB) comprising senior persons of all the seven IITs and some invited members. The IITC report, dated 21 July 2014, mentions: "The PMB in its fifth meeting held on Tuesday, 24 June 2014 at IIT Delhi agreed to examine the two reports in the broader framework developed for GRBMP" However, this claim is not supported by the minutes of the relevant meeting of PMB. From the reading of the minutes, it seems that the IITC had no mandate to do this report.

On both counts, technical and merit-based, the IITC report is under a cloud. It is not adequate, reliable or consistent to take a decision about 24 hydropower projects. IITC had neither the expertise nor the mandate to submit such a report. The MOEF & CC should not be relying on it.

It is unfortunate that the IITC has submitted a report that is obviously music to both hydropower developers and the government. We hope the IITC will be more consistent and professional and work towards rejuvenation of the Ganga and other rivers. ■

*(Being an IIT Mumbai alumni myself I am writing this with sadness.)
Himanshu Thakkar, SANDRP*



the 24th project, namely the Kotli Bhel 1A, may be dropped or modified.

While these three criteria, when clearly defined and properly implemented, are necessary conditions for any hydropower project, to say that they are sufficient conditions is not only misleading, but also shows lack of understanding of the environmental issues related to hydropower projects.

Moreover, the IITC recommendation excludes a large number of criteria that the two expert reports considered, including terrestrial biodiversity (absent in the IITC report), cumulative impact (absent in the IITC report which only looks at project specific issues), the location of projects in haz-

ardous zones and projects increasing the disaster potential of the area, among many others. But these are no longer considered by the IITC in their current report under discussion. Thus, the IITC is being inconsistent.

It is also disturbing to read the following paragraph in the IITC report: "However, projects on streams/ rivers with negligible biota may be allowed to proceed as per the environmental and other clearances already given to such projects provided that adequate provision is made to ensure the mandated e-flows. The adverse environmental impacts of such projects on the Ganga river system as a whole are expected to be negligible. Such projects may, there-

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Villages get grazing land

KANCHI KOHLI

ON 29 September, the Gujarat High Court issued significant directions related to the repatriation of grazing land to villages that had been acquired for a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Three gram panchayats in Mundra taluka of Kutch district in Gujarat had approached the High Court in separate Public Interest Litigations (PILs) specifically highlighting the scarcity and importance of *gauchar* (grazing) land in their area.

In their prayers before the court, representatives of Goyarsama, Navinal and Luni villages raised not just the paucity of grazing land available for them, but the fact that grazing land was critical for the sustenance of their cattle and that it was integrally linked with local livelihoods.

Anand Yagnik, an advocate, filed the writ petition on the issue of grazing land in Navinal village. During the course of the hearing this petition and other PILs underlined some critical developments that had emerged due to the directions of the District Collector of Kutch.

While the specifics of this case and what transpired in court are important, it is essential to understand the context in which change in land use has been permitted. Large tracts of grazing land have been given to industrial giants and port developers like the Adani group which have huge multi-sector operations in the area related to a port, coal handling facilities, power generation, ship breaking and so on. What this meant for villagers was that access to grazing land had been deterred with the creation of gates, fences or construction of railway lines.

In recent times, access to grazing land around these villages has been barricaded. A few years ago, although a railway line went along large tracts of grazing land, access to a sacred hillock, Bharadi Mata, was still possible. There weren't any guarded gates. Now, the heads of local self-government needed to assert their authority and their resident identity to get to the grazing commons and the sacred hill.

The depletion of grazing land in Kutch and access to it were debated before a two-judge bench comprising Justice Akil Kureshi and Justice JB Pardiwala. It was pointed out through various PILs that the Kutch District Collector had passed orders on 20 June 2013 granting additional government land for grazing purposes to Luni and Navinal villages, subject to conditions. Two petitioners had submitted copies of these orders before the court, highlighting the specifics of the amount of land the Collector had allocated to their villages.

The High Court's 'oral order' records that in both these orders it was the state's Department of Land Resources which has been given the responsibility of carrying out measurements of the land at the government's cost. After this, the *mamlatdar* of the area would demarcate the boundaries of the land and prepare a map based on which the land could be transferred to the gram panchayat. At the time the order was issued, no progress had been made on this demarcation and subsequent handing over. As a result, the panchayat was unable to utilise the land

for grazing purposes.

The court received information that, for Goyarsama gram panchayat, the Department of Land Resources had undertaken a survey of what was termed as government wasteland on 9 September. The land would subsequently be measured and the proposal submitted to the Deputy Collector in Mundra who would take a final decision.

With this information in hand, the High Court

31 October and the formalities of final handing over would be completed by 31 December. With this process, the administration of these grazing lands would vest with the Luni and Navinal panchayats.

However discussions with the sarpanch of Navinal in early October indicate that it was not clear to them where exactly this land was going to be located.

As far as Goyarsama village is concerned, the



It was pointed out through various PILs that the Kutch District Collector had passed orders on 20 June 2013 granting additional government land for grazing purposes to Luni and Navinal villages.

closed the PILs filed before them relating to similar issues around depletion of grazing land. The direction did not deal with the implications of handing over large tracts of grazing land for industrial purposes. This might be either because the PILs did not raise these issues or the court preferred not to deal with them. In fact, the court's order mentions that other grievances highlighted in the petitions were not examined by the bench. Therefore, neither were any observations made on these grievances nor were any orders passed.

The court finally ordered that the "Department of Land Resources shall carry out the task of measurement of the *gauchar* land already allotted to Navinal and Luni gram panchayats under two separate orders both dated 20 June 2013."

The 29 September court order indicates that approximately 387 hectares were to be demarcated for Navinal and a little over 85 hectares for Luni. The measurement process would be completed by

the court's directions were more of a request to the Mundra Deputy Collector to expedite the process and take a decision on how much additional land was to be handed over to the village by 30 November. The demarcation of boundaries and formal handing over was to be completed by 31 January 2015.

With the above directions, the PILs were disposed of by the court. While this is an important set of orders offering interim relief to the villages, what demands a deeper inquiry is the manner in which large tracts of grazing commons have been diverted for industrial purposes in an area like Mundra. Building evidence on impacts is another area of investigation waiting to happen. But what is visible even without studying impacts is that massive land use transformations have left villages fractured and livelihoods dismantled. ■

Kanchi Kohli is an independent researcher based in New Delhi. Email: kanchikohli@gmail.com

Looking beyond the Taj

SIMRAN BRAR

I visited the Taj Mahal for the first time in my 33 years last winter. Having laid eyes on the Statue of Liberty and the Golden Gate Bridge before the Taj, which stood just hours away from my home city, I was acutely aware of the irony. So when a close family friend invited us to his wedding in Agra, I cleared my schedule, determined to use the opportunity to make the long-due visit.

It would be a stretch to call me a hopeless roman-

another realm or epoch. In fact, I felt more firmly rooted in the present and the immediate, even as thousands of tourists swarmed around me hoping to make their own personal connect with the historic monument. Rather than the wonder of the tourist, I felt the desperation of local people, who pleaded with visitors in the hope of earning a few hundred rupees. Rather than being moved by the monument, I was overcome by the poverty I witnessed in the surrounding city.

I walked away from the Taj feeling disoriented and guilty.

was hard to miss.

On the 20-minute cab ride to the wedding venue the following morning, I struck up a conversation with the cab driver. An amiable, chatty guy in his mid-forties, he talked of his daily struggles – lack of fares in the off-season, power cuts, the safety of his daughters, as well as his personal triumphs: his girls were about to graduate high school. I listened quietly, interrupting only to congratulate him on his daughters' graduation, until he said something I didn't quite understand.

"The Taj is a curse for Agra", he said. "What?" I asked, certain that I had misheard. "The Taj is a curse for our city," he repeated, loudly this time. "Why?" I asked, a little taken aback. "It's taken away our employment," he said passionately. "So many factories have been shut down to protect the Taj – what are we to do? How are we supposed to earn a living?"

In 1996, the Supreme Court ordered 292 coal-based industries to switch to natural gas or relocate outside a protected zone established around the monument.

The environmental brigade highlighted the damage being done to the Taj's marble surface by pollutants emitted by surrounding industrial units, including the Mathura Refinery, iron foundries, glass factories and brick kilns, to name a few. Industry representatives, on the other hand, try to shift or diffuse responsibility by arguing that other industry groups are more or equally to blame for the Taj's plight. They'll occasionally talk about their workers, even though it is well known that their crusade to save their units has little to do with their employees. Workers in foundries in and around Agra continue to work under hazardous and exploitative conditions. Still, a job is better than no job, most would agree.

That evening, my last in Agra, I stood by my hotel window, looking down on the city, wondering why my experience of the Taj had been so jarring, so unlike the stories and accounts I'd heard. It's not like the over-crowding, the unemployment and the poverty in the adjoining city were a secret – they spilled right into the walkways of the Taj.

Yet, somehow, in our country, we've become masters at compartmentalisation. We see what we want to see, and what's uncomfortable or jarring we're able to pile away in a box deep within our sub-conscious – the incongruity and contradiction becoming less and less disturbing as time goes by, until one day it's almost as if it were invisible.

It appears to me that true beauty lies in the elevation of the human experience – in the provision of employment to the jobless, in the supply of clean water to the poor, in the repair of roads and the building of infrastructure and in all the myriad mundane, unromantic tasks that elevate human life from mere survival to the possibility of self-actualisation. I see the grandeur of a monument that a wealthy king built for his wife hundreds of years ago, yet it pales in comparison to this unrealised potential for truth and beauty in the lives of millions of our fellow citizens who live under its shadow. ■

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When I gazed upon the Taj, I didn't see an emperor's spectacular expression of love. I saw instead the skill and toil of thousands of faceless artisans whose names I would never know. I wasn't transported to another realm or epoch.

tic. I'd much rather prefer the tag of reformed, grown-up, hopeful romantic. So when I first laid eyes on the Taj, I didn't expect to be mesmerised by its other-worldly beauty, swept away by its powerful symbolism, blown away by the timeless glory of this shrine to love. Yet, I did expect to feel something within this broad genre, albeit paler.

All the pictures of world leaders posing before the Taj, all the selfies of couples in love, all the odes in print and on film, in fact most of all I'd ever consumed on the subject had led up to this. It had convinced me that I would feel something profound or be moved in some way. And moved I was. But not in ways I'd expected.

When I gazed upon the Taj, I didn't see an emperor's spectacular expression of love. I saw instead the skill and toil of thousands of faceless artisans whose names I would never know. I wasn't transported to

As I sat in bed that night, I wondered how such a narrow, romantic slice of the reality of the Taj had been so successfully imprinted on the psyche of an entire nation and the whole world. Besides the famed beauty and love story of the Taj, and the well-publicised pollution threat to the monument and subsequent preservation efforts, I hadn't really heard much about the surrounding city and the economic malaise that ailed it. No one had really put a human face on the Taj or its home city. It was almost as if one magically fell into the gardens of the Taj without actually driving up to it or looking into the faces of the people or glimpsing their abysmal living conditions. The human story surrounding the Taj seemed to have been scrubbed off, whitewashed, just like the names and faces of all the artisans who had poured their blood and sweat into this paragon of workmanship. The cruel symmetry

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Traditional dancers from the northeast perform for the people of Delhi

North vibes with northeast

Shayak Majumder & Chainika Dhingra

New Delhi

WITH a harmonica strapped to his chest and a guitar in his hand, Akhu got onstage. The crowd cheered. And the Northeast Festival got off to a thumping start. Akhu strummed his guitar and sang “Chinky Boy Song”, which he had written in memory of Nido Tania, the student from Arunachal Pradesh who lost his life to racial violence in Delhi earlier this year.

*Before every brother lose a sister
Before every sister lose a brother
Come out and sing out loud
No, no racism...
We all bleed the same colour
We all breathe the same air...*

Akhu's song not only set the mood for the night but also conveyed the purpose of the Northeast Festival. The four-day fest was an attempt to connect the people of Delhi with the northeastern states of India. Organised by Trend MMS in association with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for



Akhu, the protest singer from Imphal

the Arts (IGNCA) and the northeastern community of Delhi, the festival was held at the IGNCA grounds. Trend MMS is a part of MMS Advisory Pvt Ltd, a northeast project advisory organisation.

Performances by bands from the northeast were not the only highlight of the carnival. There were ethnic dances, fashion shows, photography and painting exhibitions, a handloom and handicraft bazaar and authentic northeast cuisine on offer. In short, the festival brought the best of northeastern culture to the north.

“This is the second time we are organising the annual Northeast Festival,” said Anita Deka Mahanta, Programme Director of the festival. “There has been so much discrimination against people from the northeast. Through this festival, we want the citizens of Delhi to connect with northeast India. They may have a different culture. But we are inherently the same.”

Akhu and his band, Imphal Talkies, were among the many northeastern musicians who performed to a teeming crowd. The repertoire of artistes featured big names from the Bollywood music industry like Zubeen Garg and Ash King along with popular

Continued on page 30

Continued from page 29

northeast bands like Imphal Talkies, Soulmate and Tetseo Sisters as well as budding bands like Guwahati Lights who performed onstage for the first time.

Guwahati Lights is a fusion band that blends rock with Indian classical music. All its members are from Guwahati. They were performing in Delhi for the first time but they weren't nervous. "We endorse our hometown, Guwahati, and we keep our music light, hence the name," explained Vikram, the band's lead vocalist.

"Most of our songs are in Hindi," he said. "There is a general notion that people from the northeastern states don't speak Hindi well. We are trying to overcome that perception by singing in Hindi. We want people to connect with us, to feel for our music. This should help us contribute to the cause in our little way."

All the performers at the festival wanted to help people connect, be it through songs of love or protest. Akhu is a protest songwriter. He comes from Imphal but has spent more than 13 years in Delhi, where he studied for a PhD in physics from Jamia Millia Islamia.

"After completing my studies, I went to Thailand and worked there for a while," recalled Akhu. "The arrest of Dr Binayak Sen in 2007 catapulted me into the music scene since I got involved in various protests in Delhi." During his years as a student living in Delhi, Akhu too was a victim of racial slurs. "Earlier, when people said nasty things to me, I used to retaliate and pick fights. But by the time I started my PhD, it didn't matter anymore."

"The discrimination, the slurs against people from the northeast have been there for a long time," said Akhu. "But the violence seems to have become worse in the last couple of years. It's sad that things have come down to rape and murder."

Rudy Wallang, lead guitarist of Soulmate, seconded his opinion. "In Delhi, such incidents are happening too often. You read about them in the papers every single day," said Wallang. "I wonder who will take the responsibility of preventing this."

Soulmate is a blues band from Shillong. It comprises Wallang on guitar and Tipriti 'Tips' Kharbangar on vocals. They have performed all over the world and are known as among India's few genuine old school blues musicians.

Is the four-day Northeast Festival enough to curb discrimination and violence against people from the northeast? Akhu, Wallang and Kharbangar say no. "The northeast is very complex," says Akhu. "It cannot be understood by just a festival. For any real progress, people have to become more open-minded."

"A child should grow up with love all around. The family should ensure that. If the child's upbringing is wrong, the inherent hatred will come out in wrong ways. You will start discriminating and hurting others," says Kharbangar. "That is why we sing songs of love. Our music is all about educating people on how to love."

The crowd readily connected with the musicians, their music and messaging. "I think this festival was necessary," said Sharique Ahmed, an amateur drummer and music enthusiast. "The performers are spreading the notion of brotherhood. If this helps to change perceptions and attitudes, it will be great."

The festival also captured some lovely moments like when a gorgeous girl from the northeast walked the ramp in a beautiful handloom silk sari from Assam.

"Muga silk and eri silk are not only nature's gift to

Assam but are the epitome of Assamese culture," remarked Dhiraj Deka, a fashion designer from the small town of Tihu in Assam.

A graduate from the JD Institute of Fashion Design, Deka's theme for the evening was 'Magical Silk Thread Craft of Assam'. He explained that blending muga, tussar and eri silk with cotton produced wonderful weaves. Muga silk, he said, protects the skin from the harmful effects of the sun.



The Vinyl Records, an all-girl band from Assam



Fashion shows were a display of the northeast's amazing varieties of silk

This year, Deka's collection consisted of Western outfits in silk. He owns a designer store in Guwahati, named Bibhusaa, a Sanskrit word that means *vastu*. He also works as a stylist for a cluster project sponsored by the Development Commissioner of Handloom, Ministry of Textiles.

Silk from the northeast dominated the fashion shows. Arita Kashyap, a fashion designer who owns a boutique called Doyna in Tezpur displayed a range of fusion silk garments. "I have used a melange of all four types of silk fabrics from the northeast in my Indo-Western collection," said Kashyap. "The message I want to convey is peace." Mulberry silk, she explained, is recognised as non-

violent or *ahimsa* silk all over the world.

The dominant colours of her garments were black, gold and white. She said her clothes reflected the festival's theme, 'Insurgence to Resurgence'. So while black tussar silk represented insurgence, muga silk in gold symbolised resurgence and mulberry silk in white signified enlightenment, she explained.

Pushpa Chaubey, a graduate in fashion design from Sikkim Manipal University, is originally from

Uttarakhand but has been living in Meghalaya for 16 years. She considers herself to be from the northeast. In her collection, the debut designer showcased the handloom fabrics of three tribal communities in Meghalaya namely, Garo, Jaintia and Khasi. Chaubey pointed out that people from the northeast are extremely fashionable and trendy but they also maintain their traditions.

According to Mahanta, the festival succeeded in connecting people from different ethnic backgrounds. "Almost 20,000 people turned up every day and had a first-hand experience of northeastern culture. We are looking forward to holding a bigger event next year," she said. ■

In search of Shere Khan

Susheela Nair
Bengaluru

ON a misty morning in mid-October, at the crack of dawn and shivering with cold, I set off on a wildlife jaunt into Kanha, one of India's celebrated national parks deep in Madhya Pradesh, in the heart of India.

Kanha Tiger Reserve is also known as Kipling Country. The park's flora and fauna, it is said, inspired Rudyard Kipling to write *The Jungle Book*. Much-loved characters from his book like the legendary tiger, Shere Khan, the lovable bear, Baloo, the wise panther, Bagheera, and Kaa, the dreaded python, were depicted as residents of Kanha.

The park continues to be famous as tiger country. Every year, Kanha attracts hordes of tourists and wildlife enthusiasts. We, too, were there to catch a glimpse of that elusive striped wonder.

Split into groups, we clambered onto open-air trucks with seats called canters. Noisy and clunky, these trucks have been recently launched by the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation. Bumping along forest paths, we came across some amazing denizens of the forest such as small mammals, birds and butterflies. We enjoyed the birdcalls and occasional sighting of mammals. We passed by trees festooned with parasitic creepers and fascinating spider webs and stopped to click pictures of them.

Driving along the jungle trail, we could see the silhouette of a lake, trees and shrubs. As the mist cleared and sunlight filtered through the green canopy, we witnessed the forest changing its hues at every twist and turn. The gentle swaying of towering sal trees and the rustling of leaves in the wind added to our experience of being in the jungle.

The calls of birds broke the morning's eerie silence and reverberated in the jungle. The birdlife at Kanha is very impressive, with as many as 300 species, both migratory and local. We spotted the crested serpent eagle along with the red jungle fowl, paradise flycatcher, golden and black-headed orioles, peafowl, blue jay, red and yellow wattled lapwings, and the grey Indian hornbill. The avian highlight was the Malabar pied hornbill meditating on a dry branch.

Kanha's spectacular sal and bamboo forests, rolling grasslands and meandering streams span over 1,945 sq km of the central highlands. Perhaps the most precious animal of Kanha is the Central Indian Barasingha. This swamp deer is the last of the world's population of the hard ground subspecies. The males have wide-angled antlers numbering 12 or even 14 which give these gentle creatures a majestic look. The best time to see them is during the spectacular rutting or breeding season when they battle each other for the female species.



All set for the jungle safari atop a noisy canter

SUSHEELA NAIR



Entry to Kipling's animal kingdom

The rescue of the barasingha from near extinction is one of Kanha's biggest success stories. The park also shelters several mammal species, including the rare flying squirrel.

Our truck traversed varied terrain – dark thickets of grassland, wide meadows, thick sal forests and bamboo clusters. We scouted for pugmarks and anxiously kept our eyes peeled for a glimpse of the tiger. Apart from the ubiquitous black-faced langurs, I was able to sight a variety of animals – a herd of spotted deer, wild boar, a pack of wild dogs, a white-socked gaur, jackals, sambar and jungle fowl. But we did not spot a single tiger. To our dismay, we did not even sight an elephant. We learnt from our guide that elephants are conspicuously absent in Central India.

All of a sudden, the jungle reverberated with a cacophony of alarm calls. Birds, chital and the hoots of the langurs alerted us to the possibility of a tiger sighting. But we soon realised that these animals were raising a false alarm. They had seen the picture of a tiger prominently displayed on our clunky vehicle and mistaken it for a real predator on the prowl.

With disappointment written all over our faces, we returned to the Kanha Earth Lodge for the night. Located on 16 acres of regenerated land, the lodge is close to Kanha's buffer zone, a 30-minute drive from the Khatia-Kisli park gate. So it is close to the park, yet at a distance from the clutter of hotels that forms

Kanha's tourist hub.

The lodge has 12 luxury bungalows, each with bathrooms and open verandahs inspired by Gond tribal architecture. Designed with local stone and waste wood, the bungalows are environmentally sensitive and low-impact. The absence of neighbouring lodges and highways creates an ideal setting for nature walks, and birding and cycling trips through the surrounding forest.

The resort's location and outstanding hospitality, along with its team of experienced naturalists and commitment towards conservation and local communities, is heartwarming. Interestingly, not a single tree was felled during construction.

Once a barren estate, the Earth Lodge is now a thriving micro-habitat.

Kanha Earth Lodge practises sustainable wildlife tourism and is a signatory of TOFT (Travel Operators for Tigers), an international campaign that advocates responsible tourism to save India's wildlife. Hoteliers and tourists who sign up need to follow guidelines recommended by TOFT. ■

FACT FILE

GETTING THERE

By rail: Gondia Junction (110 km), Jabalpur (203 km), Nagpur (290 km), Raipur (213 km) and Bilaspur (182 km) are the main railheads close to Kanha.

By air: You can fly to Jabalpur, Raipur or Nagpur.

By road: Kanha is well-connected by road to Jabalpur and Nagpur.

Best time to visit: November to mid-May. November to February is excellent for sighting birds and big game. Summer is best for sighting bears, gaur and tigers. The park is closed from July to mid-October.

WHERE TO STAY

There are varied options for accommodation in the villages adjoining the park. These are:

1. **Kanha Earth Lodge** - enquiry@pugdundeesafaris.com

2. **The Celebration Van Vilas** - celebrationvanvilas@gmail.com

3. **Bhagira Log Huts** - www.mptourism.com

Contact details: Forest Department Office, Kanha National Park, Mandla. Phone: 07642-250760

The healer of pens

Amit Dasgupta
Kolkata

IT was a ritual I remember well. My father would enact it with great solemnity every time he needed to write a cheque. For some reason that I never quite figured out, he would insist on writing cheques only in the evening. Very ceremoniously, he would first arrange the bills, one on top of the other. The bill for the monthly school fees would be placed right on top, below that would be the rent for the flat and below that the electricity and gas bills. He would make sure that the book he was reading was kept on



Samnuddin at his pen hospital

the bills as a kind of paperweight.

Then, he would unlock the Godrej cupboard and take out a small suitcase, which he would carefully place on the bed beside the writing table, click its levers open and take out the cheque book and a white cloth, which he would proceed to gently unwrap. He would gaze, almost reverentially, as the folds of the soft white cloth revealed a blue pen that once belonged to my grandfather.

He would sit on the chair and make sure he was comfortable. Then, he would unscrew the lid of the bottle of Quink and dip the nib to fill in the ink. With elaborate style, as if he were signing some royal proclamation, he would fill in the details on the cheque leaf, append his signature, blow on it to help the ink to dry and finally, look at the pen with a sense of satisfaction and pride.

“Shaeffer’s”, Baba would say, “belonged to your grandfather”. He would look at me with a smile. After the cheques were signed, he would press the washer of the pen and let all the remaining ink flow back into the bottle. Then, he would wash and clean the pen meticulously under a tap of flowing water, towel dry it and put it in the suitcase along with the cheque book, place the suitcase back where it resided in the Godrej cupboard which he would lock.

The ritual never changed. Once every two months, I would accompany Baba to a quaint little shop on Chowringhee Street that was called ‘Pen Hospital’. Baba would take out the pen and hand it over to the old man who owned the shop. The man would greet Baba and order tea and biscuits, as he adjusted his spectacles and inspected the nib. Then he would give the pen a gentle bath, as he cleaned the nib and the washer. Five minutes later, the pen

would be back in Baba’s hand and proudly, Baba and I would return home to place the pen back in the tiny suitcase that rarely saw the world outside the Godrej cupboard.

Over the years, my visits to the Pen Hospital became a mandatory stop whenever I visited Calcutta. I would take my own pens along for the ritual bath and cleansing. The old man, Mr Sultan, who owned the shop, had long since died. His son, Samnuddin, now runs the shop, which was started almost 80 years ago by his grandfather, Mohammad Riaz. It is the only shop, possibly anywhere in India, that is exclusively devoted, as Samnuddin told me,

AMIT DASGUPTA

‘to the health of the pen’ as he inspected the pen I handed to him. He looked at the nib through a magnifying glass and a smile lit up his face.

“An old pen, a rare gem”, he said. “Was it your father’s?”

“Yes”, I replied, “but it belonged first to my grandfather”. Samnuddin nodded, as he proceeded to clean the pen, while I sipped the hot sweet tea.

He spoke as he worked. He was, he said, the third generation to run the Pen Hospital. Around him, with the passage of time, the old bread shop and the kebab corner had long since disappeared, as also the second-hand bookshop that I used to frequent for Westerns. Like much of Calcutta, these

had all given way to clothes and other cheap imports from China. Did he feel threatened, I asked him. “Things change with time”, he said, without feeling excessively concerned. As I took a photograph of the signboard, vendors from the neighbouring shops crowded around. One of them said to me with pride, “Pen Hospital. Calcutta’s heritage”.

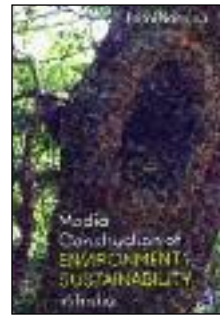
Samnuddin, around 40 years old, has easy mannerisms and told me that he grew up learning from his father about pens. As he spoke, he dismantled my pen and, with a toothbrush, cleaned it of dried ink. He put the pen back and tested the ink filling mechanism, changed the rubber washer, and then, tested the nib. The black ink flowed effortlessly, as he did a little doodle on a writing pad. Samnuddin smiled as he handed the pen back to me, “Good for the next 20 years. If anything goes wrong, bring it back”, he said.

He has two children, both boys and both in school. I asked him if either of his sons showed any inclination to do what he was doing or whether they would opt for another profession. He shrugged and said that it was for them to decide. “But I make sure”, he said, “that they spend a few hours with me every week. I teach them about the mechanism of the different pens. They must know, so that if they decide to join me, they would be well-equipped”. He opened a little black bag and took out a bunch of second-hand old pens – Shaeffer, Parker, Waterman, Mont Blanc, Cross, Pelican. “Each pen is different”, he said, “they have character and personality. Knowing that is so important”.

Like so much that is Calcutta, the Pen Hospital continues to stand in the face of change. Like me, perhaps, one day it will only be a memory. ■

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‘Media is



Civil Society News
New Delhi

ENVIRONMENT stories might not dominate the headlines but they do surface regularly in the English-language print media. The grouse among environmentalists is that these stories aren’t good enough, considering the crucial role the environment plays in development.

Prithi Nambiar, executive director of the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) Australia Inc., has in her

MEDIA CONSTRUCTION OF ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY IN INDIA

Prithi Nambiar

Sage

₹ 995

book, *Media Construction of Environment and Sustainability in India*, assessed reportage of environment and sustainability issues. Her findings are a mixed bag, some predictable and others surprising. Her survey was comprehensive, encompassing the media, NGOs, corporates, bureaucrats and academics. The study though is confined to the English-language print media since, Nambiar points out, it is the elite that drives the discourse on environment and sustainability. NGOs influence the media the most and academics the least.

The book is theoretical and discursive. Nambiar looks at the history of the sustainability discourse in India, the priorities of the elite and how environment and sustainability issues have been communicated so far. Nambiar, who has a PhD in International Communication from Macquarie University, Australia, was involved in a struggle against the denotification of the Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary in Gujarat in 1993. The Gujarat High Court eventually quashed the denotification. Extracts from an interview with *Civil Society*:

Was it your work as an activist, opposing the denotification of the Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary in Gujarat, that got you interested in the Indian media’s handling of environment and sustainability issues?

While I think I was quite passionate about what I was doing and very unafraid of its consequences, in an official sense the term activist would imply something I was not. At that time, coming from a background in development economics, I was working primarily as an educator and a communicator on environment and development for the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) in Ahmedabad.

My work on the Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary was mainly about providing objective and comprehensive analysis to people through a focused and sustained press campaign that supported

'simplistic on environment'

democratic intervention by citizens in systemic ways, for instance, through public interest litigation.

However, all change tends to be negotiated through public discourse which is largely orchestrated by the media. So, yes, you could say that the seeds of my academic interest in the Indian media's handling of environment and sustainability issues were possibly sown during that period.

The ironic part of that whole episode was that I ended up getting sued for my pains to the tune of several crore rupees by the company involved in the sanctuary saga.

Why did you base your research on India's English-speaking press?

The choice was due to theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretical, because I was looking at the adoption of a globally generated buzzword like sustainability within a national context. India, with its cosmopolitan English-language press, offers a purer opportunity to study meaning negotiation from a cultural perspective unimpeded by translation issues from global to local discourse. Practical, because English is the language of policy, business and administration in independent India, giving the English-language press primary access to influential experts and communicators who dominate public discourse in India.

Environment struggles are all at the grassroots, as you point out. Is the English media able to communicate the people's point of view correctly and with empathy?

This is an interesting question because it highlights the dividing line in terms of class that the English language or, rather, the fluent knowledge of it, has come to represent in Indian society.

The thinking of scholars like (Gayatri Chakravorty) Spivak and others to some extent has prompted the classification of people-centred environmental struggles as part of a 'subaltern' discourse. Spivak frowns upon the 'epistemological violence' implicit in the act of those from more privileged classes speaking for the marginalised.

However, the process of social change is often initiated by those who are privileged enough to recognise social injustice and eloquent enough to table the issue for policy and public attention in a suitably influential discursive arena. So whether the English media is adequately representative of a country with multiple linguistic discursive spaces is not, in my view, as important as its functional value in setting the policy agenda at the highest level.



Prithi Nambiar

'Those stories that best resemble a Bollywood plot in following basic human interest patterns tend to win out over others.'

My research does show that there are several, albeit admittedly inadequate, instances of the English media displaying competence, empathy and, indeed, activism in communicating grassroots concerns to the people.

Why do NGOs influence the media so much?

There is a general perception, supported by my research findings, that NGOs influence media the most. This could be because NGOs come into existence with the express intention of creating social change - whether economic, political or cultural in nature. Social change is primarily wrought through communication targetted at all levels of society, from the grassroots to the policy sector.

Obviously, the media offers access to all these levels and NGOs naturally tend to seek access to the media to achieve their objectives. But there is also a symbiotic aspect to this relationship when the media seeks to fulfil its agenda, setting objectives by transporting social concerns into public

discourse. In all democratic societies, the media traditionally performs gate-keeping and watchdog functions which makes it somewhat obligatory for this sector to pick up issues of social justice and interpret or frame them for the public.

What are the environment stories most likely to be picked up by the media?

Unsurprisingly, in an entertainment-addicted society, those stories that best resemble a Bollywood plot in following basic human interest patterns tend to win out over others.

Some ubiquitous framing elements are melodrama, oppositional and simplistic dialogue, and a rapid progression of events. But then again, you do find extremely detailed information and reams of abstruse technical data in an undigested and reader-unfriendly form which is also fairly common practice in environmental reporting by the media. Clearly, both styles could be problematic from an educational point of view.

The media, according to your findings, plays a pivotal role in environment reporting and in influencing people's perceptions. What aspects do you think need to be improved?

There is a need to get the media, especially the Indian media, with its rich and colourful understanding and experience of what it means to be free in a democratic country, to take its normative responsibilities seriously.

This includes responsibility for public welfare that goes beyond political and ideological loyalties because the media shapes discourse which is fundamental to the continued existence of democracy.

While narrative styles need to be attractively tailored to engage readers on important environment and sustainability issues, it is critical for the media to draw on experts, academics and practitioners to enhance the interpretation and analysis of these issues.

Ramchandra Guha, whom I interviewed during my research, strongly felt that Indian academics had an obligation to actively contribute to policy discussions in the media on sustainability issues. Prof. Girja Sharan, who has himself done pioneering work on sustainable water management using dew harvesting, was of the opinion that while the IIMs, IITs and other institutions of higher education and research must formally address the sustainability challenge, the Indian media needs to highlight innovative work done in sustainability as a matter of priority. ■

Holy Cow

THIS year, Dastkar's icon at its annual Nature Bazaar in Delhi was the cow. Cute replicas of the cow dotted the fair grounds. There were stalls selling cow products. Holy Cow Foundation, which cares for this gentle animal, also set up a stall. They were selling *desi ghee* with medicinal properties, manure for gardens, a floor cleaner made of

neem and *gobar*, a chemical-free mosquito repellent, joint pain oil, incense and sticks made of cow dung for religious purposes.

Holy Cow Foundation comes to the rescue of sick, abandoned and injured cows. It prevents old and infirm cows from being sent to the slaughterhouse. Holy Cow has surveyed genuine *gaushalas* (cow shelters) that are looking after homeless cows. It thereby stops cows from roaming the streets of the city and living off garbage. Holy Cow appeals for donations and gives this money to *gaushalas*. Just ₹40 per day feeds a helpless cow. Holy Cow's tag line is 'Each one, feed one'. The foundation also raises money by selling cow products. You can adopt a cow. Or help them by buying a natural cow product.



Contact:
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0981115112.
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holycowfoundation@gmail.com

Broom boom

KANTA Kharse travelled all the way from her village, Pindrai, in Madhya Pradesh to Dastkar's Nature Bazaar armed with brooms. She heads a Self-Help Group (SHG) of 12 women called the Mahalakshmi Swashayta Samooh Aajeevika Mission who make brooms, big and small, from *khajoor* leaves. As head of the SHG, it is Kharse's job to ensure the brooms sell at a good price. The brooms are sturdy and attractive and sweep away grime and dust with a flourish. Kharse says her SHG was supported by the National Rural Livelihood Mission which loaned them ₹25,000 as initial start-up capital.

Dastkar invited her to join their network when she was manning a stall at an exhibition in Pragati Maidan. "They have given me this stall free of cost," says Kharse with gratitude. "It's an important gesture because we rely wholly on exhibitions to sell our brooms. On average, at one exhibition I sell around ₹30,000 worth of brooms," says Kharse.

This tiny enterprise has improved the incomes of the women. Kharse says the time is ripe for them to scale up broom production but they don't have a dedicated retail outlet. Interestingly, the broom has become a compelling emblem of sorts in recent years.



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Skill training provides employment for rural youth.

After I graduated from college, I wanted to work and support my parents who get a meagre income as daily wage agriculture labourers. The only opportunity for employment in my village was working as a farm hand that was poorly paid seasonal work. Without any job prospects and income, I was depressed to be financially burdened on my family.

SST team helped me in finding a suitable job for my qualifications. They enrolled me in a 10-day youth development training program in soft skills. Once I completed the training, I got a job in a KFC restaurant in Mysore. Now I have a regular income of ₹ 7000 per month. This helps me to meet my needs and also contribute to family income.

Mr. Chaluva Nayaka
Kembal village, Mysore district, Karnataka.

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Values stronger than steel