

# Civil Society



## BHARATHON

THE STORY OF RAJ VADGAMA'S ONE INDIA RUN



### 'DESIGN NORMS FOR SMALLER HOSPITALS'

Dr Santosh Mathew on how rural healthcare is different  
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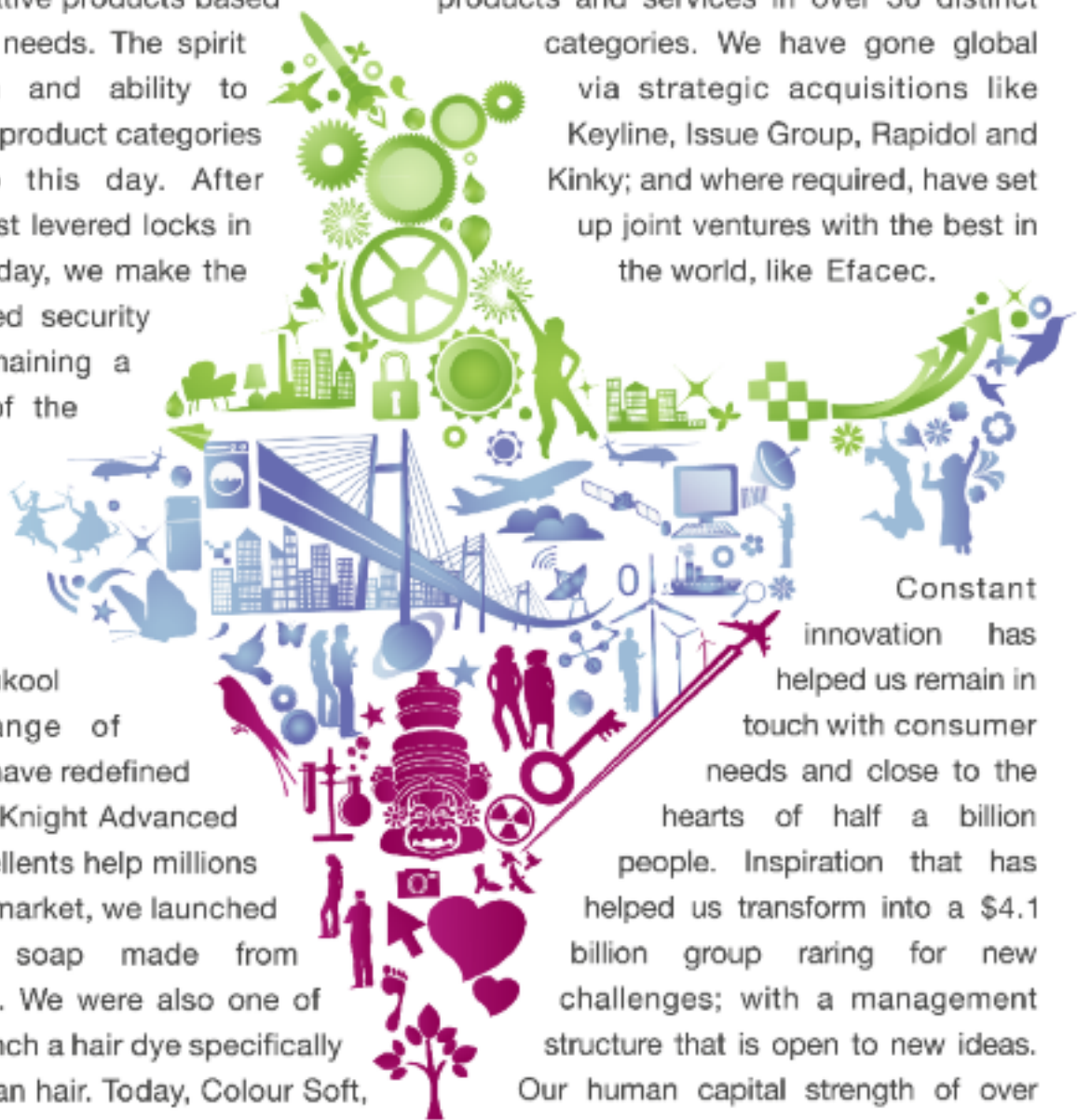
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What's more, we have been safeguarding vast areas of mangroves, way before environmental consciousness became a CSR activity. These are just some of the 100 plus firsts that we have clocked up till now. Today, we are a conglomerate spread across 60 countries, engaged in delivering products and services in over 30 distinct categories. We have gone global via strategic acquisitions like Keyline, Issue Group, Rapidol and Kinky; and where required, have set up joint ventures with the best in the world, like Efacec.

Constant innovation has helped us remain in touch with consumer needs and close to the hearts of half a billion people. Inspiration that has helped us transform into a \$4.1 billion group raring for new challenges; with a management structure that is open to new ideas. Our human capital strength of over 20,000 is a mix of experience and youth, relooking at ideas, processes, skills, execution and delivery, with just one focus: how to enrich the consumer experience and make shoppers come back for more. The Godrej way is encapsulated in a simple philosophy. One that inspires us everyday. What we like to call Brighter Living.



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**COVER STORY**

## 10,000 KM RUN IS ONE INDIA EPIC

On 15 August, Raj Vadgama set out on a Bharathon: One India Run from the Gateway of India in Mumbai. His mission is to run 10,000 km in 120 days to inspire people to take to running.

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# Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

## A running hero

**W**HEN a man decides to run 10,000 km across India in 120 days, from the coast to the mountains, it is only right to stand up and applaud his effort. It is in this spirit that we have devoted our cover story to the very amazing Raj Vadgama.

A Bharathon that emphasises our stunning natural beauty and our oneness despite our cultural diversities needs to be celebrated. Raj has on this run seen and experienced India as few of us have. The opportunity for us as a nation is to amplify his experience.

We at *Civil Society* found Raj Vadgama to be inspirational. He epitomises the power of the human spirit. Running is also growing in popularity. For those of us who carry our running shoes in our travel cases, it is difficult to miss the number of runners increasing every year as one hits the road early morning in different Indian cities. People across all ages are running. It is a trend we need to encourage, not only because of the immediate health benefits that accrue, but also the boost to the spirit. There are scientific explanations for a runner's sense of well-being – endorphins getting released etc. etc. But as a nation we perhaps need to devote ourselves to more action and less talk. In an extreme way, the ultra running of Raj Vadgama epitomises such a can-do and will-do attitude.

There is of course a lot else in this issue of *Civil Society*. Let us refer you to the interview with Dr Santosh Mathew of the Emmanuel Hospital Association. Santosh speaks for the small and not-for-profit hospitals in India. Caught up as we are with our big cities, we tend to forget that large numbers of our fellow Indians get medical attention from doctors in hospitals that don't belong to the highly profitable private chains. These hospitals have very special needs and so when the government sets out to formulate standards it should take the difficult conditions in which they deliver health-care into account. Santosh makes this point powerfully on behalf of the 20 Emmanuel Hospitals and other such small entities in the healthcare sector.

We also have Kailash Satyarthi and his Bachpan Bachao Andolan. The Nobel Peace Prize has made him big news. But we have known him for a long while and did a cover story on him a couple of years ago when a spate of grizzly crimes against children were all over the newspapers and TV channels. Satyarthi is a man of action, a street fighter who engages insistently with the system at every level. So his successes are many, but it is also a horrible reality that child labour in its most gross forms has continued to grow. Satyarthi and his colleagues have been both brave and inventive in trying to expose crimes against children. Clearly, it is not enough because what is needed is societal reform and firm action by the State. Nothing less will do. Yet, to Satyarthi must go the credit of highlighting the issue and taking on traffickers at great personal risk. There are those who believe that his contribution does not make him deserving of a Nobel Prize. One can debate that. It, however, remains an indisputable fact that the Nobel Prize for Satyarthi is a reminder of the need to act urgently to protect the rights of the children of India.

**Publisher**  
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9811787772

Printed and published by  
Umesh Anand from A 53 D,

First Floor, Panchsheel Vihar,  
Malviya Nagar, New Delhi - 110017.  
Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt. Ltd.,  
B-88, Okhla Phase II, New Delhi - 110020.

**Postal Registration No.**  
DL(S)-01/3255/2012-14.  
Registered to post without pre-payment  
U(SE)-10/2014 at New Delhi PSO  
Registered with the Registrar of  
Newspapers of India under  
RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607  
Total no of pages: 36  
www.civilsocietyonline.com

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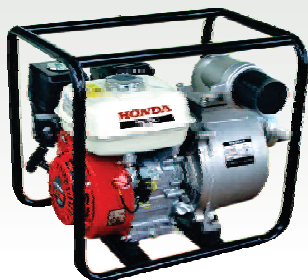


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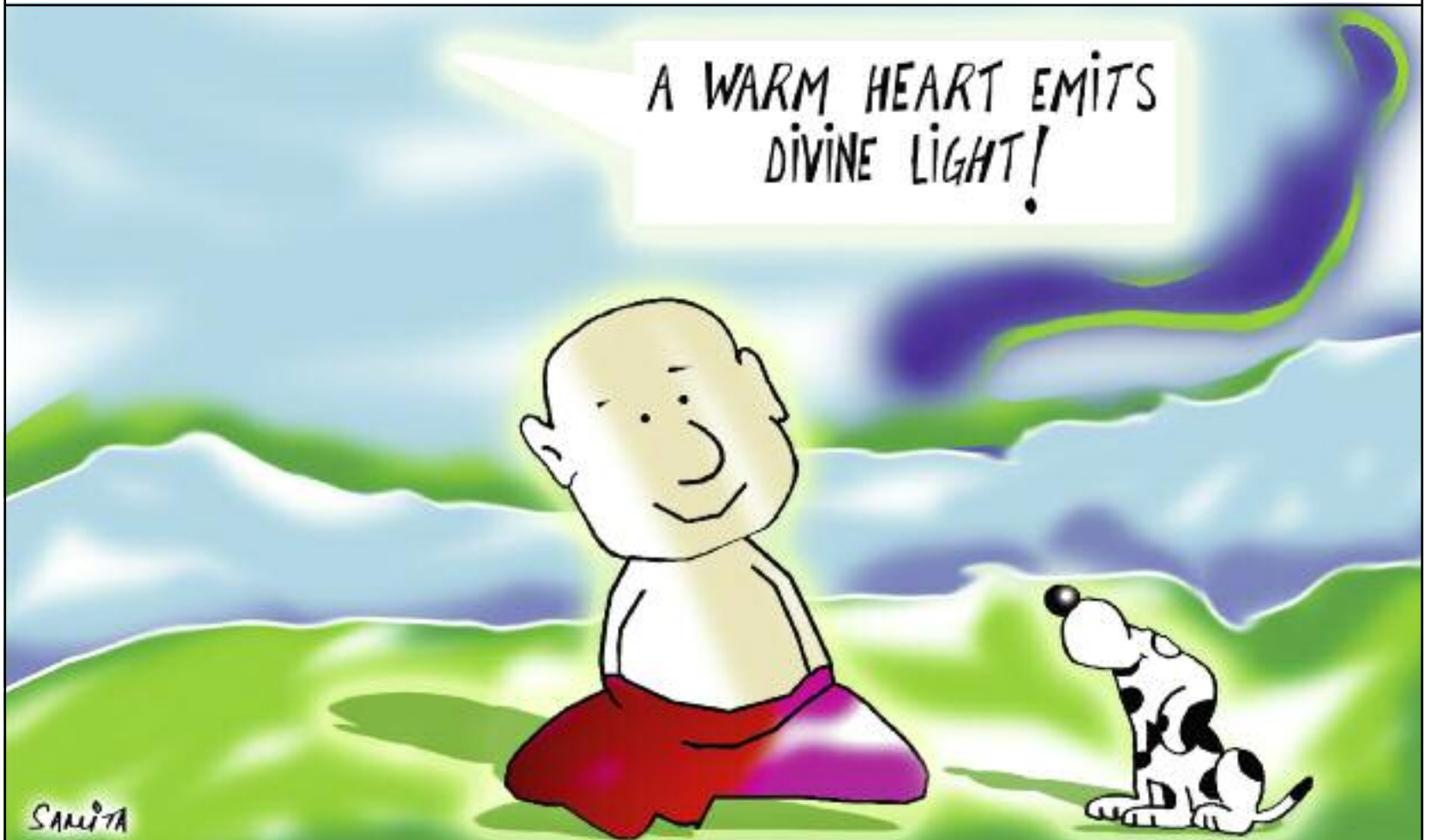
#### Lawnmower



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## IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



## LETTERS



### Hall of Fame

Your story on SRIJAN's soya project in the Hall of Fame annual issue, Working for India, was truly inspiring. The SRIJAN team has shown the way to small farmers struggling to cope with exploitative debts and poor agricultural productivity. They have ignited a ray of hope in people's minds. Both Padam and Himanshu have proved that where there is a will, there is a way. People who are not

from an agricultural background can bring about a big change in agriculture. This is a shining example. My congratulations to Padam, Himanshu and the entire SRIJAN team for making this happen.

**Pramod**

I would like to congratulate Padam and Himanshu for their determined efforts to create awareness among farmers about improved agricultural practices and free them from exploitation by *artiyas*, traders and the brokerage system.

Our organisation, Access Livelihoods Consulting (ALC) India, has been working to create large producer-owned institutions which focus on procurement, processing and marketing of local produce to deliver maximum value to producers.

We have promoted 14 producer companies across Telangana, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. We would like to replicate these successes in other states too.

**Sharad Pant**

Your story, 'Officer on a dream mission', profiling Praveen Kumar, was most inspiring. He is a real legend in Telangana. We are very lucky to have

him here. His work culture is perhaps due to the influence of Dr BR Ambedkar's ideology.

**Sudarshan**

Our secretary, Praveen Kumar sir, is an inspiration to all teachers and Swaeroes. He is the motivator. He has vision with mission. We feel very proud to work under his guidance.

**Kishore TGT**

Praveen Kumar always thinks about the poor and their empowerment. He is a man with great vision. He looks very simple but his thinking is very advanced. He gives students a lot of self-confidence.

**Srihari Swaero**

### SLIM

With reference to your interview with Dr Balam Bhargava, 'Too many medical tests do more harm than good', I would like to wish him great success for starting the Society for Less Investigative Medicine (SLIM). It will really help the poor. Currently, they are being fleeced by private hospitals who make them do several tests. The patient gets no relief. So they go to another doctor who tells them to do tests from another lab because the

first one is not acceptable to him.

**Nagamani**

### Slavery in the world

Saibal Chatterjee's film review of Robert Bilheimer's documentary, *Not My Life*, was deeply disturbing. Slavery is against humanity. But this pernicious practice has spread across the world.

We wilfully deny recognising human beings as human beings. I suggest we approach the renowned TV show, *Satyamev Jayate*, and request them to dedicate one show to this crucial global issue.

**Pramod**

### Low-cost hospital

We are educationists and have set up a school in rural areas. We want to develop a hospital for poor people. We have our own land to construct our hospital. Can any like-minded organisation help us? My address is:- Santu Halder, Pathar Pratima, South 24-Parganas, West Bengal -743383, Sundarbans and email is: santu-foodtechnology@gmail.com

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# ‘Small rural hospitals need

## INTERVIEW

Dr Santosh Mathew

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

PRIVATISED healthcare is increasingly seen in India as a good business to be in. Its success is measured in terms of the return on investment. With the government-run public hospital system having all but collapsed, private facilities are flooded with patients and they mostly pay a steep price for the care they get. These hospitals have the capital for expensive equipment and they advertise their five-star facilities as they do their handsomely paid doctors.

But what about private initiatives in the voluntary sector whose doctors and hospitals serve patients in remote parts of the country? With very little money and against great odds, they too bridge gaps that result from the lack of State-run healthcare. They have an old-fashioned commitment to the values of the medical profession and meet the needs of tens of thousands of people who would otherwise have nowhere else to go.

However, a regulatory framework being drafted by the Union government under the Clinical Establishment Act of 2010 would make it difficult for small rural hospitals in the voluntary sector to function, as its provisions seem to be suited only to large private hospitals.

Civil Society spoke to Dr Santosh Mathew, Executive Director of the Emmanuel Hospital Association, on the concerns over the new rules.

Dr Mathew emphasises regulation is welcome. But he says it is also important to recognise that the private sector consists of both the for-profit big hospitals and the voluntary small hospitals.

Since the two models are entirely different and the latter delivers healthcare under difficult circumstances, it is necessary to differentiate between minimum and quality standards. Rules that may be apt for a big hospital could shut down a small hospital or nurse-run clinic and leave patients in the lurch.

For instance, the Emmanuel Hospital Association, with 20 small hospitals in remote places, provides 1,450 beds. Some 120,000 patients are admitted annually and there are 800,000 outpatients.

The smallest of the Emmanuel Hospitals has just 30 beds, the largest has 225 beds. The hospitals are part of public health outreach programmes. They are part of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and linked to the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY).

Yet these hospitals would be hard put to implement the new guidelines because they do not take into account location, shortage of specialists in those areas, inability of patients to pay and so on.

Excerpts from an interview with Dr Mathew:

**Emmanuel Hospitals work in very difficult conditions. What are the challenges that you face? What are the flexibilities in standards needed,**



Dr Santosh Mathew: 'Trained manpower for small hospitals doesn't exist in rural areas'

**without compromising on the quality of medicine for small hospitals like yours?**

The first major challenge is the lack of manpower. Most of our institutions are in priority districts, in tribal areas, where health is poor. At most of the locations, to find adequate manpower based on the current or planned standards is next to impossible.

For example, we have a hospital in Karimganj in Assam. It's a 150-bed hospital. It's doing 3,500 deliveries in a year and about 150 to 200 major surgeries. Patients come from three districts nearby in Tripura and Manipur. We have a well-trained paediatric surgeon, obstetrician, anaesthetist – they are trained to do everything. But the current Clinical Establishment Act says that unless you have an obstetrician, a paediatrician and a physician, you cannot do a caesarean. The Act also says that unless you have an MD in pathology, you cannot run a lab; unless you are an MD in radiology, you cannot run an X-ray lab. But, the three districts together do not have a radiologist. So there isn't the trained manpower that the law requires.

It is a strange situation because the hospitals we run provide healthcare. They are also part of the National Rural Health Mission and get funds from the government. But at the same time, if the provisions of the Clinical Establishment Act are to be applied, the hospitals cannot function because there may not be an obstetrician or a paediatrician or a radiologist.

**What are the other challenges?**

The other challenge is access to lifesaving measures like blood banking.

**What is the issue with blood banking?**

The Supreme Court came out with a verdict that blood can only be given to blood banks. For blood transfusion, blood has to be taken from blood banks. This is the regulatory framework, which is absolutely fine, in the context of blood-borne infections like HIV, Hepatitis B and so on.

But there are many districts in the country where there is no blood bank or storage centre. In a storage centre, you can take blood from the blood bank and store it. There are multiple districts in the country which do not have an existing blood bank. In such areas, we used to practise UBDT or Unbanked Blood Direct Transfusion. We would take blood from a relative, do all the tests required, and directly transfuse it into the patient. This is what we used to do earlier, but now it is illegal.

UBDT is necessary in those situations in which there is no other way by which the life of the patient can be saved without giving blood. Two of our staffers in one of the hospitals, in Uttar Pradesh, had to go to jail for 15 days, for transfusing blood last year. The lifesaving procedure was done as required by the patient but it is illegal.

We accept that it is illegal. But the government should explore how to set up systems. For, say, every

# norms that work for them'

AJIT KRISHNA



they have large volumes and the money. But smaller hospitals can't afford to have a bank. Our Karimganj hospital has 150 beds but we have much smaller hospitals, with 40 or 50 beds. For example, we have a hospital in Sahebganj district, one of the most remote areas of Jharkhand. It is located in the hilly terrain of Rajmahal Hills, in the middle of the tribal community. The few roads that exist are riddled with potholes and the nearest town is 45 km away. So, when a patient comes with obstructed labour here, you need to have a blood storage centre. The nearest blood bank is in Farakka, in West Bengal. Now, you can't get blood from a blood bank in another state. You have to take blood from a bank in the same state.

#### So, is storage allowed right now?

Yes. Blood storage is allowed. But UBDT is not. It is allowed only in the Army.

**'We are talking about minimum standards. We are not talking about quality standards. It is important to differentiate between quality standards and minimum standards.'**

#### So, if today you store the blood, that's okay. But you can't get the blood to store and so to save lives you need to do UBDT.

Yes. A storage centre requires a blood bank nearby. It means every district with a certain population should have a blood bank. That kind of planning has not happened. I think one of the main challenges is that healthcare is a state subject.

#### In the Karimganj hospital, do you have a storage centre or not?

No. After a long discussion, we went to the Chief Secretary and Secretary and got permission for a blood bank – initially for a storage centre and then for a blood bank.

#### So, you resort to UBDT.

No. After one of our staff got arrested, we have stopped UBDT. We were doing it in good faith. Out of our total number of 20 hospitals, at least 14 or 15 were doing UBDT. Otherwise, patients would die.

#### One challenge is manpower, the other is blood; what other challenges do you face?

The standards under the Clinical Establishment Act are not at all realistic either for primary-care or secondary-care hospitals in rural areas.

In the tribal districts of Chhattisgarh healthcare is provided by a lot of faith-based organisations and nurse-run clinics. The PHCs are not working, sub-

centres are not functioning. There are no MBBS doctors. So these nurse-run clinics, about 240 of them, provide primary care.

They are linked to hospitals of Christian networks or other networks. Now, as per the current Act, all nurse-run clinics will have to be closed in the next two years, unless an alternative system is devised.

There are contradictions. For instance, the standards say that you need an obstetrician to do a caesarean, or even conduct a delivery. But in a government-run PHC, an MBBS doctor is allowed under the rules to conduct a delivery.

There is also a Family Medicine course in the country – a diploma in Family Medicine, an MD in Family Medicine, which gives training for obstetrics. There is something called EmOC training – Emergency Obstetrics Care training, which is WHO-approved, that trains emergency doctors to do emergency obstetrics. But the regulatory framework does not look at these standard.

#### When the new law and standards were being framed, were the rural hospitals consulted?

I think the typical thing is that the government puts it up on their web page. Generally the voluntary sector has not been protected. But we have not been proactive and suddenly woken up.

The corporate sector has been very proactive in understanding it. Only in the last two years, we have really woken up. We are trying to contribute as much as possible to the standards, hoping that the government will listen and make changes.

We can't have one standard for the entire country. There are a whole lot of districts where there are geographical issues and then there are Maoist problems in some tribal areas. These locations have specific issues.

We are talking about minimum standards. We are not talking about quality standards. We accept the quality standards. It is important to differentiate between quality standards and minimum standards.

#### What would be a good model from elsewhere in the world to follow in terms of minimum standards and quality standards? Is there anything we could look at?

There isn't. I don't think there is any other country as complex as India. There is so much geographical variety, there are multiple communities.

A suggestion we are making is to look at levels of care. Don't look at the number of beds. For example, you have a hospital that can provide a normal delivery. Who can provide a normal delivery? A nurse. Then there can be another level of hospital for an assisted delivery, which requires an MBBS doctor, who uses vacuum, forceps and so on.

A third level can be a hospital that provides caesarean services. A caesarean can be done by an MBBS doctor with six months of EmOC training, under a surgeon for obstetrics. A fourth level would be complicated obstetric management.

We feel looking at levels of care can solve problems of manpower shortage and be a practical way forward in the conditions in our country. ■

100,000 of population, there should be x number of banks, x number of blood storage centres. And if the government can't put such a system in place it should create Public-Private-Partnerships or find some other way of setting up blood banks and storage centres.

#### A blood bank surely comes with its own measure of economic viability?

Yes. Setting up of a bank requires ₹20-25 lakh. For smaller groups, this is very difficult. Another option for us is to have blood storage centres. We can collect blood from an existing bank and store it. The problem with existing banks is that they often don't have enough volumes. The private banks have their own commercial interests. So, they don't want anything to do with storage centres.

#### How would a storage centre be different from a bank?

A bank is where the blood is drawn and stored. In a storage centre of a hospital, you get the required amount of blood from the bank, store it and use it for the hospital and if it doesn't get used you can replace it.

#### So, you are saying that a hospital like the one you have in Karimganj can be a storage centre if it cannot afford to be a bank.

Yes. Bigger hospitals can afford to have a bank, if

## Radio clout for rural women

**Tanushree Gangopadhyay**  
Ahmedabad

THE invaluable role of radio and mobile technology in empowering women at the grassroots was emphasised at the inaugural meeting of the National Network of Women in Media held in Ahmedabad.

Opening the discussions, noted activist Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA, said, "Building trust and ways of non-violence through women's journalism are the twin goals we pursue."

Namrata Bali of SEWA Academy recalled the importance of radio during the Kutch earthquake of 2001. "HAM radio helped our women to rebuild their livelihoods," she said. "All India Radio (AIR) was very helpful with infrastructure as we needed to communicate with our women." These were the humble beginnings of community radio.

Although SEWA ran a fortnightly publication called *Ansuya* for over 30 years and used the audio-visual medium too, it found radio to be more democratic. Most women members listen to the radio while working.

SEWA has launched Rudino Radio (Rudi's Radio) in Manipur village in Sanand taluka. Its radio station runs for eight hours and can be heard in the three tehsils of Ahmedabad district – Sanand, Viramgam and Daskroi.

Rudino Radio conveys information on nutrition, insurance, health, education, environment, communal harmony, agriculture, traditional art and crafts, seasons, festivals and more to its women members. It has also created Listener's Groups whose members are encouraged to contribute information, recipes, music and so on.

Gurgaon ki Awaz, a community radio station, is popular among the working poor in Gurgaon. It broadcasts folk songs and useful discussions in the dialects of migrants for 22 hours. Despite having 10 FM radios in Delhi, none of them broadcast in any regional language, noted Arti Jaimi of Gurgaon ki Awaz.

"Women and men in rural areas are using mobile phone technology to discuss their problems around the country", explained Shatali Shedmake, an activist from CG Net Swara, a voice-based portal accessible on mobile phones that allows anyone to report and listen to stories of local interest.

"During a yatra through the villages of Madhya Pradesh we found women in some villages walked over three km to fetch water. Merely a phone call to people in Washington helped these women get funding for three wells in the village."

In Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, a Self-Help Group (SHG) of women manages a community magazine called *Navodayam*, financed by the state government. There is no editorial interference. The women, mostly Dalits, discuss development projects, child marriage, migration and all social problems through their monthly magazine. Annually priced at ₹140 per SHG, the 14-year-old magazine has a circulation of 40,000.

The meeting stressed that media, including digital media, is a great change maker. ■

# Rudraprayag gets



A little girl enjoys a tune on the radio

**Rakesh Agrawal**  
Dehradun

SUNITA Bhatt became a rural star overnight when she warbled a folk song on a local community radio, Mandakini ki Awaaz. "I feel like a celebrity," gushes the homely lady from Bhanaj village. "I used to sing only for my village. Now I am in demand everywhere."

The Mandakini river, from which the radio station derives its name, gurgles below, snaking its way through the Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand.

Launched on 21 September in Sena Gadsari village, Mandakini ki Awaaz already has an impressive audience of around 200,000 listeners.

"We are very popular because we are the only music station on air here," says Uma Negi, its head of content. "All our recordings are from the field. But our 12.30 to 1.30 pm programme which broadcasts local news and the weather, and our phone-in interactive segment from 4.30 to 6.30 pm are both very popular."

But it isn't just entertainment that the newbie radio station offers. It aspires to be a reliable voice when disaster strikes by broadcasting critical information that can help save lives.

The idea of starting a radio station for villages struck Manvendra Singh Negi of Bhanaj village who has been witness to a series of disasters. In 1978, a landslide occurred in Kultha village, killing 41 people. In 1998, a massive landslide in Agastyamuni



Saritha Thomas at the inauguration of Mandakini ki Awaaz with

block killed villagers and a year later an earthquake rattled his area, causing immense devastation.

"We asked around and came to know that Nepal had radio stations that gave people essential information. Then we heard about Hema Dhvani, a cable radio station in Bengaluru," explains Negi.

In 2010, he fortuitously met Saritha Thomas, a former journalist with the BBC, at a conference organised by AMARC (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters). Thomas had left

her job and started People's Power Collective, an NGO in Bengaluru, to help villagers set up their own radio stations.

"It's one medium where illiteracy, poverty and geographical isolation pose no boundary. Our vision is to help rural and economically disadvantaged communities set up and run community radio on a not-for-profit basis in India," she says.

Thomas visited Negi and his two colleagues in their village. Moved by their passion to bring

community radio to their remote villages and aware of the important role it could play, she decided to help Negi.

The first question on their minds was: in which village should they set up the community radio? In 2004, three gram panchayats convened a meeting to decide this important issue. They chose Bhanaj village.

The licence to run a community radio station was issued by the government to Mandakini ki Awaaz Kalyan Sewa Samiti in 2010. In fact, the Samiti is one of the few communities in India to register as a

**It isn't just entertainment that the newbie radio station offers. It aspires to be a reliable voice when disaster strikes.**



# a radio it can own



Devilal Bharati and Manvendra Singh Negi

Mandakini ki Awaaz lively, interactive and useful. The radio station broadcasts six hours of live programming from 7–9 am, 12.30–1.30 pm and 4.30–6.30 pm daily. There are special programmes on Sundays as well.

A lot of emphasis is given to programmes where listeners can phone in or come to the station for a chat show. So the formats are: *potlis* or capsules of information on a particular topic, interviews, dis-



Schoolgirls perform at the function



Uma Negi of Mandakini ki Awaaz on a reporting assignment

society for the sole purpose of running its own community radio station.

Mandakini ki Awaaz tied up with People's Power Collective for technical assistance, training and capacity building. Much brainstorming went into designing the training module and eventually an 18-month residential training programme was started.

In June 2013, members of People's Power Collective and radio reporters of Mandakini ki Awaaz had begun fieldwork in Rudraprayag district when the flood disaster struck.

"We were travelling from village to village, trying to gauge the needs of the people so that our radio station could be established. Sadly, the disaster struck in the midst of our preparations," recalls Negi. But the tragedy confirmed Negi's belief that radio was a crucial tool for them.

Two months after it was launched, villagers find

cussions, dramas, music and phone-in programmes.

Anybody with a mobile that has an FM radio option can tune in to the radio station. Today, even the simplest Nokia phone has an FM receiver – making radio accessible to everyone. The mobile also allows each caller to play the role of a *gramin* reporter, and phone the radio with a story or information he or she would like to share with listeners.

The topics Mandakini ki Awaaz tackles are disaster management, education, migration, health, women's empowerment, sanitation, civic issues, forest conservation and water.

The radio's core team consists of six people – all from villages and belonging to different economic and social backgrounds. Apart from programming and managerial responsibilities, they double as radio reporters, going from village to village for stories.

Shivanand Nautiyal, 25, is head of production. A

postgraduate from Bareth village, he used to conduct surveys for various organisations. Then he heard of Mandakini ki Awaaz and decided to join. "I enjoy my work since it focuses on local cultural practices, close to my heart," he says.

Uma Negi reports on water, health and women's issues, and young Shashi Negi, content team associate, reports on agriculture.

Ramesh Rangeela, head of music, is a mason by profession and a talented singer. He also reports on local events, health and village culture.

Devilal Bharati is head of fieldwork. A founding member of Mandakini ki Awaaz, his radio reports are about civic amenities, education and local culture.

Poonam Rawat, head of communication, worked to set up the radio station when she was in school. Spirited and quick on the uptake, she now handles communication and proposal writing. Her radio reports focus on civic amenities and women's issues.

The radio station's intended specialty, though, is disaster management. During a disaster, they will broadcast messages about stranded persons to their relatives and to officials for help and rescue.

"We will provide the weather forecast and forewarn people about any danger. We will also advise them to go to safer places, if required," says Singh.

Anand Sharma, Head, Meteorological Department, Uttarakhand, emphasises the importance of radio during a disaster and in normal times too.

"Since 2004, I've been pressing for hand-wound radios that can be operated even if there is no electricity and batteries don't work. So-called normal times are also distressed times in the hills. It either rains excessively, leading to landslides, or doesn't rain for days, leading to drought. The hand-wound radios could be very useful."

Sharma had warned of

excessively heavy rain before the June 2013 disaster and regularly informs farmers about weather conditions in the hill state.

Barinderjeet Singh, Superintendent of Police, Rudraprayag, who was working round the clock during the 2013 disaster, says people need information on time and conveyed to them clearly.

Another transmitter is being erected by Mandakini ki Awaaz at Durga Dhar, a very high point near Rudraprayag town. This will extend the radio's reach and improve clarity.

The Union government, too, is finally realising the invaluable role community radio can play. Says Supriya Sahu, Joint Secretary, Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, "There are too many such disasters in India and it is time we together make a case for the unparalleled value of community radio in disaster management". ■

## CONFLICT ZONE

# Poonch in despair after flood havoc

**Nazam Mir**  
Keerni

**I**MРАН Khan, 28, a resident of Berari village in the hilly terrain of Mandi tehsil in Poonch district near the Line of Control, still cannot believe that his parents and wife are no more. He has been in a state of shock since the news of their death trickled in during the floods that wreaked havoc in Jammu and Kashmir in September.

“We were on the second floor of our house, watching the rain lashing down on our village. None of us had a clue to the disaster that awaited us. Within seconds, our entire house was washed away in the landslide. When I regained consciousness, I was informed that my parents and wife had died on the spot while eight other family members had been seriously injured. All our livestock was also killed in the incident,” said a shattered Imran.

Almost every family in the rural belt of Poonch district, is grieving. This border district located in the lap of the mighty Pir Panjal range, already carries the tag of being one of the most backward districts of the state. Based on an assessment of flood damage carried out by the government, Poonch now has the dubious distinction of being the worst-affected district in Jammu region with massive devastation of public and private property, besides loss of several lives.

The intensity of the floods can be estimated from the fact that the Sher-e-Kashmir Bridge, the lifeline of Poonch, was washed away along with the abutment on both sides. Houses built on the riverbed were wiped out. As an immediate step, people were shifted to relief camps that provided them temporary relief but during the day no one could be seen at these camps. Every able-bodied adult would go back to his or her house during the day, scrounging in the slush for belongings to salvage, or simply to join the back-breaking task of clearing the rubble from around the settlements. Left behind in the camps were children and the infirm.

A month later, the scars remain fresh for people in the rural areas are still awaiting help from the government. According to locals, the administration's presence ends in the town area. There is no telling what is happening in the rural hinterland because it remains inaccessible till date. The media has not reached this distant neglected area.

Twelve-year-old Nagina Koser of Imran's village was injured in the floods by tin sheets that damaged her right leg up to the knee. “I have collected money from relatives and other people for my daughter's treatment. She has been admitted to Government Medical College, Jammu, as I have not received any

help from the administration,” rues Nagina's father, Javed Iqbal, who works as a labourer in Poonch.

It is not only the loss of human life and property that has disturbed the fragile environment of Poonch. The loss of livestock and farm fields has jeopardised the economy.

“A man in my village lost his entire herd of 18 buffaloes,” says Ajaz ul Haq, a resident of Surankote. With each buffalo priced at over ₹50,000, the economic devastation has dealt a blow the household may never recover from.

With buffaloes, goats and sheep dead in large numbers, the nauseating stench is a constant reminder of the loss and, worse, of the danger of an epidemic.

“Our priority will be to slowly get our lives back on track, starting with the repairing of damaged structures and reworking the fields. We cannot afford to even think of buying more livestock. Although we are receiving relief in terms of rations and compensation for damaged structures, no compensation for the loss of livestock and crops has come from either the state

or the central government,” rued Niaz Ahmed, a local from Surankote village.

In contrast, according to a top official, the state is slated to submit a memorandum of losses amounting to ₹1,00,000 crore to the central government as the floods have caused colossal damage to property besides claiming more than 280 lives.

In Poonch alone, 28,369 kanals of land have been affected by flash floods with no estimated figure of loss of livestock available as yet. So far, no compensation has been announced for the damaged crops and dead livestock – the very basis of survival of the rural people. And as for the compensation announced for the dead and the injured, scepticism abounds.

When Chief Minister Omar Abdullah visited the district, he declared that the government would relax norms to compensate families who had suffered extensive loss of life, livestock and property during the floods, but nothing has been announced or received as compensation for livestock.

In recent years, Poonch has been in the news for ceasefire violations disturbing the fragile peace process. Barely remembered in the reportage are the people whose everyday lives are interrupted and who, since the mayhem of the 1940s, are keen to leave behind the violent history of cross-border conflict that has plagued the region for over six decades. Today, the picturesque mountains of the Pir Panjal stand mute witness to another destruction of colossal magnitude – except this time it was triggered by forces beyond the people's control. ■

*(The writer is a social advocate working for the rights of landmine victims in Poonch)*  
Charkha Features

# NGOs to

**Shayak Majumder**  
New Delhi

**T**HE South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) is planning to outsource the management of several of its under-utilised primary schools to non-profit organisations. A part of the SDMC's Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, the proposal has caught the attention of various NGOs and social activists, who are divided over its efficacy.

As a pilot project, 34 of 588 schools managed by the SDMC will be handed over to private organisations for a trial period of two years. These 34 schools have been chosen for their low enrolment of students.

“The aim of this project is to achieve 100 per cent attendance in all our schools,” says Ashish Sood, Chairman, Education Committee, SDMC. “The NGOs will take over our schools and their primary objective would be to get children from the surrounding localities into the classroom.”

For a long time, the Municipal Corporation has been trying to come up with a school adoption scheme. “Whenever we come out with such a scheme, or some kind of partnership with private players, there is resistance from labour unions and teachers unions due to fear of losing jobs,” says Sood.

“We have a lot of under utilised schools,” he says. “We have the infrastructure, we have rooms, buildings and teachers. However, we found that in a school with 10 rooms, we have only 50 children or less. The scenario is similar in most of our schools.”

Sood and his team decided to look at other places that have successfully executed a similar PPP project. “We found many examples. There are charter schools in the US as well as the Buddy Schools in the UK, where school facilities are utilised by private players to bring the community to those schools.”

According to Sood, the Eklavya Residential Schools project in Gujarat, is a premier example. Under the project, over 150 schools are being run by the voluntary sector for over seven years and have yielded excellent results in improving standards of education and enrolment of underprivileged students. “There is a similar model in Mumbai and in Haryana,” says Sood. The Haryana government has entered into an MoU with the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation to upgrade infrastructure.

“After studying all the models, our education committee has put forward a policy document which has been adopted by the corporation,” says Sood. “Now it is an official document. We are working on how to take this forward.”

Under the proposed policy, organisations will be invited on a not-for-profit basis to take over the municipal schools. “They will get more children into the classrooms. They will bring teach-

# run some Delhi schools

SANDEEPA VEERAMACHANENI



ers, they will bring the pedagogy, they will manage the schools,” says Sood. “We will support them by way of our mid-day meal scheme and any subsidy that is given to any child attending municipal schools. The schools will still remain SDMC schools.”

The NGOs will also be responsible for funding and improving the school’s infrastructure. For two years, the NGOs will be closely monitored by experts on behalf of SDMC in evaluating the success of the pilot project.

“We have roped in NGOs and trusts who would work for us pro bono and control the project for us,” says Sood. “We are in touch with the Azim Premji Foundation, Central Square Foundation and the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, who may look into it for us.”

The policy has evoked a mixed response from various social activists who have been working with municipal schools and the underprivileged children of Delhi. Some feel the SDMC is trying to shy away from its responsibilities, while some think this might improve the educational standards of municipal schools.

Ashok Agarwal, an advocate and a champion of the education rights of children, believes it is the primary responsibility of the municipal body to run its schools. “It is the duty of the SDMC to ensure that its schools run properly. Getting private players to get children into the schools and run them is not acceptable,” says Agarwal. “For all we know, this move may just lead to privatisation of municipal schools and it may not bode well for the underpriv-

ileged children.”

Ranju Minhas, a social worker whose NGO, Shield Citizens Initiative, works closely with senior citizens and unprivileged children in South Delhi, has a different opinion. “The NGOs can provide good suggestions and ideas that would work in favour of the children and the schools,” says Minhas. “Non-profits working closely with schools will have a clear idea of what is lacking in facilities and what can be done to yield greater community involvement with the schools.”

According to Minhas, an NGO that is regularly interacting with members of a community has a better chance of involving them with the schools. “Parents trust a person they interact with regularly more than a government official who doesn’t visit them that often,” says Minhas. “An experienced NGO can easily make the community participate, ensuring that children go to school and attend classes properly and thus improve the school’s educational standards.”

Prem Chand Gupta is a social worker who provides tuition to children from slum areas near Green Park and Safdarjung Enclave. As a teacher of students of municipal schools, he is well versed with the lacunae in teaching in the SDMC schools. According to him, bringing in new teachers and

doing away with the existing system is not feasible.

“The biggest problem with the municipal schools is that the basic syllabus is left unfinished most of the time,” says Gupta. “Simply introducing a new pedagogy and a new set of teachers will not be enough to solve that problem. Rather than superimpose a new structure, the NGOs must work within the existing system and try to improve it. Education must be made interesting and interactive.”

Many NGOs which are working with government schools are not comfortable with funding the schools without much help from the municipal body. “It is not easy for an NGO to raise funds to run a school all by itself,” says Indraani Singh, Director, Literacy India.

Singh has taken on eight government schools in Gurgaon, running five of them from scratch. “It takes ₹90 lakh to run a school of 1,000 children for a year. I have to cover the cost all by myself and raising funds is not easy,” she says. “The government is sitting on huge funds it gets from the education cess. It should come forward and help fund the schools along with the NGOs. There needs to be synergy in the process.”

Jyotsna Lall, Senior Programme Officer, Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), says, “The SDMC would need to ensure that reputed and experienced NGOs are selected and the terms of engagement of both sides are clear. In addition, they should demonstrate capacity to raise funds to make this change possible.”

Lall anchors the socio-economic programmes of the Nizamuddin Basti Urban Renewal Initiative, under which the AKF has helped develop MCD schools in the Nizamuddin slum, by improving them structurally and ensuring direct benefits to the students.

“The main issue is not enrolment of children which is good, but the attendance of children, learning levels and a positive teacher-child relationship,” says Lall. “Further, we need to monitor dropout rates, especially in the transition classes like Class 5 to 6 and Class 8 to 9. There is also a tendency of children to dropout in Class 3 and this needs to be monitored.”

Several NGOs have already approached Sood to take over municipal schools. But Sood is in no hurry. “We want to formalise things first. The education committee has adopted the policy and now we will come out with all the details. We will take it to the House, where experts will furnish the policy,” he says.

He adds, “We will take our policy to all political parties, accept suggestions and ensure that everybody is on board before we roll it out. We plan to launch it within six months, before the next academic year begins.” ■

**‘The NGOs will take over our schools and their primary objective would be to get children into the classroom.’**

# The magic of stories

**Kavita Charanji**  
New Delhi

**J**AISHREE Sethi loves to tell stories. She has a bagful of tales to tell and a diverse audience to please – rapt children, blasé teenagers, lonely elders and smug middle class folk. Unsurprisingly, an interview with her turns into a storytelling session as she reminisces about her childhood and hot June nights.

This bubbly 38-year-old media and creative communications professional gave up a job at a start-up radio station in the US to do what she loves most.

In 2011 she set up Story Ghar, with a four-member team to, well, tell stories. There is Pawan Saxena, vice-president of AOV International, who oversees Story Ghar's marketing and fund-raising efforts, Shamir Khan, an IT professional and theatre artiste, who takes care of business development strategies, Bhawana Anand, a content developer, and Vibhor Mathur, who plays the flute.

Working with schools, the government and NGOs, Story Ghar runs weekly storytelling sessions, workshops, events, teacher training programmes and corporate workshops. Without a trace of the didactic, Sethi's four-member team conveys messages about a range of issues such as environment conservation, gender sensitivity, teamwork, cultural values and heritage.

Story Ghar's initiative extends to children as young as five, and elders who are over 60. On International Day of Older Persons, Jaishree is off to Arunima Social Welfare and Educational Society to lead a storytelling session for 100 elders above 70 years of age.

"The stories for this group have to be emotional, people stories. You talk about spending quality time but elderly people need quantity time as well. Loneliness is the main curse at that age," says Sethi.

How did the session go? "I told the group of elders my adaptation of the well-loved children's story, 'The Giving Tree'. The tree symbolises a parent who loves his or her children unconditionally. Many lonely elders have children settled in the West and long to be with them. My story moved them to tears," recalls Sethi. She is currently doing a PhD in storytelling from Jamia Millia Islamia and anchors three programmes on Doordarshan.

Sethi is at ease with the young ones too. But it isn't easy to keep restless three or four-year-olds engaged. So she calls on a repertory of theatre artistes and storytellers who specialise in working with that age group for such sessions.

It's more challenging but fun to work with older children. For the five and six-year-olds, picture cards accompany storytelling along with games and exercises. "Whenever we tell stories, we don't try to hammer in messages. Children are very smart, so some incidental learning is integrated or woven into the story," says Sethi.



Jaishree Sethi, founder of Story Ghar

For instance, an Indian folk tale, "The Wise Judge", is used to teach maths to children. "We add a Rajasthani Kalbelia song sung by one of my team members. The music suddenly breaks the flow and children find the story funny and interesting. You can include educational concepts. When it is a fun story it catches the child's attention. They listen to and learn concepts instead of just writing them down in a notebook."

Recently, Sethi and her team trained 200 pre-service primary school teachers of the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) run by the Delhi State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). Story Ghar conducted workshops at two DIETs, in Rajinder Nagar and in Dilshad Garden.

Story Ghar trained the teachers in making lessons more absorbing for students. "We divided the teachers into groups. Each group prepared lesson plans inculcating play scripts and activities. The teachers were shown how they could prepare and use such interactive play and role-play in classrooms," explains Sethi.

For instance, in a flood situation where soil contamination had raised the spectre of epidemics, children could be assigned to play the role of investigators into the natural calamity. "Then the children would play their roles and in between we would slip in facts. So learning is never in your face. It needs a lot of patience and creativity from the

teacher," says Sethi.

Not all teachers have the time for that, she points out. Burdened with administrative work and high-pressure working conditions, it is easy to lose enthusiasm.

Despite such challenges, the Story Ghar team soldiers on. Marketing and fund-raising, says Saxena, are tricky propositions as storytelling has intangible rather than tangible benefits. "I have to convince corporates about the synergy between the art of storytelling and education. It works in our favour that companies want the visibility that they get by sponsoring our events," he says.

Story Ghar's first event on June 21, 2012, observed as International Day of Storytellers, was a major morale booster. The theme was "Stories that Change the World". Sethi and two other storytellers, accompanied by musicians, were all set to perform at a small hall in the India Habitat Centre which can only house 60-70 people.

But 350 people turned up and Sethi wondered if the programme would have to be cancelled at the last minute. The matter was resolved by shifting the venue to the Habitat Centre's open-air amphitheatre. Braving the sweltering heat, the large audience, ranging in age from three to 60, was captivated as the storytellers went into action.

This was a high-profile event that got media coverage. Many events later, it is a ticketed programme coming up at the

Epicentre, Gurgaon, on Children's Day, November 14, this year. "The Habitat Centre programme was a great morale booster for me," says Sethi.

Since then, the National Book Trust, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Teen Murti Bhavan, Delhi Tourism and others have stepped in to sponsor their storytelling sessions.

By Sethi's side are a young, enthusiastic bunch of 20 to 30-year-olds fired with a passion for storytelling. Saxena and Khan are full-time professionals but everyone's story ideas are equally valued. Anand, a postgraduate in mass communication, began as a volunteer but stayed on to develop content for Story Ghar.

"I love reading new stories. With every new story, new content has to be developed. It's exciting as I learn, explore and convey ideas to the new generation," she says. Meanwhile, flautist Mathur leads the music team, an integral part of their sessions.

The Story Ghar team is brimming with new ideas. Sethi is off to Bengaluru with her music team to perform a mono play for the launch of a children's book. Social skill development programmes, theatre workshops and personality development programmes for children are part of Story Ghar's repertoire. A musical storytelling session for visually impaired children is on the cards. And research is underway to collect a pool of Sufi stories for an adult audience, complete with music and sound effects. ■

# The street fighting laureate

## Nobel a reminder of the plight of children

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

IT was one of those thin buildings in the congested Kalkaji area, near Nehru Place, in south Delhi. An armed guard stood at the gate. Inside, we passed a reception, some drab cabins and took a staircase that led to a large room on the first floor. Here Kailash Satyarthi sat behind a large desk, with matting on the floor and a MacBook Air in front of him.

It was 2011 and we were working on a cover story on child labour in New Delhi (*see Delhi's Shame, Civil Society, August 2011*). There had been some grizzly deaths of working children and suddenly everyone was talking about child labour.

Kailash Satyarthi was one of the first people we thought of interviewing because he had engaged with the problem at street level. The Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA), which he had founded, had made itself famous for the derring-do of its activists as they freed children used as slave labour in factories and workshops.

These were risky initiatives because child labour is a particularly lucrative component of the illegal business in trafficking human beings. There is a steady flow to the big cities and industrial belts from the poorer parts of India like Bihar, West Bengal and eastern Uttar Pradesh. There are gangs and middlemen and confronting them is no bleeding-heart pastime.

Satyarthi told us in great detail about the economics of this slave trade and his own NGO's work. He told us how he had led raids himself at considerable personal risk. The BBA's activists frequently posed as clients and trapped employment agencies. They also networked people in localities to get information about where children were being held captive and made to work.



Kailash Satyarthi being felicitated at his office

**Satyarthi's Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) had made itself famous for the derring-do of its activists as they freed children used as slave labour in small factories.**

They would then take the police and officials of the labour department there on raids.

We sent our reporter and photographer on one such raid in east Delhi and documented it for our cover story. The children had been brought there from different parts of the country and lived in appalling conditions in a small unit manufacturing leather bags.

This was, of course, just one example. We also visited northwest Delhi, where in a single lane, very small children would be used to make bindis. One such child was beaten up so badly by an employer, actually his uncle, that he died.

Satyarthi's personal reputation and that of the BBA's was built by confronting such realities as they unfolded on the ground. They not only rescued children but also rehabilitated them by finding their families and looking after them in the interim.

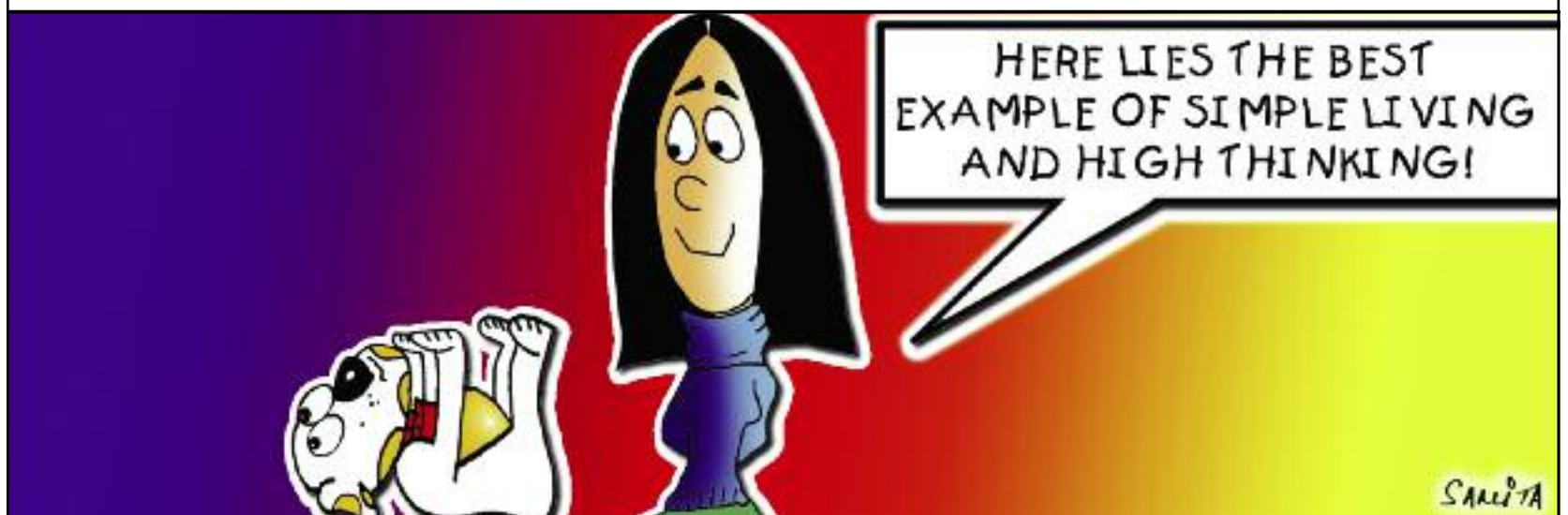
It has been a heroic mission and a sensational one too. It depends on how one sees it, but Satyarthi has often been derided for being a headline hunter. Child labour has only gotten worse while BBA has garnered recognition. Perhaps a more accurate view would be that child labour is a complex social issue that calls for high-decibel activism.

We titled our cover story 'Delhi's Shame' because it is the middle class that keeps child labour alive. Rising incomes are spent on cars, Scotch whisky, branded clothes and mobile phones. But children from poor families that can't afford to bring them up must labour in homes and factories for a pittance.

It is this reality that Satyarthi has successfully held a mirror to. The Nobel Peace Prize given to him and the BBA should be a reminder to all prosperous Indians that each day children are being driven into slavery when they should be with their families and going to school. ■

### SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



# AFTER THE DELUGE

**Jehangir Rashid**  
Srinagar

**T**HE first week of September saw a disastrous flood wreak destruction in the much-touted 'paradise' of Kashmir. Life has come to a standstill and it will take months for normalcy to return. A similar flood had hit Kashmir in 1902, under British rule.

This time around, the people's desperation has been compounded by the slackness of the state government which failed to help the flood victims. The interim relief of ₹75,000 announced by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has been paid only to a handful of families. When it began to rain incessantly from the morning of 3 September, the residents of south Kashmir began to worry for their safety. The Jhelum originates from Verinag in south Kashmir and it was obvious that those living south of Srinagar would have to face the initial brunt of flooding.

Anantnag, Pulwama, Kulgam and Shopian districts were badly hit by floods in the initial phase. Over 3-7 September there was no let-up in the rain with heavy downpour recorded across Kashmir.

"When the rain started we thought that it would be for a day or two. But the rain broke all records and took along everything that came in its way. The administration was caught napping and there was virtually no plan of action to keep nature's fury at bay," said Ghulam Nabi, a resident of Anantnag.

Once it became evident that south Kashmir had been overrun by floods, the divisional administration of Kashmir sent 250 boats for evacuation. The deluge hit Srinagar next and the boats got stranded in south Kashmir. The administration had no boats for rescue in Srinagar.

The basic reason for the flooding of Srinagar and other parts of south and central Kashmir was that the Jhelum breached its embankments at more than



*Houses have been reduced to rubble*

30 places. The same thing happened in north Kashmir, with many areas of Baramulla and Bandipora districts also getting submerged though the situation there was not so grave.

The state government did not divert the Jhelum water to the flood channel. It is also alleged that some legislators did not allow the Irrigation & Flood Control Department to carry out a breach to divert the flood water as was being done in the past.

"There was a complete breakdown and the state government could not arrange a single boat for rescuing people in Srinagar. Had the people not acted voluntarily the casualties would have been much higher. Kudos to ordinary people, volunteers and

representatives of NGOs for carrying out rescue operations and saving people in thousands," said Muzaffar Ahmad, a resident of Abi Guzar.

The chief minister acknowledged that there was no government on the ground for at least 36 hours. He said he lost contact with his ministers for three days as the communication system virtually collapsed.

According to Chief Secretary Mohammad Iqbal Khanday, 300,000 structures were damaged in the Valley, more than 12 lakh families have been affected and several people have lost their lives. The majority of deaths were reported from Srinagar district.

Both government and private property have been lost. Houses, shops, roads and bridges are damaged.



*Without shelter, women cook on the pavement*



*A child valiantly tries to dry his school books on the road*

# Getting past the stigma of leprosy

**Rina Mukherji**  
Jamshedpur

**J**YOTI Hembram will soon be moving out of her home in Jamadoba's leper colony in Dhanbad district of Jharkhand. All her life, she and her family have faced ostracism and humiliation. Now her family hopes young Jyoti will light up their lives. She is joining the General Nurse and Midwife course with help from the Lepra-Sparsh initiative.

Nirola, her mother, contracted leprosy years ago as a student. She got cured. There were no scars, sores or any traces of the disease on her body. Yet she had no choice but to marry a man who lived with his mother in a colony meant only for lepers. Her children are healthy but they too have had to live the life of lepers.

Lepra India has been working in Jharkhand, Odisha and other states since the early years of the last century. In 2009, the Tata Steel Rural Development Society (TSRDS) included leprosy prevention and cure as part of its health initiative and joined them. The partnership, known as the Lepra-Sparsh initiative, works with the government's primary health centres (PHC) and the National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP).

India is home to 55 per cent of the world's leprosy-affected people. Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and the Dhanbad-Purulia belt, comprising a part of Jharkhand and northwestern West Bengal, are the worst-affected.

Due to poverty and lack of hygiene, the mining town of Dhanbad with its tropical temperature is a breeding ground for the leprosy bacillus. It produces 2,400 new cases every year. Leper colonies are a common sight in the Dhanbad-Purulia region, with Dhanbad accounting for 20 of the 42 leper colonies in the state.

The leprosy strain found here is a hyper-endemic one and far deadlier than the one found in Madhya Pradesh. "The cases found in Madhya Pradesh mostly comprise the non-infective variety which causes a lot more deformity and is therefore easily noticed. The hyper-endemic variety prevalent here does not cause deformity, but is highly infectious, and hence deadlier. Each untreated patient can infect 10 others," says Lal Babu Singh, coordinator of Lepra-Sparsh.

TSRDS provides a medical treatment package to

patients of leprosy that pays for reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation. The money covers the cost of two months of pre-operative care and two months of post-operative care for the patient and his/her dependants as well as skill training to be able to earn a livelihood.

A communications strategy to remove social

PRASANTA BISWAS



Jyoti Hembram: she will be training to become a nurse and midwife

prejudices and provide information on how to recognise the signs and symptoms of the disease has worked well. People visit the Lepra-Sparsh centre or the relevant PHCs for treatment if they notice a discoloured raised patch on the skin that is insensitive to pain and bereft of hair or perspiration. Doctors prescribe multi-drug therapy (MDT) that totally cures leprosy.

In fact, using MDT can make a leprosy patient non-infectious within just 24 hours. In a month's time, all the disease-causing bacilli in the patient are dead. However, the disease attacks the sensory and motor nervous systems of the patient and makes him or her immune to pain. Even after being cured, anaesthetic feet are the bane of victims.

If detected on time, deformity can be avoided and regular physiotherapy can control the worst effects of anaesthetic or pain immune limbs. It can also prevent damage to the retina, says Dr Mahapatra, Director, TSRDS Lepra-Sparsh project.

A necessary part of the treatment is self-care: patients are taught to dip their feet in water and oil themselves daily to keep their skin clean and supple, lest they contract ulcers.

The TSRDS Lepra-Sparsh centre provides micro-cellular (MCR) footwear made at their centre at reasonable rates to leprosy patients from Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and other states through the government's health network. Each patient is provided two pairs of footwear per year. The footwear is customised to protect the patient from painful sores

Continued on page 16

Officials said that 4,600 government schools and 1,500 private schools were damaged. Thousands of children lost their school books. The flood forced the state government to reschedule the annual examination from October 2014 to March 2015.

Vital installations like Doordarshan Kendra Srinagar, Radio Kashmir Srinagar, the main office and exchanges of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, Regional Passport Office, Civil Secretariat, Police Control Room, Police Stations, SMHS Hospital, Lalded Maternity Hospital, GB Pant Children's Hospital, JVC Medical College & Hospital, Badami Bagh Cantonment and General Post Office were inundated.

Stock worth thousands of crores of rupees lying in shops in the commercial areas of Srinagar was damaged and had to be destroyed. Businessmen suffered huge losses and had to run from pillar to post for insurance claims. The newly floated State Economic Reconstruction Forum (SERF) has pegged Kashmir's losses at ₹1,00,000 crore.

Thousands of houses crumbled and hundreds of cattle and sheep perished in the flood. The carcasses could be seen floating on the main roads for days.

"As the administration failed to drain the flooded areas, water remained in the localities for weeks together, causing huge problems for the people," said Gulzar Ahmad, a resident of Sanat Nagar.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an aerial tour of the flood-affected areas on 7 September and announced immediate relief of ₹1,000 crore to the state. He also asked the state government to utilise ₹1,100 crore already with it under the State Disaster Fund.

The state government has submitted a proposal of ₹44,000 crore to the Centre for rebuilding. The proposal was submitted after being cleared by the state cabinet at a meeting chaired by the chief minister.

Stranded people alleged that the Army and Air Force first evacuated their own people and those linked to the corridors of power in the state. It was also said that expired food packets were air-dropped.

People are yet to recover from the shock and there is no bustle in the markets since shops remain closed, especially in the flood-affected areas. ■



*Continued from page 15*

and ulcers on their feet. For this, footwear craftsman Adal Das takes an impression of the patient's feet after they are dipped in water, and then makes the shoes.

Former patients of leprosy are also helped to rebuild their lives. Three years ago, Jharna Datta was diagnosed with leprosy. She visited the PHC where doctors advised MDT. She was fully cured. But the treatment had to be followed by an operation at the Purulia Leprosy Mission hospital so that tendon transplants could restore the natural movements of her hands. Since Jharna could not work as a tuition teacher for schoolchildren anymore, TSRDS provided her a monthly stipend for a few months before and after the operation.

Jharna is now learning tailoring. She plans to start her own tailoring outfit. Her tailoring classes have to be fitted into a schedule that involves regular physiotherapy sessions, and her duties as a home-maker. But she is cheerful as she busies herself on her sewing machine, her newest asset. After all, the machine, gifted by TSRDS, marks her return into the mainstream.

Like Jharna, Suresh Sahu, a construction worker, discovered he had contracted leprosy three years ago. A year's treatment at the Primary Health Centre cured him of the infection. In March he was sent to the Purulia Leprosy Mission Hospital for reconstructive surgery. It cured him of his deformity, but he cannot work at construction sites anymore. TSRDS has gifted him a pushcart to sell vegetables so he now has a new source of livelihood.

Besides running a physiotherapy unit at its clinic, and taking care of cases that require surgery after treatment at the PHCs, TSRDS runs mobile health vans fitted with diagnostic equipment that travel to surrounding villages in Dhanbad district. As and when cases of leprosy are detected, these mobile clinics refer them to the PHCs operational in the district for treatment.

Social stigma has gradually given way to an awareness that was absent in the past. Of course, it is still difficult to have people accept the reality of having contracted the disease, as ASHA/Saahiya worker Parvati Devi admits. "I tell them that they are unwell, and must seek treatment at the Primary



PRASANTA BISWAS

*A doctor examines a patient for signs of leprosy*



PRASANTA BISWAS

*Special micro-cellular footwear is designed for patients*

Health Centre. I do not tell them that they have leprosy. It is the only way I can ensure that they begin treatment."

Leprosy is slow and insidious. The incubation period of the disease can be as high as three to 20 years after the bacilli enter the immune system. For instance, Varsha Kumari developed a small raised patch when she was only two years old. At the age of six, the patch started growing in size. "In the past six months, it has rapidly grown in size and stands out prominently on her cheek," says Bhagwan Singh,

her father and a policeman. Thanks to the public information campaigns in Dhanbad, her parents brought her in for a medical check-up.

But, for every positive story, there are many others of despair. Surjyo Rajwar, a daily wage labourer, contracted leprosy more than a decade ago. Unable to comprehend what was wrong with him, he exposed his sensation-less feet to hard, stony surfaces and got sores and ulcers all over. Unable to work, he had to take refuge in the Jamadoba leper colony along with his wife. Seven years ago, one foot had to be amputated. He is now confined to a wheelchair donated by TSRDS, and needs crutches to move around. He makes a living by tending to goats, pigs and poultry that the TSRDS has given him.

To this day, India has 630 unauthorised leper colonies. Discrimination and isolation of lepers is banned under the law, but social stigma prevents them continuing to live in their homes. As a result, 100-year-old leper colonies, a fallout from an era when there was no cure for leprosy, continue to exist in leprosy-prone areas.

Until 1981, there was no proper treatment for leprosy. Till date there is no preventive vaccine. Once the MDT was perfected, leprosy became totally curable. However, the fate of

patients was left to the initiative of state governments. "The southern state of Tamil Nadu marched ahead since they introduced MDT in 1982. The northern states did not bother to introduce MDT until 1995," says Lal Babu Singh.

TSRDS is now planning to set up a 10-bed hospital for reconstructive surgery at its Jamadoba Lepa-Sparsh centre at a cost of ₹44 lakh. Operations will be performed by visiting surgeons three times a week, while monitoring will be done by the Centre's existing doctors and health personnel. ■

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# Environment friendly sanitation

## PROBLEM

- 1 Open Defecation
- 2 Sanitation leaks into water bodies causing water borne diseases

## SOLUTION: Bio-Toilet

## BENEFITS

- 1 **HYGIENE AND HEALTH**  
Prevents water-borne ailments like – Viral, Gastroenteritis, Typhoid, Cholera, Jaundice, Viral Hepatitis  
Prevents mosquito-borne ailments like- Malaria, Dengue, Chikunguniya  
Eliminates foul smell
- 2 **MAINTENANCE**  
Bio - Tanks are maintenance - free
- 3 **SPACE**  
Area occupied by 1 septic Tank = 3 Bio-Tanks
- 4 **DURABILITY**  
Has a minimum lifespan of 50 years
- 5 **ENERGY**  
Bio-gas generated by 50 users = 100 ml of kerosene
- 6 **WATER**  
Spent on cleaning open defecation
- 7 **ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY**  
No air and land pollution



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# 10,000 KM RUN IS

## Raj Vadgama sets new limits with Bharathon

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

IT is late in the afternoon on 23 September when the call from the landline in our office in New Delhi goes through to Raj Vadgama's mobile. He is running somewhere in Uttar Pradesh, heading for Bareilly. He has been up since 4.30 am and on the road since 5.30 am. He has stopped for breakfast and then lunch, followed by a brief rest. But apart from these two interludes he has been running continuously. He plans to run till 9 pm.

At the time we get talking he is half-way through the 45 or 50 or 60 km that he manages to string himself through in a day. He has already done a total of 2,070 km in this relentless fashion – having started out from the Gateway of India in Mumbai on 15 August, climbed all the way up to Manali and Ladakh and now returned to the plains of Uttar Pradesh to head for West Bengal.

Raj Vadgama, at the age of 47, is one of those guys who like testing the limits of physical endurance. He is admired as an ultramarathoner. But what he is attempting now is several levels above that. He has given himself the awesome goal of running 10,000 km across India in just 120 days. He calls it a 'Bharathon – One India Run With Raj'.

Ultramarathoners do really long distances under tough conditions. There are runners who have done body-sapping trails, driving themselves beyond their known limits. Arun Bhardwaj, perhaps India's most well known ultra runner, ran from Kargil to Kanyakumari, a distance of some 3,000 km, in 60 days.

Not all ultra running is a solo effort. There are organised ultra runs with many participants such as at the Bhatti Lakes in Haryana, across the Nilgiris, in the Thar desert and in Ladakh. This is, of course, in India. Globally, there are many events and punishing terrain.

But Raj's Bharathon target is a personal challenge that far exceeds anything ever attempted. If he succeeds in doing 10,000 km in 120 days he will be in the Guinness Book of World Records with an achievement that is likely to go unsurpassed for a long while.

So, even as we speak to Raj on his mobile phone, he is notching up kilometres. An air-conditioned car with a doctor and physiotherapist on board follows him. But he is pretty much alone, except when members of the running fraternity across India join him for brief spells. There are inquisitive bystanders, but no cheering crowds, no celebratory banners and no fawning TV cameras.

It is just one man on a lonely mission. Telephony provides some relief. Raj's mobile phone helps him keep in touch. We, for instance, get to speak at considerable length to him. He also surfaces on Facebook. But when you are running in the middle of nowhere, connectivity can be a big problem and there are plenty of times when he is out of range.

His mobile, however, is an invaluable tool. "I use my mobile to identify places where we can stay and eat. I use it to make bookings and get the best rates. We keep checking on what is available over the next 50 or 100 km," Raj tells us when we ask him how he plans his stopovers for the night.

Getting clean places to spend the night is an issue. So is food. Raj is a vegetarian. But *pao bhaaji*, of which he is especially fond, is not exactly a national dish. A lot of the time he has been eating what he gets and the result has been at least one major stomach infection, but he has continued running. At one point, high humidity levels and the lack of an appropriate diet resulted in Raj experiencing exhaustion and a fall in his blood pressure.

### DIFFERENT TERRAINS

When we first spoke to him (on the road to Bareilly), the toughest part of the run had been Ladakh. The rapid change in temperature got to him as he went from 30 C to 2 C. The transition was difficult to cope with and Raj lost five days



# ONE INDIA EPIC





because of the lack of acclimatisation. The Ladakh experience slowed him down and lowered his average to 45 km a day. Gujarat, on the other hand, was easy. He did 85 km a day for four days.

But if Ladakh was tough because of climate and altitude, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh depleted him in other ways. He was eating at *dhabas* on the highway and couldn't get the nourishment that an athlete requires. There weren't comfortable and clean places to stay overnight with the result that he couldn't get the rest that he needed. Security, too, was a problem and he was advised not to run late into the night.

"I was getting to consume just about 2,000 calories but burning perhaps 8,000 calories. There was muscle weakness and fatigue. For about a week I had loose motions and a fever," says Raj.

Under these circumstances, Raj decided not to go to Siliguri and Shillong and instead spend a week in Kolkata, where he got satisfactory accommodation and wholesome vegetarian meals. He found support and encouragement from the running fraternity in the city.

When he reached Kolkata he had done 2,400 km – just about a quarter of his target distance of 10,000 km. What he needed most was to recuperate, but instead Raj continued the Bharathon by running round the Dhakuria Lakes from 5.30 am to 9 pm – adding another 400 km. It helped that local runners joined him.

So, it has been a mixed bag of experiences, but the Bharathon is a serious effort that requires Raj to be supremely fit physically and strong in mind.

## WITH JUST ₹6 LAKH

Raj has been running marathons since 2004. He has done many ultramarathons. He has done 1,500 km from Delhi to Mumbai in a month with Milind Soman, the model and actor. He has also run from Ahmedabad to Mumbai. There are ultra runs he has done in the Thar and at Bhatti Lakes. Perhaps the toughest one to his name was the 100 km Ladakh ultra through the Khardung La, the world's highest motorable pass at 18,000 feet.

Raj has been a sportsman from an early age and is trained in the martial arts with a black belt to his name in wing chun. Yet the current goal he has set himself is much stiffer than anything he has taken on earlier.

When Raj plotted the Bharathon, he estimated that it would cost ₹1 crore. The run began with just ₹6 lakh. From near Bareilly, he told us he had enough money only for another 40 days. If money didn't turn up, the run would be over.

Speaking from Kolkata, Raj told us over the phone that he had ₹2.5 lakh left, which was enough for another 25 days. He was hopeful that more support would come in, but since he was headed for Chennai, Bengaluru, Pune and Mumbai he would have fewer expenses because of family and runner friends.

"I plan to spend 10 days in Pune and 10 days in Bengaluru, where there is a lot of support. In Chennai, there is my brother-in-law," said Raj.

Raising money for such a rare feat hasn't been easy. His sponsors have been Fortis Hospitals, Enerzal, Nike and GOQii, but all



he could collect before he set out was ₹6 lakh. Fortis has provided a doctor and a physiotherapist whose board and lodging costs have to be met by Raj.

Organisational uncertainties cast a distracting shadow over the Bharathon challenge. It isn't as though Raj can be focussed on the running with teams of support staff taking care of everything else. On the contrary, for such a big initiative Raj seems quite alone and lacking support systems. While tracking him from afar, the impression we get is that he is handling everything himself from raising funds to making hotel bookings.

What does a Bharathon achieve apart from being a personal milestone for Raj Vadgama?

Raj says he wants to popularise running and inspire a million Indians to run. He would like to attract young people to running and set up a running academy to identify and nurture talent.

"When people see me running they come up to me and ask me why I am running. I want more and more people to take to running because it is such a hassle-free sport. You can run anywhere – barefoot or with shoes. If you run for half an hour you make yourself healthy and deal with lifestyle diseases. Going to a gym costs money. Most sports require equipment and locations. But running is one activity you can just do anywhere and anytime," explains Raj.

Raj is a trainer certified by the American Council on Exercise. He has a company called Xtreme Sports, which teaches people to run. Since he lives in Mumbai, there are locations in the city where he imparts training. But there is also online guidance.

"For six months we focus on fitness. Fitness is vital for any sport," says Raj. "I teach people how to run in stages. Since you don't get results in one month, we insist on registration for three





months at ₹3,000 a month.”

He currently has some 70 students. The youngest is 16 and the oldest 60.

The health benefits of running are proven. Anyone at almost any age can, with some training, learn to run. There is also a convivial aspect to the sport. Runners tend to form groups, support one another, and hang together as a community. There is a sense of identity that grows.

Raj believes the scope for developing running in India is limitless. With its deserts, coasts and mountains, India should be the perfect destination for running holidays. The Bharathon underlines this opportunity.

Raj has been an interior decorator. But with Xtreme Sports he has turned his passion for running into his profession.

## JOY OF RUNNING

Milind Soman has run a lot with Raj and has deep regard for his commitment to sport and running in particular. He and Raj share a down-to-earth approach to running and do their best to promote it among folks who never imagined they could do long distances. Being a famous model and actor, Milind does not let his celebrity status come in the way. He is known to make himself available to small community groups, running along with them at local events.

“I think the Bharathon is a fantastic idea. By doing it, Raj is going to inspire thousands of Indians across the country to take to running,” says Milind.

What does it feel like to run from 5 am to 9 pm day after day? Milind says: “In running you go from one level to the next. You do 10 and 20 and 40 and 50 km because you want to know what is next and whether you can experience it. Scientifically, it is called the runner’s high because endorphins are released and so on. But it is really more than that – it is the coming together of the emotional, spiritual and physical.”

For those who run, it is difficult to know where the mind takes over from the

body and the body from the mind.

Chandan Singh, who is 32, is the kind of young person who tried out running and remained hooked. He is a natural. This year’s Airtel Delhi Half Marathon will mark his third year as a runner.

When Raj and Milind were doing Delhi to Mumbai, he ran 110 km with them over two days.

Chandan says he remembers Raj to be a “humble and large-hearted person who is sincere in his efforts to promote running”.

“The Bharathon will earn respect,” says Chandan. “No one has done it before and it will be a big thing to be in the Guinness Book of World Records.”

Chandan has had his own ultra experience when he did the Bhatti Lakes 24-hour run. Running for him is a personal thing. It is “like meditation”. He says, “What I enjoy is the peace and the quiet that takes over my mind. There are people who run listening to music. But after 30 km music can do nothing for you. The motivation has to be from within.”

## HIGHS AND LOWS

Ask Raj what it feels like to run from the Gateway of India to Ladakh, and he speaks of an almost trance-like state: “For a runner it is left leg after right and right after left.”

But it is impossible to be on a continuous high. He has his low phases when he wonders what he is doing, running like this. “There are times I ask myself if it is worth it – staying away from the family and running for so many hours each day. I’ve never stayed away from my family for so long.”

The lack of sponsors, challenging conditions and long periods of solitary effort are enough to bend the toughest of minds. Yet, Raj has persisted when most people in his running shoes would have given up.

As he set out from Kolkata, it seemed clear that the target of 10,000 km was as doable to him as when he started out. A post by him on Facebook from the Kali temple at Dakshineswar said: “No stopping now. Blessings from Ma Kali!”

Kolkata was an especially heartwarming experience for Raj. Runners reached out to him and people in general celebrated his effort. It was an emotional boost that helped him on his way.

A really cute picture on his Facebook page showed a man and his small son getting into the elevator of their apartment building with “I AM RAJ VADGA-MA” pasted on the backs of their sweatshirts.

The Bharathon is inspirational. It shows the limits to which the human body can be pushed. Raj is that man of steel who goes on running, no matter what. He shows through his own example what is possible. The little boy getting into the elevator with his father will always have a hero etched in his memory.

As we go to press with this issue of the magazine, Raj has reached Bhubaneswar. Ma Kali’s blessings and Kolkata’s affection have ensured that he keeps going. For us, putting this story together has been an extremely special experience of tracking Raj, talking to him on the phone, sourcing his pictures. We’ve never met him but we’ve become a part of the Bharathon and have been cheering for him. Raj’s magnetism is that of a truly gifted sportsman. It gets to you over long distances. ■

# BUSINESS

ENTERPRISE | CSR | ICT | GREEN TECH

## A Zero Sum fix for traffic



Ahmedabad's first variable message sign (VMS) board begins functioning

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

**B**EING in a city means making the most of urban living. Going where you want and getting there when you want is a part of it. In India it mostly doesn't happen. Even short journeys can be thrown into turmoil by traffic jams, unruly drivers, demonstrations, VIPs on the move and a whole lot else.

One way out of this chaos is to have intelligent transport systems that can tell people what to expect a few kilometres away and how a less busy alternative route could be an easy escape from the mess. For instance, when the Chinese President was recently in New Delhi, motorists would not have had to spend hours bumper to bumper if they had been alerted.

On 10 October, a pilot version of an intelligent

traffic system (ITS) was unveiled in Ahmedabad. Information on traffic flows, collected over 10 kilometres on the 132-foot Ring Road by 14 cameras, is being flashed on four variable message sign (VMS) boards.

The boards evoked a lot of interest on the first day but it was difficult to assess their impact. Putting a system in place takes at least six months. So validating ITS in Indian conditions will take time.

The pilot costs \$1 million and comes from Japan. Two Japanese companies – Zero Sum and Nagoya – have come together to set up Zero Sum ITS in the belief that the Indian market in traffic management could be as large as \$1 billion. They have been supported for the Ahmedabad pilot by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Zero Sum is essentially a development services company which is known for its web and mobile

applications for map and navigation developers. In India since 2007 it has developed Comics On The Go, a popular comics reader and tied up with Amar Chitra Katha and other publishers. It has an app called Lunar Cycle that helps women manage their menstruation cycles. Zero Sum has won M-billionth awards for its work.

Nagoya is Japan's oldest ITS company and has been setting up systems across Japanese cities. Says B. Mallesh, director and chief of Zero Sum's operations in India: "When we were thinking about what to do, about two years ago, Chikara Kikuchi, then the president of our company, was part of a delegation that visited Gujarat. They met Narendra Modi as well and got introduced to the Gujarat Industrial Development Board. We said that we would be interested in ITS and were introduced to the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC). Mr

Kikuchi went back to Japan. He approached JICA, which said it would provide \$1 million from its fund for small and medium enterprises.”

**HOW IT WORKS:** Cameras fixed on the side of the road detect the speed of each passing vehicle, classify it and determine the road space occupied by it. The cameras are the primary source of information. Taxis fitted with GPS are a secondary source and individuals using their mobile phones would be a third source.

But, for the Ahmedabad pilot, it is mainly the cameras. The taxis are used but they are few in number and therefore not that important.

The data collected by cameras are sent in real time via sim cards to a data processing centre in the cloud and from it emerges a picture of the traffic conditions.

“What’s unique about the control centre is that there is no physical control centre. It can be anywhere in the world. All the information is fed to the control centre that analyses the conditions on the roads. It calculates the average speed of vehicles on each road. Then, the information is displayed on the boards,” explains Mallesh.

The camera is not required to produce a video. It only captures the information required, which is in kilobytes, which is then sent to the cloud via mobile networks.

“There is a control box on each camera pole which transmits the data to the cloud control centre, which receives the data, analyses it and then communicates the data on traffic conditions to the display boards, or VMS boards. Our control boxes have two sim cards so as to ensure that there is a backup signal to communicate in case one fails,” says Mallesh.

The VMS boards for the Ahmedabad pilot are seven metres by three metres, which is much bigger than what is used internationally. The reason is that 50 per cent of the board has to be used for advertising to meet running costs. This is not the case in Japan and other countries where governments finance ITS.

“When we spoke to the Ahmedabad Police, they said they did not have any money to invest and the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation was not interested in doing anything about it. So, we had to think of a business model, where we take the responsibility of managing the VMS boards,” says Mallesh.

“From the advertising revenue we will manage and maintain the project. We will pay all the electricity bills and other costs. The police force will not need to put up funds. It is difficult convincing the police that traffic management can be largely automated,” Mallesh explains while recounting the groundwork done for the project.

But manual intervention is also required. For instance, what if there is an underpass that is flooded? Or a VIP vehicle that needs right of way? Or if an accident takes place? Police officers need to manually feed such information into the system.

Training police officers at traffic signals to use a tablet PC was difficult. They weren’t adept at using a tablet and weren’t familiar with English. So, the project leaders looked at the police hierarchy and found that information went from street level to control centres. Officers in control centres were better suited to using a tablet.

Now, using a tablet, an officer in a control centre can display any piece of traffic information on a VMS board.



*B. Mallesh with Chikara Kikuchi, Managing Director of Zero Sum ITS, speaks to reporters at the inauguration*

**True to its reputation as an innovator and developer of applications, Zero Sum has gone from the street level upwards. Some of that has had to do with working with government and sensitising the police force.**

**ADVERTISEMENTS:** Fifty per cent of the screen is reserved for advertisements. There are no video advertisements; only static advertisements in the form of slideshows. Each advertiser will get only 15 seconds in which it can show two or three slides of five seconds each.

“Our point is to not distract the driver from the traffic information,” says Mallesh. “Initially the police asked us whether when a person is driving a vehicle, he will be able to see that information properly. As an example, we showed them that all over the world VMS is used extensively, even on the highways. Even if you drive at 100 mph, you can still see the information. Visibility is not an issue. The only challenge is how the user can understand it.”

In Japan, the VMS shows a map, because the people there are used to reading maps. In India, reading maps is not very common. So, they will not be able to comprehend too much complicated information.

In India, Zero Sum plans to keep it simple. The boards won’t show motorists huge maps or give them multiple options of roads to choose from. The boards will merely say whether there is traffic ahead or whether there is traffic on another road. Simplicity will be the key.

“We will see the response to the Ahmedabad pilot project. The aim of the pilot is to educate the user and the police on the advantages of this business model and of the ITS. It is also learning for us as well,” says Mallesh.

“We want to see if the users find this useful. If this works, then we will implement it everywhere. The police also said that if you only showed the information in English, the average user might not be able to understand it. So, we are designing dis-

plays in Gujarati as well.”

Small messages like “Road closed” can be flashed simultaneously in Gujarati and English. For bigger messages the two languages would have to be used alternatively.

“If it’s a big message of substantial importance, then the route information will go away for a second, we will show the entire message and then switch back to the route display,” says Mallesh.

Zero Sum ITS gives importance to customisation. Nagoya engineers who came to Ahmedabad found that they had to adapt their expertise to Indian conditions.

Putting up a camera pole is challenging because of the multiplicity of agencies and the lack of clear information about utilities before the surface. There is also the behaviour of motorists to contend with. Violations are common and lead to chaos on the roads.

Mallesh points out that many big companies have tried to bring intelligent traffic systems to Indian cities. But they have offered cut-and-paste solutions that don’t fit Indian realities.

Zero Sum’s approach has been different. True to its reputation as an innovator and developer of applications, it has gone from the street level upwards. Some of that has had to do with working with government and sensitising the police force. But the setting up of an automated system has been full of learning because it has meant customising design for local conditions.

Indian cities have innumerable variables that range from unruly traffic and unpredictable driver behaviour to encroachments. Perhaps most challenging of all is to inculcate awareness that traffic can be managed through intelligent systems. Each Indian city presents its own challenges. ■

# Jackfruit for all seasons

**Shree Padre**  
Palakkad

**R**AIN or shine, it is now possible to enjoy jackfruit all through the year. A new factory in Palakkad churns out dehydrated jackfruit that swells in water and is then ready to be dunked into curries. What's more, the dehydrated jackfruit has a shelf life of one year.

The factory is the first in India to produce dehydrated jackfruit on a commercial basis. Called Grameen Green Foods (GG Foods), it has been started by the People's Service Society Palakad (PSSP), an NGO.

This year GG Foods produced six tonnes of dehydrated unripe jackfruit from 30 tonnes of raw jackfruit carpels peeled from 13,000 jackfruits. Even before the production season was over, most packs of dehydrated jackfruit had flown off the shelves.

For farmers, GG Foods is a blessing because it also works like a rice mill. They can bring their jackfruit to the factory, pay a prescribed fee and return after a week to collect the dehydrated product. Or they can take the dehydrated jackfruit on the same day after paying the processing charges.

The dehydrated ready-to-cook jackfruit is priced at ₹125 for 250 gm. It can be used in a variety of curries and to make chips. "This reduces the drudgery housewives have to undergo to prepare jackfruit," says Shaji Elanjimattam, chief coordinator of PSSP. "All they need to do is soak the dehydrated jackfruit in water for a couple of hours. The carpels can be easily pulverised into flour and used to make *upma*, *roti*, porridge, *puttu* or *paratha*."

Fresh jackfruit carpels shrink by 20 per cent after drying. But, after rehydration, a quarter kg of carpels weighs around 1.25 kg. An average-sized jackfruit produces two kg of dry carpels.

PSSP is also decentralising production by helping farm clubs like Sanghamitra, Go Green and Eco-friendly Rural Development Society to set up similar units. The farm clubs are running three units each. The fourth one is run by PSSP. With decentralised production, procurement of raw materials becomes easier and transport costs are lower. Each unit has a hot air drier that runs on electricity but can work on firewood too. PSSP helps the units with planning, bank link-ups, technical guidance, marketing and supervision.

"For a Malayali, jackfruit is nostalgia. We are banking on this feeling. That's why we mainly market our product to non-resident Malayalis. For our local clientele, we sell our dehydrated jackfruit through a retail outlet PSSP has in Palakkad city," says Father Jacob Mavunkal, Executive Secretary, PSSP. "Also, on Sundays during prayers, our staff puts up a kiosk that showcases and sells our dehy-



Women workers at Grameen Green Foods with dehydrated jackfruit

drated jackfruit. Town-dwellers in and around Palakkad have slowly started buying."

Farmers from a radius of around 20 km bring their jackfruits to sell at the drying units. Nevertheless, the units have to buy from agents too. "We mainly depend on agents for practical reasons," says Denny Thengumpally of Sanghamitra Farm Club that runs the Elavampada Unit, "We pay ₹5 for a kg of whole fruit. Each jackfruit earns us about ₹50 on an average."

Being the first of its kind, GG Foods is facing teething problems and some challenges. "You get to know what the practical problems are only after you plunge into mass production. Our main problem is the diversity of jackfruit. Soft-fleshed, firm-fleshed carpels of different colour, size and thickness make the end product heterogeneous too. This has to be strategically dealt with," says Fr Jacob.

Figuring out the exact status of the fruit by looking at it from outside is difficult. So, some jackfruits turn out to be ripe when cut and others unripe. Says Elanjimattam, "In the long term, we have to have a pulping unit too. Similarly, though seed, another byproduct, has immense possibilities, we are short of proper technologies."

Cutting and peeling requires a lot of time and labour. In recent years devices for cutting the fruit have been developed here and there, but no machine has been invented anywhere in the world for peeling jackfruit bulbs. To cope with this problem, the chips industry in Kerala outsources the peeling and cutting of bulbs to neighbouring households. The whole jackfruit is delivered at their

doorstep. The pre-processed carpels are collected after being cut. Peeling and cutting bulbs provides a steady income to these households, conveniently working at home.

Considering the ease with which one can use dehydrated jackfruit and its long shelf life, GG Foods' products are likely to do well in Kerala with its considerable population of NRIs. Each of Kerala's districts can support a dehydration industry like GG Foods. Once the dehydrated jackfruit is ready, converting it into raw jackfruit flour is just a step away. Jackfruit flour has very high export potential because it's gluten-free. With a little dexterity, this flour can be converted into *dosa* mix, *roti* mix, *payasam* mix and so on.

Interestingly, GG Foods began production in February and continued right up to August. PSSP now plans to distribute selected jackfruit grafts to about 1,000 households so that it can get raw material of the same colour, nature and average thickness.

Grafting experts and jackfruit lovers in Kerala and Karnataka have already identified cultivars that yield fruit in different months of the year – including off-season, late-bearing, early-bearing, twice-bearing and all-season types. If such off-season varieties are carefully selected and planted in the vicinity, the nascent jackfruit industry can have an almost uninterrupted supply of fruits.

"We will teach farmers to manage and prune the trees to retain a T-shape. I have two dreams. First, that like our milk societies, we should have processing centres to which each farmer can easily supply jackfruits whenever he harvests them. Second, such processing centres should work like rice mills and give back the dehydrated jackfruit in lieu of fresh fruits so that each family can use their four months produce round the year. That will ensure a solid foundation in local food security," says Father Jacob. ■



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# INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

## Andhra's APNA job scheme

NARINDER BEDI

ANDHRA Pradesh (AP) is witnessing nothing short of a miracle. It is the only state which has a government-NGO alliance called APNA or the Andhra Pradesh NGO Alliance. The state has vested in NGOs the responsibility of training workers to understand and demand the rights given to them by the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA).

All future development will be rights-based, such as the right to food security, and therefore what is happening in AP is crucial for the rural poor.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) operates in a rights-based framework. For the scheme to be successful, workers must be aware of the rights conferred on them by the law. There is need for complete transparency and public accountability in implementation.

The scheme confers a range of entitlements to all rural households that demand 100 days of work.

However, disparities in rural social structures and inequalities in functional capabilities limit the rural poor in exercising the rights conferred on them by the Act. It has been found that education of wage-seekers about their rights and entitlements under the Act is a primary condition for its proper implementation.

AP has been part of the campaign for the right to work since 1986. It already had a grouping, or an NGO Samakhya, of 40 groups that had organised public meetings, performed street plays, conducted signature campaigns, met political leaders and educated workers on the need for an employment guarantee law.

This campaign lasted till 2005 when MNREGA was legislated. In April 2006, then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi inaugurated the MNREGS in Anantapur district of AP. In September 2006, K Raju, then Principal Secretary of Rural Development, Government of AP, requested the Anantapur NGOs of Samakhya to undertake the first social audit of the six months of MNREGS work done in Anantapur district.

Aruna Roy and the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) trained the Samakhya NGOs on how to conduct a social audit. Forty mandals were selected for the audit, which revealed that officials were committing fraud and that they did not emphasise or even inform workers that this law gave them the right to work.

The government had already introduced comprehensive digital technology, computer applications and software programmes with the help of Tata Consultancy Services to collect and make information available to the people. It added a mobile app to



The state government worked with NGOs to make MNREGA a success

transfer data and photographs from the field directly to the Ministry of Rural Development in Hyderabad. The social audit was then carried out in all districts every six months to make MNREGS more transparent and to prevent fraud.

But the question that arose was whether workers were demanding their rights under the scheme and receiving them. If the scheme were official-driven, it was bound to fail. It could only succeed if workers were empowered.

In 2008, Raju requested Young India Project (YIP), a Samakhya NGO, to train and organise MNREGS workers to enable them to demand and receive their rights in selected mandals of Anantapur district.

YIP organised the workers in 21 mandals over 2008 to 2010. In September 2009, Raju, along with district officials, met 600 leaders of MNREGS organisations at mandal level. He was convinced that the workers had to be educated and organised in order to demand and receive their rights.

In February 2010, R Subrahmanyam, the new Principal Secretary for Rural Development in AP, consulted YIP and created APNA, a government-NGO partnership.

To assess the implementation of MNREGS, two criteria were drawn up. First, were job cardholders demanding their rights and receiving them? Second, was the selection and execution of works resulting in any permanent environment benefits?

The NGOs were given the responsibility of training workers to fully understand that it is their right

to demand work and of organising workers. So job cardholders from 10-15 families were to be organised into a Shram Shakti Sangha (SSS). Twenty to 30 SSS groups were to be federated into a Gram Panchayat Samakhya (GPS).

In 2010-2011, 340 NGOs joined APNA. In 2011, they began rights training for SSS groups with financial support from the government. This exercise was completed by end-September 2012.

In August 2013, the state government decided to appoint two Community Resource Persons (CRPs), selected by the NGOs from among their workers, for each mandal to form GPSs and conduct monthly meetings of each to resolve rights-based problems. The government agreed to pay each CRP ₹3,500 per month through the NGO so that the CRPs would be accountable to the NGO and not to the government.

**APNA ACHIEVEMENTS:** APNA was formed in united AP. After bifurcation, APNA too has split into the Telangana State NGO Alliance (TSNA) and the Andhra Pradesh NGO Alliance (APNA). The statistics cited here are for APNA for the financial year 2014-2015.

• Two hundred and thirty APNA NGOs are working in Andhra Pradesh's 13 districts. There are 625 mandals (previously called talukas) in the state. APNA NGOs are working in 425 mandals out of the 625 mandals. That means NGOs are active in 68 per cent of the total mandals.

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- The state has 12,996 gram panchayats. The NGOs are working in 6,859 gram panchayats, i.e. 52.8 per cent of them.
- Around 337,637 SSS working groups have been formed in the 13 districts. Seventy-one per cent of these groups have been formed by NGOs.
- The total number of households in the SSS groups are 3,029,357. Eighty-one per cent of these have been formed by NGOs.
- There are, on an average, 12 household job cardholders in each SSS group. The implementation of MNREGS is through the group and not through the individual job cardholder.
- The average labour days provided in the state is 39.9 whereas in the areas where NGOs are working, it is 52.53 days.
- In the mandals represented by NGOs, 368,301 works were allotted to the SSS groups and all the 239,700 groups formed by the NGOs reported for work. This means that 128,601 SSS groups have received and reported to work twice in this financial year in NGO areas.

The Act states that the ratio of wages to material shall be 60:40 and that no contractor or machinery shall be employed. The Act also states that work will be given within five km of the village or ₹10 per worker per day will be paid for travel.

At the worksite, four entitlements have to be provided: full medical coverage for worksite injuries and compensation for death during work; poor SC, ST and BC families have to be given tools; small and marginal peasants' land should be developed for water and soil entrapment; and horticultural trees shall be given for increase in future income.

Finally, if work is not provided within 15 days of seeking it, the worker must be compensated. If payment for work done is delayed, the worker must again be compensated.

It is the NGO's responsibility to ensure that MNREGS workers access all rights. To ensure this, the two NGO workers in each mandal conduct GPS meetings every month and bring problems in accessing rights to the notice of the Assistant Project Officer (APO) in charge of the mandal.

If the APO refuses to take action, the issue is taken up with the Project Director at the district level. If that too doesn't work, the issue can be raised during the APNA meeting with the Principal Secretary of Rural Development which takes place every two months. If government officials still don't take any action, the mandal workers organisation has the right to protest.

In contrast, we witnessed firsthand the abysmal implementation of the MNREGS in Chitradurga mandal of Karnataka. Under the Eminent Citizen's Programme, YIP was asked to monitor implementation here for 2011 and 2012.

Most of the works shown to us were huge check dams where the ratio of wages to material was 20:80. No poor farmer's land nearby benefitted.

We were shown concrete village roads constructed under MNREGS with little labour and much material cost. We were shown a water tank which could hold five lakh litres of water located on the land of a rich farmer and would benefit four rich farmers. There were no NGOs to educate and organise workers to protect and enforce their rights.

This is happening in nearly all the states. They could learn from the example of AP and its NGOs. ■

*Narender Bedi is with the Young India Project, a key member of APNA.*

# J&K flood distress

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

EVERYBODY, from the media to ministers to people on the street, is expressing concern about the flood fury that hit the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The disaster was unexpected, unpredicted and unprecedented. It remains to be seen how deep this concern is and what impact it will have. So far, the signs are not particularly promising.

Heavy rainfall was the immediate cause. As per data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), in the week ending 3 September the state received 55 per cent above normal rainfall. During 4-6 September the state's average rainfall was 250 mm (2,212 per cent of normal rainfall in three days), of which 106 mm fell on just 6 September, which is 3,116 per cent of the normal rainfall for the state for that day.

State-level averages mask location and time-specific rainfall intensities. For example, during the week ending on 10 September, Udhampur (605.5 mm), Reasi (556 mm) and Kulgam (460.5 mm) districts received much higher rainfall that was clearly going to lead to disastrous consequences.

Strangely, none of the local, state or central agencies could see the implications of such heavy rainfall. Rain began on 3-4 September, or earlier in some cases, and there was sufficient time before the water reached Srinagar or other upstream areas of the Jhelum basin and Jammu areas of the Chenab basin, but no agency could provide even a warning to these vulnerable areas.

The first failure in this disaster is of the IMD. It did not provide actionable weather forecasts in advance of the rainfall. Second, it failed to provide accurate and representative rainfall figures immediately after the downpour.



The Central Water Commission, that has the mandate of forecasting floods in all flood-prone areas, failed miserably to provide any forecasts or even any river flow information that would have warned downstream areas.

The mandate of the irrigation and flood control department of J&K is to manage the state's water resources and flood control system. But this department seems to have completely failed to provide any river flow data or any warning of impending floods to even Srinagar, the state's capital, leave aside the

## Bengaluru's broom and bin learning

V. RAVICHANDAR

THE Prime Minister picking up the broom and consequently taking on the challenge of a Cleaner India through the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) is most commendable. We have had sightings of symbolic cleaning by ministers, celebrities and, more importantly, ordinary citizens. All of this is laudable since it is through greater public awareness and citizens playing their role in a civil society that such intractable problems can ever be solved. The cynics, though, wonder

whether this will be a limited one-day wonder or is sustainable systemic change possible. Our experience in Bengaluru which has gone from garden to garbage city could have some pointers.

Bengaluru had a major campaign 'Swachha Bangalore' during 2000-04 when the Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) was working with the local and state government on civic issues (Disclosure - I was a member). The BATF phase saw the disappearance of concrete waste bins across the city with partial introduction of segregation and collection at source. Many folks feel that bins are needed across the city. Our experience was that due to waste foraging by individuals and animals, waste invariably was strewn around the bin rather than inside it! There is a case for small bins in commercial areas with high footfalls - for the rest of the city we are better off without them. This phase also saw the stirrings of community involvement through ward 'Shuchi Mitras' empowered to deal with local waste issues with the BBMP.

Cut to August 2012 when Bengaluru had the perfect garbage storm. The closure of the

# result of multiple failures



J&K) and District Disaster Management Authority under the 2005 Act.

However, except for the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), which in any case is manned by paramilitary personnel, we see no impact of these institutions in either current disasters or earlier ones. The local administration and disaster management apparatus seemed to be generally absent during the disaster. This means that even if actionable information had been available with the state and the local administration in advance of the disaster, it may not have helped manage the disaster in a significantly better manner.

The encroachment of riverbeds and floodplains, the destruction of the state's once-abundant local water systems like lakes, wetlands, marshes and flood channels accentuated the proportions of the disaster. J&K had such remarkable flood management structures that it seems that its flood management wisdom dating back to the 11th century was better than today's strait-jacketed engineering mindset. Even government agencies (local, state and central) have been found guilty of constructing buildings over such areas, which not only made these buildings vulnerable, but also reduced the flood absorption capacity of the area, creating greater disasters for other areas.

The Chenab and Jhelum basins are slated for major interventions which will make the state even more vulnerable to disasters. These interventions include about 40 hydropower projects each in the Chenab and Jhelum basins, projects of various sizes and in various stages of development, including operating, under-construction, under-clearance and planned projects.

Each of these projects involves dams, water storage, tunnels, blasting, diversion of rivers, deforestation, construction of roads, colonies, mining of materials, etc., on a large scale and dumping of millions of

cubic metres of muck from each large project.

The Chenab basin is, in fact, home to the largest capacity under-construction hydropower projects in India compared to any other basin. Each of these projects will increase the disaster potential of the state, but we do not have credible Environmental Impact Assessments, Environmental Appraisals, Environmental Management Plans or credible monitoring and compliance mechanisms, not to speak of cumulative impact assessment or disaster potential assessments.

This is not to say that such projects should not be constructed. But the way we are going about these major interventions, we are inviting greater disasters. Repeated representations to the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) on these issues have fallen on deaf ears. The new government at the centre is already destroying whatever little environmental governance exists. The Prime Minister declared at Madison Square Garden in New York on 29 September that he has set up a committee (under former cabinet secretary TSR Subramanian) to remove environmental laws.

Scientists are telling us that in such extreme weather events, whose frequency is already on the rise in the Himalayas at a pace greater than global averages, there is the undeniable footprint of climate change. In addition to the reduced drainage capacity of our landscape due to ill-conceived decisions of building on waterways as well as the increased concentration of populations in vulnerable locations, such events are likely to increase the scale of disasters in future.

The Supreme Court is already hearing a petition on the floods in J&K. We hope the apex court will order an elaborate inquiry into the reasons for the floods and management of the current disaster. ■

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rest of the state. It also failed in maintaining and monitoring embankments or providing any warning when the embankments failed. This means that even in Srinagar, people had absolutely no warning till the water entered their houses and colonies. The department's website, [www.jkirfc.com](http://www.jkirfc.com), has not been updated since 2011, except for the tenders section!

India is supposed to have elaborate disaster management institutions, from the National Disaster Management Authority to the State Disaster Management Authority to the Divisional (in case of

Mavalipura landfill by the Pollution Control Board blocked access to the Mandur landfill by irate villagers, a week-long strike by garbage contractors, a clueless BBMP and we had over 10,000 tonnes of putrefying garbage on our streets. This led to another phase of active civil society involvement that continues to this day to help fix the problem. And the courts have been extremely supportive of what's required to be done. The groundwork was laid in 2010 by 13 NGOs working on waste management who came together to form the Solid Waste Management Round Table (SWMRT). They lobbied successfully to build dry waste management centres and today nearly 80 per cent of 198 wards in Bengaluru have them.

The contours of the solution set advocated by civil society groups – Segregation at Source ('Hum do, Hamare do' now needs to stand for two bins carrying wet and dry waste!), bulk generators managing their own waste (in situ, shared services), decentralised waste processing in wards ('What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas'), installation of waste processing units by waste categories (Extended Producers Responsibility) and minimis-

ing waste to landfills (mainly rejects). Landfill locations have the potential to be the new 'Singurs' and the model of dumping our waste elsewhere is morally wrong and non-sustainable. There are folks who advocate that citizens can be irresponsible by not segregating and, magically, technology will make all this waste into energy. It will not and without segregation there is no long-term solution, even for waste-to-energy projects.

One would think that with this clarity, a city's garbage problem would be solved. Far from it! The state government did pass pathbreaking legislation mandating fines for the first six occasions that a household did not segregate waste and even a possible jail sentence subsequently. But the civic authorities have neither built awareness on the importance of segregation nor imposed any fines. BBMP waste contracts need to mandate collection of only segregated waste – this is yet to be done across the city wards which reinforces the strong association with what's colloquially called the 'garbage mafia'. These are essentially transport contractors interested in protecting their super profits by transporting large amounts of mixed waste to

landfills – Bengaluru spends the largest amount per capita among Indian cities on garbage contracts. So even civic-minded citizens stop segregating waste saying that anyways the garbage contractor mixes them! They would do so because they have vested interest in the failure of segregation.

If Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is to succeed, while building citizen awareness and responsibility is a very critical component, it will need to fix the mundane 'nuts and bolts' of governance on a day-to-day basis. Bengaluru could be that laboratory. We have a BJP-controlled BBMP that controls the garbage contracts and a Congress state government that has passed some enabling laws to expedite segregation. Panjim (part of a BJP-ruled state) has shown that it's possible to handle garbage (waste equivalent to seven Bengaluru wards) without a landfill. So here's an appeal to the PM – ask BBMP to show the way on the ground on how a progressive, galvanised city corporation supported by enabling legislations can do the right things to make our garbage woes go away and his vision of SBA a reality. ■

*V. Ravichandar, civic evangelist, continues to be optimistic that symbolic starts can lead to serious change with effective ground implementation*

# Mahan gets a breather

KANCHI KOHLI

ON 24 September, the much-awaited decision of the Supreme Court (SC) on the allocation of coal blocks was announced. This direction followed an earlier judgment on 25 August, rendering all coal mine blocks allocated through the government's dispensation and steering committee process since 1993, illegal and arbitrary. Once this was established, the SC, through detailed hearings and submissions from all parties concerned, was to decide on the future of 218 coal blocks, cutting across public and private sector joint venture partnerships and consortiums.

One option that the Government of India presented before the court was the possibility of cancelling all but 46 coal block allocations where investments had been made or mining operations had begun. However, in September, a two-judge bench finally took the view that all but four blocks would stand cancelled.

Out of these, two blocks belong to NTPC and SAIL, both public sector agencies, and two have been allocated to Reliance Sasan's ultra mega power projects (UMPP) in Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh.

The Mahan coal block in Singrauli district of Madhya Pradesh, where a strong grassroots struggle around forest rights and livelihoods has been going on, has been de-allocated. Many affected villagers had organised themselves into the Mahan Sangharsh Samiti (MSS) in March 2013. The MSS represents the villages of Amelia, Budher, Suhira, Bandhora and Pidarwa. It has brought to light serious illegalities in the process by which individual and community forest rights are to be recognised, and their consent sought before any coal mining can be initiated. At various forums and through street protests, MSS highlighted the range of impacts the mine will have on their lives, livelihoods and culture.

The Mahan coal block has been marred by regulatory controversy ever since its forest diversion was rejected by the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

Mahan Coal Ltd. had sought permission to divert forestland for the purpose of mining and supplying coal to the thermal power stations of Essar and Hindalco, adjoining the Singrauli coalfields where this block is located. The FAC had, on record, stated that the forests should not be diverted. Amongst other things, their reasoning was that forests of very good quality would be lost and over 500,000 trees would be cut. The recognition of forest rights for tribal and other forest-dwelling communities was also a concern.

When the issue could not be reconciled between different ministries, the then Environment

Minister, Jairam Ramesh, forwarded the matter to an Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) headed by Pranab Mukherjee. In his note of July 2011, Jairam Ramesh also pointed out that the life of the Mahan coal mine would be only 14 years and that the ministry had proposed that an alternative coal linkage for both the power plants be explored. Essar and Hindalco had argued for the diversion of the forest for mining purposes since substantial investments had already been made on the construction of the power plants.

Since 2011, the decision has travelled to several high-profile desks and committee meetings where two ministers of environment have had to defend the FAC's position. On 30 October 2012, when Jayanthi Natarajan signed on the first stage approval

February this year. The approval came into effect after the Madhya Pradesh government issued an order on 5 March allowing for the diversion of forestland.

The MSS challenged this approval for forest diversion before the National Green Tribunal (NGT). Ashwini Kumar Dubey, an advocate from Waidhan, the district headquarters of Singrauli where the Mahan coal block is located, also challenged the approval.

Meanwhile, the Collector of Singrauli publicly stated that a fresh process of recognising community forest rights under the FRA would be carried out after 2014. This was critical as MSS had brought to light documents and signatures related to an earlier gram sabha (village assembly) where rights were claimed to have been forged. This process is ongoing and Mahan Coal Ltd could not have initiated activities until this was completed.

The tribunal's proceedings began in May this year. Even as responses to the main appeal and contentions were being drafted, the SC's judgment, where the allocation of the Mahan coal block came into question, was announced.

With the SC's judgment, Mahan Coal Ltd does not hold the coal block as of now. For all companies where work on mines had begun, a six-month breather has been given before the cancellation comes into effect. According to the 29 September judgment: "This period of six months is being given since the learned Attorney General submitted that the Central Government and CIL would need some time to adjust to the

changed situation and move forward. This period will also give adequate time to the coal block allottees to adjust and manage their affairs."

Taking a cue from the SC's judgment, the NGT has passed directions in the case filed by MSS and Dubey. It has stated that since the coal block does not exist anymore, "the cause of action raised by the Appellants does not subsist any longer," and that the appeals have been "rendered infructuous."

However, if Mahan Coal Ltd transfers its forest clearance approval to another mine operator or if it seeks to activate the clearance following a reallocation of their coal block, the appellants will have the right to raise their contentions before the NGT, including on the grounds currently raised in appeal.

For now there is a temporary breather for MSS and all others who have been raising concerns about the impacts the coal mine will have and the serious procedural irregularities related to their approval. The issue of recognition of forest rights and related consent still remain unresolved. While the SC's directions might have taken away the current sting from the controversy, Mahan's coal journey is far from complete. ■

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*The Mahan Sangharsh Samiti highlighted violation of forest rights*

of the forest diversion, it was after clearly stating why this was allowed with a list of conditions.

It was recorded on file that the justification for the approval was that the EGoM had already taken a decision and the entire civil works and construction of the Essar and Hindalco plants had been completed after procurement of the environmental clearance (which is different from the forest diversion approval). The forest diversion was approved despite many studies remaining incomplete. Instead, there were conditions to be complied with before the MoECC could grant the final approval.

The environment minister's file note said: "Despite reservations against diversion of the dense forestland expressed strongly by MoEF at the GoM, in view of the decision taken by the GoM and the fact that the entire civil work and construction of the plant is already complete after procurement of EC and resulting inter-alia in huge exposure to nationalised banks – forest clearance approval may be granted to the Mahan Coal Block subject to the usual and specific conditions which may be imposed in this case. It must be ensured that there is full FRA compliance."

The Mahan coal block received its final approval from the MoEF under Veerappa Moily on 12

## Nestle and the Tiger's tale

A Pakistani's fight against baby food is now a film



Indian actor Emraan Hashmi plays the role of the crusading Pakistani salesman, Syed Aamir Raza

**Saibal Chatterjee**  
Toronto

A new fact-based film that a powerful multinational corporation does not want the world to see has given a real-life underdog hero and his cause a much-needed shot in the arm.

*Tigers*, directed and co-written by Oscar-winning Danis Tanovic, brings to the big screen a former Pakistani salesman's battle to make Nestle, the world's largest food company, pay for unethical practices in the marketing of infant formulas.

*Tigers* – the title refers to the name the corporation gave its sales force – had its world premiere in September at the 39th Toronto International Film Festival.

Besides the man who inspired the film, in the audience were activists of the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) who worked as consultants on the production.

The film, conceived eight years ago, has seen the light of day after a long, arduous struggle. Its producers, lawyers and insurers had to be convinced that everything in the film could be backed up with documentary evidence.

*Tigers*, originally titled *White Lies*, had a false start. Weeks before filming was due to begin in 2007, the shoot had to be called off because no insurance company was willing to come on board.

"Some very serious financiers wanted to make the film but were ultimately scared off by the threat of being sued," says the Bosnian director whose *No Man's Land* won the Academy Award for best foreign language film in 2002.

But Tanovic and co-writer Andy Paterson did not give up on the project and *Tigers*, eventually salvaged by two Mumbai-based producers, Prashita Chaudhary and Guneet Monga, is finally ready for worldwide distribution.

"It can't be acceptable that a multinational can stop stories from being told purely by virtue of their deep pockets," says Tanovic. "The more pressure was put on us, the more we knew that we absolutely had to make the film," says Paterson.

*Tigers*, starring Emraan Hashmi in his first non-Bollywood, English-language role, has turned the spotlight back on 45-year-old Syed Aamir Raza and the grave problem posed by companies that flog breast milk substitutes in parts of the Third World where poverty is rampant and clean water is scarce.

The challenges that the filmmakers faced in bringing the story to the screen mirrors, in many ways, the obstacles Raza came up against when he responded to his conscience and took on a corporate entity with immense financial clout and a fierce resolve to protect its business interests at all cost.

Now that the film is finally out, breast milk activists are confident that it will make a difference in parts of the world where packaged baby food companies routinely flout marketing norms laid down by the United Nations.

Says Patti Rundall of Baby Milk Action, the UK arm of IBFAN: "Unlike the many documentaries that have exposed this problem over the years, this movie will not



Danis Tanovic, an Oscar winner, is director of *Tigers*

only entertain, but will reach many more people at a very personal level."

She adds: "It will show the pressure on those who work for these transnational corporations and the realities we face in our work when trying to stop human rights abuses."

For co-screenwriter Paterson, *Tigers* is remarkable because "Danis has a way of making big films about ordinary people". The two travelled to Lahore

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and Sialkot to research for the film and, besides recording Aamir's testament, interviewed his friends, former colleagues and representatives of his former employer.

The man who would be the happiest to see his life dramatised on the big screen is Aamir. "The makers first contacted me in 2006," he told the audience after a screening in Toronto. "I was extremely excited initially, but when nothing materialised for years I lost my enthusiasm and began to feel that the film would never happen. I would take the calls and have half-hearted conversations before hanging up."

Aamir worked for Nestle Milkpak for nearly two and a half years before he decided to blow the whistle on his employers on discovering that the breast milk substitute that he was aggressively peddling was killing babies in Pakistan.

A middle-class Sialkot boy, Aamir was a struggling 24-year-old seller of unbranded local pharmaceuticals when he, to his amazement, landed a job with Nestle Milkpak in December 1994 despite the lack of a college diploma.



Emraan Hashmi in a still from the film

It was a dream come true for the young man and he plunged into the job with great gusto, quickly winning the confidence of his bosses. The latter gave him the responsibility of promoting breast milk substitutes and infant cereals.

Bribing doctors and providing inducements to mothers of newborns were key components of the company's marketing strategy – a fact that the corporation vehemently denies in its arguments.

It was when a conscientious doctor revealed to Aamir that babies were dying because of his company's infant formula that he chose to bail out and act.

"It was in March 1997 that I discovered the shocking truth. I resigned within a month and a half. My wife was expecting our second child at the time," Aamir told the Toronto audience of *Tigers*.

It was a leap in the dark. Unaware how it would all pan out, Aamir, with the help of his father and IBFAN activists, sent a notice to Nestle.

He soon felt the full force of the company's grip

on his country's government. He went to Germany, England and Switzerland to publicise his case. Not only was a German documentary about his fight nixed, his return to Pakistan was blocked. "The government obviously wanted to protect the interests of the multinational," he says.

## A German documentary about Aamir's fight was nixed and his return to Pakistan was blocked.

For Aamir, the personal cost of the battle has been huge. For seven years, he lived away from his wife and two children, missed the funeral of both his parents, and faced many hurdles before securing legal immigrant status in Canada.

Aamir now lives with his family in Mississauga, Ontario, and drives a taxi in Toronto for a living while continuing his fight. "My son is 19 and my daughter

17, but we still haven't completely bridged the seven-year gap," he laments.

Tanovic's own struggles to bring Aamir's untold story to the big screen have been incorporated in *Tigers* with Egyptian-British actor Khalid Abdalla essaying the role of a director locked in discussions with a prospective producer, insurers and a lawyer over the wisdom of going ahead with a film on the life of the crusading Pakistani salesman.

The dramatis personae are given fictitious names in the film. The man at the centre of the plot is Ayan Rashid, while his wife – Shafqat in real life – is named Zainab and played by Indian actress Geetanjali Thapa.

The company that the protagonist works for is called Lasta Foods, but the filmmakers in *Tigers*, in the course of an on-screen conversation, do make the point unambiguously that the real person worked for Nestle but the name of the company would have to be altered to protect the film from legal action.

"We were concerned about being able to make the film at all, so we accepted the decision to change the names if that helped people back it," says Tanovic.

With a popular Bollywood star in the cast, the makers of the 90-minute *Tigers* have a full-fledged Indian distribution strategy in mind. "We plan to release a longer cut in the country," says Guneet Monga of Sikhya Entertainment. ■

# Taiwan's



Ponds with fish traps in the Mataian Wetland Ecological Park

Susheela Nair  
Taipei

**A**FTER experiencing the clutter and cacophony of Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, we yearned for a green escape. So we headed to Mataian Wetland Ecological Park for a close communion with nature.

Located at the foot of the Masi Mountain in Hualien County in the southeastern part of Taiwan, the Mataian Wetland Ecological Park is hailed as one of Taiwan's lushest regions. It is a traditional settlement of the indigenous Ami tribe.

The genesis of the name Mataian can be traced to 'Vataan' which means 'pigeon peas' in the local language. Due to the abundance of pigeon peas, the Ami tribe named this area Vataan.

Spanning 12 hectares, this natural swamp is fed by a perennial source of water. The clear Fudeng river originates from spring water that seeps from the ground below the Masi Mountain. The river meanders south to north through the wetland, nourishing its fecund jungle life.

Changes in the river's flow and depth have resulted in a diversified natural environment which shelters nearly 100 species of aquatic plants. Among these, the Taiwan Brandy Bottle (a water lily with little yellow blossoms) is the most precious.

Mataian is also famed for its lotus fields. More than a decade ago, a special area was set aside to

# historic wetlands

SUSHEELA NAIR



promote cultivation of the lotus, Hualien County's iconic flower.

The area also boasts of a myriad species of birds, frogs, insects and a profusion of aquatic life. The proliferation of fish, shellfish and snails supplements the wetland's exuberant ecology.

We were ushered into the lobby, decorated with aboriginal-themed wooden carvings and furniture. We strolled leisurely along a network of T-shaped wooden bridges and narrow walking paths crisscrossing a large picturesque section of the wetland. As we passed lotus fields on either side, we could see hills in the distance and the fishing traps of the Ami tribe in ponds and on the river. In June, one can see the lotus in bloom and in winter, mushrooms sprout in the neighbouring hills.

SUSHEELA NAIR



We were given a demo of how an ingenious traditional three-layered fish trap or *palakaw* is used to catch fish in the wetland. The eco-friendly fishing methods of the Amis are based on the natural life-cycle of aquatic animals. We were impressed by their sustainable use of natural resources.

The Amis make a three-level structure that they place in the dykes with large, hollow bamboos, the trunk of the common tree fern, and the trunk and branches of the south crape myrtle.

Fish and shrimp then roost and breed inside. After some time, the Amis bring the south crape myrtle branches out of the water and put the shrimps sticking to its branches into a triangular net. The eel and catfish that hide in the bottom layers of the bamboo tube are then easily caught.

After the angling session we were treated to a cooking session. We watched as the chef added heated river stones to a dry leaf bowl to cook freshwater fish and wild vegetables.

We tasted fish and shrimp caught in the Fudeng river, as well as red sticky rice and salty roasted scaly tilapia grilled over charcoal - the specialty of the region.

The large freshwater Taiwan tilapia is marinated in salt and grilled over char-

coal. Peeling back the salt-soaked skin, we found plenty of juicy flesh. The second dish was a fish and vegetable preparation served in a dried leaf bowl.

The dishes were modestly seasoned. We relished the natural flavours of the ingredients and their incredible freshness.

Currently, the Taiwan government is encouraging the establishment of restaurants. It is helping Ami restaurant owners to research and design menus and dishes that incorporate local seasonal ingredients with modified flavours to appeal to a wider clientele.

Innumerable wetlands in Taiwan have been converted into industrial zones for economic development. There is rising concern about their destruction. The government and private organisations have stepped in to protect the remaining wetlands. Consequently, a growing number of farmers are becoming entrepreneurs and reaping the economic benefits of tourism.

The Mataian Wetland Ecological Park is a laudable venture of the Council of Agriculture and the Hualien County Government. The tourism being promoted is low-impact and education-focused. It has helped in employment and income generation, revitalised the agricultural sector, empowered the Ami tribes and increased tourist footfalls to the region.

From the park we headed to the Lintienshan Forestry Cultural Park, another must-see attraction

SUSHEELA NAIR



*Fish and wild vegetables in a leaf bowl*

in the Hualien region. During Japanese rule this was a logging base. The Japanese named it Molisaca, which means a slope with dense forests. We peeked at the park's variety of public facilities, including schools, libraries, barber shops and ice-dessert shops - all built by the Japanese for this prosperous town deep in the mountains.

Today, the former logging base has been transformed into a forestry cultural park to conserve a unique logging heritage within a valuable

exhibition space and set an example for the cultural tourism industry.

This hillside village of quaint Japanese-style wooden bungalows with fish-scale tiles owes its existence to the surrounding forests, rich in Chinese juniper and Japanese cypress trees. A logging railway, now disused and overgrown, penetrates deep into the mountains. There are also disused sawmills full of rusty equipment and a machine repair factory besides a rice store, a fish and tea store, and an ice store. One room has been converted into a small museum.

The Exhibition Hall, a former warehouse, evokes memories of the lifestyle and work of the logging period. The Wood Carving Gallery, lined with sculptures crafted in redwood by the best artists in Taiwan, is truly remarkable. ■

## FACT FILE

**Mataian is located on the west side of Highway 9, close to the Hualien sugar factory.**

**To get to Lintienshan from Hualien, go south on Highway 9 about 40 km to the intersection with Highway 16, then turn west for about two km.**

# Missions and omissions

Dunu Roy  
New Delhi

**M**ATHEW Cherian's book, *A Million Missions - The Non Profit Sector in India*, is a tidy little book with an appealing title. Cherian gives an excellent insider's account of the sector, estimated by one version to consist of 100,000 organisations dedicated to the upliftment of the poor.

First, a short summary of the book since it has six chapters which deal with various aspects of these 'missions'.

Chapter 1 explores the arena of 'being good' in India and posits a rather unusual argument that the "spirit of giving and sharing runs in the genetic code of many Indians". The author theorises that the voluntary sector in India can claim direct descent from Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of service to reach the last person, his practical experiments within Sevagram and the subsequent setting up of the Sarva Seva Sangh as the apex body of constructive Gandhians.

Chapter 2 then takes the genetic code hypothesis further to elaborate on the roots of religious philanthropy within Hindu establishments such as the Ramakrishna and Chinmaya Missions, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams and Jnana Prabodhini. This chapter also explores similar tendencies in Islamic, Christian and Sikh philanthropic traditions. It abounds in examples of Waqf, various Muslim Jamaats, Dargahs and associations of the Ulema as well as Christian charities and Sikh *sewa*. It is also probably the best researched and presented section in the book.

Chapter 3 dwells on India's evolving civil society in the 21st century, illustrating current trends with examples of the Leprosy Mission Trust, HelpAge India, Banyan, the South Asian Fundraising Group, the Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy, and Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti. It lays open the discussion on private and government funding sources, the functioning of corporate, individual, and community giving, and the role of volunteers and professionals. It has useful insights into how these organisations began and met certain specific needs in society.

Chapter 4 then brings to light the current state of civil society work in the context of the challenges posed by government programmes, public interest litigation, environmental issues and corruption. While wide-ranging and full of the author's own observations, it is also mostly irrelevant to the topic of the book.

Chapter 5 turns to the need for accountability in the non-profit sector examining a proposed code of conduct and issues of credibility, transparency and misuse of funds.

Chapter 6 analyses the work of well known activists like Jacob Thundyil, Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal, PV Rajagopal, Medha Patkar, Kishor Tiwari, Rajendra Singh, Baba Adhav, Aruna and Bunker Roy, and several others. While the stories



Mathew Cherian

related to each of these individuals and the institutions associated with them are fascinating, Cherian also mentions the possible impact of Paulo Freire and liberation theology on all these actors. However, the somewhat awkward shift from philanthropic activity to active (and political) mobilisation takes the reader a bit by surprise because no connection is made between the 'genetic code' of charitable activity and these explicitly considered acts of empowerment. What processes led from one to the other and how the nature of civil society changed, are not debated.

Therein, Cherian misses the opportunity to look at context and action in dialectical fashion (as Freire proposed in his landmark *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) and there are a few surprising omissions in his account. For instance, what triggered the change from philanthropy to development to mobilisation and politics – and the consequent tension between the government and industry and sections of 'civil society'?

This is certainly not explained by the tradition of 'giving' alone. There must be deeper processes of reflection and institutional dynamics underlying the transformation. One good example could have been the history of CAPART, an institution that does figure in Cherian's discourse. It had its unlike-

ly roots in the Freedom From Hunger Campaign (FFHC) promoted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation in the early 1960s. When the campaign failed to make a dent, an evaluation suggested that the mere philanthropic act of giving large amounts of food aid would not reduce hunger. It needed to be supplemented with development projects that would put purchasing power in the hands of the hungry. So FFHC changed to FFHC/AD (or Action for Development).

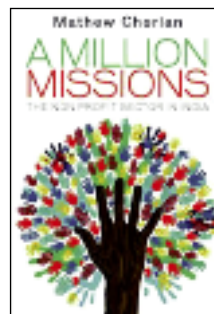
Interestingly, development projects sponsored by governments did not work either and another set of consultations (with a vociferous bunch of civil society organisations) led to the idea that people had to be participants in the process of development if the benefits were to reach them. So FFHC/AD changed again to FFHC/PAD (People's Action for Development) and, as the nation tried to break loose from international dominance, re-emerged as PADI (People's Action for Development India).

But genuine people's participation – which, in many ways, began to challenge the government-supported concept of 'development' – also posed a problem for the State. So the government married PADI to CART (Council for Advancement of Rural Technology) and gave birth to the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART)! This short summary characterises the innate tendency of radical action by non-state actors and the State's attempt to submerge dissent.

Cherian regards the failure of CAPART to support honest voluntary action, and its bureaucratic decay into a corrupt abyss, as a distressing event. Perhaps a closer look at history might have shown that CAPART succeeded admirably in its true intent – which may have been to derail the people's demand for a different society!

Another omission in this book is an analysis of how global corporations are taking over the welfare state for their own interests and how this may be mutating the 'genetic code' of Indian philanthropy. In fact, a proper examination of the historical backdrop to the passing of the Societies Registration Act just after the great Indian insurrection of 1857, and the takeover of the reins of

power from the East India Company by the British Crown, as well as a comparison with the use of the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act and the Companies Act (both mentioned in the book) to dissuade one kind of social activity and promote another, would have been a tremendous contribution to an understanding of what happens to 'missions'. What is most surprising, though, is the absence of any reference to the great debate on non party political formations that engaged both academics as well as activists during the 1980s. Nevertheless, a useful read. ■



**A MILLION MISSIONS  
THE NON PROFIT  
SECTOR IN INDIA**

Mathew Cherian

₹ 450



# What children think of school

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

**B**EHIND those school gates, amidst the hustle and bustle of learning, a certain ethos prevails. Every school strives to promote its notions of morality, nationalism, discipline and ritual to its students. The process of schooling – teachers, students, their interactions and activities – define a school's culture. Schooling is a distinct way of life.

But not many have studied school culture and its powerful flipside – student culture. Meenakshi Thapan, a professor of sociology at the Delhi School of Economics and coordinator of the DS Kothari Centre for Science, Ethics and Education at the University of Delhi, has, possibly for the first time, tried to demystify this world with her book, *Ethnographies of Schooling in Contemporary India*.

Her researchers went to schools in Delhi and Ahmedabad and also visited one in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. The schools were very different – a government school for the underprivileged, a convent school, a school for Muslim girls in Ahmedabad, an elite private school, a well-known alternative school and so on.

The researchers sought to understand what children felt about their lives in school. They discovered that children were not passive recipients of school culture. Influenced by popular culture, consumerism and their families, children questioned, formed opinions, exchanged notes and fashioned an alternative culture in school – the peer culture.

"It is the exciting world of exchanges and interactions, of challenges and defeat, of submission and rebellion, of discipline and freedom ...that the chapters in the book seek to capture," writes Prof. Thapan. Excerpts from an interview:

## What sparked your interest in school culture?

My experience as a very young teacher in a school in rural Andhra Pradesh brought home to me the fact that schools are important sites for transmitting values, whatever these might be. Hence, how a school chooses to communicate with children, what it transmits and how it does that, all become important aspects of schooling. In addition, how students and teachers create these spaces through their engagement with schools become important ways through which one can understand life at school.

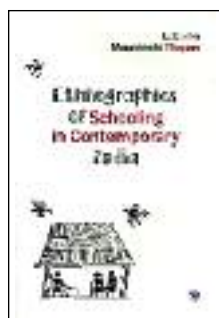
Schools are spaces where children learn more than just academic subjects: they learn from and experience being with one another, they learn from teachers and other support staff, they learn from the natural and physical landscape, they learn from what is presented to them as legitimate and 'right' according to social norms and values. Hence, the school is essentially a space for learning about a lot of things!

## How did school principals react to researchers keen to study their school's culture?

One has to maintain complete confidentiality about



Meenakshi Thapan



**ETHNOGRAPHIES  
OF SCHOOLING IN  
CONTEMPORARY  
INDIA**

Meenakshi Thapan

Sage

₹ 895

one's research. The school's real name must never be exposed. In this book, the names of only two schools have been revealed because these are very special kinds of schools and in writing about them, it is necessary to inform the readers about their purpose and the ways in which they seek to accomplish their goals. Most school principals readily agreed to allow us entry into their schools as we assured them that we would respect their privacy and ensure confidentiality.

## How difficult was it for researchers to interact with schoolchildren as friends and get them to speak frankly?

As researchers, we need to spend a lot of time in the school first, and by our presence, become an anonymous presence in

the life of the institution. Once we are recognised as part of the school, but without any real power within the school structure, we are neither revered nor feared. Children find us easy to relate to and communicate with, especially as most of the researchers were very young except for the editor.

## Would you say peer culture is as strong an influence on children in India as the family?

The family has a deep influence on the way children and young adults tend to perceive the world and their role in it. To begin with, children are socialised in the lap of the family.

However, once they start growing up and form strong peer connections, peers also influence the way in which they conduct themselves, the opinions they form and, importantly, their relationship to adult authority at school, to one another, as well as to their families. Peers often become their constant companions and overtake family when children enter their teens and in later years. However, this would vary across cultural and regional contexts, rural and urban settings, and gender differences, among other things.

## Does a vibrant peer culture improve learning?

A vibrant peer culture that is consonant with school goals would facilitate learning. Where peer cultures

reject school goals and authority, learning would be affected.

In other words, schools need to ensure they make students partners in the learning process and not take a top-down approach towards them. This is a difficult task as most teachers in schools in this country assume a position of authority vis-à-vis students. It is only when students are engaged participants in the learning process that their goals may dovetail into the school's learning goals.

## Your researchers went to a range of schools. But most of them appear to perpetuate the gender divide. Does this signify a failure of the schooling process?

The gender divide in schooling is an outcome of social norms and practices. Children and adults in schools play out the same stereotypical ideas that circulate in society.

However, single-sex schools, especially for girls, are increasingly recognising their strengths, like the school for Muslim girls in Ahmedabad, and are framing their goals and practices accordingly. This is a significant move.

The 'convent' school in Delhi in the book, on the other hand, is reproducing conventional stereotypes. I find it rather ironical that the middle class elite – school management, teachers and parents – in most private Delhi schools continues to reproduce conformist stereotypes for young women despite their easy access to different kinds of resources that would not make change impossible for them.

Giving in to parental pressure and the diktats of society is the easiest option for many schools. It is far more difficult to articulate a different set of values and practices, adhere to them, follow them through and seek to bring about lasting change through their institutions.

## Do you think the notion of citizenship taught to students is more personal than national?

In most schools, students are taught about citizenship in the context of the nation-state and are expected to internalise certain core ideas about their relationship to the nation-state. Their personal views do not really count for very much except in the peer group where youth could give expression to different forms of dissenting citizenship.

## What implication does your book have for educators?

This book is relevant for educators because it brings school processes, from the viewpoints of students, alive to them. If they are to be good educators, they need to first understand schooling from the viewpoint of the main stakeholders: children and youth, before they can do anything else!

Theories about psychology, philosophy and sociology in the context of schools are, after all, 'theory' set largely in very different social and cultural contexts. This book seeks to give an in-depth understanding of school life and is useful to educators essentially because it illuminates the world of students, peer groups, and their understanding of life at school across a few schools in India. ■

## Organic breakfast

BEGIN your morning with foods that are good for your mind and body. Dubdengreen, an organic food store in Delhi and Bengaluru, offers a range of breakfast cereals, jams, honey, tea, artisanal coffee and fresh bread at reasonable prices. Instead of cereals suffused with artificial flavours and preservatives, try Dubdengreen's ragi flakes, multi millet flakes, wheat flakes or cornflakes dunked in milk and sweetened with a spoon of honey. The tea comes in many flavourful herbs: lemon, ginger, cloves and cinnamon.

The store also offers spices, rice, eco friendly soaps, detergents and personal care products. You can order online as well.

Dubdengreen is an enterprise founded by Ganesh and Jayashree Joshi Eashwar, pioneers of the organic farming movement. Twenty years ago they set up an organic farm near Bengaluru. In 2003, they opened their Dubdengreen store in Delhi. ■



**CONTACT:** Dubdengreen, 4A Shahpur Jat Market, New Delhi-110049 Phone: 32905310, 9810131343  
Email: [dubdengreen@organicbounty.com](mailto:dubdengreen@organicbounty.com)  
Online store: [www.organicbounty.com](http://www.organicbounty.com)

## Quirky candles

CELEBRATE Christmas this year with aromatic Mom Candles wedged into old bottles of Johnnie Walker and Signature whisky. You can buy candles in various shapes and sizes. Some look like flowers while others resemble elegant glass goblets. There are cheerful candles that look like beer mugs too.

The candles are made by women of Jagadamba Camp, a slum near Sheikh Sarai in New Delhi. Sweccha, a non-profit that manufactures quirky products from waste, has trained the women.

"We have a group of seven women who work for two to three hours a day making these beautiful candles from scratch," says Neha Pradhan, Head of Programmes, Sweccha.

The non-profit has a well-stocked store called Green the Gap in Hauz Khas village. It has a range of inventive products made from waste. The candles, launched just before Diwali, can be bought on Sweccha's portal. "We will also be taking bulk orders," says Pradhan. The candles are priced between ₹150 to ₹425, depending on their size and design. ■



**Contact:**  
Kanchan Rana: 9560120295;  
Green the Gap Store, 24/3, Hauz Khas Village, New Delhi. Website: [www.greenthegap.com](http://www.greenthegap.com)



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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.

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

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