

Civil Society

AN ARCHITECT'S SEARCH FOR BALANCE



Sharukh Mistry

GREEN ON THE INSIDE



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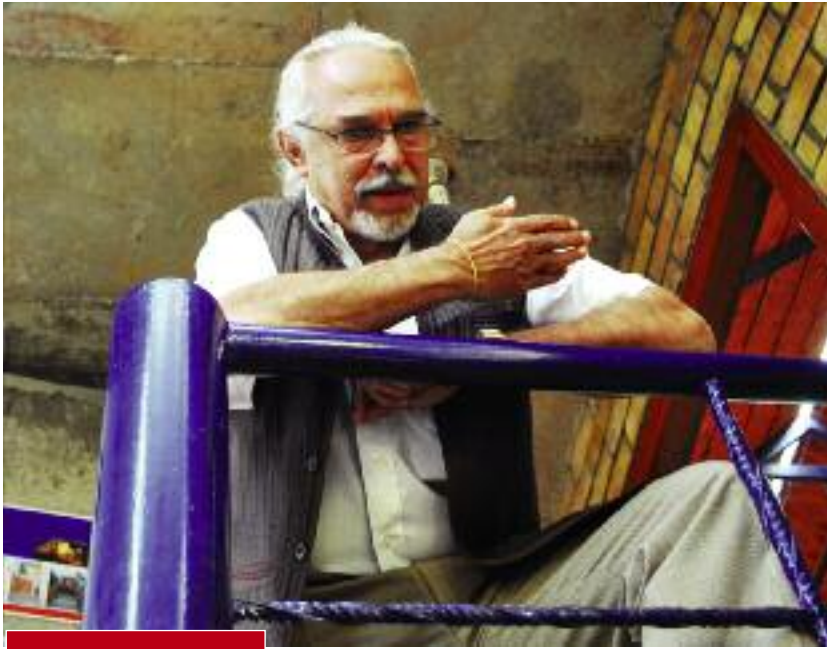
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GREEN ON THE INSIDE

Sharukh Mistry is one of India's foremost green architects. He, wife Renu and their team design buildings with a rare passion that goes beyond being ecologically correct.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Thinking green

THE construction industry is a big driver of the economy. It is also a gobble of resources. But oversight in India is inadequate and based on outdated concerns. Builders and architects aren't encouraged to think about tomorrow and on their own they do pretty much the opposite. When it comes to production materials, water, space and energy the story across India is a mighty dismal one. It is worrisome because future generations will have to live with what gets constructed now.

There is no city in India we can truly be proud of. Our buildings typify waste and excess at a time when conservation and precision are needed – not in isolated examples but on a mega scale so that savings take place in ways that matter and become a way of life.

A 'green building movement' exists, but these buildings represent merely a tiny part of the bigger picture. They account for very little. Green ratings are invariably given on narrow and clinical considerations which don't really link up with larger realities. What is the point of having a 'green building' in Gurgaon when Gurgaon itself is running out of water and is an environmental disaster. So we need to separate hype from reality and address the real issues.

Architects like Sharukh Mistry are important because they raise the bar for everyone in more ways than one. Their work and ideas need to be highlighted because they should be the basis for the broader movement in the construction business.

India's urban areas need green thinking. The challenge is more complex than an office structure here or there. Systems and technologies which satisfy the aspirations of half a billion people are required. Many of the initiatives could actually be quite simple. The complexity lies in the sophistication of a new orientation defined by human values, a respect for nature and a commitment to equal access to services and resources.

Sharukh represents such thinking. The story we have done on him is to highlight the values which we believe widely espoused. It isn't a critique of his structures but a peek into his mind and soul. Our magazine believes that only when we fetter professionals with higher values do we all go up a little.

The removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has for long been a demand of activists. AFSPA has been in the headlines recently because of Kashmir. We spoke to Wajahat Habibullah, the veteran civil servant and now Chairman of the National Commission for Minorities, for a different view on the controversy.

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Rising fruits

Your cover story on upcoming fruits was a delightful read and full of information. The Hawaiian example cited is worth emulating. It can give small farmers more income and consumers a bigger choice. Another offshoot is the impact it can have on our agro-processing industry which is still at a nascent stage. Imagine the kind of fillip it will give to employment. Fruits are great for the health and city dwellers would enjoy fruits mentioned in the story.

Narayani Singh

Inventive India

India is becoming a "superpower." There are people who believe this. The poorest Indians are no better than the poorest people in sub-saharan Africa. This is the Second India and it is very much a subject for many writers and thinkers to write and think about. After I read the 8th annual issue of your journal I have started identifying a Third India which is emerging.

Here, brilliant Indians, innovative Indians and creative Indians are coming forward and raising hopes for a better India.

Dhrubajyoti Ghosh
Kolkata

Regional Chairman, South Asia IUCN

NREGA woes

I wish to request you to kindly look at the problems being created by the Union government and the states by introducing NREGA. You may wonder how. Look at its negative impact on all of us.

- Claiming to be rural unemployed, youngsters are getting a bonanza of ₹3,000 for a maximum of six months, and it appears that the scheme is now being extended for another six months.

- The talati takes a cut of ₹250 from each applicant (as told to me by a beneficiary), and this is for a regular applicant. So for every 1000 persons the talati and his cronies must be getting ₹2,50,000 every month just for the asking. And what about the fake applicants? That would increase the amount being ripped off.

- In addition what about the wheat, rice and oil being doled out at very, very low rates? This is being sold by the recipients in the open market to sharks in the mandi who sell the produce to the general public at market prices.

You may think I am a cynic, but let me tell you please investigate as journalists. The present younger generation is going to grow up doing nothing.

Subhash Madiman

Lokpal bill

Your views are at variance with those of Anna Hazare. But that is not the perception of many of us. I too have not read the Jan Lokpal Bill and I do not think I will be any wiser reading it. But I support the purpose of this bill.

I believe that one needs to see the total picture rather than be upset about the comments of some peo-

ple. True the bill may contain views that do not fit into the constitutional or legal framework of our country. But I do not think the Jan Lokpal Bill was expected to be accepted without modifications.

The observation that 100,000 took to the streets is grossly underestimated. Every town and village woke up to fight corruption. If you feel that there is a group with opposing views, do you really believe that they can mobilize a matching section of our population? I do not. It is not fair to call these peaceful agitators a 'mob'. They did not do any unlawful activity.

My faith in Parliament and the Standing Committee has been shaken after the Women's Reservation Bill was rejected, after the recent scams, and after seeing the "cash for votes" display in Parliament. But the increase in the allowance of Parliamentarians was passed in record time, I believe, without opposition or discussion!

Lastly, should we look to the West for introducing any new ideas? Gandhi's method of satyagraha was not tried anywhere else in the world but it succeeded in India.

R.D.Prabhu
prabhur@gmail.com

INTERVIEW J&K wants the same azadi that the rest

'Removal of AFSPA won't

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WAJAHAT Habibullah's many years as a bureaucrat give him deep insights into the working of government. He is currently Chairman of the National Commission for Minorities, but he has a presence that goes much beyond his job. Having served in key roles at the Centre and in Kashmir, Habibullah was India's first Chief Information Commissioner.

Gentle and scholarly, Habibullah has his own sophisticated way of calling a spade a spade. On removing the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Kashmir, he believes that too much is being made of an issue that has now pitted civil and military authorities against each other. What is needed instead is unified action with realism and a sense of purpose.

While no admirer of AFSPA, Habibullah believes that unilaterally removing it in haste will solve nothing. Instead, he sees the urgent need for developing greater professionalism in the police force in the state and doing away with draconian laws like the Public Safety Act. Responsible for promoting the Right to Information (RTI) in Kashmir, Habibullah is a champion of local self-governance in the truest sense with gram sabhas defining development and insisting on delivery.

Habibullah's book, *My Kashmir: The Dying of the Light*, was released in September and is full of valuable insights. Here are edited excerpts from an interview he gave *Civil Society* at his bungalow opposite Khan Market in Delhi one leisurely Sunday morning.

The removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has been a long-standing demand. But you say its removal is not a solution.

I would generally agree that there is no need for special laws of that nature. But I don't think its removal is going to bring about a revolution in Kashmir, as is being touted.

AFSPA actually protects the armed forces in actions that they do in disturbed areas. It is also true that J&K is not disturbed. So there should not be need for a special law. But whether this is a matter of such vital concern that it should lead to a virtual confrontation between the civil authorities and the military is questionable.

The point is if you ask the military to overcome a certain security situation and also face a hostile neighbourhood, well, it has every right to say it needs certain things to do the job. Then you can't say I will give you this and not that. You have to consult them.

It is not only AFSPA that has been a matter of con-



Wajahat Habibullah

'What I would like to see is that the Public Security Act is removed altogether. There is no need for it. It is under this law that all those children were arrested last year.'

cern. The state has a very draconian Public Security Act. I must say the present government has initiated steps to amend that law. What I would like to see is that the Public Security Act is removed altogether. There is no need for it. It is under this law that all those children were arrested last year. Arresting children? Keeping them in custody for months without producing them in front of a magistrate? That is not worthy of a civilized country.

So these are really excesses by the police?

Yes. This whole point of the AFSPA has arisen because of the Army's alleged role in custodial deaths which sparked off that agitation last summer. It was said that the inquiry should have been

of India enjoys, says Wajahat Habibullah

bring about a revolution'

SHAMIK BANERJEE



I would say any law of that nature is a bad law. The Public Safety Act is a bad law. But you have had AFSPA for the past 20 years. It would be appropriate to evaluate that law but that would have to be done in consultation with the Army. My own view is that the Army would have been perfectly effective even without it. But I am not the authority to speak on that subject. A lot depends in this matter on the level of relationship between the Army and the civilian authority.

The Unified Command was set up for that purpose. The Chief Minister is the head of the civilian

'Self-governance does not mean only development programmes. It is about involving people in the whole structure of governance.'

authority. As Commissioner of Kashmir, I had a role in setting up the Unified Command because the Army, BSF, IB and Military Intelligence were all working at cross purposes at that time. So therefore it was very difficult to function.

The first effective use of the Unified Command was the resolution of the crisis at Hazratbal in 1993. The Unified Command was very new at that time and decisions were taken on a coordinated basis. I was the negotiator talking with the militants inside the shrine. But I wasn't functioning on my own. I kept going back to the Unified Command. The Unified Command is there to advise the Chief Minister and not to override him.

The police are accused of behaving sometimes worse than the Army. They take days to lodge an FIR, don't investigate and that angers the people even more...

There are two things in this. At one time the police had been rendered totally ineffective. Police officers were on the run. They were not willing to face the people. The most outstanding police officer the state has had was P. Ghulam Hussain Shah, retired Director-General of Police before militancy erupted. The trouble was that after militancy erupted he just drew himself away even from advising the police because there was fear among the police. So when you say they are guilty of excesses please look at it from that point of view.

The police is now very much back in active service. But the negative aspect of that is this that yes they have been guilty of negative acts. An effort must be made to exercise control. Right now you

have a very effective Inspector-General of Police who has largely managed to exercise control this year.

The police have recruited a large number of young people. The sense of violence that moves young people throwing stones, was the same sense of violence which moves these young policemen. The trouble is that the non-violent mindset of Kashmiris has gone forever. It is now a mind which is attuned to violence.

Do you think there is scope for politicians to work with the system rather than against the system?

That is the answer, to reach out to the people and work with the system. Change the system when you find it is doing things which are not acceptable to the people. Ultimately, and I can't emphasize this enough, the resolution to the Kashmir issue or to any conflict must be in the mind of the person who is your adversary.

The good fortune of our country is that we are a democracy and we are a functioning democracy. Anna Hazare is open to criticism. His team is being criticized. Kiran Bedi's travel bills are criticized. Now does that strengthen us or weaken us as a democracy? I think it strengthens us. Today India is a nation bound together by a sense of freedom. So if you want to treat J&K as part of the rest of India it should have a similar sense of freedom.

We have seen very successful panchayat elections in Kashmir. But newly elected leaders worry about whether they will get the authority to develop their areas.

There are two aspects to that. Earlier when municipal elections took place I heard the same words – young people participating, they want to serve the people etc. Have they been able to do that? They have not. Yes they should be given authority. But the panchayat should know that there are several levels of self-governance between itself and the State Assembly.

Self-governance does not mean only development programmes. It is about involving people in the whole structure of governance. How are schools and hospitals being run? Is the road okay? Is the use of taxes okay and what are you investing public money in? This element is there in the gram sabha. The gram sabha is the legislature. It's not just about nice individuals getting elected.

Leaders have to realize their future is in their hands. You go to meet them after two years and ask them if they fulfilled their promises. They reply they did not get the grants. Well, so what if you did not get the grants? Did you mobilize the people? Did you see that what they wanted was done, did you fight for them? You don't need money to tell

Continued on next page

handled by the civilian authorities and the Army said no the AFSPA will be able to deal with the matter. One positive aspect is that the Army agreed to look into that matter at the instance of the Chief Minister. AFSPA is an element of the law. It does not mean that you cannot appeal against decisions taken under it.

It has been argued that 900 cases were reported and only 43 were convicted. But then how many cases were reported to the civil authority, how many were deaths in the custody of the police, in the custody of the paramilitary forces and how many were tried?

Would you say AFSPA is a bad law?

Continued from previous page

the district magistrate to please do this or that.

So you have to prove yourself as a true leader?

Correct. Provide the leadership. And that will only come if you are able to marshal the population behind you and speak for them.

'I have had people like Sajjad Lone come and tell me here that look at Delhi it is such a flourishing city, all this could have happened in Srinagar but it has not.'

Different regions of Kashmir have different aspirations. Is there any common thread at all? Is there also a sense of drift?

There are diversities even within the regions. For example there is great difference between Kargil and Leh. Within the Valley you have great differences between north and south Kashmir. In Jammu, you have differences between the mountainous regions and the plains. All these have differences in aspirations. That is why you need local self-governance.

But coming to the larger issue of whether there is a drift well, I don't know. The positive thing is that Kashmir is peaceful. But to think that now that it is peaceful there is no problem would be a very dangerous way of looking at it. There is great anger burning among young people.

Now what is that anger? This is the interesting portion. Repeatedly last year they talked of azadi. And azadi for them meant, India go back. If there is one aspiration which unifies Jammu and Kashmir it is the aspiration to enjoy what they feel the rest of India enjoys. We have a huge Maoist movement in the country, there is the problem of inclusion of the poor, but these are not apparent to the Kashmiris.

They don't read about these problems, except now and then they may read what Arundhati (Roy) has said. So, may be everything is not doing so well but it looks like it is. I have had people like Sajjad Lone come and tell me here that look at Delhi, it is such a flourishing city, all this could have happened in Srinagar but it has not.

They are aspiring to a situation where they can live and prosper in the way they see the rest of India prospering. Therefore there is room for greater integration, not disintegration. Integration in the same way I cited earlier – a sense of freedom and a sense of belonging that we can change this if we want to. We can go sit in Ram Lila grounds and people will come and support us. They feel they have not been given these liberties because they happen to be Muslims. And this thought has been put in their minds by vested interests.

So everybody wants to be part of the India growth story?

And they all feel the other part is prospering, they see it on TV, in the movies and they say nothing of this is happening in our area. ■

Mining leases to be made public

Bharat Dogra
Thana (Rajasthan)

MINING leases in Bhilwara district of Rajasthan will soon be made public so that miners who seek to dig beyond the area earmarked for them can be held to account and illegal mining can be prevented.

The District Collector of Bhilwara, Omkar Singh, took this decision at a convention held at the campus of the School of Democracy in Thana panchayat in Bhilwara district of Rajasthan.

The convention titled, 'Minerals, Environment and Peoples' Rights,' was organized by the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) which works in this region, in partnership with the People's Union for Civil Liberties, (PUC) Rajasthan, ICAN and Shamlati Bhoomi Suraksha Samiti. The objective was to gauge the views of villagers on illegal mining in their area.

Thana panchayat is plagued by rampant mining. Several villagers explained that miners spread their operations much beyond the area for which they received a lease. They blatantly dug up fields and pastures belonging to the village. An angry young man from a nearby village said that he has stopped believing official assurances that such illegal mining and stone crushing would be stopped. It has continued unabated without any relief, he said. Villagers pointed out that they did not even know how many mining leases had been granted for lands in and around their area.

Nikhil Dey of the MKSS said that a good beginning can be made in resolving the many hassles people were facing due to rampant mining by first of all making the entire process of issuing mining leases very transparent. He requested the District Collector to ensure that just as details of the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) have to be painted and displayed in the panchayat office, likewise all relevant details of mining leases should also be displayed.

The District Collector, Omkar Singh, gave on-the-spot instructions to mining officials to ensure that all such details are displayed at an appropriate public place. When a mining official mentioned some practical problems, another official brushed those aside and said that once the mining department makes the details available, he will ensure that the leases granted to miners will be displayed within a month in the Mandal area of the district to begin with. This on-the-spot decision to ensure transparency in mining leases received a lot of applause.

Dey explained that the Rajasthan government has prepared a draft policy on mining which is clearly biased in favour of miners. The concerns of villagers and protection of the environment have been ignored. The government has not as yet finalised its mining policy. So it is important to talk to people at the grassroots, find out what they think the policy should contain and influence the government.

Kavita Srivastava of PUC, Rajasthan, recalled her own observations of mining operations near Jaipur. She said involving people's perceptions in the state's mining policy is crucial. Villages are worst affected by mining yet their concerns are blatantly ignored. When farmland and pastures are destroyed and the livelihoods and health of villagers is ruined they do protest but such agitations are put down with extreme repression. She said that politicians collude with the mining lobby and the liquor lobby.

Villagers were also told about the infamous iron ore mines of Bellary. S.R. Hiremath of Samaj Parivartana Samudaya, Karnataka, said that illegal

The District Collector, Omkar Singh, gave instructions to mining officials to ensure that details of mining leases are to be displayed at a public place.

mining and corruption there had reached unimaginable proportions. Due to the meticulous investigations carried out by the state Lokayukta the many-sided connections between mining and politicians could be revealed and the high-profile culprits could be sent to jail.

Eminent public interest lawyer Prashant Bhushan presented some findings of the Karnataka Lokayukta to reveal the extent to which the law

was subverted. He pointed out that mining leases in any village should not be given without the permission of gram sabhas. He was also against mining leases being issued to private companies. Bhushan said mining operations should be carried out by labour cooperatives and public sector units. Chuni Kaka, a senior Gandhian activist, said villages should begin a united struggle to achieve gram swaraj so that they can decide all crucial issues which affect their community. Shreedhar, coordinator, Mines, Minerals and People, said since most mining activity is illegal there should be a moratorium on new mining leases till the legal status of current contracts are sorted out.

The meeting ended with a resolution which demanded that the gram sabha should have the final word on mining leases. Mining should not be on a massive scale. Smaller leases can be given to rural cooperatives with ecological safeguards in place. Workers' rights should be well-protected. Health and environment considerations should get adequate importance. ■

A new life at the wheel

Bharat Dogra
New Delhi

SHANNO Begum, 36, drives her taxi with ease, weaving her way through Delhi's anarchic traffic. People glance curiously. After all taxi drivers are always men. But Shanno and her tribe have smashed into this male bastion by running a cab service exclusively for women, by women.

Shanno, a widow, says she used to work as a caregiver earning Rs 4,000 every month. She lives in Dakshinpuri, a resettlement colony in south Delhi with her three children. Shanno found it hard to make ends meet. So she tried buttressing her income by doubling up as a cook and tutor. One day, her daughters, Sophia and Gulista, heard that Azad Foundation, an NGO, was training women to become drivers. They encouraged her to apply. Shanno now has a commercial driver's licence and takes home a monthly pay packet of ₹10,000.

"I achieved so much from my training that a new Shanno was born," she beams. "I also enjoyed the training. I will never forget the time when I went out with my trainee friends for a picnic wearing jeans for the first time in my life."

Underprivileged women like Shanno invariably try to earn money by working as caregivers, domestic helpers or by doing stitching and embroidery. Meenu Vadera, founder and secretary of Azad Foundation, points out that these are poorly paid jobs.

She says their research revealed that more lucrative employment did exist for poorer women in 'non-traditional' areas. For instance, Azad Foundation discovered a robust demand for women drivers due to the city's high crime rate. Richer women felt safer with female chauffeurs.

"The Delhi Transport Corporation is also willing to recruit women as drivers," says Vadera. "But our experience shows that many complex problems have to be solved before we can get marginalised women access to these new jobs on a significant scale."

Azad Foundation started its training programme called, 'Women on Wheels' by holding a mobilization campaign in slums and housing clusters. The women who applied as recruits were informed that the training period was for six months and could be extended if their progress was not up to scratch. The trainees were taught day time driving, night time driving, driving in heavy rain, how to

read road maps, communication, English, legal knowledge, first aid and computers.

The foundation got Jagori, the well-known women's rights NGO, to educate the women on gender rights. The Delhi Police Women's Cell was roped in to provide training in self-defence. Maruti Suzuki provided some trainers to teach the women how to drive. The foundation also got

trainees, Azad Foundation floated a for-profit company called Sakha Consulting Wings Pvt. Ltd. The company's agenda is to provide safe transport solutions 'for woman by women' in urban India. Sakha offers three services. First, it provides placement services to qualified women drivers with individual women, NGOs and other institutions under an agreed contract. Secondly, the company runs a women's cab service for women and their families, professional women, Indian and foreign women travelers. Lastly, Sakha arranges women chauffeur services for a short duration on daily packages.

The women who underwent training say their personalities have undergone a dramatic change.

Saroj, 23, lives in Sangam Vihar, an unauthorized colony in south Delhi. Her family was facing a lot of financial hardship so Saroj was keen to learn driving at Azad Foundation. But she lacked confidence, lagged behind and burst into tears often during training.

Now she stands near her cab smiling confidently. Saroj credits Azad Foundation for this big change in her personality. "I was also happy to get good employers. They really encouraged me," she says. Saroj is now planning to join an open university course.

Seema, 21, is from a very poor family in a slum called Madanpur Khadar. She was keen to join the driving course but her father opposed the idea. She persuaded her mother to convince her father. Two and a half years later, Seema says proudly that her earnings have helped her family repair their broken home and tide over their financial troubles. One day Seema hopes to buy her own commercial vehicle.

Geeta Kumari, 19, is a trainee. She has three months left to complete her course. Her mother is separated from her father and lives with her two daughters. Domestic violence has left her with a badly injured hand so she can't go out and work. Geeta is all praise for her

training and is working very sincerely. Right now her family circumstances are grim, she says.

Trainees have also formed good relations with their colleagues. They support each other during difficult times. Uma Yadav, who learnt driving from Azad Foundation, got a good job. But tragedy struck when she was hit by a motor-cycle while returning from work.

Her colleagues and employer kept up her spirits. "My employer, Shena Damat, was so good. She phoned me many times to ask about my well-being."

Not only do the women have better paid jobs, they are also much more confident and empowered thanks to Azad Foundation and Sakha Consulting. ■



Shanno Begum (middle) with two of her colleagues

SHAMIK BANERJEE

its own trainers.

'Women on Wheels' made good progress. Getting their trainees driving licences was a hurdle since the women had no documents. So these had to be assembled from scratch. Most of the women passed their driving tests with flying colours. They were given a permanent driving licence and subsequently, a commercial driving licence.

Azad Foundation also had to tackle social issues the women faced. They suffered from low self-esteem, poverty and domestic violence. Male members of their family were hostile to the idea of women becoming drivers. But the foundation's training programme took on all these issues.

To provide prompt employment to their

FTAs make small biz worry

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE spate of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) being signed by the Union Ministry of Commerce are making micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) very nervous. They feel such agreements will hurt their businesses.

FTAs have been signed with South Korea, Japan and Singapore. Negotiations for a more contentious FTA with the European Union began in 2007. FTA talks are on with New Zealand, Canada and Australia as well.

The Third World Network, Shramik Bharti and Traidcraft have been studying the likely impact of FTAs on MSMEs. Their efforts culminated in a national workshop in Delhi called, 'India's FTAs and MSMEs – Provisions, Linkages and Possible Impact'.

MSMEs contribute substantially to India's growth story. "They account for 45 per cent of industrial production and 40 per cent of all exports. The MSME sector provides 66 million jobs. The labour-capital ratio of the MSME sector is very high," says Ranja Sengupta, senior researcher with the Third World Network.

India has 28 million MSMEs out of which as many as 94 per cent are unregistered. According to a survey by the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), 71 per cent of MSMEs surveyed said their sales have declined between 26 to 50 per cent due to imports.

The leather industry, India's nascent food processing industry, medicines, seeds and the dairy sector are likely to be among the worst affected. Adding to their woes are high interest rates, the absence of infrastructure and testing labs and the near collapse of the credit system.

If the MSME sector goes into decline, it is women workers whose jobs and incomes will be the worst hit. "MSMEs can be termed a gender sensitive sector," explained Ranja Sengupta in an interview to *Civil Society*.

What are your key concerns about the FTAs being signed by the government?

Our concerns are not just economic. There are social and development issues at stake here. FTAs are being negotiated in secrecy. Stakeholders are not being involved. This makes such agreements even more worrying.

First, under FTAs, India is reducing duties to zero



Ranja Sengupta

'Our concerns are not just economic. There are social and development issues at stake here. FTAs are being negotiated in secrecy. Stakeholders are not being involved.'

on 85 to 95 per cent of its goods, as opposed to capping these under the WTO. Removal of export measures including taxes and bans is being demanded by Europe.

Second, India is hoping to get market access in developed country markets. But the big question is: can we match their standards and their non-tariff barriers (NTBs), even in products like leather where we are price-competitive? India may end up losing its domestic market by removing import duties, without getting any real added market access due to NTBs. Unsurprisingly, India is running a deficit in the commodity trade with most of our current FTA partners. We are giving away our agriculture and industry sectors for so-called gains in IT services and sending of professionals abroad.

FTAs are also becoming overly ambitious and expansive. Not only do they cover issues related to trade in goods but also trade related to non-goods trade issues such as services trade liberalisation, investment, intellectual property rights, public procurement, liberalisation and competition policy.

IPRs, public procurement and a competition policy, are being especially demanded by developed countries in their FTAs. Such provisions can affect access to jobs and incomes, food, medicines and

other key services. They can also dictate how India's development policy will be formulated.

For example, under FTAs' investment chapters, foreign investors can sue our governments for huge sums in secret cases in international arbitration courts. This has already had a deterrent impact on development policy formulation in countries like Canada. One can imagine what its impact will be for a developing country like India.

Exactly how will FTAs impact women workers?

Since the FTA framework is more ambitious, everyone is expected to compete harder. Those who already have access to productive resources, knowledge, and technology can perhaps benefit. But what about those who cannot? Women have been historically discriminated. They are constrained by lack of time, know-how, education, skills and technical training. They are also in a weaker position socially. So whether women farmers and small entrepreneurs can compete equally remains a critical question.

But jobs have also been created for women.

Sectors like garments and agro-based exports have given more employment to women but they are employed under informal terms, given lower wages and inadequate maternity benefits. Their exploitation guarantees a trade advantage. The moment they ask for their rights or if the government brings in social security measures, they can be fired. India's large informal sector in agriculture, industry and services, have given it much flexibility. But workers, especially women, are denied their rights. The aggressive framework of FTAs will make it harder to implement social security measures.

Then, labour-saving FDI often targets women's jobs. Foreign banks and hospital services push out cheaper public services and raise user costs. Strong IPRs bypass women and threaten their access to

Continued on page 12

AFSPA fever in Kashmir

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

CHIEF Minister Omar Abdullah is at loggerheads with the Army over the proposed revocation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from some districts of the state.

It was on 21 October that the Chief Minister said that his government would soon begin the process of revocation of AFSPA from some parts of the state. Srinagar, Budgam, Jammu and Samba had been identified as the four districts from where AFSPA would be removed in the initial stage.

However, the Chief Minister's statement did not go down well with the Army top brass who stated that any dilution or move to revoke AFSPA would lead to serious trouble on the law and order front. Their contention is that militants would make full use of the abrogation of AFSPA and step up their activities across the state.

Lt. Gen K. T. Parnaik, who heads the Northern Command, said that revocation of AFSPA is fraught with danger since the militant infrastructure across the Line of Control according to him is still intact. He said militants are waiting to sneak in and once the Act is abrogated they would have a field day and nobody would be able to counter them.

It is not only the Army that is countering Omar on the issue of revocation. His coalition partner in the state, the Congress, has also opposed it.

The Jammu & Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) President, Prof. Saif-ud-din Soz, has on record said that the Act cannot be

revoked without taking the Army into confidence. He said Omar took the decision of revocation of AFSPA arbitrarily without taking the Congress into confidence. He also made it clear that various stakeholders have to be taken on board before the Act is revoked.

But the call to revoke AFSPA has caught the popular imagination. It is seen as the source of all tension in Kashmir. People who may not be fully con-

that revocation of AFSPA would bring the administration closer to the people. "The gulf between the people and the government can be removed only when significant confidence building measures like revocation of AFSPA and dismantling of bunkers are taken." Abdul Hamid Punjabi, senior Vice-President, Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry, says that the revocation of the Act is quite vital for the development of business activities in the state. He says that investors would feel more confident about investing in Jammu and Kashmir when the Act is revoked.

Syed Tahir Bukhari, a resident of North Kashmir's Baramulla district, says: "The government should set a time frame of two to three months and revoke the Act within this period. Let them start with four districts and take the process forward," says Tahir.

Siraj Ahmad, spokesman, Kashmir Economic Alliance (KEA) and President, Kashmir Hotel and Restaurant Association (KHARA) says people in general want the Act to go. "This issue has been turned into a football and whosoever comes in kicks the football," says Siraj.

Aga Syed Amin, a youth from the Magam area in Budgam, says that the security forces and the police should be brought under one single law so that they don't commit human rights violations. He says that AFSPA is inhumane and should be revoked without any delay.

"Under AFSPA the security forces personnel tend to run away after committing human rights abuses. The Act is against humanity and humanistic values. A uniform law should be applied to police and security forces and whosoever commits a wrong should be booked," said Aga. ■



Revocation of AFSPA has caught the popular imagination

versant with the provisions of the law or how it works want it removed. Omar is seen as confronting the Army on behalf of the Kashmiri people.

Prominent businessman Rauf Ahmad Punjabi says: "My belief is that the Army will not allow the state government to revoke the Act. Omar Abdullah should understand that he cannot take a decision as it is the Army that is calling the shots," said Rauf.

Shaheen Iqbal, a government employee, says

SAMITA' S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR





Disabled to get govt scholarship

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

THE National Trust, an agency under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, launched Badhte Kadam 2011 at Dilli Haat on 2 November. Badhte Kadam is a national campaign which tries to spread awareness of the rights of the disabled. This is the third edition of the National Trust's programme.

The campaign which runs from 3 November to 2 December, will spread the message of inclusion of people with disabilities in 35 states. There will be 250 cross ability fairs, counseling for parents, puppet shows, shadow plays, street theatre, singing and drawing competitions, and job fairs for people with disabilities.

The mandate of the National Trust is to promote the welfare of those who suffer from autism, cerebral palsy, mental disability and multiple disabilities.

Mukul Wasnik, Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, announced amidst much applause, that the Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship Scheme formulated and funded for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes will from now on also support scholars from the disabled category. He also talked about the recent setting

up of an Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre under the aegis of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). Wasnik said he would ensure that public sector companies reach out to the disabled through their corporate social responsibility programmes.

In Delhi and the NCR, the Action for Ability Development and Inclusion, an NGO, will perform street plays and hold seminars on job opportunities for the disabled.

It was a fun-filled day for the disabled, their parents, NGO workers and others who had gathered at Dilli Haat for the inauguration of Badhte Kadam. The programme included song, dance and a short humorous play on the daily discrimination that disabled people face.

But if the event had its lighter moments, it also brought attention to the very real concerns of the disabled and their families. "My 25-year-old daughter Poonam was born mentally retarded. My constant worry is what will happen to her after my death," says P. Babu Rao, honorary secretary of Parents Association of Mentally Handicapped of Jamshedpur, the state nodal agency partner of National Trust.

Preeti Johar, Chief Operating Officer of Family of Disabled (FOD) has first-hand experience of disability. Her father, Rajinder Johar, who was

shot at by some miscreants in Lucknow, is now a quadriplegic confined to bed. "The government and ordinary people are completely unaware of the needs of the disabled. Be it cinema halls or the roads, the common belief is that the differently abled should be confined at home," says Preeti.

The mela and other cultural events will sensitise the judiciary, legislatures, bureaucracy, the medical profession, district collectorates and media, among others. Badhte Kadam will also be reaching out to educational institutions, architects and companies.

As National Trust insiders point out the bottom line is to change attitudes to disability, and enable the disabled to gain acceptance as citizens who can contribute to the family and community.

"Among the biggest issues as I see them are accessibility, sensitivity towards the disabled and getting employers to realize that a person with disability is just as employable as anyone else," says Michael J Rosenkrantz, fund-raising advisor and organizational capacity builder at the National Trust. Rosenkrantz is, however, optimistic about the future. As persons with disability and their supporters, become more vocal, he says, change will come about in Indian society. ■

Continued from page 10

seeds, food, medicines and increase prices of products beyond their reach. Some of the promotional benefits that women enjoy, for example in government purchases, may also be threatened under FTAs.

How can farmers and MSME entrepreneurs mitigate some of these adverse impacts?

India suffers from lack of infrastructure, technology, credit, marketing facilities, quality inputs, quality upgradation facilities and these are especially scarce for its MSMEs, small farmers and women entrepreneurs. The weaker are less able to compete under a system of intense trade competition.

For one, a certain minimum size is required to be able to gain from international trade. Even getting integrated into the value chain needs certain capabilities and linkages that these groups often lack.

They may find it even more difficult to meet standards, Rules of Origin (ROO), and trade-related procedures. They will find it difficult to do R&D and compete in a high standard of IPRs. They may need certain protected markets for some time till their capacities are fully built.

Given the current framework it is difficult to fully mitigate the adverse impacts. But, in a defensive mode, MSMEs can ask for protection until their capabilities are upgraded. This will mean a thorough overhaul of India's education, R&D, cred-

it, infrastructure such as marketing, storage, transport, roads and railways, just to name a few. In terms of income and social indicators, society can also ask for cautious movement and significant protection, especially on goods plus areas, unless a certain minimum acceptable levels of human development indicators are reached in India.

The FTA process needs to be transparent and inclusive so that the concerns of all groups can be taken into account. Just a few big lobbies should not dictate India's trade policy. Trade policy cannot be treated only on the basis of commercial gains. It has huge implications for India's social development – and that will actually determine India's economic performance in the future. ■

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Aravind's vision helps India

Frederick Noronha
Madurai (Tamil Nadu)

AFTER coping with myopia since the age of seven, I grew a bit careless because my eyes didn't seem to be getting any worse after years of heavy computer use. In my 40s however, I needed an additional pair of reading specs. Then, things started going wrong. That was when I encountered Aravind, the world's largest eye-care service provider run by a Trust.

Situated in the heart of Madurai, Tamil Nadu, this is an unusual health institution which makes you wonder why its efforts are better known to the outside world than to India. Madurai, known as the temple city, is also said to be the oldest inhabited city in the Indian peninsula. From its low-rise homes and modest bus-stand, you wouldn't guess this was the capital of an ancient southern civilisation. It now has a population of 1.2 million and is the second largest city of Tamil Nadu.

It was just past 6 am when an enthusiastic rickshaw driver reached me to the hospital. Patients were already beginning to queue up: we all realise the importance of our eyes only when we have a problem.

At the clean and orderly reception area – there is a crowd, but no pushing – a notice board carries the hospital's mission. Simply and boldly, it reads: "To eliminate needless blindness." What a powerful, brief mission statement, I thought. From its record, this is no bombast.

By the time I left Aravind, after eating a ₹20 rice-plate, the early afternoon glare hurting my eyes because they had been dilated for the tests, I was impressed by many things. Including: its efficiency, its scalability, the respect with which it treated patients (even the poorest), and above all, its logic and deep insight into how to make things work in a resource poor, talent rich country.

If only other non-profits and trusts could be like Aravind, then we would have serious hope for change. No longer would the business of doing good simply mean a tiny, well-funded project with hardly significant impact and the lack of scalability.

Aravind Hospital started with the dream of a doctor, Govindappa Venkataswamy, who put in his best after his retirement. Aravind says its focus is to reach people who need eye-care but don't seek it. Such people don't get eye-care either because they are too far from the doctors, or it's too costly for them.

Take a look at figures from Aravind: "From April 2006 to March 2007, including the work done in the managed eye hospitals, over 2.3 million outpatients were treated and over 270,444 surgeries were performed." Can you imagine a small network of hospitals (in Madurai, Theni, Tirunelveli, Coimbatore and Pondicherry, besides three 'managing' hospitals including in Amethi-UP and Kolkata) touching such phenomenal numbers? But it's growth comes out of a strategy, not chance. It all started as a 11-bed hospital in 1978.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY: PATTABI RAMAN



A baby's eyes being examined at Aravind Eye Hospital

Aravind calls itself "the largest and most productive eye-care facility in the world, in terms of surgical volume and the number of patients treated." Besides its hospitals, it has a manufacturing centre for ophthalmic products, an international research foundation and a resource and training centre "that is revolutionizing hundreds of eye-care programmes across the developing world."

Aravind knows it has done something worthy of emulation. Without any sense of false pride, Aravind's leadership team member Thulasiraj Ravilla, 59, said in a must-watch TED talks: "I've come here to share with you an experiment, of how to get rid of one form of human suffering." Ravilla is Executive Director of the Lions Aravind Institute of Community Ophthalmology.

The TED video explains "what it means to be blind" by letting a Tamil-speaking village woman talk of her plight. Take the figures: one in five Indians (a staggering 200 million) would need eye-

care. Today Aravind is reaching about five per cent of this figure, with 4,000 beds in five hospitals, 33 primary eye-care centres, and its managed eye hospitals. On a typical day, they do about 1,000 surgeries, see 6,000 outpatients, hold five or six outreach camps, and offer 500 "telemedicine" consultations, apart from training doctors.

To do all this, day in and day out "and to do it well" the inspiration came from Aravind's founder, Dr Govindappa Venkataswamy also called simply, Dr V. Born in 1918 in a small village, he got a medical degree in 1944, and joined the Indian Army Medical Corps, but had to retire in 1948 after severe rheumatoid arthritis left his fingers crippled. This changed the course of his life, but things happen for the best! He continued in ophthalmology, trained himself to hold a scalpel and to perform cataract surgery. He did an estimated 100,000 successful eye surgeries.

Journalists who met him some time before he passed away, were surprised that Aravind's eye-care model was inspired by McDonald's and hamburgers. He wanted to offer eye-care with the efficiency of McDonalds, and a "franchisee model" that could grow. But India faces certain specific problems – a large under-served population, resource scarcity (both in capital and human resources), a dispersed population, low affordability, and poor logistics. These challenges were used to Aravind's advantages. Some patients pay, others get the treatment free.

But Aravind's reputation comes, apparently, by some smart thinking. It works to minimise downtime. Physician time is maximized by focusing on

Young women are recruited from village schools after they have done their high-school. They are given an intensive two-year training in ophthalmic techniques.

to see

judgment-oriented activities, leaving other tasks to specially-trained "ophthalmic technicians."

The "ophthalmic technicians" are young women, who have passed high school and undergo a detailed two-year training course. At Madurai, those I encountered were capable and smart enough to run the patients' arrival centre and guide them suitably, to conduct a rudimentary eye-test, to prepare patients to be checked by the doctors, and more.

"My eyes have been dilated," I told a young lady who was peering into my pupils with a torchlight. "They're only semi-dilated," she told me, politely but firmly and dropped in a couple of more drops.

Aravind has deployed other tricks in the book. Its global reputation comes from software assisted formal outcome monitoring, improvement programmes, what it calls "standardization without stifling innovation" and collaboration and exchange programmes.

What's important is Aravind feels its work can be replicated to other ventures of eye-care and beyond. Oddly, there wasn't "any plan to become what we are." But the vision and orientation played a crucial role. Together with caring for the needy, there was a private practice component. This helped earn revenue. But free eye camps for the poor also happened right from the start.

Slowly, their facilities expanded. One problem Aravind encountered, as Ravilla said in an interview, was their founder Dr V. was not a good fundraiser. After a trip to the industrial township of Coimbatore, he returned a week later with just a couple of thousand rupees. Dr V realised he could have earned that anyway, and then turned this weakness into a strength.

Ravilla adds: "He felt money was being given to him out of pity, and he could have earned more by working during the week. So he focussed on raising money." Aravind has always tried to live within its means. This made them cost-conscious and "very efficient in what we do". Something most non-profits and NGOs specially can learn a lot from. Every activity was put before the test of sustainability.

Online interviews have called this "compassionate capitalism". Others would see it as socialism in action – you pay what you can afford, and get the treatment you need. Nobody is forced to pay, though those who pay get better facilities, private rooms, but the same treatment. The ambience is "certainly different", but the healthcare is the same.

Aravind made a real attempt to reach out to those who couldn't afford to come, and those not yet "part of the market." They worked with Lions Clubs or Rotary Clubs, the churches and temples, to extend their reach to villagers.

As Ravilla has said in interviews, along the way they realised that "free" eye camps weren't really "free". Unless a really poor person got his transportation costs to the hospital, or food while under treatment and medication for the post-operation period, he still couldn't afford the "free" treatment. Once this was done, acceptance went up phenomenally. But entry costs are very low – the consulting



The rush of patients is handled efficiently



Patients recovering after surgery

fee is ₹50. That too lasts for three visits or three months! Costly equipment is kept in use for much of the day. This allows them to earn and also finance their expansion.

There is a trick in stretching their doctors' productivity. Of a patient's time in a hospital, the interaction with the doctor accounts for probably 10 per cent. The rest is spent in tests, diagnostics, which can be very easily delegated to the staff before a patient needs to meet up with a doctor's caliber.

Young women are recruited from village schools after they have done their high-school. They are given intensive two-year training in ophthalmic techniques. Four to five of these girls support each doctor, taking off the bulk of their work pressures. Doctors are kept for "interpretation-oriented" tasks and surgical requirements. All this makes the doctor far more productive.

Doctors, operating theatres and high-end equip-

ment are not kept idle too. In the operating theatre a doctor would have two operating tables ready for him, saving on time between operations. Detail helps to keep supplies and everything in working condition. Another small miracle is how Aravind managed to lower the costs of ophthalmic equipment, by taking up some production in India.

Aurolab, the manufacturing division of Aravind Eye Hospital, offers ophthalmic consumables at affordable prices to other Third World countries too. For instance, since 1992, Aurolab has supplied more than seven million lenses to its customers in India and to more than 120 other countries worldwide. Started in 1992, Aurolab has set up manufacturing facilities to produce intra-ocular lenses (IOLs), suture needles, pharmaceuticals, spectacle lenses and hearing aids. Sometimes, the reduction in prices has been dramatic.

Outcomes are monitored carefully; attempts are made to standardise. Collaborations with global institutions help. Because of the large number of operations and patients each day, this network has gained a reputation.

Of course, despite all this, the solution to the problem is no where near. Aravind found they were reaching barely five per cent of those needing eye-care. They say this only underlines the need to innovate. To make eye-care affordable, they gave away "a lot for free", charged market rates from those who could pay, and gained from the "market inefficiency". Ravilla earned applause when he said that Aravind had earned \$22 million, spent \$14 million and got a 39 per cent EBITA (earnings before the deduction of interest, tax and amortization expenses).

But the even bigger applause comes when those listening realise the scale of the change. Aravind compares itself to the UK, no less. Aravind's network does 59 per cent of the volume of surgeries in the whole of that country, and trains some 50 ophthalmologists a year as against the UK's 70!

Being not-for-profit and being a trust does not mean one has to be small and always destined to not making an impact! ■

Frederick Noronha is a Goa-based writer.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY: RINA MUKHERJI



Despite being near the tributary of a mighty river, the valley gets scarce rain

Village adapts to climate change

Rina Mukherji
Kathmandu

TEN years ago, villagers in the Panchkhal valley of Nepal used to think they were lucky. They grew two crops of paddy plus sugarcane, corn and potatoes every year. Located near Jhikukhola, a rain-fed tributary of the mighty Sapta Kosi river, Panchkhal is in the Kabhrepalanchok district of central Nepal, well known for its fertile soil and ample water. Panchkhal used to be blessed with rain through the year – 1200 mm in summer and during the monsoon and 300 mm in winter.

But all that is history. Panchkhal's fortunes began changing from 2005. The region suffered five consecutive years of drought. It did rain in 2010 and 2011. But the rainfall arrived late and it was inadequate.

A familiar pattern of water stress began. Parts of Jhikukhola became rocky and dry. Ponds are no longer deep and full. Women walk more than a km to the river to collect drinking water. There is an exodus of young people. The elderly bear the brunt.

In 1996, the Nepalese government had drafted legislation to take care of natural disasters. But political uncertainty came in the way of implementation. Neither could the government make alternative arrangements for water. A once prosperous rural community found itself going downhill.

Panchkhal valley is a classic victim of climate change.

Ajaya Dixit, executive director of the Institute for Social and Environmental Transition-Nepal (ISET-N)

points out, "The Himalayan region is bereft of precise information on precipitation, since we don't have enough measuring stations here."

Although data by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its report on climate change shows an overall increase in rainfall, farmers and ordinary people say that rainfall has



Rainwater harvesting is becoming popular



Farmers now grow vegetables, not sugarcane

become more intense, erratic and localized. The weather is confusing farmers. In the Jhikukhola watershed and the Panchkhal valley, climate change is making farming a very vulnerable activity.

The rise in temperature has been melting glaciers and swelling Himalayan rivers. But glacial melt in the Kosi does not affect its rainfed tributary, Jhikukhola, so Panchkhal cannot hope for more water.

With nobody to turn to, the people devised their own survival strategy. They changed their cropping pattern dumping water intensive crops like sugarcane for vegetables and paddy grown through the System of Rice Intensification (SRI).

Panchkhal valley is located along the Arniko Highway that connects Kathmandu with Tibet. It is close to Dhulikhel, a well-known tourist hill-station. Farmers found they had an assured local market for vegetables. They now grow bitter melon, cauliflower and tomatoes. Love Green, an NGO, helped out. People and Resource Dynamics in Mountain Watersheds of the Hindukush-Himalayas Project (PARDYP), a successful collaborative effort by institutions in China, Pakistan, India and Nepal to study mountain watersheds in the Himalayas, helped the people of Panchkhal with technical assistance, teaching them the SRI technique.

Using drip irrigation farmers have taken to growing vegetables in a big way. Pointing to his one hectare farm, Bhojraj Pant says, "I cannot grow more than a single crop of paddy now. Vegetables earn me an income."

Farmers have completely stopped growing sugarcane. It used to be their main crop. The cane would be sent to sugarcane mills and villagers would convert some of it into jaggery.

"Until a decade ago, we were surrounded by forests", says Ran Bahadur Bohara, head of the Village Development Committee (VDC). "There are no forests left to provide us fuel for boiling sugarcane juice to make jaggery. Indiscriminate cutting of trees has deprived us of our fauna and flora. What is the use of sugarcane?"

Since fuel wood is scarce villagers are opting for biogas. In recent years Panchkhal valley has received ample rain. Around 56 households have installed rainwater harvesting systems. The Poudels in a Chhetri-dominated village installed a rainwater harvesting system a year ago, with easy finance provided by Clean Energy, Nepal. "It cost us ₹10,000," says Sushmita Poudel. The contraption, installed on their rooftop, helps them harvest plenty of rain water for their household. They need a lot of water to dilute animal and organic waste to produce biogas, they explain.

The VDC has also dug a large water-body to irrigate village farms. Although Panchkhal continues to be water-stressed, villagers here have tried to tune into the erratic weather. ■



NAGHMA KHATOON
Patna, Bihar

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Naghma Khatoon's world came crashing down when her father was rendered jobless after an accident. At a very young age she had to share the responsibility of supporting her family. With a 12th grade education, all she could manage was a nursery teacher's job at just ₹ 800 per month. However, she soon got an opportunity to enhance her skills, through an initiative by the Bihar Urban Development Authority in collaboration with Microsoft Learning.

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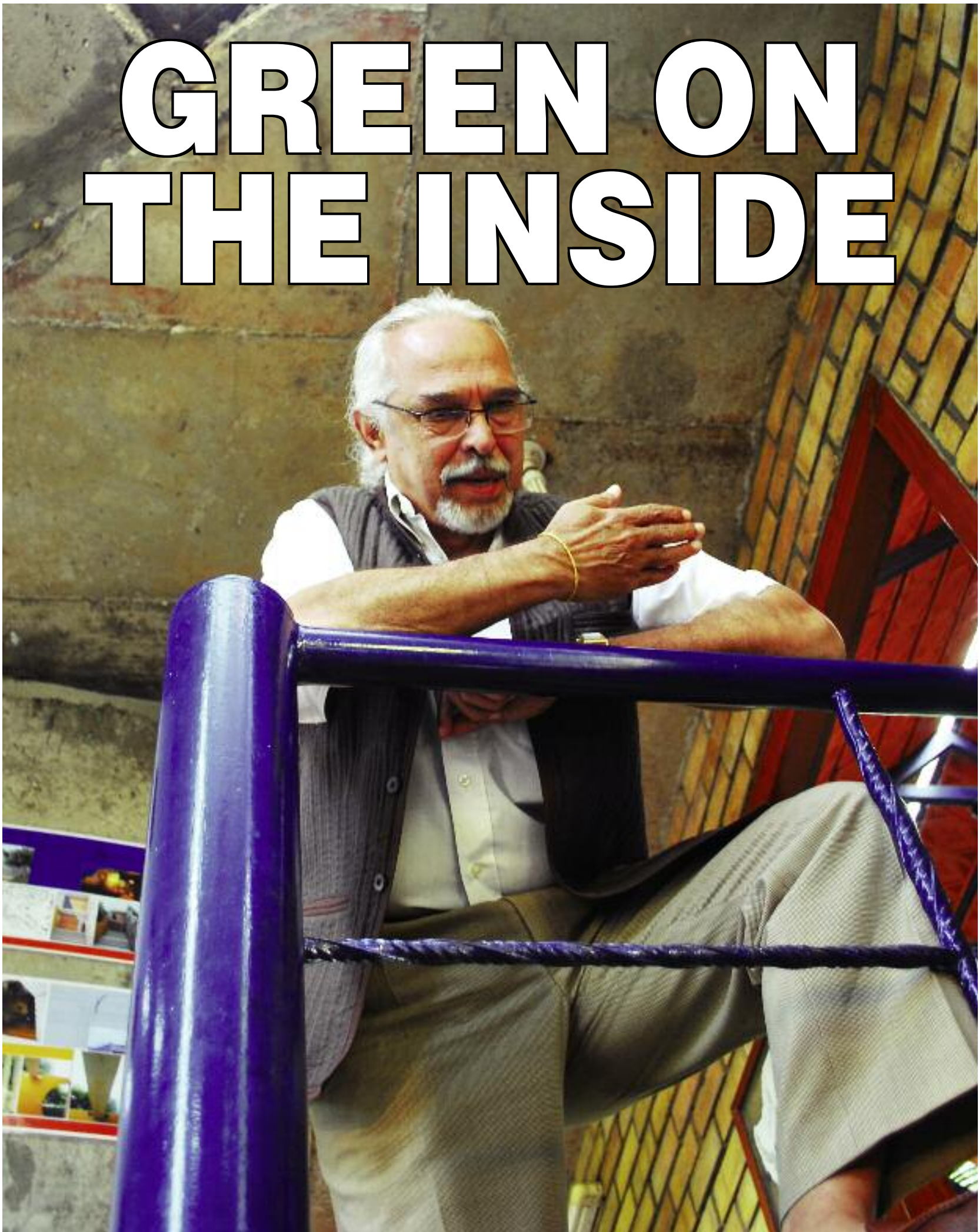


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GREEN ON THE INSIDE



Sharukh Mistry drifted into our world at *Civil Society* some years ago with Chandrasekhar Hariharan, India's first and perhaps only green developer.

He and Sharukh are among a growing number of professionals attempting to mainstream ecologically sustainable ways of construction. They rely on a mix of traditional technologies and modern efficiencies. But above all they are driven by personal values.

As it is with most inspired people, there is no dividing line between Sharukh's work and the life he leads. It is all there together in a single intuitive arrangement—the personal beliefs nurturing the professional identity and vice versa.

Many plans to write on Sharukh and his projects never materialised. We finally asked Subir Roy to take over. So we have Subir's piece and a Q&A culled from one of our rambling chats with Sharukh.

Editor

Subir Roy
Bangalore

If Sharukh Mistry were to be considered by the yardstick used for most people – how good is he at his profession – he would pass with flying colours. He is one of India's most well-known architects, with over a dozen awards to his credit. But he is more.

Sharukh has been a green champion long before the need to green our lives became mainstream. So among the distinguished, this gives him two strokes instead of one. But even that is not the whole story. He has a keen sense of social concern which strongly influences both his personal and professional life. So meet this exceptional soul – three good people rolled into one.

The best thing about sizing up an architect's work is that it is written in stone, often literally. In Bangalore, Mistry's home base, there are at least three landmarks which bear the imprint of Mistry Architects and have by now acquired iconic status.

Among them is the corporate head office of Wipro, one of the top software companies in the country which does a lot of other things too. The spaciouly laid out not-too-tall structures which dot the landscaped campus create a distinctive impression on even the untrained eye.



Office of Mistry Architects encased in green

But what does not meet the eye is as important. One, no parked cars can be seen, all of them having been spirited away in underground car parks which take advantage of the undulating terrain and skylights to use natural lighting even in what is technically underground. Two, there is an elaborate system of water harvesting and water courts, again using the lay of the land.

One of the most distinctive and symbolic structures in Bangalore is the Rangashankara theatre. The story of how a dedicated theatre person, Arundhati Nag, with help from across society, was able to give the city a hugely affordable place which theatre could call its own is a saga in itself.

It took 11 years to complete, with funds as and when they came along, and Sharukh

Mistry was there with his team right through, not losing heart. If you think the backless benches for the audience could have done with more space, then that's where the dream to put performance first comes in. Mistry became part of the desire to create a stage without stinting on space so that performance was not constricted in any way or from any direction.

At the third corner of the triangle stands the International Exhibition Centre, fair grounds of the Indian Machine Tools Manufacturers Association. It faced many challenges – too little water, scarce power and what to do with two massive banyan trees which asked to be taken seriously.

A system of groundwater recharging and use of solar lighting addressed sustainability. The promoters' willingness to go along with Mistry allowed the two banyan trees to be shifted and saved at some cost. The result is that the project has secured a green building certification with zero discharge and low cooling requirement.

There is in it a bit of architectural innovation too. Putting a roof over a very large display area proved a challenge. It was overcome by an innovation in the structure, stumbled upon quite fortuitously by capturing the principle of the intertwined fingers of a designer's hands. The exhibition complex is now a modernistic showpiece of the city.

The philosophy or value system that has guided Mistry's work right from the start – he and spouse Renu set up the firm in 1981 – can be seen to stand on three legs. One, what man builds must not take away from what the earth has to offer. The green mantra of "re-use, recycle and reduce" is central. Two, what is built has to be in harmony with what is around it – the nature of the terrain, the materials locally available, the weather and, not the least, the cultural resources of the area. Hence "site, sight and insight" become important.

Three, the needs and requirements of those who will use the facility takes precedence. The physical and psychological process by which Mistry and his team achieve this is to try and



SOS Children's Village, Raipur



SOS Children's Village, Alibagh



Abandoned quarry was turned into a lake at SOS Children's Village, Bangalore



SOS Children's Village, Bhubaneswar



At Mistry Architects teamwork gets priority



Renu and Sharukh Mistry

empty their minds before entering a project – meeting its future users and visiting the site. This means "going in blank," with minimum or no baggage of pre-conceived notions. "Every site has a story, onto which is layered the requirements of the client," explains Mistry, bringing his team's philosophy and architecture together. "When we go in we look around to see the context of the land, local art and craft, the region's architectural vocabulary."

If you are not careful you can eradicate a story, which the firm came close to doing while seeking to transform a 1902 home in Ooty. But the moment they

started discovering the merits of things like mud and brick walls which were built to last, ideas changed and eventually they kept what they could and then added the customer's requirements.

The availability of water and energy outlines the resource challenge that a project poses. The site dictates its own terms – how the play of air and light must be. The weather dictates whether to keep the heat out or in and how draughty or enclosed must structures be. The usability of

local materials and even discards dictate how costs can be kept low and the look can be kept local. And local cultural motifs are picked up and incorporated in the design to promote users' subliminal empathy with what is built. The "triple bottomline of people, profit and planet" has to be respected.

One of the early projects that Mistry designed was the SOS Children's Village in Bangalore built in 1988. The land that was given, a bit outside the city, was around an abandoned stone quarry, which was short on water and the available source of power. These handicaps were turned into advantages. The excavated

‘ My connect is emotional... ’

CITIES in India are marching into the countryside gobbling farms and villages. Much of the architecture which arises on such soil isn't easy on the eye. It's also harsh on the planet. But things are changing. The green building movement is growing in India. And it owes a lot to the energy of architects like Sharukh Mistry and his wife Renu. They have given architecture a new typology – as a humane and aesthetic profession in tune with nature. While Sharukh studied at the Academy of Architecture in Mumbai, Renu graduated from IIT Kharagpur.

Extracts from an interview with Sharukh:

You started your career at a time when there was very little awareness of green and socially conscious architecture. What was your inspiration?

In one word, I would say it was an accident of life. In the early 1980s cement, which was under government control, was all being sent to Delhi for the Asian Games. Very little was available for people in the building environment.

We were then building our little home in Indira Nagar. We had little money and, since we were cement-bred architects, and just starting to practice in India, we said if we cannot find an answer to this solution we are not worth our salt as architects.

We talked to our labour contractor and asked him how did your forefathers build? We kind of learnt of *chunam* and located rock lime in Bangalore. My father-in-law travelled to Vellore to learn the mixes, and sure enough we began looking at this material as an alternative way of doing things.

Naturally, we made lots of mistakes. The first wall that we built came crashing down because, of course, we built it just like a cement wall, not realizing that slate lime takes a little longer to set. Ultimately, it gives you more strength than what you need.

Looking at alternative ways of building excited us. In the areas we were beginning to build like the Cheshire Homes and socially relevant work, money was very, very limited.

We had to be frugal and this material was reliable, we could work with local technology and it went to the tertiary level of society. These parameters have stayed with us. So that was the inspiration.

Your ideas have of course gone beyond materials. But how did clients react to your ideas then and has that changed a lot now?

Well, I would say materiality is something very, very personal. We started to get a high, building with stone, first our own home and then Cheshire Homes. Some people liked the idea that we were using local granite and things. I mean we are on a big bed of granite – the Deccan Plateau. Some people said, no, oh no, only temples are built of stone, not homes. We had fun.

Your architecture has so many more elements to it?

Yeah. The fact is also that we are in a glorious climatic zone so it kind of allowed us to build without too much worry of heat gain, and yes, we got sensitized to Bangalore's flora and fauna, the quality of light, the air, the rain which falls for such a long duration.

Then the two of us building together our own home ...there is the parallel of human relations at one end and the parallel of the building



Sharukh Mistry

getting built at the other. These were new learnings. We both realized that we worked so differently. Renu has a phenomenally analytical approach to issues of design. I have the intuitive response to design. I like triggers to happen, anything, something said, unsaid, a crack in the stone wall... We were discovering strengths and weaknesses within ourselves.

Which of your projects do you feel the most connected with?

My emotional connect to all my projects is very, very high and size makes no difference. The SOS Children's Village excites me the most. I loved doing this project. As an architect there was the excitement and vibrancy when the children moved in. On the professional front, seeing the response of the situation and creating meaningful architecture became a very important learning experience.

I remember my first village in the 1990s when I wanted to add all sorts of gizmos and Mr Kaul – God bless his soul – said hey Sharukh don't forget, a mother is going to look after 10 children. You cannot overburden her with your architecture. Do you think you can leave some of that baggage at the door? That stayed with me.

What are the three things you would change in Bangalore?

Well, I certainly would not change the weather. I think I would look at mass transportation. I would make sure the city becomes walkable. We have great spaces. There is the old city which is a very tight fabric, and walking there is amazing. But in the newer areas, I would love to create alternative cycling and walking paths. We would be able to walk through the city throughout the year. Very few cities have the climate we are blessed with.

The other thing I would love to have in Bangalore is urban forestry. We are cutting down trees like crazy. We transported some old trees in our sites with full foliage and those are exciting things to do.

Do you think the green building movement in India is serious?

I certainly think it is serious. It has got values. There is a certain sensitivity that is happening within the architectural community. There are problems. Green washing continues to happen.

A lot of people confuse the green building rating system with sustainable green design. The rating systems are tools for measuring performance, but meaningful green design goes way beyond the brownie points of a rating system. The soul of the green building movement can never be in its rating system.

It has to be in issues of emotion, cultural context, playfulness, empathy, meaning, community, intuitiveness and all the right brained issues. These are integral to any good design. But these are intangible and not easy to measure. We still don't know the true value of forests, rivers and oceans.

What is your advice to young architects?

If you are from a small town, don't leave it. Small towns are also doing some amazing work and they are able to support architectural practices. Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities need to absorb and retain populations and open their arms to young people for green and sustainable jobs. ■

quarry was turned into a pool that recharged groundwater and grew fish; the quarry stones went into building the houses for the children and the pathways to the houses grew natural canopies of creepers.

This assignment had another impact on Mistry. The SOS Villages, conceived by an Austrian after the Second World War for orphaned children in Europe, in India took the shape of clusters of houses which represented villages, each house being home for around 10 children looked after by a mother.

All the elements of a wholesome social existence – mother, siblings, house and village – were created. Working to create a new life for unfortunate children had an impact on Mistry. "Building the SOS Villages is very close to our hearts. SOS has changed us deeply inside," he says. Today, his family consists of not just the Mistrys' two biological children but also three adopted ones. This is where the architect and the socially conscious individual get rolled into one.

Another project which has a high social quotient and has had a strong impact on Mistry is the three villages that his firm has designed for the victims of the tsunami that hit the southeastern coast of India in 2004. The firm had to work under tough constraints as it meant moving in tandem with the government which provided the land and infrastructure support.

First, one of the sites was found to be marshy, thus reducing the total number of villages from four to three. Then, came a watershed moment in Mistry's professional experience. In keeping with his and his team's well established principles of using local materials and adopting local practices to design in harmony with the weather, the plan was for thatched roofs with underlying polycarbonate corrugated sheets which would be both durable and sturdy against calamities.

But when the would-be residents were shown the models (a part of the firm's discipline) they asked if they could have reinforced cement concrete roofs over which they could at a later date build another floor and top it up with thatched roofs. This meant a cost escalation of 10 to 15 per cent and dropping the principle of adopting local practices and using local materials. But the residents were both practical and aspirational. They wanted the option to add to their homes and also wanted to possess homes with the local status symbol – pucca roofs. It was Renu Mistry who eventually pointed out that the customer or user could not be ignored.

The Mistrys practice what they preach. This is evident in their home and the office they share with their colleagues. The home was built at a time when cement was scarce in the country and a lot of lime mortar mix was used as a substitute. It was a learning process in the use of alternative materials. The structure of the home was also distinctive. Two families – the Mistrys and Renu Mistry's parents – had to make a home in a fairly small plot which had a tree in the centre. So the tree was kept at the centre and two separate and adjoining living areas were built around it so that they offered both privacy and shared resource.

The office of Mistry Architects is also distinctive. It is in the heart of a residential area of Bangalore but faces a park that is dense with trees. From particular rooms where the wall facing the park is almost not there, you can see only trees. There is a terrace which serves as a common area where the staff meet and have lunch. A lot of reused materials have gone into its building, including things like used door knobs and clamps. And as should have been guessed by now, there are very few doors in the office.

The firm is also structured differently from most conventional business organisations. There is no real hierarchy. Associate architects lead teams which have either of the Mistrys as members and which use their own junior architects and trainees to handle their designated projects. A team does its own costing and profit sharing, passes on to the partners a percentage of profits and contributes to a common pool to meet corporate expenses. Under this



Homes built in Kovai hills



A retreat at Whitefield, Bangalore



A private home



Wipro Corporate Campus, Bangalore

system juniors get to do things like designing and client interaction a lot earlier than they would in other firms. Unsurprisingly, a lot of associate architects leave after working for three or four years to set up their own firms. The Mistrys are comfortable with this. They also frankly admit that they are not "very good at soliciting work." People often come to the firm because they like some work it has done. The firm does not refuse any project and Renu speaks for all when she says, "everybody should be able to afford an architect."

Considering the Mistrys' approach to life it is natural that their children should be in a particular mould. Their son gave up seeking to become an expert in oceanography and now runs an outfit engaged in deep sea diving in



This pool extends to the edge of the terrace and appears to merge with the sky



Renu and Sharukh Mistry's office



Nature and aesthetics



The Belair, serviced apartments in Bangalore



The Bangalore International Exhibition Centre

Lakshadweep. An award-winning photographer, he uses his knowledge of life in the ocean to illustrate how some natural systems are sustainable. Their daughter, an education expert from Harvard, works in slums around Bangalore.

The epiphany moment in Mistry's life came when he and his family and friends moved to higher ground at Pondicherry on 26 December 2004 (it happened to be his birthday) for breakfast and then the tsunami struck. Had they been where they were a little earlier they would likely have been among the thousands who lost their lives.



A tree transplant taking place

At that moment Mistry realised he found the answer – in the form of another question – to the question he asked when a few months ago he had to go through surgery to treat cancer. Then he had asked, why me; after the tsunami he asked, why not me. Thereafter, designing villages for tsunami victims took on a special meaning for him. It is not that, into middle age, Mistry needed any reaffirmation of the sense of mission that is a part of his being. But any doubts that he may ever have had about his concerns extending far beyond that of a regular professional would have been washed away by the tsunami. ■

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

Smart Jigsee for simple mobile

Video-streaming for the masses with this app

Aarti Gupta
New Delhi

AT a time when telecom companies globally are feverishly devising applications for fancy i-phones and Blackberrys, along comes Jigsee, a video streaming service which works on the cheapest of handsets.

For this Canadian-Indian start-up, it's a way of converging entertainment, education and information and making all three accessible for the masses through the ubiquitous cellphone.

A ₹999 handset will do just fine even with limited memory, low processing power and a shorter battery life. Jigsee works on slow wireless networks too. All for free.



Ray Newal, founder and CEO of Jigsee, is now the talk of the tech community. An Internet industry veteran, Newal was one of the first employees of DoubleClick which virtually defined advertising on the web. Managing content and business development teams at Yahoo and Microsoft were experiences which went into shaping his start-up enterprise. Newal realized that very few companies were working to democratize information solutions. "It got to a point when I became acutely aware that technologies were doing precious little for the mid and bottom segments of the pyramid," he reminisces.

In 2007 a back-packing trip across India made him conscious of how much people were taken up with the cellphone. Newal realized they were using it for all kinds of value-added services, be it for ringtones, to seek information, or to remit money. A meeting with the promoters of Eko, who facilitate banking transactions through the cellphone, had him totally sold on the idea of working for digital inclusion.

Most of Jigsee's target audience, unsurprisingly, comprises those who have never experienced the Internet before. They do so for the first time with this application, says Newal. It is not very different from the time when home PCs were first used to access Internet in the nineties, he explains.

What has changed this time is the kick-off to 3G services. With every telco focused on maximizing data revenue, the biggest push to Jigsee's application has come from crashing GPRS (a mobile data service) prices. Paying as little as ₹50 to ₹100 for an unlimited pre-paid monthly home GPRS pack has been a watershed event. "Without that kind of enabler," says Newal, "our service would never have become feasible." There is,



Ray Newal

therefore, no additional cost to watch video, except what the subscriber pays to the service provider for the data connection. Keeping the service affordable is absolutely critical if the objective is to reach the masses.

Newal incorporated the company in 2008 and before the year ended, met Areef Reza who had spent a decade working with Nortel and Research in Motion. The latter's own start-up, Revnx, had tested the technology of streaming video content to basic phones in low bandwidths, significantly in another developing country, Bangladesh. The two joined forces together – Newal acquired Revnx – and tied up with Hungama Digital, one of the leading providers of content and value-added services for mobiles, to offer videos on demand to subscribers.

But soon it began to dawn on them that Jigsee was a square peg in a round hole. Even though they got inputs from Hungama which helped them fine-tune their offering, Jigsee learnt some important business lessons. Because of their relationship with telecom companies, Hungama's business was operator-led and focused on the top-end of the pyramid. "Our product and vision was towards the bottom-end of the customer segment. We were clearly a mismatch," says Newal.

This was when he figured that most of the service providers did want content that could be charged on a subscription basis. So Jigsee had to either fit into that value chain or build itself as a full-fledged consumer platform. That's exactly what it proceeded to do by offering content free. The plan, going forward, is to pull in customers and use advertising for monetisation after the product has been made sufficiently robust. Already some 400,000 downloads of the application since its launch in 15 August has made Jigsee a buzzing application.

Getting started is pretty straightforward – you just use the mobile handset to download the application from m.jigsee.com or any of the dozen app stores. There is no registration or any kind of validation process. Once installed, you are set to stream any video from its 250,000 minutes of content. A wide range is offered including Bollywood and Hollywood blockbusters, songs, trailers, short films, news, events related to entertainment and content for children including animation. In addition, there is great content on education, devotion, fashion, lifestyle, cookery, yoga and so on.



languages including in Hindi and English. Some of the leading names include UTV, Mukta Arts, 1Take Media, Khan Academy, UTV Bindass, TED, Sagar Arts, Mayura (a Rajasthani music label), Soor mandir (a Gujarati music label) and Wave music (Bhojpuri music). A subscriber can choose content from Assamese, Bengali, Malayalam, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu. Doing all this wasn't easy. Clearly, a start-up doesn't have money to pay hefty minimum guarantees to content providers. So

what Jigsee did was to devise a transparent reporting system on who is consuming which content. Resolving trust issues prevalent in the industry through data and transparency helped Jigsee get by with meagre resources.

The best aspect of this application is that it streams video uninterrupted, regardless of congestion in the network. The pre-loading of the

video happens at the start of the video – recall the annoying YouTube buffering – and it plays back smoothly without pause even if data speed drops to 50 kbps. "Networks are like straws," says Newal, "and we have ensured continuous streaming by adapting the flow of data to the bandwidth available." In short, optimize the width of the straw that the network is. Auto-resume is another remarkable feature. If the video is disrupted midstream, due to a drop in network signal or because of the phone battery getting discharged, the application remembers that point and offers to resume watching from thereon. The seamless video-streaming of the application makes use of five patent-pending technologies

Newal has the math all worked out. The number of people who currently access the Internet only through mobile in the Asia-Pacific region, according to him is 30 million. Estimates suggest that this number should touch 800 million by 2015. He hopes to have 25 million users for Jigsee in the next year or two – the first crucial benchmark for critical mass.

That's when the next phase of growth and monetization by way of advertising may happen, he reveals, while talking of plans to take the application to Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. With the first series of funding having come through Sequoia Partners and Indian Angel Network earlier this year, Jigsee is now gearing up for round two. "We are going to build a business that has scale – not one million or five million, but hundreds of million," he says. ■

Among those hooked is Kanta, a teenager who lives in a village in Bihar which doesn't have electricity. He tunes in to watch the TV serial, 'Emotional Atyachar.'

A diverse range of subscribers are downloading the application. Among those hooked is Kanta, a teenager who lives in a village in Bihar which doesn't have electricity. He tunes in to watch the latest episode of 'Emotional Atyachar.' Then there is 34-year-old Ram Dhan in Dariba, Rajasthan, who watches a video to learn how to protect his cotton crop. His 30-year-old wife uses Jigsee to tune into the latest soap operas. Entertainment for millions of Kantas and Ram Dhans had until now been limited to listening to FM radio on the mobile handsets.

There is something for everybody in Jigsee's content library. For city youth on the move, content includes the TED (technology, education and design) talks, a video of Steve Jobs' address to Stanford students and educational content including IIT- JEE prep material.

Some 30 content providers have partnered with Jigsee to bring content in 12 Indian lan-

Soap with a mission

Vidya Vishwanath
New Delhi

HANDMADE soaps, shampoos and body washes are emerging as the new emblem of luxury globally. A number of small self-help groups in India have been crafting such products. There is also Auroville, famous for its pricey natural cosmetics. Now from Jharkhand, Neev Herbal Handmade Soaps seeks to set a new benchmark -- better than Auroville.

Neev's brochure lists products which evoke an image of redolent luxury. Neev's soaps, shampoos and body washes are sold in trendy, organic lifestyle shops in India. They adorn hotel bathrooms and are soon going to be exported. Anurag and Shikha Jain, founders of Neev, are feted as successful green entrepreneurs.

In 2010, Neev Herbal Handmade Soaps received the National Award in Micro, Small and Medium Industries (MSMI) for being the best

Rural Employment Generation Programme (RGE)P of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) in eastern India. This year, the Neev group will have a turnover of ₹45 lakhs. A large part of this comes from its attractive, aromatic artisanal soaps.

Neev soaps are made from coconut, olive and mahua oils through the cold-press method. There is almond rose, olive rose, lemon grass, neem-tulsi, patchouli and aloe-lavender soap. There is an olive and neem herbal shampoo and body washes and hand washes. The soaps are certified as Ayurvedic products as per standards of the Government of India's Ayush department.

"We make handmade soaps because we believe that production has to rely on human skills and creativity," says Anurag. He strongly feels that mechanical production kills the imagination and is soul-destroying. "Craftsmanship is the purpose, and the purpose of life is to enjoy work. A machine kills that joy," he says.

Neev, which stands for New Educational and Environment Visions, was ironically conceived as an alternative life away from capitalism. Anurag says his life has been a spiritual journey since he graduated from Regional Engineering College, Kurukshetra, with distinction in 1997.

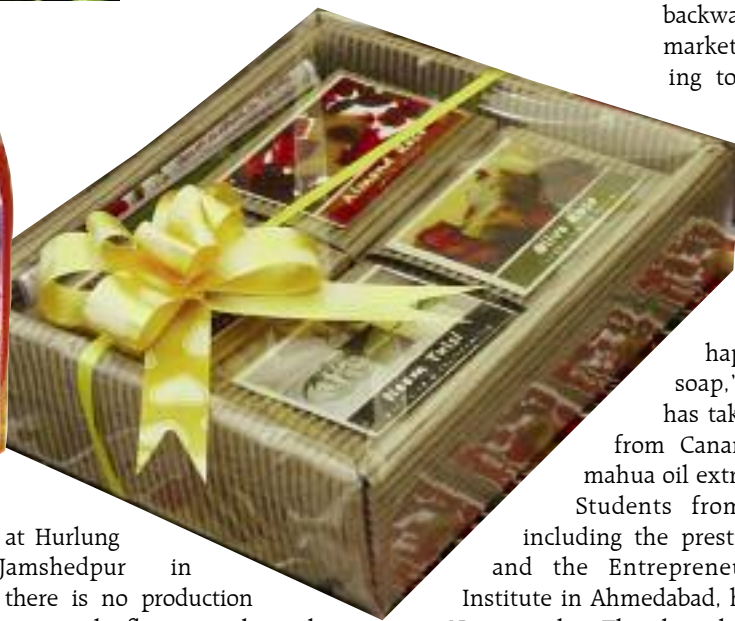
But the Jains are not Luddites. At their produc-



Patchouli soap



Olive rose soap



tion centre at Hurlung village, Jamshedpur in Jharkhand, there is no production line. Women sit on the floor in circles and work while chatting. They call Shikha, who manages the production, *didi* or elder sister. They work five hours a day. The women are not asked to perform heavy duty tasks. Work which is drudgery has been mechanised such as oil pressing machines.

The production unit itself is small. It has eight permanent women employees and 20 who come in as and when there is work. The women make about ₹1,500 per month but their children study free of cost in Neev's school which runs on the ICSE syllabus. "We have to scale up to make our enterprise sustainable. But I believe in Schumacher's philosophy that small is beautiful," says Anurag.

Neev sticks to its philosophy of not using a single chemical and therefore no pollution is caused in the entire production process. "We could bring the cost down by half," says Anurag. "We grow the herbs for the soaps. Herbs, unlike cash crops, are not monocultures, so we protect biodiversity." Neev is encouraging local farmers to cultivate the herbs used for making soap.

Neev's soaps are standardised. The cold-process

method retains the glycerine content in the soap. "Our soaps will not leave your skin dry, even in winter," says Anurag. This method also retains the properties of the various essential oils.

"When our products are put on the shelf, they will be compared with other products. So we have to keep inventing. Prices of essential oil prices fluctuate and we have to keep up with that," he explains. A 100 gm bar of Neev soap sells for ₹75 to ₹100 a bar. From corrugated packaging they are now moving to colourful attractive packaging.

Anurag is very clear that backward integration to the market will be done according to their philosophy of living. Instead of using palm oil, Neev uses mahua oil which is available in plenty in J h a r k h a n d . "Mahua is a sacred tree for tribals. It also

happens to be good for soap," says Anurag. Neev has taken a loan of ₹25 lakh from Canara Bank to set up a mahua oil extraction unit.

Students from several institutes, including the prestigious IIT, Kharagpur, and the Entrepreneurship Development Institute in Ahmedabad, have come to see how Neev works. They have had interns from China and Germany as well.

Anurag does not plan for growth in the traditional ways that companies do. "I want to create a sustainable community like Auroville here in Jharkhand," he says. "But this one won't be for the rich. I went to Auroville sometime ago too. I was shocked at the charges for their guest-house."

Neev, which has a trust, undertakes development projects. One such project has been the propagation of organic rice to 600 farmers in three blocks. Anurag and Shikha have now decided to work in one block and one village and subsequently move in there as a community.

The two have come a long way in their spiritual journey. Their quest for an alternative life began in college where Anurag first met Shikha. She got a job as a software engineer and he joined L&T as a civil engineer erecting transmission towers in remote picturesque villages of India. "I saw nature in all its glory," he recounts. The Jains have been deeply influenced by JD Krishnamurthy and Fukuoka, the guru of organic farming. ■

Insights

- Opinion
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Namma Metro needs to be bigger

V. RAVICHANDAR

BANGALORE'S first public Metro Rail ride of 6.7 km (less than 15 per cent of the planned track length of Phase I) took over six years (18 months behind schedule) and 35 per cent over budget in coming. In the run up to Reach I, as the first stretch was called, BMRCL –the Metro rail authorities – came in for criticism in the media with their 'give us a date' campaign.

But all of it was forgotten in the first flush of the official launch. Akin to 'distance makes the heart grow fonder,' Bangaloreans exhibited their passion by queuing up in large numbers for hours to experience the ride. Travellers have liked it and repeat users on the stretch vouch for its efficiency and utility. But once the initial euphoria has evaporated, local media is back to putting pressure on BMRCL – of what use is a limited stretch they lament. It sure is difficult to please everyone all the time!

One needs sociologists to help us understand the citizen frenzy and excitement around the Bangalore Metro launch. It wasn't the case with the Delhi Metro where there were even instances of disturbances around the launch. For starters, the name Namma Metro seems to have resonated – the 'Namma' (our) connection struck a chord. This was suggested years ago by brand experts among the citizenry. In this competitive world among cities, being the first State of the Vindhyas to get the Metro is hugely satisfying. Lastly, folks wanted to check out if the Metro was worth the wait and the hassles. It has scored on this count.

In all this hoopla around the launch, we tend to forget that the Metro is finally a mobility solution and not just an engineering project. In Bangalore, Metro feeder buses were introduced to improve the reach of the Metro to demand pockets around the station. This was a great proactive move by the transport authorities with possibilities of a smart card solution allowing multi modal travel. But barely a month into the project, the bus transport authorities wish to pull off the feeder buses citing low usage and profitability on these routes. This is extremely short-sighted and they would be better off finding ways to tweak the bus service rather than yank it off.



Namma Metro in Bangalore

Once the initial euphoria has evaporated, local media is back to putting pressure on BMRCL – of what use is a limited stretch they lament. It sure is difficult to please everyone all the time!

This launch has showcased the ability of BMRCL to pull off a complex technical project. It will get tougher as the Metro gets into the underground stretches of the city, but the wind is at least behind BMRCL's back. In Delhi, the toughest stretches from a location, land acquisition and engineering perspective were taken up first. This was a good strategic decision and we are now wit-

ness to areas in the NCR region demanding a Metro connection given its ripple effect on local economies.

In the case of Bangalore the easiest stretch in terms of up-market locations like MG Road and the choice (unfortunate in this author's view) to go over ground was taken up first. Going under-

Continued on next page



Bangalore's citizens enjoy a ride on the Metro

Continued from previous page

ground might have higher capital costs now, but in the long run the economic return through more transport options over ground would justify the higher spends. The Metro ought to have been buried but it's too late now. There were valid protests about going over ground by shops in the Indiranagar area but this was effectively ignored by the authorities.

There have been lessons around the challenge in managing multiple agencies in getting the project launched. The Bangalore Metro was delayed but there were permission and clearance issues, particularly from the Railways that were out of its control. There have been disquieting press reports quoting BMRCL sources of other headwinds that are likely to delay Phase 1 commissioning by 2013. Many of them have been attributed to clearances needed from the Railways and one from the State Government related to shifting a statue. The good thing is that BMRCL has proac-

tively raised a warning alert. The challenge is how BMRCL can resolve these issues well in time so that the true benefits of the Metro reach more citizens as planned on schedule.

There are well worn bureaucratic channels through which these issues are raised within government departments and resolved in IGT (Indian Government Time) timelines. More could be achieved if citizens get involved in putting pressure on the powers that be to pull their weight in ensuring timely outcomes. For starters, BMRCL needs to share more background information on the specific clearances that are being held up. Citizens should petition their MLAs and MPs to work for these clearances. Social media sites could be used to put pressure on government agencies to get out of their 'sit on the file' mode. A little bit of RTI too could aid us all in ensuring we get Phase 1 on track in time. It requires BMRCL and citizens to come together right away to make it happen.

Another continuous source of pain has been the state of the Metro work sites in Bangalore. It has been and continues to be a visible 'open heart surgery' as one travels around the city. Our ability to barricade work sites effectively is non-existent and we have high tolerance for accidents at the project locations with a resigned 'we are like this only' attitude. Local authorities point out that there have been mishaps at Delhi Metro sites which did in a sense literally qualify as 'breaking news'. One heard that there were cracks at the pillar that failed and decisions were taken to repair it rather than start all over again. Then there was the hasty desire to clear the accident site that resulted in toppled cranes. Why one might wonder are we so rushed and so callous about lost lives? It's almost as if the powers that be took the drop dead date for the Commonwealth Games too literally!

In Bangalore, reactions to accidents played out in a predictable 'Dravidian' way. Doomsday concerns in the press about the potential hazards of our Namma Metro construction were met with a dead bat. The script is oh so familiar. First, denial – it is an aberration. This is followed up with assurances – we are in a state of high alert and follow the highest standards. But then why you may ask are citizens skeptical in the face of such pronouncements? It is because we are a fearful lot and the visible cues at the construction sites reinforce our worst fears.

Just as our cricketers win over England in the home series ODI washed away some memories about the terrible earlier loss to them, a successful launch as seen in Bangalore does tend to wipe away many valid concerns about the project. Some of them relate to how the project landed, alignment et al, with a thud on the city sans any consultation, decision on being over ground in the city centre, safety concerns at the work place, project delays and the need for it to be part of the overall mobility solution for the city instead of just an engineering project. We must not forget these lessons as the country prepares to introduce Metros in more cities. ■

V. Ravichandrar, Chairman, Feedback Consulting wishes to take away more than just happy memories from the Metro ride

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Skipping forest clearance

KANCHI KOHLI

ON 21 March the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) wrote to all Chief Secretaries and Administrators indicating the revision of Section 4.4 of its Guidelines to the Forest (Conservation) Act (FCA), 1980.

The FCA determines the process by which officially notified forest land may be diverted for non-forest use. These procedures, known as the 'forest clearance' process, include many layers of permission required from the Central Government in case reserved forest land has to be de-reserved or if trees need to be felled.

Several industrial and infrastructure related projects, currently underway or in the pipeline, need land in both forest and non-forest areas to carry out construction of main and ancillary activities. However, the approval procedures that a project authority needs to undergo for each of these differs, even with respect to assessing environment impacts.

For instance, projects need to procure environment clearances under the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification, 2006, from the MoEF irrespective of the nature of land involved. Consent needs to be taken from the Pollution Control Boards of the area under the Air and Water Acts as well as the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, and Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.

Also required are clearances related to wildlife, hazardous waste and so on. Besides, project authorities need a "no objection" clearance from the local gram panchayats.

But what often happens is that for projects involving both forest and non-forest land, project authorities initiate construction activity on non-forest land while they await forest clearance to be issued under the FCA. Their justification is that work is being carried on while the approval is pending.

But this logic doesn't really work. And it is this issue which Section 4.4 addresses. The Guidelines to the FCA now state: "Some projects involve use of forest land as well as non-forest lands. State Governments/Project Authorities sometimes start work on non-forest land in anticipation of the approval of the Central Government for the release of forest land required for the project. Though the provisions of the Act may not be technically violated by starting work on non-forest land, expenditure incurred on works in the non-forest land may prove to be infructuous if diversion of forest land is not approved. It has therefore

been decided that if a project involves forest as well as non-forest land, work should not be started on non-forest land till the approval of the Central Government for the release of forest land under the Act has been given."

MoEF's letter of 21 March sets right the confusion caused by an earlier letter on 6 January issued by the Forest Conservation Division of the MoEF which had replaced the categorical guide-



line that work should not be started if there is no forest clearance, with the word that it was "advisable" not to begin work.

This had attracted a fair bit of criticism as it was seen as diluting an important aspect of project related decision-making.

But what is important to note is that the implementation of the Section 4.4 guidelines has been marred with controversy. Several project authorities have chosen to disregard its existence.

One clear example is the case of bauxite mining in the Niyamgiri Hills by Orissa Mining Corporation (OMC) for the purpose of feeding the requirements of Vedanta's alumina refinery located in Lanjigarh. Vedanta had at first proposed to carry out the mining but after a long legal tussle the Supreme Court allowed mining only if it was done by the OMC while engaging a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) with Vedanta's subsidiary, Sterlite Industries.

In late 2009, the MoEF issued a press statement during the winter session of Parliament stating that construction activity had been carried out on non-forest land without the final approval under the FCA. This was because at that stage the company had received an "in principle" (Stage I) and not the final approval (Stage II) to initiate mining activity. The MoEF's statement was based on a site inspection report by its regional office. It contended that the construction activity was in con-

travention of Section 4.4 Guidelines.

What is ironic is that Section 4.4 was invoked in three petitions when construction for the Lanjigarh refinery by Sterlite Industries was first challenged before the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Court.

In 2004, the contention of R. Sreedhar from the Academy for Mountain Environics was that the refinery project was linked to mining in Niyamgiri.

This was stated in a 2003 EIA report done by Tata AIG Risk Management Services. Neither the refinery, nor the mining had received forest clearance under FCA which made the construction of the refinery even in non-forest land illegal.

Later, as legal proceedings progressed, Sterlite managed to delink the refinery's connect with mining to save at least one of their approvals. The refinery has been up and running for several years now. Section 4.4 could not stop the refinery from coming up in Lanjigarh in the first place.

More recently on 1st November, the Machimar Adhikhar Sangarsh Samiti (MASS) has written to Jayanthi Natarajan, Union Minister for

Environment, pointing to the illegal construction activity being carried out by OPG Power Gujarat Pvt Ltd in Bhadreshwar, Mundra taluka, in the ecologically fragile Kutch district of Gujarat.

The company initiated construction activity after they received environment clearance for the plant and approval under the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification, 1991, for the construction of an intake/outflow pipeline.

However, the company applied for the diversion of 3.6768 hectares of forest land only on 17 October, 2011. A Right to Information (RTI) application received on 24 October, 2011, from the Office of the Chief Conservator of Forests, states that since the company's application was received only on 17 October, no action has been taken on it, implying clearly that the forest clearance process was far from complete. The application was filed by Kiritsinh Naruba Jadeja of Bhadreshwar.

Some may argue that Section 4.4 is only a guideline and therefore not binding. But shouldn't project authorities and regulatory bodies understand the precautionary principle that guide this Section? Or do project authorities take it for granted that once environment clearance is granted, clearances for forest land diversion will just follow? ■

Kanchi Kohli works and writes on environment, forest, and biodiversity governance issues. In her writing, she seeks to explore the interface between industrialisation and its impact on both local communities and ecosystems.

Nomads in school fix

KUNZES DOLMA

TSERING Gurmat is a school dropout. Nothing uncommon except that Tsering had to leave school because a new residential school got established in the neighbourhood. The irony is not lost on Tsering's parents who had hoped to give their child the education they themselves didn't get.

In the remote Himalayan region of Changthang in Ladakh, many nomadic parents, wiser after a lifetime of harsh life in sub-zero temperatures, face the dilemma of leaving their children behind in the new residential primary school or taking them along in their seasonal trek across the hills with their livestock.

On one hand they depend heavily on children to share their work load. Children are tasked with the duty of grazing livestock across the ranges of Changthang. But there is also growing realization among nomadic parents that education is perhaps the key to a better, certainly easier, future for their children. A way of life that sustained them for 2,000 years may not quite be working as well now, they reflect.

Nearly 150 Changpa families, nomadic pastoralists who trace their origins to Tibet, live alongside 20 Tibetan refugee families in the four villages of Korzok, Rupsho, Kharnak and Alkung close to the breathtaking Tso Moriri lake in eastern Ladakh. This vast grazing ecosystem in the Indian Trans-Himalaya stretches over 22,000 square km. Livestock is the mainstay of the economy. The high-altitude, arid landscape in this cold desert supports little else.

Few families in Korzok lead a settled life. Situated three km from the northwest end of the Tso Moriri Lake at 15,075 ft, this small village is one of the highest permanent settlements in the world. The closest town, Duruk, is over 100 km away and the capital of Leh nearly 150 km. The region is cut off for about eight months a year due to snow.

The Changpas move camp nearly 10 times a year locating green pastures for their yaks, sheep, goats and horses, their robes (small yak-hair tents) dotting the spectacular landscape. Animal produce yields an adequate, indeed sustainable, source of livelihood. Pashmina, or cashmere wool, is the most valuable. Other products include sheep wool, yak wool, curd, butter, and cheese. Children help with numerous tasks and are relied upon to look after aging parents.

Till four decades ago, there were virtually no government facilities for the Changpas in Korzok. In the 1970s, the Jammu & Kashmir State Government set up mobile schools to provide elementary education to nomadic children. The first generation of Changpa children were exposed to mainstream education for the first time. Thoughtfully, the government incorporated the nomadic way of life by moving the school with



the Changpas and their animals every few months. A special tent would be set up for the school where children learnt to read and write in Urdu and their native Bodhi language. The enrollment was not spectacular, but it was a beginning.

Things changed when the government, zealous in its efforts to educate Indians in remote areas, started constructing primary schools. One such school promptly came up in Korzok. It was later upgraded to a middle school. Over the years, the government helpfully proceeded to set up a new Centralized Residential School in the Puga, intended to cater to all nomadic families in the region – no mean feat in the barely connected arid grasslands.

But it resulted in the suspension of all mobile schools. Tsering's baffled parents now had to make a tough choice. Should they leave their child behind in the residential school for nine months for a mainstream education? Or should they carry on with the familiar and, so far, sustainable, nomadic life that required children to help with family chores? Tsering's parents opted for the latter. And Tsering left school to move on with the herd. Many children ended up not enrolling at all.

Some Changpa families did choose modern education instead of a nomadic lifestyle for their children. About 90 students, between four and 16, now study at the nomadic residential school.

Many Changpa parents fear that if they put their children in the residential school they won't learn anything about their traditional life. Such parents prefer the mobile schools which move with them so that their children reap the benefits of modern education and also learn the nomadic way of life.

The Changpas are not an isolated case. South Asia has the world's largest nomadic population. India alone is estimated to have over 60 million nomads, belonging to over 350 formally identified nomadic groups. Studies indicate that many children who never enroll in school come from communities with livelihoods that require them to move from place to place.

India's landmark Right to Education Act (RTE) in 2009 committed the state to ensure that all children from six to 14 years of age have access to basic education. In line with this, under the central government's flagship education scheme, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, innovative means were tried to include children who were in particularly challenging circumstances. The implementation of these initiatives, however, leaves much to be desired.

In a recent review of education schemes, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah reaffirmed his government's commitment to achieving 100 percent enrolment of boys and girls at the primary level by using central government schemes. Currently, 65.67 per cent of children are enrolled. "The state government is keen to revive the mobile school scheme and help children of migratory population to receive education throughout the year without any break," he said.

The mobile schools of Jammu and Kashmir are an innovative step in the right direction but lack effective implementation. Meanwhile nomadic parents in Changthang continue to balk at the choice they are being forced to make: modern schools or the wisdom of their ancestors. ■

Charkha Features

Living

- Books
- Eco-tourism
- Film
- Theatre
- Ayurveda

Chef lights up humble kitchen

PHOTOGRAPHS BY: SHAMIK BANERJEE

Vidya Vishwanath
Gurgaon

WE are standing on a sunny terrace in an underprivileged colony in Gurgaon, the swanky satellite city in Delhi's National Capital Region (NCR). Getting here involved haggling with drivers of Gurgaon's unmetered autorickshaws. There is a table on the terrace and standing on it is a vessel full of water. A chicken is soaking inside. Two women, their heads wrapped in a bandana, are standing around a short, well-built young man in jeans. They laugh and joke with him. He speaks only a smattering of Hindi but they seem quite at ease with him. With his dark hair and fair complexion, handsome Guillermo Hidalgo could be easily mistaken for being a Kashmiri.

Hidalgo is actually Spanish. The young women call him William. He is the Executive Chef of Naya Nagar, a Spanish NGO which works with Mera Parivaar, an Indian NGO in Gurgaon. The two NGOs offer vocational training to underprivileged women. One such course is learning how to cook Mediterranean food. And it is Chef Hidalgo who teaches them how to rustle up such exotic and healthy fare for parties.

Hidalgo is paid a salary by Joan Ginesta, a Spanish businessman who runs Marina Textil, a Spanish apparel and accessories company. Ginesta has earmarked eight to 10 per cent of his profits for social work. Hidalgo also cooks for food festivals at the Spanish Chamber of Commerce and for chic restaurants in various cities in India. The Living Room, a restaurant in south Delhi, is soon going to host a Latin American food festival and since the colonial influence runs strong in Latin American cuisine, Hidalgo will present Spanish recipes that are popular in most South American countries.

"Pepper and salt," Hidalgo tells Priya, the younger of the two women on the terrace. She is cutting and cleaning the chicken with



Guillermo with Gayatri, a trainee



Tuna salad in two flavours

RECIPES

Onion and carrot croquettes

Onion: 250 gm
Carrot: 250 gm
Flour: Big spoon
Butter: 40 gm
Milk (cold): 750 ml
Egg: Two
Bread crumbs (clear brown color)
Extra virgin olive oil: 30 gm
Olive oil for frying
Salt & pepper



Fry the chopped onion with some oil until transparent in colour. Add chopped carrot and fry till golden brown, adding some salt and pepper. Once done, open the pan and start making the Bechamel sauce. In the middle of the pan add flour, extra virgin olive oil, butter and mix it all up a bit. Start adding the cold milk stirring constantly till the Bechamel sauce is ready. Spread the mix on a flat tray and keep covered in the fridge for at least three hours. Then, after this time has elapsed, take the mix out from the fridge and make the mix into round medium-sized balls. Dip in beaten egg, roll in bread crumbs and fry the croquettes in oil till golden brown. Remove and place on a paper napkin to soak up the extra oil. Place the croquettes on a plate and serve.

Watermelon gazpacho

Tomato: One kg
Watermelon: 750 gm
Onion: 50 gm
Green pepper: One or two
Cucumber: One
Garlic: 30 gm
Bread: one slice
Extra virgin olive oil: 50 gm
Salt: To taste



Cut the bread and dip in water. Peel all the vegetables, wash in water and place inside a mixer. After a few seconds, open the mixer and add garlic, squeezed bread, olive oil and salt. Close the mixer and churn till all ingredients are completely mashed. Add some cold water till you get the desired texture. Once done, filter the gazpacho through a sieve so the watermelon seeds are removed. Cool in the fridge. Finally, pour the gazpacho into a glass and serve cold.



Guillermo tasting one of his dishes

a large knife. He shows her how to sprinkle the seasoning. Gayatri, the older woman, will not touch the chicken because it is Tuesday, the day when she abstains from non-vegetarian food. Hidalgo and his students are making Spanish-style garlic chicken.

Renu, a third trainee, is in the narrow kitchen adjoining the terrace. There are hardly any pots, pans or gadgets here. Hidalgo pours oil in a well-used wok which is on a gas stove. The flame is high and there are no regulators. Renu puts in the chopped garlic and when the garlic is brown, she tosses in the chicken. As the chicken absorbs the oil, Hidalgo pours in some more oil. The women giggle. "He cannot estimate," Renu says. "He keeps pouring oil again and again."

'This is called Delhicious. We now serve for 30 to 40 people at parties in Gurgaon. Soon we will be in Delhi.'

Hidalgo laughs with them. He probably does not realise the joke is on him, but the camaraderie is infectious. By lunch time he has taught them to make two kinds of tuna salads, garlic chicken and chicken strips with honey and peanut in mustard sauce. Hidalgo then shows them how to present the dishes. He places the chicken strips on a white square disposable

plate in a clump and on the other side he makes a small motif with mustard sauce. Who would say this elegant dish has been turned out in a clean humble kitchen in a poor neighbourhood of Gurgaon?

The women now get to taste the food. "This is rather bland for me," says Priya of the delicate garlic chicken. The women are learning the recipes so that they can help Hidalgo cook for parties where they can cater for Mediterranean food at ₹800 to ₹1,000 per head. "This is called Delhicious. We now serve for 30 to 40 people at parties in Gurgaon. Soon we will be in Delhi and serve for Institutes Cervantes, the official Spanish cultural centre, and the Spanish Embassy, or anyone in Delhi who wants European food," says Hidalgo, who is a hotel management graduate from Barcelona.

About seven women come and learn cooking every morning. On weekends, they help Hidalgo cook for parties. They cook together and Hidalgo packs the food in boxes. A Nepali cook, who holds a second job with them, delivers the packed boxes and unpacks it at the customer's table. He then serves it on the white disposable dishes with the sauces.

Hidalgo loves his job at Naya Nagar because he feels he is making a real difference to people's lives. Priya has just arrived from Bihar and this training in Mediterranean cuisine has opened up an exciting new opportunity for her. Hidalgo's charter from his boss Ginesta is that he has to create a sustainable business which will continue even after he leaves. Challenging yes, but Hidalgo, who came to India as a backpacker a year ago, is not worried. "I do yoga, relax and enjoy living in this country. I love this country," he says.

Hidalgo pauses and then quotes Ramana Maharshi: "Whatever has to happen will happen." ■

Contact: guillehf@hotmail.com

ANT offers crafts and coffee

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

STROLLING into The Ants Crafting Traditions, an ethnic boutique in a happening part of Bangalore, I discovered a bewildering collection of items that reflect the art, culture, craftsmanship and diversity of the northeast. At Ants, there's plenty to catch your fancy. But what's most prominent is the exquisite collection of contemporary apparel, home furnishing, jewellery, pottery and stationary, all handmade by tribes of the northeast. The range is available in alluring designs and prints, smooth textures, colours and durability.

The Ants is a store started under the aegis of the ANT – Action Northeast Trust – a non-profit based in Chirang district of Assam that believes in 'working with the strengths of the weakest.' This initiative of The ANT has merged traditions through Aagor cottons and Endy silk products for several years. The boutique-cum-cafe has been conceptualized by fashion and textile technology graduates, Smitha Murthy and her husband, Pradeep Krishnappa, who went to a tribal region to research a project and discovered their calling. "Our mission is to work for the sustainable and holistic development of rural and voiceless communities mainly in the northeast. We strongly feel that marginalized communities, especially northeast tribes must be mainstreamed, if they and their crafts are to survive," says Pradeep.

Smitha and Pradeep, who is also a designer, manage the store. Combining their business acumen, skills and experiences in fashion and textile technology, the husband-wife duo have transformed The Ants into Bangalore's most distinctive ethnic lifestyle store with a loyal clientele. One can see the rejuvenation of traditional art from the northeast, juxtaposed with contemporary aesthetics and design sensibilities. Right from home decor accessories to bright colours for your apparel, The Ants is a store that will provide you the right combination of ethnic and contemporary design. The merchandise is aesthetically displayed in simple block shelves fashioned out of rubber wood.

The store offers customized products and takes bulk orders too. Smitha and Pradeep scoured the northeastern region to collaborate on a personal level with NGOs, artisan groups, fair trade organizations as well as export manufacturers. The products are mostly handcrafted from natural materials and contract manufactured or culled from traditional artisans, craftsmen and manufacturers from the northeast by them.

SUSHEELA NAIR



Weaving fabric

The ground floor of Ants is divided into three sections. The first is dedicated to apparel, the second to black pottery products and the last section stocks bamboo furniture. The collection of trendy and traditional stone jewellery and accessories are a big draw. Basketry comes from the matrilineal Khasi tribe of Meghalaya, while the Karbis and Dimasas contribute their weaves. There is jewellery from the Kinnjura tribe of Himachal Pradesh. The designer bracelets made with resin beads and semi-precious stones are a big hit.

You can also pick up ethnic kurtis, stoles, scarves and shawls made of Aagor cottons and Endy silks (or Emi silks). There are textiles (designed into skirts, kurtas, cushion covers and more) by Bodo weavers. These fabrics are handwoven by Bodo tribal women on their bamboo looms. The technique used here is extra warp and the motifs are traditional Bodo. Men's kurtas and shirts in Aagor cotton are also available. The store offers a free fitment facility by their in-house tailors.

The Ant's vast repertoire includes an exciting range of products carved out of black pottery by the Thangkul Naga tribes of the Ukhrul region of Manipur. These include earthen pots, tea sets, mugs, jugs, cooking utensils like the griddle, and kettles in quirky shapes which lend a rustic charm to any kitchen. Known as Longpi pottery, it is of royal descent as these products could only be used by the noble families of Manipur. They were mostly used to cook special meat dishes for marriages

SUSHEELA NAIR



Smitha and Pradeep, the enterprising duo in their store

SUSHEELA NAIR



Traditional tribal jewellery

SUSHEELA NAIR



An array of bamboo products

and other festivals. Also, there are mud pots serving sets and candle-holders.

The store features an amazing collection of cane and bamboo basketry by the tribes of Meghalaya besides stocking beautifully designed bamboo baskets in natural shades of green. Also on display are a wide range of hand-crafted furniture made from the bark of trees, exotic looking chairs and doors.

The furnishings and home décor products are made from loin loom woven by the women in Nagaland. These include cushion covers, table runners, napkins, cushions, bamboo coasters, floor mats and more. The section also stocks bamboo mats and coasters, bed mattresses, chair mattresses and floor mats. Besides, there are bark

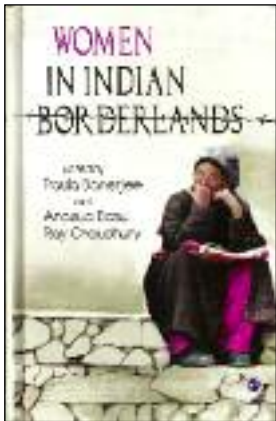
boxes, pen stands, photo frames, wall hangings and diaries that are all handmade. Games like snakes and ladders have been exclusively handmade for children. There are toys for sale made by physically disabled children, so when you buy one, you know you are shopping for a cause. Other interesting items on display are kona reed mats and baskets, a unique craft of Manipur.

Don't miss the store's open cafeteria upstairs. It is worth a visit with its multi-cuisine café offering special recipes prepared everyday by the chef. While you sip refreshing herbal tea, you can browse through the café's collection of myriad books accessed through a tie-up with Blossom, Bangalore's leading bookstore. There is a collection of around 200 books of multiple genres.

The Ant also organizes documentary screenings, book releases and talks relating to responsible tourism, positive stories from the northeast and forgotten communities of India at the Ant store in Bangalore. As a socially responsible organization, Smitha and Pradeep adhere to fair trade practices and support artisans and craftsmen with design intervention and process improvement inputs to upgrade their native skills. The products of The Ants are also marketed through FabIndia, Mother Earth, and Sustainable Threads. ■

Address: The Ants Crafting Traditions, 2023/B, 1st Cross, 14th A Main, HALL 2nd Stage, Indiranagar, Bangalore - 560 038
Tel: 080-4171 5639 / 4152 1742
Store is open from 11 am to 8 pm and the Cafeteria from 9 am to 8.30 pm.

Women in no man's land



WOMEN IN INDIAN BORDERLANDS

Paula Banerjee
and Anasua Basu
Ray Chaudhury
Sage

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

GENDER studies have paid scant attention to women in India's borderlands. Little is known about how they deal with the problems of migration, the excesses of security forces and oppressive household equations.

Paula Banerjee and Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury deserve credit for co-editing a collection of well-researched and analytical pieces on what happens to women in the conflict-ridden borders of West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast. Two of the articles zero in on the Bengal-Bangladesh border, two on the Kashmir-Pakistan border and two others on the Northeast-Myanmar-Bangladesh border. The last section called "Voices" has narratives by women from the India-Bangladesh border as well as a town named Moreh, on the Indo-Myanmar border.

In their introduction to the book, Paula and Anasua, point out, "We felt the need to tell the story of these women who, albeit ordinary, are markers of borders and resist everyday violence in all its multiplicities. ... Women living in the borders are the subject of this series of articles in our book not only because they belong to these perilous territories or the borders but also because in many ways they form them."

In the first chapter, Paula presents the realities of the Bengal-Bangladesh border by going into the history, migratory patterns and demographic statistics of Nadia, Murshidabad and Malda. Population movement in all these three states is a historical reality but so is increasing violence on the borders, she states, which has taken new forms in the post-colonial and post-Partition era. The main area of concern today, she says, has

been reduced to population flows and national security.

"As concerns over the new nation state were translated into concerns over territorial security, in the same way concerns over women's security in the borders were reduced to concerns over trafficking of women for sex," says Paula. In the process other problems were pushed to the background. For instance, the 'disappearance' of women trying to cross the border with neither India nor Bangladesh willing to take them back, sexual violence and exploitation. There are also the much deeper issues such as illiteracy and endemic poverty which weaken the position of women.

In the chapter entitled, "Narrated Time and Constructed Space: Remembering the Communal Violence of 1950 in Hooghly", Anasua studies how Partition widened the chasm between Hindus and

they had made a home.

Anasua puts the narrative approach to good use. For instance, Nafisa, now nearly 80 years old, remembers the riots of 1950. She tells the author that a girl of their locality was burnt alive, people from her community were beaten, plundered and killed while men were thrown into a fire near Mughaltuly. Fortunately she did not lose any relatives in the riot. Eventually she and her family came to the Imambarah for protection.

In many senses Nafisa is a survivor. She has coped with the riots, the departure of her husband and children to Chittagong and then Karachi, and the second marriage of her husband.

Other narratives are more disturbing. Agonised women on the borders speak of rape, sexual assault, abduction, displacement, loss of livelihood due to fencing, abuses at the hands of security forces and sometimes their own families.

Two chapters dedicated to Jammu and Kashmir show how the scars of the Partition of India and Pakistan continue to haunt the people and particularly women on the borders even today. In their essay, Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal and Suchismita cite the instance of Shehnaz, an inhabitant of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir who was unlucky enough to be picked up by the security forces in the Laam sector of Poonch-Rajpouri when she was washed away to the Indian side after a failed suicide attempt.

Subject to sustained interrogation by the forces on the suspicion of being a Pakistani spy, thrown into jail for 15 months, raped by the jail warden, giving birth to a baby girl, shuttled between a Nari Niketan and jails, she was finally released on the basis of a Public Interest Litigation filed by lawyer AK Sawhney.

Her ordeals did not end there. She was refused entry into Pakistan because of her "Indian daughter". Once again flung into an Indian jail, after a protracted legal and diplomatic battle by lawyers and human rights groups she was given permission to return to Pakistan with her daughter. Rejected by her husband and his family, denied emotional support by her brothers, the traumatised Shehnaz finally met a tragic end.

The greatest strength of the book is its ability to contextualize the contemporary issues of women in the borderlands, be it the scourge of AIDS or the impact of globalisation. The stories are numerous, particularly in the section entitled "Voices." While the voices are most often despairing, there are a few of hope and in that lies the future of women relegated to the borders both in real and metaphorical terms. ■

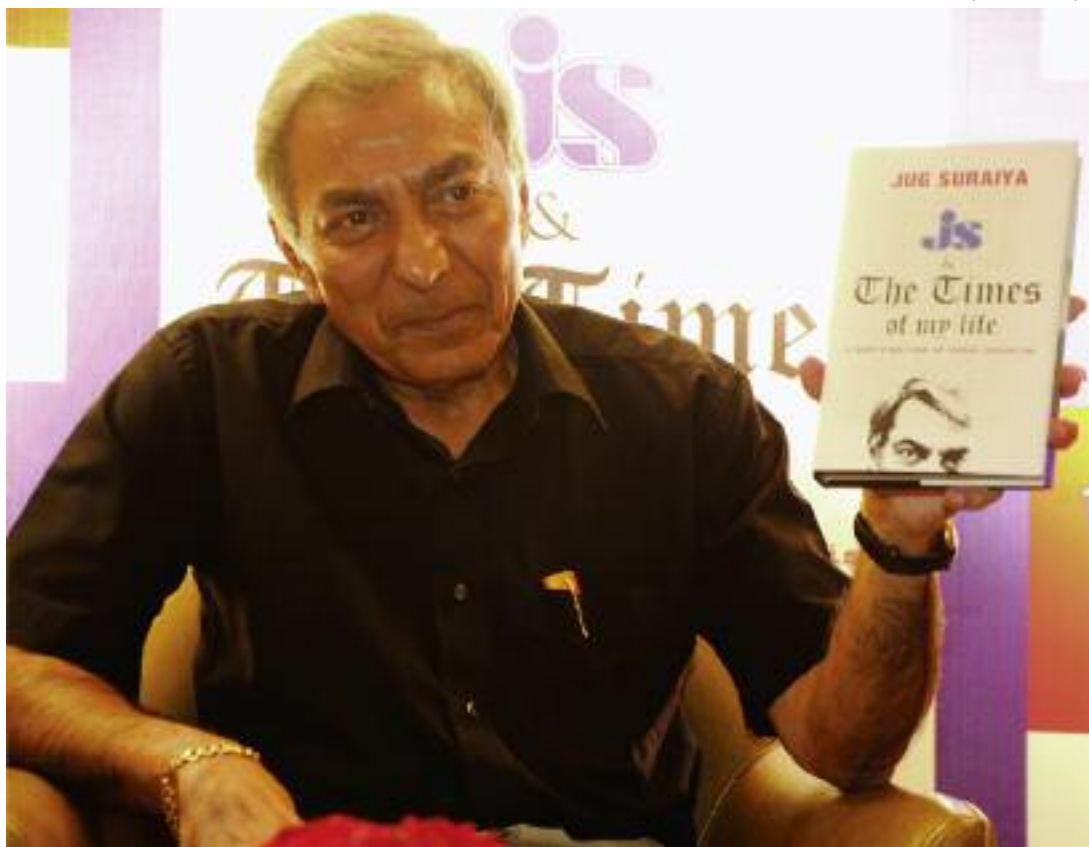


'Women living in the borders are the subject of this series of articles in our book not only because they belong to these perilous territories or the borders but also because in many ways they form them.'

Muslims and the impact this had on the lives of women. To start with she analyses the role of the Imambarah which saved the lives of thousands of Muslims during the communal turbulence of 1950 at Hooghly. The other objective is to unravel how Muslim women dealt with numerous borders – of sect, community, patriarchy and conflicts both between their own land and the place

The wonder years

SHAMIK BANERJEE



Jug Suraiya



**JS & THE TIMES
OF MY LIFE**

Jug Suraiya
Tranquebar Press
₹ 495

Subir Roy
Bangalore

JUG Suraiya has been described as the Art Buchwald of India. He is that and more. Other than having fun at everyone's expense, most of all his own, he has been an accomplished serious writer too. Most recently, he has written an illuminating report on China, which puts in sharp focus where it is and what its citizens' key concerns are. His traveller's account, powered by an arresting metaphor – buy me, we'll settle the price later – says more than many political and economic commentaries are able to do.

Jug belongs to that vanishing tribe of journalists (today they mostly come via journalism school to pursue a carefully thought out career) who are quintessential amateurs, whose parents worried that their offspring wouldn't be able to enter any profession worth the name. After graduating he made a couple of attempts at doing business which ended in hilarious fiascos. He did not want to become a journalist. He is not just intimidated

by the computer, he cannot even type. Yet he has managed to bumble through four decades of distinction mainly by dint of superior intelligence, robust common sense and determination to take an unstructured view of life.

Perhaps the most important part of Jug's professional life and the bit that readers will seek out foremost in these memoirs is the story of the birth, rise and sudden death of *JS*, the snappier name by which the *Junior Statesman* came to be called shortly after it started. Jug strayed into it after college when he was looking for almost anything that would fetch him an income so he could marry Bunny. The credit for seeing the talent in him of course goes to Desmond Doig – writer, photographer, artist and leader of men – who was the founder and keeper of the *JS* from beginning to end.

Perhaps the most important part of Jug's professional life and the bit that readers will seek out foremost in these memoirs is the story of the birth, rise and sudden death of *JS*.

The question that has mystified an entire generation and more which can remember the late sixties and particular the Calcutta of those times, is how could a phenomenon like the *JS*, which was such an obvious winner from day one, be closed down without any perceivable good reason. *JS* was described as the magazine that thought young and was even credited with inventing the Indian teenager. Till then you were either too young to be taken seriously or too old to have any sense of fun left in you. It quickly became the hub of a powerful network of not just those who were young but also those who thought young long before social networking became viral.

It is best to let Jug say in his own words what the *JS* meant and why it was put to death. "If I had to use one word to describe the *JS* it would be Camelot. The promise of a once and future kingdom, the kingdom of youth. We shall always remember when we were young. And when young no longer, we shall know that youth itself always lives on. Forever ending, forever enduring, with its astonishment, and its anger, and its pangs of joy sharp as pain. This is what *JS* was, and is, and always shall be – Camelot."

And why did C. R. Irani, who was brought in as managing director to rescue *The Statesman* from the commies, kill the *JS*? "Desmond not only had a bigger public image than the MD – the effective publisher-owner of *The Statesman* and the *JS* – but was seen, rightly or wrongly, as becoming a bigger brand name than the organisation itself.... The real reason for the killing of *JS*, I believe, was the perceived threat of himself being overshadowed by Desmond that ultimately caused the MD to signed the magazine's death warrant."

After the death of *JS*, Jug shifted to *The Statesman* where he became an assistant editor, one of the most coveted positions in Indian journalism while the paper was still considered the topmost. He became part of the tribe who wrote the paper's famed editorials. Then in the late eighties he shifted to the *Times of India* in Delhi where he has remained since then. Jug is known around the country mainly by his writings in the *Times* and his memoirs devote a fair amount of space to those years but my sense is that despite the long years there, in his heart and soul he has remained an outsider. This is perhaps because the *Times* does not have a core, it is turned inside out, a phenomenal marketed entity which faces away from its inner self as there is no inner self.

Despite also starting my working life in *The Statesman* and being from Calcutta, I met Jug only after I moved to Delhi and the *Times* in the late eighties. Thereafter our friendship has grown, nurtured by our shared love for good whisky. Right now both he and I are waiting for his next visit to Bangalore so that we three – he, Bunny and I – can do justice to the bottle of Amrut Fusion, the globally feted single malt whisky out of Karnataka which I have been able to acquire with some difficulty. I am sure it will have the same lightness that Jug's writing does. ■

GREEN CURES

Calcium and osteoporosis

Dr G. G. GANGADHARAN

OSTEOPOROSIS or porous bone is a condition characterized by low bone mass and structural deterioration of bone tissue which leads to fragile bones and an increased susceptibility to fractures especially of the hip, spine, and wrist. Men as well as women suffer from osteoporosis which can be prevented and treated.



includes oleation (Snehana); Sudation (Swedana) and mild purificatory therapies (Mrudu Sodhanam).

The treatment as prescribed in Ayurveda works in two different ways:

- By making available sufficient calcium in a bio-available form.
- By consoling the vaata through the process of oral

medical unctuation.

This two-pronged process brings in equilibrium so as to harmonize the intracellular exchange of calcium ions (Ca++), which stabilize the calcium absorption mechanism of the body.

There are two layers of calcium absorption in the body. One, from the digested food to the bloodstream, and the other from the bloodstream to the respective bone tissues. To make this happen in an appropriate way, the calcium absorbed has to go through the seven layers of digestion, from Rasa to Majja.

It is in this process that the mineral calcium gets converted into bio-assimilable and Ca++ ions which can be absorbed by the bone tissues and can make it part of the bhutas. Ayurveda explains clearly the concept of Pachakagni at the gastrointestinal tract where a partial conversion of calcium into biologically active calcium subsequently through the action of Bhutagni takes place, and the Ca++ ions are formed to be assimilated by bone tissues.

For this to happen, palliation of vaata and the availability of Asthithanmatras (Ca) are essential. Both these are made possible by Gandhathailam, a classical preparation available in South Indian traditional pharmacies.

Gandhathailam is an excellent example of the genius of our Acharyas. The ingredients of Gandhathailam can take care of all the three basic factors that cause osteoporosis.

- **Vaata:** Since its base is thaila, this is itself enough to reduce Vaata Kopa.
- **Agni deepana:** Ingredients like Nagabala, Sarala, Shatahva, Kushta, Kunkuma, Pathra etc. improve the agni at Koshta level and Dhatu level.
- **Asthi Dhatuvridhi:** Ingredients like Nalada, Nagabala, Manjishta, Madhuka etc. will add to the lost calcium molecules of the Asthidhatu. ■

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WONDER PLANT

Ode to rose

THE rose epitomizes poetry, romance and art. It has historically been a symbol of pomp and pageantry. Rose flowers are an important ingredient of several cosmetics and medicines. Roses are used for making perfumes, essential oils, rose water and other cosmetics. In Indian tradition paan (betel leaves) are chewed after eating food. The rose product, 'gulkand' is an important ingredient of sweet paan which most of us relish. Rose flowers are also used in cooking.

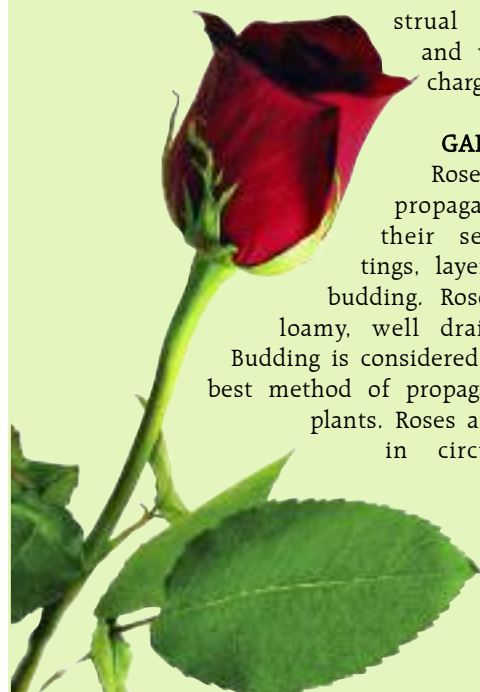
PROPERTIES: Roses have a diuretic effect on the body as they contain Vitamin C, pectin, malic and citric acid. Roses clear toxins and heat. As a result, roses have a cooling effect on the body. The rose flower can relieve sore throat, runny nose and blocked bronchial tubes. Roses are useful to people prone to chest problems since they fight infections. Rose tea helps to combat digestive tract infections and re-establish the normal bacterial population of the intestines.

Rose petals also relieve fluid retention and hasten the elimination of waste through the kidneys. Practitioners of naturopathy and herbal therapy say that the rose is a wonderful remedy for dysentery, diarrhoea and gastroenteritis. As it is a laxative, it is a remedy for all liver problems including sluggishness and constipation.

The Red Indian rose is sweet, cool, pungent and slightly bitter. After digestion, it produces sweet (Vipak) juice which has a beneficial effect on the intestines, improving digestion and metabolism. Roses are easy to digest, due to their sweet, pungent and bitter taste. The flower is also a heart tonic. It helps the nervous system as well. Roses can combat fatigue, lethargy, muscular aches, biliousness, itching and heat-related conditions. Roses are also used for gynaecological problems

such as heavy menstrual discharge and white discharge.

GARDENING: Rose plants are propagated by their seeds, cuttings, layers and by budding. Roses require loamy, well drained soil. Budding is considered to be the best method of propagating rose plants. Roses are planted in circular pits



AYURVEDA AND OSTEOPOROSIS

It is very heartening to note that Ayurveda has excellent measures for managing the condition of osteoporosis and it is high time that Ayurveda proclaimed its significance in treating this condition.

There is need for creating awareness about the significance of taking wholesome food based on Ayurvedic principles and for projecting the capacity of Ayurveda to provide micro-nutrition at the level of bone tissue. This is a unique feature of Ayurveda. The approach in Ayurveda is to improve the Dhatwagni (tissue metabolism) at all seven levels.

This has to start with the improvement of Jataragni (digestive fire). Once Jataragni is improved, it proportionately improves other agnis as well.

The ideal medicines should be those which penetrate through all these tissues and ultimately enrich the Asthidhatu (bone tissues). If such medication is administered after basti karma (medicated enema), it can reach the level of the bone tissues and rectify the problem.

MEDICINE

Osteoporosis being one of the Vaata predominant diseases, its general treatment



about 60 to 90 cm across and 60 to 75 cm deep. Remove all broken and bruised leaves while planting. Roses require at least six hours of direct sunlight for growth. The best time to plant roses is from September to October. The rose plant needs cutting from time to time. It requires manure and fertilizer at the time of planting.

SELF HELP: Rose water has certain antiseptic and anti-bacterial properties. This is why it is useful in curing certain skin problems.

FOR FAIR COMPLEXION: Wash the rose flower (one or two). Pluck out the petals and the middle portion of the flower. Mix with two or three teaspoons of powdered oats. Grind, make a paste and apply this pack all over your face. Wait for 10 to 15 minutes and then wash the mask off with cold water.

COOLANT FOR EYES: Wash eyes with clean water in an eye cup or with hands. Take the rose water, spray on a piece of cotton swab and place it uniformly on your eyes for 20 minutes. Relax and enjoy the coolness and cast off all your thoughts and worries.

FOR SCARS ON FACE: Take one or two teaspoons of multani mitti. Add one teaspoon of milk and one teaspoon of rose water. Mix together and apply uniformly on the face. Leave on for 15 to 30 minutes. Wash with cold water and dry with cotton cloth. Repeated use of this recipe will give your skin a glow and reduce scar marks on your face.

FOR CONSTIPATION: Children with bad food habits usually end up with bowel problems. Give one teaspoon of gulkand every day, morning and evening, to the child. Adults too can have gulkand every day.

COOL SUMMER DRINK: You can make a colourful drink by adding one teaspoon of gulkand and one teaspoon of honey into the milk. Shake this drink and chill with a few ice cubes. The kids will enjoy this chilled, colourful summer drink. Elders will relish it too. ■

Noorunnisa Begum S

LOOK GOOD

Eye care

EYES are the mirror of the soul. In Ayurveda, eyes are the seat of Alochaka Pitta. Follow these steps for good eye care:

- Wake up before sunrise. Fill your mouth with water, close your eyes and sprinkle cold water on them about 10 to 15 times.
- Maintain regular bowel habits. Taking triphala mixed with honey/ghee/milk acts as a Netra Rasayana.
- Consume vitamins, including Vitamin A and essential minerals. Take steamed or boiled food, fruits and green vegetables. Drink enough water.
- Eat your dinner at least two hours before going to bed. Do not stay up till late at night.
- Do not wash your hair with very hot water.
- Do regular eye exercises

First step: Blink, move your eyeballs right and left, upwards and downwards, rotating your eyes in a clockwise and anti-clockwise direction. Simultaneously, inhale and exhale slowly.

Second step: Rub your palms against each other till they become warm. Cover your eyes with your

warm palms for about a minute.

Third step: Walking increases blood supply to your eyes.

- Do not stare continuously while looking at long distance objects. Avoid reading or writing in improper or insufficient light.

Give your eyes a 20 to 30 minutes break while looking at the computer screen. Look at an object far away instead.

- Give your eyes a 20 to 30 minutes break while looking at the computer screen. Look at an object far away instead. Blink 12 to 15 times every minute. Fix an anti-glare screen on your monitor or use anti-glare glass while working on your computer.

- Avoid reading in a moving vehicle. Use plain glasses while riding two wheelers. On a long journey in summer

always use sunglasses. Avoid using headphones while driving. Protect your eyes from dust, smoke, sunlight and wind. Avoid smoking.

- For any eye symptoms, consult your doctor. Never use eye medicines without consulting a doctor. For dry eyes, gently massage castor oil on your eyeballs. For tired eyes, soak a little cotton in rose water and keep over closed eyes. Avoid vigorous rubbing of eyes. ■

Dr Rekha, RMO, IHC, I-AIM

ORGANIC CHEF

Soup and curry

CARROT ASPARAGUS SOUP

Ingredients:

- Asparagus: 400 gm
- Carrots: 100 gm
- Onion: 30 gm
- Green gram flour: 30 gm
- Cow's ghee: 30 gm
- Milk: 300 ml
- Pepper: A pinch
- Rock salt: As required
- Coriander leaves: Chopped for garnishing

METHOD: Clean all the vegetables. Chop and boil with 2 cups of water. Once the vegetables are tender, cool and blend it in a mixer. Heat a heavy bottomed pan. Add ghee and melt on a low flame. Add green gram flour and cook it for a minute. Add hot milk and cook till thick.

Add pureed vegetables to the white sauce by stirring constantly. Strain the mixture through a sieve. Boil the sieved mixture and garnish with chopped coriander leaves.

Indication: This soup is excellent for post-menopausal syndrome, for lactating mothers and for women with Pitha Prakruti. It nourishes the tissues, cools down the system and helps in body tis-

sue regeneration.

DRUMSTICK LEAVES CURRY

Ingredients:

- Toor dal: 1/2 cup
- Drumstick leaves: 1 bunch (remove the stem and separate the leaves)
- Turmeric powder: 1/4 tsp
- Chilli powder: 1 tsp
- Grated coconut: 1/2 cup
- Jeera: 1/4 tsp
- Small onions: 6
- Coconut oil
- Salt

METHOD: Boil toor dal with turmeric, chilli powder and sufficient water. Once the dal has boiled, add drumstick leaves and salt with one more cup of water and cook for some time. Then add ground coconut with jeera and boil for 3 to 4 minutes. Heat oil in a pan. Fry small onions till brown. Pour this mix into the curry. Serve with rice or roti.

Indication: This is slightly hot in nature and contra-indicated for people with piles, acidity and very lean body. For people who are obese and stout this is a very soothing dish. ■

PRODUCTS

CAMEL CORNER

FOR centuries, the gawky camel has served society, shipping people and goods across stormy deserts. Eulogised in song and prose, the camel is now fading from memory. It is becoming extinct. Pastures have vanished and people have little use for camels. But a group of NGOs in Pali district of Jaisalmer are helping.

"The camel population has gone up after the project started," says Dr Ilse Kohler-Rollefson, of the League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock. A Camel Breeders Association, the Lokhit Pashu Palak Sansthan and Camel Carishma are providing healthcare to sick and diseased camels. To boost incomes they are selling camel milk and planning to make camel milk ice cream. "The camel eats 36 different plants. It's milk is medicinal," says Dr Kohler-Rollefson. They are making creamy soap with camel's milk.

Elephant Poo, an enterprise which produces paper from elephant dung has helped them to produce Camel Poo or paper made from camel dung.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY: SHAMIK BANERJEE

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WEAVING MAGIC

FOR the first time a few people from leprosy affected colonies came themselves to Delhi's Nature Bazaar. They wanted to study current trends in fashion and produce contemporary designs which would attract urban buyers, says Jyodan Singh from Raxaul in East Champaran, Bihar. He says thanks to the Sasakawa India Leprosy Foundation, leprosy affected people are learning all sorts of skills to earn and contribute to society. A weaver himself he teaches spinning and weaving to the leprosy affected people.

On display were a range of products like shawls, blankets and mufflers which were bought by middle-class shoppers. In villages too the stigma against people affected by leprosy is subsiding. Jyodan Singh says in Motihari district, Bihar, one such colony is running a dairy and supplying milk to people. The local district magistrate had a meal with the leprosy affected people and that broke the ice.

Contact: Sasakawa Leprosy India Foundation, S-260, First Floor, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110017 Phone: 011-26013440 Email: workingmagic@silf.in
Website: www.silf.in

Solid waste collection Community participation by the residents of Kadakola to clean the village



Kadakola is a major panchayat in the Mysore District of Karnataka. It is one of the 56 villages adopted by the Srinivasan Services Trust (SST) in Karnataka.

This panchayat has 903 households and 80 commercial shops. Every day the panchayat generates about 1.5 tons of solid waste. In the absence of any regular system of cleaning a huge amount of solid waste had accumulated in the village. It posed a serious health hazard.

SST interacted with the members of Self Help Groups (women and men groups), and constituted a Village Development Committee (VDC), comprising of members of various Self Help Groups, the asha worker, the anganwadi worker, school teachers and the elected representatives of the panchayat. Now, the VDC meets every month. Its major concern was disposal of the solid waste. After a few meetings the VDC, on the advice of SST, resolved to collect Rs.30/- per month for commercial shop and Rs.10/- per month from each household. The amount so collected was resolved to be used for ensuring regular clearance of garbage and composting the degradable solid waste.



SST on its part contributed a cycle cart with dust bins. Each household segregates its garbage in two packets viz., degradable and non degradable categories. A person has been appointed by the VDC to collect it from each household. Now the cleaning is regularly carried out in six streets of the panchayat. The collected garbage is transported to a distance of 750m and deposited in compost pits.

The community's initiative has helped to resolve a long standing issue of the village.

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Asha Hansda
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