

Civil Society



MAKING CITIES SAFER

Design as vital as
tough policing



'CASH TRANSFER SHOWS UID MESS ON THE GROUND'

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Angry protesters in New Delhi have been asking for better policing and speedy justice in rape cases. While policing needs to improve, safety also comes from the built environment.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Bigger strategy needed for cities

TO find lasting solutions to the problem of crime in our cities, the recent rape and death of a young woman in New Delhi needs to be seen as the failure of urban management. Better policing, tougher laws and speedy justice are very important and much needs to be done quickly for all three. But by themselves, they are not the only solution. The built environment contributes in a big way to safety in a city. So, the layouts of residential neighbourhoods and business districts, availability of reliable public transport, use of road space, location of bus stops and metro stations, lighting and so on provide a context in which it becomes easier to prevent crime and citizens feel more secure.

In this month's cover story we have explored the latest thinking and taken examples from around the world of how cities are using design, psychology and social behaviour to deal with issues of safety. It is important to note that in all major cities serious efforts are made to balance public transport with safety. And in those where the balance is achieved through firm policing, better design and choice of technologies a greater sense of well-being prevails.

Cities are important because they are symbols of an economy's competitiveness. Cities drive growth, attract talent, provide innovations. A third of India already lives in urban spaces and there are differences in income and access to contend with. Urban management is therefore complex and challenging. It is this magazine's belief that in India we need to learn from the experience of cities elsewhere in the world. Our special issue, Future City, four years ago, showed that it is indeed possible to do so.

The management of cities requires vision, mission and expertise across diverse domains. Indian cities are seriously deficient on all three counts and therefore we find them in the mess that they are today. A year or so ago, *Civil Society* published a series of articles by V. Ravichandar of City Connect on how municipalities lacked architects, planners and engineers who were trained to deal with civic issues in contemporary ways. It is equally necessary to improve the political status of the Mayor and Councillor who should take the lead in implementing innovative solutions to problems at ground level. As of now, decentralisation of power and resources exists only in the Constitution. The political reality is very different. A perception change is required so as to attract better talent which can get down to serious work.

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Nizamuddin

Your cover story, 'Going wow in Nizamuddin,' depicts how conservation can improve people's lives. This effort by the Aga Khan Foundation truly deserves an award. Conservation and socio-economic development has been done with great sensitivity. Imagine, the project opens up a massive green space right in the heart of the city. I really envy the citizens of the capital.

Firoza Khalid, Mumbai

This conservation work has been done in a very practical manner. It is an excellent example for other cities and historic towns in India to follow. I hope the Aga Khan Foundation will showcase its conservation project to MLAs of all State Assemblies.

Shaina Maini

The Aga Khan Development Network is playing a vital role for Nizamuddin Basti.

Mohsin Qureshi

I wish the Aga Khan Foundation the best of luck for their good work.

Ghazanfar Salam

RSBY scheme

Your interview with Anil Swarup on the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) was very interesting. In fact, as an RSBY team member I feel proud to be part of such a great scheme.

Balagam Rammohan

Panchayats online

The interview with Sam Pitroda clearly shows that panchayat connectivity is going to be the next big thing in the communications industry. This project is lucky to have peo-

ple like Sam developing the infrastructure for it. This is a good cause. It will move the nation towards an open and transparent society.

Aman

Specs for ₹99

I thought your story, 'Spectacles for just ₹99,' was a very nice initiative by VisionSpring.

Ranjit Kumar Pattanaik

VisionSpring should expand all over rural India. Eyesight is critical to people's well-being and livelihood.

Shanta

Childline

The story of Childline fascinated me when I engaged with them 12 years ago and continue to do so today. I draw inspiration from them. I pray that Childline stays child-focused and child-centred even as it grapples with process, technology, funds and all other critical tasks.

Shikha Aleya

No CCI

With reference to Kanchi Kohli's article, 'Who needs a CCI', the

Government of India is planning to corporatise the entire country destroying natural resources at the cost of the common people's lives and livelihood. We have to now struggle against the CCI or an NIB.

Prafulla Samantara

Hairy rambutan

This is with reference to Shree Padre's story, 'South India takes to the hairy rambutan'. It is good to see such developments happen. We are one of the leading retail chains in Bangalore and other cities in India. We operate stores under the name 'Auchan'. I would welcome progressive farmers who have rambutan orchards in yielding stage to contact us on email.

Ponnu Subramanian,

(pons@maxhypermarkets.com)

Not much research has been done on the post-harvest shelf life or physiology and biochemistry of rambutan. Along with concerted efforts to grow the fruit and trade in it, a serious effort to extend its very poor shelf life along with product development studies is most important.

Dr K.K. Surendranathan Kaimal

INTERVIEW / NIKHIL DEY In five districts just 500**'Cash transfer pilots show UID**

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Union government's direct cash transfer scheme linked to the Unique Identification (UID) number was launched with much fanfare in January with pilots in five districts of Rajasthan. The government believes this initiative is a game changer, which will successfully plug leakages in delivering entitlements to the poor and pluck out fake beneficiaries.

Activists working at ground level have a different story to tell. The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) has been watching the government's ambitious pilots unfold with dismay.

Nikhil Dey of the MKSS witnessed the implementation of the direct cash transfer scheme in Kotkasim in Alwar district of Rajasthan. The procedure of getting money for kerosene was full of hassles for people. Nearly 80 per cent just gave up. The government announced its pilot a success, says Dey, but the truth is that the poor had been deprived of their entitlement.

Dey believes the best way of transferring entitlements to the poor is by strengthening existing delivery mechanisms – the Public Distribution System (PDS) banking and post offices. It is also better to rely on people's monitoring to curb corruption than on a wired bureaucracy.

Extracts from an interview:

Why have you been so critical of the Union government's direct cash transfer scheme?

The essential question is – when you are doing something big you will ask of what benefit is this to the beneficiary? And I have not yet got an answer from anyone. The beneficiaries of NREGA or the PDS are already getting their wages or rations. These 38 schemes were already getting what they were getting. You have only added a new headache for the poor – go get yourself registered, get this UID number and start using your thumb impression. That thumb impression depends on machines working and connectivity working. Even if it all works people have got no additional benefit. So why have it?

What is being done in India does not fall into any traditional cash transfer scheme, globally. In South America, Brazil and Mexico governments already provide cash transfers, goods and services. But there are many poor people who don't manage to take advantage of those partly because their incomes are so low. So those governments provide an additional cash transfer to poor people on condition that they send their children to school or go to the hospital. But that does not in any way function as a substitute for those services. In fact those services have to be of quality.



Nikhil Dey: 38 schemes were already cash transfers

Here in India in the government's so-called pilots, where they have changed the name from cash transfer to cash benefit transfer, they are doing nothing new. Pensions were already being given through bank accounts or post offices, scholarships too through bank accounts so this whole slogan of '*Aapka paisa aapke haath*' was already there. They have not sorted out the vagaries of the banking system either.

The only new thing being done here is the UID base which has nothing to do with cash transfer. Around 38 schemes were already cash schemes. Even in the NREGS the worker gets wages in cash, in his or her bank account or post office account. It is just much ado about nothing in one sense.

You have not approved of schemes being linked to the UID?

In the first week of January in five districts of Rajasthan where they did the pilots the number of people who got cash transfer was a miniscule 500. None of them had seeded the UID number with the bank account number. It was not seeded organically which means when you open your bank account you also get your UID identity. Neither was it seeded inorganically which means later the bank and the government converge the two numbers. So what did they do?

They say we have a broken delivery system and we are fixing it through this UID system that will somehow make it more efficient, that it is a magical game changer. But actually you have done nothing.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

beneficiaries. Is that a game changer? mess, the poor don't benefit'

ing. You should have started your pilot two years from now when you were ready and then shown us in your pilot if it was a game changer.

But those who support the UID-linked cash transfers say it will monitor and prevent leakages in the system, curb corruption etc.

You need to understand that there has to be 100 per cent threshold of enrollment and complete functional operability. The reason is that if a person's thumb impression is not legitimate, he or she will not get the benefit. If your machine is not working, or if I am not registered, or my thumb impression does not show up, then what will they do?

They say they will use manual overheads. So if their machines don't work, they say we have to pay this person his wage entitlement so we won't take the thumb impression we'll take it that this person is who he says he is. As soon as you do that your system has collapsed because all those who are frauds will come in through manual overheads.

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) itself accepts that under the best circumstances only 90 per cent of people's thumb impressions will come. According to their own estimate on their website prints of the first two fingers didn't show for 45 per cent of people. So you can imagine the case when you have to keep looking for the best finger.

But lets take their figure of 10 per cent. Those people are not going to go away without their wages or entitlements. If you do manual overheads, how do you know who this 10 per cent is?

And once you have got this super machine system worked out, then you actually stop looking at any of the manual systems. But the truth is in countries like India all these systems fail and this is the best-case scenario. You don't have connectivity, machines fall apart, our computers get viruses, and we are not even paying poor people through that. So tomorrow when people start doing fraud on your system – and we have never had a foolproof system – what are you going to do in this vast huge country?

But there are leakages in the PDS for instance...

First, lets acknowledge there are no additional benefits to the beneficiary.

Alright. But isn't the UID Aadhaar card useful as a form of identity?

They are saying it is giving an identity to an identity-less person. Who are these persons? They are in urban centres, the homeless and so on. Actually the homeless don't have any identity because no one is acknowledging UID as an identity. It is being acknowledged as an 'identification' process.

It does not give you an identity. It merely says

you are who you say you are. Even if it is giving a card to a segment of the population who never had any card at all, why should it be thrust on everyone else? People have Voter ID cards, ration cards, and so on.

This idea of having one card instead of multiple cards is problematic. My ration card records how much ration I have got. My bank passbook records my banking details. I can open it and see it. My job card shows how many days I worked and how much I got paid. It is not on some computer but in my hand. I don't want to replace it with some plastic card that does not give me an idea of my transactions. The cards are proof in my hand. I will require them in any case.

In these five districts in Ajmer, Udaipur, Alwar, where the cash benefit transfer was being done, the administration was doing nothing except this

'You have only added a new headache for the poor – go get yourself registered, get this UID number and start using your thumb impression.'

for two months. It is still doing nothing else and is unable to cope. This a huge cost.

You can open a bank account using your UID.

It could help you open a bank account. But actually banks are also asking for ration cards and other proofs. If somebody does not have any other KYC, (Know Your Customer) credentials let the banks agree to use the UID. Then we will see how many enroll. But don't make it compulsory for welfare schemes. If you tell me I won't get my rations if I don't have the UID number then you are putting a gun to my head. It is no longer an option but compulsory for the poor.

If they are shifting subsidies into cash then in our opinion it will be a disaster. The reason we have government is so that it delivers health, education and food. For the government to throw up its hands and say we can't deliver so we want to give you cash is completely unacceptable. It makes the whole selection of who will get that benefit very difficult.

They want to give cash for the PDS too on the excuse that it does not work. The PDS system was started to provide subsidized food grain all over the country. So first you acknowledge your failure

(in making the system work).

There are difficult states where the PDS has been turned around. Not just Tamil Nadu but basket cases like Chhattisgarh and Odisha because of political will.

We believe that the government wants to shift to cash to cut subsidies. They are trying to claim it is because of leakages. They are replacing the subsidized system with a market system. And this system comes with huge vulnerabilities for the poor.

For people like us monitoring is people's monitoring, not a machine. We say put everything in the public domain. When a NREGA worker goes to collect his wages, 30 people from his village know who he is. Here a faraway server is going to check the worker's identity and if his thumb impression doesn't match then despite those 30 people vouching for the worker, he won't get his wages. You want monitoring done by someone remote, not by the people.

What went wrong in Kotkasim?

In Kotkasim, around 25 per cent of people did not have bank accounts so they didn't get their subsidy at all. Then they were supposed to get subsidy in advance. They didn't get it for seven months. The government made it such a big hassle. To get that little bit of kerosene the person had to go take the money from the bank, get the cash in hand, go to the shop, give the money there, take a receipt and then deposit the receipt to show he has bought the kerosene so that his next month's subsidy is released.

So what happened was that 80 per cent of the people dropped out. And they announced it a grand success. To me grand success would have been if 100 per cent of people who needed kerosene took it.

This is perverse: let us make people suffer to the point that they abandon the entitlement. Let us change our misgovernance to our advantage and serve the rich. When the 2G scam happened did we stop the scheme altogether? Have we stopped coal production despite the coal scam? Plug the leakages but don't stop the scheme.

How do you identify beneficiaries for entitlements?

This is the biggest challenge because everybody wants cash. Someone may not want rations because he may say this is not what he wants to eat. Someone may not want a NREGA job because he or she doesn't want to spend eight hours digging in the sun. If you are only giving cash, who will refuse? So you have to be able to select. Selection is done on the basis of power. They manage to get their names in and it creates a big hassle for the selection process.

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

Are you saying the present delivery system should simply be strengthened?

Absolutely. The only thing they are doing is the addition of the UID number. If it is real cash transfer then they are converting subsidies into cash – I believe that is their objective. Even in Latin America there are problems with cash transfer. It creates a dole and vulnerabilities that NREGA does not. You need a certificate that you are sending your child to school, that you went to the hospital, or to be on the list. So you are official dependent.

A NREGA worker does his job at the worksite and the money he gets is his right. The present system should be strengthened and not burdened with UID.

These entitlements do not need the UID. We need post offices and the banking system strengthened. Already, NREGA workers are being paid through banks. Lets fix that first.

The business correspondents and the micro ATMS are another misleading term. People think it's a machine with no people. Actually it is a person with a handheld machine and cash in his hand. The biggest danger is that it will increase corruption in NREGA manifold.

Collusion is the biggest challenge NREGA faces. Earlier a worker got identified because he was paid in the public domain. But now you can get a job card and not go to the worksite. May be your brother is the sarpanch and another brother the business correspondent. With the micro ATM you can be paid for work not done.

Backend systems like muster rolls and measurements need to be improved. They say the UID is stopping de-duplication. So people who had two ration cards or job cards they got removed. My question is: How many people did they take action against? They were stealing from the state. They found them. They got absolute proof. Have they taken action even in one case?

We haven't heard of it.

Right. So there is no political will. That is what you need. If you don't act against corruption no damn system can work.

The poor are very migratory so why not have one smart card?

They are opposed to smart cards. They want one UID platform. Alright, so people migrate say from Rajasthan to Gujarat. Will the Gujarat government give me rations? The Gujarat government runs a state scheme of ₹2 per kg of rice. Will it give that to me? No chance. In India's federal structure there is no question of getting state benefits. Will the Assam government do it?

Even if the scheme is the same will states give me rations out of their resources? So what interoperability? Of the banking system? I don't need the UID-Aadhaar for that. If I have a State Bank of India account I can use that anywhere in the country.

But isn't it a good idea for migrant workers to get easy access to rations wherever they go?

Excellent idea. But a smart ration card will do or my normal ration card. ■

Life at stake, Shafiq

Empower People sensitizes men in hotspots of bride trafficking

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

UP to a point, Shafiq Khan's own story is no less dreadful than the tales of the hapless women he rescues and seeks to rehabilitate as part of a concerted anti-trafficking campaign. Once a Naxalite activist in the tribal belt of Bihar, Shafiq was compelled to flee Gaya, his home district, almost 10 years ago. He hasn't returned home since.

Instead, setting up base in Delhi, Shafiq has dedicated himself to the task of tracking down bride traffickers and their victims at grave personal risk.

The decision to leave Gaya for good was obviously aimed as much at self-preservation as it was at furthering his nascent movement to empower the most vulnerable segments of society.

"I realized that the path adopted by the radical outfit that I joined wasn't the right one," says Shafiq, the founder of Empower People, a Delhi-based organisation whose work centres primarily on rescuing and rehabilitating victims of bride trafficking across seven states.

After he abandoned the radical mode of socio-political intervention, a group of his former associates, riled at his growing grassroots popularity, physically attacked him with the aim of deflecting him from his new-fangled activism. While they did manage to drive Shafiq away from Gaya, they could not force the slightly built but steely man off his chosen path.

Shafiq took his first steps in community service in the late 1990s when he saw hunger, disease, deprivation and official apathy all around him. So he floated an initiative called the Career Development Centre (CDC) to impart education and provide food to children from poverty-strick-



Shafiq Khan: working at street level

en SC/ST homes in Gaya.

To begin with, CDC successfully set up an informal centre for primary education with the help of some students of a Gaya school. A pilot programme was then initiated in Amas block of the district. Within a few years, CDC had 23 functioning centres spread across the districts of Gaya and Chatra (now in Jharkhand).

Shafiq's sphere of influence grew quickly and his band of committed volunteers expanded steadily. That was when the violent Naxal attack on him took place and he deemed it fit to relocate to Delhi, leaving the Gaya centres in the charge of local activists who have since taken his work forward in the area.

"I still do not have an office here in Delhi for want of funds," says Shafiq. Financial limitations have been a constant stumbling block in his efforts to consolidate the movement. But that hasn't prevented him from taking his NGO to as many as seven states. "I have field offices in Haryana, Punjab, Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Rajasthan, besides active linkages in Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh," he adds.

Shafiq fights female slavery

ABHINANDITA MATHUR



Empower People, the non-profit that Shafiq set up in 2006, has 17,000 members today. Their "singular focus" is on the rescue and repatriation of victims of human trafficking. According to information posted on the NGO's website, "at least 400 bridal slaves have been rescued thus far and 40 of them have been rehabilitated."

As these numbers suggest, rehabilitation of trafficked women remains a major challenge because the requisite partnerships that Empower People has sought to forge have been stillborn. The only rehabilitation that is currently possible is in marrying off the victims to local men after double-checking their credentials. Shafiq's long-term focus is on social empowerment and sustainable rehabilitation.

Empower People germinated in the course of a 300-km march that was organised in 2005 from Jind to Hisar in Haryana against female foeticide and gender inequality. It was during the march that Shafiq met a trafficked woman and heard her story. He decided then and there that he had to do something to help the victims of this heinous practice. His NGO operates as an umbrella organi-

zation for 20 CBOs (community-based organizations) across the country.

"Women's empowerment is the essential block in the process of building an effective social movement," he says. "If you break down any social problem facing our nation to its principal unit, women constitute the basis. That is why we are working to boost gender sensitisation at every level of our work."

He believes that if a problem afflicts a society, it is from within the society itself that the solution must spring. So Shafiq organizes periodic gender sensitisation camps and field seminars for men. Every initiative counts.

Shafiq is acutely aware of the serious challenges that he faces in the battle to prevent rampant violence against women. For him, words like 'inclusion' and 'empowerment' do not represent anything particularly revolutionary. "*Yeh sab bahut zyadaa krantikari nahin hain* (all this isn't all that radical)," he says. But he recognizes how important every small step is in this mission.

He cites one of the rehabilitated women, Gaushia Khan, as an example of what Empower

People has achieved in terms of changing the lives of individuals. She heads the Mewat unit of his NGO (named Wama Vahini) and is the current president of Empower People.

But despite stray individual breakthroughs in the struggle to escape this modern-day form of slavery, horror stories abound of girls from Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Jharkhand – the principal source states – being trafficked to Punjab and Haryana and then pushed into either domestic servility, the sex trade or a life of bonded agricultural labour.

Admitting that what he has been able to unearth so far is only the tip of the iceberg, Shafiq says that bride trafficking is a "flourishing black market that involves scores of middlemen who sell and resell girls and women on the pretext of marriage".

"The problem," he says, "is alarmingly huge and will not go away anytime soon. No big, sweeping, overnight social change is possible but what we have done in these six years is to transform lives, one at a time."

Mewat, a district in Haryana that is less than two hours away from Delhi is one of the hotspots of bride trafficking. The severe sex ratio imbalance – Mewat has just seven women to every 10 men – has allowed unscrupulous brokers to smuggle girls in from vulnerable socio-economic groups in India's eastern and northeastern states.

Of course, the successes that Empower People has achieved have not come easy. For one, proving that a woman has been trafficked is exceedingly difficult in the face of the veil of secrecy that surrounds this crime. "When you work to bring about change in a community, it is hard to penetrate the walls around it," says Shafiq. "Strong resistance from the people and the local administration is inevitable."

What makes matters worse is the constant threat of violence. "We are dealing here with what has assumed the shape of organized crime. Professional criminals are involved in the racket. So we face the danger of attacks in the line of our work," says Shafiq, who has himself been targeted a few times in Mewat.

Among his biggest challenges is the paucity of funds for his work in Punjab and Haryana, the two states where bridal slavery is at its worst. "Punjab and Haryana," says Shafiq, "are regarded as prosperous states and so donor interest here is virtually zero. Gender issues are ignored here. NGOs are instead encouraged to focus on Bengal, Bihar and Assam and on questions of poverty and lack of policing rather than on questions of gender."

Notwithstanding the pitfalls, Shafiq's mission has gained ground over the years thanks to the toil of his volunteers around the country. Empower People is now well entrenched in the districts of Gaya, Aurangabad and Nawada (Bihar), Chatra and Hazaribagh (Jharkhand) and Jorhat, Karimganj and Barpeta (Assam), besides several parts of Bengal.

Although bride trafficking has been a reality in India for decades, it remains a neglected issue, which explains why agencies are reluctant to fund NGOs that work in this domain. Shafiq's goal is to get this problem the importance that it deserves from lawmakers, policy framers and civil society. The fight back has only just begun. ■

Assessing panchayats

Bharat Dogra
New Delhi

THE performance of panchayati raj and decentralized governance in rural India were discussed at a conference held at the Constitution Club in Delhi to mark 20 years of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992.

In his keynote address, Mani Shankar Aiyar, former Union Minister for Panchayati Raj and Chairman, Expert Committee on Panchayats,



Jairam Ramesh addressing the meeting

said that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has created huge opportunities. Thanks to regular panchayat elections, India now has nearly 32 lakh elected village leaders out of whom 13 lakh are women. With 50 per cent reservation the number of women village leaders will rise to around 17 lakh. These elected village leaders now function at three levels of rural governance.

Overall 15 million panchayat leaders have been elected. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act mandates regular elections. So if delays take place, provisions of the Act can be used to ensure that states hold panchayat elections.

Another upside is that candidates from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) have been elected in proportion to their population. SC/ST women are emerging as panchayat leaders due to reservations. But, interestingly, in some states women from traditionally deprived communities are winning from seats not reserved for them.

The panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir were also encouraging. Despite threats from militants people came out in large numbers to vote. People courageously stood for elections. Today, these village sarpanches are trying to provide leadership under very extenuating circumstances.

On the flipside, there are weaknesses in the functioning of panchayats. Local bureaucrats still try to dominate panchayat leaders. Panchayat leaders need to be much more assertive of their rights and dignity.

Moreover, the functions of the three-tiered panchayati raj system needs to be defined clear-

ly. What exactly are their tasks at village level, district level and panchayat level? Rights and resources should be allocated in consonance with these functions.

So just transferring school education or agriculture to panchayats won't do, said Aiyar. Panchayats have to be equipped with rights and resources to take up these responsibilities. What is most important, he pointed out, is that the role and rights of gram sabhas should be clearly defined. The gram sabha has to be made strong to play an effective role.

Once such reforms have taken place, panchayati raj can play an important role in decentralised governance and put rural development funds to good use. The rural development ministry receives the second highest allocation of funds after the defence ministry. This money needs to be used better.

Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister of Rural Development, agreed and said at least one per cent of his ministry's budget is going to be

used for strengthening panchayati raj.

Panchayats have assumed greater importance in recent years. They are being called upon to implement the rural employment guarantee scheme and projects for drinking water and sanitation. But systems of accountability and transparency need to be strengthened to ensure corruption free implementation.

In sanitation, Sikkim has emerged as a model state where all rural women have access to toilets. The performance of Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Maharashtra is also encouraging.

Some state governments ask for more powers from the Centre stating that they want to decentralize authority to districts and panchayats. Then elections to these bodies are interminably delayed. Jharkhand is one example. Andhra Pradesh is another. Jairam Ramesh warned that if elections are not held on time then his ministry would withhold funds for critical panchayat projects and schemes.

In some states where panchayat elections are held with high hopes, states don't create a conducive environment for panchayat leaders to function negating the very purpose of decentralized rural governance.

Well-known social activist and public health expert, Dr Binayak Sen, highlighted the serious crisis of malnutrition, hunger and poor health indicators. He said panchayats should be strengthened to fight hunger, malnutrition and disease. For this people's rights to natural resources should be defended. He recommended strengthening the PESA (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act. ■

CONFLICT ZONE

The forgotten migrants of Reasi

Ashutosh Sharma
Jammu

BEHIND a herd of goats and clucking chickens scurrying around a dusty courtyard, three dilapidated doors open and shyly invite you into three dank cramped sheds. Each 10 by 10 feet structure resembles a defaced pigeon hole. It has a damaged roof. Inside, an internally displaced family of as many as 35 members live.

This is not the story of one migrant family crammed into one tiny room. At the overcrowded Talwara camp in Reasi district, merely 72 km from Jammu, over 900 families severely affected by conflict live in similar or worse conditions. The camp resembles an unsightly slum. It was allotted to these families by the government 15 years ago.

Most of the families living here escaped from remote villages nestled in the mountains following a reign of terror unleashed by armed insurgents during the 1990s.

Naajo Devi's is one such family, struggling to keep home and hearth together. She was forced to flee from her village Naosi with her husband, Rikhi Ram, seven sons and three daughters.

Over time, Naajo's family of 12 has expanded to 31, out of which 21 are Naajo's grandchildren. "With a growing family, it has become difficult to survive in three small rooms. We sleep, cook, eat, and store household articles in the same home. It gets worse during the rainy season when water keeps dripping from the roof. We fear that the house could collapse any time," says Naajo, rubbing her weathered hands in despair over her face.

Naajo's family, like several other migrants, miss their happy life back home where they had adequate agricultural land, livestock and natural resources. At the camp, lack of sustainable sources of income and the absence of government aid have made life miserable. Most of the camp dwellers do manual labour or menial jobs to earn a livelihood. Even their children have to toil

INDIA



Children growing up in the shadow of militancy



Naajo Devi with her family outside their three sheds

along with the family for sheer survival.

According to the government's present relief policy, each displaced family is entitled to nine kg of flour and two kg of rice, besides a monthly cash compensation of ₹400 for four members of a family. Also, each family unit is entitled to 10 litres of kerosene every month. Inhabitants of the camp rue that even this meagre entitlement reaches them slowly and sporadically. Of the 994 households at the camp, only 655 are presently entitled to relief and rations.

Sadly, the remaining 339 households have no assistance from any quarter. These families include those who have survived bullets and

blasts. A resident of Channa village, Daleep Singh, does not get any monthly relief. His four-year-old daughter and pregnant wife were shot dead by militants. He was also hit by several bullets before militants left him for dead.

At the camp, Singh remarried and is now living with his second wife and two children. For the family's sustenance, he works as a labourer on construction sites. "Due to lack of money, I could not get proper treatment for my gunshot wounds. The government has not registered my family therefore I am not entitled to any compensation amount. The government has provided us with a one-room tenement. That is it."

Those migrant families who have a net monthly income of ₹5,000 or more have been debarred from the relief and cash compensation. An ex-service man, Punjab Singh of Thanol village, decries this policy, "I have been laid low by many ailments. Most of my pension is spent on medicines. I am not entitled to any compensation or relief as I am a retired employee. I ask this government: did I do anything wrong by serving the country?"

Recalling memories of those dreadful days, Chawkidar of village Narkot, who also lives in the camp, said, "It was the cruellest day in our lives. On 17 April, 1998, 27 people were brutally killed by militants in our village. The next day, we fled the village en masse as there was no security of life."

"During those days, gun-toting militants would roam freely in groups and they would kill and torture people," interjects the Namberdar of the village, Chain Singh, who also lives at the camp with his family.

Owing to abysmal poverty, loss of dignity and pride is an everyday reality for these displaced people. A team from an Ahmedabad-based NGO, Justice on Trial, comprising former Governor of Himachal Pradesh, VS Kokje, and a former Additional Advocate General of the Rajasthan Government, GS Gill, highlighted their plight to the media in 2010. They claimed that starving migrant women were taking to the flesh trade – a reality that the world remains impervious to so far.

In their report, "Ordeal Of Jammu Migrants - From Frying Pan To Fire," the team mentioned the miserable and inhuman conditions of displaced villagers from areas as far as Surankote, Kote Ranka, Kalakote, Banihal, Ramban, Kishtwar, Kwad, Bholderwah, Pul Doda and Udhampur. The report, however, has failed to bring about any change.

The emotionally shaken villagers rue the fact that no one from the government has ever visited them. Their blood-stained memories still haunt them. Feelings of homelessness, post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety worsen their capacity to deal with the uncertainties life throws at them.

Words of assurance by successive governments and politicians have proved inadequate. These internally displaced people believe they are a discriminated lot. The Apex Court and the High Court have also chided the state government for not treating them at par with Kashmiri migrants.

According to Balwan Singh, Chairman, Migrant Action Committee, Reasi, "Migrants of Jammu and migrants of Kashmir are victims of the same circumstances. The government has failed to secure our lives and property - why then are we not being treated at par with the Kashmiri Pandit migrants?"

While the security forces and the government claim a considerable decline in militancy, the migrants refuse to return to their homes. The reasons go beyond security concerns. As they have been away from their villages for many years, they feel if they go back they will have to start from scratch. They do not have money to rebuild their houses destroyed by militants and the weather, or for purchasing livestock and making their long abandoned land cultivable.

"Restore our dignity. We are suffering in silence, unseen and unacknowledged. This is all we want to tell our government," says every person surviving in these grimy migrant camps. ■

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Charkha Features

Kolkata tries to break free of

Compactors have been introduced, rag pickers left out

Subir Roy
Kolkata

A concerted effort is on to make Kolkata garbage free. Although that is a massive task that can't be achieved overnight, those revisiting the city already vouch that it looks a bit cleaner. The issue is important for the Trinamool Congress which first wrested control of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) before going on to win the 2011 State Assembly elections with a promise to bring about 'paribartan' or change. Changing things for the better in Kolkata is important for the credibility of the party as it goes into panchayat polls later in the year.

But earnest and well meaning as the effort is, the solution that is being adopted has the danger of overlooking two important concerns – handling urban solid waste in an environmentally responsible manner and making the rag picker a part of the solution, both as a human concern and on grounds of sound economics.

The effort supposedly stands on two legs – removing vats or garbage collection centres across the city which are a health hazard and an eyesore, and using superior technology in the form of garbage compactors to do the job. But as things stand the vats will not be gone – they will be 'beautified'. The garbage will not be properly sorted out before being consigned to the landfills and the rag picker will be simply wished away.

If these fears turn out to be true the city's solid waste disposal system will not be sustainable. It will continue to be a health and environmental hazard and finally collapse as the city's outskirts will soon run out of landfill capacity. And, of course, the rag pickers will go completely under the surface of legitimacy if they have not already done so. This means Kolkata will lose an opportunity to engineer the uplift of a severely deprived group for the benefit of all. (Only a poor country can get people to segregate garbage at affordable rates!)

Currently, the city has around 50 large vats where municipal sweepers, throughout the morning, bring garbage collected from households, shops, restaurants and roadsides in pushcarts. The stinking pile that thereby builds up is supposed to



Garbage being dumped at a landfill site in Dhapa

be cleared by late morning in trucks and taken to the Dhapa dumping grounds or landfills in east Kolkata amidst the wetlands which have made the city famous and offered it till now a largely unused opportunity to lead an environmentally sustainable existence. Dhapa should actually be closed as the Kolkata wetlands are a Ramsar site which should be environmentally preserved.

The change being wrought is being touted as a project to make vats history – remove them. The reality is that most of the vats remain where they are, except that construction is on to make them *pukka* with walls and floors covered by bright glazed tiles and netted roofs to keep scavenging birds away and water supply to wash out seepages. These showpieces will keep the garbage out of sight till it is carried away and make them look benign.

The second and perhaps more ambitious part of the project will be to bring into play a 'compactor' and 'prime mover with hook'. The garbage will now go straight into a compactor which will take moisture out and compress the stuff, thus reducing its volume. Then, at intervals the prime mover will come with a hook that will mechanically pick up the compactor and take the garbage away to the landfill. This will be an odourless operation whereas currently in the morning, city roads are dotted with vile smelling trucks from which garbage occasionally spills out despite being covered and tied down with sheets.

Currently vats at roadsides are most often an abominably smelling pile of garbage spilling out

of rudimentary decrepit boundary walls. Around them usually hover a group of rag pickers fishing for paper, plastic and metal recyclables. Cheek-by-jowl are piles of bags full of sorted recyclables waiting to be taken away by the trucks of traders who buy the stuff from the rag pickers, thus providing them their main source of income. These rag pickers often camp near the vat with their sacks which for them is a crucial investment and can be stolen by other rag pickers unless kept under close watch.

If all vats in the city become sanitized and the journey of the garbage to the landfill is invisible and odourless, it will be a great improvement from present conditions. But that will still miss out on a current major global imperative: all manmade waste should be sorted into wet compostable stuff from which fertilizers or bio gas can be produced and paper, cardboard, plastics and metals can be recycled. Once this is done the total volume of waste that is useless and inert reduces to a fraction and can be deposited in a landfill under scientific conditions so that the surrounding environment and groundwater is not contaminated by leaching.

If this is done then the volume of garbage going to a landfill becomes small in size and spares the city the problem of scouting for more landfills and placating angry villagers up in arms against existing landfills or a new one being located next to them.

December 21 was a red-letter day for KMC when its first scientific solid waste compactor station and modern portable compactors were inau-

mounds of garbage

PICTURES BY PRASANTA BISWAS



KMC's new waste compactor station

gured at Kalighat Park near the home of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. The official KMC website lists the following advantages of the new system: it will keep birds, animals and rainwater away, transport garbage to the Dhapa dumping ground in an odourless manner even at night without spilling or water seepage on the way, no more open vats and no rag picking.

A leading newspaper the next day headlined the story as, "Imagine Kolkata without garbage vats."

Sorting can be done in one or all of three places – at the household, shop or restaurant level, at the vat, or at the landfill. In Kolkata, it is currently done at the vats and the landfill in east Kolkata where colonies of rag pickers have sprung up.

Debobrato Majumder, mayor-in-council member in charge of solid waste management of KMC, agrees that sorting should be done by households or at landfills. Primary sorting is done in seven of the city's 140 municipal wards. But there is no plan to

synchronise sorting with the use of compactors so that only sorted garbage is compacted. Currently a firm, Eastern Organic, treats 200 tonnes of organic waste a day at the landfill (it has a contract to take in 500 tonnes) after sorting it out mechanically to manufacture fertilizers.

Kolkata is not in the crisis situation Bangalore is in – it has virtually run out of landfills, so periodically garbage lies rotting on the streets. But, the city is getting there. The existing landfill at Dhapa will soon be full up and the KMC has been unable to get clearance to buy land beyond the wetlands as the government is dead opposed to depriving farmers of cultivable land. The Dhapa area accounts for 40 per cent of the vegetables consumed by the city.

However the State Pollution Control Board has permitted KMC, says Majumder, to develop a third of its 152 hectares in the area as a scientifically run landfill which will neutralize harmful leaching and convert the rest into plantations and water bodies. The project cost, mainly paying off farmers, is pegged at ₹200 crore.

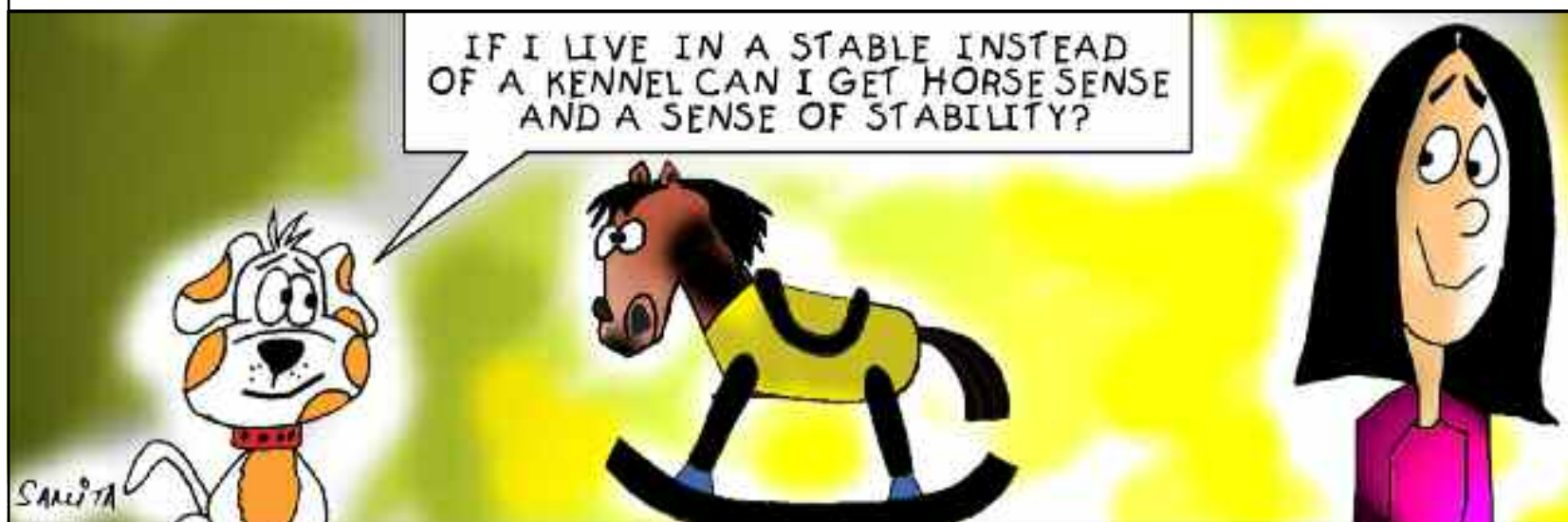
For the city's middle class and the KMC, rag pickers barely exist or are mostly considered a social menace. There is no perception that rag pickers perform a vital social function in segregating garbage and generating recyclables cheaply. A colony for housing rag pickers under proper health conditions could exist at the landfill and deliver invaluable segregating services. Over time those earning enough money through selling recyclables could graduate out of scavenging. It is the poorest people who become rag pickers because they have no other means of livelihood.

But the current KMC perception is that the existing rag pickers colony has created its own mountain of discarded garbage which is not recyclable. This mountain is a pain and so are the rag pickers, they believe. Majumder says that an attempt to wean away rag pickers from their trade by offering them jobs under the employment guarantee scheme at ₹100 per day around Kalighat Park had no takers as rag pickers earn more via their dark practices.

The irony in all this is that the compactors, incorporating technology from the Netherlands, have been bought under the Kolkata Environment Improvement Project (no less) with assistance from the Asian Development Bank! ■

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



Locals question world heritage status



The Great Himalayan National Park

Rahul Saxena & Manshi Asher
Kullu

THE Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh is known for its spectacular natural beauty. A World Heritage Site (WHS) status is now being considered for it. India has 29 World Heritage Sites. Just one is in Himachal Pradesh. GHNP would be the second title holder in the state.

The park is spread over an expansive 754 km. The upper catchments of four rivers – the Tirthan, Sainj, Jiwa and Parbati – are located here. The GHNP's abundant high altitude pastures, forests, mountains, streams and glaciers are home to rare species like the Himalayan Tahr, Ibex, Blue Sheep, Musk deer and pheasants. The endangered Western Tragopan is the poster-bird of the park. Containing only two villages, this verdant region was considered ideal for the creation of a national park as it contains viable populations of rare Himalayan wild fauna and flora and involved little rehabilitation.

India is a signatory to UNESCO's World Heritage Convention under which places of 'cultural and physical significance' are designated as World Heritage Sites (WHS). The objective is to strengthen preservation of such areas.

In October and November 2012, representatives of UNESCO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the technical advisory body to the World Heritage Committee,

visited GHNP to evaluate it for the WHS status.

But the State Forest Department's move to get such a tag for the GHNP has not gone down well with local forest rights activists. They point out that the evaluation process was kept under wraps. The history of this protected area has been marred by community opposition and secrecy can only result in more suspicion.

As in the rest of the state, people have exercised usufruct rights over the natural resources of the GHNP, mostly for grazing sheep and goats, extraction of herbs and rights of passage to religious places. These practices were considered by conservationists as detrimental to the breeding and habitat of the Western Tragopan. Subsequently, the state government evaluated these rights and compensated some of the local people.

However, this settlement of rights, based on Anderson's Forest Settlement Report of 1897, has been a contentious issue. First, the report had recorded the existence of just 314 families in the area and only their descendants were considered eligible for compensation. Secondly, Anderson's report had not recorded practices like collection of morel mushrooms (guchhi) which have lately become a lucrative source of income for the locals.

Many beneficiaries were also dissatisfied with the compensation amount given to them. When the park notification was issued in 1999 under the Wildlife Protection Act, there were protests by thousands of migrant graziers and other right

holders whose livelihoods were adversely impacted by the notification.

At the time of this settlement of rights, around 35,000 migratory sheep and goats would spend their summer months in the park. Even as late as 2003, the state government, under political pressure allowed herders into the park for grazing. Activists say that in recent years access to grazing has been curbed. But extraction of medicinal plants like nagchattri, a newly discovered money-spinning herb, has been going on blatantly right under the nose of the forest department.

Forest rights activists and local communities are now placing their hopes in the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006. In Himachal Pradesh, the implementation of the FRA has been extremely poor. The unsettled rights of communities affected by the creation of national parks and sanctuaries is an issue that continues to fester.

If the GNHP gets the WHS status by ignoring the claims of communities, the fight to settle those rights will become much more difficult, say activists.

Guman Singh, an activist living in the Kullu Valley, rubbishes the management document of the park which states that only two laws are applicable to this protected area – the Wildlife Protection Act and the Indian Forest Act of 1927.

"The issue of rights within the GHNP has to be opened up keeping in mind the FRA of 2006 which recognises the role of local communities as the primary stakeholders in conservation, management responsibilities and benefits that flow as a result. The park administration should facilitate and provide technical support for these objectives to be achieved in reality," he says.

But the park's director, Ajay Srivastava, states, "Some petitioners, dissatisfied with the amount of compensation they received, got a favourable judgement from the High Court. There are no more legal claims as of now."

The second issue which is worrying local people is the kind of tourism that GHNP will now attract and who will be its stakeholders.

"The experiences of people living near World Heritage Sites around the globe show that they are marginalised. Instead, big time tour operators move in and they are disconnected with local livelihood issues. This has led to confrontation and even violence at many such sites," says C.R. Bijoy, a forest rights activist.

"The WHS status will face people's opposition if the benefits of tourism are designed to flow to big operators from outside rather than to the local population," says Dile Ram Shabab, an ex-MLA from Kullu's Banjar constituency.

According to a recent IUCN report, nearly 33 per cent of areas with the WHS tag are affected by serious conservation issues. They are threatened by mining, oil and gas projects, tourism and armed conflict. So, do such tags really achieve the larger goal of 'conservation'?

The World Heritage Convention creates no new legal bindings for signatories. Only an area already declared 'protected' can be granted a WHS status. This means that the convention supports conservation and forest management policies that exclude local and indigenous communities and deny them their basic natural resource rights. ■

The writers are members of Himdhara, Environment Research and Action Collective in Himachal Pradesh. (info@himdhara.org)

Listen to Gurgaon's robust voice

Kavita Charanji
Gurgaon (Haryana)

It is a cold, wintry morning and the beginning of another exciting day for Gurgaon Ki Awaaz Samudayik Radio Station. Their studio in Udyog Vihar is buzzing and the enthusiasm is infectious. Suddenly, shoes off, the team rushes to the tiny studio. It is time to go on air with their



Discussion with women at the Gurgaon Ki Awaaz radio studio

daily 15-minute programme "Gurgaon Ka Haal". Station manager Soumya Jha and reporter Amrit Barwal park themselves behind mikes in the recording room while others sit outside in a cubicle to provide back-up support.

This community radio station airs at 107.8 MHz FM. Soumya and Amrit begin by presenting traffic updates, discussions on the hazards of the cold weather and tips on the indiscriminate use of plastic. Listeners can call in and vent their grievances. Most of them complain of Gurgaon's abysmal civic amenities like non-functional street lights, blocked sewer lines, acute water shortages and unsafe local parks. An animated Soumya informs them that the station will pass on their grievances to the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon, the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) and the Gurgaon Police.

Many of the radio's listeners are migrant workers, drivers, security guards and local villagers from Gurgaon.

Soon after, it's time for 'Gurgaon Live', anchored by Sharmila and Hans Raj Barwal. Today, listeners will engage in light hearted banter with two of Gurgaon Ki Awaaz team members. There is much laughter all around as listeners and anchors recount old childhood memories and recite poems. But they also talk about female

foeticide, safety for women, pollution and groundwater depletion.

Over the years, listeners and the Gurgaon Ki Awaaz team have built up an unmistakable rapport. "Music is the glue that holds it all together," says Arti Jaiman, station director of Gurgaon Ki Awaaz. Starting with a few recordings by local music mandalis (performing troupes) in villages on the outskirts of Gurgaon, the station now has a

night – factory workers, night shift workers, drivers and security guards."

Shyam Saran, an export factory worker, is an ardent supporter of Gurgaon Ki Awaaz. His detailed description of his trials and tribulations at the Voter Identity Cards centre to the radio galvanised the administration. Saran got his ID card and inspired other listeners.

The station broadcasts for 22 hours six days a week. Apart from music, there are programmes on cookery, careers, entrepreneurship, health, issues of migration and local governance.

"We call in local councillors to explain exactly what they have done or not done. The authorities could be the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon, the local police or HUDA. So basically we work with all stakeholders in Gurgaon, including NGOs," says Arti.

One successful collaboration, recalls Soumya, was with an NGO called Positive Women Network to create HIV awareness by airing interviews with truck drivers.

Gurgaon Ki Awaaz is an initiative of The Restoring Force (TRF), an NGO. Its primary focus is on career counselling for high school children in Gurgaon's government schools and improvement of the city's infrastructure.

TRF applied for a community radio licence in late 2007. In July 2008, the NGO received a formal letter of intent. On 1 November, 2009, Gurgaon Ki Awaaz Samudayik Radio station went on air.

Arti, a former journalist, is the prime mover behind the station. Her team initially consisted of Rajesh, Amrit, Sharmila and Soumya. In keeping with its philosophy, the station enlists people who belong to Gurgaon or its villages. The team now includes Amrit and Hans Raj from Sarai Alawardi village, Doli Ram from Shankar Vihar Colony, Sharmila from Budhera village, Vandana Bacchety from Mullaheda village and Jyoti Verma from Dundahera Village.

Educational qualifications do not count. Though Vandana and Jyoti Verma are university students and Soumya is a former journalist, Amrit has only studied up to Class 10. His cousin, Hans Raj, says frankly he made it to only Class 8. "At the very beginning, Amrit told us that he was totally inexperienced and hadn't even touched a computer," says Soumya. "Our criterion was to take people who knew every nook and cranny of Gurgaon."

Now after training and job experience, all members are adept at recording, scripting, editing and broadcasting. There is no hierarchy and the team is quite obviously passionate about their work.

Gurgaon Ki Awaaz is the only community radio station in the National Capital Region. However the question of financial sustainability looms large. "There is much help needed on that front. It means greater interaction with donors, trying to work out projects or drawing in more local advertising," says Arti. Other challenges are parochialism and the radio station's narrow base of a women's audience, an issue the feisty radio is trying to address. ■

MAKING CITIES

World over design is as crucial as

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



Women protesting angrily in New Delhi: This time they were supported by men

Civil Society News New Delhi

THE death in December of a 23-year-old woman after being brutally raped by goons in a bus and dumped on a road in New Delhi has unleashed anger and disgust on a scale never seen before in the Indian capital.

There have been innumerable cases of rape in New Delhi and it has for long been accepted that its streets are unsafe for women. The city's bus system is hell and women have mostly silently borne the harassment they face, fearing the stigma that follows complaints.

But with this death the response has been different. Pictures of young women atop lampposts giving the 'up yours' sign to the government tell their own story of the anger that has overflowed.

Women are fed up and, perhaps for the first time in large numbers, want to discuss rape and harassment openly and be heard about the insecurity they experience.

Carrying placards hastily made at home, middle-class women and teenage girls have joined spontaneous protests demanding tougher laws and quicker

trials. They also want the right to dress as they like and have the same freedoms as men do.

The poor management of New Delhi's transport system is being seen as a symbol of patriarchal attitudes in the city. Women seek the right to travel in safety as and when they please. Importantly, the demands made by women are being supported by a growing number of men.

This anger is a wake-up call. It is an opportunity for the government to examine how New Delhi is being managed as a city. It could learn from cities elsewhere in the world that have gone beyond policing and CCTVs to innovate with urban architecture and design, consult citizens, analyse public behaviour and create spaces in which natural surveillance keeps people from committing crimes.

Globally city governments have tried hard to make public transport efficient and safe as a symbol of their commitment to ensuring equal access and the safety of citizens – particularly women.

It is now universally accepted that a city is successful in providing a high quality of life when people use buses and trains or walk and cycle.

Efficient public transport is a great asset. It reduces the carbon footprint of the

SAFER

tough policing

city. Less pollution and an active life are good for the health of people. Taking the bus or train or mingling on the street also helps to bring down social barriers.

But when people worry about being victims of crime and accidents, they stay away from public transport. If they can afford it they use cars and other personal vehicles in an attempt to cut themselves off from the perceived risk in the external environment.

The lack of reliable public transport is a sign of many things. But above all it shows the failure of the government to protect citizens and deliver the rich, interactive experience of living in a city.

Just nine months before the unfortunate rape episode, international experts met for a workshop in New Delhi to share their knowledge on interventions and strategies that improved public transport in other cities of the world and made citizens feel safer.

The workshop went unreported, but for New Delhi this is a good time to take a look at the complex efforts being made in other economies to improve the quality of urban living and ensure that cities are the engines of growth and inventiveness that they are intended to be.

CRIME IS PREVENTABLE: Violence and crime need to be seen as being preventable. Globally, the trend is to go beyond a police response and to instead create environments in which there is less chance for crimes to happen. Governments have worked at initiatives that involve the community, urban planners, designers, travellers and the police.

Larry Cohen, founder and executive director of the Prevention Institute in the US, calls for a public health approach to dealing with violence because it goes beyond being a criminal justice issue. "Understanding what contributes to violence in the first place clarifies what must be done to prevent violence before it occurs," he says.

In the United States, Prevention Institute's UNITY initiative is funded by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It seeks to prevent violence before it occurs so that urban youth can thrive in safe environments with ample opportunities and supportive relationships. UNITY coordinated the UNITY City Network, a growing number of US cities committed to preventing violence through a public health approach.

In 2006 UNITY conducted interviews with mayors, police chiefs, public health directors and school superintendents in one-third of American cities. The interviews showed that violence was a major concern and that law enforcement and criminal justice were not effective.

Based on these findings, UNITY developed the UNITY Road Map for understanding what city administrations need to do for preventing violence before it occurs through partnerships, prevention and strategy.

In Great Britain in 1996 the environment department published an in-depth study consisting of 11 reports on Personal Security On Public Transport. The study was completed in 1998 with two additional reports on the fear of crime.

"The British government has in fact promoted an incisive policy to encourage transport companies and local authorities to invest in public transport safety," says Clara Cardia, a safety expert and professor of urban planning at the Polytechnic of Milan.

"Public transport safety requires a comprehensive approach which necessitates many diversified actions. Given its complexity it cannot be solved by the operator alone. Joint action must be



Exit and entry points need to be well lit and safe

taken," says Cardia.

She cites the example of Merseyrail, which improved the condition of its stations and trains, introduced CCTV, security in station car parks and had a team of guards to deal with anti-social behaviour. There was vigorous social marketing of these efforts in the media and through announcements.

Ten years later in 2009 the department of transport in the UK conducted a study to assess the impact of initiatives taken under the Personal Security on Public Transport document.

The feedback from passengers, for instance on Merseyrail, was that the travelling experience had significantly improved over the years and that anti-social behaviour had been checked.

Cardia lists several conclusions from this and other studies, a few of which are especially relevant to the concerns being currently expressed by citizens in New Delhi.

- Personal security should be taken into account from the earliest steps of decision-making on public transport.
- Users should be involved in decisions on how to make public transport safe.

Globally, the trend is to go beyond a police response and to instead create environments in which there is less chance for crimes to happen.

- Public transport safety must be guaranteed during the whole length of the trip: on vehicles, during the waiting time, on the routes of access to stations and stops.
- Waiting at bus stops after dark is when people feel least safe. The location of a bus stop is important. Bus stops should be opposite to each other or near commercial establishments.
- Entries and exits to stations and bus stops need visibility, lighting and natural surveillance through activities, entrances and windows facing the street.
- In an emergency, commuters should be immediately able to communicate with someone who can provide help. This requires coordination between the staff, operational centre and the police.
- A reliable night bus service should be seen as an important contribution to local transport since it provides a safe and economic means of returning home.

DESIGN CITIES FOR PEOPLE: Designing cities for cars has led to alienation and insecurity. Wide roads and high speeds divide up people. Symbols of this falling apart of the community are gated housing in suburbs and tall apartment buildings where people literally lock themselves in and depend on CCTVs and security guards.

In the Sixties, beginning with Jane Jacobs in the United States, the sprawling, impersonal model of the city came to be blamed for spiralling crime.

Jacobs famously said: "Not TV or illegal drugs but the automobile has been the chief destroyer of American communities."

Modern urban planning and industrialised mass housing hadn't provided a feeling of well-being. There was a sense that cities had to get back their old compactness – be reinvented, so to speak.

These concerns led to the formulation of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) as an alternative approach, which sought to slow down traffic, connect people and promote natural surveillance in neighbourhoods. If there were eye contact and more people on the street, crime would go down.

CPTED is based on the thought that the physical environment defines behaviour. It is too simplistic to divide people up into 'good' and 'bad'. On the other hand, urban design can make it less probable that people will commit crimes and traffic offences.

To be effective, CPTED has to vary from situation to situation and country to country. But in essence it harked back to the pre-modernistic approach to cities.

The traditional city gave importance to safety through social interaction. It came with streets and blocks and squares. It had buildings with windows looking on to the street. There was mixed use and economically mixed housing. Pedestrians were at street level.

Urban planners and administrators have come full circle to value density. The more activity there is on the street, the safer the neighbourhood. How this will play out will vary from one setting to the next. The combination of initiatives will be different.

But, as Bro Gronlund observes, when CPTED was conceived it was to serve as "an urban alternative to gated communities". Gronlund is associate professor with the School of Architecture in Copenhagen and is with the Centre for Urbanism.

Gronlund stresses the importance of urbanity. In the context of the city, urbanity represents density, multiplicity, coincidence and opportunity as well as the possible value of meeting strangers in daily life.

A city's measure is in its complexity: it needs to be both exciting and safe at the same time.

"My own short definition of urbanity," says Gronlund, "would be that it is a rich information field between humans and humans and artefacts in freely accessible space where the new and unexpected can happen and it can happen in ever new combinations and in growing complexity."

"Urbanity does not thrive in the spatially hierarchical and modernist city. It needs a more 'gridded' spatial network," Gronlund says.



Cycle rickshaws work well for short trips



Getting in and out of buses in Delhi can be tough

Cohen points out: "Changes in the built environment – the way communities are designed – can have a significant effect on making communities look and feel safer. The built environment refers to everything that we design and construct – including homes, schools, offices, places of worship, theatres, parks and restaurants, as well as streets and open spaces that connect these places."

It is important to develop public transport so that it is responsive to community needs. "Strategically, what is sold and how it is promoted influences community norms and related behaviours," says Cohen. "For instance, increasing access to healthy food, reducing the availability of firearms and developing policies that decrease the density of alcohol outlets and advertising have been shown to reduce crime."

CULTURE OF MOBILITY: It is increasingly being realized that it is not enough to make changes in the physical environment, but also to understand human behaviour. So, it won't do to provide pavements and bicycle lanes without knowing how people make decisions about their mobility.

Jeff Risom, an associate at Gehl Architects, says there is a need for changing the culture of mobility by raising the status of walking and cycling and reducing the barriers that come in the way of making these choices.

"The shift from hardware to software is complex and requires design professionals to learn more about human behaviour – why people do what they do," says Risom. Risom provided realm analysis and strategic advice for New



No place to walk: Pedestrians compete with vehicles for road space in New Delhi

Experts emphasise the need for linking transport planning, urban design, public health, transport safety, well-being and the built environment.

York's Broadway Boulevard project. He currently leads a team of consultants on the Better Market Street project in San Francisco or the redesign of San Francisco's most iconic street.

He emphasises the need for linking transport planning, urban design, public health, transport safety, well-being and the built environment.

"The multidimensional experiences of the pedestrian, cyclist and passenger must all be considered as one, at the eye-level of humans in the city," says Risom.

In Copenhagen and New York, dramatic improvements have been made in the quality of life through a people-first approach.

Copenhagen has been encouraging walking and cycling since the Sixties. Now 35 per cent of all trips in Copenhagen are by bicycle. Between five and 10 kilometres 44 per cent of all travellers use bicycles. The co-benefits of cycling are well known: better health, less pollution, less cost.

Yet when people in Copenhagen were asked why they chose cycling over other modes, they cited direct benefits like convenience, speed and simplicity.

Risom argues, "People don't change their behaviour when you tell them to but when the context compels them. Direct benefits to the individual have the largest impact on behaviour and choice and as more people choose non-motorised transport, the co-benefits to society are increased exponentially. Therefore, our challenge is to align co-benefits and direct benefits as much as possible to create a virtuous cycle."

New York, under Bloomberg as mayor, set out to achieve in just a couple of

years what Copenhagen had taken 40 years to do.

New York's Planning Commissioner, Armanda Burden, and Transport Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan visited Copenhagen to learn in 2006.

By 2007, New York had a bicycle track along Ninth Avenue. It was the first bicycle lane of its kind in North America and it went up to six blocks on Ninth Avenue. It was protected from traffic by a row of parked cars.

An important message went out with the bicycle track because it replaced a lane of vehicle traffic. So, instead of expanding the road for private transport, space had been created for non-motorised transport.

It was a small step but it spoke of a larger vision for a greener New York. It set out to change the environment for traffic in the city through several pilot projects, which were tested out for their effectiveness, redesigned if necessary or junked. At the core of this effort was the collection of people centric data and communication of it to the public.

The learning from the pilots was quickly disseminated and led to the projects under Green Light for Midtown along Broadway in Manhattan.

The New York model's success, explains Risom, was that the pilots were not random efforts but part of a larger vision. There was also a serious effort to assess how people were using spaces before the projects and the benefits that were accruing after implementation.

By closely studying the behaviour of people, the New York City government was able to arrive at a win-win situation. The Green Light for Midtown campaign reclaimed public space, but simultaneously increased traffic speeds by six per cent. Motorised traffic decreased by 2.5 per cent and yet travel time improved by 17 per cent in the central business district.

BE MULTIDISCIPLINARY: Efforts that focus on either reforming individual behaviour or creating infrastructure do not deliver results because the city is a complex place. It requires a weave – solutions that emerge from a range of expertise and insightful leadership.

Dinesh Mohan of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in New Delhi points out: "The more complex the issue there is a tendency to focus on the simpler and more technical aspects of the problem. Sustainable transport



Predictability matters: Signages help commuters find their way and feel safer

solutions are frequently reduced to those concerning cleaner vehicle emissions, provision of public transport and encouraging walking and bicycling. The reasons why people and governments don't or cannot follow many of these prescribed goals gets less attention."

Allan Williams, a social psychologist, says that training and educational programmes, when used in isolation, do not change individual behaviour. What is needed is a combination of vehicle and street design, community action, urban architecture, traffic safety and so on.

Mohan argues that city form clearly matters since cities with the same socio-economic characteristics have different traffic fatality rates.

Bruce Appleyard, who has 20 years of experience as a planner and urban designer, says, "It is not possible to change the behaviour of all residents of a city by means of educational campaigns. Therefore, it is very important to understand that infrastructure principles and urban design principles will help people in adopting desirable forms of behaviour."

Appleyard would like to see an end to "motorised apartheid" because this would make streets safer "from both crime and road traffic."

There is a need to slow down traffic through street design and traffic calming measures. Slower and more accountable traffic invariably translates into less crime.

THE CHALLENGE IN INDIA: After the New Delhi rape, the demand has been for the death penalty and greater policing. While tougher laws and strengthening of the police are needed, a safer city as we can see from examples elsewhere in the world will only emerge from a different vision of urban living.

As of now, local governments in India lack composite expertise and show no real willingness to seek it outside. There is little sense of mission and purpose.

In New Delhi the challenge of creating an inclusive city is especially complex. Its broad, sweeping avenues and secluded residential enclaves don't make for compactness and easy mixing. Traffic invariably seeks to move at high speeds.

Growth has led to sharp increases in incomes, but the disparities too are stark and with them come tensions that are difficult to manage. The rich need the poor for cheap services but don't want to share the city with them.

Making life in New Delhi safer and more harmonious requires more than better policing and delivery of justice. It calls for insightful leadership and fresh ideas that can only come from nimble governance.

The use of pilots and multiple solutions, as has been done in New York, could be one way forward.

Dinesh Mohan points out that New Delhi in parts has all the features of a traditional gridded city with a lot of street level activity. Areas like Shahpur Jat and other former village areas have a natural density of people and structures, which make for



Out at night: A city needs to be both exciting and safe



No pavements force commuters on to the road

Training and educational programmes, when used in isolation, do not change individual behaviour. What is needed is a combination of vehicle and street design, community action, urban architecture, traffic safety and so on.

greater safety. All the government needs to do is legitimise hawkers and small traders and help them clean up their act.

"We only talk about Hauz Khas village and that is because there are some expensive shops and eating places there," says Mohan. "But there are several other urban village areas that naturally lend themselves to conditions of a traditional city. Nurturing this identity for them would make them attractive both to residents and travellers."

While better policing and speedier justice are needed, Mohan believes it is necessary to worry about excessive policing and too much monitoring of the activities of people. "The young in particular need spaces to hang out and spend time together without being subjected to surveillance," he says.

Multiple measures are needed for a safer New Delhi. Mohan believes beginnings should be made with safer and more efficient public transport, mixed landuse, changes in building laws so that houses look out on to the street. "Residents should be allowed to run small businesses in their homes so that the old and the young have places to go to within a neighbourhood," says Mohan. "This automatically lends itself to greater safety because we tend to be protective to people we see and identify on a regular basis."

The Indian city needs a new narrative, which includes the concerns of the poor, says Dunu Roy of the Hazards Centre. Roy has been working on an alternative consultative process for two decades now with little success because the people who take decisions in the Indian city are far removed from the realities of the majority.

Roy points out that planners think of mobility, but the majority of road users in an Indian city think of livelihoods. They walk and cycle or would like to catch buses and therefore need employment closer to their homes.

V. Ravichandar of City Connect, a group which seeks to promote innovative



What's the choice? A girl braces for an autorickshaw ride in Delhi

urban solutions, says local government is dominated by generalist officers.

"There is an urgent need to encourage collaboration between local government and external experts and citizens groups to design and implement appropriate measures," says Ravichandar.

City Connect tries to bring citizen groups, business and government together to find solutions in water, waste, energy and security. To make a city safe and liveable, Ravichandar advocates neighbourhood watch schemes through well-represented ward committees.

Finally, cities work best for everyone when ways are found of balancing the anonymity they offer with familiarity and shared values that make urban living pleasing and manageable. ■

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
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- Go Green

Boond makes banks see the light

Village solar systems get a boost in Rajasthan

Arjun Sen
Ramganj Mandi (Rajasthan)

WE show the light," joked Rustam Sengupta, 32, as he walked down the dusty lanes of Undwa with a team of bank officials. Sengupta was keen to show them the solar-powered home lighting systems his company had installed in the village. Undwa is about 20 km from Ramganj Mandi, a town in Kota district of Rajasthan.

Sengupta is founder and chief executive officer (CEO) of Boond Engineering & Development Pvt. Ltd., based in New Delhi.

Russ, as he is fondly called by his friends, started his career working with a Belgian company, ICOS Vision Systems. He then moved to Deloitte Consulting in California and finally worked as an investment banker with Standard Chartered in Singapore earning \$180,000 a year. In October 2010, Sengupta chucked up all that to launch Boond.

Sengupta is a graduate from INSEAD, one of the best business schools in the world and an electrical engineer. Yet he is the epitome of humility. He often travels second-class in trains, gets into crowded rural buses and intermingles freely with those who work for him. His employees respect him for building a business that serves rural India. Some of his senior colleagues are happy working for him on a salary of ₹30,000 a month when they could easily earn ₹2 lakhs.

Boond's mission isn't limited to selling solar home lighting systems. "Our focus is not products," explains Sengupta. "We don't produce anything. We are trying to build a sustainable multi-product distribution channel in rural India. This would ensure that people in remote villages gain access to low-cost innovative products that can improve their quality of life and create livelihoods."

"There are many affordable, innovative and excellent products in India's urban markets and abroad which can provide villagers with basics



Rustam Sengupta, extreme right, with Shankar Lal and Satyavir Singh in Undwa village

like electricity, clean water, smokeless cooking stoves, sanitary napkins and so on. But the real problem is accessibility. There is no retail infrastructure in the rural hinterland to sell such products. Our focus is to build that distribution channel in a cost-effective way so that over time we can sell many such products at high volumes and low margins," says Sengupta.

In Undwa, the company lit up Ramgopal Dhakar's home. His grandfather is 100 years old

and can't see a thing after dark. His children can't do their homework. Dhakar has bought a 40W system comprising a solar panel and a battery that gives him three lamps to light up three rooms. He also has a 15-watt plug point to recharge his mobile phone or run a fan.

The system cost him ₹14,420. Dhakar paid upfront an initial sum of ₹2,884. The rest will be paid in monthly installments of ₹165 over five years. A farmer, he owns about five acres and

saves about ₹1 to ₹1.5 lakh a year. Most banks and private companies see savings as a yardstick to measure the income of farmers.

"These lights are very affordable and make a lot of economic sense," says Dhakar. The supply of electricity from the government is haphazard but the bill arrives regularly. Dhakar says he will save on his electricity bill.

Solar home lighting systems are now affordable because of bank finance and the subsidy provided by the Union Ministry of Natural & Renewable Energy (MNRE) under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission (JNNSM), funded by NABARD.

Boond's business is growing because local banks are financing solar home lighting systems. The company has a partnership with the Hadoti Kshetriya Gramin Bank – now amalgamated with the Baroda Rajasthan Kshetriya Grameen Bank (BRKGD) – thanks to progressive bankers like Naresh Joshi, ex-chairman, Arayavart Grameen Bank, Sanjay Mallik, ex-Chairman, Hadoti Kshetriya Grameen Bank and B.K. Singhal, assistant general manager of NABARD. The branch managers of three rural banks in Kota and Jhalawar districts are also giving villagers loans to pay for solar lighting.

The buyer pays 20 percent of the cost. The subsidy from NABARD works out to ₹108 per watt or 40 per cent of the total cost, whichever is lower. The bank provides the remaining balance as a loan at 12 per cent interest. The repayment is through equated monthly installments (EMI) for five years.

"Out of about 1,000 households in this village as many as 150 households have Kisan Credit Cards. They repay their credit every six months as their incomes are tied to crops. We are financing the purchase of these solar lamps so that farmers can pay six EMIs together when they repay their credit card loans," says D.C. Jain, branch manager of BRKGD's Ramgunj Mandi branch.

Shankar Lal, another farmer in Undwa with five acres and an annual income similar to Dhakar, is very satisfied with his purchase of two solar systems of 40W and 75W.

His lighting needs are more extensive. The total cost of the solar systems came to ₹39,020. He paid ₹7,804 upfront. The NABARD subsidy worked out to ₹12,420 and he took a bank loan of ₹18,796. His EMI works out to ₹395. "I will save at least ₹700 to ₹800 per month and enjoy light day and night. We hardly get power for 10 hours a day and often no power at all," he said.

"The Central government subsidy scheme was announced on 1 April, 2012. But unless companies like Boond come forward with products that villagers need, the scheme will remain unutilized," said Sanjay Mallik who was leading the inspection team and was primarily responsible for the bank partnership with Boond.

"We are there to help if there is a good model and good products. The solar lights are making a big difference to the quality of life in villages," remarked B.K. Singhal of NABARD who was also part of the inspection team.

The key reasons for Boond's success are quality and service. Boond installs the solar home systems carefully and has an efficient after-sales system. The company has a field manager who caters to one or two districts. The manager identifies vil-

lages that have no electricity or where electricity is available for limited periods. Then he visits these villages and identifies village-level entrepreneurs who become his first customers. These entrepreneurs then sell solar lighting systems to other villagers and to villages within a radius of about 10 to 20 km.

Villagers are offered free servicing for two years. Solar products typically last for 10 to 15 years. Boond's technicians, generally local young-



'We are trying to build a sustainable multi-product distribution channel in rural India. This would ensure that people gain access to low-cost innovative products.'

sters who have been trained, install and service the home lighting systems.

Word spreads fast in rural areas. Once people come to know that such a product is available they begin to approach Boond's village level entrepreneurs on their own.

Veterinary doctor Ishwar Patidar has come to Undwa from Sandara village which is 40 km away in Madhya Pradesh. He urges Sengupta to set up a 75W system for his home. He said he catered to sick animals living in villages at a radius of 50 km from Sandara. His village gets power on alternate days. He needs dedicated light every night to carry out his duties.

The demand for solar lights appears to be huge. In the first 10 days of January, the Boond team had already installed 10 home lighting solar systems in Undwa village. "We have orders for another

19 systems to be installed over the next 20 days," said Satyavir Singh, field manager for Kota and Jhalawar districts.

Singh, an MBA graduate, has two technicians who work under him and two helpers who install the systems at the rate of one per day. For 10 days a month, Singh visits villages to collect orders taken by his village level entrepreneurs. So far he has two entrepreneurs in the Ramganj Mandi block of Kota district and one in Jhalawar district. He spends the rest of the month identifying other villages and entrepreneurs who can sell Boond products. Entrepreneurs earn on an average about ₹7,000 per month above their farm-based incomes.

Bank financing for Boond started just a month ago and that too after senior management from NABARD and people like Sanjay Mallik and Naresh Joshi intervened. Rural bank managers are reluctant to provide such loans due to their small size and high risk.

Earlier, the company relied on their own funds and NGOs. In Udaipur district, Boond sold small solar systems of 10W costing ₹4,000 to very poor tribal families. They paid ₹500 and the rest was sponsored by NGOs like Seva Mandir and FES in Udaipur and the YWCA in Delhi.

"But this model is not sustainable in the long term although we will continue to serve the poorest of the poor using such sponsorships. In disaster hit areas like Ladakh we have given away smaller systems for free," says Sengupta.

He is requesting banks in Udaipur to provide loans for solar home lighting since the district has good demand from the local tribal population.

"Now that we have a successful model of bank financing which also helps us to generate some cash of our own, we should be able to grow organically without any hand holding. We plan to set up about 20 such centres," says Sengupta. Boond currently has two centres which cover Kota and Jhalawar districts based on the bank financing model. The company is planning to open three more centres in the next six months.

"We started with a partnership agreement with the Hadoti Kshetriya Grameen Bank. It had a presence in just three districts – Kota, Jhalawar and Baran. Now this bank has merged with BRKGD which has a presence in 24 districts of Rajasthan. We are working out an MoU with BRKGD for all these districts," Sengupta said.

Sengupta launched Boond with ₹20 lakhs of his own money. He straightaway lost ₹7 lakhs in his first two pilot projects. Later, he got ₹20 lakh from angel investors and ₹25 lakh from CIIE (Centre for Innovation, Incubation and Entrepreneurship in IIM-Ahmedabad). CIIE also provides strategic advice and connections to Boond through its extensive network of academics and experts.

Boond has been incubated by SELCO, India's largest solar light distribution company headed by well-known entrepreneur, Harish Hande. SELCO has installed over 1,50,000 systems in Karnataka and Sengupta hopes to replicate his mentor in poorer states like Rajasthan.

He hasn't broken even but Sengupta now has a turnover close to ₹50 lakhs and 14 employees. In two years he has lit up 50,000 lives with 6,000 solar home lighting units. His mission is to reach one million people by 2015. With a little help from banks he should be able to make it. ■

CSR MONITOR

Leather skills for Indore Jail

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE creation of livelihood opportunities is an important component of jail reforms. Prisoners need to be kept gainfully employed in jail and be given the skills and confidence to earn a living when they go back into society.

In a rapidly changing world it is important to train prisoners in skills that have a contemporary market and can provide significant incomes. It is even better to link them to industries so that they aspire to high standards of quality and technical knowhow.

Taking corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives into jails is one way of giving prison inmates experience, which they may otherwise never have been able to get.

Tata International, the Tata Group's trading arm, has begun working with the Indore Jail to teach the inmates how to craft products in leather which can be sold in local markets.

The initiative is at an early stage, but already each month 50 to 60 kg of leather are provided to the inmates to help them make bags, wallets and handbags.

Tata International was the first to develop a green field leather facility at Dewas in Madhya Pradesh. Over the past three decades, the Dewas facility has come to be regarded as world class, but it has simultaneously worked closely with the local communities. The Indore Jail initiative follows in this tradition. In the long term it hopes to be able to impact jail reform and make rehabilitation more skill based and market oriented.

"The leather garments and articles team in Dewas has helped bring about a change in the lives of the inmates of Indore Jail," says a Tata



Inmates learning to make leather products



Bags and wallets



International spokesperson. "The initiative has been started with the purpose of enabling the inmates to look at new skill sets that could create

a sense of self-worth and find alternative streams of livelihood."

The initiative is being supervised by the staff of Tata International at Dewas together with Dinesh Nargave, Superintendent of the Indore Jail, and Sanjay Mane, Director General of Prisons in Madhya Pradesh.

Clearly, if it is successful in Indore, the initiative can be replicated elsewhere and scaled up.

Together with manufacturing skills, there are immense possibilities of learning about marketing and branding and designing.

Tata International was established in 1962 and is the country's leading manufacturer, exporter and supply chain integrator of leather products. It works with some of the foremost international brands and is India's leading exporter of children's footwear. ■

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Insights

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EAC damns the Sutlej river

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

It is well-known that India's environment governance is very weak. The work of the Expert Appraisal Committees (EAC) in the clearance process is shoddy, unscientific and largely catering to vested interests. But with the recent recommendation of an environment clearance for the 775 MW Luhri hydropower project on the Sutlej river in Himachal Pradesh, the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests' (MoEF) EAC on River Valley and Hydropower Projects seems to have touched a new low.

First, the Sutlej was known to be an already over developed basin when the Luhri project came up for first stage clearance before the EAC in April 2007. The EAC should have refused to consider the project without an independent credible cumulative basin level study looking into its carrying capacity with respect to various aspects. The fact that the EAC did not even discuss this then, even though the issue was brought before it, showed the EAC members' complete lack of understanding of the importance of the basin level cumulative impact assessment study.

The minutes of the EAC meeting in April 2007, where the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the EIA came up for approval for the Luhri project, say that the project is going to have a 45 m high dam affecting a maximum of 45 project affected families and 13 villages. Now from the EIA it is clear that the dam height is not 45 m but 86 m, that the project will affect not 45 but 2,337 landowners



The Sutlej river near the proposed Luhri hydropower project

Competence is clearly not the correct description of the EAC. It did not even ask the project promoter for an explanation or penalise them for their misrepresentations.

and 9,674 persons and impact not 13 but over 100 villages. Any competent body would have questioned the very serious nature of changes in basic project parameters, but competence is clearly not the correct description of the EAC. The EAC did not even ask the project promoter for an explanation, leave aside penalise them for their misrepresentations.

Even legally, the TOR clearance is supposed to be valid only for two years. When the project came up for final environmental clearance before the EAC towards the end of March 2012, it was almost five years since the TOR was cleared. The

Continued on page 28



People holding up banners protesting against the Luhri hydropower project

TOR clearance was no longer valid but the EAC was completely blind to the illegalities.

The legally mandatory public hearings for the project were held in May and August 2011, but the EIA, made available a month before the public hearing as required under the EIA notification, did not have basic information about the names and impacts on the 78 villages along the path of the tunnel of the projects. The local groups had written to the ministry, the Pollution Control Board that is supposed to conduct the hearings and the EAC about these and other issues. But the EAC did not even take note of such serious legal lapses. On this count of violations alone, in the public hearing process, the EAC should have refused to consider the project. But the EAC did not even discuss this issue!

In repeated representations to the EAC, the Sutlej Bachao Sangharsh Samiti and Himdhara have been bringing to the EAC's notice that there has been no compliance with the Forest Rights Act (FRA) for the forest land required for the project and that the local administration has been indulging in manipulations and pressure tactics to get the mandatory gram sabha resolutions for the FRA compliance.

In fact, these groups have been sending representations to the EAC on all these issues since October 2011. Already, five representations have been sent, but the EAC has never even acknowledged, leave aside discussed any of these representations in its meetings.

The EAC should have invited the people who sent such representations, heard them and allowed them to be present when the project was discussed in the EAC. The EAC did none of these things clearly showing their bias for the projects and not for the environment and people which are the basic mandates of the EAC. This behaviour of the EAC is also in violation of the Delhi High Court order in the Utkarsh Mandal case

where the High Court has expressly asked the EAC to show that it has applied its mind to each representation it receives and the decision it takes in that regard.

The EIA itself has such serious inadequacies that even the EAC notes in the minutes of the March 2012 meeting that "the EIA/EMP report is inadequate," and the consultant has presented "poor quality of material." The EAC minutes record many of the serious deficiencies of the EIA in its March 2012 meeting. The EIA was so inad-

The project will destroy close to 60 km of the mighty, over-dammed Sutlej river. The callous treatment the EAC has given to such an impactful project is reprehensible.

equated, so full of contradictions and misrepresentations that the EAC should have rejected it and asked for a fresh EIA while recommending black-listing of the consultant. None of these issues were resolved in the November 2012 meeting when EAC next discussed the project. By then the EAC had also received representations from affected people, and the issues raised, which too remained unresolved. And yet, the EAC decided to quietly recommend environment clearance to the project without referring to its own observations or those of the representations. The most charitable explanation is that the EAC is inconsistent, incompetent and arbitrary. Reality is rarely that charitable.

The response of the developer and consultant to the issues raised by the EAC in the March 2012 meeting was supposed to be made available at least 10 days before the next EAC meeting in November 2012 when it met to consider the project, as per the orders of the Central Information Commission (CIC) in February 2012 and the CIC notice to the MoEF following SANDRP's appeal in May 2012. Violating the CIC orders, the responses were not in the public domain.

Even more shockingly, the project violated the EAC's own norms, but amazingly, the EAC did not even discuss it. Let us see how. The Full Reservoir Level of the Luhri dam is 862.9 m and the tail water level of the immediate upstream Rampur project is also 862.9 m, which means there is zero distance of flowing river between the two projects. This is in complete violation of the recommendations of the Avay Shukla (former additional Chief Secretary of Himachal Pradesh) Committee appointed by the Himachal Pradesh High Court and the reported recommendation of the BK Chaturvedi Committee appointed by the National Ganga River Basin Authority, headed by the Prime Minister. Both the committees' recommendations are for a minimum of five km distance of flowing river between any two projects. Even the EAC has been following the recommendation of at least a one km distance between the two projects. But the EAC did not even discuss this issue.

Even more disturbingly, the full reservoir level of the downstream Kol dam is 642 m, whereas the invert level of the Tail Race Channel of Luhri dam is one metre below this that is 641 m, which means again there is zero length of flowing river between the two projects. The EAC again violated the recommendations of the Avay Shukla Committee and its own norms. Why did the EAC not even discuss this issue? Why did the SJVN and the EIA consultants, who were familiar with the EAC norm did not raise these issues for both the upstream and downstream situation? Why did the MoEF officials who are part of the EAC and knew the importance of these issues did not raise them either? This collective silence, indicating collective collusion, raises too many questions for anyone's comfort.

It should be noted that the Luhri project has a head race tunnel length of 38.14 km, which is the longest in the world. As the EAC itself noted, the tunnel will bypass over 50 km length of the river, in addition to the 6.8 km long reservoir. So the project will destroy close to a length of 60 km of the mighty, already over-dammed Sutlej river. To see the callous treatment the EAC has given to such an unprecedentedly impactful project is most reprehensible.

It's clear that the whole episode of the EAC recommending environment clearance to the Luhri HEP is shameful. As if to keep that appalling decision away from the public gaze, the publication of the November 2012 meeting of the EAC was delayed beyond the next meeting, unlike the usual practice. The only possible option left for the EAC to clear the air and its own name from this disgraceful situation is an urgent, transparent review of this decision it has taken. Let us hope the EAC will use that opportunity soon. ■

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South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers & People (www.sandrp.in)

POSCO isn't a closed chapter

KANCHI KOHLI

THERE are some stories which need to be repeated. This is not only because they are exemplary narratives or contain vibrant lessons for us but because their end is yet to be written. As one moves along, new characters, conversations and fresh configurations get added. In these tales there are people one has met, stood in solidarity with, and walked along when the need arose.

Today's re-engagement takes us to Jagatsinghpur in Odisha where the setting up of a steel plant, port and ancillary infrastructure has met with stiff resistance for the last eight years. In this phase there have been many ups and several downs. There have been constant shifts of power with the highest offices of the Government of India intervening so that POSCO's men and machines could find their way into their earmarked project site. But a resilient local movement by a cluster of strong-willed villages stood its ground and continues to ensure that the proposed industrial design for the region does not take off.

This narration begins only in March 2012 when the National Green Tribunal (NGT) issued a strong judgment pushing back POSCO's entry into the area. Amongst many other contentions there were some important directions. First, a fresh review of the project was asked for based on the comments of earlier committees and the tribunal's observations. Secondly, the 2011 order of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) giving POSCO their final environmental clearance was suspended. Thirdly, the total land being acquired by POSCO was limited to a 4 MTPA steel plant instead of a 12 MTPA.

This appeal against POSCO's 2011 approval was not filed by the movement but by social activists in the state of Odisha who had been consistently raising concerns about improper assessments and legal procedures – all of which had been submitted to the MoEF and its various committees set up to review the project over the years.

What followed was that the MoEF set up a review committee under K. Roy Paul, former Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation along with S.R. Wate, director of National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) and R. Ramesh, Director of National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management. The committee visited the area in August 2012, did not meet the protesting villages, and is believed to have filed

its report to the MoEF. This report has neither been open to the public nor does it appear that the MoEF has taken any further action on it.

What is interesting is that due to years of protest and other delays, the first set of environmental approvals to POSCO, granted in 2007,



Villagers and activists have led a persistent struggle against POSCO



lapsed in 2012. These were valid for only five years. During this time local resistance, solidarity, and lack of the final set of permissions under other designated laws disallowed POSCO from starting operations. There were efforts to forcibly enter the area, local clashes, episodes where POSCO's officials were prevented from entering, arrests of protesters and so on.

In early January this year, the residents of Dhinkia village which has been foremost in the struggle against the project, wrote to the Chief Secretary and Chairperson, State Level

Monitoring Committee for implementation of the 2006 Forest Rights Act. It enclosed a resolution of the gram sabha of Dhinkia opposing diversion of forest land in violation of the FRA.

The Act recognises the rights of tribal and other forest-dwelling communities to occupy, cultivate, use and protect areas within which they were residing before 13 December 2005. More than 2,000 people, says the letter, reiterated that the FRA has not been implemented in the villages of Dhinkia and Govindpur and in the hamlets of Patna and Mahala which are affected by the proposed POSCO project.

In May 2011, the MoEF had issued an order granting diversion of forest land for the project based on the state government's assurance that no forest dwelling communities were residing in the project area and thereby no rights needed to be recognised. The MoEF accepted the word of the state government and not of the palli sabha of the village which had written to both the state and central government that due processes under the FRA had not been completed and therefore the said forest clearance could not be granted. This continues to be a contentious

and unresolved issue.

The above set of regulatory and judicial twists and turns can be juxtaposed with the struggle against POSCO today. POSCO continues to deny that any illegalities have occurred and clarifies its track record on its website. Ironically both the judgment of the NGT and the contentions of the MoEF's 2010 Meena Gupta committee (especially its majority committee) clearly recorded that irregularities have taken place.

The power dynamics between the people, the State and the company continues. Efforts to acquire land remain stalled. The POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS) has strongly condemned a statement by the Jagatsinghpur district collector, SK Mallick, when on 28 December 2012 he was quoted as having said that work on the project would start the next day and consent from local residents had been taken.

POSCO's tryst with India's growth story brings out how simple and complex negotiations impact the everyday lives of people. Resistance continues even as there are relentless attempts by the powerful to pave the way for POSCO. But is this story coming to a close? Ironically, my sense tells me otherwise. ■

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Lure of the homestay

SEEMA BHATT

TODAY's younger generation wants to explore the wild and exotic, experience adventure and pump up the adrenalin. The outcome is that a new trend in tourism is emerging in India.

Advertisements inadvertently sell or portray this youthful lifestyle. 'Alive is Awesome' is the tagline for one such ad selling soap. An elephant showers a lissome model perched on its back with a spray of water from its trunk. You can see male models enjoy a rain of waterfalls. Another is on a boat and upturns a bucket of seawater over himself for a wash.

The implications of these images are many. The inference is that tourism will boost local economies with more jobs and improved infrastructure. However, the worrying implications are for the destinations themselves. Most spots that attract adventure tourism are in fragile ecosystems – once degraded they might never recover.

So the crucial question is what kind of tourism is going to be promoted in such zones? The recent Supreme Court case and the subsequent debate on tourism in tiger reserves have thrown up a very similar question. A new model for tourism, which is of low impact, is indeed called for.

In recent years a growing number of small initiatives are following some of these principles. Community-based home-stays are gaining immense popularity mostly in the Himalayan region. With technical and financial support from relevant organizations, communities in several locations let out rooms in their own homes. This is a wonderful way for visitors to share local culture and tradition.

These homestays, located in the ecologically fragile Himalayas, present a wonderful model of best practices. Homestays in Ladakh adhere strict-

ly to use of the traditional Ladakhi toilet, perhaps one of the most eco-friendly toilets in practice.

Homestays in the Coorg region of Karnataka present a different model. Coorg or Kodagu in the Western Ghats of southern India is one of the most popular weekend getaways for people from Bangalore. Known for its coffee, the plantation owners decided to use part of their spacious homes as homestays around the middle of the year 2000 when coffee prices hit an all-time low. The concept has since gained immense populari-



Four eco-friendly huts for tourists in Wakro, a town in Arunachal Pradesh

ty. Visitors enjoy local culture and cuisine and experience the Kodava lifestyle. The personal touch is what makes these places different. The lady of the house is involved in cooking and housekeeping while the men help organize outdoor activities such as treks, bird watching and walks through the coffee plantations.

The northeastern states too are becoming popular travel destinations thanks to better connectivity. This region, considered one of India's biodi-

versity 'hotspots' is rich in culture and tradition. It is crucial that tourism has a light carbon footprint here and is sensitive to the region's natural and cultural heritage. The northeast can take a lead in promoting responsible and sustainable tourism.

Some initiatives are already in place. Wakro, a small town in the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh, is one example. Surrounded by the Mishmi Hills, the main inhabitants of Wakro are the Mishmis. A very enterprising Idu Mishmi,

Rohingso, has built a set of four huts on his land for tourists. Built in typical Mishmi style, each hut is on stilts and made entirely of bamboo and cane. Tastefully furnished with clean sheets and mosquito nets, the huts are very comfortable. They do have functional concrete toilets located a little distance from the huts. A tie-up with a local travel company called Purvi Discovery brings tourists here for a night or two en route to other places in the district.

Initiatives like these are growing across the country and more tourism of this kind needs to be promoted and publicized. Such enterprises can't come up overnight. Considerable investment is needed in building the capacity of local communities and helping them maintain certain standards.

Such tourism is perhaps not for the mainstream tourist seeking luxury in the form of swimming pools and cable television. But it is certainly appropriate for those ready for novel experiences. It is indeed time to look at tourism differently. Tourism development needs to be site specific and appropriate for the location. One shoe cannot fit all. Low impact tourism has to be responsible and adhere to certain guidelines. The recent Supreme Court case is perhaps the right wake-up call. ■

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Those hidden tears

A sensitive film on the aftermath of 26/11

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

IN Jahnu Barua's cinematic universe, the focus of the narrative is always on ordinary individuals caught in extraordinary, and often, tragic circumstances. No matter what backdrop he opts for, be it India's freedom struggle (*Kuhkhal*), the Assam students' agitation (*Papori*) or the run-up to the Sino-Indian war of 1962 (*Firingoti*), he finds drama in the lives of the unsung.

In the veteran Assamese writer-director's new film, *Baandhon* (Waves of Silence), the spotlight is on the horrific 26/11 Mumbai terror attack. And it is the common man's stoic resilience that remains the filmmaker's primary concern.

The film delivers a strong statement against terrorism but does so without resorting to the depiction of the nature and extent of the violence that was perpetrated on the western metropolis on 26 November, 2008, by a band of bloodthirsty desperadoes.

"I do not feel the need to show any violence on the screen in order to make a statement against it," says Barua who, in a career spanning three decades, has captured the socio-political realities of Assam with a keen sense of humanity and history.

For Barua, terrorism isn't just an assault on innocents that reduces them to mere statistics. "There are human emotions involved in the aftermath of any act of violence and that is what *Baandhon* seeks to underscore. Portraying violence to convey its horror would actually be an easy way out for a filmmaker," he explains.

Baandhon, which is 60-year-old Barua's 13th feature film, is a fictional story that plays out in the form of a simple domestic drama before it unwraps the impact of the Mumbai terror attack on an aged couple who live miles away from the scene of the atrocity.

"I wanted to make the film as universal as possible," the director says. "So I opted for a single story to capture the magnitude of the loss that people suffered."



Baandhon: the common man's stoic resilience



Jahnu Barua at work

As the film opens, we are introduced to a bickering septuagenarian Guwahati couple (played by Bishnu Khargoria and Bina Patangia) who have ostensibly had enough of each other and are desperate for a legal separation.

The duo has been inseparable since childhood – they grew up in the same village and went to the same school. But life's vagaries, including the untimely death of their only son and his wife, have taken their toll on the couple.

The only bond that they now seem to share is the one that they have with their grandson, an IIT Mumbai student. The boy goes missing from Victoria Terminus on the day of the terror attack. As the crisis deepens, the old couple is drawn

Continued on page 32



Baandhon: violence shatters the family



Jahnu Barua at IFFI 2012 with actor Jerifa Wahid

together again as they travel to Mumbai in search of their grandson.

The strong-minded but gentle-spirited grandfather in *Baandhon* is, in many ways, reminiscent of earlier Barua protagonists grappling with forces beyond their control.

His plight is pretty much the same as that of the poor peasant who is robbed of his holding by a greedy landlord in *Halodhia Choraye Baodhan Khai* (The Catastrophe, 1987) and the simple boatman whose traditional livelihood is threatened when a bridge is built over the river in his village in *Hkhagaroloi Bahu Door* (It's a Long Way to the Sea, 1994).

Baandhon is a calm and melancholic rumination on the tragic ways in which senseless violence can shatter the lives of those who have little to do with the larger dynamics of terrorism.

Says Barua: "Leaders of the world constantly talk about a global war on terrorism, but when terror does strike, it is common people who suffer its consequences."

The subterranean theme of *Baandhon* is precisely that – politicians who are directly or indirectly responsible for fuelling anger the world over are never affected by terrorism. "It is the common man who is the victim," says the filmmaker.

Baandhon, which opened in Assam to mark the fourth anniversary of 26/11, is probably the first full-fledged film on the incident that shook the nation. "I was in Goa attending the International Film Festival of India when the attacks began," recalls Barua. "It cast a long shadow on all of us. We were all extremely disturbed."

What Barua found surprising was that even

two years down the line no film had been made on the subject in Mumbai. "I used to wonder, have we filmmakers become so insensitive that a horror like this hadn't moved us," he says.

He continues: "My wife (Gayatri Barua, the production controller of many of Barua's acclaimed films, including the latest one) suggested that I should make a film on the theme myself instead of complaining. That is how *Baandhon* came about."

The film, which marks the return of the Assam State Film Finance and Development Corporation to active production after a decade-long hiatus, was accorded the honour of being the opening film of the Indian Panorama section of the latest edition of the International Film Festival of India.

Baandhon was also screened at the 17th International Film Festival of Kerala before going on to win the Best Indian Film award at the Bengaluru Film Festival at the end of last year.

Barua's home state has been witness to militancy and political violence for decades. Was the troubled history of Assam at the back of his mind as he scripted *Baandhon*? "Most definitely," he replies. "I am

concerned about the situation not only in Assam but in the northeast as a whole. But if I seek to tackle the issue through my films, I might only end up taking sides. I do not want to do that."

The genteel core of *Baandhon* is clearly rooted in Barua's creative worldview. "When a bullet is fired, no matter where and by whom, it is a direct attack on humanity," he asserts. "Every act of violence leads to a situation in which we lose a bit of our humanity."

Barua, who is currently shooting a screen adaptation of playwright and novelist Arun Sarma's Sahitya Akademi Award-winning book *Ashirbador Rong* (The Colour of Blessings), also has an ambitious international co-production on the anvil.

Titled *Homing Pigeons*, the co-production has been in the works for quite a while. "Many things have to be put in place before the film rolls," says Barua. "Hopefully, I will begin filming sometime next year."

Baandhon is Barua's first release since 2005's *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara*, a Hindi-language film that was produced by actor Anupam Kher and distributed by Yash Raj Films, Bollywood's biggest production banner.

Another Hindi film, *Har Pal*, featuring Preity Zinta, has been stuck in the cans for four years, while the half-complete *Butterfly Chase*, which touched upon the question of militancy, has been shelved in the wake of a producer bailing out of the project.

It is a happy augury that the gifted Barua is back in the thick of the action after a string of unexpected false starts. *Baandhon* is evidence that he has lost none of his edge as a filmmaker and a chronicler. ■

Yana rocks



A temple below the monolithic rock formation in Yana

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

HHEAD to the evergreen forests of the Western Ghats in the Uttara Kannada district of north Karnataka and you'll be treated to two incredible wonders. A short ride through the green canopy of a forest will bring you to the foot of a mountain where rock formations begin. A stunning sight awaits you: sharp-edged cliffs made of black crystalline rock contrasting against the evergreen Sahyadri Hills and the blue waters of the river Chandika. Located 25 km from the coastal town of Kumta and 40 km from Sirsi near the Chandrika river, Yana is a major draw for pilgrims, trekkers and nature-lovers alike.

What makes the place a visual treat are the twin pinnacles, the enchanting greenery, the wondrous caves around the peaks, the innumerable beehives on the rocks and the crystal clear waters of the Chandalika river. Rare and exotic wild flowers grow in profusion around hillsides adding to the charm of the place. The deep lush greenery, the sound of water flowing through the valleys

with amazing legends

SUSHEELA NAIR



SUSHEELA NAIR



Beehives on the monolithic rocks

and gorges adjacent to Yana and the echo of bird calls lure tourists in large numbers.

You can spot formidable boulders, roaring cascades and an ancient temple replete with legends. The soothing greenery and tranquility act as a balm to your tired nerves. Yes, there are waterfalls too. The falls originate as a trickle from the rocks and then develop into gushing waterfalls cascading into the Chandrika river. Pilgrims first take a dip in the Chandrika and then move to the Ganapathi temple. The crystal clear water of the river rejuvenates both your body and mind.

The needle sharp peaks of these two monoliths jab the sky. The taller of the two rocks at 120 metres is the Bhairaveshwara Shikara and the slightly smaller one at 90 metres is called the Mohini Shikhara. Yana has mythological significance as is common with all such places and it is also the epicentre of many a legend.

A popular legend associated with Yana says that Bhasmasura, a malevolent demon, performed penance to Lord Shiva and obtained the power of reducing to ashes anybody on whose head he placed his hand. An ungrateful Bhasmasura, how-

ever, soon decided to test the boon on his benefactor. Devotees believe that when Bhasmasura pursued Shiva with the intention of destroying him, Shiva came down to earth and hid himself in the dark nooks of the Bhairaveshwara peak of Yana. Seeing his plight, Vishnu assumed the form of a seductive female dancer – Mohini – and managed to win Bhasmasura's affections. She wily challenged him to a dance competition and

induced him to place his hand on his head. The unwitting demon did just that and was reduced to a heap of ashes. Legend has it that the other peak is called Jaganmohini in honour of Vishnu who took the form of Mohini and saved Lord Shiva's life.

A cave temple dedicated to Lord Shiva lies below these shikaras. It has an idol of the Saint Bhairaveshwara which is believed to be svayambhu or self-generated. Water from a spring on the rock above drips delicately on its braid. A shivalinga can also be seen within the precincts of the temple but curiously no worship is offered to it. It is believed that this shivalinga was once in the sanctum sanctorum along with the main idol but was shifted to its present place many years ago. Bronze icons of Ganga and Chandika are located in an adjacent cave. A small path to the left of the temple leads to a series of rock caves and a walk through this bat-infested labyrinth can be an eerie experience.

Geologically these rocks seem to have been formed millions of years ago. Their black colour is due to the iron, manganese and silica present in them. Sadly, the vagaries of time have caused these limestone structures to turn blackish brown. Legend has it that the heat generated in this combustion of Bhasmasura was so intense that the limestone, which the rocks are composed of, turned black. Adding credence to this legend is the presence of loose black soil scattered around the monoliths which locals believe are the demon's ashes.

The profusion of beehives on overhanging rocks is an interesting feature in Yana. According to the temple authorities, the bees guard the sanctity and serenity of the place. At the slightest irritation or disturbance, they attack the troublemakers. All visitors have to take great care to stay away from these guardians of the cave temples.

It used to be a great challenge to reach Yana several decades ago. In those days the dirt road used to get washed away by heavy rain and tourists had to find their own way through dense forests to reach the place, braving thorns, slippery slopes and wild animals. In the absence of motorable roads, only hardy trekkers could savour the beauty of these rock formations.

With the construction of a metallic road that culminates 500 metres before the foot of the mountain, tourist arrivals have increased exponentially. Currently, Yana is losing its charm. Tourists are littering garbage in the forest and dirtying several streams in the vicinity. The inscriptions on the rocks by tourists bear testimony to gross vandalism of nature and its art. There is a need to accord a special protection status to Yana. This place is also considered a biodiversity hotspot of the Sahyadri Hill Range and hence there is a proposal to protect the area under the Biodiversity Preservation Act of 2002. ■

FACT FILE

Airport:

Panjim, approximately 200 km from Yana Railroad or Kumta on the Konkan railway. Sirsi is 40 km away and Bangalore is at a distance of 490 km

Accommodation:

No accommodation is available at Yana. Sirsi and Kumta have some reasonably good and moderately priced hotels.

Job scheme ignites change



RIGHT TO WORK AND RURAL INDIA

Ashok K. Pankaj
Sage

₹ 1,195

Civil Society News New Delhi

IN 2006, when the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was launched, many economists dismissed it as a waste of public money. In fact, they declared this scheme a failure even before it began.

It's time to make an assessment. In seven years how has the MGNREGS been implemented and what has been its impact? In this book, 'The Right to Work and Rural India,' edited by Ashok K. Pankaj, a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Human Development in Delhi, a series of research papers answer these questions in an unbiased manner.

The MGNREGS assures 100 days of employment in public works at the statutory minimum wage to people in rural areas if they ask for it. If people do not get work within 15 days, an unemployment allowance is to be paid by the state. Job cards are issued. Women too are entitled to ask for work and provisions like crèche, drinking water, worksite close to the village, are part of the scheme.

The MGNREGS was tentatively launched in 200 backward districts. It now covers 615 districts or nearly all of rural India and is seen as the biggest employment scheme by the State in the world.

Divided into five sections, the first chapter of the book explains lucidly aspects of the right to work. The second section discusses whether MGNREGS is the right path to poverty alleviation, especially if we consider that markets cannot provide goods and services to the very poor.

A chapter discusses whether a straight cash transfer is better than an employment guarantee. The conclusion is that if public assets are created and maintained and if the wage rate is right, employment guarantee is a better route to poverty alleviation. Though administrative costs are higher, the positive impact is more widespread –

from increasing income to improving agriculture and rural infrastructure.

The third section, and this is an interesting one, tracks how the scheme has worked in districts of Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Punjab. Most public works under MGNREGS concentrate on building water harvesting structures and village roads.

Predictably, the lead states are Andhra Pradesh, where the state government has strongly backed the scheme and Rajasthan, where the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), a people's movement, spread awareness and invented the social audit to chase corruption out of the system.

In a study of five districts in Rajasthan, Dungarpur emerges as the biggest success story. Women's participation is high and having a female mate appears to have worked. Women are



also speaking up in gram sabha meetings, a positive development since elsewhere women appear to be involved in implementation and not decision-making. Money from the MGNREGS is the third source of income for women on worksites.

Water harvesting has raised groundwater levels, resulting in reverse migration in districts like Barmer where thousands of *tankas* were built. Small farmers who routinely migrated scurried began to begin sowing.

Admittedly, problems exist and these are common in all states. The assets created are often poor in quality. No plan is in place for their maintenance. Panchayats are weak and the upper castes try to derive benefits out of the scheme.

Andhra Pradesh, the second success story, has created some 150,000 public works. Here again, women make up a big part of the workforce. The state has used institutions and technology to

deliver services at the grassroots. Andhra's self-help groups, NGOs, Wage Seeker Associations have all helped people to get their entitlements. The demand here is for more employment.

Bihar and Jharkhand are perfect candidates for the MGNREGS. Both states have large rural populations and are in dire need of land development and public works. Yet the MGNREGS has been grounded. According to the researchers, the administration, civil society groups and panchayati raj institutions are all weak.

Bihar still stands a chance with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar trying to give panchayats more authority. In the few places the scheme has been implemented, it has enabled the poorest households to earn money and buy food.

The other outlier is Punjab, a state witnessing agricultural and environmental distress. The research paper analyses the working of the MGNREGS in Hoshiarpur, the district with the highest literacy rate in Punjab. The MGNREGS wage rate is lower than the minimum wage. Also, the state has *pucca* roads and canals.

The fourth section of the book, a must-read, is on the impact of the scheme in rural India. It wasn't envisaged as a cure for poverty and yet it has the potential to change rural economies.

Self-targeting is working. The scheme is attracting the poorest households – SC/ST and women especially in Dungarpur and Kangra. But facilities for women are sorely lacking.

For MGNREGS to have real time impact on the rural economy, the researchers point out that the scheme needs synergy with other government schemes on livelihood, infrastructure and watershed development. Big and

small must work together. An interesting example cited is from Chhattisgarh where the MGNREGS created opportunities for fishing, forestry and lac production.

Also, critical areas like pastures and catchments have been left out. There is a lot of work pending. So there is a case to increase employment to 200 days and strengthen gram panchayats.

According to the book, the MGNREGS has led to an increase in wages and resulted in a shortage of labour, fulfilling the predictions of the doomsayers.

However, as the researchers point out, labour intensive industries, like textiles, require skilled labour. This trend will increase. Mechanization of agriculture is likely to hasten.

The last section of the book is on prospects for the scheme. The chapters focus on how to improve implementation of the MGNREGS and strengthen rural governance. ■

Sifting fact from fiction

Peggy Mohan's novel is not just courtroom drama



THE YOUNGEST SUSPECT

Peggy Mohan

Harper Collins

₹ 299

Arjun Sen
New Delhi

PEGGY Mohan's second novel, *The Youngest Suspect*, is a fictionalized account of what happens when young Muslim boys are brutalized into confessing to terrorist crimes they did not commit. It is a novel on the aftermath of the 2002 Godhra riots in Gujarat, 'an indictment of sorts of the Modi government,' says Peggy Mohan.

After every terror attack, the police pick up young Muslim boys as suspects. They are tortured into writing confessions indicting themselves. Many of them turn out to be innocent. Yet they languish in jail for years. The stigma leaves their lives in tatters.

Mohan is a linguist from the Indian community in Trinidad. She did her doctoral thesis on Trinidad Bhojpuri. She has twice been an expert witness responsible for analyzing confessional statements in terrorism trials in India – once in the Parliament Attack case in 2002 and then for the Tiffin Bomb Trial in Ahmedabad in 2003.

As an eyewitness of POTA (Prevention of



Peggy Mohan at home in New Delhi

Terrorism Act) trials, Mohan could have written her book as fact, not fiction. But she wanted to relate her story with all its horrors through the eyes of those who suffered.

Mohan, who also teaches music at Vasant Valley School in New Delhi, spoke to *Civil Society* about her book.

Reading your book left me wondering how much of it was fact and how much was fiction. What was your objective in writing this book?

I have tried to capture the ground realities in Gujarat after the Godhra riots of 2002. The book is based on my personal experience as an expert witness called in by the defense in the Tiffin Bomb Trial in Ahmedabad. My job as an expert linguist was to analyse the confessional statements of the accused and convince the POTA Court in Ahmedabad that those confessions could not have been obtained the way the police were claiming.

My task was to refute the contention of the police that the confessional statements were verbatim depositions given freely and written down in real time. My testimony based on, among other things, a quantitative analysis of the speed of writing, the neatness of writing, sentence structure and highlighting the verbatim repetition of one particular paragraph containing the word for atonement, *paschatap* or *pastavo*, as the second and last paragraph of all the confessions, convinced the court that these statements could not have been spontaneously generated. This led to the acquittal of five of the 18 accused boys.

Moreover, the framing of charges by the police was also real. I found a woman journalist who interviewed the accused in jail and I saw her doc-

uments. The descriptions of torture including electrocution are all authentic and based on these documents. That is the reason why the descriptions ring so true.

So, where does fact end and fiction begin in your book?

Although the book is described as a 'courtroom thriller and a love story' on its back cover, it is based on the reality that Muslims are framed by the police to serve the political masters ruling the state.

The love story is fictional. The two chief protagonists – the boy Adil and the girl Megha – are actually metaphors. There are many coincidences. The boy represents young Muslims who are trying to get out of a ghetto existence and become part of the middle class. The girl represents civil society. They meet during the Godhra riots, and then again in jail when the girl is researching a media project.

There is an element of fact even in this fiction. All the five accused vanished after their acquittal. I understand one of them is now with a girl who waited nine months for him to come out of jail. You know, I always feel someday my doorbell will ring and a guy will come in and say my name is not Adil but you have written about me. Similarly, the three industrial-

alists I have described in the book are real – I was actually reporting their views not making them up myself.

If so much of your book is based on actual experiences and events, why did you choose to adopt the fiction format?

The impact happens when you write about people you know. I wanted to see the situation through the eyes of the victims and the transformations they were going through as a result of this kind of state violence. Given the facts, what other opinion could I have except an indictment of such state-sponsored violence on innocent victims, especially minorities?

You may say the book is too political, that I am taking some kind of a political stand or that I am writing from a political standpoint. But I never set out to write a political story. Modi is not interesting. It is the people I found interesting – not just the victims but also all those ordinary middle class people who would normally abhor violence yet either accept or participate in communal violence.

Take, for example, the three industrialists mentioned in the book who wouldn't employ Muslims. They never say that the violence did not happen – for them that was not important. It is an assertion of their communal identity in response to globalization when language vanishes and people within a community are no more able to communicate as they used to in the past. Of course, this is just a theory but I wanted to understand the mindset of all the people involved and portray the ground realities as well as I could. So I had to adopt the fictional format and use real experiences of individuals to explore the larger social issues. ■

For a glowing skin

Dr G. G. GANGADHARAN

GREEN CURES



AYURVEDA is the science of dynamic equilibrium. In fact, the entire science of Ayurveda revolves around different equilibriums within the body and without. Health is the balance in this equilibrium. Imbalance is disease. Can anyone

provide a simpler explanation of health? This is the beauty of Ayurveda. The unified theory of Western science has yet to find a comprehensive explanation, whereas Ayurveda has, a long time ago, reduced everything within the unified theory of Tridoshas, the all-pervading functional units of the body.

Vata, Pitha and Kapha are the radical etiological factors for skin diseases too. Wrong diet and lifestyle which go against the seasons and one's nature or prakruti are the two important factors that derange doshic balance in the body. Among them Bhrajaka-pitha, situated in the skin, is the prime vitiating factor in skin disease.

Pitha and raktha together form different kinds of skin diseases in the seven layers of the skin involving the dermis, epidermis and other internal tissues. The skin is the largest constituent in the body hence skincare is of utmost importance. Skin is the barrier which prevents harmful organisms from entering the body and also protects the body from the external influences of heat, cold and wind. To protect one's skin means to protect one's life.

Abhyanga, vyayama and udvarthana are the three important preventive and health promoting activities in daily life which keep the skin healthy and shining.

Abhyanga is the application of medicated oils all over the body in a systematic way. It is the most common treatment form in pre panchakarma, popularly called the Ayurvedic massage. It is used for a very wide range of disease conditions from pain to paralysis – and also to rejuvenate the body.

Vyayama or exercise and physical activity delivers more oxygen and nutrients to body tissues and helps the cardiovascular system work more efficiently. Vyayama pacifies the doshas in the body and cures some diseases. It also increases the potential of the digestive fire. Vyayama

retards the process of ageing and is very effective in regulating cholesterol and obesity. It gives the body good shape and brings about alertness of body and mind.

Udwarthana is gentle rubbing of medicated powders over the skin. It is beneficial for obesity and similar conditions.

LIFESTYLE

Timely eating, timely evacuation and timely sleep are the three important lifestyle factors which improve skin health.

Ahara: The most desirable foods for the skin are of madhurarasa-pradhana (sweet dominant) foods. Foods that cause early shrinkage and roughness of the skin are salty, sour and bitter foods, whereas astringent and pungent foods (kasyaya and kadu) are neutral to the skin especially if ingested with madhurarasa-pradhana foods. Fruits like pomegranate, raisins and dates, vegetables like tender cucumber and white pumpkin are good for the skin. Vegetables like bitter gourd, ridge gourd and small beans are not healthy for the skin even though they are nutritious and good for obese people and for those who have frequent bowel movement.

Malashodhana: During the process of digestion at macro and micro levels certain bi-products are formed as excretory waste and should be regularly disposed off. If these products are not excreted on a regular basis they can prove harmful to the body. They are stools or purisha, mutra or urine, sweda or sweat, tears (eye), mucous (tongue), oily secretions (skin), mucoïd secretions (mucus membrane), This Malashodhana helps maintain the functioning of our organs.

Nidra: Timely sleep is very important. It is important not to sleep during the daytime. Sleep rejuvenates the skin. It gets back its natural status by optimum physiological activity during sleep.

The above practices are for holistic skincare.

The following are very useful as skin applications to improve skin texture and glow.

- Kumkumadi thailam for dry skin. Apply on the face in small quantity and gently rub for a few minutes. Leave on for one hour for better penetration. Or apply at night and wash the next day.
- Paste of Chandana with milk for dry and dark skin.
- Bark of Lodhra with milk for oily skin.
- Red sandalwood paste with rose water for ordinary skin with blemishes. ■

Timely sleep is very important. It is important not to sleep during the daytime.

WONDER PLANT

Kutaja beauty

EVERYBODY wants to look beautiful. After all, impressions matter. And your skin is one of the most important components of how you look. Good skin is the foundation of well-honed beauty. The skin is vulnerable to ageing and pigmentation, so skin care is of primary importance.

Several medicinal plants are used in our traditional systems of medicine to prevent and cure skin disorders. One such species is *Holarrhena pubescens*, popularly known as Bitter Oleander or Conessi.

Holarrhena pubescens (*H. antidysenterica*) is a small, laticiferous deciduous tree with mildly fragrant white flowers belonging to the Oleander family, Apocynaceae. It is well known for its bitter bark. *Holarrhena pubescens* is called Kutaja in Sanskrit and its bark is the most effective Ayurvedic treatment for psoriasis, eczema, blemishes, rashes and skin infections due to blood impurities.

Location: Kutaja is a small tree around 12 to 15 ft tall. All its parts exude copious milk when injured. The bark is rough, pale brownish or grayish. Leaves are 8 to 24 cm long and 4 to 10 cm broad. They are arranged in opposite directions and feel membranous when touched. Kutaja's flowers are white, mildly fragrant and clustered in terminal corymbose cymes. Profuse flowering can be seen from April to July. Fruits are paired, dehiscent follicles hanging

from the stalk. The follicles are narrowly cylindrical and often white spotted. Seeds are numerous and light brown with tufts of silky hair on top for easy dispersal by the wind.

Kutaja is an Indo-Malayan species. It can be found almost throughout India. This tree is common in open deciduous forests along hilly tracts up to an altitude of 1,250 metres above sea level. It is also found in mixed forests, plantations and clearings.

Properties: Kutaja is a medicinal plant in Ayurveda. It is one of the best drugs for diarrhoea. For skin troubles, a paste of the bark is used as an external application.

It is usually mixed with cow's urine and applied on the affected parts. The fresh juice of the bark is administered orally to control diarrhoea. Kutaja is a known drug for amoebic dysentery and other gastric disorders. A decoction of the Kutaja bark with ginger is useful for treating bleeding piles especially to check mucous and blood. For treatment of urinary troubles, a paste of the bark mixed in cow's milk is given.

The scented white flowers of Kutaja improves appetite and its seeds act as a cooling agent.



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FEEL GOOD

Managing diabetes



Gardening: Small trees like Kutaja are best for city gardens because they comply with landscape ordinances and understand boundaries. Kutaja fits neatly under utility lines and does not obscure the view. Hence, it is a brilliant patio tree.

Kutaja with its many branches and little broad crown converts the corners of a house into a pictorial patch. Its bright white mildly fragrant flowers add grace to the garden. Though the tree is of wild origin, it performs well in the urban environment. It cannot grow well under the shade but it can tolerate full sun. As an effective screen or as a taller hedge, this species can be planted in a continuous row. It does well in tough sites with little watering. It requires no maintenance apart from light pruning. But don't plant it near the kitchen or dining space since its light seeds are carried by the wind.

Collection of fresh seeds of Kutaja should be carried out from January to April. The seeds must be then sown within two months for best results. These seeds should be soaked in cold water for 24 hours and then sown in polybags or placed in raised mother beds. Germination takes 10 to 15 days. Germination is as high as 90 per cent. For seeds raised in mother beds, seedlings of 5 cm can be transplanted to polythene bags. Seedlings a year old can be planted in the field.

SELF-HELP

Pimples: A paste of the bark is mixed with cow's urine and applied on pimples for seven days.

Scars and blemishes: The bark is dried, powdered, mixed with one teaspoon of sandalwood powder and applied on the affected parts.

Dysentery: The bark is dried and coarsely powdered. Two tablespoons of the powder is boiled in a glass of water and reduced to half a cup to form a decoction. Two tablespoons of this decoction is consumed twice daily on an empty stomach for treating dysentery.

Worms: Seeds are dried in the shade and powdered. Half teaspoon of this powder is administered orally, twice daily with honey or boiled water. ■

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YOGIC asanas have a positive effect on the pancreas and insulin functioning. But to get optimum results one needs to maintain the asana for a longer duration while relaxing the muscles.

Pranayama: In the Hathayoga eight types of Pranayama are mentioned. One of the basic preparations for Pranayama is Nadishodhan-Pranayama or alternate nostril breathing. This has been found useful in alleviating diabetes since alternate nostril breathing has a calming effect on the nervous system and reduces stress levels.

Research has shown that Bhamari and Bhasrika-Pranayama help in controlling diabetes. Bhamari has a calming effect on the mind, the brain and the nervous system. Bhasrika-Pranayama is a revitalizing Pranayama which increases oxygen levels and reduces carbon dioxide levels in the blood. In Bhasrika-Pranayama, the abdominal muscles and diaphragm are used which puts pressure on the internal organs. But before practicing these Pranayamas, one must learn and practice deep breathing, fast breathing, alternate nostril breathing and bandhas (Jalandhar bandha or chin lock, moola bandha and Uddiyan bandha or abdominal lock).

Note: Pranayama and bandhas should be learnt and practiced under the expert guidance of a yoga guru.

Meditation: The practice of meditation is especially useful in stress management. The aim of any form of meditation is to create a relaxed and composed state of mind that has a calming effect on the nervous system and brings about a balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. Initially meditation may be difficult. One can start with Omkar chanting and concentrate on breathing.

For diabetics, concentration on the pancreas during the practice of meditation has shown a positive effect on sugar levels. One can even visualize the proper functioning of the pancreas. Proper insulin administration in the body can help in the treatment of diabetes.

Yoganidra: Yoganidra is a very important process of deep relaxation. It helps to alleviate stress and

has very positive effects on the entire body-mind complex.

Cleansing processes: Master cleansing or Shankha-Prakshalana is recommended for diabetes. A complete set of Shankha-Prakshalana takes one day and is recommended once in six months. But a smaller version can be carried out three times a week.

Such a process cleanses the gastrointestinal tract completely. Drink two glasses of warm, salty water with lemon juice added to it. Then six different exercises are done. The physical activity speeds up the peristaltic movement and one needs to evacuate the bowels. In two hours about seven to eight bowel movements take place till clear water is evacuated.

Note: This is a process which is to be practiced only under the expert guidance and under the observation of medical professionals.

Agnisara and nauli: This improves blood flow to the pancreas by increasing negative suction pressure in the abdominal cavity.

Other asanas include Mayurasana, vakrasana, hamsasana, matsyasana etc. Staying in the final posture for some time helps in stretching the body part (the pancreas) and helps in relaxing the organ and activating it. Deep rest improves beta cell efficiency.

What are the asanas which are not to be done in diabetes management?

Diabetic patients may do all the asanas except yogamudra and çalabhasana.

Diabetes management with eye complications:

- External complication – Those suffering from cataract and errors of refraction may do all the diabetes management yoga practices.
- Retina complications – Dynamic exercises, forward and backward bending, inverted postures, prone asanas and those exercises which increase pressure should not be done.
- Glaucoma patients also should be treated in the same manner as those with retinal complications but they can do Trataka which is very good for glaucoma. ■

ORGANIC CHEF

LAJI

Ingredients:

Puffed rice: ¼ kg
Jaggery: 400 gm
Dry ginger: 2 pinches
Cardamom: 6

Method:

Prepare thick jaggery syrup by boiling it with a little water. Add cleaned puffed rice, dry ginger and powdered cardamom to the melted jaggery and

mix well. After a while make the mix into balls. Use dry rice flour on the hands while making the balls to avoid sticking.

Properties:

- It is sweet
- Light to digest
- Nourishing
- Relieves nausea and vomiting
- Balances pitta and kapha. ■

Dr Rekha R, RMO, IAIM Health Care Centre, Bangalore

PRODUCTS

LAKSHMAN ANAND

GOLDEN GRASS

IN the forests of Balasore district in Odisha grows a wild grass called sabai that is helping 300 village women earn a living. The women collect the grass, colour it and weave it into attractive baskets, mats, magazine stands, coasters, laundry boxes and chairs. The women have been organized into a cooperative called the Rural Active Women's Traditional Handicrafts Association (RAWHAA) by Arati Patra. It was founded by her 12 years ago.

According to Rajesh Patra of RAWHAA, they were displaying their products for the first time at Delhi's Nature Bazaar. Sales were good, he said smiling.

"A new product we have launched this year is a box which can be used for storage and to sit on," said Patra. "One hallmark of all our products is that our colours are fast. You can wash them with soap and water."

Prices vary from ₹450 for a magazine stand to ₹2,800 for a large mat. The sabai has a smooth feel. The Odisha government has helped with developing designs and local marketing, says Patra. ■

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LAKSHMAN ANAND



TEMPLE ART

DRESS up your walls with Kerala's bold and bright temple art. Bhaum Murals, a group of 20 artists in Wayanad, Kerala, are painting temple art on cloth using natural dyes. In the old days temple art adorned temples and palaces. It was meant for the sublimely powerful. Now you can own it too.

The paintings are striking with intricate lines and colours. "We use just five basic colours – red, yellow, blue, green and black," says Sujith, one of the artists in the group. The colours, extracted from minerals and leaves, have been blended so well, it appears as if the artist used a palette. Each painting costs around ₹2,200 but you can ask for smaller or bigger sizes.

The artists have also painted temple art on bamboo. These can be hung on your wall like masks. Also, available are hand painted necklaces, bangles and earrings which are very pretty and reasonably priced. ■

For orders contact:

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