

Civil Society



CIVIC ACTIVISM AND OUR CITIES

WHERE IS THE RISING MIDDLE CLASS?



ITIs GET A MAKEOVER AS COMPANIES SEEK SKILLS

Pages 27-28

BALA IN GAME CHANGERS

Pages 6-7

RADICAL NREGA UNION

Pages 8-9

STORM IN JARAWA BUFFER

Page 12

REBEL FILM GAINS GROUND

Pages 31-32

BOAT RIDE TO SEE SRINAGAR

Pages 32-33

'THE SHORT STORY LIBERATES'

Pages 34-35

Inviting Applications for the Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award 2012 - India



Winner 2011

Name: Ms Neelam Chhiber
Company: Industree Crafts/
Mother Earth, Bangalore
Work Targeted at:
Artisans living Below
Poverty Line

At Jubilant we believe in Inclusive Growth. All our efforts and initiatives are directed towards that endeavour in our communities and the world in general.

To accelerate the process of Inclusive Growth at a macro level, Jubilant has collaborated with the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship to recognize, reward and support the leading Social Entrepreneurs through the Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

We are committed to Caring, Sharing and Growing the world around us.

We are Jubilant.



Winner 2010

Name: Mr Rajiv Khandakwal
& Mr Krishnavar Sharma
Company: Aajeevika
Bureau, Udaipur
Work Targeted at:
Rural Migrant Population

Entries invited between 1st April - 31st May 2012. To apply please log on to:

<http://www.jubilantbhartiafoundation.com/recognising-social-entrepreneurs.html>
or <http://www.schwabfoundseoy.org/india>



www.schwabfound.org

The Jubilant Bhartia Foundation (JBF) is a not for profit organisation engaged in conceptualizing and implementing the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of the Jubilant Bhartia Group. The foundation's focus areas are aimed at community development initiatives that include primary education, basic healthcare services, vocational training, empowering youth & women and recognizing & supporting social entrepreneurs in India in partnership with Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship.



www.jubilantbhartiafoundation.com

CONTENTS



COVER STORY

WHERE IS THE RISING MIDDLE CLASS?

People from the middle class come out from time to time to protest bad roads, crime and corruption. They have also learnt to demand better civic services. But is this enough?

14

COVER PICTURE BY LAKSHMAN ANAND

Delhi gets 3 municipalities 6

Gurgaon faces water, sewage bad news ... 6-7

Tribals keep losing their land 10

Children lead the way 10-11

ITIs get a makeover 27-28

Bags to beat plastic 29

The seamier side of journalism 34

Ayurveda special 36-37

Products: Brown trinkets, Organic Sona.. 38

Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Cities and citizens

THIS magazine's coverage of both the middle class and our cities goes back many years now. Our second cover story in 2003 was on Bhagidari and Sheila Dikshit and from then on we have closely tracked Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) and other such formations in urban environments across the country.

It has always been obvious to us that India's future is closely tied to how well it manages its cities. Unfortunately the decay we are witnessing is unnerving. Clearly new values and ideas are needed and as has happened elsewhere in the world they will come from a rising middle class.

It is important to go in search of best practices and see how solutions are being found as the rest of the world also grapples with urban challenges. This is as necessary with regard to green technologies as with systems and leadership. It was with this in mind that we reached out across the globe for Future City, which was our special anniversary edition some years ago. It is an edition which continues to have great relevance.

Urbanisation in India continues at a pace which municipalities are finding hard to cope with. It is only in recent years that cities have begun mulling over low-cost housing or rainwater harvesting. The speed with which work gets done is painfully slow. Every municipality is burdened with archaic laws, departments and processes. In some cities, industry in partnership with citizen groups is making a real difference.

There are several good stories in this issue. There is a changing political landscape in the country for those who would like to track it. Our story on the first NREGA union which exposed a major scam in Fatehpura in Gujarat shows how it not only fought to get dues of its members but also went on to win panchayat elections. Such micro changes happening across rural India surely add up to something which perhaps the country is missing out on.

To benchmark what works *Civil Society* has launched GAME CHANGERS, which will be a series of public interactions with individuals and groups who make India more competitive.

The first event was held on 15 April in the Gulmohar Hall at the Habitat Centre. Architects Kabir and Preeti Vajpeyi spoke on their BaLA programme and how it has been transforming government schools across the country.

We had done a cover story on BaLA and Kabir and Preeti in 2006. It is interesting to see how far they have travelled. In case you would like to attend upcoming Game Changers events feel free to call or write to us on email at response@civilsocietyonline.com.

Contact Civil Society at:
response@civilsocietyonline.com
The magazine does not undertake to respond to unsolicited contributions sent to the editor for publication.

Publisher
Umesh Anand

Editor
Rita Anand

News Network
TS Sudhir, Shree Padre,
Jehangir Rashid,
Aarti Gupta, Susheela Nair

Photo-journalists
Gautam Singh
Lakshman Anand

Layout & Design
Virender Chauhan

Cartoonist
Samita Rathor

Write to Civil Society at:
D-26 Basement, South Extension
Part 2 New Delhi-110049.
Ph: 011-46033825, 9811787772

Printed and published by Umesh
Anand from A 53 D, First Floor,
Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya Nagar,

New Delhi-17.
Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt.
Ltd., B-88, Okhla Phase II.

Postal Registration No.
DL(S)-01/3255/2012-14.
Registered to post without
pre-payment U(SE)-10/2012-14
at New Delhi PSO
Registered with the Registrar of
Newspapers of India under RNI
No.: DELENG/2003/11607
Total no of pages: 40

Advisory Board

ANUPAM MISHRA
ARUNA ROY
NASSER MUNJEE
ARUN MAIRA
DARSHAN SHANKAR
HARIVANSH
JUG SURAIYA
SHANKAR GHOSE
UPENDRA KAUL

Get your copy of Civil Society from

Delhi: Bahri Sons, Central
News Agency, stalls at Green
Park market, South Extn Part
II, Aurobindo Market.

Gurgaon: Music Store at
DLF Phase 1 Market.

Kolkata: Oxford Bookstore,
Classic Books.

Bangalore: Variety on St
Mark's Road.

Lucknow: Ram Advani
Bookseller at Hazratganj.
Chandigarh: The Browser.

INTERNET EDITION
Civil Society is on the net at
www.civilsocietyonline.com.
Subscribe for a PDF version.
Register online or write to us
at response@civilsocietyonline.com



Jiyo Power Sel!

“Be an Energy Champion. Be an example. Let's pledge to save energy.”

Tata Power Energy Club (TPEC) is an Energy Conservation Club that focuses on saving energy. It believes in involving school children to propagate efficient usage of energy for a greener and safer tomorrow. TPEC started in 2007 by sensitizing 12 schools in Mumbai and has today become a nation-wide movement covering more than 250 schools across Mumbai, Delhi, Pune, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Belgaum, Jamshedpur and Lonavla. The Club has become a movement and has sensitized over one million citizens. It continues to grow with over 13,000 Energy Champions who have pledged to save energy.

So, pledge to save energy and be an Energy Champion!

Six Golden Rules for Saving Energy!

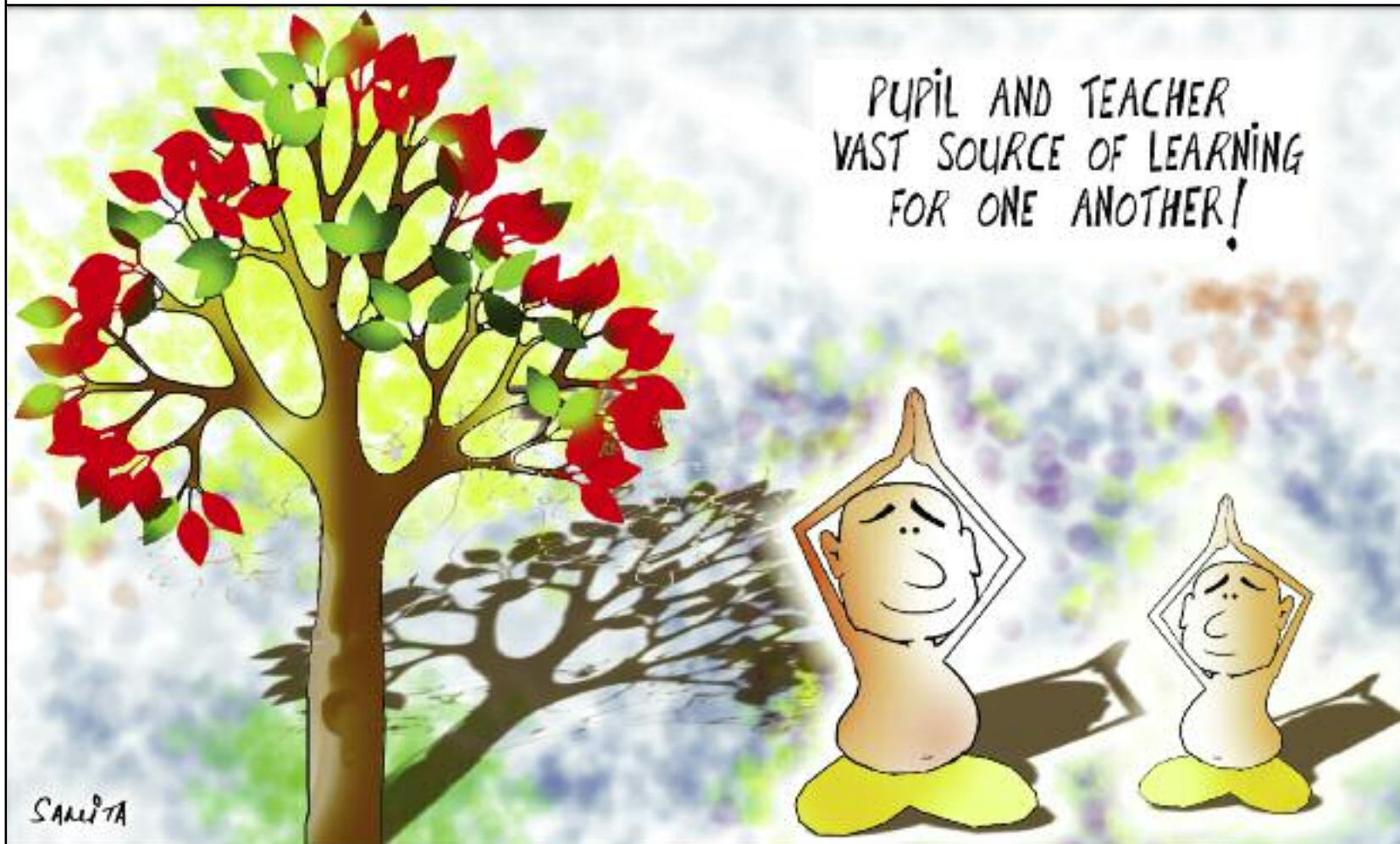
- Keep AC at 26°C or more.
- Use CFLs over incandescent bulbs to save energy.
- Use BEE 5-star rated electrical appliances.
- Switch off from the plug points.
- Lower the use of electric cooling and heating appliances.
- Switch off all Electrical Appliances from the plug point, when not in use.

Log on to www.tatapowerenergyclub.com to know more.



IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Forest village

Jitendra Chaturvedi, secretary of DEHAT, responds to Roma's letter on "Former forest village enjoys its new status" in the February issue of Civil Society.

I would like to say that the Forest Rights Act (FRA) was a product of the UPA government. The Union government has built continuous pressure on the state government to implement this law.

But it is also true that without

community pressure and well-organized advocacy efforts, the system doesn't work.

There are thousands of government orders and policies which remain on paper. When the community fights for its rights, it gets results. Otherwise these orders have no meaning.

The allegations made by Roma are completely wrong.

In Sonbhadra, we are working with JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) and the UP Govt. under the UP Participatory Forest Management and Poverty Alleviation Project (UPFMPAP) since 2010-2011 in 54 villages declared as severely Naxalite-affected.

Through our efforts, hundreds of fake forest cases against tribals have been closed. About 6,000 tribal and Dalit households have been helped to start their own enterprises based on non-wood forest products, producing and marketing vegetables, farming herbs etc.

Forty-five self-help groups have been organized in 30 project villages. The empire of the tendu patta contractors has been wiped out and now tendu patta collectors are supplying the tendu leaves directly to the UP Forest Corporation. They are

receiving all payments through account payee cheques.

We have also run programmes to improve the health and nutrition status of villages with support from UNICEF in the same area. The above efforts have motivated hundreds of youths to return to their homes and abandon Maoism.

If DEHAT's efforts with JICA support are anti-people, the reaction should be visible. We are always welcomed by the community.

In the same area, some so-called forest rights activists are motivating outsiders from Chhattisgarh, MP, Bihar and Jharkhand to cut and ruin forests and then claim the forest land under FRA. These forces have ruined thousands of acres of forest cover in this area and encroached on this land. After the encroachment, these so-called forest rights activists earn ₹10 lakh to ₹20 lakh per year (₹200 per month per family or ₹50 per month per person).

I request you to kindly visit the area and see the reality for yourself.

Jitendra Chaturvedi
dehat_vo@rediffmail.com

RIMC

I am not a Rimcollian. I am not

expected to comment but I will. The article, 'Scotch Eggs and Other Memories' gave a wonderful explanation of the word 'bonding'.

Mangesh Zade

The story could not have been written better. It was a fitting description of one of India's few institutions untouched by politics.

Rajesh Tiwary

Jackfruit

Shree Padre's article on ready-to-eat jack fruit is timely because it is creating awareness among all cross sections of society on the nutritional value of a very promising fruit which has tremendous health benefits. More importantly, Shree Padre is a gifted writer and has a very nice way of communicating his message. We wish him all the very best.

Dr. Anand Pereira

Gubbara

The story on the Gubbara unit at a government hospital in Dehradun was very interesting. Great job! I look forward to being a part of it and providing as much help as I can.

Sangeeta Semwal

Delhi gets 3 municipalities

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE recently concluded municipal elections in Delhi are significant. The behemoth Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has now been split into three entities – south, east and north. Each municipality will have its own mayor and commissioner. The new entities will have a larger percentage of women councillors due to 50 per cent reservation for women which was also introduced for the first time. The municipal corporation for the southern areas will be the richest one.

The BJP won all three municipalities. Voting was 55 per cent this time – higher than what was recorded in 2007. The youth and the elderly are increasingly coming out to vote. Posh colonies recorded overall a higher voter turnout compared to 2007. But as usual, slums and villages outdid them in voting strength.

The task before the BJP is not an easy one. The trifurcation idea came from the Delhi Congress headed by Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit. But it was never explained to residents what splitting up of the corporation would mean. Most are confused and some have unrealistic expectations.

Whether trifurcation will improve services is an open question. Councillors occupy the bottom rung of the political ladder. Before the elections, Transparency International and the Delhi Residents' Welfare Association Joint Front organized an interface between aspiring councillors and residents in the Safdarjung ward in south Delhi. Three aspirants turned up – from the BJP, the Panthers Party and the Congress. Transparency International was keen the aspiring councillors sign a pledge in the presence of residents promising a list of facilities they wanted in their ward.

The meeting ended in a fracas with the sitting BJP councillor angrily pointing out that he could not promise multi-level parking. It was outside his ambit. So were utilities and even road contracts. He couldn't close down booze shops since they had licences. No, he couldn't do anything about the defunct Delhi Milk Scheme whose booths are now used as eateries or *kirana* stores, he retorted to an angry lady. As it is he was battling the parking mafia, he said.

The RWAs, mostly led by the elderly, have no say in urban projects. But they are actively wooed during elections since the middle-class vote counts in Delhi.

Neither are RWAs keen on acquiring financial powers. Instead, as Gautam Vohra, president of the Vasant Vihar Welfare Association says, the RWAs want to suggest and monitor projects. They want to be heard.

But it is not just about monitoring either. "The RWAs where the members are engaged are already playing an activist role. They have participated in *dharnas* and actively supported Independent candidates for municipal elections," says Vohra.

Currently RWAs do not have any authority. For instance, they cannot fine residents within their own colonies for encroaching on public spaces and violating building laws.

It has been suggested that RWAs be treated as urban panchayats and be brought under the 74th Amendment to the Constitution. But there are problems in implementing this idea.

Delhi's RWAs have proliferated. A special law would be needed to regulate their functioning. Neither can each RWA head be considered a sarpanch – there would be utter chaos.

An alternative would be to have local ward committees which would bring RWAs and the local councillor together to decide how money should be spent for local area development. This initiative came from Sanjay Kaul, who now works with the BJP but began as an RWA activist.

Kaul admits it has been tough getting councillors of different political parties to come to such committee meetings but beginnings have been made. The experiment has attracted attention from the government that has appointed a committee to look into the feasibility of ward committees.

Changes in the MCD Act would be needed to provide legal sanction to ward committees and regulate their functioning. If they get the status, funds under the next phase of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) are likely to be funnelled through ward committees.

Now that the BJP has won it is to be seen how it uses trifurcation for better delivery of services. It is unclear how much power will really go to the three mayors.

Whether the administration of the three corporations will be revamped is unclear. Instead of bringing in better expertise and processes, the old municipal officials, known for inefficiency and corruption, are being shuffled around. RWAs will be closely watching what the BJP plans are.

So, is the trifurcation of the municipality going to result in more of the same? Can one expect results? It seems what is needed is a better directed and leaner municipality with clear processes. Civic works will now have to be monitored by three corporations and they will have to find ways in which they can coordinate. Drains and sewage lines don't respect such boundaries.

NGOs ask whether the municipality should be running schools and hospitals or should it be concerned only with civic infrastructure and services? But Kaul cites schools as one area in which the MCD has done well, providing hot midday meals and upgrading facilities.

He believes Delhi could have had seven corporations in keeping with the number of Lok Sabha seats. This would bring the councillor, the MLA and the MP into one constituency and citizens would know what to expect from each.

Currently if the councillor can't provide water the citizen will turn to the MLA and finally also blame the MP – who is clearly not in charge of dry taps. ■

BaLA first

Civil Society News
New Delhi

GOVERNMENT schools across India have been going through a transformation under the BaLA or Building as Learning Aid programme.

Architects Kabir and Preeti Vajpeyi use BaLA to reinvent learning environments at very little cost.

Civil Society first featured BaLA as a cover story in June 2006. Those were early days and the idea had few takers. But over time BaLA has come to be adopted by several states and used to make innumerable schools more attractive for children.

With GAME CHANGERS, *Civil Society* is revisiting some of its most popular and significant stories and presenting them to live audiences.

Kabir and Preeti addressed a packed Gulmohar Hall at the Habitat Centre in New Delhi on April 15. Anupam Mishra of the Gandhi Peace Foundation was the master of ceremonies with his trademark wit.

Kabir and Preeti drew applause and had the audience riveted as they presented 'before' and 'after' images of government schools where BaLA had been adopted.

Architects drive BaLA, but it goes much beyond brick and mortar changes. It relies on design to redefine learning environments and promote innovation.

Under BaLA, teachers and students feel inspired to come up with ideas that improve the atmosphere in a school and make learning more fun.

Lowering a window can make a classroom brighter. A blackboard at eye level is so much more comfortable. Doors can be used to teach angles and grills letters. Floors offer many opportunities for learning numbers and measurement.

Open spaces, playgrounds and greenery make schools seem less daunting. They encourage children to come in and stay longer.

The response to GAME CHANGERS was heartening.

"I really liked the talk," said retired banker

Gurgaon faces

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

GURGAON's administration turned up in full strength at a workshop organized by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) at the Institute of Rural Research and Development, to discuss sewage and water management in the city.

in GAME CHANGERS series

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Kabir and Preeti Vajpeyi

Abhay Singh." *Civil Society* is doing yeomen service by highlighting such change. I believe that small, simple changes add up to create the big bang."

Geeta Pandey, a BBC journalist and a regular reader of *Civil Society* said: "It was a real eye-opener. What the Vajpeyis are doing is absolutely brilliant."

"It was amazing to see all those schools transforming from barren and uninviting places into such hubs of colour and activity, filled with joy and laughter."

"Sometimes, simple ideas embedded with a clarity of vision and good intention can be transformational," said columnist Jyoti Pande. "I felt

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Anupam Mishra

envious not only of those children whose childhood their ideas enhanced, but also of Preeti and Kabir themselves for doing something they love which is so meaningful for others."

"It was an exciting evening," wrote R. Chopra, a senior chartered accountant, in an email.

"Kabir and Preeti demonstrated how government schools can become spaces where children want to be, to play, learn and have fun," said Anita Anand, former director of the Women's Feature Service. "With paint, trees, shrubs, platforms and patterned grills, the environment is transformed. During and after the evening I started thinking about how I could become more creative!" ■

water, sewage bad news

There was Praveen Kumar, Administrator of the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA), Sudhir Rajpal, Commissioner of the Gurgaon Municipal Corporation, Mayor Vimal Yadav and senior Deputy Mayor, Yashpal Batra.

The workshop was interactive with residents and NGOs taking part in the discussions on the findings of CSE's State of India's Environment Report, *Excreta Matters*, with reference to Gurgaon.

The report predicts that in a decade or so Gurgaon's groundwater will be finished and there will only be rocks beneath its glittering façade. The city will also be overflowing with sewage.

The present administration has inherited a backlog of problems. Gurgaon's proximity to Delhi has made it attractive to all kinds of developers who have each built according to his own vision. They mine massive amounts of groundwa-

ter and then supply it to residents living in gated communities. Previous governments should have put infrastructure in place first. But they didn't and the result is the current mess.

According to one figure cited in the CSE report, Gurgaon has 30,000 tube wells. The water table is declining by 1.2 metres every year. In 2006 the water level in Gurgaon had fallen to 51 metres. The Central Groundwater Board (CGWB) had projected if the water table hits the 200 metre mark, Gurgaon will have no groundwater. According to CGWB, 70 per cent of Gurgaon's water comes from groundwater and makes up 50 per cent of

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

the city's water supply.

Currently, the city has three Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs). Only 50 to 60 per cent of buildings have been connected to the sewage system by the builders. In any case, treated water gets mixed with untreated water. It flows from the STPs into a canal, gets mixed with untreated sewage lines en route, joins the Najafgarh nalla and then empties into the Yamuna. One resident said some offices have installed STPs but their treated water also flows into the sewage pipeline.

Water and sewage problems will be compounded by Gurgaon's scorching growth. The present population is around 1.5 million. While HUDA is trying to arrange water supply and sewage treatment for 2.7 million – the projected population growth in the next ten years – the development of Gurgaon-Manesar is expected to increase the population to 3.7 million by then.

Residents at the workshop suggested revival of water bodies and lakes to harvest rainwater. Praveen Kumar, the HUDA Administrator, pointed out the administration is identifying lakes and defunct water bodies which it plans to revive.

Residents said land is valued but water bodies and lakes are not. They don't have any legal status so builders construct over them. They suggested storm water drains on both sides of roads be diverted to ponds and wells to recharge groundwater.

It was also pointed out that whatever remained of the Aravalli hills must be protected from builders. These hills protect the city from hot dusty winds blowing from the Thar desert. Chetan Agarwal, a water consultant, suggested planting deciduous trees which retain water in the Aravallis.

Residents agreed they too were to blame. Electric motors were installed which sucked water from dry pipes and caused sewage inflow. They could use water saving technologies. Niranjan Khatri of ITC, which has a green building in Gurgaon, said builders should construct water-smart homes. Agarwal suggested aquifers be mapped all over Gurgaon. There should be a registrar of tube wells who will have the authority to decommission tube wells.

Praveen Kumar said that independent strong water cells in HUDA were needed for all this. Currently, the same engineer is used for building all kinds of infrastructure. There is no independent agency to work out a cogent water plan. Guidelines should be framed. He suggested that experienced citizens and NGOs carry out pilot projects in seven or eight places in Gurgaon, funded by HUDA and the MCG and train their engineers.

Nitya Jacob, programme-director for water in CSE, recommended augmenting water supply through recharge measures and working on a plan for a decentralized sewage system. He said sewage should be treated as a resource. Jacob said treated water could be used for irrigation after due precautions.

The Najafgarh jheel is a natural wetland that could be used to install remediation ponds to treat sewage. Gurgaon's terrain slopes from the Aravallis in the northern part of Gurgaon to Najafgarh. In the old days, areas near the hills used to get flooded with rainwater. ■

Fatehpura's radical



Paulomee Mistry addressing the NREGA union in Fatehpura

Tanushree Gangopadhyay
Fatehpura (Gujarat)

GOVERNMENT officials and functionaries still shudder at the name of Fatehpura taluka in Dahod, a tribal district in Gujarat. In August 2010, India's first union of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) workers, called the Rashtriya Rojgar Khatri Kamdaronu Kayda Union (RRKKKU), had exposed a massive scam in which ₹4.18 crores of NREGA money had been siphoned.

The union uncovered misappropriation of funds, fake NREGA job cards, fake muster rolls and fake postal accounts. The collusion of 48 functionaries including taluka development officers, sub-post-masters, sarpanches and talatis was exposed.

It was Disha, an NGO working mostly among tribals for forest rights since 30 years, which organized NREGA workers into a union.

"Had our members not been vigilant, such a massive scam would never have come to light," says Paulomee Mistry, general secretary of the RRKKKU, with justifiable pride.

A year later the infamous Fatehpura taluka

wears a brand new look. In the panchayat elections held in January, two RRKKKU members were elected as sarpanches. All nine members in this panchayat are now from the union, says Bajdibhai Burjor, also a union member. He was elected sarpanch of Jagola village.

"The corrupt sarpanch and his cohorts who lorded it over us for 20 years have been booted out," says Bharat Parghi, secretary of the Fatehpura union who through his RTI had exposed the scam.

"All of us won the election without spending any money, while the others spent all the money they looted from our wages and lost," says Burjor with satisfaction.

As many as 27 sarpanches have been elected from Disha's union, says Paulomee. Several gram panchayat and taluka panchayat members have also won.

"By holding the office of sarpanch we will eradicate corruption and make NREGA work better. In fact, this will stop all our workers from migrating. We are confident that we will get 200 days of work, our old demand, at some stage. We shall certainly ensure 100 days of work for all eligible villagers. Our development work will change the

NREGA union



Himanshu Banker at a protest in the rain in Nijhar



Shankarbai Garasia with the CD of muster rolls

face of our backward taluka," promises Bajdibhai.

RRKKKU was formed in August 2006, soon after NREGA was enacted in Parliament. The union's work extends to tribal and forested areas of Sabarkantha, Banaskantha, Panchmahal, Dahod and Vadodara.

"We have so far managed to get workers ₹4.19 crores of delayed payment wages. The union has also got 80,000 job cards made and other benefits after a lot of struggle. We now have a membership of more than 16,000," says Paulomee.

Disha's union has filed a case in the Gujarat High Court against people responsible for the Fatehpura scam. An inquiry is going on. The union has also filed cases for non-payment of wages, delayed payment, non-payment of unemployment allowance, job cards and so on.

However it is a continuous tussel between the union and officials. Shankerbhai Garasia, president of the union in Dahod district is an NREGA worker from Jagola taluka. He has been running from pillar to post trying to get wages for 25 NREGA workers in his village for work they did in April and May 2011. The wages amount to ₹65,000. Garasia has a CD with the muster rolls of

the 25 workers.

"Who will do this leg work except me. Our members are all illiterate," he says. "It cost me two months of running around and ₹1,800 to get the CD written thrice by a private computer centre. The taluka centre says it is unable to upload the details to the NREGA server, a mandatory provision for getting the wages."

"If a worker has to get the muster rolls uploaded, he wouldn't be a worker!" responds the perplexed NREGA Commissioner, N.P. Thaker.

However Shankerbhai and Fatehpura union president, Bharat Parghi, allege vendetta. "We are obviously being singled out by the administration," they say.

The deadline for uploading last year's muster list was 10 April, he says. Shankerbhai explains that payments used to be routed through the local Bank of Baroda where they all had accounts. "Then the administration decided to route payments through ICICI Bank. Tackling ICICI is tough. They don't have an office here," he explains.

Paradoxically Dahod district and Vadodara have been selected for a national pilot project on the

Electronic Fund Management System. Thaker said that they decided to shift to ICICI to facilitate uniformity.

The RRKKKU is an independent union. It was the first to file and partially win litigation in the Gujarat High Court for unemployment allowance for 100 workers. Though the workers did not get the allowance, the Court on 23 July, 2008, ordered the NREGA Commissioner, "to examine the grievance of the petitioner for providing the employment for the persons concerned within a period of four months. Compensation for unemployment shall be disbursed within one month."

Indu Kumar Jani is the overall president of the union. Ranchhodbhai Machhar, president of the union in Khanpur taluka, Panchmahal district, says after the High Court order the villagers got to meet an NREGA Commissioner for the first time.

"Just one person, Jalubhai Bhurabhai Dabhi of Jeja, was sanctioned the unemployment allowance which he refused to accept. He said only if the other workers were given the allowance would he accept it," says Machhar.

Wherever unions don't exist people get ripped off. Last year a Right to Information (RTI) application exposed the wrongdoings of a sarpanch in Nijhar taluka in Tapi district. He had cooked up records of nine people who had died three years ago and was happily collecting payments in their name.

NREGA, which provides 100 days of employment under the statutory minimum wage in rural India, operates in the midst of huge vested interests. But fighting the system has had its own spin-offs. It has empowered tribals, peasants and landless workers.

The fact that members of the union have been elected is a significant trend for it changes the dynamics of power at the grassroots.

However, Ranchhod Machhar and Punjabhai Machhar from Naroda and Khutli villages lost. They contested against nine aspirants. "Surprisingly we got 39 votes each... which is very strange. We almost feel that it is a conspiracy."

Several other states have sought Disha's help for replication of the RRKKKU. "We are extending our expertise," says Paulomee.

NREGA unions have sprouted in several states. Rallies, campaigns and *dharnas* have helped them demand work and wrest wages. It is through this show of strength that workers have strived to break power relations at the grassroots.

The opinion among NREGA union leaders is that the Government of India is averse to unionization. Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister for Rural Development has categorically said: "We don't want to promote unionization or else Gram Rojgar Sevaks would seek permanency." The sevaks work as supervisors on NREGA sites and have been asking for permanency and more money.

The minister's statement hasn't gone down well with union leaders. In the past decade many small unions have been formed in Gujarat. There is the Gramin Mazdoor Sabha (GMS) started in 2005 for rural workers.

General secretary Himanshu Banker says, "Small wonder that the Gujarat High Court rejected the Rojgar Sahayaks case for permanency. They have worked for six years and will continue to work." ■

Tribals keep losing their land

Bharat Dogra
Jaipur

TRIBALS are losing their land despite a plethora of laws to protect them. In fact, land-grab has become so rampant that tribals often find themselves landless in their ancestral villages. Several reports by experts have warned that the loss of land needs to be urgently addressed to alleviate tribal anger and alienation.

To find out how and why land-grab happens and what can be done about it, a public hearing was organized in Jaipur by the Rajasthan Adivasi Adhikar Sangathan and the Jungle Jameen Jan Andolan.

Tribals, other forest-dwellers, evicted persons, social activists and officials presented their views to a panel consisting of BD Sharma, former Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Vipul Mudgal, a journalist and Gyarsi Bai, well-known for her work against bonded labour and landlessness.

Under the Constitution of India the Panchayat Raj (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) 1996 protects tribal land. This law bestows powers to local self-governing institutions. There is also the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006, a strong law that provides land and forest rights to tribal communities and other forest dwellers.

Jai Singh from Ekta Parishad said that various fraudulent methods were used to subvert protective laws and grab tribal land. One method used is that outsiders marry vulnerable tribal girls. Other speakers pointed out that big miners from outside the region use tribal proxies to get huge mining leases.

The evictees of the Mahi and Kadna dams said that land was taken from them at a dirt-cheap compensation rate of less than ₹1,000 per bigha. Thousands of tribals were rendered homeless in this unjust manner. Even the implementation of the FRA has been unfair to them, when in fact they should have been given favourable treatment.

The representatives of these evictees said that several of them were asked to settle on land where other tribal families were already living. This created a conflict among tribal families.

More recently when tribals were displaced for the construction of a highway in Udaipur and

Sirohi districts, they were again given such meagre compensation that it was impossible for them to buy alternative land. Therefore, they became landless.

Although several promises have been made that wildlife protection laws will be modified to avoid displacement, villagers and activists complained that they face the prospect of large-scale displacement due to national parks and related projects. In the Kumbhalgarh National Park, for example, 128 villages were likely to see displacement in the three districts of Udaipur, Pali and Rajsamand.

Large-scale mining is another big threat to tribal communities. In some cases, speakers said, the government acquired the land for its own ventures but later sold it to big companies. Tribal representatives said government and industry always acquired land much in excess of their requirements.

Ramesh Nandwana, a public interest lawyer and activist, said that land mafias have become a very powerful force in the state. They have prior knowledge of where land values are likely to rise – for example in the vicinity of highways. They try to buy such land at a cheap rate much in advance. The land mafia evades laws with impunity since they have very powerful political connections. In cities like Pratapgarh, other activists pointed out, land in the radius of five to 10 km from the city, has been cornered by such land mafias.

Land mafias have become a very powerful force in Rajasthan. They have knowledge of where land values are likely to rise.

While tribals have been losing land in a big way, the FRA too has let them down. The high incidence of rejected claims was presented to the panel. Almost all claims for land rights made by other forest dwellers are being rejected. People were also being fenced off from their ancestral common

lands.

Even those whose claims were accepted were given much less land than what they had applied for, said Nandwana. If a tribal farmer cultivating five bighas filed a claim he received a patta for only two bighas. According to Nandwana just 10 per cent of claims have been accepted.

Mangay Lal, a forest rights activist, said that tribals are not informed when their claims are rejected. As a result, they cannot make an appeal though this provision does exist. Prompt information should be provided to all claimants so that they can take further action if necessary to protect their land rights.

Under the existing system, said Mangay Lal, officials of the forest department have become more powerful. The gram sabhas don't have much say. This is contrary to the letter and spirit of the forest rights law, he pointed out.

Similarly there is rampant violation of PESA. The government took a long time to formulate the rules for PESA. These rules now give more power to officials than to gram sabhas in PESA areas. Rural activists said they have sent representations to the Rajasthan government to change these rules. ■

ChildFund's In remote places



Some of the Purna Award winners on stage: Kriti Kumari, Indu

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

NANDA Munda, 13, is a tribal boy who lives in a forest hamlet, three kms from Sinduria village in Kendujhar district of Odisha. His impoverished father, a migrant labourer, compelled him to drop out of school after Class 5 and put him to work. For two years Nanda grazed cattle and slaved away at a roadside *dhaba*.

One day on his way home from the *dhaba* Nanda came across a ChildFund Children's Club. He saw happy children dancing, singing and painting. For the traumatised boy, the club looked like a dream come true. He decided to become a member. The club met every Sunday. As a result of these meetings Nanda began to understand simple things like the need for schooling and the precautions his family should take to prevent malaria.

Nanda desperately wanted to return to school. He kept pleading with his reluctant parents. But it took repeated visits by a team of determined village volunteers to get Nanda's parents to agree.

The Children's Club is being run by ChildFund's local partner, ASHA, an NGO. Due to their intervention, Nanda is going to school. He has also succeeded in motivating 38 children and eight child labourers from his hamlet to attend school regularly.

"Now Nanda has become a role model for other

heroes are leading the way

they promote education, prevent child marriages



Kumari, Durga Singh and Sukra Majhi in green T-shirt

children. They too exert pressure on their families to send them to school," says Santosh Kumar Behera, programme coordinator of ASHA.

Recently Nanda travelled from his remote village, over 200 km from Bhubaneswar in Odisha to New Delhi. He was one of 800 children who gathered in Delhi from all over India to attend Spandan 2012, a four-day extravaganza to celebrate the achievements of children like him, organised by ChildFund India.

Nanda was recognised as a National Child Changemaker and given ChildFund's Prerna Award. "I want to become a teacher so that I can improve health and education standards in my village. I will also work to make Sinduria a child labour free village," says Nanda with steely resolve.

Dola Mohapatra, national director of ChildFund India, explains the rationale behind the huge event which saw a turnout of 1,400 participants: "There were three objectives. We wanted to celebrate ChildFund India's 60 years of success, look back at what we have been able to achieve and rededicate ourselves to our goals. Secondly, we wanted to listen to the voices of children through multiple channels – videography, photography, films, artwork, cultural programmes and other forms of creative expression. Lastly we wanted to position ourselves not just as a knowledge and service provider but also as a knowledge disseminator. The event was a good convergence of the three."

Master classes were conducted by experts at Spandan 2012 for their NGO partners. There were parallel sessions on violence against children, good governance, fund-raising strategies, tribal and indigenous people's rights and food and nutrition security.

The session on violence against children was chaired by Razia Ismail, co-founder of the India Alliance for Child Rights.

India's national policy for children, she says, is now under review but there are still loopholes such as the lack of emphasis on child rights. "We are talking about young human beings and if young human beings are the foundation of human beings of any age, then it is actually a human rights not a child rights question," she said.

There was also a Development Fair with 70 stalls showcasing work in child and youth development. 'Kyunki Main Ek Ladki Hoon,' a four-minute audiovisual on the bangles industry of Ferozabad was screened. The film produced by young people, won the Indian Development Producers' Award at the Filmi Chashma Festival. A university in the US uses the film as resource material for students of development so that they can understand gender issues in India.

CHILD CHANGEMAKER: Nazima Khatoon, 16, from Saharpura village in district Jamtara, Jharkand, received the Child Changemaker Award.

Nazima is leader of the Phool Bagh Children's Club initiated by ChildFund India. She helped to prevent 13-year-old Rahina Khatoon from being married off by her parents. Nazima sensitised Children's Club members encouraging them to discuss the issue with their parents. She spoke to women's self-help groups, youth groups and hard-line religious groups. The initially obdurate community and parents of the girl finally came around. Rahina's marriage was postponed.

CHILD ACHIEVER: Kriti Kumari, 16, a student of Class 10, was awarded the ChildFund Child Achiever Award. She is a top-ranking athlete from Saraiya village, Bounsi district, Bihar. Selected to represent the block at the district level she came first in the 100 metres and 200 metres race. She also came first in the long jump event. She has represented Bounsi district at a state-level tournament in Chhapra in November 2008.

But perhaps Kriti's greatest accomplishment is a model she has developed which produces biogas from biodegradable materials. Her invention won her a ₹5,000 award from the Department of Science and Technology.

She convinced her village about the efficacy of using biodegradable materials to generate biogas. Kriti now plans to get her model installed so that

the village gets an additional source of energy. The daughter of a farmer and a teacher, she dreams of becoming a scientist when she is older.

ALUMNI ACHIEVER: ChildFund's Star Alumni Achiever award went to Sukra Majhi, 15, from the small, remote village of Sukuriguda in Koraput district, Odisha. The son of a labourer, Majhi has transcended grinding poverty and partial blindness. Sukra dropped out of school in Class 5. He did not want to rejoin. However, sponsored by ChildFund, he gained admission into a blind school. Now he motivates other children to go to school through constant interaction with their parents and villagers.

Majhi's forte is cricket. Last November he went to Pakistan as part of the Indian cricket team for blind people. He has taken part in international matches and coaches other blind children too.

Majhi's ambition is to be a great cricketer. He wants to start a cricket association so that Koraput, one of India's poorest districts, emerges as a cricketing hub and produces great cricket players who can play in international matches.

YOUTH CHANGEMAKER: Durga Singh, 19, from Bhalua village, Deogar district, Jharkand has emerged as ChildFund's Youth Changemaker. Now in his intermediate first year, he dropped out of school at the age of 14. ChildFund's NGO partner, Log Jagriti Kendra Madhupur, Jharkand, stepped in to sponsor him so that he could go back to school.

Durga Singh has flourished. He now tutors around 50 students between 12 to 15 years old in English and Maths. His other interest is street theatre. Durga Singh mobilises Youth and Kishori Clubs to perform plays that educate villagers about the importance of educating their children and abstaining from liquor.

Durga Singh was all set to go to Patna to do a computer course but his students insisted he stay back. "The parents and children in my village address me as sir," says the young boy proudly.

YOUNG ACHIEVER: This award went to Indu Kumari, 16, who comes from a very poor and backward family. Yet Indu demonstrated leadership qualities at a very early age. She formed a team of young girls who used street plays as a medium to raise awareness on issues such as child right violations, child labour, child trafficking, early marriages and gender discrimination.

She created shock waves in her community by refusing to give up studies and get married. The ChildFund project staff supported Indu and her club to form a team for street plays on early marriages and gender discrimination. They draw a huge audience. Indu now inspires young girls in her community to follow in her footsteps. ■

Jarawa buffer zone causes storm

Zubair Ahmed
Port Blair

THE Jarawa video episode has now put the spotlight on the excessive commercial activity carried on by settlers in and around the Jarawa Tribal Reserve. The controversy that followed has also revived the buffer zone notification, a highly debated regulation yet to be implemented.

The Andaman and Nicobar Administration is currently engaged in a tussle with settlers carrying out commercial activities in the buffer zone. In the ensuing melee, the Jarawas themselves have been all but forgotten.

The video which made headlines a few months ago showed Jarawa tribals being made to dance for foreign tourists. The Jarawas are a protected tribe and non-Jarawas are not allowed into the Jarawa Tribal Reserve.

The buffer zone was notified by the administration in 2007. It created considerable panic among the residents of 31 villages in South and Middle Andaman districts that fall within the five km radius earmarked as the buffer zone. Stretching from Constance Bay in South Andaman to Lewis Inlet Bay in Middle Andaman, the notification prohibits anyone other than the member of an aboriginal tribe from entering the buffer zone.

Following questions raised in Parliament on the Jarawa issue, the Supreme Court, on 9 February, 2012, appointed two Court Commissioners, Senior Advocate T.S. Daobia and Advocate Sanjay Upadhyay, to look into the matter and submit their report within six weeks. That the matter defies easy answers is evident from the fact that the two Commissioners have chosen to table two separate reports.

In his 42-page report, Advocate Sanjay Upadhyay has focused on the settlers affected by the notification, rather than on the Jarawas.

Questioning the basis of the notification, he suggests that the administration should reveal the file notings or the basis on which the decision was taken. The buffer zone decision that impacts the lives of over 100,000 people has no clarity on the extent of land falling within the buffer zone area, since a detailed survey has not been carried out. He recommends offering compensation to farmers and the owners of the commercial establishments residing in the buffer zone for the heavy losses they are expected to incur if they are removed.

Sanjay Upadhyay is also of the view that the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR), ordered to be closed by the Supreme Court, will hinder the livelihoods of the majority of the population on the islands. According to him the alternative sea route being proposed in lieu of the ATR will not be a good option due to infrequent boat services and the heavy monsoon. In his opinion, the ATR is not a mere 'convenience' but a 'bare necessity' for islanders from rural South, North and Middle Andaman.

His report is critical of the government. He raises questions on the exemption of guesthouses run by the government in the buffer zone and its confused tourism policy that aims to develop 36 beach sites including in the area in question in South Andaman.

On the other hand, Senior Advocate T.S. Daobia seems to toe the line of the Administration in all aspects. His approach takes the purported perspective of the Jarawas rather than the point of view of the settlers. The Jarawas, according to him, are happy with the status quo, though he reiterates that there should not be too much interference in their lives and progress should not be at the cost of destroying Jarawa culture.

Daobia maintains that the Jarawas are an intelligent and self-respecting tribe and have survived all these years with little interference or help.

However, they must be given the opportunity to express themselves so that decisions are taken according to their will. The staff of the quasi-governmental body, Andaman Aadim Janjati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS), should be involved in this process. With their help, the Jarawas' traditional barter system for rice should be strengthened as Jarawas prefer to procure rice rather than honey and dhup.

Daobia states that the buffer zone is essential to protect the Jarawas since indiscriminate entry in the sea adjacent to the Jarawa Reserve would reduce the supply of fish available to the tribe. How the zone should be delineated is a matter for the court to take a view on.

The ATR, Daobia maintains, should not be shut for non-tribals, many of whom have been residents here for more than 150 years, until an alternate route is developed or the sea route is made operational. However, he does suggest a reduction in the number of convoys and making a distinction between tourists and those transporting essential goods. He emphasizes the need to avoid too much interaction between tribals and non-tribals since history has proved that this is counterproductive, as in the case of the Great Andamanese tribe.

The recent move by the Administration to appoint a Nodal Officer to check the movement of vehicles, and a new law to ban videography in tribal areas are examples of proposed amendments to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulations, 1956.

This cycle of varied thoughts, processes, opinions and debates will continue till we understand the contemporary needs and dynamics of both the Jarawas and the settlers. History helps to put the matter in perspective, but a sincere understanding of the Jarawas' aspirations is essential. ■

Charkha Features





NAGHMA KHATOON
Patna, Bihar

Ensuring a certified future through Microsoft Learning

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

Today, Naghma has a globally recognized Microsoft Office Specialist certification and a wide range of job prospects. Financial security for her family is now within her reach.

BUILDING THE RIGHT SKILLS

The Microsoft Office Specialist certification helped Naghma develop:
IT skills to create professional-looking documents with **Microsoft Office Word**
Competencies in using computers
Increased efficiencies for enhanced productivity

REAL IMPACT FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

Naghma is one of the 17,000 people in Bihar to become employment-ready through this initiative. Every year, over 1,00,000 people in India are empowered to pursue better job prospects with Microsoft Learning courses and certifications.

To know more about Microsoft's initiatives, visit www.microsoft.com/india/about



Scan the QR Code with your mobile device to visit us online. In case you don't have a QR Code Reader, SMS 'CS' to 566775 to get the App for free.

Find us on: www.facebook.com/microsoftindia and www.twitter.com/microsoftindia

Microsoft®

CIVIC ACTIVISM AND OUR CITIES

**WHERE IS THE
RISING MIDDLE
CLASS?**

The middle class has the opportunity to lead with ideas that will make our cities more livable and competitive. With education and a worldview they are in a position to drive the best ideas in governance.

Umesh and Rita Anand

A rising middle class, educated, empowered and ready to engage in the strengthening of democratic institutions is an asset. So, what is the record of India's middle class? What are the values it seeks to promote and defend? How much has it evolved after two decades of reforms and quicker growth?

Candlelight vigils for justice, demonstrations against corruption and outbursts on social media have given the impression that the middle class is willing to come out and be counted.

The public displays speak of involvement, but the question is whether these are in ways which are significant enough. There is also the question of numbers and sustained involvement. Of being sufficiently inclusive to carry the huge numbers who live in poverty along.

It is easy to dismiss civic activism as a fad. But then one has to begin somewhere. Perhaps the important thing is that beginnings have been made.

Issues like corruption are difficult to grapple with. And finding civic solutions in our cities is complex and challenging. Therefore, it is heartening to see the middle class try to make a difference against huge odds.

For instance, any attempt to deal with the problems of our cities means working with outdated municipalities where there is little expertise or enthusiasm. You won't find the research and technical knowhow which are needed to make civic initiatives successful. There is also a huge backlog coming out of a long history of bad decisions made by governments.

Despite such hurdles, at least some citizens groups try to engage with administrations and find ways forward. The focus for now has to be on these outliers.

But there is reason to believe that they will pave the way for others who will follow. There is greater awareness among the young. More middle-class people are also coming out to vote.

Are these early signs of a willingness to get into politics over time and seriously raise the bar for what can be expected from leaders? Perhaps.



A tree is saved in Mumbai

Lok Satta's slogan: "The answer to bad politics is good politics" now resonates much more with the middle class.

The long-term solution is evidently not in activism, but in getting elected and impacting governance. Large-scale change is needed for change to be meaningful.

It is from the middle class that leadership and new vision must come. Particularly in cities, which are overburdened and are going to take on yet bigger loads. It is here that reforms and big-time investments are needed and an evolved middle class can ensure that life gets better for everyone.

The middle class can sponsor inclusion through the use of better technologies, financial strategies and access to housing, health care, education and so on. It can lead with ideas that will make our cities more livable and competitive. With education and a worldview, middle-class professionals are in a position to drive the best ideas in governance.

We asked writers from Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Pune to give readers their perspective on middle class activism. Most of our writers have been either involved in civic activism that has yielded notable results or been ringside observers.

We have Nandan Maluste's evocative piece on Mumbai's decline and its impact on the city's mindset, Gautam Vohra on Delhi's complacency in civic matters and Mudar Patherya on the many paradoxes of Kolkata. V. Ravichandar explains how Bangalore's citizens got organized and

made an impact. The idea of a City Connect network has now begun to spread. Pune provides an excellent model of industry taking the lead. Raj Cherubal shows how with dedication and doggedness it is possible to work with multiple departments to achieve results. Hyderabad has had a solid start with Lok Satta.

What does emerge is that a collective response and a common agenda are what give strength to citizens' movements for better cities.

Industry has a natural interest in improving cities because well-balanced urban environments spur investments. Industry also has a vested interest in the urban poor, possibly more than the domestic sector. It needs labour to run its factories and offices. IT and BPO companies hire drivers, cleaners and peons. It is time for industry to take responsibility for the poor quality of life their informal staff leads.

Industry leaders should see themselves as part of a process of finding durable and inclusive solutions to housing, health care, education, waste management and transportation. And for this they need to dialogue without narrow preconditions of what is good only for companies. There has to be a more comprehensive vision in the corporate sector of a future urban India. The Pune example is a good one.

The best cities in the world have empowered mayors and municipalities. An institution's relevance gets defined from the top. For the whole system to deliver, a coalition of interests is needed with due recognition for municipal leadership. ■





After the blasts and the 26/11 terror attacks Mumbaikars in large numbers came out to protest

In Mumbai, personal drowns out public

Nandan Maluste, an entrepreneur, explains the financial capital's decline

A generation or two ago, Mumbai was perhaps the best city in India to live and work, especially as a professional. Now, everything seems a mess. The city has been built over without regard for heritage, regulation or even water and roads. Yet this is a megapolis enjoying over twice the per capita income of India and a municipal budget that rivals that of many states.

Equally alarming – in a city which embraces Lokmanya Tilak's Ganapati festival to promote community, the social fabric seems to be falling apart. Brides are burnt without neighbours intervening; young men are beaten to death outside restaurants in front of other patrons and passerbys; old people die without anyone noticing for weeks; individuals are ostracised, or even physically attacked, because of their religion or roots outside Maharashtra – in a port city which has always prided itself on cosmopolitanism.

And, of course, Mumbai's politics is consonant with its decay. Evidence is emerging that each of the last three Chief Ministers abused his power over land allocations and use. If that was not enough, Kripashankar Singh, the Congress chief in Mumbai, was recently questioned by the CBI for assets massively beyond known sources of income (he is said to have entered politics as an auto-rickshaw driver).

Yawn, you might say. Mumbai is just going the way of the rest of the coun-

try. But this is the city which just a few decades ago claimed the best governance as well as social and physical infrastructure which allowed it to overtake other metros in economic development. Moreover, it is globally believed to illuminate the future of the developing world which is rapidly urbanising. So why is the bourgeoisie ineffective? Even their voting rate is lower than that of the poor.

The explanation popular amongst denizens of lesser cities is that Mumbaikars are too busy commuting and working to sustain an interest in public service. Many young people, for example, appeared on television after the 26/11 terror attacks on Mumbai in 2008. "Never again", they promised, holding candlelit walks and so on, securing the sacking of the Maharashtra Home Minister who responded with a faux pas on television. Within months, however, most of the excitement gave way to workaday involvements.

Mumbai's preferred excuse is that the majority (perhaps 55 per cent) of us lives in slums. A few of these have people with white collar jobs and the wherewithal to buy consumer durables, to invest in their children's futures through private education, but daily life is so challenging, real middle class values are far away. Many slum dwellers, for instance, may be more concerned with the protection Kripashankar Singh reputedly gave illegal slums

(even in security sensitive areas) than with his alleged acquisition by illicit means of luxury cars and homes.

A variation on this theme is used to attack, even physically, migrant workers from other states. Often single young men, they come desperate to earn a living and send money home. They are caricatured as bumpkins without loyalty to Mumbai. But of course, the city has always been, and continues to be, built by cheap labour of this kind.

The breakdown of community is also connected by some to the decline of the Mumbai port and demise of the cotton textile industry. The former was the progenitor of the city and the latter was its social and economic backbone. Between them, they employed at peak about 280,000 workers, many of them multi-generation Mumbaikars imbued with an urban culture. Many of their descendants are today's middle class.

While each explanation has some substance, many middle-class people have organised in the social space with persistence and success. For example, all over Mumbai citizen volunteer committees (Advanced Locality Managements) monitor municipal services, improve public parks, ensure effective policing, etc. Samitis and clubs for every cause, from pujas to sport, have sustained for decades, promoting social bonding. The likes of Citispace have braved physical threats to fight encroachments on public spaces by rich, poor and governments. Right to Information activists have braved even murder to uncover inaction, incompetence and corruption. The corporate sector has stepped up – Mumbai First has promoted such initiatives as a focus on economic growth in the city which, in the nineties, lagged behind the rest of Maharashtra and India although dominating control of the nation's private industry, commerce and finance. In fact, some Mumbaikars are so energetic that they take social action beyond the city – Citizens for Justice & Peace has pursued prosecution of the perpetrators of the 2002 Gujarat pogrom in all levels of courts, even (without precedent) getting one case transferred from Gujarat to Maharashtra. CRY-Child Rights & You, founded by a Mumbaikar, is active all over India. SPARC, an association of slum dwellers, has gone global with a presence in at least three continents.

So why is Mumbai a mess? As an optimist, I believe the next decade will see things getting better. Citizen awareness and activism on all fronts is rising, will bear fruit. Major infrastructure projects for mass transportation, for instance, are under way. And so on.

There is, however, an institutional issue which is not getting the attention it needs. This is the multiple jurisdiction, sometimes mutually uncooperative, overlaps which stymie ordinary people but enable the canny and ruthless to acquire power and wealth.

Take city transport. Roads, including traffic signals, are the responsibility of the municipality, supposedly overseen by corporators elected by the city. But traffic police are controlled by the state's Home Ministry. Vehicle and driver licensing and registration is with other another state department which will not routinely cooperate with the police to identify, for example, the owners of vehicles jumping traffic lights. Buses in Mumbai are operated by the BEST, an undertaking of the municipality. Some 7 million people commute every day by a train system of the Railway Ministry in Delhi. To make things even more interesting, the Mayor presides over the municipal corporation for only a year at a time. In any case, the Municipal Commissioner (usually an IAS officer), appointed by the state, is still governed by a 19th century colonial law by which he can ignore any decisions of the corporation if he sees fit. It is widely believed that corporators take office only to steal from the public.

If one accepts this diagnosis, the prescription is self-evident. There needs to be a comprehensively empowered city government led by a Mayor elected for five years. This is similar to the situation in most other countries. This does not necessarily mean creating a "city state" on the Delhi (even better, Singapore) model separate from Maharashtra; New York City has an empowered mayor while remaining part of New York State.

Some progress is being made. The metro system being built, for instance, is to be housed in a limited company which is a joint venture between Indian Railways and the Government of Maharashtra. Of course, it would be better if all the city's transport and traffic was with a city government.

However, the diagnosis not widely known, is often rejected. A few years ago, Mumbai First invited city and state governments to consider the governance structure of London at a seminar for which the Mayor of London, then the famous Ken Livingstone (a leftist aspiring Prime Minister), came to Mumbai. The then Municipal Commissioner, JM Pathak (now disgraced by alleged involvement in the Adarsh property scam) did the discourtesy of showing up too late to hear Mr. Livingstone. Then, Mr. Pathak dismissed the London structure as irrelevant because Mumbai already had an excellent model! Other appointed and elected officials reject a functional city government as "politically infeasible". Because, they say, Balasaheb Thackeray of the Shiv Sena, which has dominated the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai for two decades, will not accept the separation of Mumbai from Maharashtra. This may be true on emotional grounds – Balasaheb is proud of his father's role in creating Maharashtra with Mumbai as its capital. But Balasaheb and his son Uddhav (current president of the Sena), proud Mumbaikars, could agree that Mumbai could be better run by a city government. Moreover, since its foundation in the 1960s, the Shiv Sena has been elected to power in the state only for one term of five years, and that too in a coalition with the Bharatiya Janata Party. The Thackerays might reasonably calculate that a real city government would give their party a better chance of power. Uddhav Thackeray might also contemplate the international experience: successful mayors of major cities have gone on to national prominence. Most famously, the current President of China, Hu Jintao, was formerly

Mayor of Shanghai; Rudolph Giuliani, New York's mayor 1994-2001 was a possible President of the United States.

Which leads to the final hurdles in the Mumbai obstacle course. As is now apparent much of the real power in Mumbai is with the state government which, like most state governments in India, is dominated by elected officials who are not city people. They are typically landed gentry without real sympathy for urban issues.

But additionally, Mumbai is unique amongst Indian cities in that the overwhelming majority of its most talented youth do not aspire to work in government. The city's private sector is too attractive and there are also NGOs, academic institutions or hops across the Arabian Sea to employment in the Gulf or even further West. So very few Mumbaikars take the Union Public Service Commission exams to eventually head government departments, the police, etc. Thus while the middle class Delhi activist, for example, can depend on a chacha or a mama to help or advise, this is much less likely in Mumbai. Babus are usually "outsiders" by origin.

And yet, we will progress. Middle class values will prevail, certainly in the next generation when more than half of India becomes properly middle class. Officials will predominantly be imbued with public service rather than private greed. Then Mumbai will show the world its future. ■



LAKSHMAN ANAND

The perception is that Mumbaikars are caught up in work and commutes

As an optimist, I believe the next decade will see things getting better. Citizen awareness and activism on all fronts is rising, will bear fruit. Major infrastructure projects for mass transportation, for instance, are under way. And so on.

Count us out, say the rich in Delhi

Gautam Vohra lives in Vasant Vihar. Its residents complain but won't act

LAKSHMAN ANAND



The wrongly built flyover residents were incensed about

THE *dharna* was to protest against an ill-planned, ill-conceived flyover on the Outer Ring Road facing Vasant Vihar. Anger against the structure was widespread. It was indeed the chief cause of the defeat in the last elections of those who had allowed its construction. Our job, the newly elected team of the Vasant Vihar Welfare Association (VVWA), was to give priority to changing the status of the flyover.

So when the Public Works Department (PWD) decided to construct an over-bridge for pedestrians between the two stretches of the flyover it became clear that the plan, suggested by residents to extend the flyover, was being dropped. The footbridge would come in the way of the flyover.

Our team decided to protest.

We were confident that the turnout for the *dharna* would be impressive. After all had we not won by the highest votes ever during the Vasant Vihar Welfare Association elections? The residents had voted for us largely because our campaign had highlighted the urgent need to extend the flyover and preferably convert it into a four-lane structure.

To our consternation only a handful of residents turned up for the *dharna*. Had it not been for the traders and shop owners of the six markets in Vasant Vihar there would have been no show of strength. With their backing we

stopped traffic on the busy Ring Road.

Our point was made. The mayhem caused by the traffic logjam that followed was caught on TV. But, no thanks to the residents.

Well, maybe, we had misjudged their concerns which were palpable on the issue of water. Every day we are inundated by calls asking us to ensure that the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) tankers be sent to the premises of those residents who had not received piped water supply that day. Usually the houses on a gradient do not get water due to lack of pressure. Some areas are poorly served since Vasant Vihar is at the tail end of the water supply chain. As such residents are denied even their minimal per capita requirement. Added to this has been the replacement of bungalows by high-rise apartment buildings significantly increasing the number of residents and the demand for water. People have been insisting that an additional source of supply be made available for them.

This was an issue which would surely galvanise residents. Or so the managing committee thought. To pressurize the authorities we organized a *dharna* in front of the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) office.

We recalled how vehemently the residents reacted when they did not get water, what fights they put up in the VVWA office if the DJB tanker did not

turn up, how upset they were when they had to pay for water to a private carrier.

Surely they would turn up in full strength.

This hope too was belied. Had it not been for our MP, Ajay Maken, and our MLA, Barkha Singh, who summoned the *jhuggi* dwellers around Vasant Vihar, the *dharna* would have been a flop.

It became clear that the people in the middle class were not willing to get their hands dirty. They would rave and rant so that the Vasant Vihar Welfare Association did the needful. But they themselves were not willing to put themselves out.

The residents, many former senior government servants and others, middle-ranking bureaucrats, had it easy – most jobs could be done through their nexus with the bureaucracy. Now that they had retired this was no longer an option. So they vented their spleen at the Association's office.

The Anna Hazare movement aroused everyone in Vasant Vihar. Here was an event the managing committee wanted to use to mobilize the residents. Everyone agreed with us.

We decided to take a contingent to Jantar Mantar to express our solidarity. For the VVWA dealing with a plethora of agencies such as the MCD, DJB, DDA involved constant delays and the use of speed money. DJB tankers are provided free of charge to residents who do not receive piped water for one reason or another. But the driver invariably demands money and gets it. Those who are not in the queue get it out of turn if they offer to pay the requisite sum.

We felt again that we had a winning cause to motivate the middle class. Surely now they would give us more than verbal support. But when the day dawned for us to make the trip, apart from the usual suspects, no one turned up. The VVWA had to be content to drape the banner proclaiming its support for Anna's cause on the VVWA building.

The reality is that the middle class has nothing to gain by bucking the system.

In fact, it has everything to lose. Its members are good at posturing, little else.

My experience is that it is the dispossessed who are ready to fight. They are the ones willing to stand up and be counted. The Narmada Bachao Andolan's (NBA) Bombay Chapter comprised a handful of us. We met regularly to discuss the issue and methods by which we could help the cause. But whenever we needed to show our solidarity through protest gatherings at Kala Ghoda we had to swell our ranks with the support of students from St Xavier's College, Elphinstone, SNTD University and other nearby colleges.

No such subterfuge was required in villages affected by the Sardar Sarovar Dam project. The tribals supported Medha Patkar en masse. We saw this when our group landed on the banks of the Narmada in the 1980s. At that time Baba Amte had also set up his camp there. When Medha addressed the tribals they sat patiently spread out as far as the eye could see.

The government was shaken. It realized it could not take away the land of the tribals to set up hydroelectric plants (that would serve the interests of the middle class) without adequately compensating the people they were displacing.

Many were not willing to accept the compensation package for they had heard of the broken lives of their brethren who had been resettled in camps



Abandoned placards after an anti-corruption rally

We recalled how vehemently the residents reacted when they did not get water, what fights they put up in the Association's office if the DJB tanker did not turn up, how upset they were when they had to pay for water to a private carrier. Surely they would turn up in full strength.

far away from their huts. They came in hundreds to support their cause espoused by the NBA, for they stood to lose home and hearth.

The DRAG experience in the 25 hamlets of Pen taluka in Raigad district of Maharashtra working among the Katkari and Thakkar adivasis reinforced the NBA experience. When the affected population learnt that they were being denied their rights they did not hesitate to give DRAG their support. But that took some doing. Initially they were suspicious of a bunch of outsiders who kept telling them about the benefits they could secure under the Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) that was their due. For generations the authorities had exploited them and never benefited them. Why should ITDP be any different?

Once we won their confidence they accompanied us to the district headquarters in Raigad to be registered in below the poverty line (BPL) category. For amazingly enough despite the disinherited existences they were leading in their isolated *padas* (hilltop hamlets) without water, without schools for their children without employment they had not been brought within the ambit of the ITDP. To do so they had to first be listed under the BPL category. Consequent to DRAG's intervention they were duly registered with the tribal department and were hence entitled to small business loans to open a retail shop, tea stall, secure goats and so on.

The Environment Impact Assessment of River Valley and Hydro Electric Projects committee of the Ministry of Environment and Forests discovered that the main opposition to the dams that were being set up in the forest heartland came from the populations that would be uprooted. The tribal leaders against the Pooyumkutty dam in Kerala visited us with written petitions asking our committee to deny environment clearance to the project not only because vast tracts of natural forests would be cleared – those created through compensatory afforestation

could not begin to compare with millennia old natural forests with its denizens – but also because they were aware that its benefits would not accrue to them. It was residents of far away urban centres, the already privileged middle class, who would benefit.

The other campaigns that DRAG has been part of, such as the one with Paani Morcha travelling through the course of the Yamuna and Ganga, involved rallying the locals around pollution and degradation of these mighty rivers. Our discovery, by now conventional wisdom, is that those affected by the damage are the ones who take a stand.

The middle class on the other hand is not perturbed by the development policies of the government. The quickening India is its bailiwick. Yes, it may be impacted negatively such as those in Vasant Vihar are by the cumbersome flyover, the lack of water, even the endemic corruption. But the middle class has the means of getting what they want, solving their immediate problems by some means or the other. They will not challenge the system beyond a point. For if they do, they stand to lose. The inconveniences they suffer are short term which can always be resolved through the resources at their command. The middle class is a staunch upholder of the status quo. ■

Bangalore has a model

V. Ravichandar connects professionals and government for ways forward

CIRCA 1992: A former IIM Ahmedabad director decides to settle down in Bangalore not as a retired pensioner but as an involved urban citizen. He sets up the Public Affairs Centre with an innovative idea – public report cards on civic agencies to shine light on opaque institutions that cared little for the consumer, the citizen.

Circa 2000: The Chief Minister sets up a Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) for the city and invites a leading business CEO to head it. He, in turn, builds a core team with four others (disclosure – this author was a member) who voluntarily work for four years in partnership with the civic agencies. This group could have given a report, spouted advice and moved on but instead chose the more difficult route of working alongside the system.

Circa 2004: Post its closure in mid-2004, a group of four Bangaloreans best described as 'urban junkies' post their involvement with civic issues since 2000, decide to catalyse central government involvement in helping fix our cities through a national urban mission. And wonder of wonders, their many trips to the powers that be in government and outside yields dividends in the formation of the JNNURM.

Circa 2005: BDA, the Bangalore Development Authority, announces the Bangalore Comprehensive Development Plan 2015 that needless to stress has many infirmities. Citizen groups in NGOs led by Janaagraha, Resident Welfare Associations and Industry Associations come together for a month-long citizen education interaction about the plan and put together a detailed set of suggestions for consideration. The BDA expert committee hears them out but nothing substantial materialises in terms of changes to the plan.

Circa 2006-12: A few Koramangala (a burgeoning suburb) residents are appalled that their residential neighbourhood is being taken over by rampant commercial activity. They protest the violation of zoning rules and move the courts with a PIL even at the risk of being threatened by the affected enterprises. And the system prefers to find fault with the 'house footprints' of the petitioners rather than address the core issue. This activism finally pays off through a recent High Court judgement stalling commercial activity in residential zones. During this period, the *sarkari* system tries to regularize violation properties through an amnesty scheme, push through an ill-conceived TDR (Tradable Development Rights) scheme and build unwanted flyovers – these are resisted by citizens' groups as they constructively group together to rejuvenate lakes and protest against corruption.

The above are a sampling of instances of citizen involvement with and without the blessings of the government. In Bangalore there have been active NGOs like ESG, ALF, Eco Watch, Janaagraha, SWMRT, CIVIC, Awaaz, Swabhimaana, CAF, etc. who have been deeply involved in causes they believe in that are beneficial for all citizens. Many friends, seeing the state of traffic and visible infrastructure, often comment that Bangalore is hardly an example of a city that works! This author's response is that we can guess how much worse off we would have been without citizen involvement initiatives we have been fortunate to witness.

One recalls an IIM-Ahmedabad professor tell us on day one of joining – "Drink Sabarmati water. There is more business wisdom there than you will learn in the campus"! Similarly, one wonders what in Bangalore accounts for so many community activists. Given the global nature of the city's business (IT, Biotech, knowledge-based sectors) and the associated exposure to the best in class cities, there is a lot more exposure of what a city ought to be. Some

returning NRIs like Samuel Paul, Ramesh and Swati Ramanathan and Ashwin Mahesh have significantly raised the bar of citizen involvement.

Part of it has to do with new wealth and a sense of Individual Social Responsibility (ISR) among the recently wealthy. There is a willingness to contribute for civic causes partly out of a realisation that sans that, the place will not improve. There is also a feeling among this group that without inclusive growth ("a rising tide that needs to raise all boats"), many of their new found wealth could come to nought.

Getting change to happen in the public domain is often frustrating, not at all easy and time consuming. But for those who have stayed the course, even minor victories give a sense of joy that is not matched by any commercial suc-

cess in the private sector. Further, many activists are genuinely driven by the greater good over private gain. For instance, Bangalore is witness to many one-ways that does require a few to give up their privileges for the larger good of the travelling public.

Bangalore is fortunate to have elected leaders who see value in some form of citizen involvement. The BATF was a leading example of this and more recently there has been ABIDE, another government task force. In early 2000, when the administrators wanted to change the Self-Assessment Scheme for Property tax, the elected Finance Committee chief reached out to knowledgeable citizens to stall the move. Currently, the Government is partnering with the Bangalore City Connect

Foundation, a business led voluntary initiative, for designing state-of-the-art roads.

At times, NGOs do face challenges working with other fellow community organisers. In Bangalore we have 13 social groups involved in waste management come together under the banner of SWMRT (SWM Round Table) to evangelise the same set of solutions. This is fairly unique to any city and there are greater chances of favourable outcomes with this kind of union.

The *aam aadmi* involvement in civic issues in Bangalore is more than many other Indian cities. For instance, there is Praja (www.praja.in), a net based discussion forum that has a vibrant online community discussing civic solutions. If the woes of the city have been digitally fixed, it is at this site – the group even put out a detailed commuter rail solution for Bangalore that it is now pushing in the real world. Back in early 2000, three citizens stood at over 100 junctions over a six month period to come up with a one-way traffic solution for the city centre – this was accepted by the police and formed the basis of the shift to one-way traffic.

The above is not to suggest it is a cake walk in Bangalore vis-à-vis citizen involvement. There is much to fix. For instance, the appalling lack of traffic discipline, low care about the community outside their own cocoon and self-obsessed behaviour of citizens are causes for concern. But the willingness of many to get traction for the idea of improving the city gives us hope that there could be better days ahead.

Being involved and making change happen requires loads of patience and some luck in using the windows of opportunity to push the community agenda. In this journey there are good, bad and lull times, but without venturing to be part of the urban governance table, there is limited chance of seeing better cities evolve. Nothing ventured, nothing gained is so true when it comes to citizen involvement in cities. ■

V. Ravichandar, Chairman, Feedback Consulting, gets his high from his involvement in civic causes.



Residents make a gentle but firm point in Bangalore

MUDAR PATHERYA



MUDAR PATHERYA



Argumentative Kolkatans

Mudar Patherya, journalist and entrepreneur, on his city's paradoxes

THE big Kolkata paradox is that a city, which probably has more artists per sq. km. than any other urban equivalent in India, is also its most unaesthetic. A city that prides itself on its cultural sophistication is one of the dirtiest.

The second paradox is that the Kolkatan is democratic and secular in his practice – he will spit, urinate, litter anywhere but will be vehement in arguing that the city is going to the dogs and someone needs to do something about it.

The third paradox is that for a city that has probably demonstrated the most sophisticated local community network every Durga Puja season to organize the city's biggest collective celebration, there is absolutely no collective will to address its biggest civic problems.

The fourth paradox is that for a city so consciously aware of its rights and willing to take its outrage to the streets, as it did when Rizwanur Rahman was mysteriously murdered or when firing killed villagers in Nandigram, is willing to passively tolerate neighbourhood litter transforming itself into a full-fledged vat.

The fifth paradox is that for a Kolkatan who is probably up to his ears on where Beethoven erred in his Ninth Symphony or of the pain that Mahler went through to create unforgettable music, should look at citizens engaged in cleaning parks and ask in a profound kind of way: "Who are you? What are you doing? How will this help?"

What makes Kolkata refreshing on one hand and hopeless in the other? The probable answers: the Kolkatan is chronically indolent, anything to do with dirt is considered dirty, he has seen so little of the world that he does not know what world-class hygiene standards can be, he is so engaged in fighting for his survival that the survival of the city does not figure as his priority, he has made his peace with the world and adjusted comfortably with squalor, he is doing what the rest of the country has mastered anyway – passing the buck and letting somebody else bother.

The evidence of indolence is not hard to find.

When Kolkata's media highlighted the danger of a hyacinth-choked 13.75 lakh sq. ft. Santragachi Jheel not being able to attract migratory birds any longer, the story reached two million readers. Yet only five Kolkatans responded by creating a group to clean the Jheel themselves – which they did in three weeks and helped attract more than 6,000 migratory birds a day.

The 500,000 sq. ft. Vivekananda Park is one of the largest in Kolkata, perched visibly in a dense and upmarket South Kolkata neighbourhood. Fashion designer Sabyasachi's showpiece store is 30 metres from the park, politician Somnath Chatterjee lives 100 metres away, NDTV's office is only a 30 second walk and West Bengal's environment minister lives in an adjacent building overlooking the park. Until early 2012, the park had no railings, no lights, no security and no professional horticulturist. It was overrun by prostitutes, junkies and garbage. Yet only one forward-looking school cared

enough to start a movement to clean this showpiece (assisted thereafter by nine other schools, including one from the United Kingdom).

The Eden Gardens is one of the finest cricket grounds in the world. When the Rotarians played a match in January at that venue, they left after liberally sprinkling the hallowed turf with PET bottles, pan masala pouches, used serviettes and paan-stained spit. Only two (from the 22 who played) cared to remove the litter.

The Kolkatan (and Indian) psyche is that whatever is non-penal is lawful. If a fine is imposed and implemented, then that could be the starting point for adults to tell their children: "Don't litter here or we will have to pay for it." Within a couple of generations, Kolkatans would then be able to respond to non-littering more by instinct than enforced discipline.

The Kolkatan is essentially hopeless; he doesn't think that anything lasting can be done about creating a cleaner Kolkata. He thinks that people will litter regardless of their education, class or excellence. If this is too forbidding a mountain to climb, then why bother climbing anyway?

The Kolkatan has mentally assigned the subject of civic consciousness to the corporation (for whom he has little respect), to social organizations (for whom he has no time) and to schoolchildren engaged in an SUPW exercise (for whom he has no interest).

The Kolkatan culture is cerebral, not physical. He will debate, dissect and deduce. He will not deliver.

How can this be corrected, assuming that it can?

For the swiftest and most sustainable change, Kolkata's planners should encourage citizens to look beyond their walls. Puja committees need to set aside 10 per cent of their festive outlay for civic improvement. Neighbourhood committees need to be reorganized around civic hygiene. Why not have an intra-city competition for the most transformed Kolkata neighbourhood? It says something about a city's priorities that there are probably 10 competing awards for the best Puja pandals but not a single award for the cleanest locality.

The city needs to engage its proud citizen communities – schools, for instance. A school has numbers (most now have more than 500 students), is the purest command economy in the citizen realm (one says 'do!' and hundreds obey), is refreshingly idealistic (they think they can transform the world because they have not encountered the disease of cynicism) and children are most effective when it comes to embarrassing the apathetic ('Uncle, please don't spit here again!').

The city needs to rewrite the commandments. Schools, offices, Rotarians and Lion Club members need to sign pledges: "I will not drink tea and throw the cup on the sidewalk" and "I will not nail a placard into a tree" and "I will not make a bonfire of the winter leaf fall." The average citizen doesn't even know of the range of things he should or should not. A pledge brings forgotten items on the agenda. ■



Chennai's corporate citizens step forward

Raj Cherubal sees capacity and expertise as vital for urban solutions

THE capacity of our cities to deliver a better quality of life to all its citizens – rich and poor – needs to improve. The question is how. Any attempt will require considerable resources, long-term dedication, world-class expertise, coalitions and networks, sustained engagement at various levels of governments and so on.

One key stakeholder is industry. A city with a better quality of life attracts talent and investments. Yet industry has very few avenues for meaningful contribution and it usually complains about the lack of infrastructure and services from the sidelines. Engaging industrialists in improving urban governance is a must.

This was the reasoning of some of the veterans of the Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) and the Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy (JCCD) who developed the City Connect (CC) concept. The hope is for each city to have CC as a platform where local organizations including industry groups can help build the capacity of the city. CC is today active in Bangalore, Chennai and Pune.

From early on CC set itself some ground rules. An important one was – don't whine in public. City officials' jobs are not easy and they are constantly in fire-fighting mode. Even the most committed official, and there are

many, will find it impossible to convert all suggestions into reality.

"I saw amazing transportation in Hong Kong or I saw amazing footpaths in Paris, why don't you do the same here?" is sheer torture for an official presiding over a weak system. Developing empathy, not to be confused with dead end excuses for their predicament, is a vital first step.

One of the biggest barriers to our efforts is the endless scepticism, bordering on cynicism, from both people and officials. While funds, expertise, etc. are easier to come by, sentiments like, "Sir, all this works in Singapore, but not very doable here!" consumes considerable energy, especially in the initial stages.

One feel good factor in our experience is that the system does respond positively and listens. At least that is what we have seen in Chennai. The frustrating part is that it takes a long time to prove, even to ourselves, that all this is worth the effort.

Chennai City Connect decided to focus on traffic and transportation and any related urban planning issues. These are common problems and less politically controversial than say, water. Then came the daunting question – where do we start?

Our first attempt was to try and help the Corporation of Chennai (CoC) fix a 500 metre footpath in a very congested area. We enlisted architects and

experts. We measured road widths, documented conditions and created nice looking colour pictures of what could be done. We even received enthusiastic support from CoC officials. There was much fanfare in the media. Yet nothing happened for a long time. The silence provided us a valuable education on how the system and people work.

Officials get transferred. Lower-level officials sometimes go along and sometimes stall ideas. They have seen many such enthusiastic proclamations from above with very little support, so why stick their necks out. Elections arrive along with the model code of conduct, which means a freeze on public tenders and works. Each component of a road is owned by different agencies and their budgets and intentions aren't in sync.

The police own the traffic lights, the bankrupt electricity department owns the electricity boxes that block pedestrian movement on footpaths and the CoC or bus corporation may own the bus stops and so on.

Each discovery can demoralise you further. There are no up-to-date road surveys, traffic studies and utility maps. Each encroacher claims immunity due to perceived proximity to distant politicians. Lower level officials, while enthusiastic about your project, don't want to take a chance and annoy some powerful local person without authorisation from the top.

The middle class hates the hawkers, the pro-poor activists are suspicious of the middle class and of industry. The traffic police are only concerned about traffic. They regard pedestrians and other stakeholders a nuisance. Wider footpaths? Oh no! That will ruin traffic flows.

The designs you give morph into unrecognizable blobs as they do the rounds within the system. The budget requested for the project and the one approved by the city have no resemblance, forcing contractors to either become charitable entities or just run away. No one is sure who is an encroacher and who is not.

One source of paralysis is when every stakeholder blames another. A constant refrain is: our people are not cultured, educated, aware. They are too corrupt. So nothing much can be done until the people change – an excellent excuse for attempting nothing.

Another example of self-induced paralysis is to anticipate all kinds of future troubles and decide not to act till all solutions are found right away. A case in point – even if these designs are implemented, how will they be maintained 10 years from now?

But understanding these complexities and empathising is the first step towards devising solutions and ushering social change. Plus persistence and colour pictures can surmount many hurdles. Colour pictures, based on overwhelming homework and groundwork, help overcome scepticism and even begin to inspire the sceptics.

While this simple project took almost three years to get off the ground and was implemented far less to our satisfaction and specifications, it did do a few positive things. It helped build our confidence that something can actually be done. Officials, high and low, started to trust our organisation, realised we were serious, understood their constraints, were willing to work with them and not complain and embarrass them in the media at every turn.

Though the Chennai City Connect team struggled with even this simple project, we spawned other parallel projects. Using the same model of attracting experts and resources, we developed concepts on Area Development, integration of various modes of transportation, a Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) system, an integrated traffic management centre, a plan to scale up roads based on world class standards, the creation and protection of public spaces, preservation of water bodies including a highly degraded marshland, parking management, alternate and sustainable financing of urban projects and so on.

As your colour pictures, experience and presentations pile up, seeding new concepts becomes easier. Today CCC teams are involved in some very exciting projects with various agencies of the city.

A note of caution. While it is easy to complain about lack of capability within the system, there hangs another dark cloud over our cities – the shortage of credibility and capability in civil society and the private sector. Advanced cities of the world have developed their internal capabilities over decades and centuries and also catalysed capabilities in their academies, civil society and the private sector to help with public good in the city. They have access to good academic research, competent consultants and expertise, processes

to transparently vet public proposals and separate good ideas from the truly dreadful and so on. A dearth of such capabilities is another burden our cities have to bear for some time to come.

The expected and humbling learning has been that while the system is weak, so is our understanding of what needs to be done – we have much to learn. Also scaling our efforts cannot be done alone. On both these counts Chennai City Connect has been fortunate to have very empowering partnerships.

That partnership begins in our executive committee made of very prominent citizens who put in funds, but more importantly, their patience, enthusiasm, hope and credibility into this task. People like Gopal Srinivasan (TVS Group), G.R.K. Reddy (MARG Group), K. Venugopal (Business Line), Lakshmi Narayanan (CTS), Prakash Challa (SSPDL/CREDAI), M.M. Murugappan (Murugappa Group), Ramesh Mangaleswaran (McKinsey), Nicolas Beaumont (Michelin Tyres), V. Sumantran (Hinduja Group), K. Pandiarajan (Ma Foi), Varun Manian (NAPC) and V. Ravichandar (Feedback Business Consulting Services) bring much needed credibility, networks and commitment to the projects.

These are business leaders who know each other and recognize the civic frustrations and commitments which others face. Each executive committee member is loosely paired with another to raise funds, initiate and monitor

projects of their interest. The executive committee is also careful to attract only those who are sincere in their commitment to the city. Credibility with the system and fellow citizens is crucial for success in this field, a point that cannot be overstated.

Chennai City Connect's technical credibility comes from our formal and informal partnership with proven and dependable organisations that have done good work. For example, our partnership with the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) helped us invite some international superstars in city development – Enrique Penalosa (ex-Mayor of Bogota), Janette Sadik-Khan (Commissioner of Transportation, New York City) and Amanda Burden (Commissioner of Planning, New York City) – to dazzle and inspire our city. They helped us enlist experts who are not easy to find and lent us their

international credibility and experience.

Similarly, Care Earth brings years of experience in activism, research and understanding of environmental issues; SMART at University of Michigan shares their international experience and networks; Mapunity and City Connect in Bangalore bring years of battle hardened experience from an equally exasperating Indian city. It is also important here to mention the contribution of architects from prominent organizations in Chennai and volunteers from various educational and commercial institutions.

To our pleasant surprise we have found media, especially a host of committed journalists and editors, our important allies. Communicating with others in the city about exciting possibilities, tough choices the city has to make to provide a better quality of life and the need for change in the way we view these issues has been easy, especially because we received support from newspapers, radio and TV.

Last, but most importantly, our partnership with people within the system. There are plenty of politicians and officials at all levels who want to improve the city and who are willing to take the risks. CCC and its partners have had some success with engagement in public projects only because of the enthusiasm and guidance from elected representatives and officials. With cities across India competing to show they are number one, senior leaders and officials are increasingly eager to enlist any good help they can get to deliver quality of life for all citizens – rich and poor.

There is ample scope for organisations like CC who can help in an objective and non-partisan manner. Like in the case of cell phone technologies, our cities too don't have to reinvent everything from scratch. We have the opportunity to leapfrog, save our precious resources by borrowing what is appropriate from experienced and progressive cities of the world. Invent and reinvent when necessary, adopt and adapt when possible and strengthen our governance institutions. The sum total of our experience is that there are plenty of reasons for optimism about the future of Indian cities. ■

Raj Cherubal is Director (Projects) Chennai City Connect

The middle class hates the hawkers, the pro-poor activists are suspicious of the middle class and of industry. The traffic police are only concerned about traffic. They regard pedestrians and other stakeholders a nuisance.

Zero-garbage Pune sets a benchmark

Ravi Pandit & Sunil Agarwal on involving people in cleaning up



Activists in Pune wish the Municipal Corporation a speedy recovery

CITIES have been the cultural drivers of India starting from the ancient civilization of the Indus River Valley. However, today cities have become pockets of pollution, water scarcity, poverty and crime. But they are still seen as the land of opportunities, drawing in businesses and hordes of migrants looking for a better life for themselves and their families. Janwani came into being when concerns over filth versus opportunity dominated conversations about city life.

The Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture (MCCIA) set up Janwani in 2006 as a social initiative. Its goal? To make Pune the best city to live and work. Janwani's work in areas as diverse as environment, governance and city structure is a model for groups in other cities across India.

The formation of Janwani was based on two major convictions. First, cities are engines of growth and are major centres of economic activities. They attract talented and skilled workers as well as unskilled labour. In order to accommodate the influx of workers, cities must meet the demand for infrastructure and quality of life. Secondly, citizens need to actively participate so that the municipal government can understand their needs and provide for them. Without an active citizenry, cities will maintain their status quo and will not make changes unless forced by the state or Union government. The status quo already puts too

much pressure on existing infrastructure in terms of inefficient road networks, inadequate collection of waste, unaffordable housing leading to creation of slums, decline in per capita availability of water, among other problems.

These social and infrastructural problems caught the attention of MCCIA, which focuses on attracting new businesses and investments to the region and provides a platform for businesses to interact, share experiences and enhance the overall business community. MCCIA realized these concerns impacted Pune's ability to attract investments and businesses. Hence Janwani was formed under the expert guidance of the late B.G. Deshmukh, former Cabinet Secretary, Government of India, to make Pune the best place to live and work.

We at Janwani, which means 'voice of the people', advocate and promote comprehensive, equitable and sustainable development in Pune that benefits its citizens. We adopted a five-point approach to our work, taking participative, collaborative, analytical, creative and synergetic steps to identify priority areas and bridge gaps in the developmental process. We believe that collective wisdom can resolve critical issues through a healthy dialogue. By information dissemination and sharing of ideas people can make conscious decisions about the city's path of development.

Our focus areas are city structure, environment, governance, heritage and traf-

fic and transportation. Through facts, research and solution-oriented projects we provide a platform for empowerment of citizens. We collaborate with stakeholders and harness synergy in diverse opinions and interest groups. We work constructively and in tandem with other NGOs and government agencies.

CITY STRUCTURE: The built form of a city affects issues such as service delivery, pedestrian opportunity and development of community. We concentrate on policy advocacy and act on behalf of the common man with decision makers. The backbone of this focus area is Janwani's core team of architects, town planners, urban planners, urban designers, a sociologist and a finance expert. The committee maintains a balance between technical experts and socio-economic experts to analyze policies in a holistic manner.

Like any other major city in India, Pune is experiencing rapid urbanization, creating a huge demand for affordable housing, good infrastructure, open spaces and overall improvement in the quality of life. This results in ad hoc policies by decision makers and officials. The city structure group critically examines various policy decisions and provides recommendations and suggestions that promote better city life. For example, the committee made suggestions to the City Engineer of the Pune Municipal Corporation to include measurable performance indicators in the revised Development Plan. The team also sent its suggestions to the state's Department of Housing, including methods to widen the tax net to create a stock of affordable housing.

ZERO GARBAGE: We identified solid waste management as one of the biggest challenges for the urban environment. For many years there has been an agitation led by Pune's nearby villages against the dumping of large proportions of waste from the city into their areas. Pune produces about 1,400 tonnes of waste every day. With a rise in its population and changing lifestyles the waste produced will increase manifold.

In response to village protests and trash piling up on Pune's streets, Janwani facilitated the Zero Garbage Ward project, which aims to reduce to zero the amount of waste sent to landfills through segregation, door-to-door collection and disposal of organic waste within the ward's boundaries. Janwani brought together a wide variety of stakeholders, including residents, the Pune Municipal Corporation, the waste pickers' cooperative, Cummins India, a private company, and others to guarantee success of the project.

Before the project started only 30 per cent of households were covered by door-to-door collection and there was no waste segregation. Today, 91 per cent are covered, of which 85 per cent segregate their waste. The segregated waste is recycled and organic waste is processed within the ward through composting, biogas and alternative fuel opportunities. The project received ISO-certification – the first waste collection and transportation system in India to receive that honor. Cummins India was also awarded the 'Environment Challenge Award 2012' for sponsoring the project.

PEOPLE AND GOVERNANCE: Janwani strongly believes and advocates people's participation. Right from the start we mobilized 'Punekars' – residents of Pune – by creating awareness among citizens about provisions for participation in the municipal budgetary process. Under this initiative we developed a menu card listing the kind of works that can be suggested to the municipal body, created a web-based application for easier access and submission of forms and helped citizen groups in prioritizing their list of works, all in an effort to increase citizen participation in local issues.

The city's budget, which reflects the financial health and the priorities of Pune, is an important document and a good source for engaging citizens in local governance. However, the current format of the Pune city budget is cumbersome. In response, Janwani came up with a simple and easy-to-read budget booklet for the year 2011-12 that highlights the financial position of a few departments at a glance and also provides ward-wise budgetary allocations for capital projects. This has helped citizens to know about the projects being undertaken in their wards and follow up with the decision makers regarding the progress of these works.

HERITAGE AND TOURISM: Historically, the Pune region has been a storehouse of knowledge and intellect in India. We at Janwani strive to conserve Pune's 2,000 years of rich heritage and culture and promote it to the world by supporting sustainable heritage tourism.

Virasat Pune is a people's movement for Pune's heritage and culture. The aim is to conserve the rich legacy of Pune and improve its tourism prospects. The movement is a collaborative effort to promote heritage activities. Projects include a Signature Heritage Walk and Tanga Ride of Pune, developing a Pune travel book and web portal and capacity building of guides in Pune. This year, Janwani also started an annual event, 'The Pune Heritage Week'. For this event we are collaborating with 25 different organizations and have arranged more than 70 events to highlight the heritage of the city.

TRAFFIC AND MOBILITY: Pune relies on personalized modes of transport because of poor public transport facilities. The development of a cost effective and efficient mass rapid transport system that increases mobility and reduces travel time is necessary. Also needed are better roads and smart traffic management systems that ease congestion, improve road safety and control pollution.

To ease use of the local bus system, Janwani created an online Pune Bus Guide (www.punebysguide.org) that provides information about bus routes,

time-tables and travel plans of the service provider PMPML. We also initiated a GIS-based Accident Reporting System to track accidents and reduce the number and severity of the accidents (www.indic-transtech.com/ars). The system has helped the traffic police to identify accident-prone areas in the city and analyze the causes. To engage citizens in traffic governance we helped the Pune traffic police department create a Facebook page which improves the department's opportunity for interface.

FUTURE PLANS: Janwani will continue to work on projects to make Pune a better place to live and work. This includes replication of the Zero Garbage Ward scheme in the entire city of Pune. We will also collaborate with the municipal corporation and

other NGOs to create formats for Outcome and Gender Budgeting that will help the public better understand the budgeting process. In addition, we know it can be difficult for citizens to visualize the effect of policy decisions on their daily lives, so we are creating a pilot for micro area planning and development of 3D simulation models that would be open for public exhibitions. Lastly, we are working to facilitate creation of a Vision for the Pune Metropolitan Region based on stated aspirations and goals of the public.

For all of these projects, citizens' involvement is a pre-requisite. We understand that building effective participation is a long walk, and as such, we plan to pursue additional methods of communication. Traditionally, we have relied on newspapers and other print products. However, increasingly, we are turning to web-based applications and social media to reach a broader audience and achieve more vibrant participation. This includes sites such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and our own homepage at www.janwani.org.

LEARNING AND ACTION: In the past six years, we've learnt that people are more likely to get involved in issues of local governance if they can understand how it affects them and can see tangible results by participating. For example, in the Zero Garbage model, residents of the test ward increased their participation as volunteers from Cummins India visited them door-to-door to tell them how the project benefits their daily lives. The budget booklet we produced allowed elected local representatives and city-based NGOs to better grasp city spending.

We at Janwani will continue to learn from these experiences and forge ahead on new projects and concepts that are both demanded by the citizens and necessary to achieve our stated goal: To make Pune the best city to live and work. We hope that the Janwani model, with its holistic approach to improving urban life, is an example for other groups across India to make metropolitan areas more pleasant, livable centres that are responsive to citizens' needs. ■

Ravi Pandit is Chairman & Group CEO of KPIT Cummins Info Systems Ltd and a key member of Janwani. Sunil Agarwal is also a key member of Janwani.

Hyderabad does and doesn't

T. S. Sudhir, Editor of Daily South, traces the ups and downs

THE day was 2 October 1998, Gandhi Jayanti. A group of people under the banner of Lok Satta, an NGO based in Hyderabad, started visiting petrol stations in Hyderabad and Secunderabad. Their objective was to check whether the petrol stations delivered the consumers the petrol they paid for. Armed with pre-calibrated and certified containers, they found only three 'honest' petrol stations out of around 150 delivered the right quantity of fuel.

When the same citizens' vigilance drive was extended throughout Andhra Pradesh, they found that 97 per cent of petrol stations surveyed short-changed the consumer by giving 10 per cent less petrol or diesel. As a result of this initiative, meters in 1,500 petrol bunks in the state were set right.

This example is a dramatic illustration of what middle-class activism, that had chosen an issue which affected every consumer, could achieve. It saved consumers, the oil companies and the government crores of rupees in a year.

A year later, Lok Satta motivated the thinking classes to play a more proactive role in elections to the Lok Sabha and the Andhra Pradesh State Assembly elections.

Dr Jayaprakash Narayan, who quit the IAS to start Lok Satta, says, "Candidate disclosure clicked with the people who were looking for accurate and non-partisan information about candidates. We had to do a lot of work to get all that information. But 1999 laid the foundation for the middle class to lobby passionately for disclosure at the time of filing nominations. This petition was finally upheld by the Supreme Court. Today, you know of a candidate's assets and criminal record at the click of a button."

In 1995, a group of citizens came together to form an umbrella organisation called MARCH or Medically Aware and Responsible Citizens of Hyderabad. They demanded accreditation for laboratories in Hyderabad to start with, and later throughout the country.

Chandana Chakrabarti, Convenor of MARCH, says it is important that when the doctor advises you to undergo tests at a particular lab, you should question the decision. The drive to get diagnostic centres to conform to regular inspections was born out of an incident that eminent scientist Dr P. M. Bhargava went through.

He once went to a lab to get a particular test done that he knew would take at least 48 hours to complete. But when he asked the laboratory if he could have the report in 12 hours and that he would pay more, the lab obliged him. The shock that labs could be so callous gave birth to MARCH.

Convincing the government that accreditation was a must was difficult. "Today around 100 labs out of 4,000 in Hyderabad are accredited. All over India 500 labs have accreditation. This is just a drop in the ocean. But we as citizens are unable to make accreditation mandatory for every diagnostic lab. That is because the government does not have the wherewithal to carry out the accreditation process," says Chandana.

The positive outcome is that citizens can get information on what standard of services to expect from an accredited lab. But most citizens don't realize that they should know whether a lab is accredited or not. In that sense, says Chandana, there is only this much that a citizens group can do.

Some see such initiatives as islands of activism. "While efforts by the middle class to take up causes like these are worthy of appreciation, most often just a few concerned citizens participate and therefore their reach is limited," says Prof. K. Nageshwar, Independent Member of the Legislative Council of Andhra Pradesh.

The response of the middle class to the Anna Hazare movement against corruption might have made Prof. Nageshwar wonder if his assessment was wrong. The movement made middle-class activism a fashionable word.

Hundreds of citizens marched to the People's Plaza near the Hussainsagar Lake to express support to the Jan Lokpal movement armed with candles that threatened to get extinguished in the breeze. For many looking for a 'Jaago re' moment, this seemed to be it.

Chandrasekhar of the India Against Corruption chapter in Hyderabad says the enthusiasm of the crowd was infectious. "What most people do not know is that many people told us that they had formed smaller groups and chapters in their localities to spread the message. So in this way, even those who did not assemble at the main spot in Hyderabad got involved in the crusade against corruption. That was the true spirit of middle-class activism," he says.

But Prof. Nageshwar analyses the movement as the ascendance of economic activism and not social activism. "The freedom struggle was a middle-class movement, fired by idealism and the need for societal reform. Now it is characterised more by personal aspiration occupying centre-stage. What you see is a group of cynics rather than active agents of change. They condemn everything. They don't bother to delineate exactly their contribution to positive change. The media makes it worse by playing up cynicism against the political class," he says.

Dr Narayan of Lok Satta says a society that needs too much middle-class activism is actually a sad society.

"Much of middle-class activism is directed at the politician who is seen as some kind of a hate figure," Dr Narayan explains. "This happens because of a disconnect between the political class and the middle class. So much of the discourse becomes shrill, as was witnessed during the Jan Lokpal movement. When civil society is not restrained while dealing with complex issues,

the political class feels boxed in. This adversarial position which is adopted does not really help in finding solutions to problems."

Middle-class anger unfortunately does not translate into action. Take voting for municipal or assembly polls. Citizens prefer to stay at home instead of going out to vote. The Graduates constituency from Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy and Mahbubnagar districts from where Prof. Nageshwar was elected as an MLC in 2007 has 200,000 graduates enrolled as voters whereas the number should be, even by conservative estimates, at least two million. In 2007, 50 per cent of them voted. In 2009, the number dropped to 53,000. Hyderabad was the worst as it saw just 22 per cent polling.

The political class knows that middle-class activism is limited to complaining.

But politicians are forced to handle the middle class gingerly since it is an electorate that is aware. Its votes cannot be bought by money, booze or saris.

Ajay Gandhi, who founded Manthan, says that in 2005, he and his friend felt that there was a need for the argumentative Hyderabad to have a space, a platform to discuss and debate issues.

"Hyderabad needed a platform for thoughts, ideas and debates on matters of public interest. Manthan was born out of that need. In the past seven years, Manthan has created a platform for high quality, intense, free public discourse on all matters intellectual. To be a thinking person, to be tolerant to divergent views and to be free to discuss differences is essential for a vibrant, progressive civic society, for democracy and liberty. Manthan promotes all these values," says Gandhi.

To be truly engaged and effective, informed citizens need to contribute to meaningful debate instead of merely lighting candles. Prof Nageshwar sums it up when he says: "Spontaneous anger lacks programmed coherence. It eventually leads to greater frustration. Online activism, which is another forum for expression of anger, also stems from non-participatory action, where people start looking at such protests as infotainment." ■

Efforts by the middle class to take up causes are worthy of appreciation. But most often just a few concerned citizens participate and therefore their reach is limited.

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

ITIs get a makeover

Better skills will improve job prospects

Vidya Vishwanath
Gurgaon

At first glance the Industrial Technical Institute (ITI) in Gurgaon looks like a relic from a bygone era. You enter a large unkempt ground reminiscent of a derelict government campus. But keep going and a swathe of well-watered green lawns will surprise you.

The principal's office is archaic. It is a large room with a humungous desk. Now this clearly gives the impression of hierarchy, not teamwork. Well, after all, this is an institute built in the 1950s.

But finally the winds of change are blowing through the antediluvian ITIs. A partnership with industry is helping many of these institutes find their feet in rapidly industrialising India which today faces a shortage of skilled workers.

Ravinder Kumar, the principal, is in his thirties. He is from the Haryana Industrial Services (HIS) and takes you around the institute. There is a quiet sense of work ethic as one walks through the rooms. All the machines are in prime working condition whether it is the machining room, the tool and die making room, the electrical room and so on. Young men in blue and white uniforms work in pairs at each machine, learning their trade in earnest. The staff seems engrossed.

In a new building, adjacent to this one, students are learning about automobiles. They are pulling apart an old Maruti Swift car. There is an open engine in another corner with its pistons moving. This building is dedicated to multi-skilling and has been created by Maruti Suzuki. It is called the 'Centre for Excellence.'

The students don't just get a technical education here. "Many of our students are from rural areas. They lack soft skills. This has an adverse impact on their efficiency. So we have hired a separate faculty to improve their soft skills and to teach them computer training," says Kumar who started his career in 2000 working for the private sector. He was employed with Goodyear and Jay Bharat Maruti before he joined the government in 2007.

The same campus houses an ITI for women. This has also been refurbished. The sewing room has gleaming white Juki machines. There is a wooden frame on which a sari has been pinned. Two women are doing intricate embroidery on it.

The upgrading of the ITIs started four years ago when Maruti Suzuki decided to adopt these ageing institutes as part of its CSR activity. The idea was to create an employable workforce. After some brainstorming Maruti Suzuki took two decisions. The first was to create 'Centres of Excellence' in automobiles in different ITIs

LAKSHMAN ANAND



A trainee gets hands-on experience

LAKSHMAN ANAND



A student doing embroidery on a machine

LAKSHMAN ANAND



The machines and tools have been upgraded

Maruti's Service Department was given this responsibility. Today, 28 ITIs have these centres.

The second strategy was to upgrade the ITIs. A dedicated team of five members under the company's Human Resources Department was entrusted with this task. The department has signed MoUs with five state governments to upgrade 10 ITIs – four in Haryana, one in Maharashtra, two in Tamil Nadu, two in Goa and one in Kerala.

"When we started we had no clue about what to do," admits Rajeev Khurana, Deputy General Manager, ITI Projects. The team began with a gap analysis and identified five areas which needed urgent attention: course, faculty, education, infrastructure and processes. They decided to start with the faculty. They found out where ITI teachers came from and what they knew. The team discovered that the faculty had not received any training for 25 years. Out of 70 teachers only two knew how to use computers. The training of teachers was arcane and out of sync with the kind of manpower that industry requires today.

Maruti Suzuki then put together a team which visited vocational training centres across India. They found that the best technical institutes were the Mico Bosch and Nettle Technical Training Foundation (NTTF) in Bangalore. NTTF was started 50 years ago with German collaboration. Nearly 100 per cent of their students receive placements before their final exams. Students generally took a loan of ₹100,000 and learnt mechanical engineering and computers. The students who qualified from NTTF's tool and die shop got jobs immediately in countries like Australia and Germany. The training, which is residential, also took care of the overall development of students. It incorporated health, communication skills as well as theory and knowledge. So the day, which started at 5 am with yoga and ended at 9 pm, included activities to enhance memory. Sports are encouraged. The students also did tasks for industry while learning.

"When Maruti began we scoffed at the concept of zero defect," explains Khurana. "But when we went to Japan and actually saw it work we



Ravinder Kumar, principal of the ITI in Gurgaon

Maruti Suzuki identified five areas which needed urgent attention: course, faculty, education, infrastructure and processes.

changed our minds." The team organized a three-day programme on well-managed institutes for 22 ITI principals in Haryana. ITI faculty from Rohtak and Gurgaon were then taken for a 10-day programme to NTTF in Bangalore. When they saw what was possible, their minds opened up.

But for real change to happen the faculty needed to be handheld at their own institutes so that they would not regress. Maruti Suzuki roped in other private sector companies to help the ITIs upgrade further and to provide placements. Givo, Orientcraft, Caparo Maruti and VLCC have joined as industry partners to manage the Gurgaon institute. The companies have formed a council with a chairman who is a senior manager at Maruti Suzuki. Members of the council help with course material, training and placements.

One priority has been to meld the staff of each ITI into a team. In Gurgaon, Hero Mindmine, a training company for motivational and behaviour

change, was hired. Hero Mindmine organized a two-day workshop for all staff in Goa from low-rung employees to the principal. At the end of the course, the staff reported that this was the first time they had spoken freely to the principal. When students began to be taught spoken English, other staff members demanded that they too be taught the language.

The students from Rohtak and Gurgaon get 50 hours of computer training. Students and staff visit Maruti Suzuki for training on processes like Kaizen (continuous improvement) and other quality processes. These have been incorporated into the curriculum too.

The ITIs also suffered from a 30 to 40 per cent shortage of training staff. Maruti helped in advertising and recruiting. For every trade, students intern for two months in industry and Maruti helps find the right placement for them. The company has also been careful to choose ITIs based on how marginalized the community using it is.

Rohtak and Gurgaon are exceptions. Maruti Suzuki is after all located in Gurgaon. Rohtak is the Chief Minister of Haryana, Bhupinder Singh Hooda's constituency and Maruti Suzuki was specially requested to upgrade the Rohtak ITI.

Other ITIs have their own characteristics. The ITI in Kerala caters exclusively to SC/ST students. The one in Tamil Nadu is in the Nagapattinam region that got affected by the tsunami. Two ITIs for women have also been adopted. Pattern makers from the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) were invited to teach in the sewing classes. The effort is on to make the women's ITIs more market-oriented and to create craft guilds within the campus.

Ravinder Kumar says they are going to make continuous efforts to meet market demand for skilled manpower and to encourage students who want to study further to get into a polytechnic school or an engineering college. The numbers of students are still small but if industry does get involved in a meaningful way, it has the potential to create relevant education for workers and improve efficiency. More importantly upgrading the ITIs might bring dignity and respect to work done by hand. ■

Bags to beat plastic

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

IN the hill state of Uttarakhand you see polythene bags everywhere. They choke drains, waft down pristine streams and get mixed up in mounds of stinking garbage. Everybody agrees polythene bags are ugly and a nuisance but nobody does anything about it. The state government has banned plastic bags with a thickness of less than 20 microns. But even this half-hearted step is not implemented. Religious hotspots like Haridwar and the Char-dham route continue to be choked with bags made of polythene.

But a ray of hope has finally dawned. Prabhat Jain, an elderly entrepreneur from Kotdwar, a small town in the foothills of Uttarakhand, is manufacturing biodegradable polythene bags in attractive designs and doing roaring business.

"It all started when I went to the India International Trade Fair in Delhi in November 2010," reminisces Prabhat Jain. "I saw eco-friendly polythene bags at the state pavilion of Himachal Pradesh. I was told that bags which are not biodegradable are banned there. That gave me the idea of starting the same venture in Uttarakhand since our ecology is similar to Himachal's and polythene bags are a menace here too."

This decision became the turning point in Prabhat Jain's life. Accompanied by his son, Prashant, he travelled to the biodegradable plastic factory in Himachal and learnt the process. He returned to Kotdwar and set up a small unit to produce eco-friendly bags in April 2011. The unit has a machine that churns out 3,600 bags in an hour.

Prashant Jain says they invested ₹30 lakhs in setting up the factory. The raw material for bag making was sourced from Baddi in the Solan district of Himachal Pradesh. The bags, of different sizes, are priced for ₹150 per kg. One kg contains 252 small bags or 53 large bags.

Jain's bags are available in four colours – black, red, blue and yellow. Conventional plastic bags cost between ₹130 to ₹160 per kg.

In less than a year people across Uttarakhand started approaching the Jains with orders. They now sell their biodegradable bags in Gopeshwar, Kotdwar, Rishikesh, Kashipur, Ramnagar, Dhampur and Almora. "I never sell my products in polythene bags. I use Jain's bags. In fact, those bags have boosted my business," says Gopal Singh, a dairy owner in Almora. People throng to his shop which is famous

for its *lassi*. "The milk and curd we buy is given to us in biodegradable polythene bags that we carry home after enjoying his delicious *lassi*. It saves us the bother of bringing a utensil from home," says Sunita Pande, 42, a housewife.

The Jains are producing these bags from oxo-biodegradable plastic. It is still a petroleum by-product but it contains only 20 per cent polythene. "This percentage is required to provide strength to

Other shopkeepers say that the government will never implement a total ban on plastic bags. They allege manufacturers of plastic bags grease the palms of officials and politicians. "So we have decided to take the initiative. We are quite proud to use Jain's bags," says Ram Krishna Mahawar, proprietor of Mahawar Provision Store at Station Road, Kotdwar. Fruit and vegetable vendors are also using Jain's bags. "The thinner *panni* costs less but it is



Prabhat and Prashant Jain in their factory



There are four colours and the material easily degrades in sunlight.



the bags. But the ratio is so little that it doesn't produce toxins and becomes mud when mixed with cardboard that forms a major component of these bags," says Prabhat Jain.

The plastic first degrades through exposure to sunlight and air. Then, bacteria break down the plastic fragments into water and humus that is mainly organic matter comprising carbon.

For degradation, the bags need exposure to sunlight. People have been dumping these bags into their garbage but at least the bags are less toxic than the regular plastic bags. Cows, deer and wildlife will not choke and die a painful death if they munch on Jain's bag by mistake.

"All my customers want a bag. I cannot refuse. I buy Jain's bags since they cost nearly the same as conventional plastic bags and are good for the environment," says Brij Mohan Thapaliyal, a retailer in Malini Market, Kotdwar.

illegal and officials can harass us. Also, my customers prefer Jain's bags," says Rewati Bisht, 45, a vegetable vendor.

The Jains offer their clients a fairly wide range of bags. You can decide the length, width and thickness that you want. The bags have eye-catching designs and prints. They also personalize the bags by printing the name of the shop and its proprietor.

"I use only Jain's bags. People can use his bags for other purposes too. And wherever they go the name of my shop goes with them," says Arvind Aggarwal, proprietor of Doon Namkeen.

The Jains have tried to sell the idea of using only biodegradable bags in Uttarakhand to the government without any success. "We wrote to all municipal corporations, temple committees, bureaucrats and politicians but no one responded," says Prashant Jain who markets the bags. ■



VETRA

THE BEAUTY WITH BRAINS

FEATURES

- Decorative ring on motor and attractive two tone trims
- Wider tip blades for maximum air delivery
- Double ball bearing for noiseless operations and longer life
- Energy Efficient, 4 Star Rated Fan
- Available in various colors and sweeps



A FAN FOR EVERY NEED



Call free
1-800-1033-111

Living

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

Rebel filmmaker gains ground

A national award and an Internet release

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

OSCAR-nominated director Ashvin Kumar, 38, has been fighting fierce battles with the establishment for months now. In 2010, *Dazed in Doon*, a film that recounted his days in Doon School, was summarily disowned by the very institution that had commissioned the work.

The same year, a documentary that Kumar made about a young Kashmiri footballer and the many hurdles he faces on account of the fact that his father is an ex-militant, was denied a certificate by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

So the filmmaker chose to release his next film, *Inshallah Kashmir: Living Terror*, on the Internet. An unflinching critique of army atrocities on Kashmiris and 20 years of State-mandated misadventures in the Valley, the 80-minute documentary would not have otherwise got past the censors.

In the 24 hours that *Inshallah Kashmir* was available online from the midnight of 26 January this year, it attracted more than 50,000 views.

Clearly, the "independent filmmaker" tag fits Kumar to absolute perfection. But things may just be beginning to change for the combative director.

The banned *Inshallah Football* has now bagged a National Award for 'the best film on social issues', while *The Forest*, Kumar's first full-length fiction film, is finally out of the woods and ready for commercial release in early May.

The Forest was completed in 2008 but was caught in the mainstream film distribution log-jam, which is the lot of almost all small, unconventional cinematic efforts in this country.



Ashvin Kumar in red shirt filming in Srinagar

The banned *Inshallah Football* has now bagged a National Award for 'the best film on social issues', while *The Forest*, is finally out of the woods.

While we wait for the 'ecological thriller' with a sub-plot about a man-eating leopard, a conservation-related message and a cast led by Javed Jafferi and Nandana Sen, to make it to the big screen, it is quite easy to see why Kumar's *Inshallah Kashmir* has polarized opinion on social networking sites and elsewhere.

"There were two reasons why I put *Inshallah Kashmir* online," Kumar has said. "One was to get around the Censor Board. More importantly, the other was that I wanted to make it truly democratic and enable people to watch the film without having to pay for it."

Continued on page 32



A still from *Inshallah Kashmir*

The voiceover in the opening sequence of *Inshallah Kashmir* sets the tone for the rest of the hard-hitting film. "On 21st August, 2011, the Indian state made a historic announcement. The State Human Rights Commission admitted to 2,156 unidentified bodies from 38 unmarked graves in Kashmir," we are told.

Minutes later, a woman, her voice drained of any apparent emotion, says: "They are all dead." But as nobody still knows for sure where the missing men really went, the women they left behind are regarded as "half widows."

Left dangling in a psychological penumbra where despair dominates but hope has not been fully abandoned yet, they are in a state much like that of the Valley that they call home.

Inshallah Kashmir – stark, shocking and thought-provoking – probes this and many other blind spots that plague any public discourse about the ground realities in the Valley.

Militancy and its terrible ramifications have altered the psyche of the people here and security crackdowns, pre-dawn arrests, custodial torture and unexplained disappearances have become integral to the collective Kashmiri lexicon.

As the authorial voice on the soundtrack, Kumar pulls no punches. He drills holes into the portrait of Kashmir that Bollywood kitsch, corporate media reportage and bureaucratic posturing have projected over the years.

It is no surprise that *Inshallah Kashmir* has riled those who believe that speaking against the show of military might on the people of the Valley constitutes an anti-national act.

As Vrinda Grover, lawyer and social activist, explains on camera, everything in Kashmir is seen through "the prism of national security" and so "human rights violations" are not important and are explained away with the "pathetic phrase – collateral damage".

This full-length documentary isn't an easy film to watch. Uncomfortable truths tumble forth from the mouths of many of the key players in Kashmir's recent history. But are we ready to listen?

The lines of a Nitasha Kaul poem quoted in the film capture the dissonance: "Burn your

Bollywood movies. Come to Kashmir; walk through our cities, the bridges, the ruins, the graves; look at what we eat; look at our buildings".

One post on a social networking site alluded to the need to revisit the Kashmir story. "What do we want to do with Kashmir and Kashmiris? We won't give them *azadi* but we won't let them study in mainland India. We don't want them to speak through guns and stones but refuse to engage with them in a seminar. If they pick up guns and stones, we call them bigots. If

they don't, we will say 'normalcy' has 'returned', as if the Kashmir issue is settled and needs no further discussion," he wrote.

Right at the outset, *Inshallah Kashmir* also quotes a telling line from the late Agha Shahid Ali's poem 'Farewell' in 'A Country without a Post Office': "They make a desolation and call it peace".

The film then goes on to probe what the next two lines of the poem (not quoted here) so presciently alluded to: "When you left even the stones were buried: the defenceless would have no weapons." It seeks to grasp exactly why "India has never been able to rule the hearts of Kashmiris" (in the words of Dr Amit Wanchoo, who has lived on in the Valley despite the fact that his grandfather, who was "a light to me", was killed by militants).

Inshallah Kashmir builds its shocking narrative through interviews of former militants, torture victims, widows and orphans of men who have gone missing, Kashmiri Pandits who

have chosen not to join the exodus from Kashmir and senior bureaucrat Wajahat Habibullah, who served in the Valley for 15 years.

On one level, *Inshallah Kashmir* records Ashvin's own personal journey through the towns and villages of Kashmir in an attempt to understand what has gone wrong with India's handling of the state – this film emerged from footage that the filming of *Inshallah Football* yielded.

The victims of human rights violations in this land with a long tradition of Sufi saints and religious harmony (the very bedrock of Kashmiriyat) recount their ordeal on camera, providing insights into the reasons behind their separatist motives and desperate commitment to violence.

Habibullah, on the other hand, represents the tone of reason that is so crucial to finding a lasting solution. He talks about "a sense of shame" that things have been allowed to come to such a pass in the Valley.

Kumar's film is an acknowledgement of the tragedy of Kashmir. There still is poetry and song in the air, but all things fair and the people's true aspirations have been smothered by the bitter Indo-Pak dispute. The film's plea is simple: can we at least recognize the truth as the first real step towards lasting reconciliation? ■



Cruise down the Jhelum in a boat

Boat ride to

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

A new attraction awaits tourists in Kashmir this summer. A cruise service has been started which will take you sailing down the river Jhelum under bridges and along the banks of the river. The purpose of the cruise is to highlight Old Srinagar's heritage. Like most Indian cities, Srinagar has a rich past. Its cultural ethos is embedded in the byzantine lanes of downtown Srinagar.

When militancy began in the early nineties, Old Srinagar paid a heavy price. It lost its distinctive heterogeneous character when the Kashmiri Pandits left. As guns and grenades began to blaze, businesses shut down. Commercial hotspots like Maharaj Gunj, Zaina Kadal and Gada Kocha came to a standstill.

The older establishments declined and new trade centres took their place. But lately steps are being taken to restore traditional Srinagar.

As part of this process, the tourism department started a cruise service on the river Jhelum last year. The trial run proved to be a success. The cruise owners are now keen to attract more local, domestic and foreign tourists.

The cruise starts its journey from the Peerzoo Island near Srinagar's General Post Office and culminates at the Maharaj Gunj bank of the river. The tourism department has outsourced the

MEHRAJ BHAT



see Srinagar heritage

cruise service to Highland Journeys, one of Srinagar's leading tour operators.

This year the cruise service was launched on 5 April with an inaugural ride between the Peerzoo Island and Chattabal Weer. A group of journalists,

senior citizens and tourists were taken sailing down the river to witness the heritage of Old Srinagar city.

For two hours travellers got to know about the importance of river banks in the lives of people.

They saw temples and shrines and sailed under a whole lot of important bridges – Amira Kadal, Budshah Bridge, Habba Kadal, New Fateh Kadal, Old Fateh Kadal, New Zaina Kadal, Old Zaina Kadal, Aali Kadal, Nawa Kadal and Safa Kadal.

Rauf Trambo, proprietor of Highland Journeys, says the objective of the cruise is to display the rich heritage of the Old City to locals and tourists. The cruise costs ₹350 per ride for an adult and ₹250 for a child.

"The main aim is to acquaint people about their cultural wealth. Of course we want to earn profits as well," says Rauf.

Last year the cruise service proved to be very popular with domestic tourists and locals. Rauf is hoping to attract foreign tourists as well.

"The advisories imposed by foreign countries have hit us badly. These need to be removed at the earliest. Both domestic and foreign tourists should come and enjoy our cruise service. We offer juices, *kahwa* (Kashmiri tea) and *shirmali* (Kashmiri bread). Last year, we hosted 60 groups of tourists including a group from Australia. Foreigners, in fact, are more interested in heritage and architecture," says Rauf.

Mohammad Saleem Beigh, state convener of INTACH, said the Jhelum river depicts the history and life of Old Srinagar city. "There are 44 banks on the river from Zero Bridge to Maharaj Gunj area located near the Zaina Kadal bridge. All these banks have some history attached to them. People used to buy their rations and supplies of wood from here. Of course, that lifestyle has vanished," says Saleem Beigh.

Columnist Zahid Ghulam Mohammad believes that the cruise service can also be used to solemnize marriages. The two families can hire the boat for the day and get married on board. They can also peep into the past as they sail along.

"Families hire hotels to get the couple engaged. They can easily carry out all formalities on the cruise. It would also give them a chance to recollect the past and revisit the history of Srinagar city. This would add a new dimension to relationships in Srinagar," says Zahid.

Maqsood Ahmad, an engineer, said the cruise

MEHRAJ BHAT

service will be successful only if the water level in the Jhelum remains high. He said the Irrigation & Flood Control Department has to be involved if the cruise service wants to operate throughout the year.

"I don't think ₹350 is too big an amount to pay for a heritage-cum-pleasure trip. But for locals there should be a concessional fare. After all they belong here. Lower fares would attract more people," says Maqsood.

The cruise boat has 17 seats. All precautions have been taken for safety. Rauf hopes his cruise will attain fame in the next three years. ■



View of Old Srinagar from the boat

The seamier side of journalism

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

THE daylight murder of Mumbai crime journalist Jyotirmoy Dey by underworld don Chhota Rajan's men on 11 June last year is still fresh in public memory. Rival scribe Jigna Vora has been named as a conspirator in the case. Although the full truth is yet to emerge, the unholy nexus between the media and the Mumbai underworld lies exposed.

Not that we did not already know the truth, but the Dey-Vora narrative, which is still subjudice and sporadically in the news, lays bare the sheer gravity and extent of the malaise. It is in the light of this dark reality that veteran journalist Oswald Pereira's *The Newsroom Mafia*, a fictional take on the way the press allows itself to be compromised by the rich and the powerful, must be seen and assessed.

The relevance of the book's theme lends it a resonance that goes beyond the scope of what might on the surface seem like a racy thriller designed for a quick read. Yes, it is a quick, easy read all right, but there is more

to this novel than just the bare facts of the story.

The Newsroom Mafia blends fact and fiction to reveal the seamier aspects of Indian journalism. Being a long-time insider, Pereira knows exactly what goes on in the newsroom and beyond. His novel is a candid expose and a riveting thriller rolled into one.

The fourth estate was once Indian democracy's faithful watchdog, keeping an eye on the other three estates – legislature, executive and judiciary – with diligence. But in recent decades not only has the media sold out to the powers that be, it has also been infiltrated by elements that think nothing of cosyng up to the nation's criminal underbelly.

In the light of the Niira Radia tapes and what they revealed about leading Indian journalists, it is safe to say that the media has been co-opted by the corrupt. Pereira's novel addresses the

repercussions. It revolves around two larger-than-life figures – Mumbai police commissioner Donald Fernandez, alias Don, and a ruthless Mumbai don, Narayan Swamy.

The strong-willed duo is locked in a deadly battle of attrition. The collateral damage that this bitter clash causes is both physical and moral. It serves as a prism through which the writer views the dynamics of journalism. What we see is anything but salutary.

As journalists are manipulated either by the police chief or the underworld don, the principal casualty is objective, unbiased reporting. In Pereira's story, the pen-pushers are on the payroll of the criminal or use their power to glorify the police officer. They all have their hands in the till.

Narayan Swamy is a gang lord who controls a network of thugs and hoodlums. But he also runs a parallel business empire that is aimed at earning a respectable veneer for his nefarious activities. He receives generous help from a motley group of leading politicians and influential journos. He employs a battery of professionals to keep his business in running order.

Super cop Fernandez, too, has several allies, including his competent assistant Rane, Marathi journalist Sudhakar Wagle and the narrator of this story, Oscar Pinto, a hard-drinking reporter who works for *The Newsroom*, India's frontline newspaper, among many others.

Given the dangerous nature of his mission, Fernandez has many enemies, not the least among whom is Maharashtra home secretary A.K. Godbole, the bureaucrat who Fernandez hates the most. "Corrupt to the core, he was known to hobnob with the underworld," is what the narrator tells us about Godbole, before revealing that the man has made many attempts to divest

Fernandez of the post of police commissioner.

Pereira creates an interesting gallery of characters, none of whom is free from pronounced shades of grey. While the super cop himself is not averse to resorting to a dirty trick or two to outwit his foes, the mafia don has a positive side to him as a man wedded to charitable causes.

Most of the journalists in this thriller, however, live and work in a morally dodgy universe where the line between good and evil is a blur. They are crooked men and women out to milk the system in their own interest. Some go scot-free; others get caught in their own web.

The Newsroom Mafia draws most of its inspiration from real figures and institutions. Pereira weaves the actual and the imagined in a commendably seamless way to craft a readable thriller that breaks free from the confines of the genre to comment on the times that we live in. ■



**THE NEWSROOM
MAFIA**

Grey Oak Publishers
₹ 245

Being a long-time insider, Pereira knows exactly what goes on in the newsroom and beyond.

'The short

Namita Gokhale on her recent book



THE HABIT OF LOVE

Namita Gokhale
Penguin

₹ 250

Swati Chopra
New Delhi

AS co-director of the Jaipur Literary Festival and the Mountain Echoes Literary Festival, Namita Gokhale has her hands full. Yet she has found time and mental space to pen a new book – this time a collection of short stories titled, *The Habit of Love*.

Namita is a prolific writer and a well-known publisher. Her novels include *Priya: In Incredible Indyya*, *A Himalayan Love Story*, *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother*, *The Book of Shadows*, *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*, and *Paro: Dreams of Passion*. Her non-fiction books are, *The Book of Shiva*, *Mountain Echoes: Reminiscences of Kumaoni Women*, a retelling of the Mahabharata for young readers, and *In Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology*, which she co-edited with Dr Malashri Lal.

For most of her literary career Namita has written novels and non-fiction. *The Habit of Love* is different. It marks Namita's foray into the short story genre which she last remembers doing in her youth. I met her at her home in New Delhi for a conversation that captured the many nuances and textures of her life.

With your busy schedule, how do you create the mental solitude and space to write?

I have two different aspects to my personality. I have the ability to prioritise, organise and delegate administrative stuff, which involves the festivals and the projects that I do. There is an inner side that is intuitive, dreamy and vague. The huge demands I make on myself in terms of external and internal lives do lead to some conflict, but I manage.

Do you set a writing schedule for yourself?

story is liberating'

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Namita Gokhale

No. Whenever a sentence repeats itself a few times, it actually knocks, I get going. In fact, short stories are such a wonderful part of my new life because I can take two or three days off, even a long airport wait, and do one short story at a stretch. A novel requires sustained imagination. When I am doing a novel, I am carrying an imaginary trunk in my head with a complete set of characters, lives, motivations. Anybody who has written a novel will recognise this feeling of carrying an entire second life inside you. A short story is more like a bus-ride with these people.

As a novelist, do you find the genre of the short story liberating and limiting too?

I find more freedom in the short story. There are

constraints in a novel in that sense, for example it should have a certain beginning, achieve momentum, and then stop. It's much more artificially demanding to sustain a narrative for 65,000 words or so. A short story can be more erratic.

I find life puzzling. I haven't been able to reach any conclusions about what is happening around us, even in the most ordinary things. I don't find logic or rationality in anything. Human nature always surprises me, for good or bad. Every story has its own trajectory that has its own length and voice. So I find the short story much more liberating. I began when I was young by writing some short stories. I shudder to remember how bad they were. It is nice to go back to the story, just as a little exploratory excursion into figuring out the life around me.

In this collection, some stories are mere strands, the moment when something happens. And it may not be something momentous, but there is a shift, a click.

These stories are about that shift, that click in consciousness. In life, the big things are not really the big things. You think they are, but the small things persist much more. The big things – birth, life, death, marriage – I guess they have some impact. But the biggest anxieties are based on the smallest and most insignificant things. Many of us have huge courage in big crises, but panic at the smallest hurt to our vulnerabilities. If this book is about anything, it is about human vulnerabilities, or rather feminine vulnerabilities.

The way you write about the inner world of women feels spot on. That is a thread that has persisted through your books. Also, it is not just the ease with which you talk about contemporary women, but also women from the epics, like Kunti and Gandhari.

When I was writing the Mahabharata for young readers, I was fascinated by the strength of the women characters. It was so startling. It opened another universe for me. On the one hand I did a book on Sita and the courage she showed under constraints. And on the other hand, there is the Mahabharata, where these women have incredible inner lives, and the exterior lives they lead also follow a fearless pattern, whether it is Draupadi, or Amba, Ambika, Ambalika, or Ganga.

My editor at that time, suggested I do a complete set of stories on the Mahabharata. But if there were only mythic women in the collection, it would have had an artificiality. Why you find it easy to access those women is because their voices are interspersed with the voices of contemporary women. The past doesn't sound so far away because it is juxtaposed with the present.

There is also a play of memory, whether it is through the physical or emotional landscape of your childhood, or actual experiences from your life.

A lot of this book, and a lot of my life, are about memory. As I grow older, I find that what I want to say is different. The world around me has changed so much. There are other people to tell new stories. But I am in a position to tell some old stories, even if they don't have value today. If some people can remember what a corner of Kumaon used to be like in that particular time and place, it is important to place it, locate it, frame it, immortalise it, and have it there to continue.

Increasingly, what I want to do with my writing is not to locate my memories, but the time and place which has vanished and only exists in memories. India is in such a state of rapid change. This India does not belong to me – they can tolerate me, but it belongs to the young who are writing and thinking and doing it so well. What I can give them, as a gift which they may not even immediately want or value, are things I can access in my living memory, which others might access only through research. I am not as old as I sound, but I grew up in an intense and complete society, which has changed and vanished. I was also very close to the older people in my life, so I have a lot of their stories. I wrote *Mountain Echoes*, so there is a continuum. ■

GREEN CURES

For strong bones

Dr G. G. GANGADHARAN & Dr T. K. GIRIJA KUMARI

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

Ageing is a normal process accompanied by progressive alteration of the body's homeostatic adaptive responses that produces observable changes in structure and function and increased vulnerability to environmental stress and disease. Disease and ageing probably accelerate each other.

Osteoporosis is one such age-related disease that is characterized by decreased bone mass and increased susceptibility to fractures. The disorder primarily affects the middle-aged and elderly, and of special concern, are fractures of the hip and spine. A hip fracture always requires hospitalization and major surgery. It can impair a person's ability to walk unassisted and may cause prolonged disability or death.

Studies reveal that the number of osteoporotic hip fractures will rise from 1.66 million to 6.26 million by 2050. India alone will have around 60 million suffering from it with around 100,000 hip fractures. Women, especially those who are postmenopausal, are more susceptible to this degenerative and potentially debilitating disease. Women in India are neglected, especially on the nutritional front, because they eat last and least. Day-to-day lifestyle is also one of the reasons that accelerate this condition.

AYURVEDA AND OSTEOPOROSIS: There is a need to create awareness about the significance of taking wholesome food based on Ayurvedic principles and to project the capacity of Ayurveda to provide micro-nutrition at the level of bone tissue. This is a unique feature of Ayurveda. The approach in Ayurveda is to improve the Dhatwagni (tissue metabolism) at all seven levels. This has to start from the improvement of Jataragni (digestive fire). Once Jataragni is improved, it proportionately improves other agnis as well.

The ideal medicines should be that which penetrates through all these tissues and ultimately enriches the Asthi dhatu (bone tissue). If such medicine is administered after basti karma (medicated enema), it can reach the level of bone tissue and rectify the problem.

FOOD: Ayurveda says: Pathye sathi gatarthasya kimoushadha nishevane

Pathye asathi gatarthasya kimoushadha nishevane



(There is no need for any medicine if proper nutrition is given according to the given condition)

And the Siddha system says:

Unave marunthu... .. marunte unavu

(Food itself is medicine and medicine itself is food)

This indicates the importance of appropriate nutrition in all conditions.

According to this principle, the most important diet for osteoporosis – for people who consume a non-vegetarian diet – are products made out of bone tissue or bone-like tissues.

Substances like conch shell are very useful here. Food items rich with Asthi-like components are also beneficial. Fruits, vegetables, which are Asthi dhatu thulya are to be used, for instance, leaves, flowers and fruits of drumstick, the pith and flowers of plantain.

Since Vaata is the predominant factor here, foods that reduce Vaata are to be added in the diet. Ghee, milk and milk products are good. Mamsa rasa and tender tissues are good and anything that can improve agni is also advised.

Intake of foods which are of sweet, sour and salt taste, warm oil bath, enema therapy, medicated fats of different sources prepared with drugs that increase hunger and improve digestion are beneficial in this condition.

Our food habits are based on the principles of nutrition such as a balanced quantity of carbohydrates, protein and fats, vitamins and minerals. What we need is a nutritional profile of food and practices of food processing based on Ayurvedic principles.

Osteoporosis can result as a physiological degenerative condition in which the weakness of the bone marrow is seen and secondly, due to food and lifestyle changes which increase Vaata, practiced by the individual. The ageing process is accelerated in such a person who attains old age early.

MEDICINE: Since osteoporosis is one of the Vaata predominant diseases, its general treatment includes oleation (Snehana), Sudation (Swedana) and mild purificatory therapies (Mrudu Sodhanam).

Here calcium absorption by the bone tissues gets affected even after making available enough calcium in a bio-available form, and thus the bone tissues get depleted of calcium. The disintegration of calcium from bone tissues (dhatu) due to metabolic derangement is the cause where the ionic exchange system gets altered. This is what exactly happens when Vaata gets vitiated and affects the Asthi dhatu. ■

WONDER PLANT

Beautiful turmeric

OUR traditional systems of medicine prescribe hundreds of simple beauty care tips and formulations using commonly available herbs like henna, turmeric, hibiscus, aloe, etc. Unlike chemical beauty care products, herbal cosmetics cause no side effects even when used for a long duration. Interestingly, many of these herbs not only enhance beauty but also improve the metabolism of the body. One such herb used extensively in traditional beauty care is the Wild Turmeric, scientifically known as *Curcuma zedoaria*. It is used as an herbal cosmetic because of its efficacy against skin-related problems. Wild Turmeric is also used in perfumes and medicines.

Wild Turmeric is native to India and other countries of South-east Asia. However, it has been introduced in many parts of the world. It is found extensively in the forests of India's northeastern states and along the Western Ghats region.

Properties: Wild Turmeric's zedoary root is edible. It is one of the best anti-inflammatory agents therefore its paste is used to heal skin complaints, inflammation, wounds, and rheumatic pain. Its rhizome purifies blood and is used to treat bronchial problems and cancer. It also improves digestion. Wild turmeric is used as a liver tonic, aphrodisiac agent and gastro-intestinal stimulant. Some ethno-botanical records reveal that this herb can be used as an anti-venom against the Indian cobra. It cures vomiting, cough, dyspepsia and colic. Powdered rhizomes are given internally to regularize menstruation and urinary tract infections.

Gardening: Wild Turmeric is a perennial herb and requires open sun or partial shade. It has no tolerance for waterlogged soil. Like common turmeric, Wild Turmeric is also easy to grow. It requires very little water and can be watered twice a week even in summer. Its luxurious foliage of shiny green with purple blotches makes this herb a boon for the garden with its dramatic impact.

Wild Turmeric can be planted in rows or as broader beds in lawns or in containers. Nothing is more beautiful than this plant





when it is in the flowering stage. Wild Turmeric's blooms are quite ornamental with large, bright pink bracts and yellow, tubular flowers that bring a real flavour to the garden. As it has tightly packed rhizomes with numerous clinging roots, it can be planted on slopes and it helps to control soil erosion.

Wild Turmeric can be easily propagated through rhizomes. Rhizomes can be cut into one or two inch long pieces and planted in containers. New sprouting starts within a week simultaneously with root initiation. One-month-old sprouts can be transplanted in the field.

SELF-HELP

For acne: Mix half teaspoon of wild turmeric powder, half teaspoon of multani mitti (Fuller's Earth) and five drops of clove oil and make a smooth paste with water or milk. This is an anti-blemish, anti-rash face pack and the presence of clove oil exerts a therapeutic effect on the skin. Regular use of this face pack helps to control pimples and other skin blemishes. It makes facial skin smooth, soft and lustrous.

For a glowing skin: Take an equal measure of turmeric powder, wild turmeric powder, liquorice, Indian valerian and red sandalwood and grind to a fine powder. Store in an airtight container. Boil a bit of the powder in milk and apply the paste obtained on the face. When completely dry, wash off with cold water.

For scars on face: Take a few tender leaves of the lemon tree and wild turmeric in equal quantity and grind together to a paste. Apply the paste on face. Wash off when the paste becomes dry.

For vector borne diseases: A teaspoon of wild turmeric powder in stored water, a flower vase, small water tank; even a drinking water pot prevents mosquitoes from breeding for over a month. As this turmeric is locally available, people can use it easily. ■

NM Ganesh Babu is a Research Officer at FRLHT, Bangalore and can be contacted at ganesh.babu@firlht.org.

LOOK GOOD

Happy feet

FEET are the most strained part of our body. They are often neglected and uncared for. As a result problems like cracked feet, corns, bunions, infections and ingrown nails find a fertile ground. If your feet are cracked then you feel embarrassed to reveal them and often hide them. To maintain the health of your feet you need to care for them. Make it a daily routine. After all your feet bear the entire weight of your body.

Ayurveda says that foot care is not just for the feet, but also for the health of the nervous system. Foot massage keeps the mind relaxed, is rejuvenating and gives strength.

Here are some tips for healthy and happy feet:

- Wash your feet daily with soap after you return home.
- Be sure that you wash in between your toes also. Pat your feet dry after washing.
- Trim your nails as they grow.

Don't cut your nails too deep.

- Wear comfortable shoes or slippers.
- Don't strain your feet wearing high-heeled footwear. Such shoes can damage your foot liga-

ments.

- Wear clean socks every day.
- If you suffer from cracked feet soak your feet in warm salted water for 20 minutes. Maintain the temperature of the water. Don't let it cool. Keep adding warm water. Using a pumice stone, brush off the dirt in the cracks. After that remove your feet from the water and pat your feet dry.



- Take two parts of bee wax and melt it. Add one part of sesame oil to it. Heat them together and don't let the mixture char. Let it cool and then store in a wide mouthed bottle. Apply this ointment on your feet after soaking and drying them.

- Massage your feet with warm coconut oil daily at night before sleeping and you will get good sleep.

- A gentle massage will relax your mind and strengthen

your nervous system.

- For corns apply a hot poultice made of wheat flour and turmeric. Apply and bandage till the corn falls off. ■

ORGANIC CHEF

Dal & Raita

KOKUM DAL

Ingredients:

Tur dal: ½ cup
Fenugreek: 1 tbsp
White pumpkin: 100 gms
Kokum: 4-5 pieces
Red chillies: 4
Ginger: ½ inch piece
Green chillies: 2
Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp
Salt: To taste

Seasoning:

Gingily oil: 1 tsp
Mustard seeds: ¼ tsp
Fenugreek: ½ tsp
Asafetida: 2 pinches
Curry leaves: 2 strings

Method: ● Soak tur dal and fenugreek seeds the previous night.

- Next day add turmeric powder and pressure cook both.
- Cut pumpkin into one inch pieces.
- Soak kokum in water for 10 minutes.
- Grind green chillies and ginger to a smooth paste.
- Add vegetable, ginger-chilli paste, broken red chillies with cooked dal and boil for a few minutes.

- Add soaked kokum at the end. Do not squeeze.
- Allow the dal to boil for some more time and then add salt.
- Heat oil. Season mustard seeds, fenugreek, curry leaves, asafetida and pour on top of dal. Mix well and serve with cooked rice or chapatti.

PLANTAIN STEM RAITA

Ingredients:

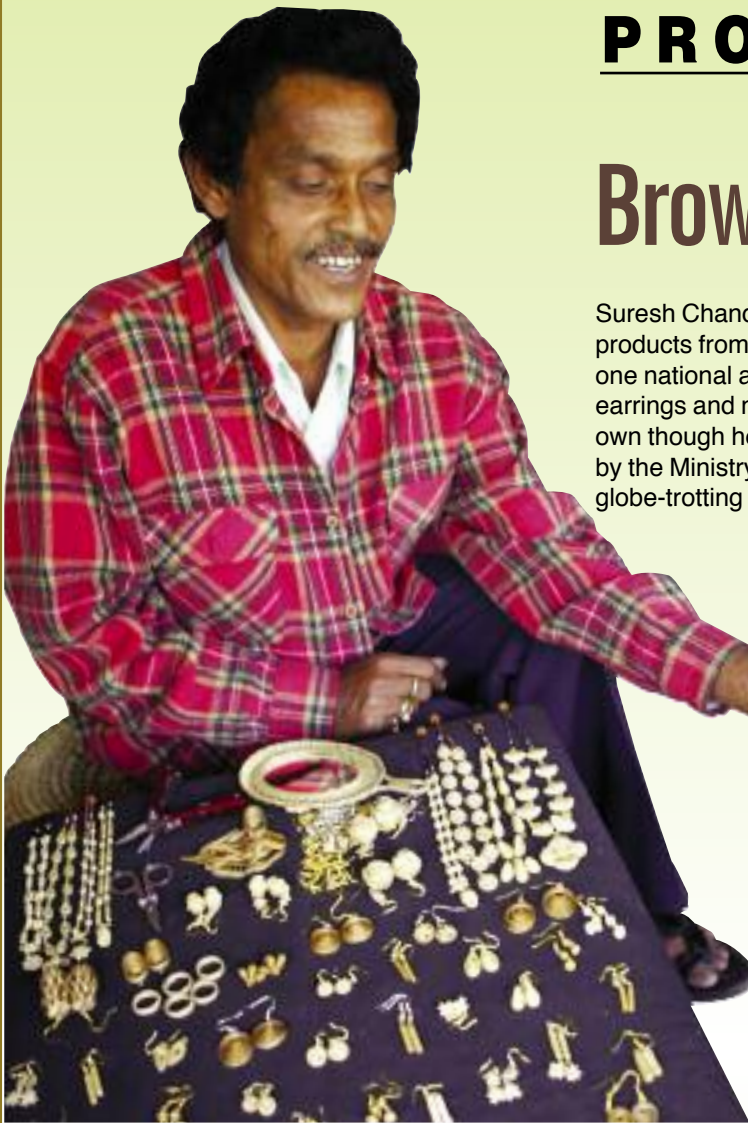
Finely cut plantain stem: 1 cup
Grated coconut: 1 tbsp
Red chillies: 5
Curd: ½ cup
Salt: To taste

Method: ● Slice plantain stem into thin discs and remove fiber which appears while slicing.

- Cut stem finely and put in water to which 1 tsp of curds have been added to prevent discoloration.
- Strain the water and stem and cook pieces alone for 2 minutes in pressure cooker (without weight). Allow to cool.
- Add coconut, chillies, salt and grind to a coarse paste.
- Mix the boiled plantain, the coarse paste and curds.
- Heat oil, season mustard, curry leaves and asafetida. Pour on the raita. ■ (Dr. Jayanthi S, Research Associate, I-AIM)

PRODUCTS

Brown trinkets



Suresh Chandra Das from Agartala, Tripura, creates a range of products from bamboo and cane. He has won two state awards and one national award for his artistry. His latest offerings are delicate earrings and necklaces made with bits of bamboo. The designs are his own though he learnt a lot from a six-month training course organized by the Ministry of Textiles, he says with gratitude. Suresh Chandra is a globe-trotting artisan. He has been to Germany, Greece, Thailand and Dubai to sell his products, thanks to the Government of India.



His home is his factory. His family of four make all the products -- trays, lampshades, coasters, baskets and jewellery. The price of a pair of earrings is only around ₹ 80. You pay extra for packing. His company, called Bishwaroop Handicrafts, would prefer bulk orders.

Contact: Suresh Chandra Das, Bordwali Taltale, Poad Nagar, Agartala-79903, Tripura. Phone: 09862208869



Organic Sona

A project by Haryana's forestry department is empowering village women in Yamunanagar and Rewari districts of the state. The women have been organized into self-help groups and helped with credit and expertise to set up small businesses. "Their dependence on forest produce wasn't helping them. They were poor and very needy," says forest ranger Vipin Grover. "Our task was to boost their income with livelihood schemes."

"We now produce daliya, gur, papad, pickles, rice, moong dal, coriander and makki ka atta. It's mostly organic. We also embroider clothes. Altogether we earn between ₹7,000 to ₹8,000 per month," says Anita, a member of the Women's Association of Haryana. The products are sold under the brand name, Hara Sona.

One of their most successful ventures is compost. Chander Kala of Rewari has received a state award for making vermicompost manure. "We now supervise midday meals, keep a watch on the menace of female foeticide and implement the Ladli scheme," explains Anita.

Contact: Anita: 09416570426, Pramila: 09812106201, Shanti: 09991866141



Changing Lives



General health care in rural villages by SST

Mrs. Nagama, 70 yrs, a poor widow from Padavedu, has been suffering from headache for months together. Whenever she suffered an episode of headache she was almost blinded, accompanied with vomiting, she used to isolate herself for hours together not able to do any other activities.

Left to fend for herself, she could not find a guardian to take her to any Government hospital, since she had to travel for more than 20 kms, let alone meet the expense of the traveling, She was anguished and helpless. She came to know from some SHG members of the village about the TVS-SST's sub centre in the close vicinity

A routine check up at the hospital revealed that she was

suffering from Hypertension. All other parameters were normal. She was first given a brief account of the nature of her illness and advised about DASH (DiETING Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet, and prescribed anti hypertensive.

On following a strict dietary regime (cutting down of salt, intake of fatty foods and increasing the intake of fresh vegetables), and medication, Mrs. Nagama has been relieved of her headache. Now she is full of life. She is continually getting antihypertensive drugs from TVS SST hospital every fortnight. In case she hasn't turn up for her routine check up, SHG members in her local area are alerted by SST. They help her to come for treatment regularly.

**SRINIVASAN SERVICES TRUST
(CSR Arm of
TVS Motor Company)**

TVS MOTOR COMPANY
Post Box No. 4, Harita, Hosur
Tamil Nadu, Pin: 635109
Ph: 04344-276780 Fax: 04344-276878
URL: www.tvsmotor.co.in



WHY DID WE ENCOURAGE THIS TRIBAL WOMAN TO REPLACE HER SARI?

Because, unskilled women employees like Asha Hansda are trained to operate heavy vehicles and machinery under Tata Steel's Tejaswini programme.

Because we believe gender should never be a reason not to be.

Because, for us, it doesn't matter where she comes from, but where she can reach.

Because she is one of our own.

Because we can't fly if she crawls.

Because we started thinking of ways to better her life over a hundred years ago.

Because it's not just a company policy, it's an unwavering belief.

Because, each time she confidently smiles, our belief finds strength.

Because however strong our steel may be, our values remain stronger.

TATA STEEL

Values stronger than steel



Asha Hansda
Beneficiary, Tejaswini Project