

Civil Society

FARM BOOST FOR JHARKHAND TRIBALS



Lakshman Oraon and his wife Sarla, once construction labour and now full-time farmers

SMALL FIELD BIG CROP



SING A SONG, READ ALONG

Brij Kothari's Planet Read builds on literacy by making reading fun and entertaining.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

The small farmer

LONG years of neglect have made the revival of agriculture tricky. Farmers need access to creative solutions in dealing with their current burden of problems. This assistance is best provided in the field through specific interventions. It is a slow and complex process in which many actors have to be involved. It means marrying traditional systems with new technologies. But above all it requires a vision of national prosperity linked to ecological balance and well-being in rural areas.

The pilot project undertaken by Tata Steel with tribal farmers in the extremely poor district of Seraikela-Kharsawan in Jharkhand proves many things. But its signal achievement is that it establishes the viability of small holdings which have in recent times been all but written off by governments seeking to acquire high growth quickly through industrial investment.

Thanks to the intervention of the Tata Steel Rural Development Society (TSRDS), farmers in that stressed out district are now doing two and even three crops on tiny pieces of land. The paddy productivity of 1.2 tonnes or so an acre is more than double of what it was known to be. In addition, there are vegetables and pulses being cultivated.

Since these farmers have surpluses, they can sell their produce in local markets, which means they have an income from their land. With food and money assured they no longer feel the need to migrate to cities to work as labourers at construction sites.

How has all this been possible? The first step was to ensure water as a year round resource using tanks, ponds, wells and so on. When water is available, life begins to seem good. It becomes possible to farm. Jharkhand gets plenty of rain which mostly goes waste. Capturing it makes a world of difference. Community structures also promote a sense of shared responsibility. Everyone can make it happen is the message that goes out.

Next has been revival of the soil with thorough analysis, right inputs and close management. Soil samples from Jharkhand were regularly tested in Chennai and the nutrients that were lacking were added. It pays to seek out the best knowledge available and draw on it. In this case the Agriculture Consultancy Management Foundation (ACMF) has played a crucial role.

Training the tribals has been important. This training has mostly been in the field with the help of experts. So, tribals learnt first-hand how to prepare their fields for a crop, use bio-pesticides and so on. They learnt about the ridge and furrow method and planting of seeds directly into the ground. Visits to Chennai and elsewhere showed the farmers how others were doing things. It gave them hope.

Finally, we see here what a difference companies can make when they work with communities. To the Tata Steel leadership goes the credit for marshalling specialised talent from all over the country and empowering a dedicated team of its own people to work with tribal farmers in creative and sincere ways. All in all this is a great effort that needs to be looked at more closely and showcased so that the country as a whole can benefit.

SMALL FIELD, BIG CROP

A pilot project by Tata Steel in Seraikela-Kharsawan in Jharkhand has shown how small plots of land can be made very productive, provide food security and stop migration.

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR

WHERE THERE IS A
WILL THERE IS A WAY...
WHERE THERE IS NO WAY
THERE IS AN EXCUSE!



LETTERS



Annam festival

With reference to your cover story, 'Eating Right', I feel we have to acquire such healthy food habits in our day to day life. Indian food by default used to be very healthy, but over the years the concept of deep frying has taken away its nutritional aspect. The next generation thinks only of junk food. Great work Dr GG!

Akash

The Annam food festival was a very

useful and timely story.

Rajesh Dogra

Already foods like ragi, bajra, jowar, shakkar, are slowly entering middle class Indian homes. Once such foods are made available and knowledge of them disseminated along with recipes, people will buy. They are tasty, nutritious and inexpensive. What more can anybody want?

Amita Sahai

I think there is a need to experiment with traditional food and come up with recipes that replace junk food. Like yam ice cream, roasted banana chips, puttu burgers and so on.

Shefali Mathur

Valley voices

As a young leader of Jammu and Kashmir, Omar Abdullah should be bold enough to accept the sentiments of the people of Jammu to have a region of their own. If not a state, let them have at least a council. Mainstream politics should be brave enough to admit that Jammu wants to break away from Kashmir. If Poonch, Doda and Rajouri want to continue with Kashmir, it's OK. But let this age old phrase of Jammu being deprived be removed forever.

Even the separatists have understood their plight and accepted their two and a half districts demand.

Jamal

We hope Omar Abdullah introduces a right to information bill after consulting civil society. We also want panchayati raj to be strong. There should be e-governance. Everyone should be computer literate. Village Development Councils should be set up till panchayat elections are held.

A well wisher

Himalayas

With respect to Himanshu Thakkar's piece, 'Bringing down the Himalayas' I would like to say that wherever hydro projects are announced, local people, including the middle class, rise against them because they see ecology being destroyed.

Then suddenly rivers, forests, animals, butterflies and mountains become very sacred. May I ask what local people were doing all these years before the hydro projects came up?

Narendra Bhatt

The Union government has already cancelled hydro projects in Sikkim. It has tried to see the peoples' point of

view. I don't think the Union government is insensitive. I think the process they use to plan and implement dam building is wrong.

Nita Asthana

Building spree

With regard to your story, 'Many die in building spree' I would like to say the condition of construction workers is truly pathetic. Now it appears from your story that even NGOs who shouted slogans at Jantar Mantar for social security for unorganised workers are not interested in implementing the law. This is shocking. The NGOs on the welfare board should answer for their inefficiency and insensitivity.

Chandra Sethi

Living in Gurgaon I have observed first hand the plight of construction workers. They have no decent quarters to live in, their children are just roaming around on dangerous construction sites and they are exploited by contractors.

Some local NGOs have come forward to help the children but it's a drop in the ocean. Builders and developers must look after their labour or be penalised.

Captain Ashish Mathur

'We want separate policy for the hills'

THE Uttarakhand Nadi Bachao Abhiyan (UKBA), a campaign to save all rivers in the state from hydro-electric projects is led by 76-year-old, Radha Bahen. A sprightly septuagenarian, Radha Bahen is director, Laxmi Ashram, Kausani, Almora district and president, Gandhi Shanti Pratishthan, Delhi. She spoke to *Civil Society* about her campaign.



Why did you feel the need to start this campaign?

There are two reasons to save glacial rivers from hydro-electricity projects. The first is that the flow of non-glacial rivers is reduced and the second is the attack on the hydrology and peoples' livelihoods. So, it was necessary to raise our voices to tell policy makers that this will not be tolerated.

But those opposed to your campaign are very strong.

Yes, they are strong and the aim is not to influence them but to tell people that a wrong game is being played by these forces. If we don't raise our voices against the injustice to people, no one will. So, we must call a spade a spade.

What is your vision for Uttarakhand?

A separate policy for development of the Himalayan states should be there. Because of our efforts, a small step is being taken by policy makers. The government has readied an approach paper for a development mission for this region.

Should you not provide the government with alternatives?

Yes, we are working in this direction. We have prepared a peoples' rehabilitation policy and are advocating development of micro-hydel projects. Only then can Uttarakhand become a *jan urja pradesh*.

How will you turn this campaign into a movement?

Only when the campaign becomes a people's issue and has a political agenda, can it become a people's movement. We are working relentlessly in this direction and are aligning with groups working at the grassroots.

What difficulties did you face running this campaign?

First there was the problem of resources. We had taken a pledge to raise resources ourselves, so we were dependent on contributions from people and personal gifts to us and our Ashram. The second was how to pump enthusiasm into people who were feeling helpless as the campaign made little impact in the initial days.

Govt agrees to halt

Dr GD Agrawal ends heroic fast

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FIVE weeks after Dr GD Agrawal went on a fast unto death, the Union government agreed to temporarily stop construction of the Loharinag-Pala hydroelectric project.

The project is a mere 25 km from the Gangotri glacier in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, which is from where the Bhagirathi-Ganga originates. "The Loharinag-Pala project has to be stopped," Dr Agrawal had said.

His request to the government was that no dams should be built on a 125 km pristine stretch of the Bhagirathi-Ganga from the Gangotri glacier to Uttarkashi. The river should be allowed to flow in its natural form. He had warned that construction of dams on this stretch will be tantamount to killing the Ganga.

The Ganga is of immense religious and cultural significance to millions of Hindus and for this reason Dr Agrawal, who is 76-years-old, was willing to lay down his life to save the river.

Dr Agrawal is one of India's best known environmental scientists. He was a professor at IIT, Kanpur, and a member-secretary of the Central Pollution Control Board. He is an expert at Environment Impact Assessment, (EIA).

Between the Gangotri glacier and Uttarkashi a series of dams

are being made. Just 25 km downstream the glacier, the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), a public sector company, is building the Loharinag-Pala project.

Reacting to the government's decision to halt construction, Dr Ravi Chopra, director of the People's Science Institute in Dehradun, said: "It is a measure of how seriously the government and the Prime Minister in particular take this issue. The Prime Minister had earlier declared the Ganga a national river. Now the government will need to take the measures needed to ensure that the Ganga really gets this status."

Dr Chopra pointed out that the government's decision to stop construction is only a temporary one. The matter will now go before the Ganga Basin Authority.

"The composition of the authority does not



Dried river bed at Maneri Bhai

People speak for rivers

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun (UP)

AFTER marching through towns and villages in 47 river valleys, the Uttarakhand Nadi Bachao Abhiyan (UKBA), arrived in Dehradun where a public meeting was held.

Most marchers, around 100, were women. They were protesting against hydroelectric projects coming up in this ecologically sensitive Himalayan state which has India's most revered rivers.

"The government in collaboration with companies has turned the state's rivers, forests, valleys and mountains into a means of making money.

These resources are giving life and water to eastern and northern India. We must not let such plans go unchallenged," said Radha Bahen, the 76-year-old leader of UKBA. She is also director, Laxmi Ashram, Kausani, Almora district and president of the Gandhi Shanti Pratishthan, Delhi.

Twenty-six groups including independent researchers took part in the march. Initially, the campaign did not attract much attention. But it slowly gathered momentum. "When people realised that these projects will harm their lives and livelihoods, they joined us," says Rajendra Singh Rawat, convener, Bhagirathi Bachao Andolan, which took one group of marchers

dam, but is it really listening?

of five weeks to save Ganga



Dr GD Agrawal on fast

particularly inspire confidence. Its members are ministers and bureaucrats. It needs much wider civil society representation. Where are the scientists and activists who should be included in it?" said Dr Chopra.

So while the reprieve is welcome, "we have our work cut out for us," Dr Chopra pointed out.

Rajender Singh of the Jal Biradari, a network of people seeking to save rivers across the country, welcomed the government's move. He said the decision showed that the government was finally giving India's rivers the importance they deserve. He pointed out that the Prime Minister

had set the tone by declaring the Ganga a national river. However, much needed to be done and there was no time to be wasted.

Rajender Singh was one of the social sector leaders who played a role in taking Dr Agrawal's concerns to the government in an attempt to persuade him to give up his fast. He said the decision had finally come at the intervention of the Prime Minister's Office.

A steady stream of NGO leaders, social activists, environmentalists, religious leaders and lawyers had visited the Akhil Bhartiya Mahasabha in Delhi, where Dr Agrawal was on

fast.

Former students of Dr Agrawal and ex-IITians had lobbied on behalf of Dr Agrawal. The Bhagirathi Bachao Sankalp actively campaigned for saving the Ganga. Religious leaders endorsed Dr Agrawal's demand for a dam-free zone in the upper reaches of the Ganga.

Earlier too, on 14 June, 2008, Dr Agrawal had gone on a fast unto death. After lobbying by several IITians, the government had assured Dr Agrawal that it would 'ensure perennial environmental flows in all stretches of the Bhagirathi and to keep it alive.'

Dr Agrawal then agreed to call off his fast.

A High Level Expert Group (HLEG) was appointed. But it proved to be a flop. A certain amount of water has to be allowed to flow unfettered into the river to keep it alive. But the engineers in the group were willing to release just four cumecs (cubic metres per second) of water into the Bhagirathi which is a Class A or pristine river.

Finally, seeing that no progress was being made, Dr Agrawal resumed his fast.

On 11 February, SK Gupta, an IITian and a former student of Dr. Agarwal said at a press conference that the Union Power Ministry, Sushil Kumar Shinde and the HLEG had agreed to release 16 cumecs of water in the river Bhagirathi or 'as directed by the Ganga Basin Authority'.

But the issue was not a question of releasing water. Pabitra Singh of Bhagirathi Bachao pointed out there was no way of monitoring whether this flow would be released. The Maneri Bhali II dam which is downstream is supposed to release three cumecs but sometimes for as long as 15 hours no water is released. The river bed is completely dry since water is released through tunnels.

across Virahi Valley, Chamoli district.

In Garud Ganga, Bageshwar district, a survey was conducted of the local watershed and of Chandrabhaga, a small degraded river near Pithoragarh city.

Several people alleged companies held fake public hearings to obtain clearances for their projects. "Hydro-electric projects must be reviewed and the government should take a genuine no-objection from the affected people. It should tell them the losses and benefits from the planned projects," said Sunita Shahi, secretary, Prayas, an NGO in Bhimtal near Nainital which went on a foot march alongside the Shipra river.

Pradip Tamta, an ex-MLA and a social worker, addressed the gathering. He viewed the movement to save rivers as a corollary to the chain of movements that had taken place in the state. "This fight is about people's control over natural

resources and we will win it," he said.

The marchers then went to the state secretariat and handed over a memorandum of demands to Prabhat Kumar Sarangi, Principal Secretary,



Department of Energy. The demands included a comprehensive policy for the Himalayan states, a pro-people water policy, no more hydro-electric projects, planting broad-leaved trees in the catchments of rain fed rivers, no more meddling with any river and a review of all sanctioned projects.

UKBA has decided to make building of dams a political issue in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. Political candidates will only be allowed to campaign in their areas if they sign the memorandum of demands put up by UKBA. Women and youth will be educated on the ecological damage of hydro-electric projects. UKBA

will form alliances with like minded groups and document the campaign.

The campaign is being supported by Action Aid, an international NGO.

Kanjhawalla launches front

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Civil Society News

New Delhi

FARMERS and slum dwellers in Delhi have come together to form a joint front called the Bhumi Bachao Andolan to put an end to slum demolition and land acquisition. They have realised they face the same problem. Slums are demolished and their residents banished to the fringes of the city. Land is acquired from farmers at cheap rates to 'resettle' the evicted slum dwellers.

It is the farmers of Kanjhawala who initiated this merger. Since the past one year they have been agitating under the banner of the Jan Sangharsh Vahini and the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) against takeover of their lands by the Delhi government.

"Fertile lands are being taken from farmers at throw-away prices," said Bhupendra Singh Rawat, convenor of Jan Sangharsh Vahini. "At the same time, slum dwellers are being evicted to beautify the city ahead of the Commonwealth Games. Neither farmers nor workers are safe. That is why we have come together."

The Bhumi Bachao Andolan was launched on 13 February. A march was held from Gandhi Samadhi at Rajghat to Jantar Mantar, India's protest street. Rawat said they would also be walking in protest against land acquisition to Rashtrapati Bhawan where a memorandum would be handed over to Pratibha Patil, President of India. The Bhumi



Women of Kanjhawalla at the rally in New Delhi's Jantar Mantar

Bachao Andolan is being supported by the National Alliance of Peoples' Movements, National Domestic Workers Union, National Workers Federation, National Kisan Mazdoor Federation, Jhuggi Jhonpri Kalyan Morcha and others.

The Kanjhawalla farmers' agitation has been relatively successful. Rawat said the Delhi government has taken over Kanjhawalla only on paper. About 1500 acres was acquired at a price farmers considered much below market value.

Kanjhawala is a large area on the northwest edge of Delhi. It consists of many villages like Tikari, Kalan, Karala, Tikari Khurd, Puth Khurd and village Kanjhawala. Although the Delhi government served notice to the villages last year, it has not been able to physically acquire the land. Women in these villages keep watch in turns through the day and prevent any government official from entering.

"We will lay down our lives but we will not give our land to the government," said Kalavati of Tikri. Two women with her, Om and Nirmala, explained that farmers from Mongolpuri and other villages which now constitute the urban centre of Rohini, gave up their land and now work as wage labour. "They wasted all the money they got from the government for selling their land. Their children are cleaning cars. It is a bitter lesson for us," said Om of Kanjhawala village.

Since last March, the farmers of Kanjhawala have been protesting relentlessly. They protested in front of district officials. Then they gheraoed the Delhi Assembly and were lathi-charged. So they started an indefinite satyagraha on 11 September last year for 35 days in front of the Collector's office and prevented him from functioning. The Delhi government finally raised the compensation for land acquisition to Rs 50 lakhs per acre instead of the earlier Rs 25 lakhs.

But the women are saying it's not a question of money. "What will we do with all that money?" says Kalavati. "It will be misspent. Our children do not have the ability to get good jobs. We may very well end up as slum-dwellers."

Slum dwellers and farmers realised that they face the same problem of eviction. So, led by Kanjhawala farmers, they have come together.



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Sing a song, read along

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

TO many, Brij Kothari's ambitions might seem just too big. It is unusual, after all, for a personal mission to be as big as his. As a member of the faculty of IIM, Ahmedabad, and as President of PlanetRead, an NGO that he has founded, Brij bravely aims to make India a country of a billion literate people.

Using the simple tool of Same Language Subtitling (SLS) on popular song-based television programmes, PlanetRead is sharpening the literacy skills of an estimated 200 million 'literate' or 'early literates'. By superimposing subtitles on visuals in the 'same' language as the audio, Brij ensures that reading becomes a by-product of entertainment that is already being mass consumed.

Government estimates claim 600 million people are literate in India, but, in reality, nearly half of these literates can best be called early literates or neo literates. Despite five years of primary school education many early literates cannot read even newspaper headlines. But, they are a step ahead of illiteracy because they do possess some rudimentary familiarity with alphabets. It is these early literates who benefit mostly from SLS.

PlanetRead has effectively leveraged the ubiquity of television in rural India to promote learning. Over the last 10 years, SLS (a joint initiative of PlanetRead and IIM Ahmedabad's Centre for Educational Innovation), has been successfully implemented on film songs and popular entertainment programmes on TV in 10 languages – Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, and Punjabi. So, a Hindi song has lyrics subtitled in Hindi, a Bengali song has Bengali subtitles. What you hear is what you read. Subtitles are even designed so that the colour of every word changes in perfect tune with the song.

Brij, an Adjunct Professor at IIM, an Ashoka Fellow, says he first thought of Same Language Subtitling while watching Spanish films. As a student of Spanish, he knew he would get valuable language practice if he could also read what he was trying to hear. He then spent nearly two years researching and testing the concept, but found it difficult to sell it to broadcasters who were clearly reluctant to give the innovative idea a shot. Finally, Brij managed a debut for SLS through the Doordarshan Kendra in Ahmedabad in 1999 where a gutsy director took the risk of using SLS in four episodes of a popular TV programme. Field reports from across Gujarat confirmed SLS worked, and viewers wrote in to Doordarshan to



Brij Kothari

laud the effort.

"Literacy skills have to be constantly reinforced if we want to prevent our population from regressing into illiteracy without much access to reading practice," says Brij. He further explains that by studying similar subtitling techniques like closed captioning and karaoke, his team has tracked eyeball movement to prove that reading of television subtitles is automatic and unavoidable. SLS also enhances the entertainment value of song-based TV programmes, and contributes to higher viewer ratings. This, PlanetRead says, is crucial for tempting private broadcasters to try

Using the simple tool of Same Language Subtitling (SLS) on popular song-based television programmes, PlanetRead is sharpening the literacy skills of an estimated 200 million 'literate' or 'early literates'.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

out SLS.

In 2007, IIM Ahmedabad commissioned an independent research study by AC Nielsen ORG - CSR to test the impact after 4.5 years of SLS in Hindi on national TV. In one finding, a group of School Only were compared with School + SLS. The results were beyond doubt. The percentage of good readers in those with access to SLS was more than double as compared to those who relied only on school.

For SLS to have widespread impact IIM and PlanetRead have brought the government, especially the Department of School Education and Literacy and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, on board as strategic partners. The partnerships have come after a long struggle.

"It has taken us 10 years of persistence to get here. We now know SLS works, but till today we are dependent on individual patronage. Individual policy decision-makers have supported us. But, SLS should be made a policy. It is difficult to negotiate the bureaucratic labyrinth. Innovation cannot be judged in a black box," explains Brij.

Brij adds SLS is a no-risk proposition considering it literally "costs a song" to implement. In India, because of the large number of viewers in most major languages, every Rs 50 spent on SLS, can deliver on average, 30 minutes reading practice to around 5,000 people, for one whole year. That's an investment of one paisa per person.

Justifiably, Brij and his team have won supporters and awards. SLS has been recognised by the World Bank, the London Institute for Social Invention and San Jose's Tech Museum of Innovation. PlanetRead has been supported by The Google Foundation, Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Mahindra Tractors and DELL Computers. Recently, Brij was a finalist for the Indian Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award 2008.

His education seems to have set the tone for this ingenuity. Brij grew up in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry and went on to get a masters in Physics at IIT Kanpur. He is also a masters in Development Communications, and a Ph D in education, both from the prestigious Cornell University, USA.

Understandably, there is a quiet sense of satisfaction in Brij's voice. "We are a team of 20, and if PlanetRead has helped 200 million people improve literacy levels, it means each person in the team is responsible for making 10 million people read better. That is very fulfilling and it's what keeps us going."

Forest dwellers find Mayawati on their side

Rakesh Agrawal
Palia (Uttar Pradesh)

RESIDENTS of Palia, a small town in Lakhimpur Kheri district, had never seen anything like it. Long accustomed to conflicts with the forest department, they found a government officer actually welcoming demonstrating forest dwellers and giving them forms to fill for claiming their rights.

At stake is the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) passed by the Centre but languishing in many states. The 3,500 demonstrators on 14 February were seeking its implementation.

The forest department in Uttar Pradesh has been opposing free access to the forests, but Chief Minister Mayawati has sent out instructions that the FRA should be implemented. Forest department and district officials now have no option but to fall in line.

The demonstrators were from 53 villages. Of these, 46 are in and around the Dudhwa National Park and seven are in and around the Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary.

Rajesh Kumar, the District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO), was there waiting for them but the difference was that he wanted to give them forms to fill so that they could claim their rights to their land and forest produce.

The forms were received by the office-bearers of Forest Right Committees (FRCs) formed in 18 villages so far. "After a long time you people are getting your due," he said. "But, you must fill these forms correctly and submit them to my department. I will personally see that things are



Mayawati, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh

worked out," he assured them.

Just six months ago, the district magistrate and forest department officials dilly-dallied over the implementation of the FRA.

But attitudes began to change after the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW), a national grouping, put pressure on the state government. JP Chamber, Mayawati's personal secretary, told Pinki Jovel the district magistrate to help implement the forest rights legislation.

Earlier the state government had sent out an important message by transferring the Sonbhadra district magistrate, Hiramani Singh, because he was reluctant to put the FRA in force, said Rajnish Kumar, local programme organiser of the NFFPFW. Jovel too has been shifted but hers is a normal transfer.

"We must tell public servants to change their

bureaucratic ways," said Laxmina Devi of the Tharu Adivasi Mazdoor Mahila Kisan Manch, which is aligned to the NFFPFW. People from Terai Kshhetra Mazdoor Mahila Kisan Manch, were equally determined. "All erring government officials have to fall in line," said Jhumka Devi.

People in this Terai belt are mostly Tharu adivasis, dependent on forest produce for their subsistence. They take thatch from the forest to build their huts. The Tharus say they used to have to bribe forest department officials with grain, meat, eggs and money. Two years ago when they decided not to pay bribes they found they could not access thatch from the forest.

But with the FRA in force, they can now go to the courts. "We served a notice to the forest bureaucracy in December 2008 and after that we started extracting thatch without greasing their palms," says Ramchandra Rana, an activist and a member of the State Monitoring Committee (SMC). The three SMC members, all adivasis, were present at Palia to express their solidarity with the people of the region.

People have generally become more assertive. Just six months ago, people of Surma village, located inside the Dudhwa National Park, retaliated when two forest guards beat up two villagers who had gone to collect thatch from the forest.

"The Forest Rights Act is the first law that gives you rights over forest produce," said Ashok Chaudhary, founder, NFFWFP, at the Palia meeting. "Until now all other laws just gave concessions. Used effectively this law provides forest dwellers the right to live with dignity at traditional locations."

With FRA and now the state government supporting them, people of this forested region living in and around protected areas have been emboldened to block any attempt to uproot them. The villages were established before the forest department came into existence, they point out.

"The forest department should take people's permission to come here, not the other way around. I call upon you to protect wildlife, conserve biodiversity and not let the destroyers of forest wealth go unpunished," Munki Lal, regional convener, NFFPFW, exhorted the protesters.

Cancer hospice for Uttarakhand

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

GANGA Prem Hospice (GPS), a venture of Shradha Cancer Trust (SCT), a non-profit, is opening a hospice in Rishikesh, on the banks of the Ganga, in Uttarakhand.

"Ganga Prem Hospice will go beyond palliative treatment. Our aim is to add life to years and not years to life. The hospice will have a spiritual facet also," explained Dr AK Dewan, Chairman, Shradha Cancer Trust, an oncologist with the Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute, New Delhi.

"Despite having about 6,000 cancer patients, no government cancer treatment facility exists in Uttarakhand," said Dr Dewan. The biggest cause of cancer here is consumption of tobacco.

A hospice combines home and hospital. It is a residential place for terminally ill patients and it focuses on the patient's well-being. A hospice provides holistic care and improves the quality of life for the patient. The hospice concept is little known in India. Currently there are just five to six hospices in the country.

The foundation stone for the Ganga Prem Hospice was laid on 4 February, World Cancer Day. "We are beginning with 20 beds but we hope to increase that number to 50 in three years," said Dr Dewan.

Ganga Prem Hospice will provide medical and emotive support to terminally ill patients. It will also provide bereavement support to family members. "It is their home," said Pooja Dogra of the Shradha Cancer Trust. The hospice hopes to open

its doors to patients in three years.

In September 2007, the Shradha Cancer Trust provided free consultation and medicines to about 400 cancer patients in and around Rishikesh. For a dignified death with minimum distress the hospice already has a team of seven volunteers who visit terminally ill patients' homes and support their relatives and dependents.

The hospice will admit terminally ill cancer patients, regardless of income. All facilities will be free of cost including stay, food, treatment and recreation.

About one million people fall prey to cancer every year in India. More than 70 per cent are diagnosed at the third stage of this fatal disease when only palliative treatment can be given. At this stage, most of their caregivers give up.

Rise of the green bag

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

BAGS made of jute, straw or recycled paper have not made inroads into the huge shopping bag market despite their eco-friendly branding and aesthetically appealing designs. The plastic carry bag is ubiquitous across urban India.

In Delhi that might change soon as the state government outlaws plastic bags to stem the rising tide of polythene. One can be fined or worse, even imprisoned, for carrying plastic bags in the national capital. Government notices have reassured people that at first the ban will be lightly implemented to give people time to switch to more sustainable and compostable options. But, finally, punitive measures will have to be taken to effectively enforce the ban.

The search for options has created business opportunities for several NGOs, environment groups and self-help communities that were involved in making eco-friendly bags. Demand has picked up and orders are coming in as shopkeepers and retailers begin trying to see how they can fall in line with official guidelines.

"We have received new orders from shops in Janpath and Hauz Khas. We can make a wide range of eco-friendly bags from jute, cloth and recycled newspaper. Although the bulk of our production is still aimed at the export market, we are hopeful of mass demand being generated in Delhi itself," says Umesh Kumar Gupta of Lakshya Badhte Kadam, a group founded by street children in 2004. Lakshya's bags range from Rs 3 to Rs 10, but costs, Umesh says, can be brought down if demand peaks and production becomes mechanised. Each bag is handmade right now.

The market is huge as environmentalists say more than 10 million plastic bags are used in Delhi every day. To substitute them, organisations are innovating with different materials. The Nature

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Times are changing. A shopper with a cloth bag

Foundation, an NGO that works to promote environment conservation and ecological awareness, has made a shopping bag. The white bag, made out of cotton with markings done in vegetable dye, is priced at a steep Rs 30.

But, Rajesh Khatri, co-founder of the Nature Foundation, is confident consumers and shopkeepers will come around to using it. "Our team goes to the local, weekly markets around the city carrying the bag. We have many people come up to us and ask us where they can get these bags

from. We need to educate people on the benefits. If we can do that, we can convert them. A public campaign is important to kick a habit as ingrained in us as plastic. The middle class is an important link. We need local reach and a bottom-up approach to make a difference."

The Nature Foundation launched these bags in January, and has already distributed 5,000 of them. Requests and orders have come in from the Delhi government, upscale supermarkets and small shopkeepers.

Sweecha, an NGO working with environmental advocacy and awareness, is experimenting with bags made from flex, the material used to make banners. Flex is commonly used by companies in large quantities, and Sweecha is recycling flex donated from companies to craft stylish bags as part of its "Green The Gap" initiative.

Sweecha's Vimlendu Jha says the government has made the right beginning and now needs to support putting in place a new supply chain of non-plastic bags.

"There are worries that banning plastic is too ambitious an idea. It is ambitious if you want to do it overnight. But, the government needs to stay the course of not just good intention but good planning and good results. Enforcement cannot be enough. It is important to enable and incentivise sustainable manufacturing. We can't have police enforcing the ban. The government needs to make it advantageous – economically and ecologically – for all stakeholders to say no to plastic."

The Delhi government seems to be listening closely to advice. It has worked to involve Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) to ban plastic bags. Some RWAs have shown an interest in making their own eco-friendly bags. The Sarita Vihar RWA in South Delhi, for instance, has created a group called Sambhav, which is working on making cloth bags. They make around 200 bags a day and distribute them to local shopkeepers.

Samita's World

by Samita Rathor



PHOTO ESSAY



Taslima Khan, sarpanch of Kaitha village



Taslima guides the women's self-help group with a micro-finance project



Taslima's husband, Habib Khan and two sons Lukman (standing) and Rais with the drum



Lukman plays the drums at weddings

Lakshman Anand travelled to Madhya Pradesh to shoot these pictures of changing aspirations

Taslima finds a new life of dignity

Taslima is a Muslim of the Hela community. She lives in Kaitha village in the Ujjain district of Madhya Pradesh.

Taslima used to work as a scavenger, cleaning toilets manually. She faced harsh discrimination and acute poverty.

In 2002, the Garima Abhiyan, a campaign against scavenging and untouchability, supported by Action Aid, helped her leave her life of exploitation and indignity behind.

Taslima is now sarpanch of her village. She helps a micro-finance project which funds small businesses for women. She has learnt to write.

Taslima's two daughters are married. Her elder son, Rais, does odd jobs. Her younger son, Lukman, plays the drums at weddings with his father.

Her family now has a life of dignity.

More pictures on next page

PHOTO ESSAY



This is what Rais wants to look like



Left: Taslima as sarpanch addresses the women
Above: Rais is the proud owner of a mobike



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What two doctors can do



Amita Joseph, director of the Business and Community Foundation (BCF), on a health initiative in Dharmapuri, Tamil Nadu

IN 1993, Dr Regi and Dr Lalitha set up a medical dispensary in a mud and thatch hut in Sittilingi, a tribal hamlet about 100 km from Salem in Dharmapuri district.

The two young and idealistic docs noted the district's dismal health indicators. It had a maternal mortality rate of 145 per 1000 and an infant mortality rate of 150 per 1000. Less than 10 per cent of people here had heard of immunization. The problems were truly awesome.

Sittilingi's idyllic setting at the edge of a reserved forest hid a dark reality. No doctors lived here, the nearest public telephone was 100 km away, the local PHC was 15 km away, and anyway it had no facilities, the roads were terrible and the rains invariably cut off villages.

The two doctors set up the Tribal Health Initiative (THI) in the middle of nowhere. After 15 years of dedicated work, THI is today the primary source of healthcare for about 80,000 tribals of the Sittilingi Valley as well as the Sitheri and Kalvarayan hills of Tamil Nadu.

The infant mortality rate is down to 32 per 1000. No maternal deaths have been reported in the past five years. Malnutrition has come down by 50 per cent after sessions on nutrition with stress on locally available food.

BAREFOOT DOCS: Seventy five per cent of Sittilingi's population consists of tribal communities and 13 per cent are lambadis (gypsies). Women make up 49 per cent of the population and 13 per cent are children under five.

THI's community health programme caters to 21 villages. It will now be converted into an outreach programme which will cover 22 villages of the



Dr Lalitha and Dr Regis in the OT



Patients at the OPD

Kalvarayan range. The idea is to reach out to those who cannot make it to the THI hospital like the elderly, pregnant women and children. In 2007, the base hospital reached out to 18,000 patients.

What is remarkable is that 95 per cent of trained health workers are from the area.

They function as barefoot doctors and are an invaluable resource, always available to the community.

Now new and better roads connect Sittilingi with the district. THI's base hospital has an OPD which is bustling with patients. Field health work has been taken up by barefoot docs or local health workers who reach remote villages on mopeds to deliver healthcare to mothers and infants at their doorstep. This has helped curb ailments like anaemia. Health workers refer major illnesses to the hospital.

Six batches of health workers have undergone an 18-month course which covers basic clinical skills, monitoring, assisting operations and delivering babies. These health workers continue to be the bedrock of THI's health care programme. They manage cases of respiratory illness and gastroenteritis, leaving Dr Regi and Dr Lalitha to attend to operations in the 24-bedded hospital.

Improved ante-natal care has had a profound impact on neonatal prognosis. The birth weight of infants has risen and this has improved survival rates. Higher birth weight was made possible through field programmes and initiatives like nutritional advice, free dispensing of calcium and iron tablets and so on.

The operation theatre is not in a mud and thatch hut but in the hospital. The laboratory has a semi auto-analyzer which makes blood tests faster and more precise. It also has ultra sound facilities. Solar power lights up the campus and pumps up water, saving energy. A biogas plant has been set up.

The state government of Tamil Nadu has recognised the efforts of THI and has designated it as a centre for tubectomy, TB and leprosy control initiatives. THI gives importance to preventive and curative aspects of illness. It spreads awareness of HIV.

"Today, health is a way of life in Sittilingi," says Dr Regi.

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Children using MultiPoint in a school in Karnataka

Innovation

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Kashmir should look at its flowers

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

KASHMIR'S economy is supposed to be dependent on tourists but sectors like horticulture and floriculture are also very important.

The floriculture sector has tremendous potential for boosting incomes and creating jobs if it is taken up as a serious activity. But, so far, the government and the private sector have not pursued it with the seriousness it deserves.

According to Fida Ali Alamgeer, Floriculture Development Extension Officer, nearly 150,000 people are currently associated with the floriculture trade in the Kashmir Valley, directly or indirectly.

"I believe there are people who want to set up their own production units, but they lack expertise," he says. "We are here to provide them with tips, but important aspects like finance and marketing should be looked into by the government. Interested people need to be given encouragement."

Experts say that instead of growing and marketing different flowers it is better to specialise in a few exclusive flowers. This, they say, would fetch very good returns and make Kashmir a hub for special flowers and their varieties.

"Tulips and lilies are flowers which we can produce, market and then sell at our own will. Conditions here are favourable for the production of these flowers and it is important to pay attention to them. This would give a new dimension to the floriculture sector in the Kashmir Valley," says Alamgeer.

He says infrastructure should be created so that these flowers can survive longer. If flowers have a longer shelf life, growers get more benefits.



BILAL BAHADUR

Alamgeer believes the introduction of mechanised farming would help growers take up floriculture in a more serious and scientific manner.

To specialise in a few varieties the government has to take certain steps. It needs to come up with controlled atmosphere storage facilities for floriculturists. "Such storage would ensure minimal losses," says Alamgeer. Greenhouse technology requires sophisticated handling. Alamgeer suggests floriculturists get acquainted with the latest techniques. There is also need to introduce double chambered poly-houses which have a heating system for winter and a cooling system for summer as well as plastic blankets and solar energy.

"Since the floriculture business is an organised activity it needs huge investment. Here too the role of government is pivotal. It should provide loans with a subsidy of 75 per cent to the people who want to set up their own business. At the same time it is necessary to carry out awareness programmes for

growers so that they learn the latest techniques," said Alamgeer.

Packing is another area of concern. It is imperative to introduce transparent packing material so that the prospective buyer gets to see the product without opening the pack. This would minimise losses at marketing and sales centres. Once flowers are unpacked, they decline fast. And if the buyer walks away, the loss is the seller's.

"Controlled atmosphere storage is a very important component," emphasises Alamgeer. "It has to be present at production centres (soon after harvesting), marketing centres and sales centres. Refrigerated vehicles with cooling chambers should be used for transporting flowers."

It is equally important to educate growers. Growers should know about balanced doses of fertilisers and how to replace chemicals with organic fertilisers. Plucking of flowers has to be done in a professional manner. Growers should not wait for the flower to be in full bloom before plucking it.

"The grower should anticipate the blooming of flowers," explained Alamgeer. "Accordingly he should pluck the flowers and not delay. Surface drainage should be in place at production units to drain the water. Garbage and other waste should be removed so that the flowers grow to their optimum level."

The floriculture expert says that there is a loss of 29 percent in flower production due to improper handling of flowers at harvesting stage. Once flowers are plucked they should be immediately transferred to the controlled atmosphere storage.

Alamgeer believes that the floriculture sector can provide employment to many if such businesses are set up in a professional manner.

Save Western Ghats, say activists

Bharat Dogra
Madkai (Goa)

ENVIRONMENTAL activists, researchers and lawyers assembled at Madkai village for a 'Save Western Ghats' dialogue from 8 to 10 February. The serious deliberations of this convention were happily punctuated with folk music and dance.

The hills of the Western Ghats run parallel to the coastline for nearly 1,600 kms and play an important role in 'guiding' the monsoon. Sunderlal Bahuguna, famous for his resistance to the Tehri dam, told the convention that well-forested hills are "the water towers of humankind", inducing or attracting rain and conserving water for a longer time. Critical ecological areas like the Western Ghats therefore deserve special protection.

Environmental lawyer Ritwick Datta told the audience about a case which sought to protect a fragile area. The other side said that only 0.05 per cent of forest would be cut. Ritwick replied that when a bullet hits a person an even smaller part of the body is

affected, yet the person dies. Similarly, when small but critical areas are hit by ecological destruction, a much larger area can be fatally damaged or 'killed'.

According to Sebastian Rodrigues, a young environmental activist who got a big ovation, about eight percent of Goa's pristine land is under mining, mainly iron ore and manganese. Between 2004 and 2005 minerals worth Rs 829 crores were obtained, but the mineral royalty received by the state government was just Rs 17 crore.

Farmers and teachers from the Sindhudurg region of Maharashtra said after ruining many villages of Goa, the mining industry is now eyeing their villages. They said farmers of Sindhudurg have prosperous livelihoods based on growing cashew nut, mango and coconut and they are determined to protect their land.

Norma Alvares, a leading lawyer of Goa who has taken up mining victim cases, said that India has good laws to protect the environment but these are not being implemented properly.

Relating an incident of how laws or even court

directions are violated, Ritwick Datta said that there were court orders for Maharashtra not to set up saw mills in certain areas. Yet exemptions were provided for an area favoured by a minister. To justify this, a senior official wrote in the relevant file that only imported timber will be processed in this saw mill. When the file went to the minister, below it he wrote in his comments: '*Dhanyavaad*' (thank you). When the Supreme Court was informed, a judge wondered whether this note says '*Dhanyavaad*' or '*dhan baad main*' (money to be paid later)! The official had to serve a jail term for contempt of court.

Big projects which destroy forest and rivers and snatch away the livelihood of farmers and tribals are now being speeded up. The message of this convention was that people, activists, researchers, media and lawyers have to come together to protect the environment. Pandurang Hegde of the Appiko movement said that integrity which sustains movements has been damaged and movements can't be based on 'imagined communities'. We have to strengthen moral integrity, he said.

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CAD/CAM training session in progress

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Manoj Kumar and Arup Chakravorty (first and third from left) with farmers in the fields of Mosodih



Ridge and furrow farming is better for



Vegetable crops have become common

SMALL FIELD,

Innovative project helps tribals farm better

Rita and Umesh Anand
Jamshedpur

LAKSHMAN Oraon and his wife Sarla are no ordinary farmers. On less than an acre of land, they grow paddy, tomatoes, potatoes and onions. Their crop of paddy has just been harvested and you can see the dry remnants sticking out of the soil. But they are getting ready for a second major crop. It could be wheat with mustard and pulses in the margins.

Water harvesting structures at Mosodih village in the Seraikela- Kharsawan district of Jharkhand have given Lakshman and Sarla stable irrigation and moisture in the soil. They grow enough for themselves and their four children to eat all through the year. The surplus is sold in neighbouring markets. The yield of paddy on their land has been steadily going up and is now 1.2 tonnes.

But just four years ago, life wasn't like this. Lakshman and Sarla would somehow grow a single crop of paddy, stash it away for their personal consumption and enlist with the visiting labour contractor who would take them and their children to cities in West Bengal where they would be put to work on construction sites. After six months of bondage, they would return with Rs 2,000 between them. It was all the money they had in a year.

Till Lakshman and Sarla learnt to make their land productive, theirs was an existence full of deprivation. The conditions they knew weren't just tough, they were inhuman. As construction labour there was no dignity. No place to stay in the city. The toll those years took shows. They are

Photographs by LAKSHMAN ANAND



productivity and more efficient

BIG CROP

no more than 40 years old but look as though they are in their 50s.

Things began to change for Lakshman and Sarla when the Tata Steel Rural Development Society (TSRDS) embarked on land and water management projects with the support of the Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT) under its Central India Initiative. Checkdams, ponds, tanks and lift irrigation systems began to come up in their district. They now have two big ponds in their village.

The Central India Initiative is an outcome of the research on the Central India tribal belt by the International Water Management Institute. The research was funded by SRTT.

TSRDS began on a programme of integrated development in villages in the periphery of Jamshedpur, the city that is home to Tata Steel. The main purpose was to improve agricultural output on small fields and ensure food security. The tasks TSRDS set itself were to redefine irrigation, improve the fertility of the soil and introduce efficient methods of farming.

A pilot project was taken up in 16 villages in the district of Seraikela-Kharsawan. Nearly 76 per cent of the people here are tribals like Lakshman and Sarla. The first results of this effort are now in evidence.

The significance of what has been achieved has to be seen in the context of the current debate in the country on the viability of small landholdings. The TSRDS pilot has shown that small plots managed well can be very productive and significantly improve the economic, social and health conditions of the rural poor as well as prevent distress migration.

In the four years since the TSRDS initiative began a lot has changed. Paddy cultivation has shot up from less than half a tonne an acre to 1.5-1.8 tonnes an acre. In some pilot plots it is as high as 2.25 tonnes an acre and the target is to reach 3 tonnes.

Not only has the first crop been secured, but a second has become commonplace. Wheat, vegetables, potatoes, onions, mustard and gram are also being grown. Tribals are even talking about a third crop and there are demands for better implements and mechanisation.

"We have tried to ensure that the villagers have at least one paddy crop. We call it paddy stabilisation, which means you try to see that the production goes up with the use of improved seeds, better practices, availability of water resources and so on," says Debdoot Mohanty, head of the Rural and Tribal Services Department at Tata Steel.

"The idea is to assure farmers that they will get one paddy crop which they are accustomed to in the kharif season and will have enough to eat. It is only then that farmers agree to go in for additional crops," explains Mohanty.

"I don't have figures for the extent to which migration has been stopped," says Arup Chakravorty, Manager, Rural Services. "but I can say that when a farmer goes in for a second crop, he is not leaving the land and can be assumed to not have migrated."

A TSRDS study done in the village of Sidmakudar shows that land under crops had gone up from 109 acres in 2004 to 133 acres in 2006 and is expected to be 199 acres by the end of this year. The area under more than one crop in this particular village has gone from just three acres to 21 acres and is expected to reach 73 acres.

In this village, the net income per family for the year had gone from Rs 14,000 four years ago to around Rs 23,000 and is expected to reach around Rs 60,000 by the end of 2009. The tribal is no longer abandoning fields in search of daily wage labour and a life of misery in the city.

Sidmakudar can be regarded as a typical village in the district of Seraikela-Kharsawan. It is the only one where a detailed study has been done. But anecdotal evidence from the other 15 villages in the TSRDS pilot project indicates that they enjoy at least similar if not better levels of prosperity.

THE CHALLENGES:

Jharkhand is rich in minerals but is among the most backward states in India. It has experienced little or no development.

When it was part of the much larger state of Bihar, it was neglected. As a smaller independent state for several years now, it has lacked resolute and visionary political leaders. The result has been limited intervention by the government to benefit the vast majority of people who live in conditions of poverty.

More than 80 per cent of the labour force, mostly tribal, is dependent on agriculture. Yet, just nine per cent of the area where crops are sown is irrigated in Jharkhand compared to the national average of 39 per cent. The paddy yield is 0.7 tonne per acre compared to the national average of around 1 tonne.

The conditions in Seraikela-Kharsawan district were even worse than Jharkhand's dismal averages.

In these conditions, the challenges before TSRDS were many. First of all, tribal people are not principally farmers. They belong in forests and survive on minor produce. It was necessary therefore to get the residents of the pilot's 16 villages to see their small holdings as assets and agriculture as a means of enhancing their livelihood.

Farming practices here were outdated and erratic. For instance, farmers would scatter seeds while planting and they made no attempt to plough the land to a good depth, which is necessary to aerate the soil and allow it to renew itself. The tribals also did not know how to prepare the soil before each crop. The result was that over the years, the top soil had degraded.

Making water available and managing it better were of course important. Jharkhand gets 1,100mm to 1,300 mm of rainfall in a year, which is very good. But the tribals would use all this rain to grow just one crop of rice for their own consumption. They did not know how to harvest water and use it through the year to increase the productivity of their fields.

One reason why crop yields were dimly low was that the seeds the tribal farmers were employing were stressed out local varieties. Use of high-yielding varieties, hybrids and saplings were sophistications of which they had little

In four years a lot has changed. Paddy cultivation has shot up from half a tonne an acre to 1.5-1.8 tonnes. In some pilot plots it is as high as 2.25 tonnes and the target is to reach 3 tonnes.



Bhaskar Mahato at Kendua



Villages cast their nets in Mosodih

knowledge and sometimes affordability and availability of quality seeds was an issue.

THE STRATEGY: The primary goal set by TSRDS was to increase income and also ensure food security by stabilising the paddy crop in the kharif season. The tribals were habituated to growing rice essentially for their own consumption. It wouldn't do to tamper with this. It was decided that once a good first crop to meet their needs was achieved and the tribals were more confident, a second crop, vegetables and so on could follow.

TSRDS needed expertise. It took on as a partner the Chennai-based Agriculture Consultancy Management Foundation (ACMF), whose mission it is to make land more productive. TSRDS is also helped by ICRISAT, which has expertise in dry-land farming. In the 1,600 acres identified by TSRDS, there are uplands which need special attention because the soil doesn't retain moisture. ICRISAT is also part of the larger Central India Initiative.

ACMF's role was critical at field level. As a non-profit, it seeks to educate and train farmers in scientific agricultural practices through training. At the core of this approach is the demonstration farm and what ACMF calls its Pancha Karma:

- Land preparation
- Soil testing and balance of nutrients
- Selection of the right crop
- Quality seeds and a healthy nursery
- Fertilisation, farm mechanisation and total management

ACMF sent down its agricultural experts to work in the fields with the tribals, teaching them through practical lessons what had to be done. Tribals also went to Chennai on a study tour. They went to Pune and Hyderabad to see for themselves how other farmers had adopted better ways of farming.

The TSRDS team went to villages and held lessons on the spot. These were especially useful because it was here that the new methods had to be implemented. It helped the women to pick up the new methods since they did not travel to Chennai and other places.

Not only did ACMF send its experts to Jharkhand to work in the fields, but the tests it conducted for the soil in these areas in a special laboratory in Chennai helped in taking crucial decisions on what nutrients had to be put into it.

It was also essential to show the tribal farmer how to prepare the ground before sowing seeds. This meant putting nutrients into the soil and using biopesticides wherever necessary.

Villagers were taught how to plough the soil to a particular depth. Once the soil was prepared, instead of broadcasting seeds or growing saplings in nurseries and then transplanting, villagers learnt to plant seeds directly into the soil using the row and furrow method which needs less water. Local varieties of paddy seeds were replaced with high-yielding seeds. The new seeds were critical to boosting crop yields.

Innumerable tribal farmers we spoke to told us how helpful it was to be able to learn in actual practice what had to be done. The women were particularly happy. "We would not have been able to go on study tours," said Bhejo Dao of Banditola, a hamlet of Mosodih village. "TSRDS came to my doorstep and taught me."

A widow with one son and an aged parent, Bhejo now plants tomatoes, gram, coriander, potatoes, wheat and mustard. This year, for the first time, she has



Preparing the fields at Kendua



Efficient use of water at a plot in Kendua



Makru Oraon and Jagannath Oraon: "We learnt to enrich, plough and aerate the soil"



Tomatoes fetch a good price

cultivated a second crop. Otherwise, she used to wander around looking for whatever work she could find. There was never enough food at home. Now she tells TSRDS she wants a tractor. A water pump which takes water from the pond to the fields has been installed by TSRDS.

A curious clause in the ACMF agreement with TSRDS was the stipulation of the use of a digital camera in the fields. The images from the camera would

give R Madhavan and other ACMF specialists in Chennai updates on how progress was being made in improving soil quality, planting methods, water availability and so on. It worked somewhat like telemedicine.

Maps have been made of each field, the overall topography, layout, crop pattern, water flows and so on in each village. At Kendua village, in the lower catchment of the Sona river, an experimental farm of 20 acres has been created with numerous small fields. You can see tomatoes growing and ladies' fingers neatly planted in the ridge and furrow method. Each plot is micromanaged. Every farmer is closely supervised. Kendua is irrigated by just one pond. Water is pumped and goes down to fields through gravity, saving energy.

"The results have been really good," said Bhaskar Mahato, a local farmer. He says he got 2.5 tonnes of paddy from his one acre. "I went to Chennai on a study tour. It was here that I met other farmers and learnt how to do it right."

Some 48 irrigation wells, 33 ponds and nine check dams have been constructed in these 16 villages of Seraikela- Kharsawan, which has helped to increase moisture in the soil. They are also a source of irrigation by choice, so the farmers now use how much water they need and when they need it.

At Mosodih village, Arup Chakravorty and Manoj Kumar of the TSRDS' team show us a large tank with a near perfect catchment ringed by low hills. This tank serves an apron of fields that slope away from it. The tank's embankment is also very fertile and is used to grow chickpeas, among other things.

To the right, at the other end of Mosodih, another tank, not as splendid, but very large, serves as a second source of water. Fish are also grown here and fishing has become common.

The result of two strategically placed water bodies is quite unbelievable. Some of the fields remain laden with moisture the year round and the soil is visibly wet. Farmers draw on the ponds using pumps and pipes whenever they need water for their fields.

SUCCESS STORIES: Better farming is ensuring that no family goes hungry and that distress migration is a thing of the past. Vegetables and fish are available through the year. Surplus is sold in neighbouring markets.

Personal accounts abound of the way life is no longer about scratching around for a single crop and then becoming bonded labour to a contractor in some distant city.

"We had no water and no knowledge about cultivation," say Jagannath Oraon and Makru Oraon, young men in their twenties who dropped out of school in Class 8. Both are from Seharbeda near the upper catchment of the Sona river.

Jagannath says his family owns around two acres. Once a year they would grow paddy, broadcasting seeds. A relative took him to Chhattisgarh to work in a shop. He was so miserable he ran away and came back to his village.

Jagannath is now a serious and accomplished farmer. He also plays a key role in motivating other tribals to make their land productive. Through lift irrigation he gets water from the Sona for two crops. He grows tomatoes, gram, chillies, snake gourd, onions and potatoes. In fact, last season he earned



The personal touch is all. Manoj Kumar with Narayan at Seharbeda.



Bhejo Dao: "There is self-respect and dignity in farming on your own field"

between Rs 12,000 and Rs 15,000 selling vegetables. Money earned from one season is ploughed into paying for the next season's crop. He says TSRDS taught him how to enrich, plough and aerate the soil, how to plant, how to fight pests, use minimal water and fertiliser etc.

Hemraj Oraon, 25, proudly shows off his field in Mosodih village. He has three fields on which he has currently planted potatoes, tomatoes and onions. He also grows lentils and chickpeas, he says. Since three years he has been cultivating his fields twice a year and selling the surplus in the market. The income he gets from selling paddy is enough to pay for the next round of cultivation. TSRDS supplies the seeds at a subsidised rate and the important thing is that the seeds are genuine, he says.

His family has seven members. Nobody needs to migrate to work in the city and nobody wants to. Previously he used to work as a daily wage labourer. His fields would yield just one crop of paddy, if there was adequate rainfall. "My life was very different in those days," he says. "I was always moving from one place to another in search of work."

Hemraj is a member of the Village Development

**If managed well,
small plots can
bring prosperity,
change the lives of
the rural poor as
well as prevent
distress migration.**



Mosodih's splendid water tank

Committee, (VDC). He says the committee makes sure everyone has water for their crops. Women in the family help out in the fields. "We also exchange our labour. So, villagers work in my field when I need help and then I work in their fields. Alternatively we pay around Rs 90 per day," he says. Farming here is done collectively. He says he would like to expand. "I want to be able to grow a third crop," he says ambitiously.

Hemraj has a bank account. He has savings of Rs 10,000. Fellow villagers and TSRDS field staff tease Hemraj about the amount really being twice or thrice that. He demurs, but not too strongly.

Narayan and his wife Sambhari Oraon of Seharbeda village farm on three acres. Narayan owns the land with his five brothers. He says he earned Rs 9,000 last season from brinjals alone. He used to be a construction labourer near Chennai. He escaped the tsunami by a hair's breadth. After that he decided to stay on in his village.

Tribals now see their land as an asset. "Everyone has land here," says Bhejo Dao, the widow. "If I go out to work my field will be uncultivated. If we rent our fields, the sharecropper will get the maximum benefit. But now see the field wholly belongs to me. I benefit because I cultivate it. True, I am alone. But here we help each other. Other women come and work in my field and then I go work in theirs. There is self-respect and dignity in farming on your own field," she explains.

PARTICIPATION: Nothing of course would have been possible without carrying the villagers along. It meant ensuring participation at every stage. It was necessary to involve the villagers in a process of joint planning.

To introduce new methods of farming it was necessary to have trial plots

where old methods and the new ones were used simultaneously so that the difference could be seen. Consent and acceptance and a willingness to implement were essential to the success of the TSRDS initiative.

The VDC proved to be an important mechanism in ensuring consultation and getting villagers to buy into ideas through collective decisions.

Each village has had individuals who have taken the lead. Jagannath at Saherbeda, Hemraj at Mosodih, Mahato at Kendua and so on.

Much has depended on individuals TSRDS put in the field such as Arup Chakravorty and Manoj Kumar. As we move through the villages with them, we find that they know farmers by name and have an easy relationship with them.

Now Manager Rural Services, Chakravorty has spent 26 years with the Tatas, a great many of these years out in the field, sometimes at remote locations. Manoj worked with a fertiliser company and then became involved with field studies. He has the low-key approach of a good researcher.

"It is important to understand the tribal mindset," says Manoj. "For instance, once you say you will do something, you have to do it or the faith is broken. A tribal who feels you have let him down will not talk to you again."

For example, one of the problems that we encounter is the breakdown of a pumpset. Manoj promises to send another along to serve as replacement. "Now that I have promised it, I will have to make sure that it reaches," he tells us.

It is through such consistent relationship building that the tribal farmer has been helped to give up older less efficient practices and adopt new ones that have brought prosperity and added value to life in the villages.

To reinforce the sense of participation, TSRDS has been careful not to give anything free. So, seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, saplings are all part paid for by the villagers as a matter of principle.

But it remains a delicate balance with TSRDS having to know when to take the lead and when to withdraw, when to suggest and when to consult. It is a process which has led to new kinds of decision-making among the tribals. For instance, Jagannath of Seharbeda will tell you that he won't be planting tomatoes rightaway because a tomato crop is already coming up nearby and he won't get a good price for his tomatoes.

Winning the confidence of the tribals has sometimes meant looking out for those needs that have been crying out to be met. For instance, elephants are a menace in the

area. They come down from the hills and play havoc with the crops.

Traditionally, tribals light torches and beat drums to get the elephants to leave. But it is not easy. TSRDS identified a special torch with an intense light that the elephants cannot stand. The torch is available in Kolkata and by importing it for the tribals elephants can now be chased away.

IS THIS CSR? An important lesson from the TSRDS project is that companies can make a serious difference to the quality of life in their hinterland if they choose to engage meaningfully with communities.

It is also necessary for companies to go beyond mere cheque book charity and instead empower people to live their lives better. TSRDS' involvement with the tribal farmers is entirely participatory. This is important.

Teams that undertake such initiatives also need to consist of people who care and have an understanding of the issues and the environmental and scientific challenges. TSRDS, you could say, excels in this regard.

It is also interesting how Tata Steel has used its own reach to bring in knowhow and talent from all over the country. It has been innovative in involving ACMF based in Chennai and ICRISAT in Hyderabad.

Finally, companies that take on complex social tasks must have a vision that goes beyond the ordinary. In this particular case, Tata Steel through TSRDS laid out the vision of improving the economic and social status of the community by an increase in crop productivity, which would lead to an increase in household income and food security and have a direct correlation with reduction in distress migration. These goals have nothing to do with making steel, but are clearly the result of how the company sees itself as a creator of wealth and a driver of social change.

' Training has been in the field'

Debdoot Mohanty is the head of the Rural and Tribal Services Department at Tata Steel. He was with the Sir Ratan Tata Trust, leading its Central India office in Jharkhand, before he moved to his current role. He works closely with the team that has helped promote better agricultural practices among tribal farmers in the Seraikela- Kharsawan district. We spoke to Mohanty at his office in Jamshedpur.



Debdoot Mohanty, head of Rural and Tribal Services at Tata Steel

What is the significance of this pilot project with tribal farmers in Seraikela- Kharsawan district?

Every programme new to the area has got different stages. First there is the pilot when the organisation doing the pilot with the farmers is taking the risk on their behalf. At this stage, essentially you are saying that if something goes wrong we will take responsibility.

The pilot has to be done with a few farmers. It can't be done with a thousand farmers. It has to be done with the farmers who have the capacity to take the risk.

A pilot has to be followed by replication and then expansion. At every stage the responsibility of the promoting organisation is different. In some areas we are in the phase of replication and in some areas we are at the expansion stage.

At expansion stage you begin cutting back on subsidies and focusing on technical support. The farmers have realised that the new methods work and have adopted them. What they look for and need is technical support.

Such support means being with the farmers in the field and helping them in different stages of the crop. In such stages we also involve agricultural experts and scientists from the universities and ask them to use the field as a lab.

For instance, we have involved ICRISAT to help with dryland farming techniques. There are uplands where farmers have been holding back because of dry conditions. Now in one of the villages we have taken up dry land farming over 40 acres with ICRISAT's support.

The main objective has been food security and increase in income of the farmers from their patch of land.

First step in this direction was to ensure that the villagers have at least one paddy crop. We call it paddy stabilisation, which means you try to see that production goes up with the use of improved seeds, better package of practices, availability of water resources and so on.

The idea is to assure farmers that they will get one paddy crop, which they are accustomed to in the kharif season and that they will have enough to eat. It is only then that farmers agree to go in for additional crops.

A lot of training has been given to farmers. Can you tell us about that?

We have focussed mostly on training in the field directly. Ours is not classroom training. The other form of training we have given is by way of exposure so that they can go to other places and see how other farmers are doing things.

We have also emphasised on exposure in the farmers' own fields. For instance, when ACMF experts come down from Chennai, they work directly with farmers in the fields. They demonstrate techniques at the field level. Even when people from ICRISAT come down, they spend the whole day from morning to evening running around in the fields.

It is the same thing for our people— all their interactions are on the ground to see how things are working.

You see at the pilot stage you have to be very serious. Close monitoring is needed. When you want to bring in change you have to make sure that

what you are implementing actually works for people to want to adopt it.

In Kendua village, for instance, we have worked intensively on 20 acres monitoring each plot and assessing the reasons for success and failure. The 20 acres have been broken up into 133 plots. By doing this we know the yield of each plot. A few plots by the canal had lower production. Since we were monitoring the data we could find out that the reason for the low production was a breach in the canal. Stagnating water had hurt the crop when it was 10 or 15 days old. On the other hand, a farmer, where the crop got the

right distribution of water, had the maximum return of 2.8 tonne per acre.

We could understand all this because we were closely involved in the field. The credit should also go to the ACMF team for emphasising the need to monitor each and every field.

What are the innovations that have emerged in the course of the project?

I can't call them innovations. The changes that we have introduced are in our approach. You cannot have a crop without having knowledge of the soil. So you need soil testing. You need to find out the deficiencies in the soil and make good what is lacking. It is not as though production has gone up magically. We have done a lot of homework: soil testing, administered the dose that is required in the soil and so on. Then there is crop management. For instance, when should the farmer weed his fields? We have found that farmers who have larger families are more thorough with weeding. On water management I would not say that we have done that much. But yes, we have done plenty of water resource work. To go in for a second crop it is necessary to have a good water management system. The time has come to go in for that.

You are making a distinction between resource and management...

Yes, resources you can go on creating, but they have to be managed properly. A consciousness is now setting in. Recently I found one of the farmers asking another why he was flooding his fields. So much water was not needed, he pointed out.

But we have not done much on water management. We are going to introduce drip irrigation wherever possible. There are many low-cost drip irrigation systems available.

There is also a good demand for mechanisation...

It is coming up. We are in constant discussion with Tata Agrico so that they can develop implements required for this area.

Are there some unusual implements that are required?

Not unusual. It is modification of the implements already available to suit the requirements in the field. Shovels for instance don't go low enough. Even using a tractor does not take you below 10 to 12 inches. But here we need to go to 18 inches to do really good work.

What has been the impact so far?

For one, production has gone up and together with that the additional income that will accrue to the farmer. It is also safe to assume that migration is going down. We can see these things happening, but there is no scientific evidence because studies need to be conducted. We are going to conduct a study very soon. Teams are ready and we are in discussion with students who are going to conduct the study for us. We want to do a thorough study in terms of output, migration, incomes, household changes and so on.

Business

- Enterprise
- Inclusion
- CSR
- ICT
- Go Green

Some solutions from City Connect

Subir Roy
Bangalore

BANGALORE has traditionally been strong on voluntary initiative and this has spawned a new public private partnership venture to come to grips with the city's intractable problems. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in Karnataka and prominent NGO Janaagraha have taken the lead to form Bangalore City Connect.

The thought that made this happen is the realisation among business that "corporate social responsibility initiatives are not enough and something more needs to be done to come to grips with our urban problems; this is critical since, if the city survives, business survives," says V Ravichandar, managing director of Feedback Consulting and veteran "civic catalyst" in the now broad PPP space.

The City Connect platform, though started by business, is open for any NGO or residents' welfare association to join by endorsing its charter. Some of its more prominent institutional members are ABLE, the association of biotechnology firms, local chambers of commerce like BCIC and FKCCI and the national association of software and services firms, NASSCOM. Enabling City Connect is a non-profit trust, Bangalore City Connect Foundation, born in 2007 after the Bangalore Urban Declaration was adopted. Bangalore City Connect is building up a corpus through membership fees and spending commitments, with around Rs 80 lakhs collected so far.

Other than business associations, civil society groups and state agencies form its two main categories of participants. The latter is vital as not only do you need the state agencies by your side to get virtually



An endless traffic jam in Bangalore

anything done, to retain the latter's continued support it is necessary to ask "what's in it for the state agencies for them to want to work with you," adds Ravichandar. He should know because he was a key force in the highly successful Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) which made a mark in the city during the early part of the decade but folded up with the change of government in 2004.

What does City Connect have to offer? It has both paid professionals and volunteers. The task it has set before itself is to develop a systematic long range process to work with the government to improve Bangalore. For each specific project there will be an MoU between City Connect and govern-

ment. The former will hand over drawings and plans for traffic or local solutions which it has developed for the government to implement.

Its first broad endeavour is the Bangalore Traffic and Transport Initiative for which it is the horizontal coordinator. For this the Karnataka government has created the Bangalore Metropolitan Land Transport Authority as the nodal agency to provide a platform for traffic agencies to work together. The first specific project City Connect is handling is a plan to enhance mobility around the highway interchange near the new airport.

As far as the lay public is concerned, City Connect first impinged on its consciousness when a couple of years ago just before the launch of the new Bangalore international airport it filed a public interest litigation pleading that the city should have two airports and the old HAL airport not be closed down. Nothing came of it but City Connect in a way got off the ground. The first bit of public action City Connect took was to provide 50 traffic wardens for around six months when the new airport opened to facilitate the smooth

City Connect has both paid professionals and volunteers. The task it has set before itself is to develop a systematic long range process to work with the government to improve Bangalore.



Chennai Royapettah Clock Tower

flow of traffic around it.

Bangalore City Connect, which is headed by CEO Kersi Wadia, has till now maintained a low profile, perhaps mindful of the lesson learnt from the demise of BATF that being high profile can have its disadvantages. It is popularly believed

that one of the reasons why BATF was grounded was that the bureaucracy felt threatened. It had access to ideas, funds and politicians. The then Chief Minister S M Krishna was a sort of patron-in-chief. "City Connect is still below the radar and can do with more patrons in government," admits

Ravichandar who has no formal role in it but is very much of a facilitator.

When BATF folded up word of what it had achieved in Bangalore had spread to other parts of the country. Delhi, for example, showed an interest but nothing much came of it. An implicit lesson that seems to have been learnt is to keep such initiatives as decentralised as possible right from day one. Now a Chennai City Connect has come into existence founded by CII, Tamil Nadu, with Janaagraha as a knowledge partner. The two prime movers are Gopal Srinivasan, chairman of TVS Capital Funds and GRK Reddy, chairman of MARG, an infrastructure and construction firm.

City Connect Chennai has taken two initiatives. One is a regional development plan for Chennai, codenamed MAP because it takes in three satellite towns Marakonam, Arakonam and Pulicat. Regional development with high speed links to the satellites will ensure that improvements in Chennai do not attract even more people to it. City Connect has also formulated a plan to reengineer traffic with the pedestrian in mind on Chennai's Lattice Bridge Road. The Chennai Municipal Corporation will implement the project.

What is more, preliminary meetings have been held for a City Connect for Cochin under the Urban Kerala Mission and one more city, Pune, has begun to show interest. This is the way the idea of City Connect is expected to grow horizontally with citizens and business in different cities

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Maya's organic model

SAURABH YADAV



Maya Organic's store in Bangalore

Saurabh Yadav
Bangalore

WALK into Maya Organic and you see a swanky store with good quality furniture, shiny toys and earthy garments. The quality of the products is impeccable. It's not your usual dowdy handicraft or cottage industry outlet.

Maya (Movement for Alternative Youth Awareness) was formed to eradicate child labour and help rural and urban poor communities. "The problem of the poor is not a lack of opportunity or laws to protect their interests, but the years of subjugation that have made them passive," says Solomon Jayaprakash, CEO. Since 1989, when he started working with street kids, motivating them to get off the streets, Solomon has always tried to empower people who 'feel incapable'.

He started with a workshop for street children. Twenty five children were selected at a time from shelters and put through a 10-day programme. The goal was to get the kids to stop "hoping for a miracle" and understand that "life is what you make it out to be". The programme was a success and gave many children a new direction in life. Subsequently, Solomon travelled to cities across India, working with children.

He soon realised that the impact of such a programme was minimal. His goals were loftier. He wanted to touch the lives of a much larger group and make a stronger impact.

Solomon worked with other NGOs in a national campaign to eradicate child labour. He realised that improvement in education was necessary for the roots of child labour to be eradicated. If children dropped out of school, they went straight to work. Children needed to enjoy going to school.

He set up Prajayatna, an education reform initiative in 1999 to address elementary education and livelihood. Prajayatna got the Karnataka government to set up School Development Monitoring

Committees to keep tabs on the progress and administration of schools. They now work with 25,000 plus schools across 22 districts in Karnataka and two districts in Andhra Pradesh.

Another programme, Early Childhood Care and Education, works with 40,000 children in Karnataka. Prajayatna has community owned pre school centres for children aged two to six. Nutrition, medical care and learning facilities are also provided.

Maya's livelihood programmes include a unit which makes bags, shirts, kurtas, cushion covers, educational aids and operates from Gottigere and Ramnagam. The Gottigere centre employs about 40 women and five men, most of whom come from a Weavers Colony about 4 km away.

All the women make at least Rs 2,500 a month. The trimmers and checkers are mostly disabled people who cannot use their feet on the electric machines.

There are three worker owned collectives employed at the garments unit, each with their own president, secretary and a cashier. Parvathi, a cashier with Sree Shakthi Collective, earned Rs 3,500 last month. The money pays for her rent and groceries but Parvathi has not bought any assets since she started earning. She has paid off old loans of the family, though.

The women stitch the products which are checked thoroughly and then ironed. Among the orders the centre catered to were grocery bags for stores in the US and UK like Trader Joes, The Como Foundation and Milton Keynes.

The Chennapatna toys unit has changed the way Indian toys are looked at. Artisans were leaving their family tradition of doll making and looking for alternate work. But the last two years have seen young men joining the doll industry because the future looks bright. The artisans, who were reduced to making mass produced napkin rings, got a new lease of life through Maya.

Maya's eco-friendly toys are non toxic. There is no trace of heavy metals. Vegetable based dyes are used in standardised colours and shapes. Toys have been certified for safety by CE (Declaration of Conformity) for Europe and ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) for the US.

The artisans exude a new self confidence as the toys they make are unique because of strict quality control. The bright, smooth, wood covered toys have sold so well that a plant was set up in Vishakhapatnam four months ago to make the dolls because Chennapatna could not cope with the demand from overseas.

An average artisan can hope to make Rs 10,000 up from the Rs 2,500 he made a few years ago.

Plans are afoot to make educational aids on a large scale. The aids have already been tested in a network of schools Maya and its sister concerns work with and the results have been encouraging.

Labournet, another concern of Maya was registered as a private limited company two months ago. It operates through a call centre and has registration centres where workers like carpenters, plumbers, masons walk in, register themselves and get ID cards issued. Everyone who registers gets a bank account and accident insurance.

Labournet is now present in seven cities in India

There are 5,739 workers registered on Labournet. Members can come for training and skill upgradation workshops. The carpentry section of Maya, located at Begur, Bangalore, makes furniture using interlocking wood pieces, without nails or polishing with formaldehyde or melamine.

Made only from cured and treated wood, the furniture looks excellent. It is meant to be value for money. Though most workers are locals, some are migrants who were construction workers prior to working with Maya.

The furniture is sold through HomeStop in Delhi

and Mumbai but Solomon aims to have stand-alone stores because people appreciate the quality and there is demand.

The simple satisfaction of doing something good for a community pushes people like him. "What can more money buy?" he asks. "A certain amount is enough. A better car or bike, better clothes, life is so much more than all that."



Solomon with Chennapatna toys

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Eco-farming yields more food

BHARAT MANSATA

LAKSHMAN ANAND

INDIA has an acknowledged 10 millennia history of farming. Many have paid glowing tributes to this country's great wealth of traditional agriculture. British agricultural scientist, JA Voelcker, wrote, for example, in his 'Report on Indian Agriculture' (1891): "It is wonderful how much is known of rotation, and the system of mixed crops, and of fallowing ... Nowhere would one find better instances of knowledge of soils and their capabilities, as well as the exact time to sow and reap as one would in Indian agriculture; and this is not at its best alone, but at its ordinary level. Certain it is that I at least have never seen a more perfect picture of careful cultivation ..."

There are still many practising organic farmers in India from whom much can be learned and disseminated to other farmers. Outstanding among these are veterans like Bhaskar Save, who has inspired a whole new generation of organic farmers in India. His farm, Kalpavruksha, near village Dehri in southernmost coastal Gujarat, is a veritable food forest. It is highly productive at minimal cost, and a net supplier of water, fertility and energy to the eco-system of the region, rather than a net consumer!

There are other remarkable organic farmers like Vasant and Karuna Futane in Amravati District, Maharashtra; Dharendra and Smita Soneji in Narmada District, Gujarat; and many more in various parts of the country. Such farmers typically retain important aspects found in our traditional, self-sufficient agriculture, that actually provided a higher aggregate yield of diverse, useful produce and organic matter than the chemical-industrial, mono-cultural systems.

Down the years: While Indian agriculture suffered under British rule, it steadily improved after independence. India's first Minister of Agriculture, KM Munshi, adopted a policy of regenerating the ecological foundations of farm productivity



based on a bottom-up, decentralised and participatory strategy. He called for the healing or restoration of the hydrological (water) and nutritional (fertility) cycles in every Indian village. As a result, the nation's agricultural productivity received a significant boost in the first two Plan periods, post independence.

But from the 1960s, organic farming steadily declined in India, as the government pushed the 'Green Revolution' with much determination and a generous basket of incentives and support. In more recent years, however, this once seductive 'modern technology' has plainly left farmers and farmlands writhing in India.

In extreme distress, over 200,000 Indian farmers committed suicide in the past decade. There is unabated spi-

ralling of farm input costs; and extensive degradation/depletion of natural resources, including soil and groundwater, vital for agriculture. Systemic toxicity levels, pestilence and diseases have greatly increased. Farm produce prices remain unremunerative, with the government's minimum support prices falling far short of production costs. And agricultural yields have not just become stagnant, but are actually declining in many parts.

According to the National Sample Survey, per capita food grain consumption has fallen to levels lower than the 1939 to 1944 famines! UNDP, UNICEF and World Food Programme state that almost half the children in India are malnourished, and 20 per cent of the country's population goes hungry. But ironically, media reports indicate that India aims to plant 35 million acres (140,000 sq km) of bio-fuel cash-crops like *jatropha* – to grow food for cars rather than people!

Amid this alarming situation, India's National Commission on Farmers recently bemoaned that 40 per cent of India's agricultural families would

Farm produce prices remain unremunerative and agricultural yields are actually declining in many parts.

like to leave farming. This forebodes a potential quarter billion economic and ecological refugees streaming into India's slums in quest of any available work to earn their living. Without doubt, such a situation will become even more unsustainable, economically and ecologically. Cities will become a fertile breeding ground of rampant and uncontrollable social unrest.

Small and organic : The global IAASTD report (International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development) is testimony that planetary consciousness is finally waking to the stark reality that chemical-intensive industrial agriculture has been disastrous at multiple levels. The 2,500 page IAASTD Report recommends that small-scale farmers and agro-ecological methods are the way forward, with indigenous knowledge playing an important role.

The IAASTD Report points out that genetically modified (GM) crops, aggressively promoted by agri-business corporations like Monsanto, are surely not an answer to hunger and poverty. They will heighten the farmers' vulnerability through increased dependence on expensive, externally purchased inputs. Most importantly, GM crops are fraught with grave, poorly tested hazards and long-term risks to health and the environment; and they threaten inevitable (and virtually irreversible) genetic contamination and erosion of biodiversity essential for the future of agriculture.

On September 25, 2008, the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations produced a report stating: "The essential purpose of food, which is to nourish people, has been subordinated to the economic aims of a handful of multinational corporations that monopolize all aspects of food production, from seeds to major distribution chains, and they have been the prime beneficiaries of the world crisis. Research conducted by the UN Environment Programme suggests that organic, small-scale farming can deliver the increased yields which were thought to be the preserve of industrial farming, without the environmental and social damage which that form of agriculture brings with it. An analysis of 114 projects in 24 African countries found that yields had more than doubled where organic, or near-organic practices had been used."

It is increasingly evident that the path to sanity, sustainability and social justice demands an integrated, holistic strategy of organic mixed cropping suited to local conditions and needs. This must necessarily draw on indigenous knowledge and wisdom; and it must be combined with a mass-participatory campaign to regenerate our natural resources – of soil, ground water, biodiversity and forest/tree cover.

While organic certification may play a limited role in fetching higher produce prices for some farmers, making agriculture more remunerative for them, this option has little relevance for most small farmers who largely consume their produce within their own family, selling or sharing any

small surpluses of diverse, perishable produce within their local community or village. Such small and marginal farmers, with land holdings of less than two hectares, constitute almost 80 per cent of all Indian farmers. Unless an alternative, suitable paradigm of sustainability with equity addresses their needs as well, the future of conservation agriculture may well be a repeat story of token measures - 'too little, too late'.

The certification of organic produce is essentially a marketing strategy to procure a higher value from a minority of conscious consumers - often in distant places – who can afford it. (Product labelling should actually be required of hazardous industrial junk-foods, not safe foods!). In countries that are poor and ill-equipped, the expensive certification process currently followed, invites corruption; and inevitably, there will be unethical trade-offs in the 'buying

and selling' of certificates, which only a small section of farmers may be able to afford. Rather, 'farmer-consumer organic cooperatives', mediated by local or regional/state organic farming associations, may be a better option than impersonal certification of allegedly organic produce from anonymous suppliers.

Any undue emphasis on certification effectively marginalises organic farming into a niche. While such a niche may grow from tiny to small, or not-so-small, the narrow certification corridor can certainly have no pretence of moving agriculture in general to a level of mass-scale sustainability, essential for addressing the burning challenges of our time.

In any case, large-scale, market-oriented organic farming cannot hope to be truly sustainable even if one ignores considerations of equity. This is because it primarily focuses on convenience of functioning for maximising short-term profit. It thus tends to be mono-cultural, or near mono-cultural, growing only such crop/s which are most profitable, and thereby missing out on the synergies that are possible with more diversified, poly-cultural systems.

Good, cheap food : To reach out to large masses of both food growers and consumers with long-term viability in mind, it is imperative that the costs incurred by farmers be brought down, without reducing aggregate yields, so that sufficient food – varied and wholesome – is universally affordable and accessible. Regenerating our natural resources – of soil, ground water, biodiversity, vegetative cover and organic matter – on which sustainable agriculture fundamentally depends, will be crucial for this. India thus needs to nurture Socio-Ecological Zones rather than Special Economic Zones that encroach unsustainably on agricultural lands and livelihoods.

It is also important that both food and farming

inputs be sourced as locally as possible. Ideally, the consumption of food produce should be within a 100 mile radius of its source, with only low-volume, high value items of surplus (in excess of local demand) sold outside the region. This is required to keep distribution costs low, as well as to minimize energy inefficiencies and related ecological hazards, including climate change.

The challenge is thus nothing short of evolving, and implementing on the ground, an inclusive, holistic paradigm of integrated agro-ecology to address the impending multiple crises – of food, fresh water, fuel, extinction of species, health problems, climate change, unemployment, social unrest and violence – that are simmering ominously all over our planet.

Poly-cultural organic farmers, particularly those who integrate trees and perennials, provide not just food, but vital ecological services as well - including bio-diversity regeneration, groundwater recharge, augmentation of soil and fertility, incremental net harvesting (rather than consumption) of energy, and mitigation of climate change. The economic value of such services may significantly outweigh the monetary return from the sale of produce, particularly in a context of stable, affordable pricing of food for common citizens. Consequently, there is wisdom in compensating organic, agro-ecological farmers for such services, rather than pursuing far more expensive, and much less efficient technological 'solutions' and mega-projects.

Considering that the Indian government currently provides a massive annual subsidy to the tune of Rs 119,000 crore (or thereabouts) to support inefficient, inequitable and ecologically damaging (and hence, unsustainable) chemical-industrial agriculture, it is high time that it began to encourage and

proactively support more beneficial and deserving agro-ecological methods instead. This would call for a progressive phasing out of old subsidies, perhaps over a pre-announced period of four to five years, and correspondingly diverting the funds that are saved towards sustainable organic methods and natural regeneration.

Bhaskar Save's 3rd Open Letter, dated 9th October, 2006, to the National Commission on Farmers, summarises a number of suggestions by him towards formulating a new agricultural policy for India. Similarly, the 'Civil Society and Farmers' Representation,' 2007, outlines a holistic agricultural agenda for the nation, offering a host of ecological, economic, social and health benefits. Without doubt, the rationale for adopting such a national agenda with highest priority is compelling. On how soon we act on this depends our chances of averting a calamity of gravest proportions, and retrieving a sane future for ourselves, our children, and generations to come. Without firm foundations that recover food sovereignty and security, mere economic glitter is sure to fade like a mirage. We need to urgently learn from the Cuban story post 1990.

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Small-scale farmers and agro-ecological methods are the way forward with indigenous knowledge playing an important role.

Organic certification has little relevance for most small farmers who largely consume their own produce.

Bhuj must protect Hamir Sar

AMITANGSHU ACHARYA



Hamir Sar lake in Bhuj

THE story goes that Hamir, a rabari herdsman, once dug a small lake (*talab*) for the people of Bhuj. As the city prospered, successive rulers from the clan of Jadeja Rajputs realised the lake's water harvesting potential. They increased its size and developed it further.

But history named the lake after Hamir, the nomadic herdsman who voluntarily dug the lake to offer succour to his people during the dry summer months in Kutch. So, Hamir Sar (lake) reminds us of the rich tradition of water philanthropy we once had where an ordinary herdsman brought the gift of water.

Located at the centre of Bhuj, the district headquarters of Kutch, Hamir Sar has been the principle source of water for the walled city of Bhuj. Around 450 years ago, the rulers of Bhuj realised that water was critical for sustaining urban habitats. Water from three different catchments was connected and collected through an intricate and innovative network of canals, reservoirs and tunnels and brought to Hamir Sar.

Planning was based on deep understanding of local geology and climatic constraints. Hence canals/tunnels traversed the porous sandstone belts, recharging aquifers all the way. These aquifers were optimally tapped by a set of 306 wells which catered to the domestic water needs of the city. The fall back options, in case water harvested in the channels was insufficient, were five feeder dams, spread across the three catchments. Each was located on impermeable layers of shale, ensuring that very little water escaped through seepage. Aesthetically designed sliding gates were developed at the head of the channels to control the outflow of water from the feeder dams and its inflow into the lake. Excess water in Hamir Sar was systematically released into adjacent Prag Sar, ensuring flood control and repair and maintenance

of the former, whenever required.

The importance of Hamir Sar in the cultural and economic landscape of Bhuj is immense. The lake attracts migratory birds like pelicans, flamingos and ducks like widgeon, mallards and pintails. Local and international visitors come here during the Rann Utsav that takes place every December. Beyond events, Hamir Sar brings to the population of Bhuj a sense of identity.

The Bhuj earthquake in 2001 disrupted life and livelihoods in the city on a large scale. The spin offs were good and bad. Many citizens feel that post earthquake Bhuj showed resilience through rapid economic growth in a short span.

But for the Hamir Sar the earthquake was a permanent blot. Reconstruction after the earthquake was insensitive to Bhuj's water heritage. Prag Sar, adjacent to Hamir Sar was filled up with debris and got converted into a playing ground. Old step wells and ventilation shafts which got damaged remain in a state of disrepair. Debris blocked the drainage channel. Finally, the proliferation of *prosoxis juliflora*, an invasive weed, all across the catchment areas affected the flow of water into the lake.

Though in time efforts were made to revive the system, a bigger threat emerged. Hamir Sar now had to contend with an economically prosperous and populated Bhuj. The projected population for Bhuj in 2011 was approximately 2, 15,000. In 2008 it already reached 2,20,000.

Simultaneously per capita demand for water shot up and so did the amount of sewage and waste water generated. Shift in demographics was coupled with a consolidation of centralised urban water supply systems. Wells were replaced with systems that operated on assumed efficient economies of scale. Of the total 19 million litres per day (MLD) of water being supplied by Bhuj Municipal Corporation 80

per cent now comes from bore wells, the rest from the Narmada. And yet centralised water supply reaches only 42.93 per cent of the entire population. The rest manage with their own bore wells, or from tanker supplies, which again resort to tapping local aquifers. Hence, while systems to replenish groundwater aquifers have fallen into disuse, the ones for extracting it have become popular and widespread.

Fast paced urban development requires insightful planning and proper regulations on land use. Absence of it has encouraged large scale real estate encroachments on the lake's catchment. At the same time, indiscriminate solid waste dumping, especially in and around the lake system, has negative ramifications on water quality. As local sources fall into disuse, dependence on unsustainable exogenous sources such as the Narmada grows deeper. And as always happens, respect for the resource declines the further it is located.

Managing Hamir Sar is not an easy task. It means looking after three lakes and their 40 sq.km catchment area. Institutional regulation is not enough and co-management is the only way out. The earthquake led to precipitative action within civil society and a number of actors joined hands to conserve Hamir Sar. A consortium headed by Arid Communities and Technologies (ACT), Hunnarshala and Alchemy Urban is presently engaged in serious research that attempts to provide pointers on lake friendly land use and town planning. Dr Yogesh Jadeja, ACT played an instrumental role in establishing the importance of catchment management to the life cycle of the lake. Beyond academic analysis, ACT has made concerted attempts to reach out to the citizens of Bhuj by organising catchment walks for both school children and adults. The district collector of Bhuj, RR Varsani has been inspirational in his collaboration with the Bhuj Municipality and civil society organisations and sanctioned Rs 50 lakhs in 2007 for renovating a debris infested channel that brings water into Hamir Sar.

What is required now is proper socio-economic evaluation of the lake itself and communicating the findings to citizens and the state administration. Hamir Sar's role in providing domestic water to the city of Bhuj remains unknown, the science being complex, the underground resource being invisible. The lake recharges groundwater and also gets replenished by a high water table. One cannot survive without the other. This is yet to make sense to water supply authorities and citizens.

The value of Hamir Sar to the citizens of Bhuj will be measured by their willingness to conserve water through roof top rainwater harvesting and by developing decentralised waste water treatment systems in housing colonies. Regulatory authorities can always pitch in and provide incentives on property taxes to encourage such initiatives. This can go a long way in securing a fair share of water for future generations and saving a valued heritage.

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Living

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

Smile Train takes Pinki to Oscars

Shreyasi Singh
New Delhi

EIGHT-year-old Pinki is the protagonist of *Smile Pinki*, a 39-minute documentary which has been given the Oscar Award. Made by American filmmaker Megan Mylan, Pinki lives through a real-life fairy tale. Because she is born with a cleft lip, Pinki is an outcast in her native village in Uttar Pradesh's Mirzapur district till she meets Pankaj, a dedicated medical worker. Pankaj brings her to Varanasi's G S Memorial Hospital for a free surgery to correct her deformity.

Smile Pinki captures this life-changing episode in the young girl's life. Film critics and viewers around the world have lauded Mylan's treatment of the heart-warming story. Mylan's moving portrayal is rightfully hers – and Pinki's, of course. But, the journey really began with Smile Train.

Headquartered in New York, Smile Train is an international charity with a single mission – to facilitate free surgeries for children born with cleft lip and cleft palate in developing countries. Its motto, 'Changing The World One Smile At A Time' defines its goal. By its 10th anniversary later this year, Smile Train would have conducted over 500,000 surgeries across 76 developing countries. In India, Smile Train has helped more than 150,000 children get their smile back and a second chance at life through its 166 validated hospitals and 250 empanelled surgeons country-wide.

A cleft, or a gap, in the upper lip and/or palate is one of the most common birth defects. Doctors say cleft lip occurs from the failure of the foetal tissue and bone to fuse and close together during the tenth and twelfth week of pregnancy.

Although the exact causes are still a medical mystery, it is estimated that one in every 700 children is born with this, which means India has over 35,000 babies born with the defect every year. Each of them lives in isolation and suffers social ridicule. Most don't even know a cleft lip is a completely treatable deformity. Even fewer are aware Smile Train conducts these surgeries for free.

"We fundamentally believe only India can solve India's problem. We work with local doctors to create long-term self-sufficiency. We want to create medical capacities, not fly in foreign doctors for camps. Each surgery conducted is a hope-



LAKSHMAN ANAND

Pinki at a press conference in Delhi on her way to the Oscars

affirming story like Pinki's," says Satish Kalra, Smile Train's Regional Director for South Asia.

This hope has found resonance across the world. *Smile Pinki* premiered at the prestigious SilverDocs, and was also nominated for the best documentary short film at the International Documentary Association 2008.

Life's turned cartwheels for Pinki who has transformed from a lonely, depressed child to a bubbly, playful girl. As a child, she refused to go to school, afraid of being mocked and ridiculed.

Pinki is now an international traveller. She attended the Oscars ceremony on 23 February at Los Angeles' iconic Kodak Theatre with her father, Rajendra Sonkar, a daily wage labourer who had never dared to dream like this for his little Pinki.

Rajendra and Pinki were accompanied by her surgeon, Dr Subodh Singh. The proverbial good doctor, Singh, a specialist plastic surgeon, is zealously devoted to cleft lip patients.

His G S Memorial Hospital in Varanasi's Mahmoorganj area has conducted around 13,000 cleft surgeries, including Pinki's on 19 March, 2007, since it became a Smile Train cen-

tre in 2004, making it the largest cleft centre anywhere in the world. Dr Singh has himself operated on more than 10,000 cleft patients!

In fact, the seeds for *Smile Pinki* were sown at Dr Singh's hospital. Brian Mullaney, Co-Founder and President of Smile Train, visited Dr Singh in November 2006.

He was so moved by the experience that when two weeks later, Megan Mylan, on the lookout for a socially relevant issue, met him for ideas in New York, Mullaney suggested she check out G S Memorial Hospital's stellar work.

"The Oscar experience has strengthened my resolve to continue working for cleft patients. *Smile Pinki* might have made it to the Oscars, but for me each child I operate on is an award. You have to see their happiness when they come back after two to three months for a check up. I am blessed I get to win an Oscar every day of my life," says Dr Singh.

"The documentary will spread incredible awareness about cleft lip and palate across the world. Society isn't really aware of this problem," he says.

Hotel with a green soul



Green Hotel

Susheela Nair
Mysore

ONCE an enchanting summer retreat for the royal princesses of Mysore, the Chittaranjan Palace is now a soulful Green Hotel. It was bought first by a local business tycoon who transformed it into the famous Premier Studios where many notable films were shot. The palace made news headlines when a fire broke out during the shooting of Sanjay Khan's *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* some years ago.

After the dust settled the palace was restored. The Green Hotel idea was conceived in 1993 when Hilary Blume, Director, British Charities Advisory Trust acquired it on lease from the Premier Studio family. The trust decided to run the palace as a heritage hotel. Hillary Blume is not alone in her mission. Supporting her cause are Stan and Mari Marcel Thekkekara, board members of the hotel who ensure guests luxurious comfort, the warmth of a home and benefits to the community.

The Green Hotel looks splendidly regal. Spacious, charming and well ventilated, the restored palace resembles a Raj era lodge, its Edwardian drawing rooms equipped with chess boards. The palace is *vaastu* compliant and traditional engineering skills are discernible in every nook and corner. A striking feature is the built-in cross-ventilation, perhaps meant to keep the palace cool for the princesses during sultry Indian summers.

Guest rooms flaunt dark-wood furnishings, high, wooden-beam ceilings and some film memorabilia. Rooms range from the Princess Rooms and the two-room Bollywood Suite in the old wing. There are also bargain traveller rooms in the

garden block. The wooden stairs, stained-glass windows, antique furniture, innumerable little rooms and beautiful terraces evoke an old-world charm. Rosewood antiques stand hand in hand with coir, bamboo screens and cane furniture.

In keeping with its green image, the hotel is verdant with well-laid out lawns and flowerbeds. It has won several prizes in the Best Garden Category in the annual competitions organised by the Mysore Horticultural Society. Green in name and operations, it is environmentally friendly and sustainable. Minimal electricity is used. There is low-energy lighting, solar water heating, no air-conditioning. There is a range of fancy toiletries in the old-fashioned bathrooms.



TV addicts might find their stay at the hotel a bit boring as none of the rooms are fitted with the idiot boxes. All laundry is done by the good old dhobi, keeping energy-sapping washing machines out of the picture. The natural control devices include tilapia, mosquito-eating fish placed in small ponds in the hotel grounds. Handicrafts and linen come from a women's project.

The hotel takes its green image extremely seriously. It stays away from packaged foods as far as possible by serving locally sourced and freshly made food. One can dine outdoors in comfortable wicker chairs, around tables scattered throughout the gardens, or in a sunny, white, high-ceiling, glass-enclosed terrace surrounded by plants. The hotel's specialties are its tasty green curries and the vegetable *hariyali* (vegetables in a green gravy) it serves.

The Green Hotel is run as a model of responsible tourism with socially and economically deprived communities employed as its staff. Some employees are orphans and widows from the vicinity. The service staff are recruited and trained by Rural Literacy Health Program, a local NGO. They do not possess degrees from hotel management institutes but are trained to be most caring, ensuring guests a home away from home. Attrition rates are very low. Since it opened its doors to guests in the early nineties, the hotel has lost only five employees—speaking well of its labour policies.

All profits from the hotel are donated to socially relevant work and community development programmes like health clinics, environmental projects and local causes. Some of the commendable charitable works taken up by the hotel's trust are provision of grant towards land and building for Vishwa Bharath Vidyodaya Trust which runs a comprehensive education programme for adivasi children and the Village Greening Project by Parivarthana in Hunsur Taluk in Karnataka. The NGO works on sustainable agriculture in tribal and Dalit villages. The trust has given grants for the welfare of the mentally disabled and for the construction of an office-cum-training centre for the Bhoodan Vikas Mandal in Nilambur in Kerala.

Ashwini, an NGO which runs a comprehensive health care programme for adivasis in the Gudalur and Pandalur taluks of the Nilgiris is one of the beneficiaries of the Trust. This includes a 25 bedded hospital, eight sub centres, training of village health guides and insurance schemes for tribal patients. The profits from the hotel also support Dean Foundation in Chennai for cost of palliative care for terminally ill patients, supplementary education for slum children and higher education for former street children. Grant was also doled out to set up a honey and bee museum in Ooty.

Rarely does one come across a hotel pumping all its profits into the community. No wonder it has received several accolades.

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The truth about panchayats

IS the Indian village becoming more inclusive after the introduction of panchayati raj? Professor BS Baviskar and Dr George Mathew of the Institute of Social Sciences, (ISS), New Delhi, embarked on a mission to find out. They got 17 serious researchers to spend a lot of time in villages, interacting and observing. The outcome, published in a book, *Inclusion and Exclusion in Local Governance: Field Studies from Rural India* is remarkably insightful.

The book, comprising 16 studies from 14 states, captures the ground reality in India's villages. Yes, there is some dismal news but inexorable change is also taking place. Baviskar and Mathew spoke about their work to Milindo Chakravarti.

What was the motivation for the book?

The idea was concretised in 2000, seven years after the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution was passed. These years were a very important and critical period. By that time one election for panchayats in each state was over. We were closely watching what was happening at ground level. We had another compulsion to do such a study since we were the first institute to publish a 'Panchayati Raj Update' that provides a record of what is really happening at ground level in each state.

We found horrible things were taking place as far as the practice of democracy at the grassroots is concerned. Nobody is bothered about the practice of democracy at the national level. The percentage of voting in the panchayat elections is far higher than that recorded in Parliament or for that matter, even in the Assembly elections.

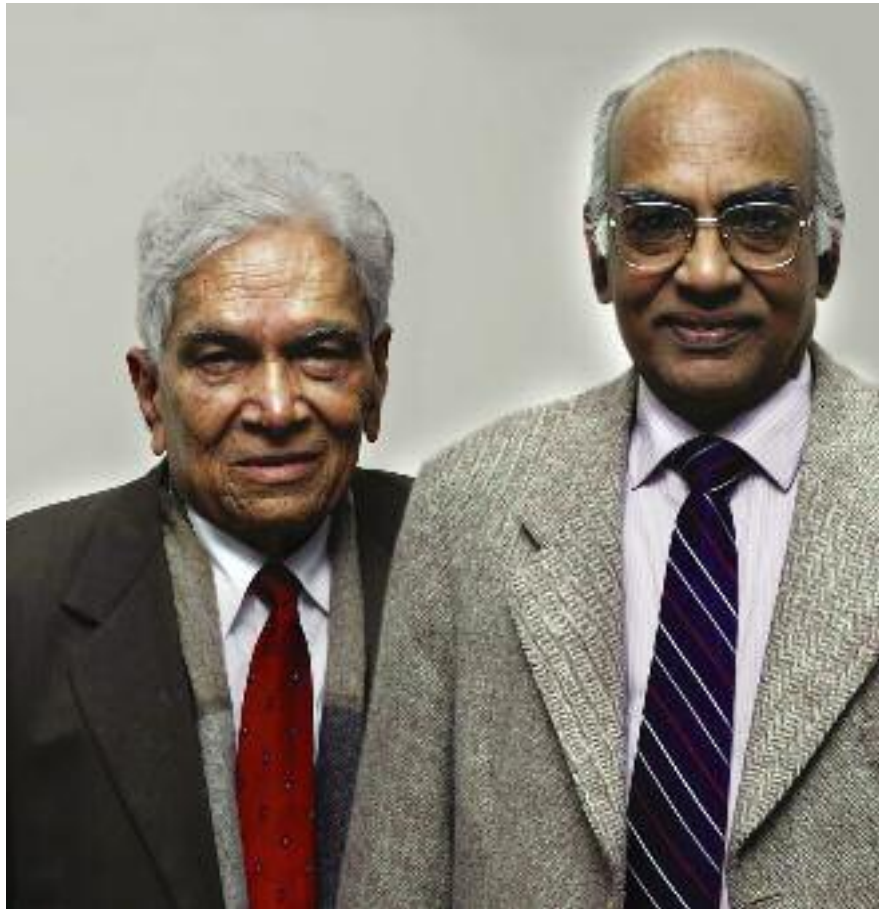
But the reality was terrible, for example, in Madhya Pradesh. All that they did was conduct the election. There was eerie calm outside but within villages women were molested, Dalits were beaten up, people were killed. One has to understand that any social change has a conflict dimension. It is not an evolutionary process. The introduction of panchayati raj institutions also triggered the conflict dimension of a democratic polity in India. Such atrocities are taking place even today.

To put the record straight, more than 50 per cent of the Indian population is still excluded from local level democratic governance and exclusion is still the norm of the day. The socio-economic-political reality, after the floodgates for institutionalising local democratic governance system were opened, motivated us to go for the study. Not to forget, the concerns, conviction, experience and sensitivity of ISS in strengthening the system of local governance and empowering the excluded.

Your study is unique. What was the methodology used?

Several studies have been done on panchayats in India. But the issues were different. The present study is unique in its attempt to understand the impact of panchayati raj institutions on the social fabric of India at village level. Methodologically also we diverted from the traditional way of carrying out research in a hierarchical manner involving researchers, consultants and investigators. Generally, researchers identify the questions and prepare structured questionnaires. Then, investigators collect the desired information. Consultants and researchers analyze the data and arrive at conclusions.

For our study, researchers spent more than two months in rural settings, attended at least one monthly meeting of the village panchayat and not only heard but observed the SC, ST and women representatives participating in the meetings. The degree of inclusion or the lack of it could be captured in



Prof B S Baviskar and Dr George Mathew

a more realistic manner than what could have been understood through canvassing of structured questionnaires. Moreover, the researchers were so chosen that they had prior experience of carrying out socio-economic research in those regions and they were all conversant with the local language.

How did you gauge exclusion?

The motivation of the study was to ascertain if the underprivileged sections of rural India have really been empowered or not after the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution and if, yes, to what extent? For the purpose of the study, we defined empowerment as the ability to influence decision-making in a community level action despite the opposition of others. You are powerful in a community action when others oppose you but you still succeed. You are then considered empowered. So we were to find out if those belonging to SC/ST or the women were successful in influencing the decision making process.

What are some of the key findings of the study?

The process of inclusion is happening at a very slow pace. There exists considerable variation across states. However, the whole country has got a signal that the process of inclusion is here to stay and will grow at a faster pace in the days to come. But some basic issues like poverty and social security need to be seriously addressed as a precondition for empowerment to happen. It is interesting to note that the results of the Assembly elections in many states have been influenced by the attitude of the incumbent governments towards empowering the process of rural governance in general and sections of the underprivileged group in particular.



Inclusion and Exclusion in Local Governance: Field Studies from Rural India

Edited by: Prof. BS Baviskar and Dr George Mathew

Sage

Rs 750



Saluting India for saluting human potential

Something that is unique to human nature is the question we often ask ourselves, “what more can I do?”. History stands as proof. Man invented the wheel, the wheel became a pulling cart, the pulling cart became a bullock cart, then a bicycle, a car and now we are working towards developing eco-friendly cars. Next, we might have a car that flies, who knows? We have never been hesitant to push our limits. With each push, we have not only discovered our potential but found a new dimension to it as well.

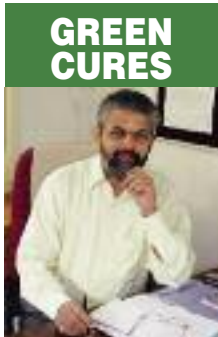
We believe that to bring out the best of one’s potential, there needs to be an opportunity to do so. We would like to congratulate the Government of India and governments of the respective states which have undertaken several initiatives to provide their constituents with this opportunity and bring India one step closer towards becoming a truly global nation.

We congratulate the following projects and their creators who have made the most of this opportunity. They have become shining symbols of an India that holds unlimited potential and inspiration for many more to follow in their footsteps in the years to come.

- **Public Distribution System Online**
Government of Chhattisgarh, Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Raipur and National Informatics Centre, Raipur
- **Electronic Gazette (e- Gazette)**
Government of Himachal Pradesh, Controller of Printing and Stationery, Department of Printing and Stationery, Shimla and NIC, Shimla
- **e-Lekha- Stride Towards Core Accounting Solution**
Controller General of Accounts, New Delhi and its Accounts Informatics Division, New Delhi
- **e-Procurement**
Government of Gujarat, Industry & Mines Department, Gandhinagar
- **e-krishi-kiran**
Anand Agricultural University, Directorate of Information Technology, Anand, Gujarat
- **HIMPOL (Himachal Pradesh Police Web Portal)**
Government of Himachal Pradesh, Police Department, Shimla
- **Fire Alert and Messaging System**
Government of Madhya Pradesh, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Forest Department, Bhopal
- **e-HUDA**
Plots and Property Management of Haryana Urban Development Authority and its Information Technology Wing, Panchkula, Government of Haryana
- **Digital Order for Supplies (OFS) and Excise Permit System**
Karnataka State Beverages Corporation Limited and National Informatics Centre, Bangalore, Government of Karnataka
- **www.cityhealthline.org**
Nagpur Municipal Corporation, Nagpur
- **Tele-ophthalmology Project**
Government of Tripura, Department of Health, Vision Centre, Agartala
- **Hospital Management Information System**
Government of Gujarat, Commissionerate of Health and Family Welfare, Gandhinagar

Your diet chemistry

Dr GG GANGADHARAN



GREEN CURES

MANY people get frustrated while planning their diet. People get caught between choosing one over another. There is no such thing as a perfect diet plan but there is, what we call, suitability. The best diet is the one which suits your health habits, personality and lifestyle.

In the last issue we had talked about Prakruthi, or the concept of different personalities in Ayurveda. Most individuals are a combination of two dominant Prakruti. We had discussed the characteristics of Vata Pitta Prakruti,

Vata Kapha Prakruti and Pitta Kapha Prakruti.

Each personality has a suitable diet. The best diet in the world can work for some people but that doesn't mean it will work for everyone. Since we are all built differently, our tendency is to respond or react differently to certain matters too. This is why it is important to weigh things and study the options first so that you get a suitable match. Here are some diet plans along with measures to be avoided for different personalities.

VATA PRAKRUTI DIET

Food	Take	Avoid
Taste	Sweet, sour and salty	Bitter, pungent, astringent
Cereals & grains	Jowar, ragi, red rice, wheat	Bajra, Indian millet, varagu, maize, barley
Pulses	Black gram, horse gram, tuvara, green gram, sesame	Avara, Bengal gram, pigeon pea, cow pea, kidney bean, lentil
Vegetables	Ash gourd, cucumber, snake gourd, pumpkin, water melon, brinjals, bimbi, sponge gourd.	Bottle gourd (repined), ridge gourd (tender), bitter gourd, lady's finger
Leafy vegetables	Brahmi, drumstick leaves, methi leaves, punarnava leaves, radish leaves, subsige leaves, onion leaves, fenugreek	Banana stems and flowers, potato, mushroom, spinach
Tubers/Rhizomes	Tender radish, onion, garlic, carrot	Sweet potato, yam, radish (ripe)
Oil seeds	Castor oil, coconut oil, mustard oil, gingili oil, palm oil	Linseed oil, groundnut oil, corn oil
Spices	Asafoetida, black pepper, cardamom, cloves, dalchini, dhaniya, dry ginger, long pepper, cumin seed, omum, turmeric, cinnamon, saffron	
Fruits	Dates, badara, ripe grapes, amla, jackfruit (ripe), mango (ripe), pomegranate, watermelon, coconut, cherry plum (ripe), custard apple, walnut, lemon, kokum, butter fruit, tamarind, almond, fig, cashew, papaya orange, apple, pineapple	Unripe jackfruit and mango.
Milk & Milk products	Cows milk/ curd/ ghee, goat's milk/ curd/ghee, butter milk, lassi, butter	Buffalo's milk/ curd
Sugar items	Jaggery (old), sugarcane, honey	
Non Veg	Goat, cow, beef, pig, chicken, fish, egg	Pigeon
Wine	Old wine	New wine
Water	Hot	Cold

Avoid : • Cold food items and environment. • Strong stimulants. • Fasting. • Intake of excess astringent taste, pungent / bitter taste. • Dry food articles. • Too much of a liquid diet. • Strong medicines. • Too much talk.
Selection of food: • Select food articles which have guru (heavy) and snigdha quality (oily in nature). • Sweet, sour and salty food substances.

PITTA PRAKRUTI DIET

Food	Take	Avoid
Taste	Sweet, bitter and astringent	Sour, salty, pungent
Cereals & grains	Barley, maize, ragi, wheat, rice	Jowar
Pulses	Green gram, black gram, Bengal gram, cow gram, kidney beans, lentil, sesame	Horse gram, mustard
Vegetables	Ash gourd, cucumber, snake gourd, bitter gourd, sponge gourd, sweet melon, brinjals, bimbi	Pumpkin, ripe brinjals
Leafy vegetables	Agasti leaves, brahmi, coriander, spinach	Radish leaves, methi leaves, drumstick leaves, mushroom
Oil seeds	Coconut oil, groundnut oil, palm oil, corn oil, sunflower oil	Mustard oil, gingili oil, linseed oil
Tubers/Rhizomes	Yam, sweet potato	Radish, onion, garlic
Spices	Turmeric, saffron, cumin seeds, fresh ginger, fresh pepper, cloves, cardamom	Asafoetida, black pepper, cloves, dalchini, dry ginger, omum, mustard
Fruits	Badara, grapes, amla, ripe jackfruit, mango, pomegranate, watermelon, plum, custard, apple, almond, wood apple, jambu	Unripe-jackfruit and mango, lemon, pineapple, kokum, fig, orange, tamarind
Milk & Milk Products	Milk (goat, cow, buffalo), Ghee, butter milk, butter	Sour, curds, lassi
Sugar items	Jaggery (old), sugarcane, honey	
Non veg	Goat, rabbit, eggs	Cow, pig, fish, chicken
Wine		New and old wine
Water	Cold	Hot

Avoid: • Excess exposure to hot environment. • Over intake of pungent foods. • Too liquid diet. • Alcohol / smoking. • Anger / fear / worry etc.
Selection of food: • Select food articles which are sweet, bitter and astringent in taste. • Milk and other cool drinks which are fresh.

KAPHA PRAKRUTI DIET

Food	Take	Avoid
Taste	Bitter, pungent and astringent	Sweet, sour, salty
Cereals & grains	Ragi, rice, barley, maize	Jowar, wheat
Pulses	Bengal gram, cow gram, kidney beans, horse gram, lentil, sesame	Black gram, green gram
Vegetables	Pumpkin, brinjals, cucumber, snake gourd, bitter gourd, sweet melon.	Sponge gourd-ripe, ash gourd, lady's finger, water melon
Leafy vegetables	Agasti leaves, brahmi, coriander leaves, fenugreek, drumstick leaves	Radish leaves, Indian spinach, mushroom
Tubers/Rhizomes	Carrot, garlic, onion, sweet potato.	Yam, potato, radish (tender),
Oil seeds	Gingili oil, mustard oil, corn oil, almond oil.	Palm oil, coconut oil, groundnut oil, linseed oil
Spices	Asafoetida, black pepper, cardamom, cloves, coriander, dalchini, dry ginger, long pepper, jeeraka, omum, mustard, turmeric.	
Fruits	Amla, pomegranate, lemon, plum, wood apple, jamun, pineapple	Coconut, jackfruit-unripe /ripe, mango-unripe/ripe, grapes, walnut, apple, kokum, tamarind, almond, fig, orange.
Milk & its products	Goat's milk, cow's milk	Sour curd, buffalo's milk.
Sugar items	Honey	Sugarcane
Non veg	Chicken, rabbit, mutton	Pig, cow, fish, eggs.
Wine	Old wine	New wine
Water	Hot	Cold

Avoid: • Excess intake of food. • Sedentary habits. • Sleeping during day time (afternoon sleep). • Excess intake of sweet, sour and salty diet. • Excess oil application.

Selection of food: • Select food articles which are laghu (light) in property. • Rooksha and ushna (rough and hot). • Select bitter, pungent and astringent foods.

We all know we have to eat right and exercise, so why can't we just do it? Increasing research supports the premise that diets alone do not work. Factors like self-esteem, self-acceptance and behaviour change bring about permanent results.

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The power of colour

SAMITA RATHOR

HAVE you ever wondered if colours have relevance in our daily lives? The answer is that they do. Colours can influence us at physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels as we exist in these different levels at the same time. The bond between colours and our temperament is very profound. Not only do colours affect us, they also have therapeutic and healing properties.

Colour therapy is one of the most natural and spiritually uplifting therapies. The human organs are full of myriad colours including millions of cells present in our body. If any part of these cells or organs becomes ill then the colours get imbalanced along with the imbalance of the chemical substances present in the body. Colour spectrums vibrate at various frequencies. The speed of the vibration determines whether a colour is hot or cold. The quicker the vibration, the warmer the colour.

Here are some profound impacts of colour:

Violet: Violet is a very powerful colour and has strong links with creativity. Violet is useful in treating people who are emotionally restless and helps people suffering from obsessive eating disorders.

The creative energy unleashed by this colour is often too much to handle and if not channelised properly can make a person feel quite ill. Clinically depressed individuals should avoid this colour.

Indigo: The colour indigo is associated with the mysterious and the profound. People attracted to this colour usually look beyond the surface of things. They are drawn to higher things, sometimes even the occult.

Indigo stimulates the intellect. It gives a person a sense of courage, authority and inner calmness.

At the physical level, indigo purifies the blood. It is useful in treating diseases of the ear, nose

and eyes and for sinus problems. It is also used for curing varicose veins, diseases of the nervous system, boils and ulcers, and skin disorders. An excess of indigo can give you a headache and make you feel sleepy.

Blue: Blue is the colour of reality, goodness and quietude. It has a cooling, soothing and calming effect. Meditating on the colour blue before one sleeps helps to ward off nightmares.

In the physical sense, blue is useful in bringing down a fever. It helps to stop bleeding, is good for burns and can cure a sore throat. It is recommended for people suffering from shock, inflammation and nervous breakdowns. It is not advisable for people with bad circulation. However, blue can be calming to the point of having a sedative effect. It can make a person passive and easily led or taken advantage of. An overdose of blue can make you feel cold, sad and depressed.

Green: The colour green represents balance, harmony and hope. Green helps to calm fatigued nerves and is good for people with heart conditions. As it creates a serene atmosphere, it is recommended for pregnant women. It enhances growth and helps to heal broken bones and tissues. Too much green can bring on a sense of lethargy as the person settles into a state of tranquility almost approaching stagnation.

Yellow: People attracted to yellow usually have a luminous character and are good communicators. Those who prefer stronger shades of yellow are likely to be egotistical, while those who are drawn to the more pastel shades of yellow may be of a gentle nature. Yellow stimulates the intellect and has a generally cheering effect. It has been found

to be useful in facilitating the digestive process and in curing skin problems. It is not recommended for people experiencing great stress. Over stimulation could result in exhaustion and depression.

Orange: Orange is a happy colour. It strengthens digestion and the immune system. Like red, orange stimulates and energizes. In limits, the effect can be rather warming. It is spirit lifting and helps depressed and lonely people. Gall stones, digestive ailments, chest and kidney diseases and arthritis can be treated with the help of orange. Too much orange can lead to anxiety and restlessness.

Red: Red has a stimulating effect on the heart and circulatory system. It increases the energy levels and strength. The colour red also represents vitality, creativity and power. People who favour the colour red are usually those that like to be in the forefront where they can attract a lot of attention. They are often quick to react and overemotional. Red stimulates the release of hormones in the bloodstream which raise the haemoglobin levels. Therefore it results in greater strength and energy and is good for treating anaemia and other blood-related conditions. Red can also make you feel warm, reducing pain that comes from the cold. It also helps lethargy or depression.

However, an excess of red can make a person agitated and aggressive. While it may lead to an increased libido level, it can also increase anger and destructive behaviour. It is not recommended for people who have heart trouble or who have a nervous disposition.

Research has proved using the right colours at the right time has a desirable and positive effect in treating various disorders.

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BUY A BIRDHOUSE

In urban areas pollution and deforestation has taken a heavy toll on bird population. To connect people with birds, the Nature Foundation has designed all-wood bird houses priced at Rs 450 which can be easily put up in balconies, terraces and gardens at homes. In their pilot phase before the current, final design was arrived at, the Nature Foundation distributed over 100 bird houses to see how birds respond. Feedback has been good. The NGO is working on a campaign aimed at schools now. "We want to get 200 Delhi schools on board. We have created an entire nature kit with the bird houses. The kit will have a CD Rom with a short film on birds, photographs and information sets to help educate students. We are successful if children begin to understand and love birds," says Rajesh Khatri, co-founder, Nature Foundation.

By Shreyasi Singh

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LAKSHMAN ANAND

Saga of the homeless

RITA ANAND

TILL nine years ago, the homeless were invisible in Delhi. Without a roof you had the status of a beggar. Then, in the chilly winter of 2000, dead bodies began to surface on the footpath. They were the homeless. They slept in the open with no blankets and by morning they were dead.

The media started reporting these grim facts. The story shook the conscience of sensitive citizens. As luck would have it, some months earlier, the Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan (Right to Shelter Campaign), supported by Action Aid, had started in a small way to work for the homeless.

Aashray Adhikar began to investigate. It uncovered the sad existence of the homeless. Pathetic stories started tumbling out. Not all homeless were from the toiling classes. A few were graduates. Many homeless worked very hard to earn a living.

Indu Prakash Singh of Aashray Adhikar and his team did a survey, moving around late at night. The homeless slept just about anywhere: under flyovers, near temples, in parks, under staircases, on railway platforms. The activists' rough survey yielded 52,765 homeless, mostly single men. There were vulnerable women and children also for whom the night was hell.

The state government did have ramshackle night shelters, mostly locked up. Aashray Adhikar demanded that shelters be renovated so that nobody would need to risk life and limb for a night of sleep. They took note of empty community halls and government schools where the homeless could sleep.

The homeless were a frightened bunch – especially of the police. One night Indu led some of them to the courtyard of a police station and made them sleep there. The amazed policeman said nothing. Arshad and Dipankar, then homeless children, now young men, listen to that story and giggle.

Anyway, the government passed on a few shelters to Aashray Adhikar and other NGOs. These were cleaned, equipped with blankets, drinking water, medical aid and other facilities. A small fee was charged every night which the homeless were happy to pay.

In one shelter in the Walled City computers were installed and English taught. Aashray Adhikar started a postal service for the homeless. Some happy stories began to emerge as long lost runaway boys got in touch with their families through the postal service.

Butterflies, which takes care of street children, runs a shelter near the railway station with food, blankets, lockers and teaching facilities. It started

an innovative bank where street children can safely put away their small earnings.

Social action for the homeless was working. "We thank Indu," say Ashok and Mansoor who spent 11 years on the footpath. "He took the first step. Because of him we got shelter."

In many ways Ashok and Mansoor typify the empowerment of the homeless. Mansoor became the manager of an NGO run shelter. He now works for the Shahri Adhikar Manch: Begharon ke Liye (Urban Rights Forum for the Homeless) which got registered in February. Around 24 NGOs are part of this new forum dedicated to helping the homeless fight for their rights and lead their own movement, which, as Indu says, was the foremost objective right from the start.



Ashok works for the Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSS) which is supporting the forum and for Shahri Adhikar as well. There was a time when all of them were afraid to speak up. "Now we can talk back, we know our rights," explains Arshad.

Then and now: You could say the movement for the homeless has been a success. Actually, it's not so simple. The movement now confronts complex challenges, an outcome of circumstances.

When IGSS did a survey in 2008, it found that the number of homeless was 88,410, an increase of 68 per cent since the 2000 survey. Dhananjay Tingal, coordinator of IGSS, attributes this rise to slum demolition. To spruce up the city for the Commonwealth Games in 2010, slums were demolished. Residents were shifted to Bawana in the fringes of northwest Delhi. And not all got this space.

Many evicted slum dwellers worked within the city as domestic help, daily labour, plumbers, electricians and so on. They found it costly and inconvenient to keep travelling up and down. So they would simply sleep on the footpath returning

home on Sundays.

"Earlier the homeless were mainly single men. Now we find whole families on the footpath," says Dhananjay. According to his survey there are around 4,000 footpath families. The age of singles is also younger between 18 and 35, he says looking a bit puzzled.

There is also a new phenomenon called the 'housed homeless'. These are evicted families who cannot afford to pay much rent. So they hire a small room for a few hundred rupees. They place all their belongings in it. Since the room is tiny, the family sleeps on the pavement outside. Then there are the growing number of children (7,500) and women. "There is, to date, not a single shelter for women though we have so many women political leaders," rues an activist.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Older problems of the homeless continue to fester. The sore point is they still don't have an identity. To be recognised as an Indian citizen you need a voter identity card. For that you need a confirmed address and documentary evidence. The homeless say they can give proof that they sleep in a particular spot every night and other homeless can be witnesses. The police, worried about illegal Bangladeshis, are sceptical.

Way ahead: Shahri Adhikar and its 970 members say their demands are for identity, livelihood, food health and housing. It is a decentralised network. Every neighbourhood of homeless people now has its own 'nigrani' committee to tackle day to day issues.

The IGSS says many more shelters are needed. It is managing three tents, three community centre shelters and another two are in the pipeline. The NGO is talking to the Election Commission for the identity cards and lobbying for a shelter for the women. St Stephen's Hospital is pitching in with health facilities. Shelters are all equipped with blankets, a TV, toilets, water and electricity. A homeless person pays Rs 6 for 12 hours. Saahasee, an NGO, is providing micro-finance to the homeless.

Well-off people can stay in hotels and hostels. But the working poor have nowhere to stay for a small fee. Different types of shelters could solve the problem. What is really needed is low cost housing and inexpensive, efficient transport. The middle class should be willing to pay a little more for services so that the working urban poor can afford to live better. But, as the years of liberalisation showed, the middle class has not cared to pay fair wages to those who work for them.



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Empowering Self Reliance.



Empowerment of Women



Self Help Groups

Income Generating Projects

my story...

"I belong to a family of agricultural labourers and our income is largely seasonal. Though I dreamed of earning a regular income, I needed some activity that I could do from my home. Being a member of a Self Help Group, the opportunity knocked at my door when Srinivasan Services Trust started tailoring training program in my village. After completing the one month tailoring programme, I availed of a group loan of Rs. 5000 to buy a sewing machine. I now earn Rs.150 per day which gives me a steady income of Rs. 3000 per month, working from my home."

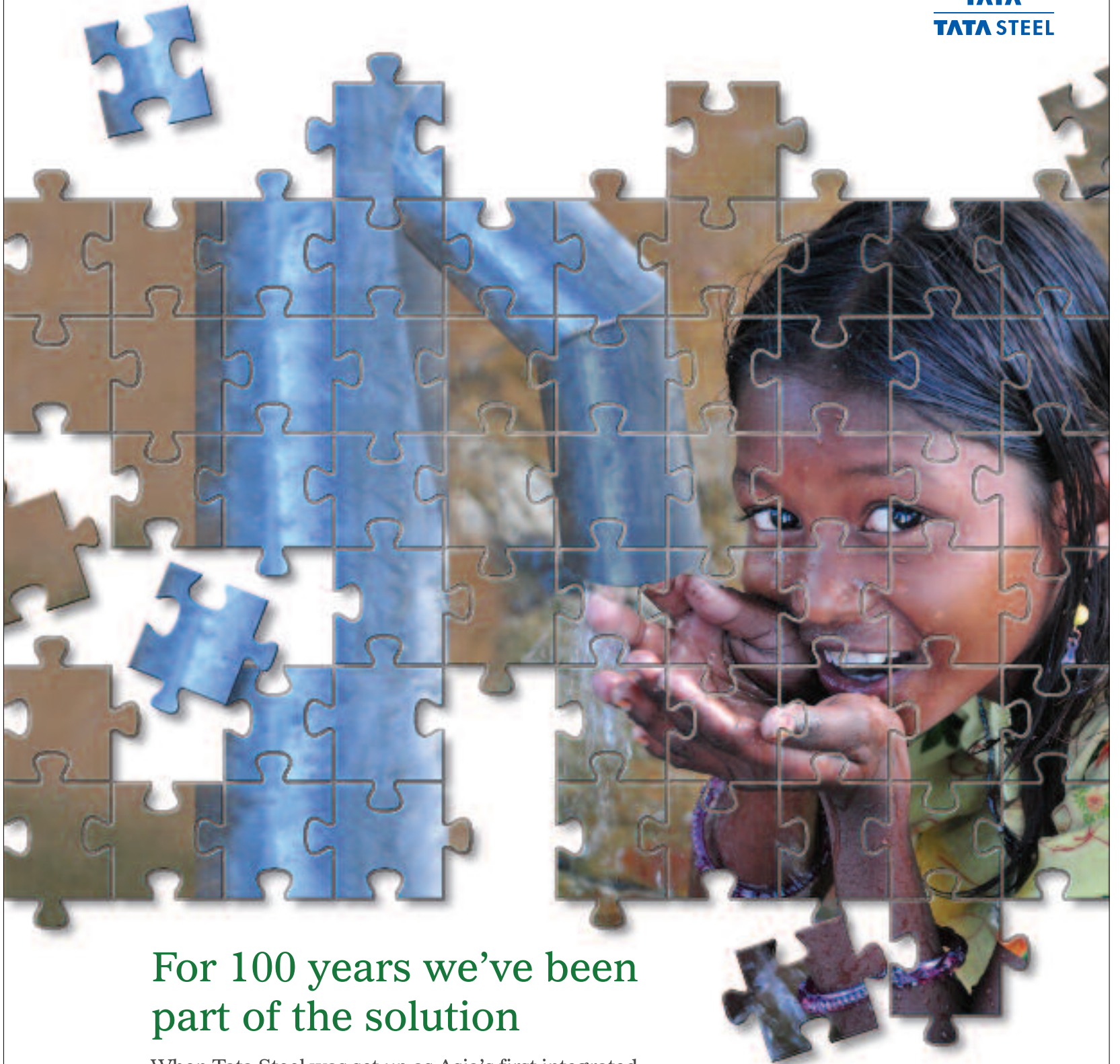
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