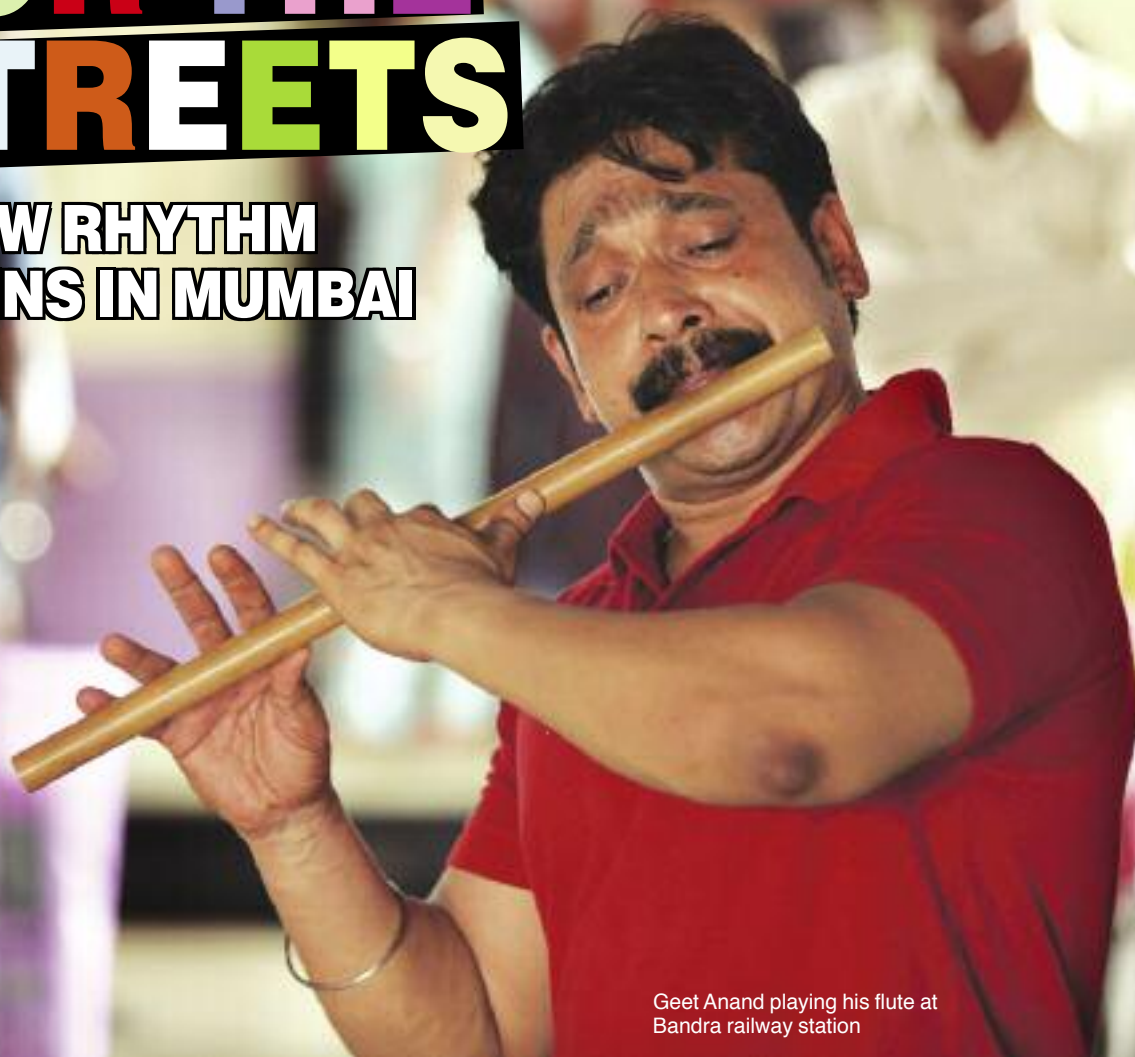


Civil Society

MUSIC FOR THE STREETS

A NEW RHYTHM BEGINS IN MUMBAI



Geet Anand playing his flute at Bandra railway station



'NAC'S ROLE SHOULD BE FORMALISED'

Aruna Roy on stepping down and her work ahead

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MUSIC FOR THE STREETS

Mumbai has found new joy in performances by musicians at railway stations and in other public spaces sponsored by the National Streets for Performing Arts, an NGO.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Perking up our cities

THERE is a dreary feel to Indian cities because of their lack of infrastructure and poor governance. But citizens often find ways of peping up their lives and making urban living a lot more cheerful even as their bigger problems wait to be solved.

Our cover story this month is about one such initiative by the National Streets for Performing Arts (NSPA), which is trying to put music into cities, beginning with Mumbai.

NSPA pays musicians to play at railway stations and in other public spaces. A typical day in Mumbai, with its long commutes and heavy traffic, is full of stress. Music changes the pace. A public performance provides something to stop and watch – it has its own appeal, a touch of drama. For the beleaguered commuter here is an opportunity to relax, however briefly though it may be.

NSPA's effort deserves wider recognition and support for the joy that it can bring to our streets. There is a need to promote a general sense of well-being through a better use of common spaces. Impromptu music is one of many mood enhancers like colourful flowers and places to sit out.

The growing trend in cities across the world is to shift the focus to ordinary people and promote inclusive values. India's city governments could learn from this experience and have a more contemporary approach to urban design.

Not everyone can afford to buy a ticket and go to a musical performance. But at a station or in a park, when a musician plays it is for everyone to enjoy.

If New York can take road space away from the automobile and give it to buses and cycles, why can't New Delhi? The difference is in the vision of what a city needs to be.

From Mumbai, NSPA plans to take its idea to other cities like Bangalore. Its success, however, will depend on how city governments adopt the idea and make it easy for bands and individual musicians to come out and do their own thing. Right now there is red tape and different kinds of permissions have to be arranged. It should be much freer.

Indian cities would do well to go back to what they used to be: slower, well-knit and expressive.

A city is as good as the first impression it gives. If it is green, clean and provides access without discrimination, a city scores straightaway. Music is one of many ways of loosening up and saying 'be happy, don't worry'.

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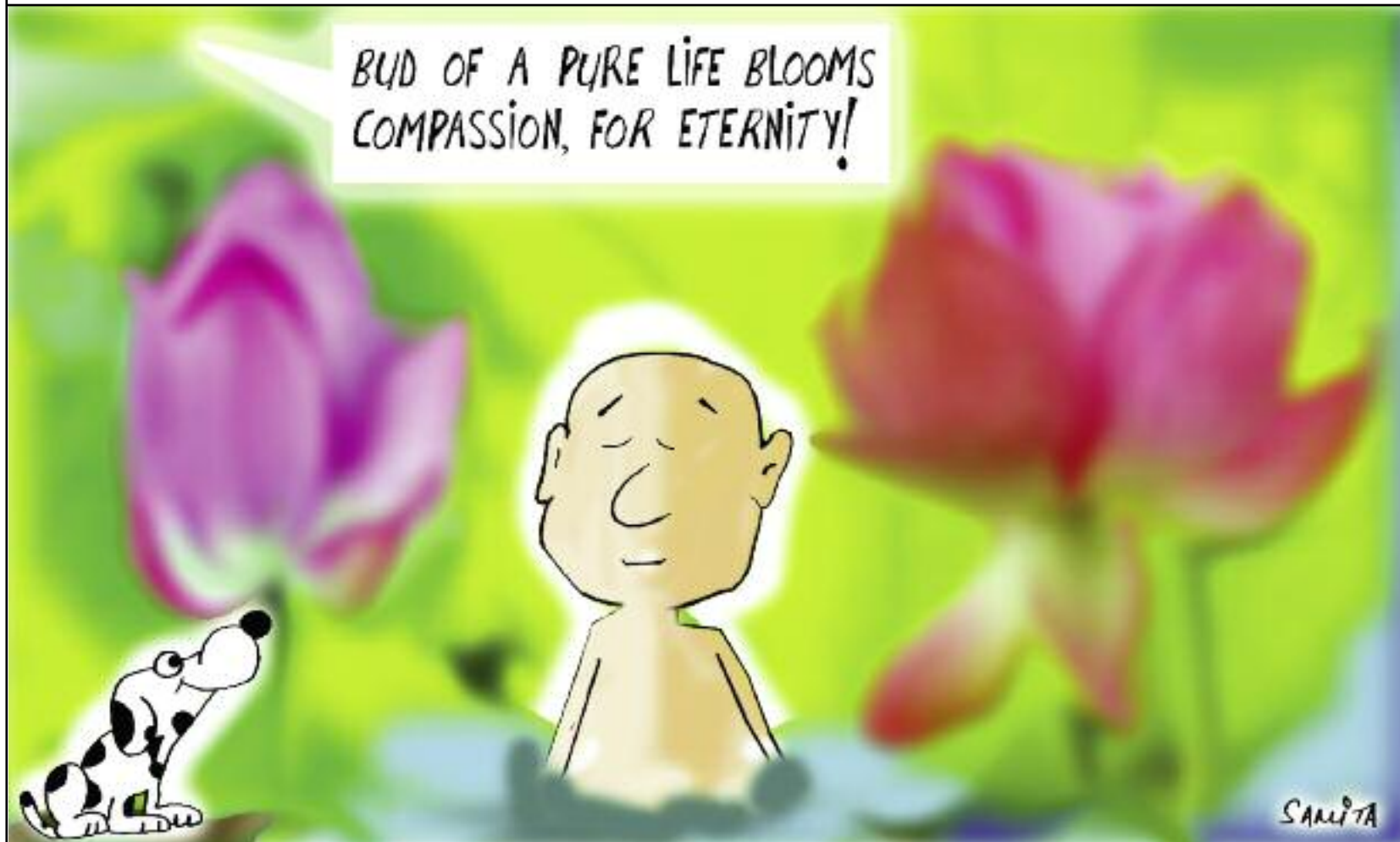
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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



MANSI Way

Your cover story, 'The MANSI Way' is very useful for companies keen to implement serious corporate social responsibility projects. The story highlights the importance of strategic partnerships. Tata Steel also identified the specific health needs of young mothers and children. It used the human resources available. Commitment to the project and not just money ensured it succeeded.

Dr Shyam Grewal

The Tata Steel Rural Development Society has done great work.

Chandan Kumar Mahato

The MANSI Way shows that when a company forms creative partnerships with an experienced NGO and a foundation a lot of excellent work can be done. Each partner brings specific skills to the table. Also, right from the planning stage the objective is to make the project sustainable.

Asha Chatterjee

Apple revival

I read your story, 'Apple takes root in Karnataka.' I am proud to inform you that I was a student of Dr Parmar. He is a true horticulturist and he continues his efforts till he achieves his target. Dr Parmar is popular among the scientific fraternity as a wild fruit specialist. The credit of popularizing wild fruits goes to him. I am sure his efforts to commercialize apple cultivation in Karnataka will bear fruit and be a boon for farmers.

Dr BVC Mahajan

The article was very interesting. Lets hope that the commercial cultivation of apple will be a success in Karnataka.

Yogesh S.L.

A very informative and inspiring article by Shree Padre. There are a lot of tropical fruit trees with great potential just waiting to be tapped by farmers.

Indeed an apple tree in the garden of Pandurang Hegde, the popular environmentalist and farmer in Uttara Kannada district near Sirsi, has also started yielding apples after six years.

R. Vasudeva

Temperate plants fruiting in tropical conditions is a very interesting and inspiring phenomena. I have seen mushrooms being grown in tropical conditions at a university in Vietnam. More farmers in Karnataka should try out these experiments.

Dr Ramesh V Bhat

Innovations don't happen merely by accident. They happen when someone sees things with an open mind. May this invention help the farmers of Karnataka.

B.S. Bhat

An apple a day by our farmers in Karnataka will keep all other apples away. Thanks for the story, Shree.

Jagadish K.N.

Chharba vs Coke

I hope the people of Chharba will succeed in defeating the government's plans to set up a Coca Cola factory. When will politicians learn to look at the larger picture?

Evita Fernandez

Jackfruit

The story, 'Jackfruit defies drought in Vidarbha' was a nice write-up. Hope this inspires more usage of jackfruit in the country.

Mohan Talakalukoppa

Shree Padre has inspired us to grow jackfruit.

H. Ramesh

Green state

With reference to your cover story, 'At home in Sikkim', I was overwhelmed by such exposure of the state to outsiders. Please visit Heebarmiok and stay close to nature at The Red Mud Chalet, a blend of a homestay and a resort.

Barun Sharma

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com

INTERVIEW / Aruna Roy Decision to quit NAC driven

'NAC is good, but should not

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Aruna Roy: 'NAC can be located as a pre-legislative consultative platform on social sector issues.'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHEN Aruna Roy recently chose not to continue as a member of the National Advisory Council (NAC) there was much speculation on the reasons for her departure. Roy had been one of the clearer voices in the NAC and a driver of key social initiatives emanating from it. As a founder of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) she also brought valuable grassroots experience to the NAC.

It was rumoured that she was upset with the Congress-led UPA government for not implementing several of the NAC's suggestions and was walking out in protest. But the NAC is often called an alternative power centre which dictates terms to the government. Why then would an influential member like Roy be leaving?

Roy spoke to *Civil Society* on her reasons for not continuing in the NAC, her plans and the complexities of a NAC-like mechanism. She believes that the NAC should be institutionalised as part of a process for shaping policies and laws through wider consultation.

You were a significant member of the NAC. Why did you choose not to be nominated for another term? Have you left in anger, as some seem to think?

The decision not to renew the NAC term is a collective decision of the MKSS. Over the past year, the MKSS has been advising me to change my role from policy and law making to focusing on the enactment and implementation of recommendations already made.

My membership in the NAC has meant spending time in Delhi. The MKSS and I concurred that I should spend more time in rural India, specifi-

cally in Rajasthan, to be more directly involved with processes of change at the grassroots.

Even for someone like me who has a foot in a village, prolonged spells outside in a month have eroded the time that is needed to understand the fluctuating politics of caste, class and gender.

The perception that I have left in anger is incorrect.

Do you think a NAC-like mechanism is necessary and that any government should adopt it in the Indian context?

I think there is a need to look at the NAC from a purely institutional perspective as opposed to the personalised narrative which connects the NAC exclusively with Mrs Sonia Gandhi, or repeatedly tries to pit the NAC against the Prime Minister. As an institution, the NAC is a collective body which brings together many different points of view

by need to work more actively at the grassroots be personalised'

from across civil society and (in NAC-2) from within the government itself. It makes recommendations after a mandatory process of consultation and deliberation.

The NAC is a fairly new body and is still evolving within the institutional set-up of the government. It has evolved and defined procedures for itself, which determine the consultative process of the NAC. This has given the NAC the experience to draw upon a range of opinion and expertise from outside itself, as well as begin discussions with government departments and ministries about their views and understanding on different issues. It has, therefore, given shape to a set of consultative procedures through which it deliberates on different issues to make purely advisory recommendations to the government. I believe that any government will benefit from such a mechanism.

This process of consultative deliberation for its own recommendations is what has given the NAC the confidence and conviction to recommend a pre-legislative consultative process, which can give all citizens an opportunity to participate in the making of law and subordinate legislation. I believe that the NAC recommendations on the pre-legislative consultative process are significant and intrinsically connected to its own experience. The NAC can be located as a pre-legislative consultative platform on social sector issues.

What are the other ways in which a pre-legislative consultative process can be strengthened?

While the NAC has performed as a platform for a pre-legislative consultative process by opening its own recommendations to public comment before finalisation and sending to the government, it is important that such a process be institutionalised. In this connection, it is significant that the NAC has just made a recommendation that the government institutionalise a pre-legislative process. Through that systemic reform, any citizen of India will get an opportunity to participate in the making of law and subordinate legislation.

This has been a lacuna in the Indian democratic framework. This point of view is amply demonstrated by the number of agitations over the last few years, explicitly and implicitly expressing the citizens' desire to participate in governance. In contentious issues like land acquisition and the Special Economic Zone Act, for instance, the marginalised groups need to place their differences and concerns during the deliberative process. In a democracy, competing claims on policy initiatives and limited resources must be managed through a fair and deliberative process. The pre-legislative process will help promote that basic democratic process.

Placing the NAC in the pre-legislative process addresses the criticism that it is an exclusive

body. It will also lay out a process by which the executive gives reasoned answers for the acceptance or rejection of suggestions that come from the people. Even the NAC has not had this privilege as many of its recommendations have been rejected without sufficient reasons being offered.

Several pieces of legislation such as on food security, whistleblowers, grievance redressal are pending in Parliament. Do you think more needs to be done to sensitise the political class?

The fact that these bills have been tabled for passage in Parliament itself means that the political class is aware of these problems and the need to address them. In their rhetoric, too, most politicians come across as tuned to the needs of the

'I think the larger issue is the capture of the State by vested interests and the lack of accountability. In the absence of a real political alternative, elections are an inadequate mechanism to enforce accountability.'

people. So it is not so much an issue of sensitisation as one of political will – and this extends across parties.

I think the larger issue is the capture of the State by vested interests and the lack of accountability. In the absence of a real political alternative, elections are an inadequate mechanism to enforce accountability. More than this, there is a need to make governance systems themselves more responsive and democratic. These bills may be pending in Parliament – however there are several pro-poor laws such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the Forest Rights Act (FRA), which are very poorly implemented. This is one of the things I want to focus on now.

What are the issues you plan to take up now on a priority basis?

I would like to return to rural Rajasthan to work again with peoples' democratic politics. This includes – the non-implementation of MGNREGA, the need for financial security or pensions for the unorganised poor, the lack of employment for educated youth, addressing and countering the shameful atrocities against Dalits and women. I will give time to plan with the Loktantrashala a series of activities to make peoples' democratic education again the focus of my concerns.

Finally, I feel there is much that we have learnt

in all our campaigns that needs to be assimilated, analysed and understood. I feel we need to deepen our democracy through action and reflection by those who have the greatest vested interest in change. Perhaps that is the greatest hope for a better tomorrow.

You expressed disappointment over the Union government's unwillingness to implement minimum wages. This involves the states too. What is the all India minimum wage structure you would like to see put in place?

The Minimum Wages Act in India was passed in 1948 and has remained sacrosanct since then. There have been a series of Supreme Court decisions that have underscored its basic importance, and held that non payment of minimum wages is a violation of the workers fundamental rights and is tantamount to forced labour. The Union Government is making an assertion that under MGNREGA they can set a wage lower than the minimum wage. However, that is unconstitutional and puts paid to any claims of inclusive growth.

It is true that the minimum wage structure in

India is much distorted and very little progress has been made in evolving a rational system for fixing of minimum wages. For instance the daily minimum wage in Delhi is ₹297 whereas in UP it is only ₹100 even though the two states are adjacent. Parts of UP, like Noida, are as urbanised as Delhi. Then there's a national floor minimum wage, which is ₹115 daily. There is an urgent need for rational fixing of the floor level minimum wage to reduce these kinds of inter-state vulnerabilities.

There is logic to having different wages for different states, but the fixing of the minimum wage must be based on rational and accepted standards. There are standards for fixing of the minimum wage as set by the Indian Labour Conference, which have been ratified and enhanced by the Supreme Court. However, no state is defining its minimum wage as per this standard. Wages are ultimately also an outcome of the relative bargaining capacities of the worker and the employer. That is why a minimum wage and a national floor level minimum wage are both so important.

There is also the issue of implementation of the Minimum Wages Act. The MGNREGA has been pivotal in enhancing the bargaining capacity of all workers. For the first time, in some areas minimum wages are becoming a reality. That is also why there is so much resistance to the issue of minimum wages by market oriented economists.

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

industrialists, and large farmers. The MGNREGA minimum wage has become a market mechanism that has enhanced the earning capacity of all labour. Even in places where MGNREGA is not being implemented well, it has set a wage standard, because workers refuse to be employed at less than that amount.

Minimum wage in MGNREGA is an opportunity to free the mass unorganised sector from generations of exploitation and we must understand that the issue is one of basic principles and practice and is therefore of far greater importance than its budgetary implications for the central government.

Implementation of MGNREGA has been patchy. What are your suggestions to ensure it works better across states?

We have made comprehensive suggestions to improve the functioning of MGNREGA repeatedly through the Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) and NAC. However, over the years, in large parts of the country the implementation of MGNREGA is deteriorating – with budgetary allocations, average number of days worked, and SC/ST participation declining across the board because these suggestions have not been implemented.

The refusal to pay minimum wage in policy – and in actuality through the callous implementation of piece-rate measurement systems – has resulted in wages as low as ₹1 per day. In addition, several months of delayed payments has made MGNREGA very unattractive to workers.

What makes MGNREGA different is its demand-driven nature which provided work as a matter of right, with strict accountability mechanisms. However, till date, only a handful of cases have received unemployment allowance when work demanded was not provided in time. It is thus imperative that dated receipts be issued at the time of demand of work, and that unemployment allowance is paid in each instance where work is delayed.

Similarly, there are provisions in the Act for compensation to be paid to workers for delayed payment of wages, which has largely gone unimplemented. Some kind of facilitation at the village level is also necessary to ensure that the planning process to determine the works that will be taken up under the MGNREGA functions well.

Finally, transparency measures such as wall paintings and social audits (facilitated through independent Directorates of Social Audit) are extremely important for the proper implementation of MGNREGA. There are other suggestions related to measurement of work, work-site management etc which if seriously implemented would make a huge difference to the programme and its impact.

Despite many detailed provisions, implementation is weak primarily because of a class bias of the officials and elected representatives whose mandate it is to implement and monitor the act. Many of them come from a contractor, large farmer class, and they do not like the dignity and bargaining power the programme has given the wage worker. Despite all its problems, and even with poor implementation, the MGNREGA is a lifeline for millions of poor and vulnerable wage workers. ■



Vijay Dhasmana: 'Ninety species of forest trees native to the Aravalis have been grown.'

Jungle in a concrete

Gurgaon residents revive a derelict

Shayak Majumder
Gurgaon

TREKKING through a winding forest trail of the Aravali Biodiversity Park, Vijay Dhasmana says, "I love wilderness. There are no boundaries and rules here, and yet you find harmony among things growing and living together." He stops in his tracks. "Keep quiet and listen," he says, "you can hear the calls of a wide variety of birds." He is right.

It is hard to believe that we are standing in the middle of rapidly urbanising Gurgaon. Sprawled over 576 acres of rocky terrain, this patch of green was recently designated as a Biodiversity Park under the 2031 Gurgaon Master Plan.

Dhasmana has been deeply involved with I Am Gurgaon, an NGO, as its chief ecologist. He has

also been working closely with the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (MCG) to develop and maintain the Biodiversity Park. "In a span of three years, we have managed to grow 90 species of forest trees which are native to the Aravalis," he says.

The Biodiversity Park was once a mining site. A Supreme Court order ruled all mining operations as illegal in 1992. The land was marked as not available for either agriculture or construction. "We had to put up quite a fight to ensure that this land did not get marked as agricultural land. Had that happened, any real estate developer could have changed it to a construction zone," says Latika Thukral, of I Am Gurgaon.

It was indeed a struggle. The area was treated as wasteland by locals and construction workers building high-rises nearby. Waste and carcasses



Latika Thukral: 'The MCG and residents have been enormously supportive.'

Just a little away from the Guru Dronacharya metro station lay a vast unused terrain. In 2010, I Am Gurgaon approached the then MCG commissioner, Rajesh Khullar, who at once agreed to afforest the area. The MCG began planting trees soon after. Khullar's successor, Sudhir Rajpal, advised I Am Gurgaon to plant the trees themselves to facilitate greater citizen involvement with the project.

Says Thukral: "As we started planting, we realised that we really don't have any expertise on the flora and fauna of the Aravali Hills. And that's where Vijay (Dhasmana) came in."

Dhasmana, a naturalist, has worked with Delhi's tree-guru Pradip Krishen, author of the bestselling field guide, *Trees of Delhi*. Krishen sent him across to meet I Am Gurgaon. Dhasmana came in armed with knowledge of native Aravali species and went on a vigorous de-plantation drive, uprooting plants which were not native to the Aravalis.

The park was riddled with the non-indigenous *vilayati keekar* and *prosopis juliflora*, a Mexican weed. "We had to pull them out to let native species take root," says Dhasmana. The difference was remarkable. As soon as the foreign trees were uprooted, native plants like *barna*, *amaltash*, *palash*, *khair* and others began growing abundantly, bringing with them a plethora of wildlife like neelgai, jackals, snakes and a vast variety of birds.

Even wildlife steered clear of the *vilayati keekar* whose leaves are not edible. The birds avoided sitting atop *vilayati keekar* branches and picked native trees to build their nests on.

The indigenous saplings are grown in the park's own nursery under the care of workers who tend to over 90 species of plants day in and day out. "We got immense support from the MCG and from residents around the park," says Thukral. "This is a people's park."

Companies like Genpact, Bacardi, Coca-Cola and others have provided funds for the beautification of the park and for setting up the nursery and water supply system.

The park is designed for birdwatchers, walkers and cyclists. "We organise nature walks and tree

planting events where visitors come and plant trees themselves," says Dhasmana. Till date, over 15,000 people have planted trees in the park.

"People know that their planted trees will be taken care of here. We charge ₹500 for each sapling planted and we maintain the tree for a period of three years," says Thukral. The park also features an open-air theatre where musical concerts are held for visitors.

But much still remains to be done. The land has not yet been recognised as a protected forest or a heritage biodiversity park which means that it could be lost if the Haryana government were to commission a real estate project here. "We haven't yet received an MoU marking the park as a protected forest," says Dhasmana.

But due to the immense support it received from the MCG, I Am Gurgaon is hopeful that the forest will soon be declared as a protected area by the government.

Charudutt Chitrak, who lives in DLF Phase 4, a residential colony nearby, says he saw the park grow before his eyes, turning from a barren wasteland riddled with antisocial elements and garbage to a green paradise. "No wonder MCG supports it so actively. It has been the only good thing that has happened in the name of true development around here," he says.

The park is only three years old. It is going to take at least another seven to eight years more to become a lush natural forest. But unlike other forest reserves, which are out of bounds to visitors, the Aravali Biodiversity Park was open to people from the beginning. "We would get visitors who would tell us that some trees were not growing properly, or that others had withered away. It's such a misconception. We should all see the bigger picture. The trees will take a long time to grow. Once they take their full shape, everyone will realise that," says Thukral.

She is, of course, happy to see how the forest is taking shape. "You know what makes it all worthwhile? When you are taking a walk in the forest and an elderly man strolling by, recognises you and blesses you for the work you have done. It feels good," she says. ■

jungle wasteland

were strewn all over. "The land was also encroached upon by liquor shops near the toll and people treated it as a dump site for used bottles," says Thukral. Villagers used the land as a route to commute to Delhi. The entry points were spotted and barricaded to put a stop to such movement.

Thukral, a banker, has lived in Gurgaon for over 17 years. She has seen the city change from being a residential haven to becoming a concrete jungle. Hoping to bring about positive change, she and a few other residents came together to form I Am Gurgaon. "We wanted to save the city by working with the government and other groups," says Thukral.

I Am Gurgaon began with small endeavours like cleaning market areas and improving parking lots. "We figured that to usher in real change, we needed to do something big," she says.

Pension Parishad to step up campaign

Arjun Sen
New Delhi

ON 3 June Pension Parishad activists met in New Delhi and decided to hold a two-day Jana Manch or national convention in the capital to coincide with the monsoon session of Parliament. The tentative dates fixed are August 27 and 28. The Pension Parishad will also organise a separate Jana Manch for residents of Delhi prior to the national convention probably on 17 July.

The Pension Parishad meeting was chaired by Nikhil Dey of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) and attended by representa-



LAKSHMAN ANAND

Rajasthan has identified beneficiaries and fixed the pension amount at ₹500

tives of several people's organisations. The meeting began by assessing the progress made in getting pension for the elderly in the unorganised sector. Dey informed the participants that the Rajasthan government has already announced universalisation of pension for all men above 58 and all women above 55.

The pension amount has been fixed at ₹500 per month. From April 20 to May 20 the government organised pension camps in all villages of Rajasthan to identify the beneficiaries. As a result, two million new beneficiaries have now become eligible for old-age pension. "This has changed the entire political atmosphere in Rajasthan which will be going for Assembly elections later this year," Dey said. "Before the announcement of universal pension, the BJP led by Vasundhara Raje seemed to be holding all the cards. But now there is rising popular support for the ruling Congress," Dey said.

"We have to take the Rajasthan model to other states, meet the Chief Ministers and convince them of the huge popular support that can come from accepting our demand," he said. Dey also said he and Aruna Roy, one of the joint conveners of the Pension Parishad, had already met the Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and

will soon be meeting Delhi's Chief Minister.

He said that the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Akhilesh Yadav, had already accepted the demand in principle and has shown great enthusiasm in the idea especially after it was explained to him that the cost of implementing the pension scheme in Rajasthan was just around ₹3,000 crores a year and that the financial implications for a universal pension of ₹500 per month was well within the reach of the UP government.

He, however, said that discussions with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar revealed he had no idea of the demand for pension nor its implications. But he has promised to study the issue and

make an assessment as to what his government can do. The meeting also took stock of the convention of 25 civil society organisations held on 21 May, on the demand for universalisation of pension in Delhi. Leading activists stressed the need to step up the campaign to make the proposed Jana Manch for Delhi residents a success. "We have to ensure the participation of thousands of people", Dey told the participants.

Noting that while the 21 May convention had helped finalise a charter of demands for submission to the Delhi government and the three municipal corporations in the city, there was a need for organising a pilot survey of at least one area of Delhi to find out all the issues involved in ensuring 100 per cent pension coverage for the aged in Delhi state.

The survey would identify all the beneficiaries of the area under study, find out who among them were already getting pension, and who were not getting pension and the reasons why they were not so that Pension Parishad leaders would be in a position to answer all questions that may be raised by the Delhi Chief Minister and other officials during their proposed meeting. "This pilot study will also help us identify what is ideal and should be done in the long term and what we can now demand on an immediate basis," Dey said.

The meeting also noted that while 10 MPs had signed the document of the Pension Parishad demanding universal non-contributory pension for the aged, so far no MP had shown any disagreement with the demand. The meeting decided to step up this campaign so that a major push can be given to the demand for pension during the monsoon session of Parliament. "If we miss the bus now we may have to wait another four years till the time of the next election," Dey said. ■

Tech savvy



Forest watchers use GPS, camera trapping, a cell phone, and

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

KARNATAKA has always been at the forefront of information technology. The state is now using the latest hi-tech equipment to protect wildlife habitats. Camera trapping, GPS based patrolling, night vision monitoring, solar-based energy in Anti-Poaching Camps (APC) are some of the technologies being employed by Project Huli to protect the tiger. In fact, Project Huli is being hailed as a trendsetter in wildlife conservation.

Vijay Mohan Raj of the Indian Forest Service and currently the executive director of Jungle Lodges and Resorts started Project Huli when he was Chief Conservator of Forests in the BRT Tiger Reserve.

"The Forest Department is an active innovator," he says. "We started this programme since the National Tiger Conservation Authority has mandated Daily Patrol Log forms in the new Phase IV monitoring of Tiger Reserves. Any tiger conservation or protection strategy should focus on foot patrols. These are the backbone of tiger conservation. That's why the Forest Department started Project Huli, the first venture of its kind, to track forest officials in APCs by devising a GPS system."

Armed with a GPS tracking device, a cell phone and a laptop, forest watchers in the BRT Tiger Reserve trudge through treacherous terrain everyday from dawn to dusk to protect India's national animal, the tiger.

These foot soldiers are mostly tribals. They log

tribals keep tiger safe



a laptop to keep tabs on animals

Technology in the hands of forest watchers has helped to closely monitor the health of the tiger and study the forests. It was a real challenge to keep the technology very uncomplicated for the forest watchers. Simple graphic user interfaces were devised to enable forest watchers to log in their details. Subsequently, the system was upgraded and tablets with specialized apps were provided to officials in the APCs.

The daily logs have ensured accountability and made it easy to consolidate the data derived into monthly reports. These present a bigger picture of the ecosystem's dynamics – the movement of elephant herds, the seasonal sighting of prey like gaur



A tiger spotted at night



Most forest watchers at the BRT Tiger Reserve are tribals with deep knowledge of the terrain

the route they take, the location of each sighting of animals like tigers and herds of prey, disturbances, and illegal activities like snares and cooking fires that indicate intrusions. Then they transfer this data to a laptop and using cell phone signal boosters, transmit the information from their hilly terrain to a centralised data centre.

and deer, disturbances to the habitat from poachers and grazers and animal mortality. Once a GPS log is generated and details of the area patrolled are known it is easier to identify vulnerable points where intensive patrolling needs to be done.

The patrol logs filed by these unsung heroes aid in future planning and go a long way in managing

tiger reserves. The data collected for six months indicate whether the tiger reserve has a prey base to support a large population.

"One of the startling revelations of Project Huli is the tremendous innate knowledge and natural history skills of these watchers," says Raj.

Solar lighting for forest rest-houses in the interior, solar walkie-talkie chargers capable of charging multiple cell phones along with walkie-talkies have been provided. The field level frontline staff know how to use camera trapping. In fact, camera trapping results have enthused forest watchers because the technology enables them to see the tigers in their jurisdiction rather than analyse the indirect signs they encounter in the course of their daily duties.

The success of Project Huli's pilot in the BRT Tiger Reserve has encouraged the Forest Department to extend it to all its Tiger Reserves – Nagerhole, Dandeli, Anshi, Bhadra and Bandipur. The Information and Communication Technology Cell of the Karnataka Forest Department will act as coordinator.

A second programme, Project Aane (Elephant), is at the drawing board stage. It is being designed to mitigate the problems that forest department officials face in dealing with elephant intrusions and rampant forest fires. There are plans to place transmitters along every 200 meters of fencing that separates forests from agricultural land. Whenever an elephant intrudes into agricultural land, the transmitter will send an SMS to the nearest forest camp.

Wildlife photography and filmmaking have also contributed to conservation and proved especially useful for campaigns. "Well-researched wildlife documentaries help people appreciate and understand nature and thereby create empathy. Good wildlife photographs play a similar role, especially when pictures are properly captioned to provide insights into the subject of the picture," says Shekar Dattatri, a well-known wildlife documentary filmmaker.

He feels conservation photography goes beyond capturing natural beauty. Its purpose is to highlight the destruction of nature to bring about change. Some of Dattatri's wildlife documentaries have played this role. *Mindless Mining*, his short film on the impacts of iron ore mining on a precious evergreen forest and natural grassland habitat was used by conservation NGOs in Karnataka to put a stop to mining. The film was also submitted as evidence in a PIL filed before the Supreme Court and ended a public sector iron ore mining operation in Kudremukh.

A short audiovisual on Narcondam Island in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was used by the conservation portal www.conservationindia.org in a campaign to stop devastating construction on this tiny and fragile island and protect the rare Narcondam hornbill. Since few people have seen Narcondam or know anything about it, the film was meant to be an eye-opener.

"In some recent instances photographs have created a huge impact. For example, shocking pictures of tens of thousands of Amur falcons being trapped and killed for food in Nagaland exposed this horrendous trade to the world and initiated steps to end such slaughter. Other films like *Silent Valley* or *The Truth about Tigers* were primarily meant to provide well-researched facts in an interesting manner to people," says Dattatri. ■

SPECIAL REPORT No solutions to issues of river Panel on Ganga blurs the facts, has

Himanshu Thakkar
New Delhi

AN Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG) has submitted a report hugely in favour of large hydropower projects in the Upper Ganga basin and the Ganga river, raising doubts about the impartiality of its deliberations.

The report is especially significant in the context of the recent devastation in Uttarakhand. It was submitted over a month ago to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), but it is yet to be placed in the public domain.

A detailed perusal of the report shows that the IMG has not done justice to its mandate of studying the impact of hydropower projects on the ecology of the Ganga.

The report has also not been endorsed by the three independent members of the IMG, of whom Dr Veer Bhadra Mishra sadly passed away during the working of the group. Rajendra Singh, the second member, has given a dissent note, not agreeing with the report in its totality. The 'alternative view' note from Sunita Narain, the third non-government member, is not much of an alternative and is not in the interest of the river, the people or the environment. However, the fact that none of the non-government members have endorsed the report speaks volumes about the credibility of the report.

The IMG was heavily loaded in favour of government officers, who comprised 10 out of the 15 members. So its independence was already in doubt from the time it was constituted.

The IMG has attempted to make 69, mostly large hydropower projects in the Upper Ganga basin, a fait accompli when only 17 of them are under operation and 14 are under construction. In many cases, the IMG has reached unscientific and unfounded conclusions. Some of the recommendations are also fundamentally contradictory. In many cases, the IMG has made statements and implied recommendations that are bad in law. In general, the report shows that the IMG has poor understanding of the science of rivers. Even where the IMG has sought to make some seemingly environment friendly recommendations, it is generally not serious about these recommendations.

A broad conclusion is inescapable that the IMG report (except the dissent note by Rajendra Singh) is largely an exercise in deception, with a pro-hydropower bias. While this note points out key negative aspects of the IMG report, the IMG report is not without some positive aspects.

The main terms of reference given to the IMG were to decide the quantum of environment flows for the Upper Ganga basin rivers, keeping in mind the IIT-R (Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee) and WII (Wildlife Institute of India) reports on cumulative impact assessment of the projects.



Back to back hydroprojects on rivers in the Upper Ganga Basin are not conducive to the health of rivers

The IIT-R report was flawed and the MoEF's Expert Appraisal Committee on River Valley Projects was critical of it. The WII report was better in some respects though it too suffered from basic infirmities.

The IMG was set up to go into these two reports (and any relevant papers) and decide on a course of action. But it was compromised at the outset given the track record of the majority of the IMG members. A further dilution of environment norms was inevitable.

Cancelled projects & HEPs on the Bhagirathi ESZ shown as under development: Shockingly, even projects like the Loharinag Pala, Pala Maneri and Bhairon Ghati that have been officially dropped are shown as under development by the IMG (see Annex VID of the IMG report)! In fact in Table 12 and 13, the IMG even calculates the reduction in power generation and increase in tariff at Loharinag Pala (among others) if the IMG

recommended e-flows are implemented! The 140 MW Karmoli HEP on the Bhagirathi, on a stretch that the MoEF has declared as an Eco Sensitive Zone, and on which the Union government has said no large hydro projects will be taken up, the IMG has actually suggested that the project can be taken up! The 50 MW Jadhganga project, very close to the Gangotri, is shown to be a project under development!

Wrong classification of projects as under construction: The IMG has divided the 69 hydropower projects in the Upper Ganga basin into four categories – Operating projects, under construction projects, under clearance projects and under development projects. It is here that the IMG has done its biggest manipulation by classifying a number of projects as under construction when they are not and cannot be under construction since they do not have statutory clearances. The IMG classification of projects under clearances is

ecology no vision



voir behind the dam has been counted as zero by the IMG. Moreover, the IMG has made no recommendation as to which of the projects need to be dropped (except a vague review of the projects in Annex VI-D) to achieve that magic figure of 60 per cent. This again shows how non-serious the IMG is, making this recommendation meaningless. The 'alternative approach' note by Sunita Narain says that 50-60 per cent of the river should be allowed to be destroyed by projects, without providing any basis for that figure. More shockingly, she has made no attempt to apply this principle to any of the projects at hand!

IMG double talk on distance criteria: The IMG has said that: "There is a clear need to ensure that adequate river length is available to meet societal needs and the river gets adequate time during its flow to regenerate itself" (emphasis added). This sounds good. But the IMG has shown no will or interest in ensuring that this happens. In fact, the IMG exposes its poor understanding on this matter when it says, "the distance between two hydro projects should generally be such as to ensure that over-crowding is avoided".

This is a funny word the IMG has used, not even bothering to define it. However, when it comes to implementation, dumping all these requirements, the IMG has justified zero distance between projects where the gradient is high. Now let us understand this: where the gradient is high, if the distance left between the projects is less,

will the time the river flows between projects be smaller or greater than if the gradient is low? Clearly, if the gradient is high, for the same distance, the river will have less time to travel than if the gradient were low. It is in fact the time of free flow that is a crucial driving parameter for the river to regenerate itself. This again exposes the poor understanding of IMG members about the science of rivers.

In the case of many projects where the distance of a free flowing river between projects is very little or nil and where construction has not started or has not progressed much, there is today scope for change. For example, in the case of the Vishnugad Pipalkoti (VP) HEP on the Alaknanda: the Full Reservoir Level of the VP-HEP is the same as the Tail Water Level of the upstream Tapovan Vishnugad HEP. This means that there is zero length of free flowing river between the projects. The VP-HEP does not have all the clearances and its construction has not started. Even for the upstream Tapovan Vishnugad HEP, the construction has not gone far enough and there is scope for change in both projects to ensure that there is sufficient length of free flowing river between the projects. The IMG should have recommended change in parameters in this and other such cases, but it has done no such thing. Even the 'alternative approach' note in Annexure XI has not bothered to recommend such changes even while recommending three to five km free flowing river between two projects.

The WII recommendation of dropping 24 HEPs rejected by IMG without any reason: The IMG notes that WII has recommended that 24 hydropower projects of 2608 MW installed capacity should be dropped in view of the high aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity. However, the IMG decides to dump this WII recommendation without assigning any reasons. Of the 24 projects that the WII report recommended to be dropped, the IMG has shown eight as under construction and four as "projects with EC/FC clearances". This is sheer manipulation, an attempt to make them a

Shockingly, even projects like the Loharinag Pala, Pala Maneri and Bhairon Ghati that have been officially dropped are shown as under development by the IMG.

equally problematic. The IMG and even the 'alternative view' by Sunita Narain says all these projects in the first three categories can go ahead without any change, except the e-flows recommendations. This shows the pro-hydropower bias of the IMG.

Manipulations about percentage length of the river that the projects can destroy: The IMG has recommended that "projects may be implemented so that not more than 60 per cent of the length (of the river) may be affected." There is no mention on what the basis or science behind that magic figure is. At the same time, the IMG has said that if all 69 projects were to be implemented then 81 per cent of the Bhagirathi and 65 per cent of the Alaknanda will be affected.

Firstly, these numbers are not correct if we take into account the full length of the reservoirs and the bypassed river lengths by the hydro projects. In many cases, the length of the submerged reser-

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Fragile zone order comes too late

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

MONTHS after a 100 km stretch of the Bhagirathi river from Gangotri to Uttarkashi was notified as ecologically fragile, floods and landslides in June caused widespread damage, flattening the holy town of Kedarnath. The notification had come much too late.

Environmentalists have been warning of a disaster. But for years now hydropower projects and unplanned urbanisation in the name of development have robbed the Ganga of the space to flow.

So, when the monsoon broke early and Uttarakhand received 360 mm of rain in 36 hours, rivers in the upper reaches of the Ganga like the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda went on the rampage, tearing down houses and bridges.

The venerable Prof. G.D. Agarwal has been pleading for years that the Bhagirathi should be allowed to flow freely for 135 km from the upper reaches of the Himalayas without being throttled by dams and canals. Environmentalists say release of water from the reservoirs of dams swelled floodwaters even further.

The notification of an eco-sensitive zone has been slow in coming because politicians, engineers and companies involved in dam construction as well as villagers living along the Bhagirathi have been opposing it.

"The recent devastation rationalises the eco-sensitive zone tag even more. It is essential since it prohibits haphazard development alongside rivers and calls for free flowing rivers, which means no dams and hydro-electric projects," says Ravi Chopra, director of People's Science Institute in Dehradun.

"This havoc is not a natural, but a human-made disaster," says Nitin Pandey, a paediatrician and coordinator of Citizens For Green Doon. "We have choked the natural flow of rivers here by relentless construction on riverbanks. Debris and sewage is

dumped. The rules for an eco-sensitive zone forbid this."

Interestingly, the decision to notify the stretch pitted the Centre against the state government though they both come under the Congress. The notification was issued on 18 December. The state government of Uttarakhand came to know of it only in April.

Thereafter, all hell broke loose with the Chief Minister, Vijay Bahuguna, accusing the Centre of keeping him in the dark. Such are the interests



A house inundated by the recent floods in Uttarkashi

involved that local politicians of all hues opposed the notification.

The notification was also opposed by 88 villages along this stretch of the river. As per the notification, 4,179.59 sq km on both banks of the Bhagirathi, will have restrictions on quarrying, commissioning of hydropower projects above 2 MW and construction of roads. Besides, there will be a blanket ban on felling of trees and setting up of factories to manufacture furniture.

Chief Minister Bahuguna is a vocal supporter of dams and hydroelectric projects. He has requested the Prime Minister to review the notification since the consent of the state government has not been

taken. Bahuguna has also met Union Minister for Environment and Forests, Jayanthi Natarajan, and urged the Centre to set up a high-powered committee to review the notification.

Bahuguna's concern is that road building and work on hydroelectric projects will stop. He is eager to revive three major power projects: 600 MW Loharinag Pala, 480 MW Pala Maneri and 380 MW Bhaironghati. Besides, a series of other projects including the 150 MW Karmoli and 50 MW Jadganga have also been scrapped on environmental and religious grounds. Altogether, hydroelectric projects with a capacity of over 1,743 MW will be affected by the notification.

"Hydropower projects of 1,743 MW capacity will be closed if the notification is implemented. This will cause a loss of ₹2,000 crores to the state. Mining, construction of hotels and resorts and land use conversion will be affected between Gaumukh and Uttarkashi," says Alok Kumar Jain, Chief Secretary.

The notification forbids construction in areas having a gradient of more than 20 degrees. Polythene will be banned. Tourism will be regulated in the notified area.

"The notification should be welcomed with an open heart. It is a landmark step for the protection

and rejuvenation of the only pristine stretch of the Ganga. It doesn't halt developmental activities in the region. It only calls for a responsible approach to development with the full participation of people, especially women, to secure their livelihood needs," says Chopra.

"The contractors and builders lobby is opposing the notification as it will affect their business. Building huge hotels will be forbidden. Only small hotels made with local material and architecture will be allowed. The notification forbids dumping of sewage into the river so the Ganga will be cleaner. All this will benefit locals," points out Nitin Pandey. ■

Continued from page 13

fait accompli. Strangely, the 'alternative approach' note in Annexure XI does not say anything about this manipulation and in fact says the projects in Annexure VI-B and VI-C can go ahead!

Non-serious recommendation about keeping six tributaries in pristine state: The IMG "recommends that six rivers, including Nayar, Bal Ganga, Rishi Ganga, Assi Ganga, Dhauri Ganga (upper reaches), Birahi Ganga and Bhyunder Ganga should be kept in pristine form." This sounds good, but turns out to be a joke, since firstly, if these rivers are to be kept in a pristine

state then the IMG should have asked for immediate stoppage of under construction projects and also time bound decommissioning of the operating projects on each of these rivers. Instead, at least five of the six rivers that the IMG claims it wants to stay in pristine state are no longer pristine! They have multiple projects, most of them under construction or yet to be developed and the IMG has said these projects can go ahead!

No attempt at assessment of social, religious, cultural needs: The IMG keeps talking about social, religious and cultural perspective and the needs of society from the river and so on. However, there

has been no elaboration of how all this is to be decided and who all are to be involved in the process. The IMG says that the Building Block method is the best one for arriving at environment flows, but without any basis concludes that it is not practicable!

However, on most positive aspects, while the IMG has been less than sincere, there is huge potential to take the environment flow movement forward. The MoEF and the NGBRA should take some positive aspects forward, while rejecting the report. ■

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VIJAY BAROT



Workers picking up a bountiful harvest of potatoes grown as ordered by companies

Potato boom in Deesa

Tanushree Gangopadhyay
Ahmedabad

DEESA, a border town near the river Banas in north Gujarat, is on its way to becoming the world capital of potatoes.

Multinational companies (MNCs) are vying with each other to entice Deesa farmers to grow the shapely potatoes they need for their premium French fries, chips and burgers. More than 20 companies, both Indian and foreign, have entered into potato contracts with farmers. Almost 50 per cent of potatoes grown here are bought by just one MNC.

"A large number of farmers prefer to grow the genetically modified (GM) varieties of potato to take advantage of this lucrative market," rue veteran farmers. As a result, the GM potato is practically wiping out the traditional table variety, say potato watchers.

McCain Foods (India) Pvt. Ltd., the major global giant in French fries and frozen foods, contracted 4,500 acres in Deesa from farmers who grew 50,000 metric tonnes of potatoes this year. The Canadian MNC, whose premier clients include McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken, plans to double production to 8,000 acres.

"Although China is the world's largest grower of potatoes, and we have a facility there, Deesa is our most favoured area of production," says Rajeev Chauhan, Plant Manager of McCain. The company's facility is located at Baliasan village near Mehsana, 106 km from Deesa.

McCain Foods entered the Indian market in 1998 and zeroed in on Deesa. French fries require potatoes of a particular shape and size. The potatoes are harvested in March following a gestation period of 120 to 150 days.

Shapody, Santana and Kennebec are the best vari-

eties for French fries. The potatoes are processed and kept in cold storage from May till November to inhibit the formation of sugar. The fries are then exported in refrigerated containers to South Africa, South America, West Asia, South-East Asia and other countries.

Pepsico, another major MNC famed for its Lay's chips, procures potatoes from Deesa. "We prefer the FC-3 variety for its stability with sugar, field potency, whiteness and, more importantly, its capacity to store," says Ravi Bhushan, Agro Manager. "We also purchase Koofry, Sinduri and Koofry Badshah, the famed varieties of Deesa. Their shelf life is three months and thereafter the sugar starts forming."

Bhushan says the company is training their supply chain to tackle fluctuations in temperature since it affects potatoes. He says Pepsico's purchase price this year was ₹10.50 per kg.

"Several disputes arise between farmers and the companies related primarily to the favoured size of the potato and its price," remarked a scientist of Deesa's Potato Research Institute.

Parle Foods, ITC and Balaji also source their potatoes from Deesa. Their price ranges between ₹7 and ₹10 per kg.

The Sardar Krushinagar Dantiwada Agriculture University's Potato Research Centre in Deesa provides professional extension services to farmers. Senior Research Officer Dr N.H. Patel says Deesa's dry, sunny climate with sandy loam soil is very conducive for potato cultivation. The average cost of cultivation per hectare is ₹1 lakh. Forty per cent of this cost is for seeds, the most important component.

The research centre sources seeds from the higher reaches of Himachal Pradesh. They have developed new varieties such as IPS 1,2,3 with a diame-

ter of 100 mms and less sugar. "The Deesa Single Row Potato (DSP) 7, 92, 11 are among the other species developed here," says Dr Patel. The process is very laborious. Around 800 germ plasms are bred at the centre.

Deesa grows 34 tonnes of potatoes per hectare, whereas 30 tonnes is the average in Gujarat. This year 35,000 hectares were cultivated which yielded around 2 crore bags (50 kg to a bag).

Strangely, one farmer living close to this GM potato boomtown has entered the Guinness Book of World Records for growing the maximum amount of organic potatoes this year.

P.J. Chowdhary, a farmer from Dangia village nearby, grows 87 tonnes of organic potatoes per hectare in 120 days. His father, who died recently at 97, was very judicious about the crop. "I am grateful to all the companies and the Potato Research Centre for their help. But I get the price I demand. I can't cope with the companies whose prices are not enough for me," says Chowdhary, a former police officer who spreads his knowhow to other farmers.

Paresh Padhiyar, a progressive farmer whose family is called Deesa's 'Potato King', recalls that his father cultivated potatoes on the Banas riverbed from 1910 to 1980 until the riverbed dried. Padhiyar's family owns a cold storage of international standards in Deesa. But he continues to grow the traditional table variety of potato.

He says tie-ups with companies are not profitable as they pay only ₹10 per kg. "This way I have the freedom to sell at my own pace. Importantly, I don't have to maintain the size."

His son Kunal, an engineer, runs the cold storage. Ironically, McCain Foods is his only client. The government gave him a subsidy of ₹1 crore. The cold storage has a capacity of 20,000 tonnes. In its second year the facility today stores 5,000 tonnes.

In fact, Deesa has 250 such cold storage facilities, the largest number in Gujarat, says Ganpatbhai Kacchwa, President of the Gujarat Cold Storage Association.

Today, infrastructure like drip irrigation, cold storage and mechanization have improved the incomes of farmers. Their options have increased since they can form alliances with several potato processing companies. The competitive market has also created new jobs related to the farm sector.

But there is a downside. The potato market is highly speculative. Several criteria govern price. A good production year could be bad news for farmers. A glut in 2011 sent prices crashing and ruined small farmers dependent on just one crop.

Savjibhai and Amthabhai, two small farmers, say that in 2011 they were forced to sell their crops even as the price nosedived to ₹2 per kg from the rate of ₹7 a kg. "We were compelled to sell at a throwaway price. Money lenders breathed down our neck. We could ill afford their whopping interest rates," they say.

"Since we have broken even this year with prices hovering between ₹7 and ₹10 per kg we wouldn't want to recall that bad patch," say the two farmers. 2013 has been a good year for Deesa farmers. The reason is that potato production in UP and Punjab dwindled due to a wet patch. Cold storages in Deesa are full to the brim. Big farmers especially hope to reap a golden harvest. "We shall sell our potatoes at higher prices in November," says Chandukaka whose fields are brimming with *alu*. ■

PICTURES BY CHARKHA



Zahida Parveen lost her leg due to a landmine and can't go to her school which is 4 km away

CONFLICT ZONE

Curse of the landmine

Ashutosh Sharma
Poonch (J&K)

SITTING huddled in her mud house, Syeda Kouser, a student of Class 10, is trying to come to grips with a new heartbreaking reality. She is scribbling on a notebook with her left hand instead of her right one. A tragic victim of conflict, Syeda lost her right hand while fiddling unknowingly with an abandoned explosive device near her house.

The incident happened on July 2009 in her village, Batidhar, in the Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). A girl accompanying her lost her life. Syeda survived but had to undergo a below elbow amputation. "Old habits die hard. I am still struggling to carry out my daily chores with my left hand," says Syeda pensively.

Syeda received ₹70,000 as compensation from the government last year. Nevertheless, in Poonch—which is surrounded by the Line of Control (LoC) on three sides—many child victims of conflict are living a scarred life without support from the State and society.

Children disabled by landmines invariably belong to poverty stricken families living in conflict zones. "According to estimates in Rajouri and Poonch alone more than 100 children have been maimed and mutilated by border disturbances and militancy related violence in the last decade. Primarily, it is landmines which continue to target naïve children," observes Nazam Din Mir, a local activist. "Their present plight is a clear violation

of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children which is internationally binding."

Ashiq Hussain, 13, loved to play cricket in his village, Khardi Kardmara, near the LoC Trade Centre. But in June 2011, his life changed irrevocably. Ashiq was playfully rummaging through rubble in a stream near his house when he unwittingly detonated a stray landmine. Though he survived by a whisker, the blast blew off his hands and damaged his left eye completely.

"Every day I feel depressed when I realize that I am no longer like the others," he says in a choked voice. The pain of shattered dreams frequently surfaces in his conversation. "I have grown-up seeing Army men. I also wanted to be one of them."

His family had to borrow a huge sum of money for his medical treatment. Today, this destitute family is unable to pay back these debts as there has been no assistance from the government.

The sufferings of Ashiq's family are worsened by repeated official neglect. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the Union government's flagship programme for universalization of elementary education, does have provisions for paying special attention to disabled children. But it hasn't been of any help to Ashiq. As

per norms, there should be an alternative schooling facility within one km of every habitation but the reality is starkly different in this mountainous terrain.

Another amputee, Zahida Parveen, 14, of Jandrola village is enrolled in Class 10 but has stopped going to school. "It's impossible for me to walk down to school. We don't have roads and the school is four km from my home," says Zahida, helplessness writ large over her sombre face. On 22 June 2011, she unwittingly stepped on a landmine while grazing cattle.

The parents of these innocent victims, especially girls, are worried about their social reintegration. Zahida's mother, Misar Jaan, wails that the mine blast ruined her daughter's life.

Showkat Hussain, 12, of village Murrah was critically injured when militants attacked his family, killing two members some years ago. Showkat now walks

with a limp. His father, Mohammad Akram, a labourer says regretfully, "I don't have money for his specialized surgery." Akram himself is partially incapacitated since he was injured with a bullet during this attack.

Sudden shelling from the Pakistani side left several people injured in Dallan village in the evening of May 30, 2009. Shahnaaz Akhtar, 11, was among them. "Since her head injury was not properly treated at that time, her eyesight is fast deteriorating," says her mother, Noor Jahan, who lives with her maternal parents after their house got destroyed in the shelling.

NGOs do distribute relief material. But it isn't just an artificial limb, a cow or a goat, a sewing machine or token money in charity, that is required for people to lead a dignified life. The compensation amount from the Union government reaches the victim after years of bureaucratic hurdles. It provides only temporary relief and not permanent rehabilitation, say activists.

"The main compensation is given by the Ministry of Defence. The amount depends on the nature of disability of the survivor. Also, the government gives a monthly scholarship of ₹750 to children orphaned or disabled by the

conflict," says Dr. Zakir Hussain, District Social Welfare Officer.

"There is an urgent need for a permanent rehabilitation policy so that these children can ably meet the challenges of disability they will face in life," says Deputy Commissioner, Ajeet Kumar Sahu. "It has already been brought to the notice of the government." ■

(The article is part of a series on "Life in Conflict Zone" written under the National Media Fellowship instituted by the National Foundation for India)



Ashiq lost his hands and left eye

Tough task for ASHAs

Bharat Dogra
Kanpur

THE National Rural Healthcare Mission (NRHM) has created a huge cadre of women Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs). Their mandate is to reduce maternal and neo-natal mortality and ensure institutional childbirth. ASHAs work in villages and are a very useful link between village communities and the government health system.

But ASHAs are facing formidable hurdles. They lack training. Rural medical infrastructure is practically non-existent. Neither do these hardworking women ever get paid on time for their efforts. Slowly, they are losing respect among their communities.

"ASHAs have an important role to play and their potential can be increased with additional training to fill critical gaps," says Rakesh Pandey, coordinator of Shramik Bharti, a voluntary organisation which works in the Kanpur Dehat district of Uttar Pradesh.

Shivani Singh, who was closely associated with a recent training project says, "It was a very encouraging experience to work with ASHAs and see how their life-saving skills can be improved with carefully prepared training modules. It was even more heartwarming to see the dedicated work they put in to save the lives of mothers and newborns."

Rekha, an ASHA in Rasoolabad block of Kanpur

Dehat district who underwent training, won widespread praise when she worked very hard to save the life of a mother, Geeta, in Bilha village.

But, she says, ASHAs have to overcome many problems not of their own making. For one, ASHAs have not been provided any regular salary



ASHAs: They get no facilities in community health centres

or honorarium. Whatever little they earn is related to payments for specific contributions they are supposed to make. For example, when they take a mother for her childbirth to a community health centre, they get a payment plus transport expenses for a single childbirth.

Payments are invariably delayed. Rekha, another ASHA, says payment for institutional childbirth are made sooner or later. But other payments for which the signature of the ANM (Auxilliary Nurse

Midwife) is compulsory are uncertain. She says she has not received payments for over one year.

Pushpa, another ASHA of this village, is also credited with having saved the life of a mother, Shabnam, who was in critical condition. Pushpa says that she has almost given up hope of receiving voucher-based payments due to her for the last one year. This is very discouraging for ASHAs who work very hard, she says.

Another problem faced by several ASHAs is the lack of essential facilities for them in community health centres. Sometimes they arrive here late at night with a pregnant woman who needs urgent medical attention. The ASHA is very tired but there are no toilets or bathing facilities for her. This makes it very difficult for an ASHA to spend quality time in the community health centres. Some time ago, an ASHA even died due to excessive exposure to cold in Rasoolabad area.

Although the government is keen to increase institutional childbirths, rural medical facilities are very few in number. Health centres are often overcrowded and deficient in life-saving medical facilities.

ASHAs have to face the flak for the government's failures. The pregnant woman's relatives complain bitterly. They ask her, "Why have you brought us

to such a government-run health centre? You promised we will get good care, but no one is attending to our needs." The ASHA's credibility and reputation in her village are at stake.

As a result, ASHAs are beginning to find it difficult to work among their communities. Sometimes even their working area is not demarcated properly, leading to confusion. The acronym ASHA denotes hope and optimism, but they have good reason to feel a lot of *nirasha* or pessimism. ■

SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



Young leaders and their passion

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

SHARIQ is from Lucknow. His initiative, Safe Safar, works closely with autorickshaw drivers to ensure that the city's public transport is secure and equitable. Shariq crusades for safe transport for women.

Bappaditya Mukherjee is from Kolkata. His campaign, Prantakatha, organises leadership building classes for underprivileged youth in the districts of West Bengal and enables them to make their voices heard.

SHREYANJANA BHATTACHERJEE



Hejang Misao: healing hand in Manipur

Hejang Misao comes from Manipur. He is the founder of InSIDE NE, a group that uses the exuberance of music and sport to prevent youth in the northeast from joining militant groups.

Shariq, Bappaditya and Hejang were three out of 22 youth leaders who were brought together by Commutiny – The Youth Collective (CYC) and Pravah to share their work and ideas at the Annual Change Looms Public Recognition Event in New Delhi on 14 June.

CYC and Pravah offer annual fellowships to youth leaders with great ideas. A jury panel selects 15 leaders from all over India after going through a whole lot of applications. Fellows get national recognition and handholding. Each fellow is assigned a mentor who helps him or her build

capacity and raise funds.

To have an impact a campaign requires systems, smart thinking, good teamwork, facilitation and an insightful perspective on youth. Change Looms focuses on all these areas and more.

Anupam Sircar of Prantakatha and Bappaditya Mukherjee of Prantakatha both said their interaction with the Change Looms team was a learning journey. "I learnt to look at life with a new perspective. I made new friends with whom I shared my deepest thoughts and feelings," said Anupam.

"If I hadn't experienced Change Looms and seen the wonderful work done by applicants from all over the country, I might have given up on my campaign," remarked Bappaditya.

His campaign, Prantakatha (voice of the marginalised) helps the young to create their own social change initiative. Then it builds synergy among them so that as a collective they can raise their voice on issues that affect the marginalised. Prantakatha has 500 volunteers who rescue and rehabilitate children who have been trafficked and participates in anti-trafficking programmes.

Shariq's Safe Sahar has worked with auto-rickshaw drivers for around two years. With an outreach of over 5,000 drivers, his campaign has already trained 350 drivers, sensitizing them on gender equality and women's safety. "We are happy to see that auto-rickshaw drivers themselves take firm action against eve-teasers making Lucknow safer for women," says Shariq. Safe Safar plans to buy 10 auto-rickshaws and place them on the streets of Lucknow with gender sensitive auto-rickshaw drivers.

Hejang Misao of InSIDE NE (Integrated Social & Institutional Development for Empowerment, Northeast), tries assiduously to mainstream youth in Manipur. Hejang has been working since 2006 but got his group registered only in February this year. "Given the political scenario, the young easily get misguided into taking up arms, creating chaos and disrupting peace," says Hejang. He decided to reverse this scenario.

InSIDE NE organises music concerts, sports and cultural events for youth. Hejang is the lead vocalist and guitarist of his own band. When young people perform in front of a crowd it gives them confidence, he says. "We have seen how the confidence of youth grows when they perform in front of a crowd and win accolades for their talent. Many of our best football players are now established players in national football clubs," he says. InSIDE NE provides skill-training classes to the youth so that they can find employment.

John Phangcho of Peace Team promotes communal harmony in the Diphu district of Assam. He holds public meetings and workshops. "We have worked with a wide spectrum of communities. The people respond well to our initiatives. I am happy to say that we have brought about peace and harmony in at least 65 per cent of the communities we work with," says John. ■

'Delhi needs

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

THE Primary Census Abstract 2011, recently released, states that the sex ratio in Delhi has improved marginally. In 2001, the city recorded a sex ratio of 821 women per 1,000 men. In 2011, this figure rose to 868 women. In the past decade, Delhi's female population grew by 24.9 per cent whereas the male population rose by 18.1 per cent.

Are campaigns by the Delhi government and NGOs having any impact? Ranjana Kumari, Director of the Centre for Social Research (CSR), an NGO in Delhi, agrees that the city has a long way to go. Neither families nor medical practitioners are still fully aware of the law against female foeticide, she says. Delhi has become notorious for crimes against women.

CSR's 'Meri Shakti Meri Beti' campaign, run with support from the German Embassy, has been trying since the past five years to spread awareness among citizens about the importance of the girl child. The campaign appeals to parents to shun selective abortion and be more gender sensitive.

Ranjana Kumari spoke to *Civil Society* about Delhi's skewed sex ratio and what could be done to improve it.

What is the main reason behind Delhi's lopsided sex ratio?

Low sex ratios are mostly found in educated and affluent segments of Delhi's society. These families wish to retain their family lineage as well as their wealth. Somehow they have this idea that it is only possible through a boy child. Therefore, selective abortion takes place. The issues of more security and dowry are just an excuse.

NFFPFW now

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW) announced that it had become a union at a conference held in Odisha from 3 to 5 June. It will now be known as the All India Union of Forest Working People (AIUFWP). Jarjum Ete is the union's president. Its general secretary continues to be Ashok Chowdhury and vice-president, Sanjay Garg.

At the conference, Jarjum Ete emphasised the need to ensure tribals and other traditional forest dwellers get their rights as laid down by the Forest Rights Act of 2006. In his speech, Ashok Chowdhury said it was essential for the union to build alliances with other marginalised people dependant on natural resources and industrial contract workers.

6th Urban Mobility India Conference-cum-Exhibition

The event promoted by Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India will be held from December 3rd – 6th, 2013 at Manekshaw Center, Dhaula Kuan, Delhi. (India). Further details may be obtained from the Executive Secretary, Institute of Urban Transport (Shri C.L. Kaul):

Tel: 011-65020106/07 and 66578730/40
Fax: 011-66578733/44

E-mail: umi13@iutindia.org; and
You may also visit the Conference website: www.urbanmobilityindia.in

mass campaign for girls'

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Ranjana Kumari: 'Dowry and security issues are just an excuse.'

What are the solutions?

The most effective solution would be to implement the PCPNDT (Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostics Techniques) Act. Today, there is easy access to medical technologies, especially in cities, which facilitate sex determination. There has to be a control on the use of these technologies. Secondly, a mass awareness campaign must be run to make families understand the true value of a girl child. Women should be empowered with more control over property rights. A better level of education must be provided to girls, which would not only increase their employability, but also give them a major role in decision-making. The Delhi government has come up with a few effective action plans,

like the LADLI campaign, but we need more such campaigns to truly make a difference.

Why is the sex ratio not improving dramatically despite efforts by the government and the NGOs?

The NGOs have very limited resources and manpower. NGOs generally are a group of people, be it volunteers or core members, whose sole focus is on the cause. Governments, on the other hand, have the wherewithal to control a situation like this. The only reason why they fail is due to lack of governance. In our studies and visits, we have found that many of the doctors doing illegal abortions are not even aware of the law against it! When a medical practitioner himself doesn't know the law, it shows

a clear lack of implementation.

How far has your campaign been able to change attitudes?

Our campaign is in its fifth phase now. We have developed over the past five years, adding layers of understanding and expertise. We follow a three-level strategy.

In the first level, we work closely with the government. We work as a national inspection and monitoring team, identifying clinics which do sex determination and selective abortion. In the second level, we engage in dialogue with the authorities and official practitioners to achieve proper functioning of the law.

In the third level, we promote community awareness programmes all over Delhi, in schools, colleges, residential colonies, railway stations and everywhere else. We have helped in the formation of community groups like the Community Against Female Foeticide groups with the Resident Welfare Association (RWA) members of Karol Bagh, Vasant Kunj, Vasant Vihar, R.K. Puram, Greater Kailash, Dwarka, Preet Vihar and Rohini.

We also held Kanya Janam Mahotsavs in Karol Bagh, Central Delhi and other places, where fathers bring in their baby daughters, not older than six years of age, to celebrate their birth. It was so well received that at times fathers came to me and said, "You have opened our eyes."

What has been the response from the medical fraternity?

The problem with the medical fraternity is that there is a dearth of medical ethics among medical practitioners. To make more money, doctors are carrying out these illegal activities unabashedly.

What does your campaign plan to do now?

Right now, we are focused on working in Delhi. We plan to promote our cause through street plays in more areas and colleges and through posters pasted on public transport vehicles like auto-rickshaws. Imagine if no girl is born, how will civilization survive? We won't let that happen. I believe that society needs to show firm commitment to this cause. ■

a union, to build alliances with marginalised

Gautam Mody, secretary of the National Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) said in order to fight international capital the working class must unite under the red flag and enter into collective bargaining to 'challenge the imperialist forces backed by the Indian State.'

The AIUFWP resolved to build solidarity among forest working people by uniting Adivasi, Dalit and other marginalised groups. It committed itself to establishing community forest governance and cooperatives for minor forest produce. The AIUFWP will support social security for the unorganised sector, MGNREGA and minimum wages.

The conference in Odisha held discussions on three themes to draw up an immediate action plan for the union. The key points that emerged were:

First, women should be represented proportionately in the union. Union members will con-

duct meetings in villages to identify women leaders and inculcate them into the union. The women will take up development issues such as education, health, sanitation, water, violence against women and liquor.

The union will also fight against bonded labour, seek unemployment allowance for those who are not getting work and fight for the end of the contract system in all forestry work. The union will ensure workers get insurance, pension, education, health and social security. Tribals and Dalits who have cases lodged against them by the forest department will be given legal help. AIUFWP will demand at least 240 days of work for people.

The union will also lobby for the office of the labour commissioner to cater to forest areas. It will work for the development of forest areas so that forest villages have hospital, roads, schools, colleges, technical institutes and drinking water.

Scrapping of the provision that 75 years residential proof was essential for gaining rights under the Forest Rights Act has been a long standing demand of the former NFFPFW. This remains except for Tripura. Delegates from Tripura wanted the 75 years provision to stay otherwise they said non-tribals would take over forest land and minor forest produce.

The union is also opposed to companies getting leases on forest land for mining or any other activity. Afforestation of indigenous trees should be done by the community and the Green India Mission, joint forest management must be scrapped. Gram Sabha nod for projects was deemed as a must and displacement of people from sanctuaries was opposed.

The new union's icons are Birsa Munda, Karl Marx, Aiyankali, Bhagat Singh, Savitribai Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar. ■

MUSIC FOR THE STREETS

A NEW RHYTHM BEGINS IN MUMBAI

Michael Snyder
Mumbai

THE rains have started in Mumbai, leaving the ground wet, the air thick and the sky dim, but failing to slow the city's relentless pace. At 9 am on a Saturday, commuters still pour into Bandra railway station, a tiny fraction of the seven million passengers who ride the city's local trains each day.

Geet Anand has arrived under the Victorian-Gothic eaves of the station's Heritage Hall with a black plastic tube slung over his shoulder; inside, he carries a set of bamboo flutes in a variety of sizes, which he empties onto the covered ground near his feet in front of a pair of signs reading National Streets for Performing Arts (NSPA), a Mumbai-based NGO working to reintroduce musicians to the city's public spaces.

Watching Anand prepare, one wonders how such a small man on such a small instrument will have any effect in a space as large and bustling as Bandra station. But the moment he lifts his flute – playing in a classical mode learned in the hills of Madhya Pradesh – people stop: not many, and not all at once, but unmistakably. A few people standing on the platform back slowly toward the Heritage Hall to listen while waiting for their train to arrive. A woman in a pink salwar stops to film the music on her phone. A boy in a ratty Barcelona T-shirt stands just a few feet from Anand, frowning slightly, as if conducting an inspection.

At any given time, there might be people in a cluster under an archway, street kids gathered near the platform edge, passersby slowing down to glance over in surprise or pleasure or both. Save for a pair of shoeshine men who set up shop here, all the spectators are mobile, engaging for a brief while before moving on to continue their day. The audience is in flux, but Anand plays happily throughout. "I'm not concerned whether people stand and listen," he says. "The purpose of NSPA is to give peace and melody."

Later that afternoon, Byculla's Bhau Daji Lad Museum becomes the venue for another concert. The trees in the plaza behind the museum, gone brilliant green under the emerging afternoon sun, mostly block the traffic noise from the Lalbaug Flyover. Against the neo-classical backdrop of the museum, a small crowd of 40-odd people has gathered for another NSPA concert, this one of Uttaranjali folk and something called 'Kabir Rock'. Neeraj Arya and Nitesh More, the second act of the afternoon, sit in chairs facing an audience of families and well-off museum patrons. Seated in folded wooden chairs,



Commuters at Bandra railway station slow down as Geet Anand begins to play his flute

polite, attentive, still – this audience is something of a departure for NSPA musicians like Neeraj and Nitesh.

Though young and slight, Neeraj sings powerfully and intensely, hugging his guitar, as he juxtaposes Kabir's 15th century poetry with the musical idioms of western folk rock, accompanied by Nitesh – quiet, erect, alert – on the *djembe*, a west African drum. Behind Neeraj and Nitesh, where the museum's lawn backs onto the grounds of the zoo, another small crowd has gathered to listen. A group of workmen, having parked their bulldozer with a mechanical grunt, lean in against the gate as Neeraj sings about love and peace and equality of spirit in a centuries-old dialect just beyond understanding. Like railway audiences, the men behind the fence cycle in and out to listen to the music, as much out of curiosity as enjoyment.

The founder of NSPA, Ajit Dayal, initially conceived of the organisation as a mode for bringing music back to the streets of Mumbai while helping to support the livelihoods of musicians. When the organisation was launched in October 2012, it consisted of programme coordinators Shrishti Iyer and



Anisha George, both trained musicians, and a network of 11 musicians – mostly culled from their personal networks of friends and acquaintances – who played in three stations on the Western Railway line.

"In India, the attitude toward street performances is that it's akin to begging, so people have a mental block – particularly in railway stations," says George. "The first 11 musicians were mostly a young bunch who took a risk in terms of going against the mainstream notions and structures of music. Ever since then it's been quite organic."

In that time – just seven months – NSPA has grown via word of mouth to include 25 musicians performing in genres as diverse as Uttaranchalli folk, Carnatic and Hindustani classical, alternative rock and American folk in six railway stations

across Mumbai: Churchgate, CST, Dadar, Bandra, Borivali and Vashi.

By negotiating an agreement with the railways and providing musicians with a pay of ₹1,000 per performing hour, NSPA has begun to generate a new ecosystem for musicians in the city. "In a middle class family, there is pressure to become a doctor or engineer," says Neeraj, who moved to Mumbai from Delhi in order to work with NSPA. "Musicians are taking risks. But NSPA supports us, helps us to feel that we can do something as musicians."

Save for a pair of shoeshine men who set up shop all the spectators are mobile, engaging for a while before moving on to continue their day.

THE LURE OF MELODY; Among other things, NSPA's musicians have begun to reintroduce Mumbai's citizens to a mode of street performance that has, for the most part, faded from the city's crumbling pavements and disappearing gardens.

Among children and commuters at the station as among the workmen at the museum, perplexity is a common reaction.

From nine in the morning for two hours, the period set at Bandra, the three on-site coordinators, sporting yellow NSPA T-shirts and carrying pocket-sized foldout performance schedules, field constant questions from commuters passing by. At the pilot concert, held on 27 June of last year at Churchgate station, George says, "everyone was very curious, coming forward and asking 'Why are you doing this?' and 'What is the purpose?' and 'Who are you all?' and 'How long are you going to be doing this?' – the performers and the organisers were all bombarded with questions."

That first concert involved two 30-minute segments. "For the first half an hour we had someone doing Bob Dylan and Rolling Stones and Beatles songs in English, and for the last hour we had someone doing Uttaranchalli folk," remembers Dayal. "A Mumbai listener may not really know English or Dylan or Rolling Stones, and may not know Uttaranchalli folk, but people loved it. We knew we were onto something fun and exciting."

Seven months later, the questions have changed. Anthony Noronha, one of the event coordinators, says, "People more and more are asking for the specific musicians." According to Arvind Ekrupé, another of the performance coordinators, "There are people who follow the schedules now, who come to see particular musicians." After the museum concert, Neeraj and Iyer even joke that several of the musicians have received letters from admirers.

Questions, of course, are part of the point. "A lot of commuters have maybe never seen a violin or don't know what a *djembe* looks like. So, the idea is to have different kinds of musicians come and play," Iyer says.

"Our idea is to expose audiences to new art and thus give them a wide variety of musical genres from which they can develop new tastes," George agrees. "And a lot of the notions that we had in our heads about what kind of repertoire would suit what kind of station went for a toss when we actually got down to performances."

George recalls one musician performing original compositions in English in the early months who found his largest audience at Borivali station, where, as she puts it "most of the people did not understand what he was saying." Perhaps even more surprising was the Marathi folk singer whose largest audiences were Bihari labourers in Bandra. "The tension between Biharis and Marathis is extremely politicised in Mumbai," George says. "These guys wouldn't understand him, but he sang protest music and a lot of that would hark out to them, so he built a connection with them."

This is precisely the type of connection that has facilitated the organisation's growth. After those initial 11 performers, most of the musicians directly approached NSPA to inquire about auditioning, many of them after having seen performances in transit. "I was just passing through and heard a performance," says Anand, who works as an HR manager for a shipping firm.



Rock band Promise Land: Harmony at the frenetic Bandra railway station



Musicians from Uttaranchal: Suresh Singh singing with K.K. Singh

Anand performs on his flute only on Saturdays and sees performing with NSPA as being entirely about pleasure.

Dayal, who funded the musicians' salaries personally before Quantum Mutual Fund became the official corporate sponsor, imagined much the same thing when he first conceptualised the project. "You have a situation [in Mumbai] where commuters who use buses and trains really don't have any joy, so we said let's make people smile by at least giving them some music," Dayal says. "You have millions more people using trains and buses [than before] and you actually have many more kinds of music than 30 or 40 years ago. Yes, you've lost gardens, but you've got more railway stations, so we just said let's try to make this work."

TRACKS AND TUNES: The process of actually 'making it work' has devolved largely to George and Iyer, who together have developed a more comprehen-



Nitesh More and Neeraj Arya deliver Kabir Rock to a rapt audience at the Bhau Daji Lad Museum

sive mission for NSPA.

"NSPA has two primary goals," says George. "One is to bring art to the people and the current modus operandi is to reclaim public spaces to do so. The second is to support the livelihoods of musicians."

For a team working in a city as lacking in public space and as notoriously bogged down in bureaucracy as Mumbai, reclaiming public spaces is a complex procedure. Aside from offering crowds, the city's railway system also proved a more manageable starting point for the fledgling organisation than spaces that would require permissions from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). "The railways are a much more organised service. So, their bureaucracy is easier to navigate. They're much easier to approach and communicate with. The BMC is just humungous," explains George, whose previous work as an advocate for rural communities for the right to food, amply prepared her to work between a small non-profit and large government bodies.

While the railways proved easier than the BMC, managers there still needed convincing. According to Iyer and George, railway officials initially expressed concerns over security and additional confusion in already chaotic railway stations. The pilot performance at Churchgate last June was designed to address these concerns. Needless to say, the experiment succeeded once railway officials saw that "performances at the stations can actually help absorb some of the tension, can help calm some of the mad energy of these spaces," George says.

Having demonstrated the workability of the project in one of the city's busiest railway stations, NSPA began its scale-up, selecting stations based on their size and the availability of spaces adjacent to, but not disruptive of, commuter traffic. Having established successful morning and evening models on the Western Railway at Churchgate, Bandra and Borivali, NSPA added its Central Line sites at CST, Dadar and Vashi. Most recently, they have added a daily lunch performance in the Horniman

Circle Gardens, where, Iyer says, "you get mostly office workers from the banks who have come for a nap. It's a completely different audience."

Positive responses from all of these points have begun coming in, even if audiences only occasionally have time to stop and express their appreciation in person. Using social media and NSPA's website, audiences leave messages for specific musicians, inquiring about the initiative, and generally congratulating the team for work well done: "Great finding some fresh music in the city," writes an admirer. "Thank you for bringing back a little soul to Mumbai," says another.

On Facebook, a visitor expressed regret at not having time to stop to watch NSPA performers, while another posted six times consecutively, saying that hearing Pratyul Joshi was "juzz like finding oasis in a hot desert".

With the success at the railway stations established, George says, "We want to go to public spaces that are neglected and unused. At a larger level, we're part of a movement to reclaim public spaces in general." A new array of spaces will also allow NSPA to branch into other forms of the performing arts, introducing narrative arts like dance and theatre in locations more conducive to static audiences. "So our broad thought process when we began this about a year ago was that would need 90 musicians to cover much of Mumbai. As of today we've got about 30, so we've got a long way to go," says Dayal.

"And again," he continues. "This is only for Mumbai." The next stage in the programme's expansion will address the 'National' portion of its title by branching out to cities like Bangalore, Pune, Chennai, Hyderabad and Delhi. Though the initial goal had been to expand into new cities after the completion of one year, the team has remained flexible on timelines. "It will just sort of slowly take on a life of its own over time," Dayal says, "but we have to do it carefully, slowly to be sure we're doing it in the right way in every city."

'A lot of commuters may not have seen a violin or a *djembe*. So, the idea is to have different kinds of musicians come and play.'

TOUCH OF FAME: After the Bhau Daji Lad concert, it is time to return to Bandra to watch the final half



At Churchgate, Suresh Singh's Uttaranchali songs make people stop to listen



Neeraj strumming on his guitar



Tommy, the Churchgate dog, and two children with commuters watching Suresh Singh perform

hour of the evening performance by Mukund Ramaswamy and K. Dakshinamurthy, a Carnatic classical violinist and percussionist, respectively. Neeraj and Nitesh have come along. The rain has begun again, lightly, and the evening crowds disembarking from the northbound locals linger under the cover of the Heritage Hall to hear the pair play. The crowd is larger and more relaxed this time, standing closer to the musicians and smiling, one man lightly following the *taal* with drumming fingertips.

Sometimes, Mukund and Dakshinamurthy join with Neeraj and Nitesh to play Kabir songs. Together, these four represent an essential piece of the NSPA mission. "We have these meetings so the musicians get to hear each other. That's how collaborations happen. These four met through NSPA," Iyer

says. "They all come from separate traditions, but bring those to 15th century poetry in a way that is very contemporary."

Whatever other goals NSPA might have, the focus, in the end, is the musicians. Iyer's own Master of Fine Arts is in Bharatnatyam dance and 20 years of training in Indian classical dance and vocals makes her as much a performer as an organiser, though her responsibilities are more in respect to the latter. "NSPA's biggest assets are its performers," she says.

With institutional support to fund their work – however modestly – and to provide them with legitimate access to public spaces, these musicians have a greater reach and a sturdier platform for their work, whether they are full-time performers, students or professionals in other fields who perform as a hobby. With these musicians as its evangelists, NSPA hopes to spread public art across the city and finally withdraw.

"We hope that we're able to demonstrate this culture enough so that it begins to take organic root," says George. If successful, NSPA would have opened up the city to the possibilities of public art and created a robust culture of shared public life in an increasingly fragmented urban landscape.

NSPA will also measure its success through its musicians. A singer-songwriter, Pratyul Joshi, for

instance, was recently selected for nh7's Bandstand Revival Contest. "We start as facilitators," says Iyer, "but our musicians find bigger stages and better audiences until they don't need us anymore."

But it will be in combining these facets that NSPA has its most profound effect. "We'll help people reimagine art," George says.

In the meantime they will continue adapting to Mumbai's changing artistic and social topography. Their learning will be from experiences which are both organisational and at ground level – whether in the quiet of a museum or in the tumult of the railway station.

"A station audience is dynamic. Every 10 minutes the people change," Iyer says. "Every 10 minutes you have to reinvent yourself." ■

Business

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Growing up quicker with Marico

Akshaya Patra, Microspin and Yuva Parivartan to scale up

Michael Snyder
Mumbai

It's been 13 years since Akshaya Patra served its first meals to 1,500 students at five government schools across Bangalore. Since then, the organisation has become the world's largest midday meal programme, providing nutritious lunches for 1.5 million students across nine states last year.

Though Akshaya Patra has not yet attained its ambitious founding vision that "no child in India shall be deprived of education because of hunger", the organisation has demonstrated remarkable capacity for growth, increasing its reach 1,000 times in only 10 years. By 2020, Akshaya Patra hopes to reach fully 5 million children, and aspires to complete obsolescence by 2030 when, they hope, lack of food will no longer be an obstacle to education. Yet a simple question remains: how will they get there?

A new pilot expansion programme set to roll out in 2014 will disassemble the current centralised kitchens in favor of a 'hub-and-spoke' model. Where centralised kitchens require consistent all-night hours for employees, the new model will organise packaging and distribution from larger 'hub' kitchens, while 'spoke' facilities set up nearer to the communities they serve will allow employees to work more traditional morning hours and ensure that the meals delivered will be fresher.

Once the midday meal has been prepared, spoke kitchens will become available for rental to other organisations, thus serving as sources of



Akshaya Patra, the world's largest midday meal programme, will use a hub-and-spoke model to expand rapidly

revenue for Akshaya Patra. The hub-and-spoke model, says General Manager Vinay Kumar, should decrease costs and make it possible for Akshaya Patra to provide breakfast as well as midday meals. Each new hub-and-spoke module will also create around 250 jobs.

Since last year, the leadership team at Akshaya Patra has participated in the incubation programme sponsored by the Marico Innovation Foundation, which aims to accelerate growth for promising social enterprises. Founded a decade ago, the foundation has from the outset taken a unique approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), focusing on research and knowledge dissemination to foster a stronger and more transparent culture of innovation among

social enterprises.

"Most organisations are looking at CSR in terms of hardware," says Harsh Mariwala, the Chairman and Managing Director of Marico Ltd. "Ours is more catalytic – that is, we help others get results. We hope the impact is much bigger."

Teaming with the Bangalore-based consultancy, Innovation Alchemy, the foundation uses a system of market-led research and hands-on guidance to speed the scale-up process. In the course of the three-year partnership, the team has helped to accelerate five projects: two from the programme's inaugural year and three more beginning in 2012.

In May, representatives from the leadership

Continued on page 26



Parvathi Menon, CEO of Innovation Alchemy, talks with participants during the meeting

Continued from page 25

teams of those three projects – Yuva Parivartan, an employability and training programme for uneducated Indian youth; Microspin, a company that hopes to return value to cotton farmers through a small, manageable yarn spinning technology; and Akshaya Patra – gathered along with representatives from leading financial and business institutions at Marico Ltd's corporate offices in Mumbai to present their progress and plans.

"The next-stage requirements are twofold," says Parvathi Menon, founder and CEO of Innovation Alchemy. "One, they need organisational capacity building. Second is funding." The small conference room at Marico Ltd's corporate offices at the fringes of the Bandra Kurla Complex is filled with representatives from the three enterprises, from the foundation and Innovation Alchemy and from leading business and financial institutions. "Today's session was designed around getting these teams to see through that lens."

CLIMBING UP: One of the most innovative elements of the incubation programme is the diversity of projects it can accommodate. In their first year of collaboration, the foundation and Innovation Alchemy selected two projects for acceleration. The first, Waste Wise, came in as a non-profit dealing with waste management in Bangalore's Electronics City. After a year in the acceleration programme, the organisation had secured a private contract with the Electronics City Association to handle infrastructure and solid waste management.

The second project taken on in that first year was with Yuva Parivartan – an organisation that would continue working in the programme in 2012. The initial project helped Yuva Parivartan develop a model for expanding its employability training programme deeper into rural India with mobile camps. Roughly 80 per cent of Indians below 25, who constitute nearly half of the national population, lack formal schooling. With neither education nor skills, these young people have little chance of

advancing socio-economically.

"We started as a 'mom and pop' NGO with 100 students in 1998," recalls Kishor Kher, founder of Yuva Parivartan. "Last year we had 100,000, but I'm not very proud of that – we should have done a million." With the help of the acceleration programme, the Yuva Parivartan camps increased in size from 301 in 2011-12 to 1,310 in 2012-13. The number of students soared, increasing by almost 70,000 in the camps' first year of operations. With that kind of growth and the continued help of the foundation, Kher believes Yuva Parivartan can reach the one million mark within three years.

Now in its second year of the acceleration programme, Yuva Parivartan is looking to expand its model by developing partnerships with local NGOs, instituting a curriculum development team to carry those partnerships forward and creating a strong network of potential employers in the informal sector. With these systems in place, Yuva Parivartan hopes to expand its reach still further, not only providing much needed skill training for uneducated youth and connecting them with potential employers, but also fundamentally changing attitudes toward employment in underserved regions and communities.

Founded in 2009 under the aegis of the non-profit Fractal Foundation, Microspin – the youngest organisation in the acceleration programme – has developed a technology that will allow otherwise impoverished cotton farmers to oversee their own yarn spinning operations. The second largest industry in India after agriculture, textile production is – as Microspin founder and CEO Kannan Lakshminarayan points out – a highly diffuse and fractured industry. By devolving the spinning process back to the farmers themselves, Microspin aims to increase farmer revenues and alleviate poverty in an underserved population.

"This is not a spinning machine sitting in Madurai," Lakshminarayan says. "It brings the tools to cotton farmers and brings them up the value chain." It also, Lakshminarayan goes on to point out, decreases both carbon footprint and



Harsh Mariwala: 'We help others achieve results.'



Akshaya Patra's many vans deliver nutritious food to children in

costs. "We believe we can be the lowest-cost yarn producer on the market," he says.

Lakshminarayan's presentation perfectly illustrates the tools, techniques and stages of the Alchemize methodology. Beginning with the social problem that first generated the concept for his company, Lakshminarayan proceeded to the quantifiable results of field research and eventually to plans for scaling based on those results, scaling that would simultaneously increase the Microspin product's impact and profitability. The presentation, in short, traced the company's progression from an experimental non-profit start-up to a private limited company.

"We are not an early-stage model for projects with an idea or a concept. One of our beliefs is that innovation requires the ability to work in



ready to go here, or that are innovating at a level where they could," Menon explains.

The last round of workshops has resulted in 37 applications for the incubation programme, among which livelihood, clean tech and health-care projects are the most prevalent. From this set of 37 applications, the foundation plans to induct eight into its third acceleration group, more than doubling the team's portfolio.

Once projects have been taken on, the acceleration process begins with what Menon calls an "innovation diagnostic" to help identify the challenges preventing a major scale-up for the existing project. Second, core teams will identify insights

hopes to go from a one per cent market share this year to an ambitious 40 per cent in the next decade.

"We may have had a model, we may have had an idea and we probably would have been able to implement it on our own," Kher says of Yuva Parivartan. "But the acceleration programme has given us a more robust model than we would have been able to develop otherwise."

SYNERGY AND SCALE: "These organisations will not grow automatically," Mariwala said following the three group presentations, which form an essential part of the Alchemize methodology's collaborative last stage. "That's what hand-holding is for."

With Alchemize, the foundation's acceleration programme has not only produced new programmes at the cutting edge of development in India, but also quantifiable results for a set of practices that will, with luck, serve as a growth model for a diversity of other social enterprises and start-ups.

"I really want to create a robust, replicable methodology. My hope is, if we are able to demonstrate with 15 projects or 20 projects, then other projects will use it," Menon says. "You see, we really need to solve these problems in India in the next decade. We don't have another decade. Entrepreneurs learn from us. If the methodology works and demonstrates results, then people will use it."

By generating results and documentation, by facilitating a more in-depth understanding of the possibilities

inherent in socially conscious business and by putting those organisations in contact with one another, acceleration ultimately serves to create an ecosystem that is supportive of social enterprises, not just in terms of funding, but also in terms of sharing ideas and experience.

Here at the Marico offices, Kher has already begun asking questions about the employment needs for Akshaya Patra's new kitchens, while representatives from banks and companies have begun offering suggestions to Lakshminarayan on potential funding sources for Microspin's next stage. Organisations that began as relatively small efforts to ameliorate some of the many social ills that continue to plague modern India are now in a position to explore those efforts as large-scale remedies. By sitting in this room together, the leadership teams from these three organisations not only have an opportunity to forge useful bonds for future growth, but also to learn valuable and diverse lessons from each others' past experience.

"Real scale will happen when these programmes can talk to one another," Menon says. Here under bright fluorescent lights and the supportive watch of the Marico Innovation Foundation, that conversation has already begun. ■



Microspin has developed a technology that will allow otherwise impoverished cotton farmers to oversee their own yarn spinning operations.

via market-led research to develop a plan for overcoming those challenges. With these insights in place, the teams will develop and implement a prototype, and finally, having proven that prototype viable for scale, will quantify and document their work, and seek collaborators.

Alchemize also encourages groups to shift their mindsets while researching mechanisms for growth. Akshaya Patra, for instance, conducted its research across a variety of institutions, from the Auroville farms to McDonald's. By drawing on a variety of farming, processing and cooking models – including those from corporate, profit-minded companies – Akshaya Patra has generated a scheme that can increase quality and efficiency, lower costs and generate capital.

Microspin developed its new 1,600-spindle prototype after extensive market research on productivity and net costs for spinning machines of various sizes. The newest product, Lakshminarayan says, could produce net profits as high as 18 per cent. The next stage in the process is finding organisations to help fund farmers for purchasing the machinery itself, which Menon describes as "investing in the market to create market pull". With that pull, Lakshminarayan says his team

government schools

these spaces long-term," Menon says. "Good innovation is about execution. So these are all models that have been on the ground for a while – two or three years – and are now ready to scale."

Alchemize facilitates that scaling process through a series of specific steps, developed for flexibility and adaptability to the unique needs and challenges of different programmes. The process undertaken by the Marico Innovation Foundation and Innovation Alchemy as a team begins with a series of "Innovation Workshops for Social Enterprises". Following these workshops, leadership at the foundation and Innovation Alchemy analyse the participating organisations and invite the most advanced or promising to apply for the acceleration programme. "We're really picky about choosing organisations that are

Canon tries to get CSR focus right

Civil Society News
New Delhi

KYOSEI or the 'spirit of cooperation' has defined Canon's approach to doing business in diverse markets since the idea was postulated some 35 years ago by the company's president, Ryuzaburo Kaku.

In 1978, when Canon was exploring new horizons, Kaku realised that it was necessary to create shared value so as to build long-term acceptance of the company and its products. Under Kyosei, individuals and organisations work together for the common good. Kaku believed that when practised by a group of corporations, Kyosei could become a powerful force for social, political and economic transformation.

So, how has Canon implemented Kyosei in its Indian operations?

Kazutada Kobayashi, the CEO in India, says it is integral to business processes: "Kyosei is regardless of race, philosophy, religion – we harmoniously want to cope with living and working together in the world."

But priorities vary depending on geographies. For the purpose of defining its commitment to society in India, Canon has chosen three domains: education, environment and eye care.

The village of Ferozepur Namak, in the Mewat district of Haryana, was adopted last year. iCare, which is Canon's corporate social responsibility (CSR) wing, has partnered the UK-based Charities Aid Foundation to work in the village.

"Rather than assist public schools or high schools, we wanted to focus on children who are not going to school and help them get admission. In Ferozepur Namak, we put children in school," says Kobayashi.

Canon India has also set up a visual care centre in the village. Kobayashi explains, "Our products deal with vision – from cameras to photocopy machines. Eye care is a natural concern for us. We would like to make our contribution to helping people have better vision." In the past year, Canon has sponsored eye-screening camps across six states.

To create and maintain a green environment, Canon has developed green belts in front of Metro stations in Gurgaon by planting lines of picturesque green plants and trees.

Emphasizing the eco-friendly nature of Canon products, Kobayashi says, "Our R&D department



Kazutada Kobayashi: 'Over five or 10 years we will make a meaningful difference.'

in Tokyo has always kept in mind that whenever they design a new product, it should be environment friendly and low on energy consumption."

Canon uses eco-friendly bio plastics in the manufacture of all its products. It has also set up refurbishing factories in China, where old Canon copy machines are exported and are completely refurbished, ensuring that the products stay efficient and eco-safe.

"We generally get back 20-25 per cent of the old

'We would like to make our contribution to helping people have better vision,' says Kobayashi. Canon has sponsored eye-screening camps across six states.

machines from our customers. If the returned machines are in good condition, we refurbish it and use it internally, or at times rent them out to customers who need them as an emergency until the new machine arrives," says Kobayashi.

The philosophy of Kyosei envisages that an organisation must achieve absolute cooperation between the workers and the owners. "I want employees to feel like they are a part of the corporation through these activities, so that they can feel to be at one with our corporate philosophy." While the participation of the employees in these activities is completely voluntary, it is mandatory for senior management officials to visit the village of Ferozepur Namak once every quarter to assess and report on the progress there.

Kobayashi has served in Europe and other markets for Canon. The need for a company to be seen as caring and sensitive to the needs of all stakeholders is now universal. But the ways in which Canon expresses its social commitments do vary.

"The framework of CSR is no different, but the practice is unique. As far as I know, in other Asian countries, adopting an entire village is unheard of," he says.

Should Canon be doing more to use the technologies it develops to improve the lives of people? Should it be into skill building and

training? The company's CSR activities seem far removed from its core businesses and internal strengths. Canon's retinal scan cameras, which recognize eye diseases, have some bearing on public health, but nothing appears to have been done to leverage this. Canon India also doesn't seek to partner governments. But it looks forward to collaborations with other companies in social initiatives.

"If you look at things in a very short time frame, like half a year or one year, you may think the social changes brought forward by Canon are minimal. But over five or 10 years our CSR activities will deliver meaningful results," says Kobayashi, adding, "We want to stick to our activities for at least five years and then undertake a review. Secondly, we like to take advantage of our global networks – we are thinking of starting a project where a child from India can take a picture with the cameras we provide (in the village) and exchange that photo with one taken by a child in similar conditions in China. We are still looking for the best way to contribute to society through our private enterprises." ■

Insights

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CSR penance for sinful miners

Prompted by Shah Commission, a fund is set up

SUBIR ROY

PICTURES BY PRASANTA BISWAS

DURING April and May a succession of NGOs trouped before Justice M.B. Shah to make presentations about themselves and their work. This followed a dictate issued earlier by Justice Shah, investigating the extent of rule-breaking by iron ore mines in Odisha and elsewhere, that the miners must give back to society a small part of what they had taken from it, so as to atone for their past sins.

One of those proudly highlighting her work was 65-year-old Tulasi Munda, with bobbed gray hair, classical tribal features, exuding transparent sincerity and looking a bit like a latter day Sarojini Naidu. In western Orissa's iron ore rich Keonjhar district, she is synonymous with the Adivasi Vikash Samity which she founded 27 years ago.

"When Justice Shah asked what should be done, I said, where there is mining, there is no cultivation. So miners have to look after those affected by mining. Water, education, health, environment and agriculture are the areas where work needs doing. Even if mining is undertaken as per rules, with mechanisation what is there in mining for labour?" she asks.

"The Shah Commission has given us the responsibility to develop villages according to Gandhian ideals," she declares and goes on to deliver the lecture that all visitors must listen to on how Gandhiji's dream remains unfulfilled as the poor remain poor. Then on the present situation, she says, "except for the Tatas, who look after their own employees and do a bit for people in the area around their mines, the rest of the big companies have done little so far. CSR (corporate social responsibility) work will begin when mining resumes," that is, after the end to the large-scale closure of remiss mines ordered by the state government.

But Tulasi Munda apparently has a longish relationship with Thriveni Earth Movers which has in the last five years given her organisation over Rs one crore, she says. Thriveni's name appears first in the list of donors in the Adivasi Vikash Samity's



Tulasi Munda: 'Miners have to look after those affected by mining.'

annual report for 2011, followed by Jindal Steel and Power and Sesa Goa. Right now, next to the Samiti's compound in Barbil a large school building is coming up to expand the residential school for Adivasi children she already runs. Thriveni says it is going to spend ₹1.5 crores for the new building.

Established large iron ore miners in Keonjhar have been engaged in what has today come under the rubric of CSR for a decade now. What queered the pitch was the boom in international iron ore prices in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics in 2008 leading to the proliferation of illegal mining in India in the last decade in states like Karnataka, Goa and Orissa. In the eastern state there was a nexus between the mining mafia and politicians, with ready demand for ore from small sponge iron plants.

Within the general process of public interest lit-

igation (PIL) culminating in the Supreme Court issuing sweeping orders to stop mining till, under the gaze of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC), the rule-abiding miners are allowed to resume work, Odisha has followed a somewhat different script. It clamped down on illegal mining before the Supreme Court stepped in and has over the last several years put in place an elaborate set of rules to regulate mining. Today, the big challenge before the state government is the renewal of over 300 mining leases when only 59 have filed valid applications, says Deepak Mohanty, the state's director of mines.

In response to the commitment made before Justice Shah, over half a dozen mining interests – KJSA, Prashant Ahluwalia, Indrani Patnaik, D.R. Patnaik, Tarni Minerals, R P Sao, Sirajuddin & Co,

Continued on page 30



Thriveni has been running an academy that trains tribal youth in safety, security and disaster management



Expansion of a residential school is being financed

KMC and Thriveni – have just set up the Gramin Vikas Chaitanya Kendra (GVCK), a public trust with an initial corpus of Rs 101 crore. They will contribute to the trust at least one per cent of their annual sales which will come out of the two per cent of annual profits that are now mandated by government to be spent on CSR.

The trust will initially work in Keonjhar and Sundargarh districts as a sort of pilot and then, after getting its act right, will branch out to other districts. GVCK will be headed by retired Chief Justice Mukul Mudgal as its chairman-cum-managing trustee and its corpus will form a Focus Area Development Fund.

The presentations made before the Shah Commission by educationists, scientists, experts in healthcare, agriculture, water management, environment, skill development, sports and clean energy have helped identify an initial GVCK agenda along the following lines:

- Set up primary healthcare centres with mobile vans to deliver ambulatory services to those needing secondary or tertiary medical care.
- Dig bore wells for people across the focus area.
- Construct toilets in villages and hamlets, keeping in mind gender needs.
- Utilise sewage to generate biogas.
- Set up primary day boarding-cum-residential schools with provision for computer learning.
- Set up a graduate college each in Sundargarh and Keonjhar districts to offer degree courses in science, arts and computer technology.
- Clean up and beautify town centres.
- Facilitate the setting up of local village, neigh-

bourhood and community based committees to manage and maintain the above facilities keeping in mind the wishes of the local people.

- Promote a range of skills among the local people to help them raise their incomes through newer practices like bee keeping.

Imparting new skills to help local people earn a living in ways different from subsistence agriculture and collecting forest produce has been a concern of mining interests for some time now.

The Thriveni Industrial Security Academy gives shape to this approach. It is set in an idyllic location – a red earth clearing ringed by low densely wooded green hills. Corrugated iron barracks stand by the parade ground-cum-playing field which is dotted by obstacles that are the staple of any training ground for security forces. The academy trains local tribal teenagers with middle school education in safety, security and disaster management through a 45-day course, according to Colonel Sangram K. Mahapatra.

So far the two-year-old academy has trained nine batches of around 60 teenagers each. They have all been absorbed by Thriveni, with the exception of around 25 who have made it to the country's security forces. The teenagers get a stipend of ₹1,500 during their training and earn a pay of around ₹8,000 per month on joining Thriveni. The group has spent ₹5 crores to set up the academy and spends ₹13,500 to train each youngster.

The hope is that slowly other mining or business concerns will absorb these boys who will have a career in the security industry. The social goal is that for every boy who makes it through this academy, there will be one less potential recruit for extremist outfits and one more family pulled out of dire poverty.

Late last year Thriveni won an award from the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) for the CSR work it has done through the academy. It is in the process of getting accreditation from the Security Knowledge and Skill Development Council after which it will be able to offer degree courses.

Thriveni started off a little over a decade ago as

a mining contractor and now likes to describe itself as a total mining solutions provider, officially operating as a mine development and operations provider. Last year it earned a revenue of ₹760 crores. The company employs around 1,500 directly (a similar number is provided by contractors) and spent ₹2.3 crores on CSR.

Among the NGOs making presentations before the Shah Commission was Aditya Kumar Mohanty, of the RAWA Academy which runs the Adruta Children Home in Bhubaneswar and eight others in the state taking care of altogether 400 children.

There is a proposal from GVCK for the academy to set up a somewhat unique home in Keonjhar which will house both children and old people so that they can live together as in a family. What the children's home does now goes to the heart of taking care of the absolutely needy. It adopts girl babies who have been abandoned by their mothers who have been deserted by their husbands, or are otherwise destitute or unwed.

Mohanty, who is a retired professor of philosophy, tells harrowing tales of what they come across occasionally. Sometimes when they reach the spot on getting information they find that the baby has been partially eaten up by roving animals. Padmini was rescued when a cowherd saw a polythene bag being thrown by a motorcycle rider into the Brahmani river and discovered a baby in it. She was taken for dead when brought to the home but the doctors at the hospital where she was taken for a death certificate found her still alive. She remained in coma for 16 days and is now an intelligent four-year-old.

The home is heavily in debt and that very morning, Mohanty said, a bank had visited them and given a notice that it would sell the building housing the home to recover dues totaling ₹18 lakhs. "When we decide to do something (give shelter to a baby) we do it and then figure out where the money will come from. If you try to find the money first then rescue work will stop. The one limitation we have imposed on ourselves now is not to raise the number of inmates."

At least one place has been vacated by the first baby with whom the home started. Purnima Piyali is now grown up and has got married. As we speak one of the girls comes in excitedly and shows Mohanty an envelope just delivered by a courier which contains her passport. It has a 10-year US visa. She is one of a troupe of teenage girls from the home who will be travelling across the US, at the invitation of the Odisha Society of the Americas, performing the classical dance form Odissi. Other than formal education, great stress is laid on teaching the girls various forms of the performing arts.

A major proposal of GVCK is to set up a 150-bed super speciality hospital in the Joda-Barbil area of Keonjhar. During the presentations Justice Shah spoke to Dr Sugata Mitra in the United Kingdom through a video link. Dr Mitra, who has become internationally famous for his ideas of letting children learn by themselves with the help of computers, may guide the setting up of an education centre in Keonjhar.

The idea of GVCK "is indeed a good beginning," Justice Shah has said. Looking into the future, he has expressed the hope that "if this plan succeeds then it will benefit not just the people of Odisha, but also prove a benchmark for other states." ■

Blocks and barricades

KANCHI KOHLI

LET'S go to Junabander. You have to see what has become of it!" a colleague from Machimar Adhikar Sangharsh Sanghathan (MASS) remarked as we decided to take an evening detour to this traditional fishing harbour in the Mundra taluka of Kutch district in Gujarat. The last time I had gone there access to the sea was still unhindered even though manmade bunds had choked the creeks and blocked the flow of tidal waves which supported mangroves and artisanal fishing practices. But much more was in store for me that day.

As we approached the fishing harbour we confronted a guarded gate towering in front of us with emblems of assertion by the Adani group, the largest coal handling, port and power generation operation on the Mundra coast today. I wondered whether we were entering the company's premises or was this the route to the fishing harbour itself? It was a bit of both, I guess. While the company allows the fishing community to have regular access to their traditional fishing grounds, it seems to be a conditional favour. The previously unhindered entry and exit into these common fishing grounds was now through gates owned and controlled by the Adani group. These fishing commons have been barricaded forever.

As I left Junabander that day, I could not help think of the range of blocks and barricades that have begun to enclose India's present and future all in one go. My mind went back to 2008, when I witnessed the strength of the villagers of Jagatsinghpur in Odisha protesting against the setting up of the POSCO steel plant and port operations in the region. There were two kinds of obstructions that we could observe here. One, was the bamboo gate near Dthinkia village which the residents themselves had erected with a placard of the Posco Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS). This bamboo gate symbolised that the South Korean major POSCO would not be allowed to enter the area, an assertion which continues to be central to the movement against the company and the state government even today.

The other blockade which we witnessed was one which was going to be broken. In April 2008, villagers protesting against POSCO were determined to recapture lost ground by ending the four-month-old barricade put up by the administration at the end of November 2007. This had meant that for four months even essential supplies had been stopped from reaching people in the area, a phenomenon that protesting villages face even today in varying degrees. As I watched hundreds of people demolish these 'restrictions' what resonated in my mind was what one of the village leaders had vehemently told me the previous day. "The only barricade is ours", said the leader, referring to

the bamboo gate with PPSS' mark of rejecting the company's entry into the area.

The third block I encountered was when I was moving around in Himachal Pradesh trying to understand compliance and enforcement issues related to hydropower projects in the state. My colleague and I were on a motorcycle, enabling us to reach the remotest parts of the state where tunneling and extraction was taking place to make a

continues to be a critical issue.

What was more intriguing were the facts revealed to us by the guard and a few villagers at a local tea shop that day. The barricade was not human induced but a reaction to unthinking machine machoism. The huge Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) digging through Adit 2 of the Parbati II HEP at Sheelagarh had gotten stuck while burrowing through the fragile landscape.



Fishing communities find that their easy access to the sea is now blocked

dam 'possible'. Up at Sheelagarh, we could hear loud sounds almost like a landslide. We were not able to go inspect up, close and personal, as a feeble yet long piece of log with yet another guard manning it stopped us right there. It was certainly something that perturbed one's soul that day. We were acutely aware that for villagers in the area not being allowed access to forests they once openly accessed was and perhaps even till date

This was not just delaying construction of the dam for months but also enhancing the risk of pushing through an ecosystem which appeared to be restricting such a massive and transformative intervention. Ironically, the environmental assessment of the project had earlier disregarded the geological and ecological fragility of the region as being of any significant concern — thereby assuring a smooth mitigated ride for the dam building exercise.

In many ways each of these physical instances of enclosing, overcoming and challenging both human and environmental defenses also represent barriers of the mind. Why would the Adani group want to eventually engulf Junabander into its Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and keep existing occupants out of it? Does the consistent push for POSCO in Jagatsinghpur not represent a walled vision envisaging industrial expansion at all costs? And why don't episodes like Sheelagarh make us realise that nature cannot always be overcome?

How do we begin untangling mental blocks and barricades? ■

**As I left Junabander that day,
I could not help think of the
range of blocks and
barricades that have begun
to enclose India's present
and future.**

What young India does not want

ARJUN SHEKHAR

LAKSHMAN ANAND



Discussions on youth aspirations mostly reflect adult needs

YOUNG India has suddenly become the flavour of the decade. Everyone is talking of what the youth of this country wants. There is the debate on political representation where youth, 25 to 40 years old, constitute a paltry 6.3 per cent of the Lok Sabha. Also being discussed are plans of using the youth to achieve India's neoliberal ambitions. So the young are being feted like never before. Bestselling authors, commentators, governments and corporate mandarins are all shouting from the rooftop about what young India wants and should aspire for.

Having worked in the youth development sector for the last 20 years we have acquired an empathetic ear for youth voices. Our research has brought out one clear and common need that youth, across the board, seem to have.

The rest of the story of youth aspirations, we believe, is a projection of adult needs. Sure, gainful employment, climbing out of poverty and the India growth story are concerns for large sections of the youth but by portraying economic aspirations as the major pan-Indian youth need, policy makers are barking up the wrong wall.

Vocational training, as against a liberal arts education, is being seen as the mantra for empowering youth and taking advantage of the demographic dividend. The objective of the recently established National Skills Development Commission is to skill 150 million people in rural and urban India by 2022. The challenge has been taken up by the private sector with unprecedented gusto.

Before we come to what we feel is the most common desire of all Indian youth, let's understand

five things that young India certainly doesn't want.

Young people don't want adults pontificating on their behalf. They would much rather have their own voices heard. They don't want to be told what to do. Do you? I remember a discussion on youth policy in which the panelists ranged from their late thirties to their late sixties. After we had done our opinion sharing, a young man got up and announced to a packed hall. "What youth want is simple. We want adults to get out of our way. Why is there no young person in your panel? Why is the youth minister, supposedly our spokesperson, even older than the oldest among you?" At that time the honorable Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, M.S. Gill, had just attained the ripe age of 73.

Youngsters don't want rhetoric, like in the debates that are broadcast on TV where faces, some young, mostly old, slug it out. Youth, the new voters they are trying to swing, aren't arriving at their TV sets to see them. Increasingly, the Internet is becoming the channel of choice for young people to obtain news analysis.

Especially among urban middle-class youth, the Internet is vying with TV for eyeballs and appears to be winning. Between print and the Internet, there isn't even a contest anymore. Print is on the wane.

Young India doesn't want to become instruments for fulfilling adult agendas. They don't want to become a statistic in the 'march towards progress'. These societal agendas aimed at youth range from causes to consumerism, from patriotism to productivity, from medals to mutinies.

History is replete with examples of young people acting as foot soldiers for a cause. The starkest is

the recruitment of youth by extremists to fight for an ideological cause often in the name of wresting justice. There are villages in Odisha where no young males are left, since they have all been cajoled or coerced into the Maoist movement.

Also, consider the brainwashing done in the name of religion or other causes that make young people go against the basic evolutionary instinct of survival. The practice of suicide bombing, started by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the 1980s has only strengthened in the last two decades. We do not bat an eyelid any more at the news of another suicide bomber.

Youth don't want any more simplistic solutions that will become tomorrow's problems. Despite embracing capitalism for two decades, every third poor person is an Indian, one out of three illiterates is an Indian, the Gini coefficient has increased and the environmental conditions in the country are in steady decline. Policy makers owe it to young people who will be most affected by environmental decline, to think systemically of the interconnectedness of different elements of the whole system and work towards their alignment rather than shoot wastefully at individual causes.

Lastly, young people don't want identities thrust upon them by adults and tradition. They don't want caste, gender and religion to be rigid in a nation, they are told, is embracing modernity and globalization. It's confusing at best and life threatening at its worst. They routinely see love marriages on screen, yet in real life if they reach out for that freedom they face stiff resistance from elders.

So, is there any one thing that we can be sure all of young India really wants? Is there a quest that binds rich and poor youth from urban and rural areas?

We believe the answer lies in moving away from a social, context based viewing of youth concerns and donning a psychosocial lens. From our research, we have established that youth is a time of first impressions and of identity seeking. It is a time to experiment, a time for understanding the connection of the self to common spaces.

Policy makers, commentators, NGOs and other youth facilitators should develop youth for the sake of the youth. This youth centric development cannot be undertaken in reflective isolation and occurs best by allowing the young to *reflect* through small social change experiments in their neighborhood, city and country.

From our experience, we find youth flocking to undertake these inside-out leadership journeys from self to society and back. In a recent longitudinal impact study of our work we found that 50 per cent of these youth went on to join the development sector full time and 80 per cent became social change agents in their own spheres of action. As the Buddha said: "The foot feels the foot best when it hits the ground." ■ *Written by Arjun*

Shekhar on behalf of Pravah and Communitry - the Youth Collective.

Living

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World tucks into Lunchbox

Delectable debut film is flavour of the season

Saibal Chatterjee
Cannes/New Delhi

OF all the Indian films that were screened in Cannes this year, the standout was Ritesh Batra's debut feature, *The Lunchbox*.

The unpretentious but charming tale is an instant crowd-pleaser, and for all the right reasons.

Elegantly crafted, superbly acted and emotionally nuanced, *The Lunchbox* hinges on a platonic bond sparked between two loners when a home-made meal is delivered to the wrong address by one of Mumbai's otherwise famously efficient *dabbawalas*.

The film was part of the Semaine de la Critique (Critics' Week), a section that runs parallel to the main Cannes Film Festival. It received a standing ovation at each of its four screenings in Cannes.

The Lunchbox also went on to win the Grand Rail d'Or Viewers' Choice prize. This was the first award that a full-length Indian film has received in Cannes since Murali Nair's Malayalam-language *Marana Simhasanan* (Throne of Death) bagged the Camera d'Or (for the best first feature) way back in 1999.

While *Variety* described *The Lunchbox* as a film "that hits all the right taste buds", *The Hollywood Reporter* called it "a very Indian tale in its delicacy and humour". Given its innate crossover appeal, it is indeed one of the most significant directorial debuts in contemporary Indian cinema.

Batra is clearly a writer-director to watch. He has the right reference points and understands that one needs to be "local" in order to be "universal" like a Satyajit Ray or an Abbas Kiarostami.

The 34-year-old filmmaker told an American film industry magazine on the sidelines of the Critics Week: "What is mostly happening in India is that we are self-conscious and trying to be something we are not – such as trying to be Tarantino-esque.



Director Ritesh Batra



Irrfan Khan in a still from 'The Lunchbox'

Something original and organic comes after you invest in yourself and discover your voice."

The global hunger for *The Lunchbox* is reflected in the sales that it has generated. By the end of the 66th Cannes Film Festival, Match Factory, the Cologne-based international sales company representing the film, concluded distribution deals for virtually every major market in the world.

Sony Pictures Classics has picked up *The Lunchbox* for North America while Artificial Eye has acquired it for the UK. The film also has distributors in large swathes of Europe, in Australia/New Zealand and in Japan and Korea, besides many

other key territories.

The Lunchbox is being compared to Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding*, which not only won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 2001, but was also a certified global box office hit.

Batra's film has 'success story' written all over it. A heart-warming tale predicated on what is a near-improbability – a meal delivered to the wrong address by a Mumbai *dabbawala*, *The Lunchbox* is a sensitive study of loneliness and unrealised aspirations in a big city that has little time and patience for those that cannot keep pace with it.

In essence, the film is an exquisitely crafted love letter to Mumbai, a city the writer-director was born and raised in before he headed to New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.

"Mumbai," he has said, "has many cities within

Continued on page 34



Nimrat Kaur in 'The Lunchbox'



Irrfan Khan and Nawazuddin Siddiqui in a still from the film

it... The city keeps evolving but there is a core that doesn't change." While *The Lunchbox* projects a city that has grown and evolved rapidly, Batra's principal characters are sharply etched individuals who are enchantingly old world, who communicate through furtive handwritten notes in an era of emails, mobile messaging and social media.

"India was a very different place when I was growing up," the writer-director said in Cannes. "In 20 years, it is a completely different place."

It is in this markedly "different place" that Batra locates the love story at the core of *The Lunchbox*, but he infuses the tale with a deep sense of nostalgia for a time when neither food nor inter-personal communication was quite as fast as it is today.

The Lunchbox is the story of a woman, Ila (Nimrat Kaur), who, egged on by an elderly neighbour who lives upstairs (a lady we hear but never see), uses her culinary skills in a bid to wrest back the attention of her hopelessly negligent and dis-

tracted husband.

The lunch that she cooks ends up at the wrong office desk. The recipient is a weary, emotionally drained accountant, Saajan Fernandes (Irrfan Khan), a widower on the verge of superannuation, a man completely defeated by life and fate.

Figuring out that her lunchbox was mistakenly delivered to a complete stranger, the next morning Ila sends Saajan a note placed in an empty compartment of the *dabba*. The latter responds with a note marked by characteristic coldness.

But as the days pass and the lunchbox goes back and forth, the little notes become a means for the two to reach out to each other and reveal their inner selves, bit by bit, even though they do not meet.

For both Ila and Saajan, the brief epistles trigger suppressed dreams and raise hopes of an escape from the drudgery that they are trapped in.

The character of the reticent Saajan is contrasted with that of Aslam Shaikh (Nawazuddin Siddiqui),

a garrulous apprentice who the senior pro has to bring up to speed before he hands over charge. Shaikh is a true Mumbaikar, an orphan who has learnt to take the blows of life on his chin.

Besides Saajan's drab and functional office and Ila's modest middle-class home, the film plays out in crowded trains, buses and auto-rickshaws, and captures the hustle and bustle of the city in all its diversity. This isn't Bollywood's romanticised version of the western metropolis. It is the chaotic but untamable urban sprawl that its residents know and encounter on a daily basis in reality.

In Batra's film, Mumbai is a city where mishaps and miracles occur every day and nothing represents its urban dynamics quite as wonderfully as the 5000-odd *dabbawalas* who unfailingly feed millions of office-goers in the metropolitan maze

While *The Lunchbox* projects a city that has grown and evolved rapidly, Batra's principal characters are sharply etched individuals who are enchantingly old world.

come rain or shine.

Batra captures that spirit with an unfailing and unsentimental eye, and gives the real-life *dabbawalas* and their songs a central place in the screenplay. The story that *The Lunchbox* narrates is organic to Mumbai – it could not have happened anywhere else. But in terms of style, Batra adopts an approach that is highly sophisticated and restrained.

He is aided in his strategy by the fact that his cinematographer (Michael Simmonds) and editor (John Lyons) are American, while his sound designer (Michael Kaczmarek) and music composer (Max Richter) are German.

He eschews cinematic gimmicks and makes no concessions to audience expectations, letting the characters and the situations drive the narrative all the way through.

The Lunchbox germinated about six years ago, when Batra was planning a documentary on the lunch delivery men. He embedded himself with them for an entire week and went on the rounds. He saw them at work from close quarters and heard their stories.

The idea of a fiction film and the characters emerged from Batra's interactions with the *dabbawalas*, who shared their impressions of the people that they serve and the latter became the kernel of the fictional screenplay.

The Lunchbox is an international co-production in every sense of the term. Besides India's Guneet Monga of Sikhya Entertainment, Anurag Kashyap of AKFPL, DAR Motion Pictures and the National Film Development Corporation, it has been co-produced by France's ASAP Films, Germany's Rohfilm, and Lydia Dean Pilcher's Cine Mosaic, an American entity.

A global effort put *The Lunchbox* together. It seems the whole world is coming together again now that the film is ready to travel. ■

Hacra offers desert experience

Rakesh Agrawal
Hacra (Rajasthan)

HACRA, a village of 30-odd households some 80 km from Jodhpur, is a speck on the map just off the temple town of Osiyan in Thar Desert.

Thanks to a rural tourism venture conceived by a grassroots entrepreneur, Gemar Singh Bhati, Hacra is becoming a destination for travellers who seek more than just a few days of relaxed indulgence.

Bhati has developed a homestay here called Hacra Dhani, a 0.4 ha campus. It has three huts in a compound in which Bhati lives. Opposite this are four huts for 'guests'. These jhumpas are neat, circular, stone structures with jhhopas, sloping thatch roofs made of twigs and straw, bound by local fibre rope. Sparrows flit in and out.

Sand dunes, small millet fields and flocks of goats, cows and camels, besides birds and gazelles, complete the picture.

Tourists are made to feel like family. Hacra Dhani has no electricity or running water but the simple joys of village life and home-cooked food are plentiful.

A lantern above the bed is the only source of light and water has to be carried in buckets to the washrooms. But nothing detracts from what pure and pristine desert life has to offer.

Bhati is a self-made man. While studying in Jodhpur, he often wondered what it was that drew foreigners to Rajasthan. "I realised our culture and diversity attract them the most," he says.

But he had no interest in setting up a guesthouse or hotel in Jodhpur. "I wanted to remain attached to my soil and work for my community so that my entire village could benefit," says Bhati, who can converse in both English and French. He is also net savvy and uses his laptop and data card to stay in touch with the world, thanks to the solar panel that supplies power to his home.

Bhati started Hacra Dhani in 2001 with a couple of jhumpas when village tourism was unheard of. In 2008, Village Ways, a UK-based company that aims to make the villagers equal partners in tourism in India and Ethiopia, joined hands with him. "Only if people have a direct stake in the venture will it succeed," says Graham Edgeley of Village Ways, a rural development expert.

The venture is run by a Gram Paryatan Samiti (Village Tourism Committee). Its members are desert guides and artisans.

"We meet every month to discuss important issues and plan for the future," says Mohan Singh, president of the Samiti. The committee has 11 members, including four women.

"Our endeavour is to turn our guests into friends for life," says Mewa Kanwar, Bhati's wife and Samiti member. "The women cook with us in



Gemar Singh Bhati (right) standing outside his jhumpas

the kitchen and our children play with the younger guests." Meals here are typically bajra chapatis, lentils, onions and choorma made by the affable Mewa.

A German couple sums up the allure of the place. "I wanted to enjoy a slice of rural Rajasthan on our second trip to India. We're glad we came here," says Kathi from Heidelberg, Germany. Adds Gero, his female companion: "I became friends with Mewa. In a commercial hotel, it would be unthinkable."

Hacra Dhani is a community enterprise designed to better the lives of the villagers. "These two jhumpas are built on my land and the villagers also chipped in to provide construction material," says Bhati.

The guides earn ₹250 per day for their services. "As I have just 9 ha that is divided among five brothers, this additional income during the lean period sustains us," says Parbat Singh, a guide who got 15 days work from seven bookings in 2011-12 and for 23 days in 2012-13.

As the tourism season lasts for six months in the desert – from October to March – any additional income is welcome. "The bookings will surely increase in the years to come," says a confident Chain Singh, another guide who retired from the army to join hands with Bhati.

Bookings have increased over the past year, thanks to word of mouth. Bhati also gets compensation from Village Ways. "It is ₹1,600 per person per night," he informs. Part of this goes to the local camel owners.

"I earn quite a bit during the tourist season," says Inder Singh, who owns two camels and takes tourists on a camel safari.

Some village women, who cook local delicacies for tourists also have a direct stake in the venture. "Not only do we get paid for our work, we also sell milk, curd and ghee and food grains like bajra," says Nanhi Bai Vishnoi, also a Samiti member.

Hacra Dhani offers 10 different walks spread over five days. The community walk is the first. Hacra is a Rajput community, but also dominant are the Bishnois, famous for their love for wildlife.

The camel safari is a gentle excursion through scattered villages towards the main sand dunes. Villagers provide the camels and escort the guests, who travel in a traditional camel cart, stopping for a leisurely picnic lunch. Tourists can also take part in the nature and shrine walk. Other walks enable visitors to explore the desert and the farms and savour the sunset. Besides, one can also take a horse-ride to Ranakpur Jain Temple or visit the Osiyan Jain Temple. ■



FACT FILE

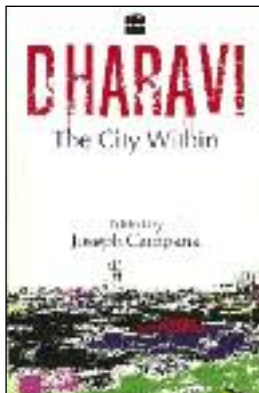
Hacra: It is 18 km from Osiyan, the nearest railway station, and 85 km from Jodhpur. The Delhi-Jaisalmer Express reaches Osiyan at 6:15 am in the morning.

Charges: Rs. 2,100 per person, per night, inclusive of stay, food, camel safari and transport to and from Osiyan.

Contact: Gemar Singh, 094-605-85154. Email: guidedesert@gmail.com, or visit: www.hacra.org

RANDOM SHELF HELP

A quick selection from the many books that turn up for review



**DHARAVI
THE CITY WITHIN**

Edited: Joseph
Campana

Harper Collins
₹ 399

THE Oscar-winning film, *Slumdog Millionaire*, catapulted Dharavi to fame. International celebs and writers descended on this two-km ramshackle stretch in Mumbai gingerly winding their way through its narrow lanes. A spate of books and films followed.

Well, here is another book. But this one is readable and realistic. It isn't preachy or densely academic. Journalists and urban planners – Jeb Brugman, Jerry Pinto, Kalpana Sharma, S. Hussain Zaidi and others – have each contributed a fine piece of writing to Joseph Campana's sprightly book.

Divided into four parts: Arrival, Work and Money, The Daily Grind and Timepass, and Fixing Dharavi, the book captures life in Dharavi from all angles. The picture that emerges is of a dynamic 'city system' within a city where migrants and locals have through sweat and toil raised families and built careers.

The government saw them as illegal squatters and did not provide them any amenities. So they built their own sparse civic system, described by the writers here.

Fetching water and accessing sanitation are major hurdles. All in all it's a tough life described with wry humour and compassion.

'Water Wars' by Freny Maneckshaw is insightful. Sameera Khan's piece on schooling is ironical. Every parent wants their child to learn English but the government only subsidises education in the vernacular.

There are also profiles of Dharavi's people: the late activist Waqar Khan's family, notorious gangster DK Rao, and the amazing story of how he rose from the dead, a Tamil poet with a fan following and a ragpicker woman who began from scratch when her godown was gutted. Also included are rags to riches stories: Sayeed Khan Bucklewala and Ghulam Waris of *Sapna Times* and the humbler achievements of potters and recyclers.

The original inhabitants of Dharavi were the Kolis, traditional fisherfolk. The piece on their perspective of Dharavi is a slice of contemporary history.

The latter part of the book analyses plans to redevelop Dharavi. Its strategic location near the Bandra-Kurla complex has made it the happy hunting ground of shady builders. The redevelopment plan, conjured by Mukesh Mehta, aims to turn Dharavi into an integrated township by reinstalling residents in tiny 300 square feet apartments and selling the freed up land for middle class housing. This overlooks Dharavi's organic growth. It isn't just a residential area but an industrial one too. So potters, tanners, home-based workers could be stuck in vertical slums with no work.

As the essays seem to state, Dharavi's residents want a better quality of life, especially *bijli*, *sadak* and *paani*. But there appears to be no surety of that happening. As for redevelopment, Dharavi has already developed itself as a high density, work-home model which could be spruced up with sensitive urban planning.

The problem is that the middle class and the government see Dharavi as the poor man's territory, a blot on the city. Nobody likes slums, including the people living in them. Slums are dirty because the municipality does not provide civic amenities. And low-cost housing isn't only for the poor.

Think of middle class students scouring the city for cheap paying guest accommodation, the youngster on his first job, the young couple starting life together, or a family whose incomes have gone awry. At some stage everybody needs low-cost housing. So Dharavi, like Mumbai, is for everybody. ■



**TEN
THE NEW
INDIAN POETS**

Selected &
Edited: Jayanta
Mahapatra &
Yuyutsu Sharma
Nirala
₹ 295

IN between music and literature there is poetry. This anthology doesn't disappoint. Ten of India's upcoming bards compose verses on feminism, romance, nature, freedom and rebellion. The diversity is breathtaking. Created by the revered duo of Jayanta Mahapatra and Yuyutsu Sharma, *Ten* is a pleasant read. Ranging from the autobiographical *Guitar* by Robin S Ngangom to the humble *Funeral Speech* by Kynpham Sing, *Ten* never provides one dull moment of reading. Rabindra K Swain's *Moths* has to be the pick of the lot. Written in response to the mass killing of tribals by the police at Bhubaneswar, *Moths* questions the system and sympathises with the downtrodden. ■

A frosty reality

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

23 WINTERS | 30 minutes

Directed by Rajesh S. Jala

Produced by The Elements

A real-life schizophrenic Kashmiri refugee, on a terrace in south Delhi, counts, "one, two, three, four...", as he chucks shards of shattered glass inches away from his feet. The camera tilts down to capture an indistinct reflection of the man's ill-kempt but expressive visage. His unfocussed eyes and his scruffy hair lays bare the febrile state of his mind. He is not all there. His is a skewered soul.

The man has been away from the land of his birth for over two decades. He still longs to return to the home he was forced to abandon in Bandipora amid threats of violence. He does

The world of

LIGHT SHADOW & ME | 50 minutes

Directed by Manohar S. Bisht

Produced by Films Division

FEW cameramen have had the kind of impact on the visual evolution of Indian cinema as V.K. Murthy. He is the only cinematographer ever to win the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, India's highest recognition for contribution to the film industry. The prize was conferred on him in 2010, almost 20 years after Murthy withdrew from the profession that made him an icon.

This 50-minute documentary, in which the legendary cinematographer (who is today 90 years old and lives in Bangalore) reminisces lucidly about his professional and personal life during his eventful Bombay years, is a heartfelt tribute to an illustrious career which coincided with the rise of Guru Dutt as a director and an actor.

Working with Guru Dutt on all his groundbreaking films, Mysore-born Murthy took black and white cinematography to its zenith in this country, achieving effects that became the benchmark for generations of Indian cinematographers.

Jailed during the Quit India movement,

DOCUMENTARIES

make it back but only to end up in a psychiatric ward in Srinagar.

That is the narrative crux of Rajesh S. Jala's profoundly moving 30-minute cinematic essay on the agony of deracination. However, the filmmaker informs the 'story' with so much more, both in terms of haunting imagery and historical context, that it becomes difficult to slot *23 Winters* in a generic category.

The protagonist's anguished face is a human canvas blemished irretrievably by years of emotional trauma, caused by forces too overpowering for him to comprehend and tame. As he lies listlessly on the terrace, a Radio Kashmir newsreader lists the day's happenings in the Valley: the gutting of an 11th century Sufi shrine, a plea by parents of disappeared youngsters for a government probe into hundreds of unmarked graves, a political uproar over a statement by a separatist leader...

23 Winters is a film in which the real and the scripted overlap as the central figure, Sushil Kumar Kaul alias Bota, sinks into hallucinatory depths as he lies on the bleak, damp rooftop, staring at the pale sky as an empty white polythene bag flutters in the wind.

Jala's camera captures little red ants, a crimson sky framed by a window, kites flying in the sky, an old transistor, and a carelessly strewn pair of



A still from *23 Winters*

slippers lying apart from each other while a disoriented Bota lolls around until a voice from downstairs reminds him that he has his medicines to take. He responds only after several insistent shouts.

A little later, a phone call from the Valley brings happy tidings: an invitation to visit Kashmir. It is a dream fulfilled for him, but Bota frets over whether his stay there has been properly arranged. He asks: "Will I be killed? Is there any danger?" Fear still stalks him.

Jala captures Bota's lingering doubts and misgivings entirely in visual terms and with the help of a Nida Fazli ghazal, *Garaj baras pyaasi*

dharti par (Oh thunder, rain on this parched earth), that the refugee recites haltingly. The poem becomes the leitmotif for the man's life.

Behind the dark and evocative images that Jala crafts is a story of human resilience against all odds. The poem that Bota intones wonders why "anybody should have enmity against another" and pleads, "let those who live know how to die in ease". And when he reaches Bandipora and visits his abandoned home, now in complete ruins, Bota not only breaks into the crumbling structure, he also makes it a point to pray at the neighbourhood temple. "This is my homeland. I want to stay in my home," Bota says.

In the final moments of the film, the screen goes blank for several seconds and we hear the protagonist's voice protesting that nothing is really wrong with him. Ask the doctor, he suggests in all innocence.

And as it rains and we see shots of abandoned houses, one is reminded of the words of the film's theme poem: "*do aur do hamesha chaar kahan hota hain/soch samajh waalon ko thodi naadaani de maula* (two and two do not always add up to four/oh lord, please bless the learned with some innocence)". That is, in essence, is actually a plea for sanity in a cleaved world. ■

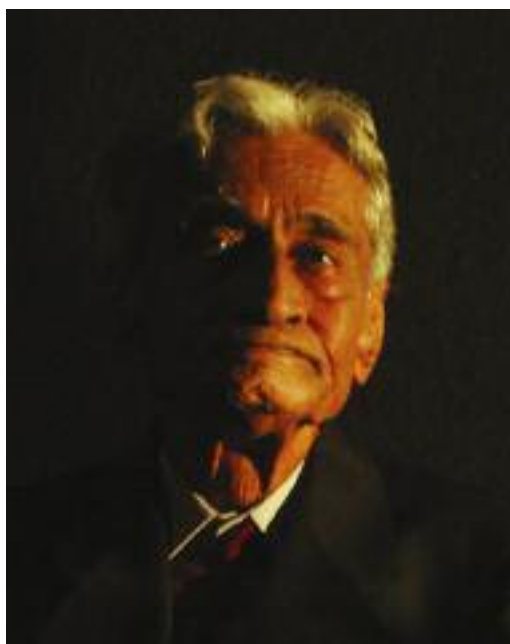
Murthy

Murthy was a trained violinist who, as he himself avers, might have become a musician had cinematography not weaned him away. His grounding in music, of course, came in handy when he composed his finest shots, several of which he and his associates/acolytes discuss at length in this film.

Murthy crafted the unforgettable visual texture of *Pyaasa*, *Kaagaz Ke Phool*, *Sahib Biwi Aur Ghulam*, *Chaudhvin Ka Chand* and *Aar-Paar*. As Shyam Benegal puts it, Guru Dutt and V.K. Murthy were "totally in sync with each other". Murthy could get into the director's vision and enhance it with his own unmatched artistry.

Waheeda Rehman and Amitabh Bachchan talk about their association with the great man, and about what they remember of his outstanding work. Bachchan is particularly eloquent when he alludes to the close-up of Waheeda in the *Yeh duniya agar mil bhi jaaye to kya hai* song in *Pyaasa* and describes it as the single most memorable close-up ever in Hindi cinema.

After Dutt's untimely death, Murthy found himself at a bit of a loose end but went on to shoot Kamal Amrohi's memorable *Pakeezah* and two of Doordarshan's greatest productions – his erstwhile assistant Govind Nihalani's adaptation of Bhishm Sahni's *Tamas* and Shyam Benegal's



V.K. Murthy: Iconic cinematographer

interpretation of Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India – Bharat Ek Khoj*, which, incidentally was shot on 35 mm film.

Murthy also shot several commercial Hindi films directed by Pramod Chakravarty – *Ziddi*, *Love in Tokyo*, *Naya Zamana*, *Jugnu* and *Nastik*. The last-named film starred Amitabh Bachchan, who, in the course of this documentary, admits that he and the rest of the industry (post-Guru Dutt) were unable to measure up to Murthy's

towering stature as a craftsman.

What emerges from *Light Shadow & Me* is the portrait of a man and a technician who was way ahead of his time. Two aspects of Murthy's personality come out in bold relief – on the one hand is a down to earth, amiable gentleman with an infectious sense of humour and on the other is the no-nonsense, meticulous craftsman constantly innovating with available technology and resources to light up the screen in startling ways.

Cinematography, as Murthy says in the interview, is both science and art. While the science is the same for everybody who handles a camera, the art depends entirely on the person who is interpreting it. The manner in which Murthy tapped the art of cinematography remains unparalleled to this day.

Nihalani points out that Murthy brought "modern cinematic aesthetics" into Hindi cinema and that he was "a master of the close-up". Others refer to the magnificence of his song picturisation – the documentary presents numerous examples to underscore that fact. Bachchan extols a Rehman-Meena Kumari number in *Sahib Biwi Aur Ghulam*, which was filmed entirely in "close-ups and mid shots" to capture the mood.

Murthy's career was littered with many such moments of sheer inspiration. For a documentary to capture all of it would be well-nigh impossible. *Light Shadow & Me* gets only as close to the essence as is humanly achievable. ■

'Light Shadow & Me' is available through Films Division, Ministry of I&B (email: publicity@filmsdivision.org)

PRODUCTS

BILAL BAHADUR

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A blob of pickle is an indispensable part of any Indian meal. It tickles the palate and is good for digestion. India has a rich tradition of pickle making. One of our most famous pickle makers is Ghulam Qadir Seeno from Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir.

Seeno's family has been making pickles for three decades. He has won accolades for his tasty pickles locally and globally. Seeno makes an amazing 110 varieties of pickles. "By the grace of the Almighty my pickles have earned the reputation of being the best in the market," he says.

Seeno rustles up pickles from a variety of vegetables like carrot, radish, lotus stem, garlic and ginger. He also prepares pickles from fruits like grapes, cherry, mango and lemon. His pickles made from chicken, fish and mutton are also very popular. "I am glad people relish my pickles," he says.

Today Seeno's pickles are exported to Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Germany, Italy and many other countries. The price of his pickles range from ₹100 to ₹500 per kg. Vegetable pickles cost ₹100 per kg, mutton pickle is priced at ₹500 and chicken and fish pickles are for ₹400 per kg.

Seeno also prepares a tikki masala of tasty spices which can perk up any meal. "Tikki masala is a big hit among people from all over India," says Seeno. ■



For orders contact Ghulam Qadir Seeno at 0194-2454786.

BILAL BAHADUR



Contact: Shakeel, Najar Saw Mills, Ali Jan Road, Saidapora-Eidgah, Srinagar (J&K) Phone: 09419017867

PRETTY WINDOW

TRADITIONAL homes in Kashmir are crafted with intricate woodwork. The art of Khatambandh, for instance, consists of carving a wooden ceiling in a home and is done by an experienced artisan.

Shakeel Ahmad Najar, a Khatambandh worker, was asked by the son of a former police officer to design Panjras for him. At first he refused. But his persistent customer asked him to go visit the famed Broadway Hotel at Srinagar and see a Panjra.

Panjras are intricate woodwork carved on windows and doors that add to the aesthetics of a house.

So Shakeel went to Broadway and saw the Panjra. It was love at first sight. He decided to quit Khatambandh work and take up Panjra work forever. Panjra work is once again regaining popularity in J&K.

"There is tremendous scope for Panjra work both in the private sector and the government. This artwork is very elegant," says Shakeel.

A team of Panjra artisans led by Shakeel has already carved beautiful Panjras in different shrines in Batmaloo, Khankah-i-Moulla and Fateh Kadal in J&K.

Shakeel has also carved an eye catching Panjra for the Mumbai International Airport. He has made 18 panels, eight feet by four feet, to pretty up the airport.

People are already placing orders for Panjras of different designs with Shakeel and he is happily fulfilling their orders. Shakeel says that 75 per cent of his clients see Panjras as part of interior design. He says that people wait patiently for him to finish making Panjras for them. After all, this is craftsmanship at its best. ■

Products identified by Jehangir Rashid