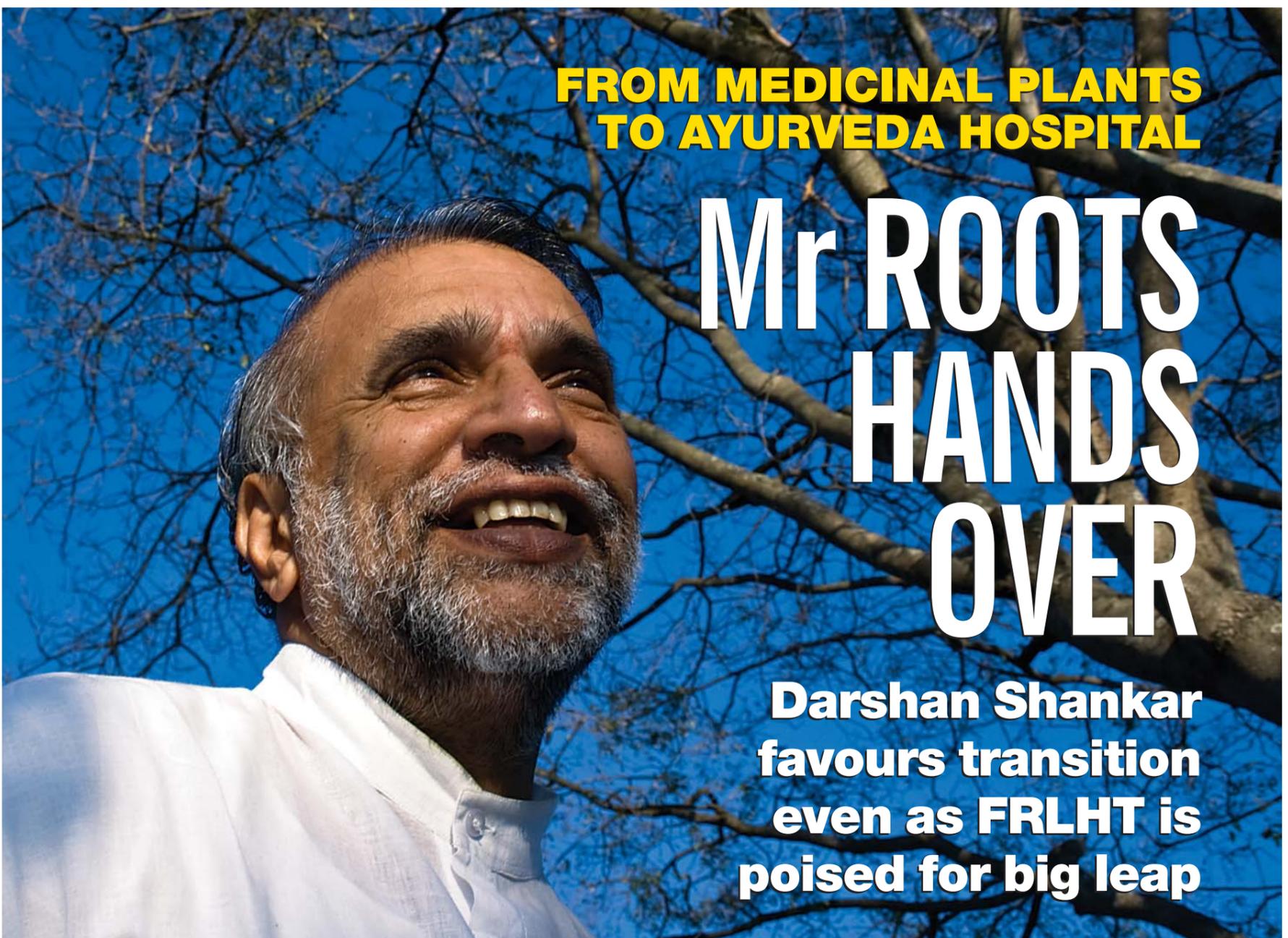


Civil Society



**'WORRY
ABOUT
PUBLIC
TRANSPORT
NOT THE
NANO'**

Pages 6-7

SCHOOL FOR BRICK KILN CHILDREN *Page 9*

VILLAGES DISCOVER COMPUTERJI *Page 25*

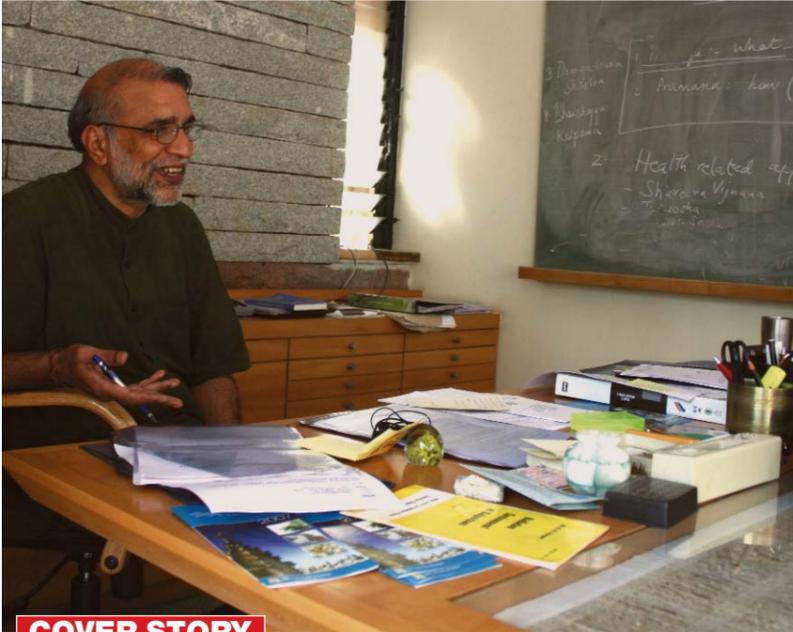
THE DARK SIDE OF PE FUNDS *Page 31*

GREEN CURES FOR AILMENTS *Page 36*

CONTENTS

CIVIL SOCIETY February 2008

3

**COVER STORY****Mr ROOTS HANDS OVER**

Darshan Shankar favours transition even as FRLHT is poised for a big leap. It now has a modern Ayurveda hospital, gleaming labs, a herbarium, an ethno medicinal garden...

18

Cover photograph by LAKSHMAN ANAND

No transport plan for Gurgaon?	7
Little cash saves pregnant women	8
Nomads want to settle down	10
Kriti's film club	12
Discovering life at menopause	13
Many surprises in river rebirth	14-15
Standing up for those who can't	16
Shubha Mudgal's music venture	27
Bangladesh's fearless Begum	29
Red light for traffickers	33
Rare rice attracts farm tourists	35
Your karma is your destiny	36

Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Learning to move on

SUCCESSION is always a tricky thing to handle. The perception is that we Indians are not good at it and that we have little respect for organisational structures, shy away from accountability, get too emotional and so on and so forth. This may or may not be true about us as a people as a whole. But there is no escaping the fact that in India succession does not happen effortlessly, be it in the corporate sector or among NGOs. Organisations tend to revolve around individuals and as time passes they mirror their predilections, power equations and social networks.

Now, to be fair, it is just human to want to hang on if the going is good. But if organisations are created for bigger goals than individual ambitions, the challenge is to structure them so that the mantle passes — at all levels. How much can one do for a cause or a brand or a business after a point? Others are needed to bring in new energy and refresh the sense of purpose — especially so when public money is involved.

We felt it would be a good idea to showcase Darshan Shankar's decision to give up the directorship of the Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) for precisely the reason that he is at the acme of his success. He does not need to hand over 15 years of hard work just when everything he has strived for is falling in place. FRLHT is poised for great things.

But Darshan seems to have prepared meticulously for his departure. A team of secure and efficient professionals is in place. They are equipped to take FRLHT forward. Darshan's successor, DK Ved, also comes from within. He has the confidence of the others and a commitment to FRLHT's future. Even more interesting is the transition plan document being prepared by KRS Murthy, former director of IIM Bangalore, on the organisation and the course that it can take. Darshan will continue in an advisory role because he has been key to raising funds and promoting FRLHT. But about the succession there will be no doubt.

FRLHT is a rare organisation in the social sector. A mere idea 15 years ago, it has gone from conserving medicinal plants in the wild to setting up a modern Ayurveda hospital, a laboratory, a crucial herbarium and has been instrumental in influencing national policy on traditional medicine. It is ready for market linkages that will make it self-sustaining.

When I first met Darshan in the nineties, FRLHT was in some kind of city office in Bangalore, a flat if I remember right. Now it has a five-acre campus and huge pool of talent. One thing, however, has not changed: the passion with which Darshan told me about his cause at that first two-hour meeting. At 56, he is much older, but just as intense. What a wonderful way to step down.

Publisher

Umesh Anand

Editor

Rita Anand

Editorial Team

Riaz Quadir
Vidya Viswanathan
Rina Mukherji
Rakesh Agarwal
Shuktara Lal
Bidisha Srivastava

Contributors

Ram Gidoomal
Arun Maira
Milindo Chakrabarti

Consulting Education Editor

Abha Adams

Photographer

Lakshman Anand

Cartoonist

Samita Rathor

Printed and published by Umesh Anand from A 53 D, First Floor, Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi-17. Printed at Kaizen Offset, 19 DSIDC Scheme 3, Phase-2, Okhla Industrial Area, New Delhi-20.

Postal Registration No.

DL(S)-01/3255/2006-08.
Registered to post without pre-payment U(SE)-10/2007-08 at New Delhi PSO

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers of India under RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607

Total no of pages: 40

Write to Civil Society at:

E-2144 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana
122017, Ph: 9811787772

civil_society@rediffmail.com

www.civilsocietyonline.com

Advisory Board

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

You read it first in Civil Society

Great stories of change across India
from a magazine built on trust



Rs 600 for 1 year; Rs 950 for 2 years;
Rs 1,300 for 3 years; 1 Year International \$50

RATE FOR INSTITUTIONS
One year subscription for Rs 1,000

Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Name: Mr/Ms/Institution First Middle Last Designation:

Institution: Department/Class: Area of Interest:

Address: Office Residence City:

State: Country: Pincode:

Phone: Office Residence Fax: E-mail:

Tick (appropriate): 1 year (Rs. 600) 2 years (Rs. 950) 3 years (Rs. 1,300) 1 Year International (\$50) 1 year for Institutions (Rs. 1,000)

I wish to pay by Cash / MO Cheque / Demand Draft (add Rs 65 for outstation / non-Delhi cheque)

Cheque / Demand Draft No. Dated Payable to Content Services & Publishing Pvt. Ltd. Mail it to: E2144, Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana-122017.

Note: Order will be executed on realisation of your remittance. Please allow 4-6 weeks for us to process your order.

IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR

**Volunteering**

Your story on volunteering in your January issue, 'Honest Indians' shows that the middle class does have a conscience and can work with sympathy for the underprivileged.

It's a very well written and inspirational piece. People get happiness and feel good about doing such work. This means more to them than earning money. I wish more people could work selflessly like this.

Dr Ratna Rangnekar

I like the spirit of the volunteers. Do keep it up.

Randhir Khanna

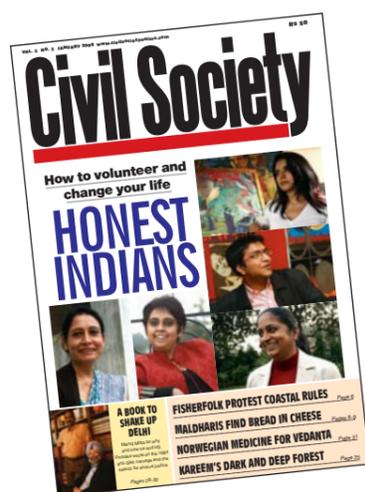
Across the world volunteering is catching up. We have the example of 'doctors without border' and similar groups. I think if people get together and form a team, work can have more and wider impact. Some companies are doing this. What about resident welfare associations getting volunteer teams together? They could sensitise the middle class in their localities on a number of issues like energy and water conservation, separation of garbage, respect for women and being more generous to their domestic help. Let's begin by volunteering to resolve local problems, like the people you write about in your article.

Shalini Sharma

River reborn

Shree Padre's story, 'Kerala river springs to life' was great. As an environmentalist, I found it very heartening. All rivers in India are a mess. I don't have a tally of how many have disappeared but the number must be a big one.

Not a single river in India meets any quality standards and we are constantly mining water from it. Ahads should make an inventory of all the rivers of India that have disappeared and get all state governments to revive them.

LETTERS

We'll have fewer disputes over water. Water is wealth. Revived rivers will breathe life into agriculture.

Amit Goswami

Shree Padre's story is an amazing one. Congratulations!

Dilip Chaware

Vedanta

Thanks Kavaljit Singh for a well written piece, 'Norwegian medicine for Vedanta.'

As a lay person I could understand why the tribals were grateful to the Norwegian government for removing its investment in UK-based Vedanta.

Yet, here, on home turf, neither our government nor any company has the gumption to speak up for the people. Currently activists and tribals in Orissa are locked in a tough battle against the mining giant.

The court's verdict has just delayed the inevitable. Let the tribals live in peace with their beautiful culture, hills and rivers. The environment is of immense value. What sort of development tribals want should be decided by them. They should approach the

government with their ideas. Rehabilitation is often another word for 'forced development'.

Bikash Mohanty

Goa SEZ

I would like to congratulate the people of Goa for having stopped the SEZ juggernaut. They got together and fought the builder lobby, contractors, greedy industrialists, in short, the entire establishment mafia. The Goa activists must help others to also organise against 'development' that they don't want.

Asmita

1984 riots

Congratulations to Manoj Mitta and HS Phoolka for their courageous exposure of the 1984 riots. Mitta has written a superb article. What is commendable is that they have stuck to the facts. More journalists should take up such issues.

MP Sinha

World news

Please could you give us better stories on South Asia. This region is underreported in the media. Most news pages are devoted to India, Pakistan, terrorism and politics. Could we look beyond that? Your coverage is inadequate. Please make these pages like your India section.

Rahul

Errata:

In the story, 'Return of Bengal's wondrous rice,' Dr Anupam Paul's name was wrongly spelt as Dr Anupam Pal.

In the story, 'Ration cards, PDS go online,' Comat Technologies was incorrectly called Comat Services.

The two errors are regretted.

Editor

“Public transport is not absent in India. What is absent is the existence of clean, efficient and reliable systems. This is because there has been very little interest in affordable public transport by the upper middle class, professionals and the media.”

Dinesh Mohan

Transport expert, IIT, Delhi

“More than 90 per cent of denotified nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes want to settle as they are tired of roaming. Their first and most important need is to have a secure livelihood so that they don't go hungry.”

Balkrishna Renake

Chairman, National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes

Get your copy of **Civil Society** from any of the following stores:

Delhi: Oxford Bookstore, Bahri Sons, Mercury, Central News Agency, SP News Agency at Green Park, Chitranjan Park stalls

Gurgaon: The Music Store, DLF Phase 1 Market. Quill and Canvas

Gangtok: Citi News on MG Marg.

Kolkata: Oxford Bookstore, Landmark, Classic Books, stalls.

Bangalore: Landmark at the Forum Mall, Koramangala. Oxford Bookstore at the Leela, Variety Book House on St Mark's Road.

Chennai: Oxford Bookstore

Mumbai: Oxford Bookstore

Lucknow: Ram Advani Bookseller at Hazratganj.

Chandigarh: The Browser

Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Hazaribagh, Siliguri: Stalls and vendors.

'Worry about public transport not

Civil Society News

New Delhi

THE high voltage launch of the Nano at the auto show in Delhi prompted unprecedented public interest in the cute personal car for a base price of just Rs 1 lakh and the Indian engineering prowess at Tata Motors that had made it possible.

The oohs and aahs were, however, also interspersed by a note of caution sounded by environmentalists and activists who worried about what the Nano and other small cars like it would do to air pollution levels and congestion in cities.

The short answer to these concerns was that the Nano meets advanced emission norms and its entire production will account for only a small part of the demand for personal transport. It would also find buyers in smaller cities where public transport is virtually non-existent.

But even as the debate went on, several questions deserved better focus and clarity. Do we have too many cars on our roads? Do we have enough road space? What is really a cheap car? Will an inexpensive Nano actually mean an explosive increase in car purchases?

We spoke to **Dinesh Mohan**, transport expert at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Delhi for a reasoned and professional view.

Do you see the Nano and other cheap cars that may follow as inhibiting the development of public transport?

Actually cheap cars are already available in the Indian market. They are called second-hand cars! You can get an air-conditioned car in reasonably good shape for less than Rs 100,000. Second-hand cars are also cheaper on insurance and can be repaired by roadside mechanics. Monthly expenditure on maintaining a car which does about 30 km a day can amount to about Rs 3,500 and monthly payment on the loan Rs 2,500 to Rs 3,000. A middle

class family cannot spend more than 15 per cent of its income on transport and so must earn more than Rs 35,000 per month to afford a car.

At present only about 30 per cent of families in Delhi earn more than Rs 25,000 per month and less than 20 per cent in smaller cities. Secondly, people earning Rs 30,000 to Rs 40,000 a month live in small flats and don't have much space for parking. Therefore, I don't see a massive explosion in car ownership in India.

Development and use of public transport is not decided by volume of car production. It is dependent on income, congestion levels, availability of parking, safety of pedestrians and availability of public transport. If you include travel by chartered bus, company bus, vikrams, tempos, etc., as 'public' transport then more than 60 per cent of motorised trips in all Indian cities is by public transport. This proportion is higher than that experienced by any European or American city! This is mainly owing to our low income levels.

The upper middle class will use public transport only if walking is safe, roads are congested, there is no parking at the destination, use of public transport involves minimum walking and the system is reliable. These issues can only be addressed by government policy.

The introduction of the Nano can indirectly affect the development of public transport, as the media diverts attention from mobility and access issues to car ownership. It is quite interesting that when modern low floor buses were introduced in Delhi (these modern buses were much cheaper than foreign imports) it was quite a revolution – the bus design changed after 40 years. But the media didn't think it was important, they even questioned whether these buses were suitable for our cities!

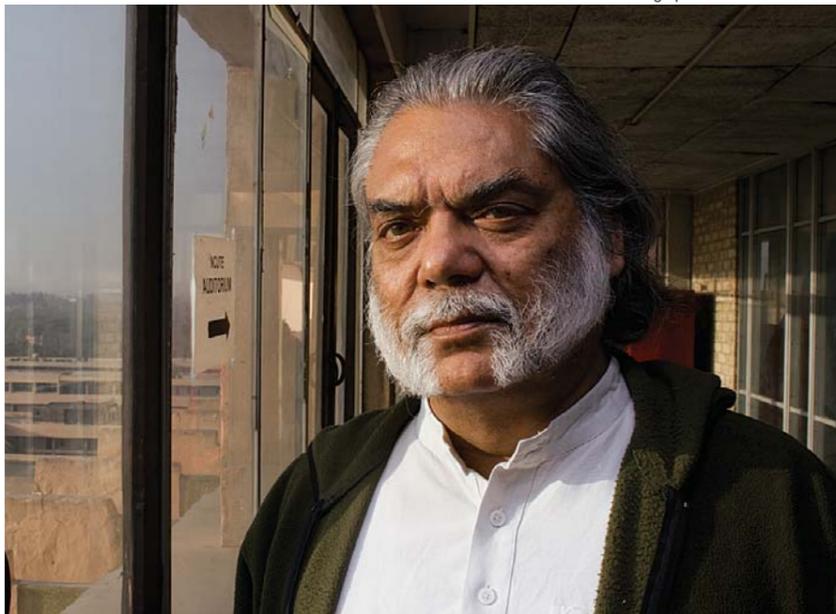
able for our cities!

The Nano is regarded as a technological marvel. What is your take on its technology?

The team of Tata engineers has to be given credit for taking on a challenge and producing a car that satisfies current emission and safety standards at the price offered. This, in itself, is a major achievement even if you use currently available technologies. Innovations like this encourage young people to think big and create a societal environment where engineers develop confidence to experiment and produce goods that suit our environment and the economy. Unless one knows the details of all the technical components used in the car, it is difficult to say whether it is a marvel. But, I don't think that should be an issue.

Do governments have a role in prompting new technologies?

Governments have a role in prompting new technologies both directly and indirectly. The most important indirect role is what the government does about higher technical education. Unless ordinary people can enter and study in well endowed institutions of excellence very cheaply, there cannot be much technological innovation across the board. Upper class people do not do research or technical innovation. It is the lower middle class, upwardly mobile, intelligent young men and women who take up technical careers and work hard. If education is privatised and made expensive then you don't get these well trained people and nor do you get competent people to take up research and teaching careers. The US is the best example – it allows ordinary people to get educated completely free at the high school level, and then provides very well equipped state universities where they can study without depending on



Dinesh Mohan

Photographs: LAKSHMAN ANAND

'When modern low floor buses were introduced in Delhi it was quite a revolution – the bus design changed after 40 years. But the media didn't think it was important.'



Nano at the 9th Auto Expo, Delhi

the Nano'

their parent's support.

The direct role of the government is in having financial and fiscal policies to encourage desirable investments and discourage harmful activity. If the government charges market rates for operation and parking of cars, removes taxes on bus transport, and announces that incentives will be given to states and cities that promote walking, bicycling, bus and taxi use, then we might see innovation in more desirable directions.

Many have voiced fears of deteriorating urban environment. Do you see small cars as such a threat.

If small cars replace larger cars, that would be a positive development for cleaning up the environment. All cars should be levied an annual pollution tax proportionate to the engine size, volume of pollutants and CO2 produced per km of operation.

Do we have too many cars or too few roads?

It is not easy to regulate the number of cars. But we can regulate the amount of space taken up by roads in the city. International experience suggests that roads always get filled up with vehicles. So the amount of pollution in a city is ultimately proportional to the road space provided. The amount of road space available in Indian cities is similar to that in European cities. For example, London has about the same proportion of land devoted to roads as Delhi, but London has five times the number of cars per capita as that in Delhi. We should not be clamouring for more road space at all. Better management of traffic, road design for safe walking and bicycling and dedicated lanes for buses on arterial roads is the only way forward.

What in your opinion is the reason for the absence of adequate bus systems and other forms of mass public transport in India?

Public transport is not absent in India, as I have mentioned. What is absent is the existence of clean, efficient and reliable systems. This is because there has been very little interest in affordable public transport by the upper middle classes, professionals and the media. The only form of public transit this section of the population focuses on is the metro rail. It is not possible for our cities to provide metro rail facilities for a significant section of the population in the foreseeable future. We have spent about Rs 11,000 crores on the first phase of the metro in Delhi which accounts for about 3 per cent of the trips in Delhi.

If you just take the cost of capital alone, this amounts to a subsidy of Rs 35,000 per passenger per year – more than the per-capita income of the country (Rs. 28,000 per year). This is not sustainable, or feasible. But in the process of waiting for this magical solution all other options have been ignored and neglected. Secondly, vast amounts of money are being spent by every city to build flyovers that only benefit motorists, leaving little available for investment in public transport.

Can we use this occasion to ask you what is the status of the HCBS in Delhi?

The first corridor is under construction and operations will start this year. This will be the first arterial road in the country which will provide seamless travel to disabled persons, safe dedicated bicycle and walking lanes and reserved corridors for buses. Car use will become less irritating as friction with buses and slow moving vehicles will be removed. Public transport will become very predictable and swift. Such smooth traffic and reduced conflicts are expected to reduce both pollution and accidents. The government of Delhi has given its approval for the planning and construction of five more corridors.



No plan for Gurgaon?

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

If you have been stuck in those endless traffic jams in Gurgaon you may have wondered what the problem is.

Three young men, Sachin, Sumit and Satish have the answer: Gurgaon has no public transportation plan. The three have filed right to information (RTI) applications wanting to know what the plan is and drawn a blank. They have met senior officials, including, most recently, the Deputy Commissioner of Gurgaon, and come away without a clear answer.

With its skyscrapers, shopping malls and plush offices, Gurgaon is often described as India's millennium city. The rich flock here to build stylish homes. The swish set like to believe it is up market. There is the exuberant BPO crowd too.

But if you don't have a car you will be stranded. Gurgaon's public transport system is worse than a dilapidated small town's. There are auto rickshaws which belch smoke and squeeze in at least 10 passengers. Private taxis charge exorbitant rates. Pavements are all broken and so it is a good idea to keep your orthopedics' phone number handy to get that twisted ankle fixed.

The lack of public transport affects young people who need to go to work, especially women. Not everybody is rich enough to afford a car. For some this is their first job. There are also poorer people who have to commute to earn a daily wage and risk their lives on bicycles.

Sachin Tilwale who works for E-valueserve, Sumit Poddar who is with TCS and Satish B from Hero Honda decided to do something about this abysmal state of affairs.

"The city is expanding from Manesar to Dharuhera. It will be 100 sq km yet there is no plan for transport," says Sachin in disbelief.

They work as volunteers with an NGO, Association for India's Development (AID). Sachin is from Mumbai, Sumit from Kolkata and Satish from Bangalore.



Sumit, Sachin and Satish

"We are individually paying taxes in thousands of rupees to the government. We are all working professionals. At least we should get some safe public transport from the state government," says Satish.

"We have been asking all the higher authorities wherever we go if they have any transport plan for Gurgaon," says Sachin. "The transport commission in Chandigarh told us they have yet to receive it. We asked Mr Arya, GM, Transport Haryana Roadways, the SDM and we have now met the DC. Our question is simple. Gurgaon is growing rapidly you must be having some plan. Like Delhi has DTC and the metro, so Gurgaon too should have a similar service."

Arya told them he has a proposal and he would give them a copy. He asked for Sachin's RTI application. "We filed it three weeks ago and he has yet not responded. The Regional Transport Authority (RTA) replied with a terse, 'this information is not concerned to this office.' But the duty of this office, if information is not available, is to pass it to the right authority and inform the person who has applied for it," says Sachin.

The questions they have asked are simple. How much has been allotted by way of budget for a public transport system in Gurgaon in the last three years? How much money has the government spent on improving or introducing public transport in Gurgaon? What is the criterion for introducing a proper bus service in the city?

"There must be some money allotted for transport but they are not going to share this information with the public," says Sachin.

The three young men have understood the truth. There is no plan. Being practical and realistic they are proposing to put up a commission consisting of HUDA, transport authorities, RWAs, NGOs, senior citizens to make a plan.

"We can all get together and give a proposal," says the untiring Sachin. "We can start with what is the current transport in the city. What are the needs of the city in the next 20, or 30 years? We can then give it to the authorities to submit it to Chandigarh. We can put pressure, run a campaign."

Little cash saves pregnant women

Biswajit Padhi
Khariar (Orissa)

THE joys of being a mother were shortlived for Rebati Harijan. When her post-delivery bleeding didn't stop, she was taken to the nearest government-run community health centre at Khariar road. Anaemic, like most of her counterparts in the district and still bleeding, the doctor advised her blood transfusion and referred her to the district headquarters hospital 10 km away. Rebati's family, instead of taking her to the hospital went back home because they didn't have money. She bled and died seven days later.

One woman dies every week of pregnancy-related causes in Nuapada, going by the statistics of 2006-07. Studies have confirmed that poverty is one of the major causes of maternal mortality and morbidity, says Haridas Patel, Assistant Coordinator of the White Ribbon Alliance in Nuapada district.

Eighty five per cent of the district's population lives in rural areas and 78 per cent are below the poverty line (BPL). Even after the Janani Surakshya Yojana was launched, only 39 per cent of pregnant women have gone in for institutional delivery. With 52 maternal deaths a year, and all preventable with a little social and medical intervention, the alliance has formulated multifarious strategies to reduce not only mortality but also morbidity, added Patel.

The maternal and peri-natal death inquiry conducted by Srusti, an NGO working here, revealed that out of 52 deaths, 12 were in hospitals. Most women were dying at home. Family members confirmed that they couldn't afford a hospital delivery. There were geographical barriers.

The Janani Surakshya Yojana promulgated under

the aegis of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), every pregnant woman going for institutional delivery is given an incentive of Rs 1,400, has an inherent drawback, said Pabitra Pradhan, coordinator of Srusti. The money is given only after delivery and doesn't help meet the pre-delivery supplementary nutrition needs of the women, she added.

Finance being a major issue, Srusti along with its

Women going for institutional delivery are given Rs 1,400 under the NRHM. But the money is given only after delivery and doesn't meet their pre-delivery needs.

partner NGO formulated a new strategy. "The day a pregnant woman is identified, we give her a small savings box to save for her delivery," said Badhia Tandi, coordinator of Ngoyar. "We encourage women to save Re 1 per day in the first month and ask them to keep doubling the amount till the ninth month, and they save Rs 1,350," said Tandi.

This has not only ensured availability of ready cash with pregnant women during crucial times but also increased their confidence. "Now that I have ready cash with me, I will go in for an institutional delivery," said a beaming Rama Bag, who is in her

seventh month of pregnancy.

The government machinery has matched the efforts of the alliance. Continuous malnourishment and poor food habits result in most women being anaemic. Sickle cell anaemia and malaria compound the problem. In such a hostile environment, there have been cases of pregnant women with as low a haemoglobin count as 4.8 gm. Pregnant women are expected to have between 12-14 gm of haemoglobin and anything less than 8 gm could be fatal, according to Dr B Mishra, a gynaecologist. The problem is compounded in cases of ante-partum or post-partum haemorrhages, added Dr Mishra.

The cost of blood transfusion being a barrier to accessing the life saving intervention, Srusti took it up with the district administration. The Nuapada collector, Dr Mrinalini Darswal, herself a medical doctor, could gauge the pregnant women's woes. She has now decentralised the process of assistance to the needy from the Red Cross fund by placing money with the Tehsildar of Khariar for poor patients of three blocks.

The people of remote Sinapali, Bodenand Khariar, who were unable to source Red Cross assistance, can avail of this fund to meet emergencies. A private hospital in Khariar with blood transfusion facility has been roped in to provide cashless assistance for blood transfusion to anaemic mothers. The mission hospital has not only brought down its rates at par with government facilities but now claims the amount from the Red Cross society instead of from the patients, said Patel.

Within a couple of month of its implementation, seven needy mothers have availed of this facility, which means seven lives were saved, said a beaming Pabitra Pradhan.

*Biswajit Padhi is secretary of Srusti.
Contact him at: 91 6671 232110 or 9437072910 FAX: 232433*

Jamawar shawls to get facelift

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

THE age-old tradition of Jamawar shawl weaving is likely to be revived as the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) has entered into an agreement with Jammu Kashmir Bank. Under this agreement, loans would be provided to weavers so that they produce shawls of the highest quality.

"We at KCCI have entered into an agreement with the Jammu Kashmir Bank which would provide loans to the weavers to revive the tradition of Jamawar shawls. For many years, weavers were found to be exploited by exporters; they would hardly earn anything once a shawl was produced," said Rauf A Punjabi, a leading businessman and former president of KCCI.

It is worth mentioning here that there was a time when Jamawar shawls were a speciality in every house, but with the passage of time it seems to have faded away.

The Jamawar shawls were famous because of the intricate work done on them. But as the Pashmina was woven on machines, customers were not sure about the quality of the work done.

"In the past, Pashmina used to be woven by hand but with the introduction of machines this art died. Once the people were not sure about the quality of

the Pashmina, it was difficult to decide whether the shawls could be purchased or not. Basically Jamawar is the beautiful work done on Pashmina shawls, and if you are ignorant about the material's quality, you might not purchase them," Punjabi said.

People say, over the years the demand for Jamawar shawls declined, and the number of prospective customers dwindled. The low demand

'We at KCCI have entered into an agreement with the Jammu Kashmir Bank which would provide loans to the weavers to revive the tradition of Jamawar shawls,' said Rauf A Punjabi, a leading businessman.

for this type of shawls decreased the value of skilled artisans, and they bade goodbye to their jobs.

"Valued artisans used to produce great work on shawls and their work was appreciated by people living across the globe. But as very few people were ready to purchase these shawls, there was a sort of devaluation for the skill of the craftsmen. As a result, the younger generation of craftsmen did not follow the footsteps of their forefathers and adopted other professions," said Abdul Qadir, a leading exporter.

The exploitation of the weavers at the hands of dealers is yet another glaring problem associated with the Jamawar shawl industry. Leading exporters as well as dealers want to take the lion's share out of the advancement of the Jamawar shawl industry, thus leaving the weavers high and dry.

"In the long run the exporters are mainly benefited with the weavers being left to the mercy of God. This exploitation has always impacted the weavers in a negative manner. At the end of the day, it is the age-old trade that has been affected with the weavers being the worst hit," said Muhammad Aslam, a shawl dealer.

The former president of KCCI said that under the agreement with Jammu Kashmir Bank loans would be provided to weavers so that they can purchase raw material of their own. "Once this is done, it is likely to end the exploitation of the weavers, and hopefully revive the Jamawar shawl industry," he added.

A school for brick kiln children

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

NORTH 24-Parganas district in West Bengal is dotted with brick kilns. These kilns have always provided seasonal employment to landless labour from the arid regions of Purulia, Bankura, Jharkhand and Bihar. But there are no amenities for the thousands of migrant families who throng to the kilns and child labour is rampant.

Finally, there is a ray of hope. Thanks to Prayasam's Progoti and Parivartan programmes in Ichapore and Manirampur in Barrackpore and Haroa, under the aegis of the local administration, many of these children can now dream of a better life.

On a visit to any of these kilns one can see hundreds of children lending a helping hand to their parents as they carry soil from the river banks, prepare the clay mixture with various chemicals for bricks and then mould the bricks by hand. The going rate of Rs 100 per 1,000 bricks is no small temptation for their families.

In December 2005, realising that it would be difficult to wean children away from this kind of income for migrant families, the district administration invited Prayasam, an NGO working with underprivileged children, to chalk out a project. Prayasam decided to provide educational facilities to the children by reaching out to brick kiln-owners.

Parivartan, the Haroa project, was started with the support of Unicef in December 2005. The project in north Barrackpore was started under the aegis of the north Barrackpore municipality with the support of the DFID-backed Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor (KUSP).

Today, Prayasam's 20 non-formal schools that double up as multiple activity centres (MACs) reach out to 1,250 children in Haroa, and more than 900 children in north Barrackpore. As Prayasam founder-director Amlan Kusum Ganguly points out, the two projects cater to 26 brick kilns in Haroa and 10 in north Barrackpore.

How did they get brick kiln owners to agree? Some brick kiln owners found it difficult to retain labour since migrant families were getting a choice of jobs. They felt Prayasam's project would help labour to stay on. Progressive kiln owners such as Sandhya Singh of BVS kiln were the first to respond to the NGO's request for cooperation for the betterment of their workers.

The restrooms of the overseers in such brick kilns were converted into classrooms. For the children, it was a novel experience and they grabbed it with both hands.

Take nine-year old Pavan, whose family is from Wazirganj in Bihar. Constant migration denied him the opportunity to go to school until last year. A few months at the school in the Shankar brick kiln at Manirampur in North Barrackpore opened up new vistas for little Pavan. "I love learning numbers, reciting poems and singing songs. I have also learnt to make monkey masks now," says an excited Pavan.

For fatherless Nandini Kahar and her siblings, whose mother works at the BVS brick kiln in Ichapore, school was a distant dream. But the opportunity to read and write proved a boon for her. For 10-year old Pinky Mahato, one of three sisters and a brother belonging to a family that has migrated from Gaya in Bihar for the brick-making season,



Children play happily at Prayasam's school



A little girl absorbed in a game



Face masks and drama

attending the non-formal school since the last three months has meant learning dance, songs and a few angrezi words. These children work at the kiln from 6am to 10am in the morning. After a bath and a quick brunch, they are at the school till 3 pm after which they return to the kiln and work until dusk.

The teaching pattern in both schools is similar. Children come in as they like. The younger ones, who do not assist their parents, are in by 11 am, while the older ones come in later. Learning is never by rote, as teachers Shibani Mukherjee and Shankari Das clarify. The children play football and learn to skip, make

masks or draw. Songs, skits and dances are often learnt and staged. To encourage the children to express themselves, Prayasam has also been making use of comics. This has caught the imagination of children, especially girls. Through the medium, they open up on girl-child education and the importance of letting the girl-child blossom into an individual in her own right.

Besides, the children's theatre group, Dakabuko (Daredevils), and dance troupe Ahladi (Loved ones) teach them to stage plays and dance dramas on health and social issues from time to time. This has helped children learn the significance of hygiene and sanitation and pass this on to their parents and elders.

Once a year, a camp is organised at one of the multi-activity centres. "We let the children do whatever they like, depending on what they have learnt until then," explains Ganguly. They make kites, dolls and collages from waste material, play and in short, have a ball.

Interestingly, with all these activities, the number of families that return home after the peak November-May season is dropping drastically. According to KUSP project co-coordinator Udit Ghosh Sarkar: "Last year, very few families returned home. Parents have realised the advantage of staying back here, since it gives their children the opportunity of being mainstreamed into regular schools."

Now even the parents come forward expressing a desire to learn along with their children. As Ganguly and Sarkar say, "They would come and tell us- aap hamme bhi kucchi sikhlaiye, hum bhi to angutha chaap hain." The parents don't confine learning to writing their names.

They are as excited as their children to learn kite-making and kantha stitching. A lot of mothers love making dolls too. They have also imbibed the basics of hygiene, population control and nutrition.

A good beginning has been made. But the future of these centres is still uncertain. The district administration is expected to take over the MACs, once the initial donor funding is over. Assurances by the authorities concerned are yet to take effect.

Neither have any of the kiln owners taken over the MACs. What is worse, many kiln owners are yet to come forward and facilitate adoption of the scheme.

'Nomads want to settle down'

Rakesh Agarwal
New Delhi

EVERY Indian city has its share of impoverished street entertainers. They can make monkeys and bears dance, or a snake sway to a lilting flute. Sometimes in a park you will see a little girl doing acrobatics or walking on a tightrope high in the sky.

Such traditional performers belong to a broad cluster of communities that come under the category of denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes. For historic reasons these communities are amongst the poorest in India today.

At one time, communities like the Banjaras, Sansis, Pardis, Nats, Gadiya Lohars freely roamed through forests, pastures, villages and towns. Herders went in search of pastures while itinerant traders bartered spices, honey, salt and other products. Footloose musicians, acrobats, fortune tellers entertained the people.

But in 1871 the British branded these wandering souls as criminals by birth under the Criminal Tribes Act. They were suspicious of tribal communities without an address because they could not keep tabs on them. The British also wanted to extend their writ over forests.

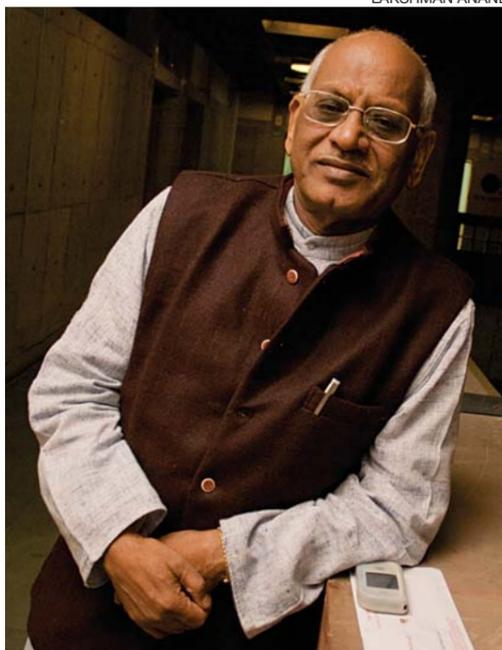
In 1952 the government abolished the shameful Criminal Tribes Act or 'denotified' these communities. But in 1959, the government enacted a Habitual Offenders Act which activists say is biased. They have asked for its repeal.

Such tribal communities are India's invisible people. They don't have ration cards or voter ID cards or access to education, shelter and livelihood.

Civil Society spoke to **Balkrishna Renake**, chairman of the National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes, which comes under the Union government's Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Do nomads want to settle?

Yes, there is. More than 90 per cent of DNTs and NTs want to settle as they are tired of roaming. Their first and most important need is to have a secure livelihood so that they don't go hungry. The second is the facility of shelter. Along with these, education facilities are required. Residential government schools should be established for them. Such schools should also provide vocational education. All these are the government's responsibilities. There should be time bound programmes to



Balkrishna Renake

provide the DNTs and NTs shelter and livelihood.

How can they earn a livelihood?

Their professions should be changed and modified. They should not become destitute and be forced to beg. People from such communities can become exemplary artists and performers. Their skills should be made market oriented so that they can earn not only money but respect. For example, nats who perform dance for a living can become professional dancers. Similarly, snake charmers could be taught to extract snake venom.

Their skills should be linked to land, water and forests. Then their skills which are now considered their weakness may be converted to their strength. A cultural academy and research institute of their arts can be established.

There is also a need to extend the employment guarantee scheme to them. It can be linked to skill building. So they could earn money from the employment guarantee scheme for three to four years and alongside learn enough skills to become self-reliant and earn a living on their own.

What is the census awareness about the number of

DNTs/NTs?

As per our estimate, the number of these most vulnerable and destitute people must be about 100 million. It is very difficult to tell exactly how many such people there are as they are spread over SC, OBC and general categories. The last census on caste basis was done in 1931 and we have extrapolated some data from it and from our own special surveys.

Should there be a separate list for them so that they can avail of reservation?

Yes, I would advocate for it, since in some states some of them are in the OBC category and in other states they are in the general category. For example, the Banjaras are listed as OBCs in UP and Maharashtra and as ST in AP and Karnataka.

Should there be private sector reservation for them?

In the new economy, doubtlessly, the role of the private sector is very important. But reservation for them is not the answer as most of them do not have even the bare minimum skills to take up jobs in the private sector. They don't have the capacities to avail of this reservation. There is the danger that others will falsely acquire their caste certificates to corner this facility. The current need is for skill building and capacity development through quality, vocational education. Reservation in the private sector may be provided to the next generation.

Should the Habitual Offenders Act be abolished?

This act is as good as dead as it is not applied on caste and community basis any longer and the police never invoke it. The first need is to provide them citizenship, so that they are able to enjoy all legal rights including forming gram sabhas and gram panchayats. Then, the Prevention of Atrocities Act should be extended to them. Finally, the Minimum Landholdings Act may be applied to them.

There must be some existing laws that could help?

On the contrary, some laws made for the welfare of the country and society at large are quite painful for them. For instance, because of the Wildlife Protection Act, many people belonging to these tribes like those who perform acrobatics with monkeys and bears, are now considered criminals. Similarly those who depend on selling traditional medicines can be harassed under the Drugs and Magic Act.

Samita's World

by Samita Rathor





Yesterday's movie magic

Susheela Nair
Bangalore

DELHI-based photographer Shahid Datawala has taken eye catching pictures of cinema halls in all their grandeur and irony in and around Delhi. His camera spans the many cinema halls lying closed.

"My study is inspired by the visual treat of cinema hall spaces and their changing cultures. Hoardings create an atmosphere. People interacting with those hoardings create a story. It has been of particular interest to me to seek out and document cinema halls where hand-painted hoardings are still being used," says Datawala.

His camera has captured the old-world elegance of classic cinema halls. Datawala recounts that many of the halls he photographed have been demolished and replaced by multiplexes. Most of Datawala's pictures are punctuated with a streak of melancholy and nostalgia and are devoid of a boisterous audience or cacophonous clatter.

Many of the images focus on the spacious and majestic interiors of old cinema halls with ornate pillars, neatly laid flooring, gleaming glass windows and broad staircases with shiny wooden railings, all of whose time has



come and gone. Others depict the vast expanse of the theatre as seen from the balcony rows of seats which end at the large screen with the lights atop the theatre resembling stars at night. Datawala's camera does not miss out on the narrow passages, glow signs, grill doors, ladies/gents cloakrooms, and even objects like the spittoon positioned in a corner.

Among other interesting pictures are the ones with cinema posters and hoardings where the photographer's keen sense of observation is discernible. The pictures aren't contrived but captured with an eye for insight. There are other interesting pictures which

depict that celluloid fantasies are also very often an escape from the stark realities of life. Adult movies and the politics associated with them were brought forth in a picture where an advertisement for a female event management executive was displayed next to a poster showing a scantily clad woman.

A self-taught photographer, Shahid Datawala worked for India Magazine as a freelance photographer from 1995 to 1998. From 2000 to 2001, he photographed the daily drama happening in and around the bustling Connaught Place area which culminated in his first solo show, 'A Walk with Pillars' in 2001 at Max Mueller Bhavan, Delhi.

In 2002, he received a

grant for a project on cinema and the cinema-going culture and since then, Shahid has been photographing old spaces in New Delhi.

Currently a freelance photographer for the Delhi magazine First City, Datawala is also engaged in photographing old lingerie shops and old architectural spaces in Delhi and Mumbai; he is also working on publishing a book on his photographs of abandoned cars. A grant received from the Ford Foundation will see him collaborate on a photography project on markets and public spaces in Delhi.



Kriti's neighbourhood film club

Shailey Hingorani
New Delhi

A tiny workplace in Tara Apartments, New Delhi, comes alive every third Saturday of the month. It reverberates with discussion, debates and friendly arguments over a film that the audience has just watched.

This vibrant film club started by Kriti, an NGO, in 1999, is attracting genuine admirers of socially relevant cinema across the city. Generally, documentaries are shown.

"We want films to do more than just entertain," said Aanchal Kapur, team leader, Kriti. "Documentaries shouldn't be restricted to film festivals that take place once a year. Films should occupy a constant space in the minds of the people. The fiery discussions that take place after a film is shown have strengthened our belief that films are a great way of initiating a discussion."

In fact, that's what attracts film buffs: the movie doesn't end once the reel is over but 'kick-starts' a discussion. Even better, the director of the film is invited to discuss his or her work with the audience, answer questions and perhaps defend his or her position.

With a variety of documentaries to choose from, it must be tough making a choice. Kapur doesn't think so. "Films are chosen usually as a response to or in support of people's movements. So they are mostly topical. This month we screened Dakal, a film on forest rights," she said. The Forest Rights Act was notified on 1 January after a long campaign by people's groups and NGOs and the film was screened on 12 January.

"It isn't easy to find a ready audience for documentaries and it is here that the film club really scores," said Deepak Roy, director of Dakal. "The easy interaction with the audience is essential for the director who needs critical feedback for his films to know what he is doing right and where he is going wrong."

What makes it even more comfortable for directors



Members of Kriti's film club

The movie doesn't end once the reel is over. It helps start a discussion. The director of the film is invited to discuss her work with the audience and answer questions.

to collaborate with Kriti is the club's non-biased and non-judgmental stand. Directors the club regularly collaborates with include Amar Kanwar, Shikha Jighan, Sanjay Kak and Krishnendu Bose. Their films in the past have been well received by the audience.

Amateur and professional filmmakers, young and old hands, are invited regularly to Kriti Film Club to showcase Indian, South-Asian and international films. Kriti collaborates with filmmakers to disseminate information about their work through their mailing lists and helps with their sales by carrying their films with them to outstation stalls and by housing them at their workplace.

As a member of the film club you can screen, borrow and buy films too. All are welcome. Members are a varied group consisting of students, activists, homemakers, teachers and so on. That is why the club has an informal neighbourhood feel. The average attendance at a screening is 20 to 40 people, apart from the filmmaker.

Kriti screens the film even if the audience is small. With a collection of about 300 films available to screen, borrow and buy, the film club is a pioneer in the kind of work that it does. Although members and non-members can access the film club at differential rates, members get benefits in terms of the number of films they can borrow

and the rates at which they can borrow them.

Members pay Rs 75 per film and they can borrow up to three films for three weeks. Non-members pay Rs 150 per film and can borrow three films for two weeks.

Kriti Film Club is not privately funded or funded by an institution. It runs on the contributions of the audience members, who drop their contributions in a gullak (box) which is placed in front of everyone after the film is over. Kapur added, "We break the gullak on Diwali and usually find about Rs 3,000 every year."

A few apprehensions have been voiced about the film club. These have to do with spatial constraints. Kapur said, "Many people would like us to screen at bigger venues so that the film club gets the audience that it deserves. People also want us to hold screenings regularly, and that's something we are working on."

The film club is very serious about retaining its dynamism. For this reason it doesn't plan its screenings in advance and lets the choice of film be responsive to topical issues. The films which are chosen to be screened are decided a week in advance and the audience is informed through a mailing list which reaches over 5,000 people.

For further details contact:
Kriti Team, S-35 Tara Apartments, Alaknanda, New Delhi
Ph: 26027845, 26033088 space.kriti@gmail.com

Rs 600 for 1 year; Rs 950 for 2 years;
Rs 1,300 for 3 years; 1 Year International \$50

RATE FOR INSTITUTIONS

One year subscription for Rs 1,000

Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Name: Mr/Ms/Institution
First Middle Last

Institution: Department/Class:

Address: Office Residence

State: Country:

Phone: Office Residence Fax:

Tick (✓ appropriate): 1 year (Rs. 600) 2 years (Rs. 950) 3 years (Rs. 1,300) 1 Year International (\$50) 1 year for Institutions (Rs. 1,000)

I wish to pay by Cash / MO Cheque / Demand Draft (add Rs 65 for outstation / non-Delhi cheque)

Cheque / Demand Draft No. Dated Payable to Content Services & Publishing Pvt. Ltd. Mail it to: E2144, Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana-122017.

Note: Order will be executed on realisation of your remittance. Please allow 4-6 weeks for us to process your order.

Discovering life at menopause

Rina Mukherji
Kolkata

MANASI Basu had trained to be a classical singer. But marriage and household duties put her talent on the backburner. Two years ago, detected with cancer, Manasi was overcome with depression. She was successfully operated and treated by her gynaecologist. Yet, the futility of her life suddenly overwhelmed her. The fact that she was childless made her feel worse.

Her gynaecologist, Dr Ratnabali Chakraborty, persuaded her to help out at awareness camps for slum women. Getting involved in these camps awakened a new sense of self-worth in Basu. It also made her aware of the changes that women undergo once they near menopausal age, the need to monitor body weight and bone marrow density, take the right nutrition and lead a healthy life. She disseminated her newly-acquired knowledge to friends in her locality and took the lead in organising similar interactive camps for other post-menopausal women in her locality in Paikpara, in north Kolkata. Today, Basu and her friends run one of the Kolkata units of Urjo (Power).

A brainchild of Dr Ratnabali Chakraborty, who heads the Indian Menopause Society's chapter for the eastern region in Kolkata, Urjo evolved out of a need felt by Dr Chakraborty for a platform where women in their 40s could interact and overcome post-menopausal depression.

"Menopause is accompanied by physical and psychological changes in the female body. While women may consult physicians when a disease is detected, hardly anyone bothers to delve into the psychological problems they may be going through. This is especially so among the Indian middle-class where, notwithstanding the prevalent education, the patriarchal hierarchy relegates women and their physiological and psychological problems into the background. Complications that arise may force women to withdraw into a shell. This is indeed very sad since a woman in her post-menopausal years has a wealth of experience that can be of immense benefit to society and the world," says Dr Chakraborty.

As per statistics, menopause generally sets in between 45-55 years internationally. However, as per data collected by the National Family Health Survey (1998-99), menopause sets in quite rapidly among Indian women after 40 to 41 years. Fall in estrogen levels in women past 40 accounts for the high incidence of osteoporosis, heart disease, hypertension, breast and other cancers. Yet, very few women are aware of the inherent dangers during these years.

Since many educated middle class women give up successful careers or vocations in favour of bringing up children, the marriage or moving out of grown-up sons and daughters can also plunge mothers into gloom in their advanced years. Post-menopause, physiological changes add to the general depression women feel and make many absolute wrecks.

Recognising the need for a general awareness campaign and an organisation to address these problems, Dr Chakraborty formally set up Urjo in December 2006. However, the foundations of the organisation were laid when she got many of her patients involved in the free gynaecological camps she has been conducting for slum women for many years.

Once Urjo was registered in 2006, the informal groups were streamlined into chapters. Urjo got organised into north Kolkata, south Kolkata and



Dr Ratnabali Chakraborty at a medical camp organised by her

Salt Lake chapters. Another chapter, that of Tribeni, was added later at the initiative of Mridula Banerjee, who felt inspired to build up a similar organisation when she read a newspaper report on what Urjo stood for.

The chapters have proved a boon for many middle class and upper middle class women in and around Kolkata.

Swapna Roy, a neighbourhood friend of Manasi Basu, started feeling gloomy ever since her only son got married and moved out with his wife. Time seemed to hang heavy on her hands, since she had

Swapna Roy started feeling gloomy ever since her only son got married and moved out with his wife. Joining Urjo motivated her to once again cultivate her hobby of making jams, jellies and sauces and marketing these.

discarded all her hobbies to educate and bring up her son. Joining Urjo motivated her to once again cultivate her hobby of making jams, jellies and sauces. As a qualified food craft certificate holder from a catering institute, she now uses Urjo as a successful platform to market her wares in her spare time, while teaching others interested in the art of preservation. With a good number of other ladies her age to confide in, her gloom has totally disappeared, and her loneliness helps her focus better on her hobby.

Losing her elder son in an accident some 15 years ago had plunged Ila Bhattacharya in grief. She had ended up with a nerve disorder that prevents the smooth functioning of one of her legs. A great music lover, she had given up her music. The fact

that her younger son had gone abroad made matters worse for her. Joining Urjo has now brought back the light in her life, and she is cheerful again.

Pushpa Basu lost her husband and experienced an unprecedented sense of loss. Since all her daughters had married and were settled in other cities, she had no one to turn to for solace. An aunty (pishima) to all the post-menopausal women in Tribeni, this prolific writer of flowery prose now keeps herself busy drafting Urjo brochures and pamphlets from time to time.

Manasi Basu and her group at Paikpara make it a point to teach music to students at the Park Institution for Girls once a week. Similarly, adult education classes are conducted by the Paikpara group for maids working in the neighbourhood. Visits are also arranged to old age homes where the ladies recite poems and sing songs to entertain the elderly from time to time.

Most significantly, each one of the members has gained a great deal of knowledge of her body. Manasi Basu had always suffered from osteoarthritis in the past. But taking refreshing evening walks, refraining from red meat and fried food has brought her to a stage where she does not need to take any painkillers for her ailment. Mridula Banerjee suffered from a seven year bout of rheumatoid arthritis in the past. But adjusting herself to a healthy diet regimen has prevented her from suffering. Being part of Urjo has made each one of the ladies realise the importance of bone mass density and its connection with osteoporosis, as also the role of tension in exacerbating illnesses like arthritis.

Increased longevity among urban women has gone hand in hand with the advent of nuclear families everywhere. Consequently, when women enter this crucial phase in their lives, there are few other women within the family whom they can turn to for physical or emotional support. By its very composition, Urjo tries to fill that gap, and create a sisterhood among women who can come together, care and share in times of distress. In the bargain, it prevents women from withdrawing into their shell and can manage to infuse new energy into post-menopausal woman, in keeping with what Dr Ratnabali Chakraborty envisioned when she set it up.

Many surprises in Kerala river

Shree Padre, who first reported this story in Civil Society goes back for more details and discovers the constructive role played by a government agency

A river that has come to life in Palakkad district of Kerala offers more than one surprise in its unique rebirth. This is the first time in southern India that a river has been revived. Even more amazingly, its resuscitation has been made possible by a government organisation generally criticised for being sluggish and corrupt. Called Ahads (Attappady Hills Area Development Society) the government organisation worked with local tribals to achieve this miracle.

(For the first report on this unique event see *Civil Society* January 2008)

The Kodungarapallam, which has a 28 km course, can now be seen flowing in Mannarkkad taluk, north of Palakkad town close to the Tamil Nadu border.

Three rivers originate from the surrounding Attappady hills: Bhavani, its main tributary Siruvani and Kodungarapallam. The three rivers join in Koodappatti. From there onwards, the river is known as Bhavani. It flows to Tamil Nadu and joins the Cauvery.

Attappady and Kasargod are punishment transfer destinations for government officers. In fact in some parts of the state, fools are referred to as Attappady!

Sadly Attappady's name used to conjure images of a backward desert where poor tribals like the Kurumbas, Mudugas and the Irulas had to fight for survival.

Clement Selvaraj, assistant director of Ahads' soil and water conservation programme, recalls the first day he visited Vattulakki, an Adivasi hamlet devastated by environmental degradation: "It was in 2003. There was only one Adivasi living on a hilltop. There were no birds, not even a dog. A goat was searching in vain for a blade of grass. An old woman with silver hair, Vellyamma, was climbing the hill with a vessel of water on her head. She had to walk two km to fetch it. How would we construct check dams when there wasn't even water to mix cement? That night I didn't sleep. If we don't do anything who else will? By next morning, I had taken it as a challenge."

In 1995 a few good-hearted bureaucrats started Ahads. They received financial assistance from JPIC (Japan Bank for International Cooperation) and the state government. Their main objective was watershed development of Attappady and improving the livelihood of local communities. The Rs 219.3 crore project had a JPIC loan component of Rs 176.9 crore. The rest has been borne by the state government. Ahads comes under the Local Self-Government Department of Kerala.

Nobody knows when the Kodungarapallam disappeared. The catchment of the river which is in Tamil Nadu is still green. But the catchment in Kerala in eastern Attappady was completely dry and degraded.

Yet Kodungarapallam was once a lush river. Recalls 65-year-old Nariyan, an Adivasi: "Kodungarapallam had knee deep water in summer. There were huge trees on both sides. During the monsoon, the adventurous among us used to tie a rope between trees on either side to cross the river."

And then it gradually metamorphosed into a desert. Many factors contributed. Colonial policies, government policies, road construction, charcoal production, over grazing, cropping patterns and finally soil erosion, the highest in Kerala.

Tribal families abandoned their land and turned to brick kilns for work.

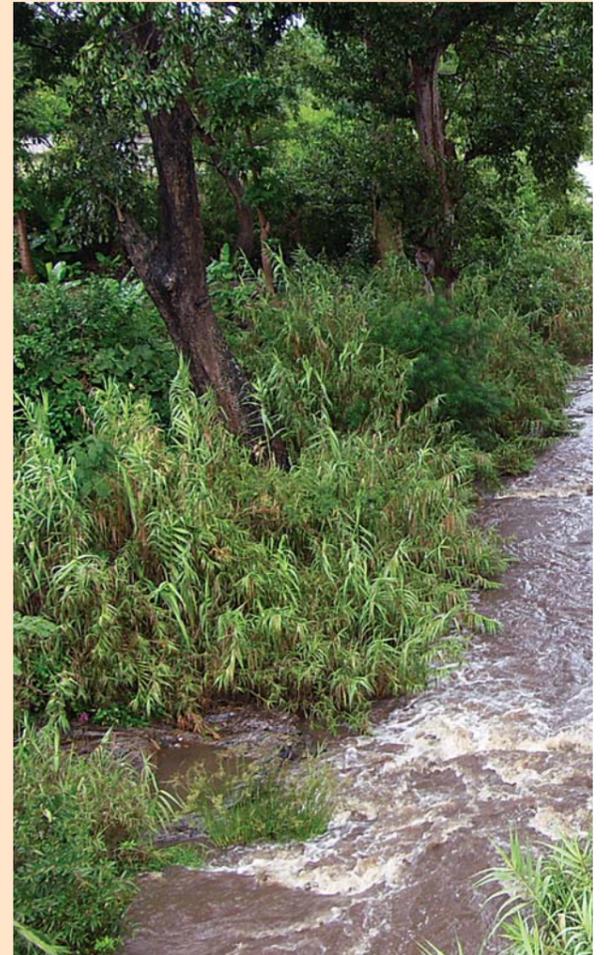
As the fertility of soil declined thin topsoil began to be used for brick making. The net result was that about 507 sq. km out of a total of 745 sq. km. turned into wasteland.

In 1999, starvation deaths, uncommon in Kerala, were reported from Vellakulam hamlet.



Kadali bananas going off for sale

Attappady and Kasargod are punishment transfer destinations for government officers. Attappady's name used to conjure images of a backward desert.



The revived Kodungarapallam river

THE STOP GAP FOREST: Like any other government project, Ahads had its share of teething problems. Low on staff, the group started trying to create awareness in 1997. However, it was only around 2000 that the project took off.

In the meantime rumours had begun doing the rounds. Vested interests sowed seeds of suspicion. "This is a conspiracy to take the land of poor tribals by the Japanese," whispered some devious people. "One more scheme to rob off remaining forest trees" was another mischievous rumour. And "officials are here to make money" said others.

"In the beginning, when we visited the hamlets, the Adivasis would flee," recalls an employee of Ahads. An earlier study had categorically stated that development projects hadn't reached the target groups. "This made us very guarded. We went to the communities with three new approaches: participation, transparency and financial accountability," recalls VH Dirar, assistant director, training. "All the project details were discussed with the stakeholders."

Ooru Vikasana Samithis or Village Development Committees (VDCs) were formed. The office-bearers were elected. The implementation of the project was done by the VDCs. Money was paid to the respective office-bearers only by cheque.

People were hand picked for responsible posts. Most of Ahads staff is young and untainted by sloth. "We didn't demand 10 years' experience. The average age of our 120 plus staffers is around 30. Then there are 300 volunteers working as animators who are young locals," said Vinod Uniyal, project director.

This may be one reason why Ahads tempo did-

rebirth



n't slacken though they had 11 directors in 12 years and many staff transfers.

The total area treated by Ahads in this river catchment is 60 square km. Soil and water conservation structures were built using only stones and soil. The next year itself they struck water barely three feet below the surface. Velliyamma was excited. She now had to walk only 300 metres to fetch water. The pond didn't dry till monsoon.

The project provided ample employment to locals as labourers. Instead of the occasional Rs 40 as wages, they started getting regular work at Rs 110-120. This melted suspicion and distrust. At a later stage it was the water available nearer their houses that reinforced their belief.

As the region has an undulating terrain, different soil and water conservation techniques were adopted. Efforts were made to slow down the water and make it seep into the ground starting from ridges and ending valleys.

Six million plants in forest lands and private wastelands have been planted. "You can call this a stop-gap forest," said Radhakrishnan, assistant director, forestry. "After 15-20 years, the planted trees will develop good canopy and micro-climate. The process of natural forest formation starts from here. Birds and animals will take over. Till then, we have to ensure there are no gaps in canopy, no forest fires, no grazing and that local use of forest produce does not exceed a critical level."

The Ahads team took their mission seriously. Yet nobody thought the river would flow again. "Kodungarapallam hadn't registered in our minds as a river or even a dried river," confesses Sumesh Kumar, soil and water conservation officer. "We



Photographs: SHREE PADRE

More banana plantations are coming up



Milk production has more than doubled

assumed that it must have been a motorable road." In 2005, the river flowed till February. Then its dry period started shrinking. Next summer it is likely to flow the year round. Other small streams like Uppungarapallam and Puliapathi -- two tributaries of the Kodungara -- are also flowing.

But many locals are not ready to believe that the river has resumed its flow thanks to watershed development. "There have been

good rains since the last few years," they point out.

Ground water levels in 25 observation wells at Vattulakki, Mattaththukad and Puliapathy, according to Clement Selvaraj, show a rise of seven to 40 feet. A study by Kerala University indicates that in dry and partially dry wells, water availability has increased from 7 to 37.8 cubic metres per day.

FRUITS OF LABOUR: Vellangiri, a settler from Tamil Nadu, says his 60-foot well used to go dry by March. A deep bore-well sunk five years ago failed. Losses in agriculture and the marriage of three sisters made Vellangiri a defaulter at the local bank for Rs 2 lakh.

Now his well is brimming with water. Apart from other crops, he has been growing banana on an acre for the past three years. He has now bought another three acres. Another bore-well sunk recently is a success. "Now I am hopeful of reducing my dues at the bank," he says showing off his chillies and bananas.

At Muttaththukad, large scale banana cultivation is on. One acre of kadali banana - a much sought after table variety - fetches an income of Rs 80,000 to Rs 1 lakh.

According to one estimate, farming has been extended to about 200 hectares in eastern Attappady. Half of this is banana. Vegetables like brinjals, chillies, ladies' finger, tomatoes and snake-gourd are also grown in a large area.

"The farmers are hard working. If they get a little water they raise one crop or the other. Though the topsoil is so degraded, it grows very good vegetables with proper farming techniques and, of course, water," points out Sumesh Kumar.

Five to ten years ago an acre was available for Rs 15,000 to 20,000. This has now increased to anything between Rs 60,000 to 2 lakhs. Observes Venkatachalam, officer at Canara Bank, Anakatty, "Loan repayment has improved by 30 to 40 per cent. The villagers who didn't mind walking for 10 km earlier now shell out Rs 5 to 10 to travel in service jeeps. Bus services have increased. More children are going to school and the dropout rate is coming down."

Small towns like Anakatty, Agali and Kottaththara now have fancy shops, STD booths, lodges and even digital studios. Milk procurement in local cooperative societies has more than doubled. At Kottaththara, the main branch of the society,

milk output has increased from 350 litres per day five years ago to 800 litres.

Farmer suicides that have become a regular feature in Wayanad, Idukki and other districts haven't occurred here.

STEPPING BACK: The downside is farmers from nearby districts are moving in attracted by water. The ground water aquifers so painstakingly built by local communities are now being carelessly used by 'visiting farmers' who have no sentimental attachment to the land, water and forest.

These farmers are using chemicals liberally. "Farming with groundwater is not suited to this area," warns a local youngster. "The groundwater is hard and has many dissolved salts. In the irrigated farms, flooding is common. A thin white layer forms on topsoil. In the long run, as in Punjab, the soil might turn unproductive."

Ahads is the only large-scale employer. The project will wind up by March 2010 but nobody is prepared for that. "We haven't thought about this at all," says Vijayan, president of Anakatty VDC.

"Yes, that is a big concern," admits Vinod Uniyal, "and we have been seriously thinking about it. Our priority is to prepare the communities. To retain the gains earned in this long process, community management is the only answer."

"Locals should start getting income from the forests," says Radhakrishnan. "Apart from fodder and firewood there are medicinal plant products in this area. Many companies are commercially collecting them. If the local JFM (joint forest management) committees can be empowered to take it over, that would make the communities develop a deeper interest in forests."

Ahads is carrying out a unique education programme called 'Enlight' for Irula, Muduga and Kurumba tribals separately. Trained instructors, preferably from the same communities, conduct classes at the Adivasi Ooru's (settlements) during twilight. The focus is literacy and informal environmental education. Text books have been printed in their own language. Community resource centres have been built. At present the literacy programme covers 110 Adivasi centres.

Contact : AHADS, Post Agali, Attappady, Palakkad District, Kerala 67581. Ph: 04924 - 254 516/17/18; E-mail: ahads@sancharnet.in

Standing up for those who can't

Amita Joseph
New Delhi

YOU don't need wings to fly. Not if your name is Rajinder Johar. A senior occupational therapist working at King George's Medical College, Lucknow, Johar did not know that his life would change forever when intruders pumped three bullets into him in 1986. One bullet hit his spine and

ity certificate, proof of residence and two references. FOD staff visit the candidate to verify details and then FOD assists them in procuring materials to begin the trade of their choice.

The special needs of the candidates are kept in mind and a maximum of only two visits need to be made. The whole procedure does not take more than 30 to 45 days and regular monitoring is done to provide support. Intermittent workshops are held

Vikas, one such entrepreneur, sells fruit for a living in the market. He earns about Rs 6,000 a month. Chandrababha runs a mobile PCO-cum-shop near the hospital. Vikas is diversifying his range while Chandrababha aspires for a permanent booth.

While promoting artists among the community by converting paintings into greeting cards, FOD felt the need for a broader platform to do justice to the abundant talent they saw and the idea of displaying paintings through a national level exhibition, 'Beyond Limits' was born in 2001.

'Beyond Limits' has emerged as a platform for artists, uplifting their spirits. Since 2001, four exhibitions have been held and their canvas of artists keeps growing.

The artists who participated in the 2006 exhibition include Arveend Budh Singh, Yog Raj Dang, Sreekant, Shilpa Gupta, Jamaluddin, Mukesh Rajesh, Reema, Pradeep, Ashis Kabash, Beetan Goswami, Debashis, Nilanjana, Nirmalaya, Santanu, Ram Raghbir and Siddharta and Sriharsha from Orissa. There is also Imamuddin from Rajasthan with his spectacular tiger paintings. Imammudin, who is hearing impaired, was a sign board painter for eight years before he joined the Ranthambore School of Art.

Gallery Space is donated by Arpana Caur just as 'The Voice' is supported by generous contributions from the Krishnan family of Surajkund. FOD is sustained largely through individual donors and does not have institutional support. About half of this team of eight, headed by Rajinder Johar and his daughter Preeti, are people with disabilities. Rajinder takes no salary while for the rest of the team FOD is only able to afford modest honorariums.



Rajinder Johar. Preeti is third from left

made him a quadriplegic for the rest of his life.

He was declared 100 per cent disabled, paralysed neck downwards. Yet the founder of Family of the Disabled (FOD) and winner of 13 awards, Rajinder Johar has proved that disability need not be a constraint if one has the will to overcome. He has helped hundreds of others like him get back on their feet. "If one has desire, it is enough to inspire," he says simply.

Starting with the country's first magazine on disability in 1992 called 'The Voice', FOD started promoting artists with disabilities by printing and marketing cards designed by them from 1994. Beginning with a borrowed capital of Rs 1,000 and four card designs, his group now sells around 20,000 cards. Each is designed by disabled artisans. Sales of cards, however, are decreasing.

In 1998, FOD started implementing its Apna Rozgar Scheme (ARS), a unique employment programme. Under ARS, FOD economically rehabilitates those below the poverty line who are unlettered, unskilled and have disability by providing them an interest-free loan to procure materials for a trade of their choice. This enables people with disability to financially support themselves and their dependents.

Till date ARS has helped 352 disabled persons in and around Delhi to earn a living with a success rate of over 80 per cent. The majority of ARS entrepreneurs are physically impaired, leprosy cured, hearing impaired or with other impairments. "I am lighting those houses which were enveloped in darkness. ARS is a ray of light for them," says Shiv Kailash, an ARS field worker.

ARS follows a simple procedure and candidates approach FOD directly or are referred. They are required to fill up a form with a photograph, disabil-

ity certificate, proof of residence and two references. FOD staff visit the candidate to verify details and then FOD assists them in procuring materials to begin the trade of their choice.

Trades include petty shops, PCOs, vegetable and fruit vending, sale of cassettes, soft toys, stationery, cosmetics, general merchandise, clothing and clocks. Earnings have led to independence, respect in the family and society, savings, self-reliance and dignity for people with disabilities. They have also led to a better quality of life, improved medical facilities, aids and appliances, education to siblings and children.

FOD is one of the few agencies economically rehabilitating disabled people with micro-finance. Regular feedback is sent to donors to the ARS giving details of the person, trade, progress, as FOD believes in accountability. The power of small sums of money made available without bureaucratic hassles cannot be underestimated. People often need timely, critical and sensitive interventions to be independent. If this is achieved they are able to move on and cope well for themselves.



Chandrababha at her PCO shop



Vikas runs a fruit business

FOD encourages education of economically weaker disabled students with a focus on the girl child through Gyanpanth. It conducts educational tours and excursions, arranges free aids and appliances for those who are economically disadvantaged and provides counseling to its many entrepreneurs.

The organisation is constantly looking for volunteers who can provide time, marketing, managerial and networking skills and even raise funds from donated newspapers. With a supportive family and a sensitive engineer brother who designed an innovative low-cost writing device, Rajinder Johar continues to dream. A Hindi version of the magazine to reach out to more people, a multiple rehabilitation centre with treatment, library and recreational facilities to cater to all categories of disability are dreams yet to be fulfilled. All that these dreams need is 200 square yards of space on the ground floor anywhere in Delhi.

For joining the mission or volunteering contact: Preeti Johar, B 1/500, Janakpuri, New Delhi, 110058 Ph: 25597328, 9811792505
E-mail: contact@familyofdisabled.org
preeti.johar@familyofdisabled.org
Website: www.familyofdisabled.org

AD MICROSOFT

Mr ROOTS HANDS OVER

**Darshan Shankar
favours transition
even as FRLHT is
poised for big leap**

Rita and Umesh Anand
Bangalore/New Delhi

SIX months ago, Darshan Shankar began a process that took his colleagues at the iconic Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) by surprise. He privately sounded them out on how they would react to him stepping down from the post of director.

The normally placid and even-paced FRLHT campus outside Bangalore has since, in its own quiet way, been coping with this intimation of impending change. Talented scientists, foresters, taxonomists, researchers, computer professionals and Ayurveda physicians work here on giving traditional medicine modern meaning. Most of them were drawn to FRLHT because of Darshan's vision and they stayed for the large reserves of positive energy that the organisation thrives on.

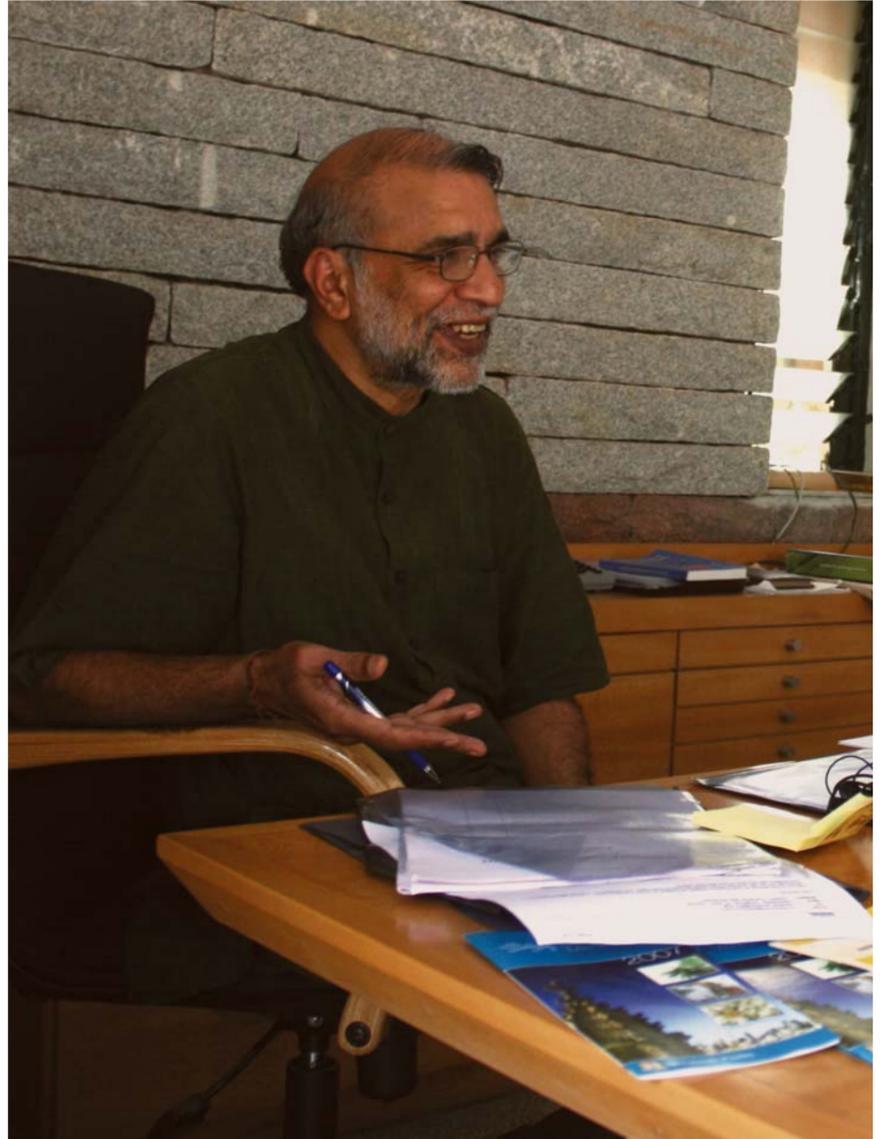
FRLHT has done more for promoting Ayurveda and other traditional health systems and bringing them within handshaking distance of western science than any other voluntary organisation in its bandwidth. It has been instrumental in influencing national policy and has created awareness about medicinal plants and folk healers. Perhaps most significantly, FRLHT has tried to bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and the modern market for it in integrative approaches to healthcare.

It is rare that heads of Indian voluntary organisations offer to demit office. In Darshan's case, the decision to take early retirement was even more surprising because FRLHT is at the acme of a success built with hard work, innovation and much sacrifice over 15 years. Darshan has been at the helm all this while. And to go now would be to walk out of the spotlight just when he should be basking in many wats of deserving glory.

Civil Society first reported on Darshan and FRLHT in a cover story, "Meet Mr Roots", in January 2004.

In the grand sweep that Darshan was able to institutionalise, FRLHT moved

Photographs: LAKSHMAN ANAND



Darshan Shankar at his desk

from working with communities to creating digital databases of plants, documenting local knowledge, setting up a modern laboratory for validating therapies and finally establishing an Ayurveda hospital.

The organisation leapfrogged from a city office in Bangalore in the nineties, to a five acre campus on the fringes of the city. It now employs over a hundred people and its departments are headed by skilled and personally secure professionals who are empowered in their spheres.

Darshan, a robust but benign head in this flat hierarchy, could have continued as director for life in such circumstances. But Darshan was adamant that he has to go. At 56, it was time, he said, to hand over the directorship to the second line. He could continue to be in the organisation to serve, but he was insistent that others should have the opportunity to lead.

And so with those first private chats began the process of consultation about who that person could be. If it was someone from within, would he/she have everyone's approval? Would it be possible to shift to a collegiate model of paths chosen by consensus? Darshan has been a team player, but he brought to the founder-director's job an entrepreneurial edge. Would a successor be able to wrest the same space, set the same tone?

Or was it necessary to replace Darshan with an outsider and make a clean break? Perhaps an outsider would come with new energy and vision and put the organisation on another trajectory. May be a better, more beneficial one than Darshan has been able to define.

As it happened the choice fell on someone from within. It was decided that Additional Director DK Ved would take over. Ved is a Mechanical Engineer, by training, a forester by profession and perhaps one of the country's most knowledgeable experts on the geographical distribution of the 6,000 species of medicinal plants of India. He has designed and developed multidisciplinary medicinal plant databases in FRLHT. Darshan intends to be around in some kind of emeritus role to make the transition smooth. But a new phase in leadership would be clear to all. Ved will now assume office in March.

OVER THE YEARS	In situ conservation of medicinal plants in forest habitats. Till 2007 there have been 84 conservation areas established in nine states	Database on botanicals used by Indian systems of medicine	Network of folk healers in seven states.	170,000 home and institutional herbal gardens	Bio-cultural herbarium and raw drug repository	Community owned company for medicinal plants	Laboratory for pharmacognosy & product development
	1993		1994		1996	2001	



Darshan had not only been a builder of durable systems and a motivator of people. He had also been a hugely successful fundraiser. He had worked to create a wider identity for FRLHT, connecting it with government and private institutions across the globe. The transition plan needed to ensure that all this was not thrown into jeopardy.

"When there is a change of leadership, be it in a company or an NGO, it is necessary to examine what is at stake and how achievements can be consolidated. It is also the time to see whether a shift of gears is possible," Murthy told Civil Society in Bangalore.

"Change is inevitable. Even good," says Murthy. "But change needs to be handled carefully. Darshan's strengths in bringing good people together, providing a profile for the organisation, raising funds etc are essential for the future of FRLHT. So, it is necessary that he continue in an advisory and supportive capacity even as a new director takes over."

Murthy observes that there are limitations to the roles that founders can play be it in commercial entities or voluntary organisations. They mostly tire, lose perspective and fail to make technological leaps. For instance, research shows that in family owned companies, the business begins to wither by the fourth generation. Professionals are then needed to take over. The challenge founder-entrepreneurs face is when and how to hand over.

The criticism of Indian NGOs is that their founders tend to hang on for too long. Organisations are built around individuals and tend to mirror their personal whims and fancies. The promoter of a good idea grows rapidly in the public eye, then plateaus and finally hangs on at all costs because of the insecurities associated with letting go.

Indian NGOs tend to pay little attention to structure and systems though they use public money. They prefer self-regulation to more rigorous forms of independent scrutiny. There is a sense that transparency worries them unless



FRLHT 's verdant campus

FRLHT has tried to bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and the modern market for it in integrative approaches to healthcare.

they can choose the parameters. NGO organisations are built mostly as pyramids with a huge gap between the person at the top and the next in command. Transition plans are therefore unheard of. And when they are implemented, they are invariably accompanied by undisguised backseat driving. No one is left in any doubt as to who is the real boss.

In Darshan's case he seems to be blessed with the temperament to let go. Asked what gave him the idea to quit, he replies with an example from his past: "When I was in my twenties I set up an NGO in a tribal area of Maharashtra. At 35 I felt I should find a younger person who had the natural enthusiasm and energy to continue doing the kind of work that was required of me there.. I then went out and looked for someone in his twenties who could take over and found such a person. When this person turned 35 he came to me and said he was ready to hand over. It so happened he died of a heart attack swimming in the river the day after he had found a successor for himself."

There is an inevitability about handing over and passing on. The greater our

However, even as consensus emerged several stages remained before the decision could be formalised. If the FRLHT team had talked it through, the governing body remained to be consulted.

Darshan wrote to the redoubtable Sam Pitroda, chairman of FRLHT's board. Pitroda had helped Darshan in critical ways when he had wanted to set up FRLHT in 1993 and has continued to serve as chairman, nurturing the organisation with strategic directions and his many connections.

Pitroda, who once fathered the technology missions and was a key advisor to Rajiv Gandhi, is now chairman of the Knowledge Commission and much, much more. Pitroda was often thrilled at what FRLHT had managed to achieve with his moral support and strategic advice. He has helped by his opening a door here or there. Darshan had gone to him as a young man with a big vision in search of a benefactor.

Once asked by a leading light of the NGO movement what he as a technocrat was doing as chairman of an organisation working on traditional knowledge, Pitroda responded: "Find me 100 other Darshan Shankars who are as serious and committed to an idea and I will happily help open doors for them and be chairman of their organisations."

Pitroda was okay with Darshan retiring if he really wanted to, but he insisted that the process of handing over would have to be structured. "It is a world class institution and not some pan shop that you can transfer to somebody else" he said. A committee should oversee the transition, redefine roles and responsibilities of the second and third level leadership and endorse a successor. Darshan, he advised, would have to hand over the mantle at a public function so that the world could know of the change, Darshan's contribution and FRLHT's many milestones.

More importantly, it was decided that FRLHT needed a formal transition plan. Prof KRS Murthy, former director of IIM Bangalore who is on the FRLHT board, was given the task of drafting such a plan. The idea was to plot a path for the future growth of the organisation so that it could keep up its momentum.

Methodology for sustainable harvesting of medicinal plants	Ethno-botanical garden and nursery	Ayurveda hospital is set up at FRLHT campus	Herbal remedies for malaria prevention	Documentation of ancient medical manuscripts
2003		2004		2005

AWARDS		
1998: Norman Borlaug Award for contribution to conservation of medicinal plants	2002: Equator Initiative Prize for linking conservation to livelihoods	2003: Cultural Stewardship Award from the Columbia School of Medicine

success the closer we get to obsolescence. The stronger we burn, the weaker we get. Traditional systems of medicine make it easier to understand such permanent impermanence with their emphasis on connections between body and mind, on the inward-outward oneness with Nature.

But Darshan is no aloof philosopher. FRLHT would have never been built and grown into the institution it is today if he were not a man of action: impatient, practical, driven by the need to act.

A poster by his desk quotes from Goethe: "It is not enough to know. It is necessary to do"

Pitroda too is a man of action. Speaking to Civil Society on the seventh floor of the Taj Palace in Delhi on one of flying visits to India because he lives in the US, he says: "We have to learn to move on. When C-Dot was over I never looked back."

Pitroda almost changed the face of Indian telecom in the eighties with a young team of engineers in C-Dot. They came up with the small rural automatic exchange or RAX which made rural telephony possible in difficult Indian conditions. If politicians had allowed them to continue they would have provided the first large indigenously made telecom switch. As C-Dot lost momentum, India's telecom revolution was delayed by a decade.



Sam Pitroda

Pitroda likes being a trigger, a sponsor of new and useful ideas. "When Darshan came to me 20 years ago, I saw someone simple, honest and willing to do something different. I instinctively trusted him and have always trusted him since. It was my gut feeling. If we had more people like him, India would benefit."

At first the support Pitroda gave Darshan was in bits and pieces. Then came the idea of a foundation. "I didn't do much. I've been a catalyst but he did it. It took 15 years, but now it is an institution," says Pitroda.

Pitroda believes that there is little difference between a small NGO and a small business. Both have high expectations, chase great ideas and are invariably short of money. Both need help in finding their way through the system and this where a Pitroda, reaching out to industry and government as a well networked benefactor, can help.

But the challenge is to move from hand-holding to self-sufficiency. Like a business must depend on revenue streams, NGOs need to be sustainable and capable of institutionalising their gains. "Very often NGO leaders want money to do what they like doing, as though it were a hobby. That is not good enough," says Pitroda.

For Pitroda, the next stage at FRLHT is to commercialise and build market linkages so that the organisation can sustain its activities without asking for funding. As the wellness business grows along with interest in traditional therapies, FRLHT is certainly on the threshold of great opportunities.

The first building blocks of a new identity are already in place. A hospital and wellness centre with 20 beds and plans for 80 more, a modern laboratory for validating therapies and a company for producing value-added herbal products whose shareholders are marginal farmers and rural women all serve to draw FRLHT into the gravitational pull of market forces.

You could add to this a potentially lucrative finishing school that FRLHT will shortly initiate for short-term training for doctors and therapists to equip them to serve in the Ayurveda and Yoga departments on allopathic hospitals and wellness centres. Such are the huge investments in holistic care across the world that FRLHT can hope to be much in demand.

In addition, FRLHT is well advanced in terms of what it has already achieved, to transform in the next few years into an Indian Institute of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine. This is visualised to be an IIT-level institution that will provide undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral level training.

FRLHT began with the rather basic programme of designing and implementing an innovative strategy for preserving medicinal plants in the wild. That was in 1993. It is to Darshan's credit that he foresaw the entire range of activities that could emerge from that beginning and moved as and when resources permitted to establish them. The evolution of FRLHT is a story of how a large vision can be realised step by step with steadfast perseverance and unwavering focus.

Says Darshan: "In 1993, the only support we could get was for the conservation of medicinal plants. But even then FRLHT dreamt of becoming a world class institution. The problem was resources. No one was willing to support a comprehensive vision of an unknown organisation in an uncharted field."

But FRLHT kept taking the steps it needed. It developed its strength in informatics in 1994 with the use of computers to store traditional knowledge and make it easily accessible. Now you can get CDs of the seminal Charak

Samitha at FRLHT. Then came a bio-cultural herbarium in 1996, efforts for reviving community based health traditions in 1997, a modern laboratory in 2001, the beginnings of the hospital in 2004 and finally research on medical manuscripts and the theoretical foundations of Ayurveda in 2005.

The achievements of last 14 years prepare the FRLHT institution to effectively contribute to the emerging era of pluralism in medicine, many had envisaged but few had been able to act upon in the early nineties. As Ayurveda and Yoga acquire increasing importance in integrative healthcare, FRLHT is uniquely positioned to be an institutional bridge between traditional Indian systems and western science.

FRLHT's mission has been to make traditional systems comprehensible to the modern world. The survival of traditional systems depends on them being understood in contemporary scientific terms without diminishing their original

Pitroda believes there is little difference between a small NGO and a small business. Both have high expectations and chase great ideas.

knowledge base. The problem is that while traditional knowledge is based on holism, modern science is rooted in reductionism. Making the connection requires a complex vision and a deep understanding of comparative epistemologies. It is the challenge in medicine as physicians and scientists explore uncharted frontiers.

Some of the concerns belong in the realm of pop culture.



Professor KRS Murthy

Books like "The monk who sold his Ferrari" look for body and mind solutions. Deepak Chopra dominates this space. The debate goes deeper and is difficult to enter in the absence of a common scientific idiom. Modern medicine is structurally defined and therefore is full of quantitative certitudes. The practitioners of Ayurveda on the other hand rely on knowledge that is based on systemic theories and hence the fields in Ayurveda cannot be reduced to structural entities.

The challenge in Integrative medicine is to evolve a methodology to define the relationship between the whole and the part. It is clearly not a one to one relationship. "FRLHT or for that matter any one else does not have the final answers," says Darshan. "But it is a pioneer in exploring the relationships in the context of health sciences. It respects both holism and reductionism as ways of knowing Nature. The way we see it is that the whole consists of the parts, but the parts don't necessarily add up to the whole."

A modern scientific laboratory is necessary for translating the systemic parameters of Ayurveda into the scientific structural parameters of modern science. It can develop quality standards for a plant or an Ayurvedic drug and check it out for toxins, heavy metals and so on. The laboratory tests become a means of epistemologically sensitive communication between practitioners of different systems. But the laboratory cannot measure the systemic parameters on which Ayurveda is based. It can only measure representative points in the systemic field. In the hospital an Ayurveda practitioner can benefit from reading an MRI or an ultrasound. He needs to however be trans-disciplinary in his perspective in order to be able to interpret the change in structural parameters in Ayurveda's systemic frame work. The void in Ayurveda will still need to read the pulse and assess the body type of the patient in ways that are completely alien to the physicians trained in modern medicine.

FRLHT was founded to find everyday solutions to such complexities. Its success will finally be in creating new and sustainable relevance for the wealth of knowledge that is India's legacy but tends to get lost in debris of change and confusion about the content of an Indian programme of modernisation.



A room in the Ayurveda hospital



Dr GG Gangadharan



Dr Padma Venkat in her lab



Dr K Haridasan in his ethno-medicinal garden

Ayurveda hospital, lab, garden

How FRLHT has gone from conservation to research, value added products and clinical practice

THE campus of the Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) sits on five acres amidst a green wilderness in the suburbs of Bangalore. The area is called Jarakbande Kaval and you get there via Yelahanka, invariably braving traffic jams, pollution and screeching horns.

The campus itself, however, is an island of serenity and unruffled activity. There are three buildings with tiled roofs and architecture that ensures interiors are flooded with natural light and air. A fourth building is under construction: it is a gift from a patient. He was so happy with the treatment he received at Amruth, the FRLHT Ayurveda hospital and wellness centre, he insisted on paying for another building on the campus as a donation.

Set up in 2004, Amruth is in a sense the crowning glory of FRLHT's activities. It rounds off the work which began in the early nineties with the identification of medicinal plants, and their preservation in the wild, creation of a herbarium, identifying of folk healers, development of medicines and value added products and the setting up of a modern laboratory as a testing facility. In this chain, the hospital puts everything in sharp perspective because it showcases Ayurveda in practice as physician deals with patient.

The hospital is headed by the forward-looking Dr GG Gangadharan, who used to be at the Arya Vaidya Pharmacy in Coimbatore. In addition to him there is a clinical team of five doctors led by a postgraduate in Ayurveda with a decade and a half in clinical experience. FRLHT on the whole has 15 Ayurvedic doctors and Siddha, Unani and Yoga consultants.

"We started Amruth to mainstream Ayurveda, not as a science from the past, but as a contemporary system of medicine which can play a fruitful role in tackling degenerative, lifestyle related and chronic diseases. These are the problems of this century. Modern medicine is weak here and Ayurveda is strong," says Dr Gangadharan.

The hospital's 12 departments include geriatrics, mental health, diabetes and neuropathy, cardiac disorders, gastro-intestinal and respiratory disorders,



Products made by FRLHT

ophthalmology, complementary treatment for cancer, skin diseases and so on.

Ayurveda has been under assault on many fronts. If on the one hand the vanishing of medicinal plants has been depriving it of its raw material, on the other there aren't the facilities where Ayurveda as a traditional science is kept alive in a contemporary setting and with a new relevance.

Amruth in its very presence seeks to correct these imbalances. It is a modern, clean and well-equipped facility. It has 20 well-kept rooms for patients to stay and treatment facilities. In time to come there will be 100 rooms. All the Panchakarma treatments under Ayurveda are available here. There is a pharmacy with Ayurvedic medicines chosen from the most reliable manufacturers across the country.

It already has the odd-landmark success to its name. A bus driver with paralysis after a bad brain haemorrhage was brought to Dr Gangadharan. He looked at the MRI and said there was nothing that he could do. When the family persisted, he agreed to treat the man. Herbal packs for the head and other medications were given to him and in three weeks he began moving. Fresh MRIs after two months showed that clots had gone. Dr Gangadharan is however cautious about presenting Ayurveda as some kind of miracle science. Ayurveda should be used for those ailments which it is known to treat. "We believe one such hospital in Bangalore is not enough. We would like to multiply it in India and

other countries," he says.

So this hospital will become a module which can be integrated into health centres, women and child health centres, allopathic hospitals etc. People today seek choices in healthcare. The future, as Dr Gangadharan points out is in integrated health systems. Amruth is keen to be part of the trillion dollar wellness industry with its network of resorts and spas.

TEACHING HOSPITAL: Amruth is also meant to serve as a teaching hospital with its own syllabus and degrees both at a graduate and post-graduate level. The physicians who come out of here will be new in their orientation. They will

learn how to give treatment guided by the shastras, but use modern diagnostics to interpret biomedical parameters and assess the outcomes of Ayurvedic treatment. They will also be encouraged to use information technology.

Their training will be to remain within Ayurveda's systemic framework, but simultaneously connect with the reductionist theories of modern science. Making the connection is important for communicating the benefits of Ayurveda in an age when there is a huge demand for its therapies.

Finally, it is physicians who can strike this delicate balance who will keep Ayurveda alive and relevant in a classical sense.

At yet another level, Amruth will be a finishing school for short-term training to doctors and therapists who can then work in clinics and alternative medicine departments of allopathic hospitals. A huge demand is envisaged for such professionals.

The teaching of Ayurveda is either mechanical or doggedly conservative. Young Ayurveda physicians get degrees, but their knowledge tends to be superficial. It doesn't emanate from the philosophical and logical framework of Ayurveda. They can't explain their line of treatment and tend to hide behind the shastras as dogma. The result is that they suffer from low self-esteem in comparison to allopathic physicians who have clear answers for all that they do.

In the absence of a deep understanding, the new Ayurveda doctor does not know how to enter into a dialogue with practitioners of modern medicine and build a constructive relationship. There is also a tendency to ignore present-day public health requirements and shy away from preventive and promotive healthcare in which Ayurveda can be very effective.

The challenge therefore is to be classical with such rigour that it is possible to be modern without being contrived. For the Ayurveda physician caught in today's needs and exigencies, creative scholarship is the way forward. Get the texts right and all else will follow.

It is precisely to achieve this that FRLHT has on board Prof Lakshmi Thattachar, former director of the Sanskrit Academy, Malkotte, Karnataka. He is a grammarian and he is assisted by his son, Dr MA Alwar, who is a Sanskrit logician.

The two pundits are deciphering ancient medical texts, including the Charak Samhita. They have studied 500 catalogues, taking down technical details. They plan to make primers for students of Ayurveda. The exercise also serves to salvage important medical works. It also includes the process of finding out original manuscripts. There are many versions. The Charaka alone has 100. Then they plan to bring out a critical edition of these manuscripts.

Their research associate is Dr Shankar, an MBBS physician, who has translated from Sanskrit to English a book on dietetics called Kshemakutubalam from 13th to 14 century written by Kahema Sharma, chief cook of a Rajput king and an ayurvedic physician. The book is a scientific book on how to preserve your health with details on the right diet, when how and where to eat food, the qualities of a cook, utensils to be used, how to detect toxins and poisons.

LABORATORY: FRLHT set up a laboratory in 2001 to use chemistry and pharmacology for assessing traditional medicine. The laboratory is headed by Padma Venkat, a PhD Cantab. She worked for 10 years in Cambridge University before Darshan got her to join FRLHT and set up the lab.

"The main idea is to determine the quality standards of medicinal herbs and traditional medicine not just from the modern scientific point of view, but also from the traditional viewpoint," says Dr Padma.

The laboratory has the complex job of providing the methodology by which concepts of traditional knowledge can be correlated with modern science. But in a less intricate role it uses standard facilities in chemistry and biology to evaluate and certify raw materials and processes used in traditional medicine.



A plant which produces natural red dye



Plant material from all over India

Amrutha Vana has more than 800 species of tropical Indian medicinal plants from habitats across India.



Exotic orchid



One of many beautiful and useful plants



Seeds for the herbarium

herbal soups in sachets for acidity, digestion and as a refreshing drink.

"I have totally expanded my knowledge base," says Dr Padma.

HERBARIUM: Work on a herbarium or botanical repository of Indian medicinal plants began in 1995. Till date the herbarium has collected about 70 per cent of the medicinal plants used by Indian systems of medicine.

Work is already underway to digitise the herbarium. FRLHT's herbarium is recognized by the government as the national herbarium for medicinal plants of India. It is also an internationally accredited herbarium. When it is expanded, the herbarium will include medicinal fauna and the metals and minerals used in traditional medicine. It could one day be a chemical and cell repository.

The herbarium serves to identify plants and their variants and trace them to their habitats. Plant stems, leaves and seeds are then stored away. Digitising them involves scanning them and making them available as images on computer.

"We have information on 7,361 medicinal plant species, with their vernacular names, distribution data, seeds propagation," says Vijay Barve, senior systems manager. There is a library of 14,000 images and maps showing eco-distribution and forests.

A team of four to five botanists make frequent trips to hunt and identify medicinal plant species. States which have been mapped include Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. State wise CDs of plants are available

AMRUTHA VANA: An ethno-medicinal garden, the Amrutha Vana, has been created on the FRLHT campus. It has more than 800 species of tropical Indian medicinal plants from habitats as far away as Arunachal Pradesh. There are grasses, herbs and trees.

"We would like to make this a national garden with medicinal plants from every region of India," says Dr K. Haridasan, one of India's leading botanists

It has developed innovative products such as a herbal soup for industry on a consultancy basis.

Traditional healers say herbs should be collected only from a particular location at a certain time, stored in a certain way to be effective. The laboratory tries to find out scientifically whether such instructions make a difference to the quality of herbs.

Pharmacognocny, or the identification of crude drugs is done here. All sorts of herbs are traded under one name. This can result in adulteration. The labs use DNA markers to determine species. It has invented a diagnostic kit for small industries that can authenticate the quality of their medicine. FRLHT has applied for a patent.

The lab validates certain traditional practices in the context of modern science. For instance, tests conducted at the lab have found that copper vessels do kill bacteria which cause e-coli, typhoid and cholera. They have identified kitchen herbs which purify water. A squeeze of lime for instance gets rid of pathogens. Pipali, boiled in milk, increases its bioactivity. The labs have invented

and a specialist on the northeast. This garden has been lovingly put together by him and Ganesh Babu.

The plants are organised in some 20 different themes. There are 30 species for hair and skin care, 27 species that work as antidotes for poisonous bites, 40 species for primary health care, 56 species that are on the Red List and highly endangered. There are also a great many aromatic medicinal plants and an aquatic herbal garden as well.

The Amrutha Vana has been the inspiration for other home, community and institutional herbal gardens. Thousands of kitchen gardens have been created in the Bangalore area from here.

"IT companies, Ayurveda resorts and spas are asking for these plants," says Dr Haridasan. "A garden has been built by us in Hyderabad's Genome Valley. There is scope of going commercial. We are backed by a great knowledge base."

Dr Haridasan says FRLHT has a village botanist programme which teaches villagers to identify plants and educates them on IPR issues. This knowledge can be used for local health needs, tourism or for forest department surveys. There is also a plant identification course.

IN SITU CONSERVATION: Conservation of medicinal plants is where FRLHT began in 1993. This conservation took place in forest habitats. Since then the programme has covered nine states created 84 conservation areas for medicinal plants. These areas serve as wild gene pools. India is now a world leader in the in situ conservation of medicinal plants.

FRLHT has had to work with the forest department and sensitise its staff, who have gone from being completely apathetic to medicinal plants as a forest community resource to now actively participating in efforts for their conservation.

GA Kinhal of the Madhya Pradesh cadre of the Indian Forest Service is on deputation with FRLHT and oversees this programme. Kinhal says there has been a lot of learning among foresters.

"Most of all I have learnt to be persistent on certain aspects of forestry and to engage in community dialogue. There is a lack of interaction between society and the forest department," he says.

Kinhal emphasises the importance of sustainable harvesting of medicinal plants. These plants should be planted within appropriate forests by the forest department to preserve the gene pool.

"Cultivating species for industry does not mean conservation," he clarifies. To conserve, the causes of depletion should be removed.

Using a mix of traditional and scientific knowledge he has helped work out how and when medicinal and aromatic plants should be

harvested. The role of the community is essential in this process. Plants harvested at the right time and using the correct method are easier to preserve after processing. Similarly seeds when collected at the right time yield more oil.

IT AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE: Since 1995, FRLHT has been putting on to computer the material medica of traditional systems. Dr SN Venugopal is an Ayurveda physician who works on digitising the texts so that they become easily available. He has built a huge database of 125,000 plant names used in Ayurveda. From the Charaka Samhita he has identified 12,875 Sanskrit names of plants. "After grouping these we get 620 plants," he says. There is detailed information on each plant: its formulations, properties, qualities, critical comments, botanical name, identity. There are pictures of each plant.

Plants from Siddha have also been computerised. Dr Venugopal designed software for this documentation. A complete grouping of plant nKames from the Charaka Samhita is available on CD from him for Rs 250 for students and educational institutes.

GRAM MOOLIGAI COMPANY: FRLHT's work in mobilising communities and helping them use their local knowledge remains hugely exciting. The challenge before FRLHT lies in taking communities to the market through various connections.

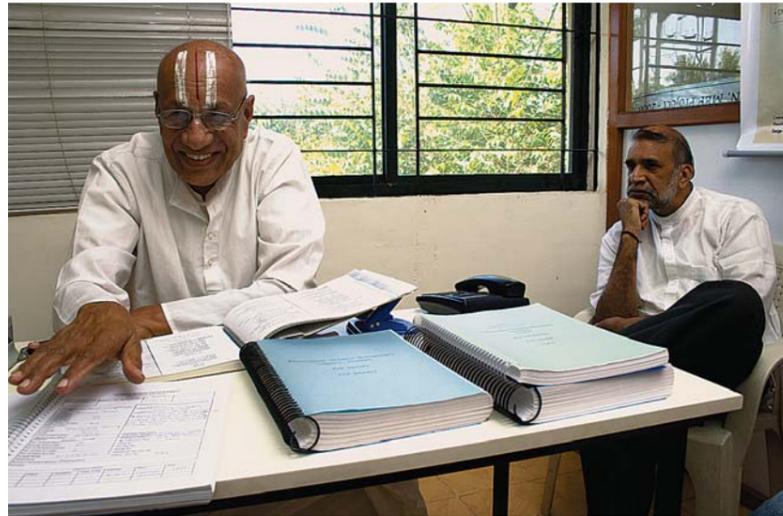
FRLHT has been instrumental in the setting up of the Gram Mooligai Company whose shareholders are rural women and small and marginal farmers. It is registered under the companies act and in the past three years has

done total business worth more than Rs 1 crore.

The company cultivates and collects herbal plants and produces products from them such as a natural remedy for cows.

MALARIA DRUG AND A COUGH SYRUP: FRLHT seeks to bring back local health solutions in rural communities in southern India. To do this it has sponsored conventions of folk healers at the district and state levels. It has also been giving awards to outstanding folk healers.

This has led to the evaluation of local remedies. An interesting trial was conducted in districts of Tamil Nadu with a local cough remedy. Its efficacy was measured against allopathic prescriptions. The study was done by M Abdul Kareem



Professor Lakshmi Thattachar



Some of the community outreach team



At work in the herbarium



GA Kinhal



Dr Venugopal

of FRLHT in collaboration with the Christian Medical College in Vellore. It showed that the local remedy was more effective. A study for scabies yielded similar results.

Dr Nair was asked by the Kannada Milk Federation (KMF) to help out with health ailments faced by their cattle. Nair worked with folk healers to identify 190 herbs. Five inexpensive medicines which could tackle mastitis, wounds, repeated breeding were made. KMF has got a licence to make the mastitis medicine which costs only Rs 60.

Similarly, herbal formulations have been found to inhabit malaria in the liver. "Traditional healers give different medicines for different types of fever," says Dr Prakash, who heads the malaria research programme. These fevers and medicines were identified. A number of observational studies were done, including in Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts of Orissa. The group given the preventive herbal medicine did not develop malaria. Around 10 formulations have been identified and FRLHT will be collaborating with the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore to commercialize these.

The involvement with folk healers has also involved evaluating the work of bone-setters. Says Dr Lokesh, "Our studies have shown that they can handle simple fractures and dislocation, but not the complex ones...."

The benefits of folk medicine at an affordable cost has prompted FRLHT to work with other NGOs and self-help groups of women to promote over 200,000 home herbal gardens across the southern Indian states and in Maharashtra, Orissa and Chhatisgarh as well.

Pushpa HK, a life sciences graduate says for urban residents, a complete package of 21 plants costs only Rs 300. Advice on how to look after the plants is readily available from FRLHT. Plants are available for cough and cold, skincare, digestion, to tackle stress etc. Schools are finding herbal gardens an excellent way of teaching botany.

Twenty plants have been identified for primary healthcare. In rural areas, the home herbal garden is being promoted with herbal formulations to tackle anaemia in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh said Dr Nagendra. Women are encouraged to grow greens in their backyard. Around 161 herbal formulations for anaemia have been short listed.

Dr Nagendra has also been organising folk healers. "Each village has one or two but they have no common platform," he says. A folk healers association of 150 has been formed. They have been taken for exposure visits and three state conventions have been held. "These are the last generation of folk healers and it's important to store their knowledge," says Dr Nagendra.

call 3033 3333

there's one for everyone



Presenting a wide range of Reliance phones, from Rs. 777 to Rs. 18500
 Available on all prepaid and postpaid plans



Classic 703
Rs 777

B & W



Classic 731
Rs 999

Colour



LG 3000
Rs 1399



LG 3100
Rs 1799

Colour FM



Nokia 2505
Rs 3799



MotoFlip W355
Rs 3999



LG 6600
Rs 6799

Camera and More



MotoRazr2
Rs 18500

RELIANCE Mobile

Business

BEYOND PROFIT

Rethink money with us. What should the entrepreneur of the future be like? How can you get rich and still serve society? Do causes need bottom lines?

When villages discover Computerji

Civil Society News
Ahmedabad

FOR many years Vasava tribals in Ghanikut, a village in south Gujarat's Netrang district, waited patiently for electricity. Poles and promises were made. Officials came and went. Stuck on a rocky hill, the Vasavas waited in vain.

Then, in May 2007, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) and Microsoft set up a computer hub, called a Community Based Technology Centre (CTLC), close by in Thava village. Salim Bhai, the technical trainer told Mohan and Ishwar Vasava that they could find out through the computer why they were not getting electricity. Salim also told them about the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

The form was downloaded and signed by 60 Vasavas. It was sent to the Gujarat Electricity Board with a copy to the district collector. Almost instantly, a nervous district executive engineer appeared saying he'd fix the problem. For the Vasavas, it was a rare moment of victory.

Microsoft and the AKRSP have set up 13 such CTLCs in Bharuch and Surendranagar districts of Gujarat. Each has around six or seven computers, a technical trainer and a community worker. It services villages in a 10 km radius.

The facilities the computer kiosks offer are catching the fancy of rural folk. Villages are vying with each other to have one. Tribals in deep forests are lobbying for at least a 'sub-centre'. At Phulgram village, in Surendranagar district, as tea was passed around, the village sarpanch keen to fob off any likely competition, marshalled a long line of reasons why a CTLC in his village would be a bigger success.

"Our village is better located near the main road, other children can come easily, we will create space, look after it..." he continued.

All eyes were on Vikas Goswami, head of Microsoft's CSR programme, here on a blitz tour to find out how the CTLCs were doing.

Having a CTLC is not only a matter of prestige. The kiosks are attracting rural youth, farmers, tribals and village communities because of the range of information and computer courses they offer. Despite targeting the poorest, the CTLCs still netted revenue of Rs 7 lakh in seven months surprising even AKRSP's assiduous project coordinator, Sheeji Abraham.

For one, the CTLCs provide computer training courses at very low rates. You get admission readily if you have the following qualifications: poor, marginalised and barely literate. A two month basic computer course is just Rs 200 and a three-month Microsoft Unlimited Potential Program costs only Rs 450.



At the end of the computer course Microsoft gives a much valued certificate

At the end of the course, Microsoft gives a much valued certificate. At Chotila village, when certificates were to be distributed by Goswami, the panchayat turned up in full strength with flowers, speeches and flashbulbs popping to record the moment for posterity.

For those who can't pay at all there is a subsidy scheme. It is mandatory for government servants in Class 3 and Class 4 category to learn how to use computers to get ahead in their jobs. The CTLCs charge them Rs 2,500 for a certificate course. This helps subsidise the poorer students. Then the centres take up job work, which helps needy students gain experience and meet the cost of the course. Till now 1,046 people have been trained.

Employers now go to the CTLCs to head hunt. When the bank manager of the Baroda Gujarat Grameen Bank at Netrang was looking for a data entry operator, he inquired at the kiosk. Coincidentally Deepmala, an unemployed graduate was doing a course there. Her technical trainer recommended her. She now works at the bank earning Rs 2,700 and the bank manager wants to hire more youngsters from the center.

The walls of each CTLC are decorated with job notices. The technical trainer gathers all these for display. Information is accessed from the Internet and job applications downloaded.

At the Sagbara CTLC, Shankar a 22-year-old tribal who used to travel 17 km to attend the computer course now has a job at the Pune Telephone Exchange.

The CTLCs live up to their slogan: 'Computerji jode duniya se' (Computer Sir will join you to the world). They are certainly jodo-ing people with the government.

"In many cases government schemes are not implemented," says Adal, AKRSP's communications officer. "The reason is villages don't know how to access these schemes and the government doesn't know whom to give the money to."

The CTLC workers tell people about all government schemes including the rural employment guarantee scheme, the tribal sub plan for which Rs 13 crores has been allocated, the Manav Kalyan Yojana (for micro enterprises), micro-finance schemes, how to get a BPL certificate and so on.

Since the NGO has been working for long in these regions it has built federations of farmers and of women. The government is happy to give money to such groups or to individuals they recommend.

"When we wanted cows we applied under an animal husbandry scheme," explained Indira of Ghanikut, where AKRSP has organised an SHG and made a lift irrigation system. "We got 66 cows and we gave the first few cows to the poorest women

The facilities the computer kiosks offer are catching the fancy of rural folk. Villages are vying with each other to have a kiosk.



A technical trainer at the computer kiosk

in our group."

Local heroes have also emerged. Thirty two-year-old Chhan Radaviya of Mulkapada helped villagers get payment for work done under the employment guarantee scheme. He took it on himself to speed up measurement of the work. He also got people their BPL certificates.

For farmers there is information on agriculture. The CTLCs are linked to agricultural universities and Krishi Vigyan Kendras. Farmers get to know about farm practices, pest control, seeds, crop care and medium range weather forecast. Correct prices of crops can also be accessed. The CTLCs have tied up with the Multi Commodities Exchange (MCX) to help farmers sell at a good price.

Suresh Bhai, a physically disabled farmer lives in Vakhtar village, in the Sayla taluka of Surendranagar. When his sesame, groundnut and cotton were ready for sale, he desperately wanted to know what the correct prices were so that he could negotiate with wily traders who were sure to turn up at his door.

'It is a hub and spokes model'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

ON a visit to Gujarat to assess the Community Based Technology Centres (CTLC), set up in partnership with the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), Vikas Goswami, head of Microsoft's CSR programme, spoke to *Civil Society*.

What is your assessment of the CTLCs?

I think the centres have done well especially considering these are remote areas. The quality of education and infrastructure is better in Gujarat than in eastern UP and Bihar. Yet if one looks at government data, employment for the youth is an issue. So training them on skills which increase employability is very crucial.

I like the way computers are being used by people who may not be seeking employment but do want to know what their rights and how they can access those rights, services or goods from the government. So right to information is very crucial because people are now using it to get power, for roads, for being identified as BPL. They have been able to lobby the government for services because the information was available via the computer.

AKRSP is using the computer as a tool for empowerment. Instead of duplicating services, people are being helped to access government services that are already available. They can find out how to identify a good cow from a bad and what a particular breed of cow looks like via a computer. So farmers who don't have surplus cash know the asset they are buying is worth the money they are paying.

There are demands for expansion.

When we partner an NGO we not only look at the grassroots network they have but also their commitment to own the programme and extend it as the demand rises. The Aga Khan Foundation was very interested though they may not have had a lot of experience in it. Most of their skills have been focused on livelihood and on farm and non farm labour.

They were willing to run with the programme because they were willing

Then it struck him that he'd seen a banner in Sayla with a slogan about a computer giving such information. He hurried to the CTLC in Sayla and told the staff there about his plight. They quickly downloaded market rates in Chotila and Rajkot. Suresh got 20 per cent more for his crops this year. He is now doing a computer course at the CTLC.

Villagers are asking not only for more kiosks but for software on agriculture, livelihoods, animal husbandry, Tally, Photoshop and a training programme on computer maintenance.

The runaway success of the kiosks is due to a careful strategy. Microsoft partnered an NGO who understood rural development. In AKRSP, with its experience in watershed management, micro-finance, agriculture, gender equity and a slew of other projects, they found a perfect match.

AKRSP, in its turn, marketed computer technology to villages: they held plays, sang IT songs, displayed posters, banners. Their community workers went from village to village, sometimes carting along computers and explaining why people should use them.

It was easy. All they had to do was to press buttons.

Villages are also enthused since they see the CTLCs as their own facility. The Sagbara CTLC is housed in a room provided by the Navjeevan Adivasi Mahila Vikas Manch, a federation of SHGs consisting of 41 villages and 81 SHGs. They have even donated a computer to it. The Thava CTLC is managed by the farmer's federation. The Dediapara CTLC is looked after by the Jagruti Mahila Manch, another SHG. The local panchayat contributed a computer.

Microsoft and AKRSP are keen to hand over CTLCs to these groups. Says Sheeji. "We want to make it a profit generator for them."

To meet rising demand AKRSP is planning a 'hub and spokes' model. The CTLCs on main roads will continue and smaller sub-centres will be set up in interior villages with a trainer and community organiser, so that each village, especially the women in it, finds a friend--- the liberating Computerji.



Vikas Goswami (third from left) in a dark kurta

to listen to what their primary beneficiaries had to say. They were also willing to understand that traveling 20 km for women to get to the CTLC would be impossible, so can we adopt a hub and spokes model? They are willing to take the programme further and further into the interior. So the programme will be extended in that way.

The other thing is institutions are willing to take ownership of the CTLCs: the farmers' federation, the women's federation, the panchayats. They are willing to run it, to give space for it, to donate computers and to see the programme is a success because they see a value behind it.

Local partnerships have been a crucial factor behind the success of the CTLCs because peoples' institutions have taken ownership of the programme. The Aga Khan Foundation has a withdrawal policy. The idea is to let people run the CTLC and make it sustainable.

Subsidising the programme has enabled people who could not afford the fees, to take advantage of it. So there are innovative models that have emerged organically.

People are asking for software related to agriculture and animal husbandry.

Microsoft is not an IT services company. We build the basic platform after which other people develop the software. But we do have a volunteering programme under which we will investigate the possibility of Microsoft employees coming together to develop this kind of software.

What are your plans for other states?

Till now we have partnered with 11 organisations. The programme will expand but it will be refined and adjusted according to the learning we have from the grassroots. We don't choose a state. We choose a partner who has good presence at the grassroots and is willing to contextualize and run with the project.

Getting rights of musicians right

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

SHUBHA Mudgal, the maverick Hindustani vocalist and her husband, tabla player Aneesh Pradhan, have launched Underscore Records, a venture to sell music online. Unlike other recording companies, Underscore would like musicians to own their music.

Underscore sources music of all kinds to represent the diversity of India. "If it is rock music from India we would like to carry it. If it is a song sung by women during rituals we would like to carry that too," says Mudgal sipping her pomegranate juice at Café Turtle in Khan Market, Delhi.

Underscore helps musicians bypass big recording companies. The idea for the venture came with Mudgal's own experience. "Nothing prepares a traditional musician for the business of music. They don't understand copyrights and mechanical licences," explains Mudgal. "You would be called for a recording by the biggest names, given some flowers. Then a document would be thrust before you. It would run into several pages. You would not understand what you were signing away. So if I recorded *Raag Yaman* for them, I could not record it for anyone else. They have worldwide rights for posterity."

According to her, the *raag* is not hers to begin with. It is traditional knowledge and cannot be anybody's property. Music contracts are a western concept. The subsidiary company in India follows the same model. Mudgal has lost a wide repertoire to the music companies. "I composed music for poetry written by 17th century mystic poets. I want this to be documented and available for posterity after I'm gone. But a record company gains rights and then withdraws it from the market and it cannot be recorded again," she says.

The venture already has about 100 albums, some books, videos, MP3 downloads, podcasts and ringtones. The portfolio consists of a wide range. Some are projects undertaken by Underscore Records, others music sent in by musicians and some is music that belongs to companies or agencies.

One of the projects undertaken by the company is the restoration of a 78rpm disc recording of Kesarbai Kerkar, the legendary Goan Hindustani vocalist. The Indian Record Collectors Society has a copy of the record which had been produced by two jewellers in 1935. The duo has spent a lot of time restoring the disk. The hiss and crackle of the 78 rpm had to be transferred to a crystal clear hi-fi system. Since the singer sang into a microphone, you can't hear the sarangi and tabla as clearly. Specialised software was used to potter around. But they had to make sure that the pitch did not change. They also had to make sure that they were not making it faster. They had to listen, analyse and reject many times.

Underscore Records also sources music to make it available. An interesting set of three CDs has been collected from the Gurgaon-based Archival and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology. The centre had organised a festival called "Remembered Rhythms" in 2005. The underlying theme was Diaspora – of other cultures in India and the Indian Diaspora itself. The Sidi Goma representing the African Sidi community of Gujarat in India, D'Bhuyaa Saaj of the East Indian community from Trinidad and Rivers of Babylon, a London based group of Indian Jews performed at the event. Mudgal happened to watch the performance and sourced the recordings. Underscore does not ask for exclusivity.

In most cases the artists decide what they want to record. "We can help," says Mudgal. The company keeps 20 per cent and the artist gets 80 per cent of the sales. Royalties are billed on the 31st of June and the 31st of December. Underscore is careful about putting up the music that they receive. "Even musicians exploit others. They send us a piece of music which does not have consent from the accompanists. We do not take music unless we know that everyone performing knows and we have written permission," says Mudgal. "We want to promote a culture of working in a fair and reasonable manner," she adds.

In some cases they make an exception and produce the music. Kissa Punjab where filmmaker Gurvinder Singh had made field recordings from all over Punjab is an example.

The company sends a soft copy of the contract to each artist so that they can run it through their lawyer and customise it. It is drafted in English. Basically the contract says that the artist decides the price. They give the company two weeks notice to pull off any album. The artist decides the period of the contract. The company also encourages musicians to consult their well-wishers, lawyers or to question them. They also sell books. "We often sell compositions of musicians. A student often publishes this and it costs say Rs 40 and he prints 500 copies. We want to make this available universally," says Mudgal.

The tech-savvy Mudgal has ambitious plans for the future. "Five years from now, our single track downloads should become very popular. We want to collaborate with players like iTunes and Napster. We will not be legal representatives but



Shubha Mudgal

'Nothing prepares a traditional musician for the business of music. They don't understand copyrights and mechanical licences.'

want to manage hundreds of musicians and make them aware of possibilities. For example, some musicians don't believe in selling. But in sharing freely, they are giving away family heirlooms which anybody can then sing," she says.

They also want to create conversations. "If somebody is a genius, we should be able to say it musically. If he is a sitar player has he made changes to the instrument? Has he added something to the strumming? Has he changed the way he holds it?" she explains. The idea is that musicians' contribution should be articulated. "What is the textual

content? Was the music written to express indignation against violence in Nandigram for example? If I am taking a certain poet's work and composing do I know what others have done. I discovered that Siddeshwari Devi had composed work, the first two lines of which were from Kabir's poetry," she quips.

Is it possible to protest against modern events in Hindustani music? Mudgal who extensively researches history of music says during the freedom struggle, Gandhiji met the Tawaifs of Varanasi and asked them to sing songs of protests. Vidyadhari Bai was one of them. Underscore is soon going to host an album of freedom struggle songs.

Another project that the company is planning this year is the archiving of early jazz in India. There were Goan musicians playing jazz in the 1930s and 1940s. The company is collaborating with Naresh Fernandes, the editor of Time Out Mumbai on this project. Also on the cards is a book on Indian music for children. The first book is on the tabla. It is written by Aneesh Pradhan and illustrated by Liquid Designs.

Even though the company has ambitious ideas and plans, it is run very modestly. It was started by Mudgal and her husband with a couple of lakhs. They lost money for a couple of years. The website is designed by Ani Gupta of Metaphorm who often gives them a discounted bill. Sudev Sheth, a student from the University of California, Berkeley, who is researching music in Delhi and also learns tabla from Aneesh Pradhan, helps them with marketing. "We realise that we need to involve more people. We don't want our passion to get lost in power point presentations. If someone wants to come on board and help us we will be willing students," says Mudgal.

Worldview

LATITUDE MATTERS

Everyone owns a shrinking planet. People count more than governments. Track change before it becomes news.

Pak activism is reason to hope

Riaz Quadir
Versailles

ONE of the key elements of the democratic process is the rule of law. Without it democratic institutions cannot take root. The dismal state of civil society in Pakistan is a perfect case in point. NGOs in Pakistan in general have a disconnect with society at large because in the absence of the rule of law the feudal structure of the ruling class, irrespective of which political party or army echelon they come from, have the same elitist goals and a common stranglehold over the country.

Having said that, one can see the gradual emergence of an independent judiciary and media. Pervez Musharraf tried to take Dick the butcher's advice to dictators: "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers." (Henry VI, Shakespeare) and failed, but not for lack of trying. The recent show of unity among the nation's judiciary has greatly weakened Musharraf's position and given hope to the people.

A sizable number of middle class, educated professionals are waiting in the wings to help turn the tide. Women are fed up with being sent back to the pre-Islamic era by being used as fodder in the war between fundamentalists and the USA, and have put in place enough grassroots organisations that will bloom in no time once the rule of law has been established. True, that in the recent past, these voices have been silenced by the din of angry Islamic fundamentalists tearing down posters of women, burning music and video discs, and shouting slogans demanding Sharia law. Since America is seen as a common oppressor one does not visibly see much protest against the fundamentalists. But Pakistan is not Afghanistan.

Nor will the marketplace allow it. The slow but sure absorption of the female workforce into the labour market will not permit a reversal. Positive trends in education and health for women are also a fact in Pakistan, however marginal, despite the surrounding political chaos. In brief, civil society is woven into the fabric of Pakistani society and with time (and minimum interference from America and its Western allies) will emerge into full view.

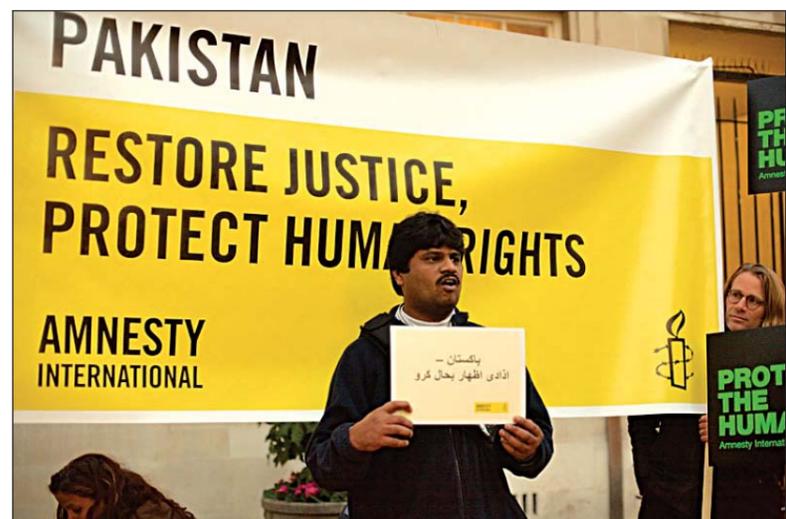
India will play a major role in Pakistan's future. By reversing the caricature role of enemies India stands to gain. In effect, if not in form, the original unity of the Indian sub-continent can be regained. The European Union is a fine model for warring nations seeking that kind of unity. India and Pakistan have far more in common than France and Germany or England and Spain. Independence from colonial rule in 1947 was but a beginning. Healing the divide would be the ultimate victory.

The September 1947 edition of *Time* magazine described the birth of Pakistan with the words: a geographic monstrosity is born. Surely, the colonial principle of divide and rule had been carried to such ridiculous extremes that a country with two wings, separated by over a 1,000 miles of the very country from which it was being sliced off, was, to say the least, a disfiguration. That the two wings, East and West Pakistan, split under very bitter conditions after cohabiting for less than 25 years was proof enough of the absurdity of its *raison d'être*.

That India with its vast intellectual heritage and forceful leadership couldn't be turned into a puppet state did not prevent the Imperial powers from trying their hands on fledgling Pakistan next door. Sharing a 5,000 year old cultural heritage with the rest of the South Asian sub-continent made it similar to India in so many ways, and yet religion - the basis of its separation from India - made it so distinct. In any case, the ideals of democracy had surely taken root in what was to become Pakistan at the same time as it did in the rest of South Asia dur-

ing the long struggle to overthrow the colonial yoke that had kept it in chains for centuries.

For the first decade after independence Pakistan struggled as a nascent democracy. History was stacked against it, however. Its leaders were, in fact, really Indians, and like millions of its citizens, migrants (*mujahirs*) themselves: strangers in a strange land trying to fashion a nation out of a meagre Muslim intellectual diaspora. Pakistan's founder Mohammed Ali Jinnah, died with 13 months of its birth and its first Prime Minister and co-founder, Liaquat Ali Khan,



A protest by Pakistanis in Britain

Since America is seen as a common oppressor one does not visibly see much protest against the fundamentalists. But Pakistan is not Afghanistan. Nor will the marketplace allow it to be.

was assassinated three years later (in precisely the same Municipal Park in Karachi where 57 years later another politician, the late Benazir Bhutto would be assassinated).

The struggle for power between the natives and the newcomers was the underlying reality that would shape the politics of Pakistan.

Perfectly positioned for the machinations of the Cold War warriors, the Sandhurst trained Army General, Ayub Khan, ended the short-lived aspirations of people's rule, starting a legacy of martial law and army dictatorship that was to become the future of Pakistan. A country rich in human and material resources and strategically positioned for global domino politics, it had like so many others, become the target of American foreign policy. Which of course meant putting a halt to the growth of democracy. American foreign policy was quite simple: it was easier and more expedient to prop up and control a small coterie of decision-mak-

Bangladesh's fearless Begum

Kavita Charanji
Dhaka

TASLIMA Nasreen continues to live the life of a fugitive in India. Thrown out by West Bengal's communist government from Kolkata, she sought refuge in Jaipur. But the BJP wasn't sympathetic either. She was bundled into a car and sent to Delhi where she occasionally talks to the media from somewhere, repeatedly pleading her right to return to Kolkata.

Across the border in Bangladesh, Taslima's home ground, women haven't completely lost their voice. Since 1947, a spunky magazine called Begum, with an octogenarian editor named Nurjahan Begum, has been taking up women's rights with gusto.

Now a monthly, the magazine, the first illustrated weekly for Muslim Bengali women in the subcontinent, covers a gamut of issues such as poetry, news, novels and articles.

Tracing the early years of the magazine, Nurjahan says, "Those who could read or write or at least had primary level education were the target readers of the magazine. Begum has passed through different stages of women's emancipation and given women more effective roles. Women can speak out, educate themselves and have a breathing space where they can move, talk, love or breathe freely. In the 1940s, girls would be married off at the age of 13 or 14 years; now the situation has changed. Likewise at that time, when there were only 50-60 women graduates in what is now Bangladesh, women have access to education and cultural activities," she goes on to add.

From its first issue in 1947 published from Calcutta to its move to Dhaka (Patuatuli), Begum has attracted writers such as Rabeya Khatun, Mokbula Manzur, Zobaidda Gulshanara, Fahmida Amin, Maleka Begum and Ferdousi Rahman (better known as a singer). To Begum's credit, Syeda Khanam, Bangladesh's first woman photographer, began her career here.

The ground breaking magazine was founded by Mohammad Nasiruddin and has been edited by his daughter Nurjahan for over 58 years. The latter took over the reins from Begum Sufia Kamal, writer, poet and women's activist. Those were turbulent times with communal riots breaking out. "It was very difficult to bring out the publication at that time," recalls Nurjahan. Among the hurdles was inadequate block and type, collecting ink and paper and transporting the staff to and from the office.

Nurjahan hails from an illustrious family. Her forward looking father, renowned journalist and editor of the monthly Shawgat, Mohammad Nasiruddin, lived in Calcutta while the little girl lived with her mother Fatema

Begum in Chalitatali. Later owing to pressing circumstances, she moved to Calcutta with her mother.

The liberal Nasiruddin enrolled her in Sakhawat Memorial School of Calcutta after going through two other schools. Nurjahan has fond memories of Sakhawat school: here she learnt to sing, dance, act, cook, sew, draw and engage in sports. On her matriculation, she joined Lady Brabourne College where she did her Bachelor's in ethics, philosophy and history.

Apart from her father's support, she was also backed up by her husband, well known journalist Rokunnuzaman Dadabhai who encouraged her to pursue her passion for journalism.

Begum received popular acclaim as a pioneering women's magazine. Among the issues covered were women's rights, how women are discriminated against, a woman's status in the family and society, their social status, and female education. Right through its inception the magazine has waged a battle to draw women out of a cloistered existence and into the mainstream. Though there were hardly any women writers and photographers at the time, the magazine still rolled out of the printing press.

Nurjahan's hand is visible even today—from the selection of articles, to gathering photographs and reading proofs.

A recent well produced women centric film, titled Begum, also turns the spotlight on the magazine and its editor. Says Ribon Khandokar, director of the film, "Begum encouraged women to come out of the veil, express their innermost feelings and gave them information on the world outside them. It is and was a wonderful platform for women writers."

However, there is a downside as well. A funds crunch and lack of technological innovation have impaired the quality of this revolutionary magazine. A question mark also hangs over the issue of succession though her two daughters Flora Nasreen Khan and Rina Yasmin Miti are lending her a hand.

Likewise there have been changes such as the closure of the Begum Club. This club, established in 1954, used to buzz with women from home and overseas joining hands to discuss literature, music, culture and society, Nurjahan still nurses the ambition to revive the club.

Another area of concern is the current insecurity and poor law and order situation in Bangladesh, which Nurjahan believes contribute to the secondary status of women. In her words, "Even today there are obstructions to gender equality such as religious fundamentalism and superstition." Despite such hitches, Begum continues publication and holds open the hope that the magazine will not only survive but continue to articulate the burning concerns of women.



An early issue of the magazine

Begum received popular acclaim as a pioneering women's magazine. Among the issues covered were women's rights, how women are discriminated, a woman's status in the family...

ers who would do their bidding than export the principles of democracy on which their own nation was built. Such proxy rule had worked for the English and the French when they had been forced to quit their colonies.

The seeds of democratic institutions which had been planted and nurtured during the long struggle for freedom were being throttled and swamped. But would they die? Perhaps not. Despite the US supported dictatorships and the irreligious use of religion in the past 60 years, the aspirations of the people who had glimpsed freedom, however occasionally, continued to simmer. The rule of law which has been cabined, cribbed and confined never ceased to raise its head whenever the slightest opportunity offered itself.

Religion has always been a double-edged sword when it came to statecraft and politics. Religion in itself rarely interfered with the truly democratic values of public life. Yet, religion has always been used by kings and later day national leaders as a weapon of blackmail against the people. In Pakistan, the religion on which its creation was based continued to be used to whip the people to frenzy each time they sought accountability of those in power.

Three wars, interspersed with numerous skirmishes have been fought to maintain that minimum level of enmity with India, enough to keep the people distracted and off balance. One could easily imagine that the Kashmir issue was solely created by the departing British as permanent blight on sub-continental politics. India, no stranger to playing politics, kept its end of the bargain by complying each time; that is till both nations had acquired nuclear weapons. Scape-

goating for both nations has now become harder. Internet blogs and better communication in general, have opened the eyes of the people and given rise to a new scepticism.

This may have given us some hope of banishing the religious weapon for good, had it not been further reshaped and perfected by the Americans fighting a proxy war with the Soviet Union in the 80's. The fundamentalism of the peripheral tribal regions was made powerful enough by the USA to swamp a large portion of the country long before the Americans themselves attacked Afghanistan. Once sentiments turned against the Americans the whole region of the north-west – and gradually the majority of the populace in Pakistan have become ambivalent to the fundamentalist religious sentiments that gives them a sense of unity with other Muslims from Morocco to Indonesia, all of whom are oppressed by the same oppressor.

The fragile situation has been made even more volatile by the USA holding a sword over General Musharaf's head. Bush's "You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror..." applied to Pakistan more than any other State. In all probability the majority of Pakistan's population is against the USA. Thus, declaring that he is fully allied to Bush's War against terror actually puts Musharaf squarely fighting his own countrymen – not an unusual scenario for a large number of dictators from the Shah of Iran to Marcos to Saddam Hussein... who were installed, supported and eventually let down by the Americans, each believing that they were backed by the most powerful country in the world.

So where does money go?

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

THIS week I came across a strange-looking headline in a blog that ran "All governments seem to be in debt, so where did the money go?" The BBC has informed us that President Bush was in the midst of an emergency meeting to create a 'stimulus package' for the banking and financial sector rumoured to be in the region of \$160 billion dollars. There was an instantaneous, uh huh, connect-the-dot, gut reaction

which saw this to be the possible answer to the blogger's rhetorical question.

In the real world the labyrinthine path that money follows lends itself to no such easy answers. The world's trade, banking and money (currency) markets are complex enough to rattle the sharpest minds and only when we begin with the larger picture (ironically, quite simple really) can we understand its logic. This is largely true of most complex systems.

At the end of the Great War only one country stood revitalised by it, the United States of America. A clear victor who could, if not impose its will upon the world, at least manipulate the world to do its bidding. The Bretton Woods Agreements, deliberated upon and signed during the first three weeks of July 1944, even before the War had ended, provided the blueprint for the economic and financial future of the world. It was clearly designed to create a world of 'free trade' and where the principal currency was the American one. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were born to ensure this. The GATT (later to be reborn as World Trade Organization or WTO) was also a brainchild of this Agreement but annexed to the United Nations for greater legitimacy.

Assured of its economic supremacy the US did not hesitate to peg the value of its currency against the dollar and the rest of the world's currencies to its own. But only till such a time when US's balance of trade went into red for the first time. Thus in 1971 the Gold standard was abandoned unilaterally by Richard Nixon. The US could now print as many paper dollars as it wanted and ship them overseas. Today the US balance of payments runs close to a trillion dollars (approximately \$3,500 for every man, woman and child in the USA). In other words, \$3,500 worth of whatever every American owns is not paid for and belongs to the world. Clearly, the rest of the world's population do not own that much asset per capita.

Why then do we, the rest of the world keep on providing this bankrupt debtor further credit – and more importantly, why do we continue to treat its worth(less) dollar as the prime currency of the world? With a prowess that combines military clout, business and media savvy and the sheer psychological intimidation on the part of the Americans (government and the corporate sector in perfect unison); and inertia and ignorance on the part of the rest of the world, the out-dated financial system continues to be sustained. At the other end of the

spectrum we could ask why a country like Zimbabwe (a country of immense natural resources and wealth) has suffered ten's of thousands of per cent inflation, where, as of today 10 million of its dollars are worth about US\$4? It's President, Robert Mugabe has been at loggerheads with the US and other Western nations who control the money markets of the world. Could there be a correlation?

The world has been led to believe that democracy and free market economics go hand in hand and that once the nations open up their markets to global businesses everything else will fall into place. Examples of developed economies are constantly offered as a proof. The truth is, in the absence of just and fair laws that regulate the activities of the powerful, jungle economics prevail where the few strong and privileged climb to the top of the proverbial pyramid and the numerous weak sink to the baseline.

What we have missed in the intelligent presentation of the 'free market' theory is that for those developed countries, led by the US, the national pyramid of economic and social hierarchy has actually been expanded to include the entire world. The pyramid now includes the globalised world; at least as far as the doctored free market system is concerned. Thanks to the WTO's master plan of both creating and opening up the investment machinery (stock markets) in every country that wants to be a part of the 'world community,' the financially strong of the developed nations can now invest their money and own the bulk of the world's production. Once the entire planet is encompassed in such a system there is no beneficial trickle-down effect. So, yes, in purely financial terms the developed countries do seem like a model of economic well being. In reality their wealth is generated elsewhere; usually the developing countries, and the exchange system – trade and currency – are unfairly stacked against these poor countries.

Even within national economies the transference of wealth is always from the public to the private sector, always from the broad base of the hierarchy to the privileged few. Follow the trail of the \$160 billion that Bush is about to hand over to the ailing banking industry. Where is the money coming from? Who does it belong to? And where will it end up? For example the tax cuts he has created will have given \$477 billion (52 per cent of the total) between 2001 and 2010 to less than



Even within national economies the transference of wealth is always from the public to the private sector.

1 per cent of the taxpayers.

Even when the money is visibly given to the needy it ends up with the wealthy. The banks always lend you money so that you can return it to them with interest. Incurring debt is enslaving yourself for the time that you are indebted. Modern economies have turned the definition of freedom ("I am bound to no man...") on its head. The US and the UK lead the world in personal debts. BBC ran an article in March 2005 calling the plus one trillion pound personal debt a time bomb that could bring the country to its knees. The start of the current recession is the beginning of the process. The collective ingenuity of the financial wizards have managed to stave off disaster with band aids for a long while – but that only ensures the increased magnitude of the dam when it finally breaks.

WHERE
ARE WE
BEING
READ?

Civil Society is going places...

Delhi, Dhaka, Trivandrum, Tennerife, Nadia, Nagpur, Kolkata, Ghaziabad, Washington, Geneva, Bhubaneshwar, Ladakh, Paris, Bangalore, Mumbai, Meerut, London, New York, Versailles, Dehradun, Chandigarh, Belgaum, Dibang Valley, Shillong, Patna, Shimla, Ahmedabad, Panjim, Hyderabad, Singapore, Porto Alegre, Gurgaon, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Lucknow, Surrey, Srinagar, Manali, Pune, Peechi, Pondicherry...

Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Perspectives

CATCHING TRENDS

Have an idea? Perhaps a lost cause? Tell your story or just express an honest opinion in these pages.

The dark side of PE

KAVALJIT SINGH



YEAR 2007 was a gala one for private equity (PE) investments in India. During the year, the total number of PE deals stood at 386 with a value of \$17 billion, as compared to 302 deals with a value of \$7 billion in 2006. The private equity firms are investing in a range of businesses in India including infrastructure, telecom, financial services, healthcare and real estate sectors. With more and more Indian companies willing to go private, private equity has become the latest fad in the investment game.

But how many of us really know about private equity? How many of us have heard about Blackstone Group, the Carlyle Group, Bain Capital, TPG Capital and Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. (KKR) – the five largest PE firms in the world? These five firms together manage assets worth hundreds of billions of dollars. Their influence over the real economy can be gauged from the fact that these five PE firms control companies that employ more than two million workers. The Blackstone Group, which started as a two-man team from a single room, now has close to 350,000 employees at its acquired companies worldwide. And more than 500,000 employees work at KKR-controlled firms.

Some of the well-known global companies and brands (such as Burger King, Jimmy Choo, Toys "R" Us, Dunkin' Donuts and Polaroid) are now owned by private equity firms. Private equity firms are increasingly becoming the employer of choice for politicians, senior government officials and celebrities.

WHAT IS PRIVATE EQUITY? Private equity is a broad term used to define any type of equity invest-

ment in an asset or a company that is not listed on a public stock exchange. Therefore, the purchase of shares in a company is privately negotiated. The shares of a company could be acquired through the sale of existing shares by shareholders or private placement of new shares.

Because of heavy dependence on leveraged buyout (buying a company through significant amount of borrowed money) to raise money, a private equity fund and a buyout fund have almost become interchangeable in the US and Europe.

Unlike investment in stock or bond markets, returns on private equity are not linked to the performance of a market or index. The private equity industry works on 2:20 principle. Typically, General Partners (the management firm which has unlimited liability) are compensated with an annual management fee of 2 per cent of committed capital. Thus, a \$10 billion fund can generate \$200 million a year for a PE fund in management fees alone. In addition, the general partner is entitled to 'carried interest,' a performance fee paid to managers, based on the profits generated by the fund. Typically, the general partner gets carried interest of 20 per cent of profits. No wonder, the key partners at some of the largest private equity firms have

become billionaires. According to Forbes, the top 20 managers of private equity and hedge funds at Wall Street pocketed an average of \$657 million in 2006. This compensation is 22,255 times the pay of an average US worker.

While Limited Partners (the investors, who have limited liability and are not involved with the day-to-day operations) receive income, capital gains and tax benefits. Financing in private equity operations is in the form of both equity and debt. In a typical leveraged buyout deal, the private equity fund puts in just one-fourth and the remaining three-fourths of the total capital is financed through debt.

THE PROCESS: The buyout process starts by taking a public listed company completely private. The proponents of PE firms argue that private ownership frees companies from the short-term pressures of the stock markets, and thereby enables them to invest for the long term.

But the main reason is somewhat else. Unlike privately owned companies, public-listed companies are required to disclose a number of information about its operations to the shareholders, regulators and the general public. The disclosure of information may invite closer scrutiny and demands from diverse shareholders, public interest groups, environmentalists and trade unions. By going private, PE firms can bypass the responsibility of complying with regulations (such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act in the US) and carry out its activities free of oversight and public accountability. The exact operations of the acquired companies are not even revealed to

(Continued on page 32)

PE firms can bypass the responsibility of complying with regulations and carry out their activities free of oversight and public accountability.

The dark side of PE

(Continued from page 31)

the limited partners of the PE funds. So the lack of transparency is an essential part of the PE business model.

Apart from providing capital, private equity funds also provide business expertise and usually assume complete management control of the companies in which they invest. PE managers micromanage the firms they buy. Besides joining the board of the portfolio company, PE funds also have a final say over how the company is run. The buyout firms save on cash flow by cutting cost and minimising investment. They may fire workers and oversee change in senior management if required.

It is important to note that PE firms typically invest in only those companies that generate higher cash flows rather than growth companies. The target company's cash flow plays a key role in the decision since it determines the company's ability to service debt including additional debt incurred as part of its restructuring. In many developed countries, PE firms have intentionally bought companies that have lower growth prospects but higher cash flows.

The main intention of PE firms is to increase the value of the companies through restructuring, generally over a three to five year time span, and then exit through an initial public offering (IPO) by listing its shares in the stock market or sale to another private equity or strategic investor.

In a nutshell, PE firms buy companies not to own and run them with a long-term perspective (as foreign direct investors such as Siemens or Vodaphone might do) but they are essentially buy-to-sell investors.

QUICK FLIPPING? Recent evidence suggests that PE funds are undertaking buyout deals with short-term investment horizons. Increasingly, many private equity funds are making quick profits through management fees and financial engineering rather than improving the operational efficiencies of acquired companies with a long-term perspective. To illustrate this point, take the case of the buyout of Hawkeye Holdings. Three weeks after PE firm Thomas H Lee Partners agreed to buy Hawkeye Holdings in May 2006, the company filed registration papers with the US Securities and Exchange Commission to launch an initial public offering. Hence, no efforts were made by the PE firm to restructure and polish the company, which is stated to be the *raison d'être* of the private equity industry.

PE firms have a natural tendency to increase a portfolio company's indebtedness to pay themselves large dividends and thereby quickly recoup their initial investment. Firms are extracting record dividends within months of buying companies, often financed by loading them up with additional debt. It is not uncommon to find PE firms declaring a billion dollar dividend. Take the case of Warner Music Group which was bought for \$1.25 billion in 2003 by a group of PE firms consisting of Thomas H Lee Partners, Bain Capital and Providence Equity. Within months of acquisition, Warner Music made dividends, advisory fees and other payments of \$1.43 billion to PE owners. In other words, the company paid off all the equity originally committed by the buyout group. The promises made by PE firms at the time of the acquisition of Warner Music are yet to be materialised. On the contrary, the performance of Warner Music has been deteriorating with no improvement in revenues and profits. The company suffered a loss of \$27 million in the first quarter of 2007.

Another example is Celanese, a US-based chemical company, which was bought by the Blackstone Group for \$3.8 billion in May 2004. In this deal, Blackstone had put in about \$650 million in cash equity. However nine months later, Blackstone paid itself \$500 million in dividends. Besides, Blackstone also cornered \$45 million from Celanese as advisory fees.

THE PERIOD OF BOOM: In 2007, the global PE market witnessed some of the biggest buyout deals ever. The US-based energy company, Texas Utility, was acquired by KKR and TPG Capital for \$45 billion, while Blackstone took over the control of Equity Office Properties (US) for \$39 billion and announced its \$26 billion purchase of the Hilton Hotels chain. In the month of July 2007 alone, private-equity buyouts totaled \$64 billion.

This raises a moot question: why is the private equity business booming so much? The answer lies in global financial market conditions which have been very conducive for the PE industry



Activists in the US protesting against PE funds

since 2003, with low interest rate regime, worldwide glut of capital, buoyant credit markets, and massive growth of structured credit products such as collateralised debt obligations. The low interest rate regime encouraged wealthy investors to look out for more remunerative alternative investment options such as private equity. Big investors prefer to invest in a big PE fund rather than hold direct stakes in several companies. Pension funds find it convenient to invest in a PE fund rather than invest in a diversified portfolio of companies.

THE BUST? Following the eruption of the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the US in mid-2007 and the subsequent squeeze in the global credit markets, a slowdown in the pace of buyout deals by PE firms has been noticed. The turbulence in credit markets has negatively affected the global private equity industry which largely banks on borrowings to acquire companies. Lenders are demanding higher interest rates and tighter conditions on buyout loans.

Thus, the PE industry is facing a severe resource crunch. Several mega deals have been held up. Financing packages for the acquisitions of Alliance Boots, Chrysler, First Data and Cadbury Schweppes have been postponed. It will be more difficult and more expensive for PE firms to borrow money for buyouts.

SPACES FOR INTERVENTION: By and large, NGOs, citizens' groups and corporate researchers have not given much attention to private equity issues. To a large extent, the technicalities and complexities involved in the business of private equity explain this gap.

If peoples' movements are strong, alert and influential, the PE industry could be brought under a strict regulatory framework. The PE industry could be forced to play by the same set of regulations as other businesses. If banks, pension funds and other financial institutions are regulated, why should private equity be an exception? The demand for workers and community stakeholders having a say in the buyout deals is not only desirable but feasible too.

With the help of labor unions and other civil society actors, a concerted effort to educate and persuade public, workers, policymakers and media can bring necessary mechanisms to ensure greater regulatory oversight and public accountability of the PE industry.

However, the biggest obstacles are political. Thanks to political patronage, the global private equity industry operates free of regulatory oversight and public accountability. In the US, for instance, the private equity industry is politically well organised. Sensing trouble over tax and transparency issues, the US-based private equity firms not only activated their own lobby groups but also formed alliances with other industries such as real estate, energy and venture capital in order put forward a united front to oppose the proposed tax rate hike.

What is amazing is that despite their sharp internal differences, the US-based PE firms joined hands to launch Private Equity Council in February 2007 in order to collectively fight against moves for greater regulation.

Is this strategy worth emulating by civil society actors?

Kavajit Singh works with Public Interest Research Centre, New Delhi. He is the author of *Why Investment Matters* (Madhyam Books, 2007) and *Questioning Globalization* (Zed Books, 2005).

You Too

What do Bono, Jack Welch, John Major, George Bush (senior), Fidel Ramos, Arthur Levitt and James D. Wolfensohn have in common? They are all in the business of private equity. Bono, the lead singer of Irish rock band U2 and anti-poverty campaigner, is a partner in a private equity firm, Elevation Partners, which specialises in media and entertainment deals. This firm also partly owns Forbes Magazine. Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric, is a special partner at Clayton, Dubilier & Rice, Inc.

John Major, George Bush (senior), Fidel Ramos (former President of Philippines) and Arthur Levitt (former chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission of the US) have been at the service of Carlyle Group in various capacities. James D. Wolfensohn, former president of the World Bank, founded Wolfensohn & Co. LLC in 1995, a private equity firm which invests in emerging markets.

Paul O'Neill, former US Treasury Secretary, joined Blackstone as a special advisor in March 2003. And Mitt Romney, who co-founded Bain Capital Partners, is a Republican candidate in the 2008 US presidential election.

Putting a stop to trafficking

JAYESH RANJAN

TRAFFICKING of girls and women is witnessed in many parts of the country. It is one of the most dehumanising social problems still prevalent. Attempts in the past have mostly focused on rescue of the trafficked victims from brothels by conducting raids involving NGOs, government departments and the police. The problem, however, is increasing in magnitude, indicating that mere raids are not sufficient to eradicate it. The focus is now shifting to tackling the source from where the girls and women are trafficked. The present paper attempts to outline a community-oriented approach using social mobilisation. This method is yielding impressive initial results in controlling trafficking in some of the most endemic areas in Andhra Pradesh.

Poverty is generally believed to be the most important, if not the sole cause for trafficking. It is held that certain families are so poor that, to survive, girls and women are trafficked. However, if we examine this belief closely, it will not stand the test of logic. If poverty were indeed the cause of trafficking, we would have found women from all poor families involved in it. But this is not usually the case. In a typical village, girls from only a handful of families are engaged in trafficking, while many families which are even poorer and have girls and women resist the temptation to do so. The fact that all girls and women who are trafficked come from poor families establishes that poverty is strongly correlated with trafficking, but poverty is in no way the sole cause of trafficking.

It is therefore important to examine what the real causes are. After detailed investigations in trafficking-prone communities the following five main causes can be identified:

Attitudes towards women: The men in the families where women and girls are trafficked usually have negative attitudes towards them. Women and girls are seen as objects or commodities that can be exchanged for money to ease living conditions.

Lack of vision on poverty alleviation: Families whose members are involved in trafficking live with the impression that the money that they get in return will help them come out of poverty immediately. They fail to realise that substantial investments are required to rid themselves of poverty in a sustainable manner. Investments of such high quantum can be got only from an outside source, and that too when sufficient credibility and credit-worthiness is established.

Peer influence: Many women who come back to their native village after spending some years in brothels in the cities are looked up to as role models by other families since for some time at least, they are seen wearing fashionable clothes, owning symbolic material possessions like TVs, and leading a life of some comfort. The humiliation and physical torture these women have undergone recedes into the background.

Lack of social norms: Permissive social mores in these habitations also encourage some families into trafficking their daughters. The village elders see no wrong in it. Thus, there is silent, collective support for trafficking. The villagers do not feel that it is immoral or wrong to use the women and girls to earn money through such means.

Organised crime: Some individuals with a criminal intention, usually organised into gangs, have a vested interest in promoting trafficking.

For most agencies concerned with combating trafficking, an important focus of their thinking and action is economic rehabilitation of the trafficked victims. This concern emanates from the argument that poverty is the root cause of trafficking and hence the families which engage in it need to be given economic support. It is, however, a common observation that victims who have come back and received a financial package have gone back to brothels, either on their own or pushed by their parents or forced by criminal gangs. This gives rise to the justified criticism of spending money unproductively on the victims for their rehabilitation.

Economic rehabilitation of the victims, apart from being counterproductive and addressing only a part of the problem, also has a difficult moral dimension. As mentioned earlier, in a typical village only some families send out their girls and women for trafficking and a large majority of them who are, perhaps, even poorer, do not succumb to the temptation. Under such circumstances, it is also morally questionable to help only those families which have a trafficked victim without doing anything for the other families who uphold certain civic values.

In a village only some families send out their girls and women for trafficking and a large majority who are perhaps even poorer do not succumb to such temptation. It is morally questionable to help only those families which have a trafficked victim without doing anything for the other families

A strong counter-opinion would be that if at all financial help is to be provided, it should first go to these other families who chose not to take the easy way out and struggled with their poverty in more honourable ways.

The answer to all these moral and practical dilemmas is a community-oriented social mobilisation approach. Social mobilisation creates a strong receiving mechanism which helps in successful and sustainable delivery of the economic rehabilitation package.

Through experience in a number of community-based projects, the steps involved in the social mobilisation process are now well understood. They can be enumerated as follows:

Sensitive support mechanism: Social mobilisation can be done by an agency that carries credibility among poor communities. Most government agencies are viewed with mistrust by the poor. In contrast, any other agency having committed grassroots development professionals will be seen as a selfless and credible mechanism, and will have a better chance to deliver intended results.

Bonding with the poor: A strong bond between the community and the facilitating agency will serve as a foundation on which subsequent transformation of the community will take place. This bonding is usually achieved by physically staying with the poor, sharing their daily rituals and appearing to be truly selfless in all interactions with the poor.

Dialogues about poverty: The poor are usually fatalistic about their poverty. It is important to create a strong belief in them that there are some known barriers preventing them from coming out of poverty and that it is possible to overcome these barriers by gaining in strength.

Self-help Groups: The first step in organisation-building is to organise the poor into homogenous, affinity-based Self-help Groups (SHGs). Women can be organised into separate groups, and subsequently, men too can be organised.

Capacity building: Internal thrift and credit is usually the common thread binding members of the group together.

The facilitating agency builds the capacities of the SHGs regarding internal management aspects. Groups whose capacities are built strongly become credible in the eyes of support organisations.

Local social activists: To ensure that poverty alleviation initiatives are sustained over long periods, local activists are identified with the help of the community and are inspired and motivated to provide social guidance to the poor at all times.

Federation of SHGs: In order to meet common needs and interests of the poor across a region, the SHGs are federated, usually in a three-tier structure. The apex organisations serve as a platform for the voices of the poor to be heard.

Social contract: As a part of institution building, the poor are made aware of the reasons why they have little credibility with donor agencies. Lack of faith and trust comes usually from their general ignorance and their belief in certain superstitions. Wasteful expenditure that they are seen to be engaging in also erode their credibility. Trafficking girls and women is another social practice that erodes the credibility of the poor. The facilitating agency encourages SHGs and their federations to realise the link between the need to take up pro-social attitudes and behaviour and come out of poverty.

Priority needs: Once the SHGs and their apex federations become mature enough, the facilitating agency organises for support to their priority socio-economic needs from various agencies such as government line departments, banks, donor agencies and NGOs. This paves the way for the poor to improve their quality of life and eventually come out of poverty in a sustainable fashion.

Trafficking of girls and women has been universally condemned as a socially uncivil and criminal practice. However, very little of this outrage has translated into concrete action. It is not that people do not want to do anything; it is just that they have not been able to figure out how to do it. The poor have the ability to transform their lives and a social mobilisation approach can help them. A clear end to trafficking is possible by learning from new positive experiences.

(Jayesh Ranjan belongs to the Andhra Pradesh Cadre of the Indian Administrative Service. He has worked as the Project Director of World Bank funded District Poverty Initiatives Project (DPIP) in Chittoor District. While working as District Collector of Cuddapah district between 2002 and 2005, he was the head of the Regional Network to combat trafficking in three districts, Cuddapah, Chittoor and Anantapur, supported by UNICEF.)

Contact: jayesh_ranjan@hotmail.com

But where's the doctor?

MILINDO CHAKRABARTI

INDIA ranks a poor 105 out of 129 countries in the 'education for all development index' recently published by UNESCO. We rank 94 out of 118 developing countries in the 'Global Hunger Index' prepared by the International Food Policy and Research Institute (IFPRI) in collaboration with two international organisations.

In the 'Human Development Index' (HDI), India is positioned 128 out of 177 countries. Our country is ranked 66 out of 155 countries in the Human Poverty Index, estimated by the UNDP. UNICEF reports that only four countries beat India in the incidence of malnutrition among children under five. Forty three per cent of our children suffer from malnutrition and we are way behind in achieving the millennium development target set for 2015. The Trade and Development Index developed by UNCTAD finds India languishing in the 66th spot with indices estimated for 123 countries. The Corruption Perception Index estimates by Transparency International finds India positioned 74 out of 163 countries.

But make no mistake. Out of 5218 greenfield FDI projects initiated in 2006 in developing countries, 981 landed in India with a count of 1378, next only to China, according to the World Investment Report by UNCTAD. The Global Retail Development Index developed by the AT Kearney Group puts India on top among the most attractive 30 global hotspots that are identified as havens for investment in retail trade. Their Foreign Direct Investment Confidence Index places India in the top group, just below China, with the US coming third. The per capita gross domestic product grew at a healthy 7.7 per cent during 2005-06, a rate matched by only about 10 to 12 countries (World Development Report, 2008, The World Bank).

Come October and there is a plethora of 'Global Reports' that are considered report cards for countries around the world on their performance for different indicators. These reports also identify some specific issues that require the urgent attention of the global community. All of them are available on the Internet.

- The 'Global Corruption Report 2007' by Transparency International was launched on 24 May at the London School of Economics with emphasis on growing corruption in the judiciary. A final revised version of the report appeared on 11 October.

- "The Challenge of Hunger 2007" report prepared by the International Food Policy and Research Institute (IFPRI) in collaboration with two other international organisations was unveiled on 12 October.

- UNCTAD came out with two reports - World Investment Report on 16 October highlighting 'Transnational Corporations, Extractive Industries and Development' and 'Developing Countries in International Trade' that estimates Trade and Development Index on 6 November.

- The World Bank came out with the World Development Report on 19 October with an emphasis on 'Agriculture for Development'.

- FAO released its last edition of 'State of Food and Agriculture' on 15 November with the focus on the need for 'Paying Farmers for Environmental Services'.

- UNESCO released its EFA Global Monitoring Report on 29 November, the focus of the report being, 'Education for All by 2015: Will We Make It?'

- Transparency International published 'Global Corruption Barometer 2007' on 6 December.

- In the meantime UNICEF released a document entitled 'Progress for Children: A World Fit for Children' Statistical Review No. 6 on 10 December.

- AT Kearney Inc., a Chicago-based global strategic management-consulting firm, published '2007 Foreign Direct Investment Confidence Index' on 10 December. Its '2007 Global Retail Development Index with a subtitle "Growth Opportunities for Global Retailers"' was released on 24 June.

Another interesting report is being published annually for the last five years that estimates the 'Commitment to Development Index' for 'developed' countries. As per the 2007 report, 21 countries occupy proud places on this list, with the Netherlands at the top followed by the Nordic countries of Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland. The US ranks 14th.!

There is no point summarising the findings of these reports. It's not feasible to read all of them before the next set of reports start pouring in. The reports are voluminous, intensive and involve painstaking research by hundreds of dedicated researchers. But what is more important is their utility to the global community. Most of these reports attempt to generate a quantifiable index that can be used to rank countries in terms of their relative achievements in a particular field - health, education, corruption, hunger, etc. The ranking of the countries - a relative measure of achievement - is often talked about, rather than the value of the indices, an absolute measure of achievement.

One interesting feature in the reports, other than those focussing on hard economic achievements - growth in GDP, business prospects and flow of FDIs -

is the near total global addiction in favour of maintaining the status quo in social and humane aspects of life across all countries - both developed and developing. The rankings across countries have not changed much over time. There are a few exceptions here and there, but they are sporadic and do not emerge out of any particular, identifiable paradigm that any of these reports suggest. No causal factors that may explain the perceptible changes or the lack of it in ranks across the countries are highlighted in these reports.

What if, for a change, one decides to publish the 2008 reports with only the ranks of the countries in terms of social indicators, hiding the quantitative values of the indices? We can safely photocopy the ones published in 2007, or, may be even in 1990! The mistakes that may remain can safely be passed off as typographical errors.

It is also hard to find any initiative taken at the national level, at least in India, to link the policy regimen to a targeted improvement in global ranking in terms of any of these indicators. It is intriguing to find so little academic and practical effort to identify the dynamic

inter-linkage across the estimates of several indices in a country - many of which are now available for a considerable period of time.

The German Advisory Council on Global Change released an important document titled 'Climate Change as a Security Risk' on 10 December. The report identifies 10 hotspots of climate change that are vulnerable to heightened conflicts in the coming years thanks to the utter disregard for nature. They are:

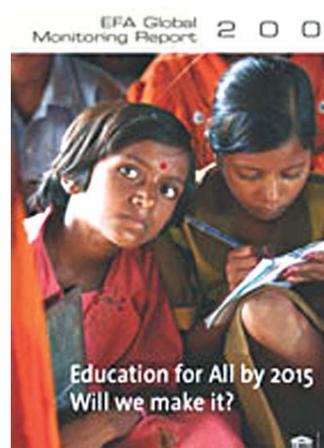
- Arctic and sub-arctic region; ♦ Southern Europe and North Africa;
- Sahel region; ♦ Southern Africa;
- Central Asia;
- India, Pakistan and Bangladesh;
- China;
- Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico;
- Andes Region and
- Amazon region

Surprisingly, most countries located in these hotspots also find themselves at the lower end of the ranking tables as we track the level of human development. Barring China, India and South Africa, they are laggards in terms of hard economic achievements as well.

The publication of the first 'Human Development Report' some time in the late 1980s helped us a lot - methodologically and conceptually -- in quantifying the state of development with a human face across countries. Other indices helped to sharpen our understanding of the maladies. However, these publications are no better than the diagnostic reports a doctor asks for while treating a patient. Ultimately it is the doctor who prescribes medicine or surgery to help an ailing patient turn healthy. The time has come to locate doctors - either global or local - who can effectively utilise these diagnostic reports in suggesting a line of treatment. Any doctors around ready to take up the challenge?

Milindo Chakrabarti is director of CREATE (Centre for Studies in Rural Economy, Appropriate Technology and Environment) E-mail: milindo62@gmail.com

The rankings across countries has not changed much over time. There are a few exceptions here and there, but they are sporadic. No causal factors that may explain the perceptible changes or the lack of it in ranks across the countries are highlighted in these reports.



Living

BODY & SOUL

**Be different, look within.
There is always more to life.
Reach out to alternatives.
Heritage, eco-tourism, green
cures, traditional foods, buy
from NGOs, spiritual talk,
organic counter, where to
donate, where to volunteer,
web watch.**

Rare rice attracts farm tourist

Susheela Nair
Palakkad (Kerala)

AS the train crossed the Tamil Nadu border and trudged into neighbouring Kerala, the change in scenic charm was discernible. The awesome mountains of the Sahya range which stood sentinel-like guarding the region heralded a welcome to Palakkad, the gateway of Kerala. We saw swaying palmyras and vast expanses of paddy fields.

Palakkad is hailed as the 'granary of Kerala' thanks to its endless vistas of paddy fields. As we approached our destination, we saw wide swathes of green paddy fields in valleys straddling the exotic navara crop. Marigold plants luxuriant with vibrant coloured flowers herald a welcome to the ancestral home of Narayanan Unny, an enterprising agriculturist, who specialises in the cultivation of the rare variety of Navara rice.

This 75-year-old Navara Eco Farm is located on the banks of the picturesque Chittur river at Karukamani in Palakkad district. It claims to be the largest Navara farm in the world and the only certified organic medicinal farm. The ambling pathways in the sprawling 18-acre farm offer excellent exercise coupled with scenic views. The farm teems with medicinal herbs, coconuts and lovingly tended fruit trees droop with the weight of mangoes, jackfruit, lemons, papayas, and



Unny at his farm

This 75-year-old Navara Eco Farm claims to be the largest Navara rice farm in the world and the only certified organic medicinal farm. Its ambling pathways offer excellent exercise coupled with scenic view.



pomegranates. The dense foliage in the farm shelters a bewildering variety of birds and butterflies. An organic vegetable garden has several varieties of vegetables which keep the kitchen well supplied.

Walking around the farm we came across a resting place which was used as a surveillance post in olden days to keep vigil against pilferage of grain. We saw workers winnowing, thrashing paddy after the harvest and having a siesta under an enormous mango tree overlooking the ancestral home. The 75-year old tree has been a silent witness to the sweat, toil and success of three generations of traditional agriculturists. The prime focus here is the cultivation of the wonder rice, Navara. What makes it distinct are its medicinal properties and therapeutic qualities. The rice finds mention in ancient Ayurvedic texts like 'Ashtanga Hridaya' and 'Susruta Samhita' which refer to it as a 'pious grain' used on auspicious occasions.

(Continued on page 36)

Help for an aching back

GREEN CURES

Ask Dr GG



Dr GG Gangadharan is one of India's best known Ayurvedic physicians. Currently, he is deputy director of the Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) in Bangalore. In this column, Dr GG, as he is popularly known, answers queries from readers seeking effective alternative remedies.

I am a 65-year-old woman living in London. Every winter since the past two years I have been suffering from arthritis. Once the weather becomes warmer my condition does improve. Please could you suggest some medical advice for me. The pain in my joints, especially my knee and ankles is fairly severe.

Please note that the condition you have described is akin to rheumatoid arthritis which needs physical supervision for treatment. Still, I can give you some suggestions/advice which will help improve your condition.

Every morning take 120 ml of water, put 20 gms of fresh crushed ginger and boil till the water becomes half. Filter it and to this lukewarm kashayam add one tablespoon of honey. Take 30 ml of this in the morning before breakfast and the balance 30 ml in the evening before dinner. Do not take fried food, root and tuber vegetables and baked items which have got yeast. Drink water which is boiled with jeera, and apply warm mustard oil on painful joints after adding a pinch of salt. Take Thriphaladi chorna one tablespoon every night with water. If you can get any guggulu preparation like Thriphala Guggulu, take 2 gms twice a day after food.

I am a 26-year-old male and I work at a call centre in Gurgaon. My job requires me to sit on a chair for at least eight hours. Recently I am suffering from pain in my lower back region. I have changed my chair and improved my posture. But I still have some pain. Since I do not want to take drugs please suggest some alternative healing methods for me.

Your sitting posture is very important to reduce this pain. Since you have improved it now apply warm Chinchadi Thailam on the back every day and apply the same oil on the back with cotton soaked in it. Make sure that you do not have constipation. If your stool is hard, take one teaspoon of Thriphala choornam with hot water.

Recently I bought a pair of earrings made of white metal. I wore them for a few days but then my ear lobes started itching. So I removed the earrings and applied

cold compress and moisturiser. But my ears have become slightly inflamed and continue to itch. Please advice. I am an 18-year-old college going female.

Just apply everyday turmeric mixed with Tulsi juice. Apply this and press it on both sides of your ear lobes. The itching and redness will go. When you have a bath, cover your ear lobes with some plastic.

I am a 54-year-old woman well past my menopause. Since the past few months the hair on my face especially along my lower chin has become darker and more prominent. Please could you tell me what this is due to? Also please advice some medication or cosmetic application that can take care of this problem permanently.

This may be due to light hormonal imbalance that takes place during menopause. Take Thriphaladi mixed with equal quantity of turmeric powder and mix with lemon juice and apply on that area everyday. The hair will slowly go.

I am prone to suffering frequently from cold. Every time the weather in Delhi changes I contract a viral infection. Please could you tell me the best way to strengthen my immunity to cold?

To improve your immunity, take any preparation of Guduchi. If you can get hold of fresh Guduchi stems, cut it into small pieces and remove the outer brown skin, crush it slightly and put this into 120 ml of hot water. Soak this overnight and the next day in the morning squeeze the stem into the water, filter it and take this juice on empty stomach.

If you cannot get this fresh stem, take Amritharishtam 30 ml after food twice a day for one month, every time the weather changes. That is, you can take it at least three times a year, each time for one month. If you can get fresh gooseberry (Amla) remove the seeds, crush into juice and drink that everyday with one piece of turmeric. Every night take one tablespoon of Thriphala choorna mixed with honey to make a paste. Take at bedtime followed by warm water.

My 12-year-old daughter has recently recovered from a bout of jaundice. But her appetite is still extremely poor. We are proceeding cautiously and giving her thoroughly cooked food and fruit juices. Is there anything we can give her so that her appetite improves? She is looking very weak and is extremely irritable.

After jaundice for at least six months you should have only bland food. No spice, no oil, no fried items and very little or no salt. To improve the appetite and strengthen the liver, take one teaspoon of Hinguvachadi Choornam mixed with honey 2 to 3 times a day before food. She should have a good laxative everyday to remove any excess pitha. Give her a tablespoon of Thriphala choorna mixed with honey at bedtime followed by warm water.



Tinospora Cordifolia

E-mail: vaidya.ganga@frrht.org

Rare rice attracts farm tourist

(Continued from page 35)

Navara is cited as a special cereal with properties to remedy the basic ills affecting the circulatory, respiratory and the digestive systems. 'Ashtanga Hridaya' described two types of Navara, black and white, of which the latter is superior. But the yield and quality of Navara varies from location to location. As the cultivation of Navara was restricted to a limited area and did not multiply substantially, it is considered an endemic crop. It is hailed as the 'gold with fragrance' because if a farmer has a stock of the seeds with him he can earn a good price in any season.

Describing his experience of cultivating this singular strand of rice, Unny (as he is popularly called) said, "Grown from time immemorial, Navara is known as 'Shashtika rice' as it takes a short span of 60 days to grow and mature." Tracing the origin of this indigenous plant of Kerala, Unny said, "Navara has been used in Ayurveda treatment from the ancient times and prescribed as a health food for people of all ages."

Grown mainly in the northern districts of Kerala like Wayanad and Palakkad, Navara, is Kerala's indigenous medicinal cereal plant. Herbal healers have endorsed its rich medicinal properties. Traditionally navara kizhi is used in Ayurveda for treatment of neurological disorders, polio, psoriasis, rheumatism, diabetes, snake bite, arthritis, anaemia, peptic ulcer, emaciation of limbs, lifestyle maladies while the porridge of navara grains in milk is prescribed as special food for invalids and infants.

Navara, the native genetic resource of Kerala, famed for its extensive use especially in Panchakarma treatment (traditional rejuvenation therapy) is popular among foreign tourists and stressed out executives. Scientists at the Kerala Agricultural University have identified an anti-cancer gene in the rice and say it is effective against breast cancer. According to a scientist of KAU research wing, once clinically developed it will be a great boon to cancer patients. It is a unique cereal having high content of free amino acids.

Unny bagged the maiden organic certification for navara cultivation. He feels that efforts should be made to patent this indigenous plant of Kerala because Intellectual Property Rights apply to agriculture too. Researchers, students, scientists from the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation and other eminent research institutes make a beeline to the Navara Eco Farm for research and study of the navara crop pattern.

To cater to the increasing number of visitors and growing breed of researchers and scientists to his farm, Unny has joined the bandwagon of agro tourism promoters, synergising both agriculture and tourism. He has ambitious plans to start the first rice museum in India showcasing different varieties of rice and traditional farming implements.

Walking around the farm and the paddy fields, we got a whiff of the countryside, learnt about traditional techniques of farming and watched workers toiling hard in the fields to transplant rice. It offered a back-to-nature experience, giving us a rustic flavour and a close look at village life. Another highlight of the place was the food prepared from fresh fruits and vegetables from the farm. The taste of the delicious Kerala fare dished out by Rema Unny lingered long after our visit.



SOMETHING FROM ANYTHING

Trash to cash is the mantra of Society for Child Development (SCD). The NGO works for children and young adults with intellectual and physical disabilities. After children complete schooling in SCD's special school called Prabhat, it is difficult to find them employment. So SCD has a vocational training centre where they are taught arts or craft. Products are sold by SCD and the money given to the young entrepreneurs. Making ordinary stuff won't get buyers. So SCD produces quality goods from trash. Waste is recycled to make amazing products. Waste temple flowers are turned into eco-friendly colours for Holi or made into handmade paper. Waste fabric sourced from garment factories becomes acid-free art paper. SCD's Art for Prabhat project has popularised this paper to well known artists. Discarded tape becomes a folder. Take your pick.

Text and pictures: Lakshman Anand

Contact: Dr Madhumita Puri
Address: M 63, Lajpat Nagar II, New Delhi-110024
Phone: 41727004, 9810003512.

Because your karma is your destiny

Samita Rathor
New Delhi

WE are accountable for what life brings us. All of us are reaping the consequences of our previous actions in this life or in previous lives. To comprehend this better we first need to understand the law of karma.

Watch your thoughts, for they become words.
Watch your words, for they become actions.
Watch your actions, for they become habits.
Watch your habits, for they become character.
Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.

Unknown

The word 'karma' comes from the Sanskrit verb kri, to do. Although karma means action, it also means the result of action. Whatever acts we have performed and whatever thoughts we have thought have created an impression, both in our minds and in the cosmos around us. The cosmos gives back to us what we have given to it: 'As ye sow, so shall ye reap' as Christ said. Good actions and thoughts create good effects, bad ones create bad effects. Karma can be generally understood as 'The Force' or 'The Cause and Affect of a Deed or a Thought.' Very much in analogy with Newton's 3rd law 'When a force applies to an object, there will be an equal and exact opposite force against the applied force.'

Karma is simply the process of cause and effect. If you do good, good will happen. If you plant seeds and water and look after them, plants will grow.

If our thoughts are for the most part those of kindness, love, and compassion, our personality will reflect it, and these thoughts will be returned to us sooner or later. If we send out thoughts of hatred, anger or pettiness, those thoughts will also be returned to us.

Whenever we perform any action and whenever we think any thought, an imprint is made upon our mind. These imprints or grooves are known as samskaras. Sometimes we are conscious of the imprinting process; just as often we are not. When actions and thoughts are repeated, the grooves become deeper. The combination creates our individual characters and also strongly influences our following thoughts and actions.

If we anger easily, we create an angry mind that reacts with anger rather than with patience or understanding. As a water dam when directed into a narrow canal gains force, so the grooves in the mind create canals of behaviour patterns

which become extraordinarily difficult to resist or reverse. Changing an ingrained mental habit literally becomes an uphill battle.

Children inherit samskaras from parents. The mother's diet, mental and physical condition during her pregnancy could affect the baby in the womb or the father with sexually transmitted disease could cause serious genetic malfunctioning in the foetus. Karma influences our current life in two ways. First, we carry karma as part of our life conditions, though not all of our conditions are

karmic in origin. Karma is the part of our condition that represents unfinished business and other residues from the past. Second, we create future karma continually with every thought and action.

The first step in dealing with existing karma is awareness and acknowledgement of it. Are there any themes that seem to recur throughout your life? Nothing happens by chance. Recurrent themes suggest the hand of karma. These recurrent themes are telling you they are providing conditions for some necessary life experience.

Once you understand the karmic themes of your incarnation you can start working with them, swim with the tide rather than against it. If you find it hard to acquire or hold money, you need to practice good money management. If you find it hard to make friends you need to be that bit nicer to others. If you're not sure how to work with your karma, ask for guidance and be open to the answers.

The Bhagavad Gita says, "As the blazing fire reduces wood to ashes, similarly, the fire of self-knowledge reduces all Karma to ashes."

The most important thing that one should know is never, ever try to offend other sentient beings and their beliefs. Therefore, go through life with extreme caution. Do have compassion for all beings. Do have

a generous attitude toward all beings. Do treat them with love and respect because they will be happy to forgive you if you accidentally offend them. Karma works at a more immediate level by returning to you what you give to others. There's nothing particularly mystical about this. If you're friendly to others, you receive friendship. If you're generous, people are more inclined to be generous to you. As the saying goes, "do unto others as you would have others do unto you." Matthew 7-120

Samita Rathor is a cartoonist, writer and yoga teacher.

E-mail: samitarathor@gmail.com

SOUL VALUE

This vast universe is a wheel.
Upon it are all creatures that are
subject to birth, death,
and rebirth.
Round and round it turns,
and never stops.
It is the wheel of Brahman.
As long as the individual self
thinks it is separate
from Brahman, it revolves upon the
wheel in bondage to the laws
of birth, death, and rebirth.
But when through the grace of
Brahma it realizes its identity
with him, it revolves upon
the wheel no longer.
It achieves immortality.
Svetasvatara Upanishad
(Prabhavananda), 118

GRAPHIC BY SAMITA RATHOR

WHERE TO VOLUNTEER

CanSupport India

Kanak Durga Basti Vikas Kendra,
Sector 12, R.K. Puram, Near DPS
School,
New Delhi-22
Tel: 26102851, 26102859, 26102869
E-mail: cansup_india@hotmail.com

Rahi

Rahi is a support centre for urban
middle class women suffering from the
trauma of incest. It provides
information, individual support, group
support and referrals. Through
workshops and peer educators they
help survivors and spread awareness.
Contact: H-49 A, Second floor, Kalkaji,
New Delhi-3
Phone: 26227647

Association for India's Development (AID) - Delhi Chapter

AID works for the environment, children,
women's issues, education, and health.
They also undertake fund raising.
Contact: Anuj Grover B-121,
MIG Flats, Phase-IV, Ashok Vihar Delhi-
110052 Phone: 9818248459
E-mail: anuj.grover@gmail.com

Youthreach

A volunteer team at Youthreach helps to
match your skills and interests with the
needs of their partner organisations.
This exchange is monitored and
facilitated from beginning to end by the
volunteer team. The team also partners
other non-profit organisations that are
working with children, women and the
environment.

Contact: Anubha or Ria 11 Community
Centre, Saket, New Delhi - 110 017
Phone/Fax: (011) 2653 3520/25/30
Email: yrd@youthreachindia.org

Deepalaya

They work with economically, socially
deprived, physically and mentally
challenged children. They believe in
helping children become self reliant
and lead a healthy life. Deepalaya works
on education, health, skill training and
income enhancement.
Contact: Deepalaya 46, Institutional
Area, D Block Janakpuri, New Delhi -
110 058
Phone: 25548263, 25590347
Website: www.deepalaya.org

Mobile Crèches

Mobile Crèches pioneered intervention
into the lives of migrant construction
workers by introducing the mobile
crèche where working parents can
leave their children. They work in the
following areas: health, education,
community outreach, networking and
advocacy, resource mobilisation and
communication. You can volunteer by
filling out a simple form online.
Contact: DIZ Area, Raja Bazaar, Sector
IV New Delhi - 110001
Phone: 91-11-23347635 / 23363271
Website: www.mobilecreches.org

The Arpana Trust

Arpana is a charitable, religious and
spiritual organisation headquartered in
Karnal, Haryana. They work with rural
communities in Himachal Pradesh and
with slum dwellers in Delhi. Arpana is
well known for its work on health. They

have helped organise women into self-
help groups. These SHGs make
beautiful and intricate items which are
marketed by Arpana.
For more details: Arpana Community
Centre,
NS-5, Munirka Marg Street F/9, Next to
MTNL,
Vasant Vihar, New Delhi-57.
Phone: (Office) 26151136 and (Resi)
26154964

HelpAge India

HelpAge India needs volunteers from
doctors to lay people in all our
locations. Older people love to talk to
younger people and need emotional
support.
We require volunteers in Delhi and
Chennai to survey older people staying
alone in homes, who could use our
Helpline for senior citizens. If you wish
to volunteer please email Pawan
Solanki, manager at
pawan.s@helpageindia.org or write to
Vikas, volunteer coordinator, HelpAge
India.

iVolunteer

iVolunteer is a non-profit promoting
volunteerism since 2001. We have a
presence in New Delhi, Mumbai,
Chennai and Bangalore. We welcome
individuals who wish to volunteer. We
assess organisations that need
volunteers.
We match the skills of volunteers with
the right organisation so that both
benefit.
Contact: Jamal or Seema, D-134, East
of Kailash, New Delhi-65, Phone:
01126217460
E-mail: delhi@ivolunteer.org.in

WHERE TO DONATE

Indian Red Cross Society

The society provides relief, hospital services,
maternity and child welfare, family welfare,
nursing and community services.
Contact: Red Cross Bhavan, Golf Links, New
Delhi-3 Phone: 24618915, 24617531

Child Relief and You (CRY)

CRY, a premier child rights organisation,
believes that every child is entitled to survival,
protection, development and participation. You
can sponsor a child's education, healthcare, or a
health worker and a teacher.
Website: www.cry.org

Community Aid and Sponsorship Program (CASP)

CASP enhances the capacities of children,
families and communities through participation
and advocacy leading to sustainable
development and empowerment. You can help
by sponsoring underprivileged child/children
from any work area where CASP implements its
programmes. These include building old-age
homes, projects relating to AIDS etc.
Website: www.caspindia.org

HelpAge India

HelpAge India is involved in the care of the poor
and disadvantaged elderly in 55 locations
across the country. They organise primary health
care at village and slum level through 53 mobile
medical vans, care of the destitute elderly
through Adopt a Gran programme with 222
voluntary agencies, Helplines and income
generation for the elderly. Their recent
programmes are in the tsunami affected regions
and in Kashmir for the rehabilitation of the
elderly affected by the earthquake disaster.
HelpAge serve more than a million elderly in
India. If you wish to donate or adopt a granny,

please donate online on our site
www.helpageindia.org or send an email to
helpage@nde.vsnl.net.in
Address: HelpAge India, C-14 Qutub
Institutional Area, New Delhi- 110016
Chief Executive: Mathew Cherian -
mathew.cherian@helpageindia.org

Bharatiya Academy

The Eco Development Foundation
and the Soni Foundation Trust have set up the
Bharatiya Academy which runs
a school for underprivileged children and for
children of defence employees serving on the
border who are victims of violence and war. The
school is located in Tashipur, Roorkee, Hardwar
district and has 115 children on its rolls. The
school requires money for buildings and
sponsors for the children. Temporary buildings
have been made by the Bengal Sappers
regiment. Teachers are also required.
Contact: Soni Foundation Trust,
F-2655 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon,
Haryana-122017
E-mail: kcjcodev@rediffmail.com
Phone: 0124-2360422

Smile Foundation

A national development agency with offices in
New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore & Kolkata, is well
known for its work with over one lakh Children
& Youth through various projects with focus on
Education, Health & Empowerment across 15
states of India. You can give your valuable
support for our various programmes like - Twin
e-Learning, Smile on Wheels, Individual Support
Programme, Swabhimana, etc.
Visit Us : www.smilefoundationindia.org
Contact : Smile Foundation, B-4/115, 1st Floor,
Safderjung Enclave, New Delhi - 29
Phone: 41354565, 41354566
info@smilefoundationindia.org

Ad

