

# Civil Society



## MASSACRE RAJ IN NANDIGRAM IS THIS THE INDIA WE WANT?



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Baldev Gulati, who has problems with his vision, runs a spice business which employs differently abled people. Their brand is NP Masale

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COVER STORY

## MASSACRE RAJ IN NANDIGRAM

Has the CPI(M) gone too far for its own good? Has it crushed Nandigram and put the fear of death into the rest of Bengal only to lose the respect of liberal minded Indians?

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# Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

## Let down by the Left

THIS magazine has often been seen as being soft on the Left. We have been happy not to deny it. We don't subscribe to the Left's ideology, but we do believe the Left represents that space which is needed for the health of our democracy.

It is therefore a sad day for us and so many others when the CPI(M) and its Left allies undermine their own credibility as they have done by letting cadres loose against the villagers of Nandigram. What is the difference now between Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and Narendra Modi?

The people protesting on Kolkata's streets, as also in Delhi and Mumbai and on the internet, are liberal-minded citizens who evidently don't agree with what the CPI(M) and its allies have done in Nandigram. The current outbursts are also perhaps part of a growing dissatisfaction with the CPI(M)'s rather old fashioned leadership which has mortgaged itself to its illiterate cadres and cannot fathom new paradigms of empowerment, globalisation and sustainable growth.

CPI(M) leaders need to ask themselves why from Nandigram to the JNU student elections and the once sympathetic film and theatre fraternity in West Bengal they are running into so much opposition. Where is the new talent in the party?

On Nandigram, no one seems to buy the argument that it was in the grip of Maoists. If indeed it were so then the MP and the MLA of the area who are from the Left Front have a lot of explaining to do. Why did they sit back and watch the Maoists dig in? The sad fact is that the people of Nandigram turned against the CPI(M) because they did not want to part with their land for a chemical hub and SEZ. And the CPI(M) leadership in Bengal, led as it is by the nose by industrialists, was so out of sync with their concerns that it could only think of sending in armed cadres to rape, kill, burn and maim.

Nandigram should make us worry. It is not as if we are new to political violence, but the way in which several thousand people have been beaten into submission while the entire West Bengal government looked on is a dangerous precedent in politics. As a democracy we have touched a new and hazardous low.

It is yet more worrisome that central leaders of the CPI(M) like Prakash Karat have gone on national TV to justify the violence by their party's cadres. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya went to the extent of saying that the CPI(M) had "taken an eye for an eye" and that the villagers of Nandigram had been "paid back in their own coin". The silence of the Congress has been equally stunning. Not a single national Congress leader has spoken up. Nor has the Union Government expressed concern.

It is only the Governor of West Bengal, Gopal Krishna Gandhi, who has risen to the occasion and raised the issue with the state government. When he cut no ice, he finally had to issue a press statement expressing his anguish only to be accused by CPI(M) leaders of being unconstitutional. Now, anyone who has followed Gopal Krishna Gandhi will tell you that he is a careful person not given to improprieties. He must have been pushed to the wall to issue that statement.

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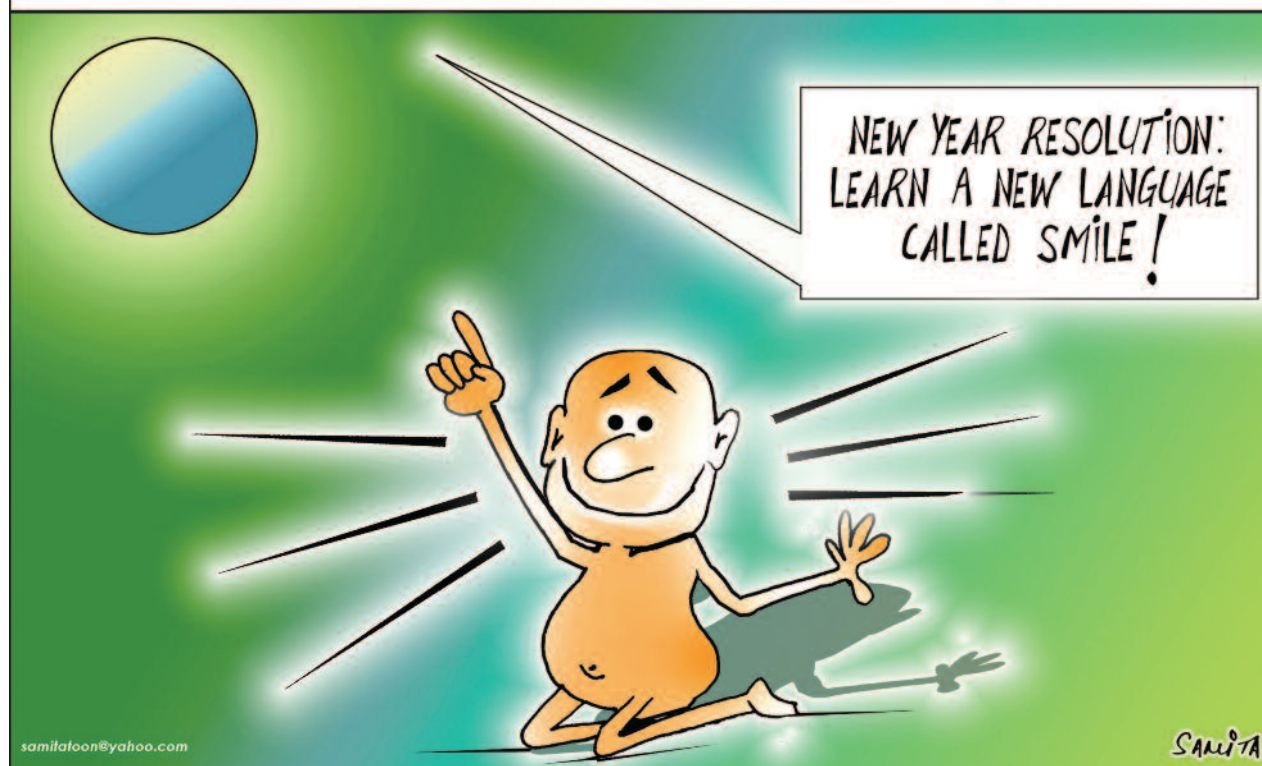
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## IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



“ Too much credit is being given to Maoists. There may have been, in the villages, young people of different persuasions. The fact is that this was a people's movement against giving up their land. ”

Medha Patkar

Leader of National Alliance of Peoples' Movements on Nandigram

## Bridges for villages

Your cover story on Girish Bharadwaj 'Bridges for Villages', was very inspiring. Girish's work is a boon to society and to the world of civil engineering. Young engineers, require such a role model who through his knowledge is serving our motherland. A big thanks to Shree Padre for bringing us a motivating story.

S Bhatt

It was very interesting to read about the bridges Girish Bharadwaj is making. I wish local governments would show more interest in such activities and draw up action plans to provide similar footbridges to more villages.

MS Rao

We stay on one side of one such bridge which you have written about in your cover story. In fact the anchor of the bridge is in our farm. And, yes, it provides lots of benefits to local people. Earlier they couldn't cross over to the other side after sunset.

Vidya

It's really good to see people coming out with cheap and reliable technology for the grassroots.

Steven

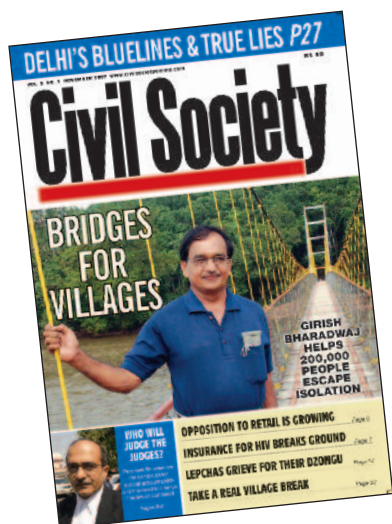
Your cover story is an eye-opener for many of us young Indians. We have the talent and the resources. Probably what we lack is initiative. Girish Bharadwaj's initiative is inspiring. Many thanks to Shree Padre, a journalist with mercurial vision.

Dr Gaurish Padukone

## Bluelines

I would like to comment on Dunu Roy's article, 'Delhi's Bluelines and True Lies'. It seems to me that Mr Roy is taking the side of the Blueline buses. I agree to all of his story. But I do want

## LETTERS



to say that the Bluelines do not have licence to kill. Can Mr Roy provide some solutions to this problem?

Bineet

True the Blueline buses are squeezed on the road. But then we do have narrow roads. There is a limit to how many roads can be broadened. People on both sides would have to be displaced and that would result in another outcry. We need to limit the number of cars and auto-rickshaws, put better buses on the road and examine non-road options like the circular rail system. The HCBS is going to hog more road space. Citizens can expect more accidents and traffic jams.

Vineeta D'Souza

## Corruption

The trend of corruption among NGOs is rising. Last year, your magazine wrote a good cover story on the new voluntary policy for NGOs. They largely got what they wanted from the government. The government agreed not to interfere in their affairs and corruption was omitted. Self-regulation was seen as the answer.

Now there is silence. Self-regulation has never worked.

Dr SK Thakur

## Soul Value

Very few magazines tackle mental health. Samita Rathor's column on winter depression was informative and practical. Her 'In the Light' cartoon is always thoughtful and I like to look at it.

Anshu S

## Sexual harassment

Street sexual violence is undoubtedly a serious offence and those who indulge in it should be meted severe punishment. To a large extent such harassment has to do with entrenched male attitudes to women. But the film industry is also to blame. Cheap songs, jokes about women or showing women in poor light must not be allowed. Our censor board should snip out all such garbage.

Anindita Rai

## Rizwanur

The murder of Rizwanur is a telling comment on the state of our society. We profess democratic values, liberalism and claim to be an open society. The truth is we don't practice what we preach. Many middle class families treat their girls badly. They have scant respect for women. Families are often zones of gender inequality, casteism and communalism.

Ritu Ray

As your correspondent Shuktara Lal points out, the murder of Rizwanur has woken up Kolkata's citizens. Previously, such spontaneous protests were seen only in Delhi and Mumbai. It is good to see Kolkata awaken.

Nandita

“ Never did I dream that Buddhadeb and his Left Front will join the band of SEZ wallahs and start killing unarmed men, women and children. ”

Mahasweta Devi

Writer and activist

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# Miramar grows a sand dune

Rina Mukherji  
Panaji

GOA'S golden beaches are lined with shanties and garbage. Sand dunes, once the hallmark of Goa's seaside, are disappearing. Everybody agrees tourism is responsible. Goa has a population of 1.3 million but it gets 1.6 million tourists every year.

Sand dunes are nature's first defence against the mighty sea. Rows of dunes protect the hinterland from fierce winds and prevent erosion. As sea levels begin to rise because of global warming, sand dunes will be needed more than ever. There is also the lurking danger of tsunamis.



**Rows of sand dunes protect the hinterland and prevent erosion. As sea levels begin to rise because of global warming, sand dunes will be needed more than ever.**

While erosion is eating away coastlines, tourist footfalls have flattened sand dunes at Miramar, Panaji's city beach. Beautification drives by municipal authorities removed vegetation instead of encouraging it. Sand on the beach had nothing to hold it down. Gusts of sand would blow on to the road alongside. There were times when roads around Miramar Circle had to be closed since there was the threat of accidents due to windblown sand.

City authorities spent a lot of money on men and machines to clear the road of sand. "We had to spend Rs 10 lakhs annually," says Elvis Gomez, Municipal Commissioner.

Gomez and the municipal corporation then approached the National Institute of Oceanography for help. Dr Antonio Mascarenhas, a geological oceanographer, has been studying sand dunes since some time. Talks proved fruitful and Gomez and Mascarenhas started work on India's first sand dune regeneration project.

Dr Mascarenhas advised the municipal corporation to place fences at regular intervals for sand dune regeneration. Accordingly, fences were constructed with puttees separated by gaps so that sand would blow through and subsequently deposit on the other side. To prevent people from walking on the regenerated

sand dunes, gaps were left in between fences.

The sand fences were meant to intercept and trap windblown sand over a considerable stretch along the front end of the beach. By July, three months after the project started, little sand dunes started forming. In October, creepers like Ipomoea and Lantana began growing on the infant dunes.

Of course, a lot remains to be done. As Dr Mascarenhas says: "The corporation has kept too many gaps between the fences. These need to be fewer, so that a linear sand dune with ample vegetation is regenerated with minimal human interference. The puttees should also be arranged a little more apart for greater deposition and faster growth of dunes." Gomez

intends to correct these aberrations in collaboration with Dr Mascarenhas.

The municipal corporation is eager to move into the second phase of the project. They will then create a progressive triangular pattern of vegetation which is normally found on undisturbed beaches.

Dr Kasturi Desai, a botanist and an expert on sand dune vegetation explains: "Coastal sand dune vegetation has a herbaceous pioneer zone with creepers, a mid-shore zone of herbs and shrubs with comparatively deeper root systems, and a back-

shore zone with large trees that have deep roots like casuarinas and coconut palms."

Embryonic dunes are nearest to the sea. These are just above the high tide level and are formed by sand delivered to the beach by waves. You can find creepers like Ipomoea, Spinifex and Lantana on embryonic dunes.

Mid-shore dunes generally have shrubs. Hind shore dunes have trees with long root systems, growing along the line of vegetation. Casuarinas and coconut palms form most of the vegetation here.

"Dune vegetation is highly adapted to salt-laden coastal winds. It traps sand blown up from the beach and helps repair the damage inflicted on dunes by natural phenomena or by human impact," said Dr Desai.

In the second phase of the project, shrubs, wind breaking casuarinas and coconut trees will be planted along the line of vegetation. Entry by tourists will be restricted.

Once vegetation grows lush, Dr Mascarenhas feels walkovers should be built over sand dunes so that visitors don't destroy them. This has been done in Europe, for instance, in Portugal. "Sand dunes will not just beautify the beach but will also protect human habitations from calamities like storm surges or tsunamis. Dunes can limit damage," said Dr Mascarenhas.

# Activists

Rakesh Agrawal  
Dehradun

THE National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW) has begun work on implementing a new central law on forest rights in the hill state of Uttarakhand though the government is yet to notify the rules.

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Right to Forests) Act has the support of all political parties but the rules for implementing it have been held up by the government in deference to concerns expressed by wildlife enthusiasts

On 2 November NFFPFW held a rally and a workshop in Dehradun to demand that forest dwellers, pastoralists and nomads be given the right to live in and around forests and collect forest produce for a living.

The wildlife lobby is worried about national parks, sanctuaries and the vanishing tiger. It believes the new law will result in people living legally inside these areas. This, according to them, will adversely affect wildlife, especially the tiger. So the wildlife lobby wants core areas in national parks and sanctuaries to be designated 'inviolable spaces' and kept out of the purview of the Act.

The wildlife lobby also wants people living inside parks and sanctuaries to be relocated before the Act comes into force. Their argument is that once the rules of the Act are notified, it will be difficult to throw people out.

However, the tribal lobby and forest rights activists point out that the new Act already has provision for relocating people living inside parks and sanctuaries (chapter 3, clause 4) and they are not opposing 'inviolable spaces' in specified areas.

"Today, the fight is between forest dependent, deprived people and resourceful wildlife lovers. We will not let them win and we will extend this fight beyond forest areas to society as a whole," said Ashok Chaudhury, convenor of NFFPFW at the Dehradun workshop.

NFFPFW is keen that the new Act should be notified and rules made at state level so that it can come into force soonest.

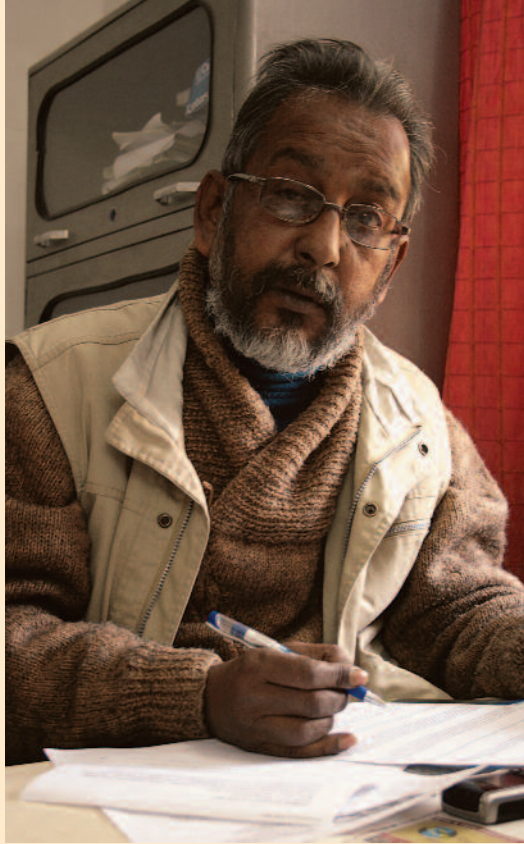
"The campaign to implement the Act will begin in Uttarakhand and it will be a model for other states," said Chaudhury. In an interview he spoke to *Civil Society* about NFFPFW's strategy.

**Wildlife enthusiasts want people to be moved out of national parks and sanctuaries before the Act is notified. What do you have to say?**

Resettlement is already provided for in the Act. People should be resettled with their complete cultural and social milieu and this is not possible outside forest areas. In the name of resettlement, they are thrown into shanty towns like the Taungiyas of Rajaji National Park who are forced to live in Patrai. What is important is their rehabili-

# get ahead with new forest law

Photographs by LAKSHMAN ANAND



Ashok Chaudhury

tation, not resettlement.

**NFFPFW has been lobbying with the government to draft rules that are people friendly. How far have you succeeded?**

The government has agreed in principle to include Taungiyas, women and pastoralists in the rules. But we have to wait till the final rules are notified to give an opinion. As far as women are concerned, there is a provision of joint ownership with their male counterparts when they sign the *patta* (deed) for the land. Many women's groups were lobbying for a two-thirds share of land for women. The government has agreed in principle. Under the category of, 'other forest dwellers,' Taungiyas and pastoralists are bound to be included.

Forest lands are government lands. It is people's pressure that will work. The final rules must be clear. But the government tends to keep the wordings of pro-people rules ambiguous so that there is leeway for manipulation.

We cannot depend on the government's wordings. After all when the Forest Bill was being discussed in the Rajya Sabha, the government gave us a verbal assurance that it would amend the Bill and remove certain features like proof that a forest dweller has lived on the land he or she is occupying for 75 years, but then nothing happened.

**How is NFFPFW planning to implement the Act?**

We have four specific plans. First, information dissemination about the Act is very important as most forest-dependent people are not even aware of the new law. So, our constituent groups are holding constant workshops, meetings and door-to-door contacts for this. Secondly, demarcation is critical to assess exact areas of forests and fields. We are actively making local maps.

Thirdly, we are strengthening local grassroots groups and organisations. Unless the people liv-

ing in and around forests are involved, no one from outside will come and help. Lastly, community governance of forests is a must. We are deeply involved in this.

Community governance will be cost effective and it will put pressure on the forest administration to implement the Act.

We are also working on forest management so that it yields sustenance to forest dependent people. Collection of non timber forest produce (NTFP) is important for it provides an income to people. Collective ownership is the logical fallout of this process. Again, it is not possible for individuals to fight the forest department. Here, social pressure by social movements should be built. This would reduce people's dependence on the government and pave the way for community

department has a colonial mindset and thinks it is the master of the forests. Forest officials will obstruct implementation of the Act.

Then, in many places, the authority of the forest department and the revenue department (RD) overlap. The existing fight between these two departments over land demarcation will worsen. Here state rules are very important.

For instance in Uttarakhand, most people irrespective of caste, are forest dependent. People have had access to reserve forests. Rules here must be carefully framed so that van panchayats, that are a unique system of self-governance of forests, are revitalised. Van panchayats have received a setback because of the government's joint forest management (JFM) programme.



■

*Resettlement is already provided for in the Act. People should be resettled with their complete cultural and social milieu and this is not possible outside forests.*

■

governance of forests.

**What are the hurdles you will face?**

The biggest problem is going to be the so-called proof of residence that forest dependent people would have to furnish for compensation. It is not possible to furnish 'proofs' that are more than 75 years old since most forests belonged to landlords at that time.

In the original draft of the Act, the forest department was not included in the monitoring committee. Now, in the rules, it has been included. This will create problems since the forest

**What will be the impact of the Act on India's diminishing forest cover?**

It is bound to be positive as the Act has specific duties to conserve forests along with rights. This will dispel the middle class notion that forest dependent people are responsible for reducing forest cover.

**How do you intend to respond to the wildlife lobby?**

It is very important to expose the real intention and colonial mindset of the wildlife lobby. It accepts only the 1927 Forest Act and not even the Constitution of India. Local groups will counter their propaganda by constant resistance and pressure building so that the wildlife lobby becomes democratically oriented.

**Are you satisfied with the political support you received?**

All political parties have had to support the Act for political reasons. They have to get the support of forest-dependent people in the next elections that may be declared any time now. Political parties have not done any work on the ground to get this Act implemented and make the rules pro-people.

# Rescuing the little household slave

Rina Mukherji  
Kolkata

**A**FTER her father's death, five-year-old Sihuli Kalia was sent by her mother to work at a home in New Alipore in Kolkata. Sihuli's job was to look after a baby, cook, clean and wash for a family of three. It was decided that her mother would be paid Rs 200 at an interval of three months or more. Sihuli's employers often beat her up. "My mistress even cracked my skull once," she recalls.

Her heartless employers found her 'inefficient'. They sent her to work at their parents home in Sakherbazaar. Here, Sihuli befriended Archana

Take the case of Moni Jana. She came to Kolkata when she was a little over 15. She cooks, cleans and washes for a paltry Rs 400, and her boarding and lodging are taken care of by her employers. They even helped her open a bank account. She brought her uncle's 10-year-old daughter, Jhuma Pradhan, to work in Behala a year ago. Since then Jhuma has been working in the neighbourhood for Rs 200 and lives with Moni. "I dust, sweep and wash utensils," she says. A month ago, Moni fixed up a neighbour's nine-year-old daughter, Monica Manna, in a neighbouring home in Sakherbazaar. Monica is 'learning to work.' The nine-year-old girl, the eldest of four siblings, whose father is a barber back home, can grind masala, wash

LAKSHMAN ANAND

parents she would make sure Rozina had a better life.

In West Bengal, most children who work as domestic labour are from Sandeshkhali and other remote regions of the Sundarbans/South 24-parganas and Midnapore districts. Every family has on an average five children to fend for. Lack of development, limited agricultural yields owing to salinity, and few means of livelihood have all contributed to a situation where "every addition to the family is viewed by parents as an additional source of income," as Hriday Chand Ghosh, programme coordinator of Save the Children's CDW project in Sandeshkhali, puts it.

As a result, there is a steady supply of child labour from these parts. The girl child is particularly vulnerable, as Ghosh points out, with nearly every family sending girls to earn in the city. Consequently, 84 per cent of child domestic workers in Kolkata are girls, while 99 per cent of those working in Delhi -- a large number of female domestic workers are from West Bengal -- are girls. Of these, many get trafficked by agents into the red light areas of cities.

Apprehending the culprits is a tough task since parents are often actively involved in the deal. "We only get to know when a complaint is lodged by parents three or four months after the transaction has been completed. This again happens only when they do not receive the amount agreed on from the particular agent," says Sandeshkhali Police Station Officer-in-Charge Gautam Mitra, who has rescued 15 girls from the clutches of these 'agents' and restored them to their families within one and a half years of his posting here. "I do not know how long they will be kept with their families. If a girl is prevented from being sold in Kolkata, the parents collude with agents to sell her off in Delhi or Mumbai. The main culprit is poverty."

The right level of coordination between concerned government departments is imperative for legislation to take effect, says Manabendra Nath Roy of Save the Children.

"I had suggested the formation of local committees with representatives from NGOs, panchayat pradhans, the Block Development Officer, OCs, actively participating. But this has yet to be done," says Mitra.

However, an awareness generation programme is underway since December last in Sandeshkhali Blocks I and II, as also the adjoining blocks of Basanti, Mirakha and Hasnabad.

Meanwhile, Save the Children and Right Track, its partner NGO, have adopted a more subtle approach to reach out to these children. Right Track has persuaded some employers to let them off for a couple of hours. The domestic workers use the time to visit drop-in centres in Behala, Gol Park and other parts of South Kolkata, where they learn to read and write, embroider, dance and act. Right Track has managed to get many of these children, who are school dropouts, readmitted into regular schools. The children also undergo personal safety lessons to save themselves from sexual abuse. They are informed about how they can get in touch with organisations like Childline, which runs a phone helpline, in an emergency. Many children have got back their childhood, with their parents going to work instead.

Middle class families are often insensitive to the plight of poor children who are forced to slave for them. Like other employers, they take advantage of the child's innocence, docility and helplessness, for their own ease and comfort. A massive awareness campaign by the police, NGOs and concerned citizens, along with punitive punishment, can force the middle class to mend its ways.



A child slaving at a zari unit in Bawana, outside Delhi.

Banerjee, an elderly domestic worker. "Mashi (aunt) used to cook there. Seeing how I was ill-treated, she found me another job at Sakherbazaar." But that didn't end Sihuli's problems. The family's college-going son would often try to get physical with her. Complaints bore no fruit. "Mashi advised me to give up that job and move in with her." Sihuli now works part time in three homes for Rs 1,200 per month. Her working hours are from 6 am to 7pm.

On October 10 last year, the Central Government amended the Child Labour Prevention Act to ban children under 14 from working as domestic servants and in *dhabas*, hotels and other commercial establishments. Employment of children was made a punishable offence. But a year later, surveys by Save the Children and Bal Raksha Bharat prove that the problem is far from eradicated. Even today 74 per cent of child domestic workers are under the age of 16.

Only three state governments -- Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka -- have published action plans for the rescue and rehabilitation of working children as directed by the Central Government.

Although child domestic work has been recognised by the International Labour Organisation as one of the most intolerable forms of child work, and been compared to a new form of slavery, it is extremely difficult to protect children from working as domestics.

For one, domestic workers themselves don't know about the law. They recruit other children to work in homes, believing they are just helping them earn money and stave off hunger.

## Only Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have published action plans for the rescue and rehabilitation of children.

utensils and dust her employer's home.

As per surveys conducted by Save the Children and the Chennai-based Tulir, physical abuse in the form of beating, burning and slapping is faced by 68.3 per cent of child domestics in West Bengal, and nearly 86 per cent of the children have faced emotional abuse. Save the Children and Tulir found that 20.3 per cent were forced to have sexual intercourse, while various degrees of molestation were common to 32.2 per cent of the children, which included both girls and boys.

Such cases have been hitting the headlines time and again. Some years ago, Kolkata was shocked by the case of seven-year-old Rozina Khatun. The little girl worked as a domestic in a schoolteacher's home in Behala. One day, she fell asleep while taking care of her employer's four-month-old son. When the schoolteacher saw that her son had rolled off the bed while she was away she beat up Rozina mercilessly. The little girl needed stitches on her head. Ironically, this frail girl from Habra had been brought to the city by the schoolteacher who promised her



Photographs by LAKSHMAN ANAND

# How Kalamkari was saved

**Shailey Hingorani**  
New Delhi

THE Kalamkari artists of Srikalahasti, in Andhra Pradesh, were dying of poverty when Anita Reddy stepped into their lives. Their only means of livelihood was Kalamkari, an intricate art of painting on cloth with vegetable dyes. Despite its exquisiteness, it was languishing for want of a market.

Anita Reddy and her father Dwaraknath Reddy started Dwaraka (Development of Weavers and Rural Artisans in Kalamkari Art), an organisation that has successfully enabled Kalamkari artists climb out of poverty.

Anita was in Delhi to take part in a four-day cultural festival on federalism, organised by the Asian Heritage Foundation, supported by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, from November 4 to 7 at the India Gate lawns.

The event was planned so as to coincide with the 4th International Conference on Federalism in which 40 countries took part. The idea was to provide real life experiences of Indian federalism.

So there were discussions and street plays on federalism. Several issues, such as space for minorities, the three-language policy, the conflict between wildlife concerns and forest rights, special economic zones, Right to Information, revival of art forms and crafts, youth in politics were discussed. A food court sold forgotten foods of India. A structure, which looked like an igloo, denoted different layers of government, like the gram sabha, panchayat and nagar pallika.

A small crafts bazaar displayed India's diverse artisan tradition. There were Chamba rumaals, applique, Etikopakka toys and, of course, Kalamkari.

Anita is managing trustee of Dwaraka. She works mostly in the urban slums of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. She spoke to *Civil Society* about how her group revives dying art forms and the challenges they face.

## What motivated you to work with Kalamkari artists?

Kalamkari developed around Srikalahasthi, a temple town near Tirupati. According to folklore it was Krishnadevaraya's patronage, which helped Kalamkari to flourish. The river Swaranamukh, which once flowed through this region, was critical to this art form. Most Kalamkari artists live on the banks of the river. But the Swaranamukh dried up, threatening the survival of Kalamkari.

The languishing of art forms is just one of the problems besetting people living near the banks of the river. Other, more immediate problems, like poverty, social oppression and exploitation had to

be addressed first before the art form could be revived and made a lucrative option. Many weavers like the famed Ramachandrayya committed suicide after getting ensnared in debt. All these reasons motivated me to work with the community and that is how Dwaraka, which is supported by the Dwarkanath Reddy Ramanarpanam Trust, was born.

## What did you do to revive the livelihoods of Kalamkari artists and weavers?

Our approach was extremely pragmatic. We firmly believed that if the artist lived then the art form would live too. We started by first organising weavers and Kalamkari artists. We addressed food, security and shelter and then looked at how the art form could be revived.

We facilitated the formation of a federation called the Kalamkari Artisans Revival and Upsurge for National Acclaim, (Karuna). It ensures that craftspeople and their children benefit from state government training programmes. It has six training centres in Kalahasti where the artists and their teachers receive stipends of Rs 300 per month for skill

development courses. Artists were also encouraged to pick up other skills so that their livelihood options would expand. Besides, while we were primarily interested in Kalamkari we did want to work with other weaving communities in the region. We established forward and backward linkages so that we could also look after the needs of communities like the Kenkatgirivavi weavers.

## How did you address the needs of Kalamkari artists?

The artists didn't have any major infrastructure needs. I didn't have an art background and I went to them with my background in community mobilisation. I offered them no stylistic inputs. The problem was ideological as well – about what we called art and what we didn't and this also deter-

mined the prices each art piece would fetch. We helped mobilise them so that we could collectively interface with the market, understand its needs and make Kalamkari art a lucrative art form. Product diversification has been very successful. Now, we provide them raw textile material, which we source at cheap rates from Bhagalpur and Nagpur. They design it. Other raw materials like vegetable dyes and milk are locally available. We didn't want to interrupt the local production cycle by changing around too many things. We then innovate upon this unfinished product. It is sometimes made into a wallet, at other times a handbag, depending on the demand in the market.

## There is some criticism of product diversification. It is said it dilutes the art form.

Many people have criticised us for indulging in product diversification by arguing that this does not amount to revival of an art form but a dilution of it, and that it should no longer be referred to as Kalamkari art but Kalamkari craft. But, like I said before, it is more important for us that the artist survives. The survival of the art form is always secondary. Now, with the setting up of our Dwaraka store in Bangalore, which houses these Kalamkari products, the artists earn anywhere between Rs 3,500-4,000 per month.

## Who determines the prices of products?

The pricing happens according to the pulls of the market in Bangalore. But we encourage artists to price the Kalamkari themselves, and then we price the finished product on the basis of this price decided by the artists plus the raw materials and the overheads. The money goes back in the same proportion. Artists get about 30-40 per cent on each sold

item. To help generate more money for the Kalamkari artists, we have started exporting to countries like Japan, US, Denmark. Collaboration with the International League of Artisans has given us scope to do more.

## What challenges have you faced in the work that you have done?

One of the biggest challenges that I face is that artists sometimes complain of work becoming boring when large consignments come requiring them to work as machines reproducing the same thing over and over again.

For example, once, the National Geographic magazine commissioned us to prepare 1,000 scarves, and the artists were bored to death doing the same thing again and again.



Anita Reddy

*Our approach was pragmatic. We first addressed food security and shelter and then looked at how the art form could be revived.*



# Burma activists seek campus roots

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

THE dust over September's Burma protests seems to have settled. Those peaceful monks, activists, citizens demonstrating for a democratic Burma have gone home to wait and watch till the military junta begins its next crackdown, you think.

Ask the Burma Solidarity Group which heads the campaign. For them its business as usual as they trudge from college to college lugging banners and posters and lobbying to garner public opinion. They would like citizens to change the Indian government's neutral policy on Burma.

The Burmese delegation is warmly greeted in academia. In JNU, the seminar room is crowded with teachers and students. Dr Tint Swe and Soe Myint make presentations. While Dr Swe is a minister in the exiled National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), Soe Myint is editor of *Mizzima*, a monthly journal on the Burmese democracy movement which you can read on the internet.

There is sympathy. But how can we help, the Burmese are asked? India can't intervene. There is China. Wouldn't Asean be a better bet, inquired one sympathetic professor dipping her biscuit in tea? Some academics, known for their Left leanings, are squeamish about the loud support the Burmese are getting from the West.

Dr Tint Swe and Soe Myint seem well armed to deal with such questions. And Dr Swe's request for help is disarmingly modest.

"We would like the Indian government to give scholarships to Burmese students for a range of subjects: political science, management, information technology. India should help build Burma's human resources," he says. "We also want India to

host an international convention on Burma attended by all stakeholders to find a way out. We don't have democratic institutions. We want India to help us build them. Instead, your former President APJ Abul Kalam Azad, on a state visit to Burma, offered democracy training to the military junta,"



Soe Myint and Dr Tint Swe

he says impassively.

It seems the Burmese diaspora wants to equip itself so that it can take over from the military junta whenever the time is ripe. It doesn't want to gain power and then start finding its feet. It doesn't want Burma to be another failed state.

Dr Swe says the Burmese diaspora can play an active democratic role and it is worthwhile to invest in it. "We are looking for friends in need," he says. The Burmese have managed to get solid support from India's northeast. In Mizoram, political parties and students held a rally. Protests in Delhi were well attended. The UN has stepped in and the military junta has opened talks with the iconic Aung San Su Kyi, who has been under house arrest

for years.

Dr Swe says his government in exile has been talking to ethnic minorities in Burma.

"Over the last 19 years political understanding between us has grown. There are differences but broadly there is agreement to build a federal union in Burma based on democracy and not to let our country disintegrate."

The military junta is in total control, but then change happens in stages.

Soe Myint says there are marked differences between Burma's 1988 uprising and the present one. At that time there was no media around. But this time the whole world saw peaceful monks, who led the movement for democracy, being beaten and killed and the military junta had nowhere to hide.

In 1988, students demanded a change of regime. In the recent uprising, peaceful monks were chanting and asking for national reconciliation and dialogue. In 1988, to defuse the situation the junta called for elections. But when Su Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won, the junta refused to hand over or share power. Dr Swe, who won on

an NLD ticket, had to flee to India.

"Now faced with international pressure the junta has started to talk with Su Kyi. But they do not want to share power," says Soe Myint.

So anger continues to simmer. The junta's crackdown has once again forced the movement for democracy to go underground and onto the internet.

Civil society groups are growing slowly. There are students forming networks, women leading protests, monasteries pitted against the military. Burmese society is split down the middle. Will the movement for democracy in Burma be like the Free Tibet movement ---alive abroad, but suffocated and dying at home?

## Kashmiri shawls face identity crisis

**Jehangir Rashid**  
Srinagar

FOR long Kashmir has been known for its shawls. But recently, the absence of branding along with the intrusion of Amritsar look alike shawls has played havoc with its shawl industry. It has dawned on Kashmiri producers and sellers that their shawls should have a distinct brand to clearly distinguish them from shawls knitted elsewhere.

Recently, the President of Kashmir Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KCCI), Dr Mubeen Shah, advocated that a brand, namely 'Kashmir' should be introduced for shawls made in Kashmir. This would ensure that the reputation of the shawls made here is not questioned, he said.

Although, the Valley's shawl industry is many centuries old, no serious effort has gone into maintaining the identity of shawls produced here. It is due to this that the people have started

making shawls elsewhere, branding them as shawls made in Kashmir.

"We have artisans who have produced great things over the years. But the irony is that the people, especially those at the helm, have taken things for granted paying no attention to a concept like branding. For the last several years, shawls produced at other places like Amritsar have been identified as those made in Kashmir, and today the situation is such that one has to explain the finer points of Kashmiri shawls to a stranger," said Mohammad Yousuf, a shawl merchant.

The people associated with the shawl business in the Kashmir Valley believe that there is a lot of difference between the quality of shawls produced by hand and those produced on machines. However, at the same time it takes less time to make shawls on machines.

"It takes 20-25 days for a person to prepare a shawl. On the other hand it would not take more than two days for the same shawl to be prepared

on a machine. The manufacture of machine-made shawls needs to be discouraged, and the people involved in knitting the shawls themselves should be allowed to excel in their field. The government has to take whole-hearted measures in this regard, and only then can one expect better things in the future," said Kaleemullah Khan, a noted businessman.

After shahtoosh shawls were banned in the Kashmir Valley there was a high demand for Pashmina shawls. The ban on shahtoosh shawls has always remained a point of discussion. Several say, "It is a myth that the Tibetan antelope is killed for the preparation of shahtoosh shawls. The truth is that the animal sheds its wool during the winter season and only that wool is used to make the shawl. Once an animal is killed its wool cannot be used in the shawl-making process. It is a move aimed at ruining the shawl industry of the Valley and these people have been successful in their efforts," said Mushtaq Ahmad, a shawl businessman, bitterly.

**MICROSOFT AD**



## Shocked Kolkatans

# MASSACRE RAJ

## People ask: Is Buddhadeb

**Rita and Umesh Anand**  
New Delhi

ARMED Marxist cadres have overrun villages in the Nandigram area of West Bengal's East Midnapore district to beat into submission people who have been refusing to part with their land for a chemical hub and a Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

Between November 6 and 10, the cadres, using guns and bombs and reinforced by criminal elements, put an end to opposition by the villagers. Nandigram was blockaded and the carnage was brief and brutal. It left some 40 people dead and several thousands are reported either missing or homeless.

Senior Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) leaders have justified the recapture of Nandigram on national TV. West Bengal's Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, said it was an "eye for an eye" and that the villagers had been "paid

back in their own coin". Prakash Karat, senior CPI(M) central leader, said Maoists were behind the villagers and had to be evicted with violence.

But the use of armed CPI(M) cadres to butcher innocent people while the police and the entire government machinery looked on has made thinking Indians fear a model of governance that doesn't differentiate between party and State.

Huge protest rallies have been held in Kolkata and addressed by Medha Patkar, champion of the disenfranchised, who was earlier refused police protection and, together with other activists, beaten up by CPI(M) cadres when she tried to go to Nandigram.

"The CPI(M) must realise that its cadres can't do what they like and declare 'The Red Sun has risen' because when that happens the Sun of Democracy sets on the other side," Medha Patkar told *Civil Society* after finally entering Nandigram.

She lamented the CPI(M)'s unwillingness to accept opposition to its policies.



PRASANTA BISWAS

## protest in anguish

# IN NANDIGRAM

## any different from Modi?

She said letters seeking a dialogue on Nandigram received no response. "I was often told by groups in Bengal about how undemocratic and intolerant the CPI(M) is here. I really did not believe it. But now I have experienced it for myself."

There have been protests in Mumbai and Delhi as well with the Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee, who belongs to the CPI(M), being turned away from the Jawaharlal Nehru University campus by students.

Significantly, the rallies in Kolkata have been attended by Bengali film-makers, actors and intellectuals like Mrinal Sen, Subhaprasanna, Anjan Dutt, Rituporno Ghosh, Joy Goswami, Nabanita Deb Sen, Aparna Sen and Bibash Chakraborty. Many of them are known to be Left-leaning. Damning criticism has even come from Ashok Mitra, the former West Bengal finance minister.

"We are all very scared. The CPI(M) is the ruling party and in government. They should extend the same facilities and benefits to everyone regardless of their political affiliations," film director Aparna Sen said. "But the party and

the government have become one. Anybody who is not a supporter is seen as an enemy. Every single person in Nandigram has some vulnerabilities."

Nandigram has also brought into focus the flaws of a development process in which industry and governments take decisions without consulting people on projects. Industry can hardly be expected to feel comfortable with bloodshed and the killing of innocents. It will feel concerned about the future of investments made on commitments from leaders like Bhattacharya who are clearly cut off from reality. Sustainable business initiatives need peace and inclusion. A massacre may be a show of political strength for the CPI(M), but industry will worry about cadres who hold so much sway over the fortunes of a party.

Few independent observers accept that there was any significant Maoist presence in Nandigram, though it is established that the Trinamool Congress has been trying to making political capital out of local discontent.

On the other hand it is well known that the villagers were CPI(M) support-

ers till early this year when plans for the chemical hub and SEZ were sprung upon them and the Buddhadeb Bhattacharya government began browbeating them into giving up their land for the project.

Said activist and writer Mahasweta Devi to *Civil Society*: "The ground reality is that Nandigram Block 1 and Block 2 were largely dominated by the CPI (M) and other Left parties. Panchayats and other local bodies consisted mostly of Left Front supporters. But they did not want the SEZ."

Bhattacharya repeatedly pledged himself to the project (which is getting investment from the Salim Group in Indonesia) to strengthen his pro-industry image. But there was no consultation with villagers. Their opinion was not sought on whether they wanted the project or how they should be compensated for the loss of valuable and fertile land and innumerable traditional livelihoods.

The villagers sealed Nandigram and cut themselves off to protect their land after they were first attacked in March. CPI(M) cadres on that occasion moved in under the cover of police gunfire and tear-gas. In all 14 people were killed but rape, molestation and arson told a much more brutal story. The March attack was followed by a national outcry. The media and social activists descended on Nandigram. Having survived that attack and worried that they might be forced into parting with their land, the villagers made supporters of the CPI(M) leave the area. They also refused to allow government officials to enter.

Thereafter the situation continued to simmer with sporadic violence. The evicted CPI(M) families were not allowed to enter the villages. The government on its part seems to have made no effort to restore normalcy.

## Public anger

As matters came to a head in November, appeals from both sides began reaching the West Bengal Governor, Gopal Krishna Gandhi, who is a grandson of the Mahatma and enjoys wide respect for his impartiality.

The Governor, however, could not succeed in getting the government to act and finally he issued an unprecedented public statement saying: "At the time of writing, the most accurate description for Nandigram is the one used by our Home Secretary, namely, it has become a 'war zone'. No government or society can allow a war zone to exist without immediate and effective action."

The Governor went on to say: "Those who had to flee Khejuri must come back with full confidence and dignity. And no quarter should be given to the cult of violence associated with Maoists. But the manner in which the 'recapture' of Nandigram villages is being attempted is totally unlawful and unacceptable."

Activists like Medha Patkar, Mahesweta Devi and Saonli Mitra and innumerable others have said that the victims of the November violence have all been ordinary villagers and not Maoists. The dead and injured included women and children who were taking out processions on November 10 to ward off the full-scale assault that the CPI(M) cadres were planning.

"If this can happen in Nandigram, the CPI(M) can do the same thing anywhere in West Bengal," is the refrain from Kolkata.



A woman examines the ruins of her home in Nandigram

# 'Not Maoists but CPM goons'

WELL known writer and activist Mahasweta Devi has been a fearless voice for denotified tribals and other disenfranchised people in West Bengal. She has been closely involved with communities in the Nandigram area and has been instrumental in having a medical team visit the victims of the March 14 violence. She spoke to *Civil Society* on her impressions of the recent developments.

**You have followed many people's movements. What is your reaction to the happenings in Nandigram?**

I am aged enough to remember the British times, the Partition, the Bengal Famine. After I married B Bhattacharya of IPTA I came close to the CPI and I witnessed many movements. I remember the days of Marichjhapi eventually followed by the gunning down of seven women in Naxalbari and the genocide in Kashipur-Baranagar. But never did I dream that Buddhadeb and his Left Front will join the band of SEZ wallahs and start killing unarmed men, women and children and encouraging gang rape and arson on a war-footing.

**The CPI(M) says there are no plans now for an SEZ in Nandigram?**

Nandigram is very much a part of the government's SEZ plans. The idea is to make a gift of a chemical hub to Laxman Seth, the MP and CPI(M)'s supremo in Haldia. He will extract his pound of flesh from the enterprises that come to the SEZ and chemical hub. The CPI(M) also wants to make a gift of



Mahasweta Devi

a nuclear plant at Haripur to the US. The government is ready to surrender the very freedom of its people for the interest of the party. I can't express how shocked I am. But at the same time I see the faces of common people from the remotest areas. They are surging up daily and it makes me believe that change will come and people will assert themselves.

**Was the recent violence in Nandigram between CPI(M) cadres and followers of the Trinamool?**

In Nandigram, the CPI (M) has been amassing arms on a very large scale and recruiting goons and killers as their cadres. In Nandigram I find that the Trinamool and the Maoists are named again and again. The ground reality is that Nandigram Block 1 and Block 2 were largely dominated by the CPI (M) and other Left parties. Panchayats and other local bodies consisted mostly of Left Front supporters.

As far as my experience goes, between March and November this year, every night CPI (M) recruits would throw bombs and fire bullets from the Khejuri

side. Nandigram retaliated on a much lesser degree. Last week I learnt about a fresh big stock of bullets and bombs being stored in Khejuri. Groups of anti-social elements and ruthless killers were recruited from other parts of the state and from outside the state like Bihar and Jharkhand. They were seen loitering openly in the locality. On November 8 evening the CPI(M) leader, Biman Bose, declared in front of the media: 'From tomorrow our boys will take charge. We shall surround them from all sides.'

PRASANTA BISWAS

DRIK INDIA

Old Kolkata hands point out that a bandh called on November 12 was spontaneous with ordinary folk registering their protest and asking how safe they are in a situation in which the government allows party cadres to use violence to enforce its writ.

Comparisons have been drawn with Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh where tribals are being armed by the state government and let loose on other tribals who have gone with Maoists. Parallels are also being drawn with the communal riots under the Narendra Modi government in Gujarat.

These situations are not entirely similar, but there is a growing concern that governance across the country is slipping into the lawless zone of state-sponsored violence.

People are aghast at the way events have unfolded.

- Nandigram was sealed from all sides, the police kept out and heavily armed



A burnt house in Nandigram

**‘No quarter should be given to the cult of violence associated with Maoists. But the manner in which the ‘recapture’ of Nandigram villages is being attempted is totally unlawful and unacceptable,’ said the Governor, Gopal Krishna Gandhi.**



West Bengal Governor Gopal Krishna Gandhi

cadres sent in to maim and kill villagers including women and children. Several days of preparation preceded the attack on November 10.

- Prakash Karat, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and other CPI(M) leaders were seen on national TV glibly defending the attack and saying Maoists had to be taught a lesson.
- Medha Patkar and other activists were beaten up by CPI(M) cadres despite court orders that they should be allowed to enter Nandigram.
- Medical relief teams were not allowed to go to the rescue of injured people.
- The West Bengal governor, Gopal Krishna Gandhi's requests to the state government for preventive action were ignored.
- No one senior in the Congress condemned the ghastly violence. Instead, silence on the developments was apparently used to get the Left's support on the nuclear deal.

Much of the public anger is on the internet. A petition signed by 93 concerned Indians, among them activists and senior academics and lawyers, says: "What is happening in West Bengal today is indeed unprecedented in contemporary India and has doubtless besmirched the State's rich history of demo-

cratic struggles so that even the Governor of West Bengal who has shown tremendous restraint has been pained to issue a statement against the unfolding events in the State."

The petition continues: "The manner in which the anti-socials of the dominant party in the ruling front attacked the residents to reestablish their domination over the area exposes the party's lack of commitment to democratic values, principles and norms. The actions of these people under the benign indulgence of the State administration can only strengthen the criminalised and anti-democratic forces in our polity. For four days since the operation began the media and journalists have not been allowed to enter Nandigram, indicating that there is much to hide."

What has been particularly galling is the way in which the CPI(M) has refused to bother with public opinion. The Governor's approaches to the government to reduce tensions in the area and restore peace were ignored. Finally, when he issued a public statement of his concerns, he was accused of unconstitutional behaviour. The day after the Governor issued the statement, the final assault on the villages took place.

## People's tribunal

Several voluntary organisations have tried to restore normalcy since the first incidents in Nandigram in March this year. A People's Tribunal showed how in the March attacks women and children suffered. It also established that party cadres and police and government officials had colluded in the violence. Party cadres had in fact worn police uniforms. Fire-arms and iron rods were used. A significant number of bullet injuries, the Tribunal reported, were in the back, which meant that people were shot at even as they were being chased. Cases of rape and sexual assault were reported to the Tribunal. Women came out in the open and spoke of these atrocities.

An independent survey was conducted after March by Sameekshak Samannaya, a human rights group. In a published interim report the organisation says: "The most grim atrocities were those regarding violence on women. Physical torture in the form of brutal assault with batons, rifle butts and fibre rods and also other kinds of physical force were inflicted on 274 women. Worse still, in 17 cases, women were sexually tortured. This includes brutal strikes in the vaginal zones by batons/rifle butts causing not only serious physical injury, but also severe trauma."

The survey says there were 11 definite cases of rape and in 46 cases the modesty of women was outraged in different ways. "This includes violent molestation, grabbing by force different organs of the female body, pulling the clothing of women or even robbing women partly or fully," the survey says.

The tally of deaths and injuries in March provided by the survey is as follows: 14

people died out of which 12 were men and two women. Bullet injuries were received by 41 men and 18 women. The atrocities on women were like this: 274 cases of physical torture, 46 of modesty violation, 17 of sexual torture and 11 of rape.

Many find it amazing that even after all this, the West Bengal government did not think it necessary to reach out, reassure people and provide a healing touch. Instead, it thought it fit to deliver a crushing blow on Nandigram by sending in its cadres on November 10.

## Why Nandigram was crushed

Nandigram has lived with violence since early this year when villagers refused to give up their land for the chemical hub and SEZ.

Stopping the SEZ saved their lands, but it also put the villagers, organised under the banner of the Bhoomi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee (BUPC), in the eye of a much bigger storm.

For the CPI(M), Nandigram's defiance couldn't be taken lightly. In the three decades that it has been in power in West Bengal, the CPI(M) prides itself on

# How Nandigram unfolded



**Jaya Mitra**  
Kolkata

**N**ANDIGRAM has become India's new word for state-sponsored terrorism. A rural area some 200 km from Kolkata,

Nandigram comprises five panchayats divided into two blocks. Land is fertile and yields a good crop, including vegetables. Located near the coastline, Nandigram, Haripur and Kontai get a constant supply of brackish water fish,

an important food product that is exported and earns foreign exchange.

This area is one of the most prosperous in West Bengal. According to a state government agency report of 2005, Nandigram is one of three blocks in West Bengal that have the highest calorie intake per capita. The literacy rate, even among girls, is high. There are branches of several banks within the villages. Out of the 130,000 people in Nandigram, the majority were CPI (M) supporters.

Since the last two years, the state government has become enthusiastic about 'globalised development'. After the row over Singur, where 997 acres of fertile agricultural land were handed over to the Tatas despite strong opposition, the government announced that 2,500 acres would be acquired in Nandigram. Ten acres would be handed over to Dow Chemicals to set up a chemical hub. The rest would go to the Indonesian builders, the Salim Group, which would construct bridges and highways, the infrastructure needed for the chemical hub.

Two thousand and five hundred acres means more than half the area of Nandigram. Entire villages would be displaced. A population of 125,000 would lose their homes and livelihood. A rich natural resource would be replaced by polluting and dangerous industries in the name of development.

The majority of people in Nandigram rose up in a big way against this decision. They felt betrayed by the CPI (M). Confrontation began. No government initiative to open dialogue with the people concerned was visible. Instead there were constant skirmishes with the CPI (M)'s hired goons. To stop these attacks the Bhumi Uchched Pratirodh Committee (BUPC), a local committee of villagers, dug up roads at all the entry points. The exchange of fire and the death toll spiralled.

The chief minister then announced that the land acquisition notice had been put forward by mistake and that no chemical hub would be set up in Nandigram, if the villagers did not want 'development'.

But the people of Nandigram had lost faith in the government. Moreover, they saw that the government had given false statements in court about the voluntary disposal of land in Singur. The opposition parties, mainly the Trinamool, joined hands with the BUPC.

Tension and violence increased every day but there were no sincere peace efforts from the government. On the contrary, party leaders like Biman Basu and Binoy Konar gave public statements openly supporting the CPI (M) cadres. The chief minister while describing the tense situation in Nandigram used terms like 'our boys' and 'the others'.

And then violence began to erupt. For quite some time the BUPC kept saying that many known anti-social elements and goons could be seen roaming openly in the area. On November 8, CPI (M) leader Biman Basu declared before the media: "Our boys will teach them (Nandigram) the right ways. We will encircle them from all sides."

CPI (M) cadres had encircled the small village of Satangabari, burnt houses, killed cattle and put poison in the fish ponds. On November 9, thousands of villagers entered the burnt down villages in an unarmed peace procession with women and children marching in the front. Nobody thought that a peace march would be brutally attacked. But it was.

The number of dead will perhaps never be known because bodies were buried in mass graves. Some were dumped in the river and even burnt in a nearby brick kiln furnace. Innumerable villagers were injured and women gang-raped. Children were killed. Thousands were surrounded and taken to other places. They were beaten, tortured and some were killed.

The police was just standing around, inactive. There was no trace of any government administration for three days. The entry points of all roads to Nandigram were blocked by foul-mouthed ruffians carrying red flags. No media, no relief or medical teams were allowed.

having built a party machinery that doesn't brook rejection. Particularly galling to the CPI(M) is the embarrassing reality that BUPC consists of its former supporters who have distanced themselves from the party.

The especially crushing attack on November 10 seems to have been designed to finally settle scores in Nandigram. More significantly, it is meant to send out a message to the rest of the state to either accept CPI(M) dominance or face the same fate as Nandigram.

But has the CPI(M) gone too far for its own good? Has it crushed Nandigram and put the fear of death into the rest of Bengal only to lose the respect of liberal minded Indians across the country?

For the CPI(M) the future after 30 years in power in West Bengal comes with challenges at many levels.

Perhaps the biggest challenge before the CPI(M) if it wants to position Bengal as a modern state is to reform itself from within. The party has always seen its cadres as its strength. Now its cadres hang like a weight on the party, long accustomed to the many bonuses of being in power and unwilling to surrender local influence. It is unlikely that a modern economy can be built through exercising such heavy-handed controls.

It is unrealistic in this day and age to think of bringing in investments that break the backs of local communities and flout environmental and ecological considerations. State of the art business practices require reaching out to all stakeholders.

## Ageing, uninformed leadership

On the economic front the CPI(M) has little to show for itself in West Bengal. It is commonplace for talented young people to leave the state in search of employment, education opportunities and so on. An ageing and severely unin-

**'We are all very scared. The CPI(M) is the ruling party and in government. They should extend the same facilities and benefits to everyone regardless of their political affiliations,' film director Aparna Sen said. 'But the party and the government have become one.'**

formed leadership has found it increasingly difficult to give Bengalis a modern and vibrant economy. Ask any young Bengali and he/she will tell you that there is nothing left in West Bengal.

When the CPI(M) does connect with industry, the party's leaders invariably become playthings in the hands of businessmen and entrepreneurs. Serious investments are long over due. But instead of bringing in investments with vision and an overall plan for the state, the CPI(M) leadership easily falls prey to proposals for SEZs and real estate projects with little

understanding of the displacement they will cause or the environmental impact that they will have or what economic benefits they might finally deliver.

The CPI(M) has counted among its successes control of the countryside and land reforms. But now as land has to be given to industry it becomes increasingly clear that titles haven't been changed and new ownership hasn't been established. So, the serious investor who wants to come in for the long term and build an industry with local support does not know who to compensate.

Moreover, since people haven't been prepared for industrialisation, it is uncertain how they will avail of the jobs that new industries will generate. In many cases like Nandigram, people prefer to continue with the way of life they know.

This of course does not necessarily mean that they don't want industrialisation, but they don't know how to cope with it. And they don't trust the West Bengal government.

Since CPI(M) leaders seem to be led by the nose by investors on the one hand and entrenched and often corrupt local cadres on the other, they don't tend to have an understanding of the impact that projects will have on farming and fishing communities, on people who may live off the land but don't have the right of ownership and therefore will get no compensation. These are people who also do not have any alternative means of livelihood. They will probably never qualify for jobs in the industries that come up and will finally turn up on the streets of cities.

If the events in Nandigram were intended to send out the message to the rest of the state that the party's plans are not to be toyed with, the result will almost certainly be total submission. But for people who seek a vibrant and progressive West Bengal, a 'massacre raj' and cadres the party cannot control will really be reason to worry.



The conscience of students at JNU in Delhi was stirred. They came out and protested

**Has the CPI(M) gone too far for its own good? Has it crushed Nandigram and put the fear of death into the rest of Bengal only to lose the respect of liberal minded Indians across the country?**

# 'Nandigram has the peace of a graveyard now'

**MEDHA Patkar**, Anuradha Talwar and other activists were finally allowed entry into Nandigram on November 14. Earlier attempts to enter had been thwarted. On one occasion the activists, including Medha Patkar, were beaten up and their vehicles damaged. On November 14, however, they were allowed entry after the CPI(M) cadres had completed their operation in Nandigram. Patkar spoke to *Civil Society* shortly after the visit.

## What is the situation in Nandigram?

There is the peace of the graveyard in Nandigram. Some 15,000 families have been pushed out of the villages, their homes burnt, the women assaulted. These people are now in makeshift refugee camps with very little food or shelter. The West Bengal government has sanctioned just Rs 2,000 or Rs 3,000 per family as relief. It is nothing. The camps are being run by the Bhoomi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee (BUPC) with very limited resources. Taking care of these people is the need of the hour.

We also met 15 to 20 CPI(M) supporters who took us into villages and showed us the houses of some of their people that had been burnt. This is a much smaller number than that of those who have been pushed out.

The CPI(M) supporters who were on motorcycles said they wanted the SEZ because it would give them jobs. It is the cadres who are in charge. The police are totally inactive. The CRPF, which is at the disposal of the state government, has not been properly deployed. In fact the CRPF commander has said that there is nothing left for his men to do now.

## Prakash Karat has said that Maoists have been at work in Nandigram and therefore cadres had to be sent in to evict them. What do you have to say?

It is not correct. Too much credit is being given to Maoists. There may have been in the villages young people of different persuasions just as there may well be in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). The fact is that this was a people's movement against giving up their land. The BUPC had people from all parties in it, including former supporters of the CPI(M).

I was often told by groups in Bengal about how undemocratic and intolerant the CPI(M) is here. I really did not believe it. But now I have experienced



**Medha Patkar**

ment has responded.

The violence of the past few days in Nandigram has been an act of political vengeance and Laxman Seth the MP from here has said as much publicly. Even now as we visited a relief camp, one person was abducted. Attempts were made to pull a few BUPC supporters we took along with us into the villages off our jeep.

## You have often taken the support of the Left. What has happened?

We have always seen the Left as playing an important role in our democracy and providing a challenge to globalisation, communal forces and so on. We continue to see ourselves as left of centre and secular.

## CPI(M) leaders such as Prakash Karat have openly defended the violence in Nandigram while speaking on television. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya has said the villagers have been paid back in their own coin and the CPI(M) taken an eye for an eye. Do you worry about what this means for our democracy?

It does worry me. We have fought against projects in other states, but haven't faced such a situation. Even in the BJP-ruled states, with all the BJP's communal biases, it hasn't been so bad. The CPI(M) must realise that its cadres can't do what they like and declare "The Red Sun has risen" because then the Sun of Democracy sets on the other side.

## What should be done now to restore normalcy?

Civil society groups must move in. There is an urgent need for relief and medical relief in particular.

Secondly, a political decision must be taken to stop the use of arms and intimidation. Everything rests on a political decision. The Congress should prevail upon the CPI(M), which is its partner. When we were stopped from entering Nandigram it was a political decision and similarly when we were allowed to enter it was a political decision.

Thirdly, the Centre should intervene and ensure the safety of the families who have lost their homes as the National Human Rights Commission has directed the Union home ministry.

it for myself.

The CPI(M) in Bengal must learn to be much more tolerant. They must realise that there is a role for an opposition in democracy. In Andhra Pradesh the CPI(M) has played the role of an opposition and won concessions from the government.

Here in West Bengal, too, it must be ready to hear another point of view. There has been no response to all our offers of a dialogue for the past several months. We have repeatedly asked for talks to reduce the tension and restore peace, but neither the party nor the govern-



# Worldview

## LATITUDE MATTERS

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

## Right Livelihood Award

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

**T**HIS year's Right Livelihood Award, often referred to as the Alternative Nobel Prize, is being shared by four recipients: Christopher Weeramantry (Sri Lanka), Dekha Ibrahim Abdi (Kenya), the Schmeisers (Canada) and Grameen Shakti (Bangladesh).

"The 2007 Right Livelihood Award recipients highlight existing solutions for today's world: Dekha Ibrahim Abdi and Christopher Weeramantry demonstrate how war and terror can be overcome by peace-building and the rule of international law. The Schmeisers and Grameen Shakti show us how to protect two essential services of our global ecosystem -- our agricultural resources and our global climate," said Jakob von Uexkull, executive director of the Right Livelihood Awards Foundation, a Swedish charitable foundation.

So far the foundation has presented awards to 123 recipients from 56 countries. The presentation ceremony takes place in the Swedish Parliament on December 7. The total prize money is \$310,000.

Christopher Weeramantry is a renowned legal scholar and a former vice-president of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). He has played a crucial role in strengthening and expanding the rule of international law especially to address the threat of nuclear weapons. He has focused on areas of cutting edge jurisprudence like the impact of technology on human rights and environmental principles.

In 1996, it was Weeramantry who disagreed with the majority opinion in the ICJ to leave undetermined the legality of the use of nuclear weapons for self defence if the survival of the state was at stake. He understood that this exception would, in practice, be used by nuclear weapon states. He asserted that use of nuclear weapons was illegal "in any circumstances whatsoever."

His lengthy exposition of international law in this, one of the most important cases in the history of the International Court of Justice, is regarded as his crowning achievement. His books are widely recognised for their immense legal value.

In 2001, he set up the Weeramantry International Centre for Peace Education and Research in Sri Lanka in 2001, to foster peace education, cross-cultural understanding and international law.

Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, a global peacemaker from rural Kenya, builds peace with grassroots activism. The teachings of Islam are cited to motivate warring people to opt for peace. Dekha is from Wajir, a district in north Kenya. The district was under emergency law from 1963 to 1990 since government forces were fighting guerrillas in the Shifta war. But when this war ended, the different clans started fighting, leading to several deaths. Dekha started a grassroots peace initiative by bringing together people of different clans. Despite opposition from clan elders they began to mediate between warring groups.

The Wajir Peace Committee was set up, with representatives of all stakeholders – clans, security forces, parliamentarians, civil servants, Muslim and

Christian religious leaders, NGOs – to implement the agreement. Dekha was elected as secretary of the Peace Committee.

The model developed in Wajir was used again in 1998, when the Christian community in Wajir experienced violence. Dekha helped form a disaster committee of Muslim women to assist and make amends with the Christian community. They held prayer meetings in which Muslim and Christian women shared their experience and strengthened their relationship. Subsequently, the Wajir Peace Committee began to include Christian women, leading to the formation of an inter-faith committee for peace which has undertaken further activities to intervene in religious conflicts.

Dekha's methods have been copied not only in Kenya, but in Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Africa. She has defined a set of principles that summarise her experience of peace building: Analysis, Flexibility, Responsiveness, Innovation, Context and Action (AFRICA).

Percy and Louise Schmeiser's ongoing battle against Monsanto highlights how an aggressive agri-company can bully and ruin farmers and biodiversity across the world.

The Schmeisers are farmers from Saskatchewan, one of Canada's 10 provinces. In 1998 Percy Schmeiser and his wife received a letter from Monsanto accusing them of having used Monsanto seeds without a license in planting their 1997 crop.

But the Schmeisers had never bought Monsanto seeds. It turned out that some Monsanto Round-up Ready genetically modified canola (rape) seeds had blown over to the Schmeisers' fields either from a neighbour or from passing trucks. And so genes that Monsanto claimed to 'own' under Canadian patent law ended up in the Schmeisers' seeds.

Monsanto threatened to sue the Schmeisers for 'infringement of patent'. It sought damages of \$400,000 including about \$250,000 in legal fees, \$105,000 in estimated profits from the Schmeisers' 1998 crop, \$13,500 (\$15 an acre) for technology usage fees and \$25,000 in punitive damages.

At the same time, Monsanto offered to withdraw the case if the Schmeisers signed a contract to buy their seeds from Monsanto in future and to pay the technology use fee.

The Schmeisers contested the case up to the Canadian Supreme Court, whose ruling supported Monsanto in the claim to own the gene. As a result, the Schmeisers lost their breeding research, which they had built up for decades, and the varieties that they had painstakingly adapted to their local environment through cross-pollination, because they now contained the Monsanto-'owned' gene.

However, the court also concluded that the Schmeisers did not have to pay anything to Monsanto because they had not in any way benefited from having the seeds on their property.

Now, in a new legal case, the Schmeisers are turning the notion of benefit to farmers from Monsanto genes around, by rightly saying that Monsanto

*(Continued on page 21)*



**Christopher Weeramantry**



**Grameen Shakti**



**Above: Dekha Abdi  
Left: The Schmeisers**

# The Big Apple's rickshaws

**Shuktara Lal**  
New York

NEW York has the most extensive public transport system in the US so it isn't a surprise to see rickshaws sailing through a busy street. New Yorkers call the vehicle a 'pedicab'. The rickshaws are popular with tourists. It enables them to see and learn about the city in a slower, languorous and more intimate manner. Buses and taxis are too hasty. The subway, of course, doesn't even qualify.

So rickshaw drivers double up as tour guides and give tourists detailed descriptions of New York hotspots like Times Square, Central Park and downtown Manhattan.

Rickshaw drivers are mostly affiliated to pedicab companies in the city. Two such agencies are the Manhattan Rickshaw Company, established in 1995, and Main Street Pedicabs. But there are others.

Says Rick who has been driving a pedicab for six years, "I work for a company called Mr Rickshaw. The rickshaw I drive is theirs. I don't live in New York, so I work part-time."

Drivers employed by these companies are not given a separate licence for driving rickshaws. They are designated as registered drivers of the agencies they work for after they undergo training with them. A potential candidate applying for a job as a pedicab driver is expected to have a driving license. The companies prefer to hire people looking for part-time jobs. International students are welcomed since their fluency in two languages helps attract a wider pool of tourists.

Existing alongside registered drivers are unregistered ones who have bought their rickshaws from other sources and are, therefore, not legally employed. One of these drivers refused to divulge his name to this writer, categorically stating that he could "get into trouble with the authorities." In matters like these, New York functions uncannily like an Indian city.

The rickshaws are visually attractive. Built around the model of large tricycles, the Main Street Pedicabs comprise TIG welded 4130 chromyl frames which have a powder coat finish and steel axles. The area that seats passengers is made of light fiberglass and steel frames of several colours. The seats are padded and have vinyl upholstery. To ensure safety at night the rickshaws are equipped with cat-eye LED headlights, running lights, brake lights, reflectors and light signals that indicate when the driver will take a turn. The rickshaws come with rear hydraulic brakes. Each rickshaw has an attached canopy (not very different from our homegrown rickshaw covers) that can be raised above the heads of passengers if it rains.



**A person applying for a job as a pedicab driver is expected to have a driving licence. The companies prefer to hire people looking for part-time jobs. International students are welcomed since they attract more tourists.**

Apart from transporting tourists interested in sight-seeing, the rickshaw agencies offer a variety of services. They take large groups of people from one place to another, pick up and deliver packages and cart luggage. Rickshaws tie up with film production units that require rickshaws in the scene they are shooting or use them to carry equipment. Rickshaws can be hailed on streets or reserved beforehand. New Yorkers are pretty imaginative. Pedicab agencies list marriage proposals and weddings as occasions where rickshaw services could be asked for.

Since the rickshaws ply in areas that attract lots of people they are popular with advertisers. For instance, boards displaying New York Fashion Week were mounted on pedicabs connected to the Manhattan Rickshaw Company.

The only real drawback to using rickshaws for transport, are the rates charged by the companies and drivers. The cost of a single ride varies from \$15 to \$30. Robert, a pedicab driver, says he charges \$20 to \$30 for a ride. This is much more than what you would pay if you travelled by a bus or a taxi or used the metro.

Robert says tourists and New Yorkers use his services. "There are residents who prefer using rickshaws to taxis for short distances."

However, New Yorkers don't use rickshaws very often. A pedicab ride is mostly reserved for a special occasion or for a pleasure ride. Rickshaws serve a more elite clientele, apart from tourists.

Pedicab associations showcase the environmental friendly nature of rickshaws, undoubtedly the vehicle's strongest asset. But for rickshaws to become a viable alternative to traditional public transport in New York, rates need to be more competitive.

# Afghanistan's true champion

**Saad Mohseni**  
Kabul

**S**AYED Mustafa Kazemi, 45, a prominent Afghan politician and former minister, was killed in a suicide bombing on November 6. He was one of Afghanistan's most competent and capable politicians with a talent for 'bridging' the visions of opposition parties and the international community.

In 1992, just before Afghanistan's bloody civil war, Sayed Mustafa Kazemi – then the aide de camp to a prominent Afghan Jihadi commander – was tasked



Sayed Mustafa Kazemi

with organising a high-level meeting between two of Afghanistan's most prominent leaders. Both leaders insisted that the other visit him at his location. The meeting never happened and the fighting that ensued resulted in over 50,000 deaths and the complete destruction of Kabul. This was an important lesson for Kazemi. He learnt that compromise is a necessity in the world of politics and pride should have no role in determining a nation's fate.

Further lessons were learnt when the Kabul regime collapsed in 1995 and the Northern Alliance retreated to the North. In 1998, he barely escaped with his life when the city of Mazar-e-Sharif fell to the Taliban. It was said that he led the last Northern Alliance contingent out of Mazar.

Sayed Mustafa Kazemi went on to become an important advocate of peace and reconciliation, representing the Northern Alliance in Rome and then in Bonn. While in Bonn he was instrumental in the election of Hamed Karzai – whom he had befriended earlier in Rome – as President. He later joked that he was Karzai's eyes and ears in Bonn, talking to him via satellite telephone daily.

When Karzai announced his first cabinet in 2002, Kazemi was appointed

Commerce Minister. By being a true champion of the private sector, Kazemi went on to achieve more results than any minister in that position has done before or since. During his tenure the economy grew substantially, albeit from a low base, and important bilateral agreements were signed ensuring Afghan products and services reached regional and international markets. For example, Afghan dried fruits became the second-most imported item in India. He established Afghanistan's High Commission for Investment, modelled on Singapore's Economic Development Board and the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA), the nation's first one-stop shop, became an example of efficiency in the region. Registration periods for businesses dropped from 27 to 3 days.

Despite the extraordinary hurdles of working within the ranks of the Soviet-modelled Afghan government, Kazemi did much to create an environment conducive to investment. Within the first two years after its liberation from the Taliban, Afghanistan had a Singapore-style High Commission for Investment to encourage private capital inflows from abroad; an investment support agency to help foreign businessmen navigate the Afghan regulatory system; a stable new currency backed by reserves that have increased to almost \$3 billion today from nothing in 2002; the country's first fully serviced industrial parks; and a new tax and tariff regime that started to roll back the dross of 20 years of communist-inspired economic policy.

After his election as President in 2004, Hamed Karzai decided to remove Kazemi from his position as Commerce Minister, citing his lack of tertiary qualifications as the primary factor. As one of Karzai's most vocal and longstanding supporters, Kazemi was shocked by this decision.

Kazemi, undeterred by this rebuke, ran for Parliament the following year. He was elected MP for the Province of Kabul in 2005. Unaccustomed to life as an MP he was often off the mark. He failed in his attempts to chair the Economic Committee and along with his fellow former Northern Alliance MPs, failed in their attempts to block key government appointments. However, by 2006, Kazemi led a number of legislative endeavours, including forming an important parliamentary block.

Kazemi also helped establish the National Front (a loose alliance of former Jihadis, communists and former technocrats) with Yonnu Qanooni (speaker of the House), Marshal Fahim (former Defense Minister), Ahmad Zia Massoud (vice president), Oloomi (former governor of Kandahar during Dr Najib's reign), Gulobzoy (former communist Interior Minister) and Burhanuddin Rabbani (former President) where he became the spokesperson and chief strategist. Soon after he secured enough votes to wrest control of the Economic Committee's chairmanship, and from then on quickly moved to assist the executive branch in pushing through pro-business legislations.

By 2007, he was one of Afghanistan's most prominent commentators and opposition politicians, calling for national reconciliation and private sector development. His dreams of a secure, prosperous and inclusive Afghanistan were cut short when he and 100 others were killed in a suicide bombing in Baghlan, while inspecting a sugar plant, the privatisation of which he had championed in 2003.

(Saad Mohseni is Director, Moby Media Group, saad.mohseni@mobymediagroup.com)

## Samita's World

by Samita Rathor



# Children of a lesser country

THE same South Asian friend who a few months ago had berated the Guadelopeans as lazy and good-for-nothing, ventured to comment this weekend that the French couples who had paid thousands of Euros to Zoe's Ark for 103 Chadian children were innocent. The French media mostly shared his perspective.

Driving home that evening it struck me that this argument, of error in good faith, has been used so often by Western media (and European civilisation in general) that even the rest of the world has come to believe in the white man's innocence and good intentions as *a priori*, in exactly the same fashion as he has come to believe that every African (or Asian, Latino... in short, every non-European) is corrupt and somewhat less than human. Readers of Edwards Said's *Orientalism* will easily recognise the symptoms of such a belief system, which has taken almost a millennium to perfect.

The Chad scandal is a perfect case in point. Of course, I could pick from scores of others.

A former president of a four-wheel drive club in France, Eric Breteau and his girlfriend Emilie Lelouch set up l'Arche de Zoe (Zoe's Ark) in June 2005 and, with what can charitably be described as missionary zeal, set off to rescue those 'poor children' of sub-Saharan Africa. While French society continues to debate the merits and demerits of this case, and probably will till doomsday (as only the French can), the gloss that is being put over it all around is that even though they may have committed a mistake their motives were largely pure and humanitarian.

What really irks is the irony with which the most destructive race in modern times, the Caucasians (each day adds to the overwhelming historical proof that already exists), after having appropriated pretty much the entire planet for themselves, by guile and plunder, actually believe in their own innocence and goodness. It can only be explained as a pathological condition.

How else can we explain the current situation after Janice Peyre of Enfance et Familles d'Adoption (an adoption network in France) along with a local immigrants' rights group, France Terre d'Asile alerted the French government early in the year about Zoe's Ark which had been campaigning in France and Belgium to find host families for thousands of children from Darfur. Eric Breteau was called by the Foreign Office and in August this year Zoe's Ark personnel were even interviewed by the child protection squad of the French Police. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a 'caution' to the 258 would-be foster parents who had already paid up to Euros 6,000 each for the procurement of their future wards.

*Caveat Emptor* is Latin, and thus a European phrase. So when you are 'buying' a child in Europe one has all the more obligation to enquire into the finer details as to the origin of the child and the legality of the transactions. Especially when you have been cautioned by your own government about the deal you have made. Claiming innocence becomes even more suspicious when faced with all the available evidence (a French judge has already opened a formal investigation leading to a charge of funding an illegal adoption network) and yet they continue to insist that they were saving those children from death. Nor are the children, orphans as has been claimed.

One would have imagined that we had come a long way from the horrors of Canada's Residential Schools in the late 19th and early 20th century, when the Canadian government commissioned churches to run boarding schools for Aboriginal children. These schools were actually more like prisons and abuse was rampant. Children were beaten for speaking their native language and sexual abuse was common. The Canadian government (and the church) believed

that conversion to Christianity would "Europeanise" the Aboriginal people and integrate them into Canadian society.

In 1909, Dr Peter Bryce, general medical superintendent for the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), reported to the department that between 1894 and 1908 mortality rates at residential schools in Western Canada ranged from 35 per cent to 60 per cent over five years. These statistics did not become public until 1922, when Bryce, who was no longer working for the government, published *The Story of a National Crime: Being a Record of the Health Conditions of the Indians of Canada from 1904 to 1921*. In particular, he alleged that the high mortality rates were frequently deliberate, with healthy children being exposed to children with tuberculosis.

Lest we forget, at that time these schools were considered benevolent do-gooders by the population.

I am not saying that similar abuse was contemplated for the Chadian children. Only, similarity in the belief that Europeans with their materially elevated standard of living are surely capable of providing better for the overall welfare of these children than their own parents and extended families.

Whenever such horrors have been enacted against non-Europeans, glossing over them has been commonplace – and still is. Belgium proudly displays statues of Leopold II, who in less than a decade decimated half of Congo's population

(over 15 million men, women and children) with the connivance of the rest of the European nations.

The horrific French legacy in Africa has barely been recognised...and the details far from revealed, yet. Schools are run (The School of Americas in Georgia, USA, and similar secret ones in Western Europe) that have been teaching torture methods to selected Asian, African and Latin American military for years. And in 2007 we have a French President, who believes he is Napoleon's reincarnation (not just in physical stature) and jets off to Chad to free his countrymen (and other fellow Europeans, as did his ex-wife during his first week in Office, freeing fellow Europeans from those barbarians, sorry, Libyans). Diplomacy with a kick, I daresay! I am trying to remember the last time an African, Asian or South American head of state went to another country to arm-twist the release of his countrymen who have been accused of crimes. In fact, thousands of Africans are jailed regularly all across Europe for far lesser crimes.

The airport scene of President Sarkozy dropping off the Spanish detainees he had managed to rescue from Chad, in Spain, where they were received with honour by the Spanish President Zapatero reeked of tribal ritualism – European, ironically, even though such an expression is normally reserved for those lesser Africans.

Those of us in the West who elect our leaders cannot be absolved of our responsibilities. Should our leaders act in our name, we are responsible for their actions. Can the Americans who re-elected George Bush in 2004 after it had become crystal clear to the world that the invasion of Iraq was in error, be absolved of the guilt of the chaos that is Iraq today? Acting in ignorance is a sin, especially when our actions are directly related to the matter in question and when we have easy access to relevant information.

After being warned by the Foreign Office, would-be foster parents had all the more reason to find out what the maverick founder of Zoe's Ark was up to. As Unicef spokeswoman Veronique Taveau said, "What happened in Chad, and the way it happened, is both illegal and irresponsible. It took place in violation of all international rules." Ignorance of the law has never been a valid reason to avoid punishment.

## LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

## Right Livelihood Award

(Continued from page 18)

"owned" genes should be regarded as contamination.

Since the first court case, the Schmeisers shifted their agricultural business from canola to wheat, mustard, peas and oats to avoid future problems. But soon they found genetically modified Monsanto canola plants on their land again. They called the company and demanded that the plants be removed.

Monsanto conducted tests and confirmed that these were their Monsanto Roundup Ready plants. The company agreed to remove them if the Schmeisers signed a document with a non-disclosure statement and an assurance that they would never take Monsanto to court. The Schmeisers did not sign and again demanded that Monsanto take these plants off their land.

When Monsanto did not react, they paid some workers to remove the plants and sent Monsanto the bill of \$600. When Monsanto did not pay, the Schmeisers sued them in a provincial court. In May 2007, a mediation attempt

failed and the trial date is now set for January 23, 2008.

Grameen Shakti has installed more than 110,000 solar home systems with a capacity of about 5MW peak covering 30,000 villages with plans to reach one million installations by 2015. Currently, more than 4000 solar home systems are being installed per month.

Under its managing director, Dipal Barua, Grameen Shakti has shown how solar energy applications can be scaled up rapidly to provide affordable and climate-friendly energy to the rural poor. Grameen Shakti has four different credit schemes to make the solar home systems affordable. It has built a network of 390 village unit offices, in all of Bangladesh's 64 districts.

Through the village unit offices, Grameen Shakti promotes solar home systems, which typically consist of a small 30-100 W photovoltaic panel connected to a battery for storage. For maintenance, it has started a network of technology centres managed mainly by women engineers who train women as solar technicians. The women are equipped with tools to service and repair the systems in their areas, and to manufacture solar home system accessories. Seven technology centres are already in operation.

# 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?**

## The masala messiah

**Vidya Viswanathan**  
Ghaziabad (UP)

**B**ALDEV Gulati could be just about any small businessman in Ghaziabad's collapsing industrial estates. A few hands, modest turnover, low profits. But the truth is Gulati is a messiah in his own right. Visually challenged, he has started a spice business which employs 50 differently abled people like himself. The spices go by the name of NP Masale, the brand coming from Gulati's company, Navprerna, which supplies spices to retailers, households in Ghaziabad and institutions like the India Habitat Centre and Hotel Broadway.

"This is not just a business. It enhances our visibility in society," he explains. "Physically challenged people buy ingredients from wholesalers. So wholesale traders treat them with respect and negotiate as equals. We deliver to housewives and caterers who negotiate with us. So mobility increases and that changes attitudes in society."

Gulati's employees are mostly unskilled people. Earlier, he ran a unit which made candles that float on water. Disabled people from villages were employed for 15 days. They underwent training in work ethics. Then they were assessed to find out if they could report on time and work productively for eight hours a day. After that, Gulati found them employment in industries in Ghaziabad.

"I treat them really badly during those 15 days," he says frankly about his internship scheme. "They will find the world outside a better place. They have to report to work on the dot. The disabled come with the expectation that they won't measure up and so they work hard." Gulati has got jobs for 253 disabled people in other companies. Word has spread and now people from faraway places like Aligarh, Badaiyan and Gorakhpur turn up at his unit for work.

Gulati found that demand for candles was seasonal. He could employ people for only four or five months. He studied 250 businesses before zeroing in on the business of spices.

"This has the highest return per lakh of investment for the disabled. It can employ people with all disabilities, skilled or unskilled. It won't become obsolescent. With social changes, it will only grow. The food processing industry suffers from a high rate of adulteration and our products are pure," he explains. Besides, he points out, housewives are not brand conscious and this is one business that is not likely to face competition from China because all the spices are grown here.

The shed for his business has been donated by Aditya Sachdev of Diamond Industries who runs three factories in Ghaziabad. For working capital, Gulati borrowed from banks.

Gulati is clear that the disabled will have to create their own space in the 'ruthless' market economy. "The State can't provide for us," he says. "If the disabled have the money power to go to a movie hall, a club or a bar, these structures will be made accessible to them. We have to show businesses that it makes business sense to employ the disabled."

Gulati has mapped the problems that industries in Ghaziabad face. Able-bodied workers are paid less than minimum wages, so they leave if another employ-

Photographs by LAKSHMAN ANAND



**Baldev Gulati with his workers at their factory in Ghaziabad. Left: Masalas being packed in NP Masale packaging**



er pays just Rs 50 more. If workers are prevented from taking a break to smoke, chew tobacco or gossip, they take erratic toilet breaks. After salaries are disbursed there is absenteeism because of alcohol. Migrant workers go to their villages for festivals and don't return on due date.

Gulati tells businesses that disabled people are likely to be more loyal, take fewer breaks and are less likely to go on holidays. But convincing businesses that a disabled person can be equally productive is another matter.

In 2001, when Gulati began doing the rounds of companies with his walking stick, he could not get past the security guard. The guards were afraid that he would go inside and ask for charity. He got entry when he went with his wife but for six months he could not convince any employer to hire him.

Gulati and his wife then approached the Noida SME (Small and Medium Enterprises) Association and asked for a 20-minute slot in one of their meetings. He promised not to appeal for charity. He got the Vocational Rehabilitation Centre in Delhi to ship machines and candidates to the meeting. During the tea break, association members saw disabled people working on lathes, sewing machines and computers.

When they assembled, he requested them to light a floating candle for each person they were willing to employ. That worked. He now has a network of 30 companies.

(Continued on page 24)

# Captivating the minds of children

**Vidya Viswanathan**  
New Delhi

**T**ILL a few years ago, children in India had very few nice books to read. Mostly, middle class children made do with books from overseas. But over the last decade, things are changing. There are now three or four publishers dedicated to bringing out books for children of all age groups. Their titles are beautifully illustrated, well-researched, well-written and produced on good paper. The Chennai-based Tulika Books is one of them. The company, whose staff strength is all of ten people with three editors, publishes at least 17 titles every year for children. They bring out picture books, bi-lingual books, fiction for older children, non-fiction and teacher resource books.

Their books are illustrated with Indian art. For instance, *Putul and the Dolphins*, a book about a girl who lives on the banks of the Ganges in Bengal is illustrated in the Bengal style of art. Tulika tries to bring out the diversity of India. Most stories are about contemporary India. There is a book about a girl who grew up on an archeological excavation site in Tamil Nadu where her grandfather is one of the workmen helping the archeologists.

A history book called *The Forbidden Temple* is a collection of stories about children who lived in different periods in India. There is a picture book about the games that children play. It is titled *Gada gada gudu gudu* which is an expression used in Tamil. The book also shows street games like marbles, *gilli danda* and kites.

*Civil Society* spoke to **Radhika Menon**, who started Tulika Books in Chennai about their work.

## Why did you get into children's publishing?

I was teaching at the Krishnamurthy Foundation School in Chennai and that is where my interest in education and children's books began. At that school, you had to create your own syllabus and teaching methods. I found there was a lack of good books on India and Indian themes.

The experienced teachers had a fund of stories and songs. But I always had trouble facing the class. I could find a lot of books on the Amazon if I wanted but closer home... there was very little material.

There were garishly coloured comics. The Children's Book Trust's books are beautifully illustrated but the stories are too simple. Their non-fiction books are crammed with text and facts. Some of my colleagues at the school had their own children's collection which they had brought from overseas and when I read those I was excited by the possibilities.

## How did you begin publishing?

In 1987-88, my sister-in-law, Indira Chandrashekar, who had a publishing background, and I decided to start something. So we began by doing pre-press work on Apple Macs for Rupa, Penguin and other publishers. That was the start of Tulika Communications and that is where we learnt the ropes of the business. She went on to publish academic books on social sciences at Tulika, Delhi. I started Tulika for children's publishing in Chennai in 1996 when Sandhya Rao, one of our editors joined us after quitting her job at *Frontline* magazine.

## How do you decide what will work and what won't?

We want a range of books for children up to 15 years of age. We go by our judgment and often against conventional wisdom. For example our "Under the Banyan Tree" series which we did with Karadi Books are very wordy.

Sometimes we know some books won't be popular but we still go ahead. *Suresh and the Sea* (about a boy from the fishing community after the tsunami), *Heena in the Old City* (A girl who lives in old Delhi) and *Aiyappan and the Magic Horse* (A boy from the folk performing community) are examples. We will do history, geography, sociology, science and the works for children. There is also a process of education and the teachers own exposure. About 30 percent



**Radhika Menon**

**We want a range of books for children up to 15 years. We go by our judgment and often against conventional wisdom.**

of our books are risky and may not move but the other 70 will be bought if seen. The same schools which did not respond earlier buy our books for their library. Soon our titles should move into classrooms.

## How do you choose authors and topics?

We look for like-minded people who love publishing. We are just ten people and three editors. We outsource all our printing. The books on rivers were done by Priya Krishnan a publishing assistant who works with us part time.

Nina Sabnani is a professor of animation at the National Institute of Design. She had made animation films titled *The Story of Nothing* and *Mukand and Riaz*; we got her to do books based on those films. We knew

that Zai Whitaker had worked with the Irula tribe and so we got her to write the story of Kali, an Irula boy who goes to school. Sometimes authors bring in their own books.

We are also very careful about visualisation. Not many illustrators can visualise.

Sometimes we suggest the style and at other times we layout the entire page. Visualisation makes the ordinary, uncommon. The book, *What shall I make?* is about how the *chapati* dough morphs. What makes the book interesting is the way it is broken up.

## How are your bi-lingual books doing?

We were very clear that you have to learn your own language and we published *Line and Circle* in English and Tamil. Using books with two languages in classrooms was unheard of 10 years ago and teachers wanted us to take off Tamil. But we continued publishing in Hindi and English. We started doing Marathi and Gujarati because an NGO wanted it. Now we publish bi-lingual books in eight Indian languages. It has started paying off because rural libraries are coming up. Delhi-based Room to Read, Bangalore-based Akshara and Pratham are setting them up. There are also smaller groups doing it. But marketing is still a struggle. We have to give our distributors 40 to 50 per cent margins. We pass that on to the NGO. We recover our cost and a little more on these books.

## Are you profitable?

It is still difficult hanging in. We almost closed down three years ago and then we used to publish only when we got a sponsorship or a grant. Now we can plan for about 20 titles a year. We have done 15 in 2007. But out of these, ten are in eight languages and so that is 180 new books. We still can't sit back and say we will do so much of retail and so much through schools like the big publishers do. We have to push all three channels – retail, schools and NGOs. We do about Rs 1.5 crores a year but cash flow is still a problem. We don't let go of any title. We print all.

## What are your future plans?

We will publish different kinds of books and more importantly create a market for those books. All kinds of schools should use them. These books bridge the gap between the rich and poor. If a child reads a book in English and the same book is read in Telugu by another child, they are sharing an experience and that makes it meaningful.

## When you say create a market what do you mean?

Wherever our books are visible, they sell. But we are now starting an independent publisher's network. A combined catalogue will create strength in numbers. Instead of 30 or 40 titles, we will now have a thousand titles. The network includes Tulika Delhi, Left Word, Three Essays, Women Unlimited, Stree and Navayana.

# Thorny bush is Ladakh's goldmine

**Anjali Pathak**  
Leh

**S**EABUCKTHORN, a thorny bush growing in the wilds of Ladakh, is becoming a goldmine. Companies, entrepreneurs and small farmers are cashing in. This innocuous plant is being seen as a stepping stone to prosperity and a range of products have been invented.

Mantra Ayurveda, a Faridabad-based company, is producing natural soap, shampoo, conditioner, body lotion and cream with seabuckthorn oil, leaves and seeds. The products are marketed through the Fabindia chain of stores. The Field Research Laboratory, Leh, has invented herbal tea with seabuckthorn leaves and other Himalayan herbs. It is being produced by a Chandigarh-based company owned by Anand Prakash. Juices, jams and squashes are being introduced.

Seabuckthorn is used locally for firewood, fencing and animal fodder. The healers of Ladakh have used seabuckthorn in traditional medicine for several centuries. It has very long, spread-out roots making it an ideal plant to check soil erosion and afforest large areas. The berries are high in Vitamins A, B and C, and contain valuable flavonoids and carotenoids. Seabuckthorn oil is rich in Omega 3 fatty acids and Vitamin E.

When the seabuckthorn-based drink, Leh Berry juice, hit the market a few years back, little was known about Ladakh's seabuckthorn. Though the juice was an instant hit, it disappeared mysteriously from store shelves a few months later to reappear intermittently in the market.

Ladakh Foods Ltd. and Compact International, the makers of Leh Berry juice had set up processing units for seabuckthorn in Leh and Nubra in 2001. The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) has subsequently ruled that local cooperatives must collect and extract the pulp from the berries of the seabuckthorn.

In 2004, the Council invested Rs 10 lakh in purchasing basic processing equipment from Delhi. The technical guidance of Sonam Jorgyes, a Ladhaki entrepreneur was sought and Tadbar Joldan, the deputy registrar of Cooperative Societies was made the project's nodal officer. The panchayat buildings in Leh and Nubra were used. The pulp was packed in 50 litre drums with a suitable Class II preservative and sold to private companies.

Currently, 15 cooperatives and some self-help groups are bringing their berries to the cooperative society processing plants in Shey and Nubra. The plant in Shey is being run by the Bami Duniya Cooperative. The two plants in Nubra are run by the Consumer Cooperative Society. About 70 barrels of 50 kg pulp can be produced every day in a plant if the harvest is good. The production cost per kg of pulp was Rs 43 and it was sold at Rs 75 per kg in 2006 by the cooperatives. The berry collectors, mostly women, are paid Rs 22 per kg. The harvest

begins in early September and lasts for approximately 30 days.

Abdul Baqi is the secretary and treasurer of the Indus Tsestalulu Society, a village women's cooperative that started the cottage industry production of seabuckthorn juice in 1990. The society was registered in 1994 and in 2006 a machine for making the pulp was bought. An FPO licence was also procured. The society has 24 women members in the Shey-Chuchot area. These women have small family holdings, and work in the cooperative supplements their family income. Most are illiterate. In a good harvest season they can harvest 50 kg of berries per day and earn up to Rs 1,100 per day.

In 2007, the society will supply 50 barrels of seabuckthorn pulp of 50 litre capacity to the cooperative for sale to big companies. Approximately 2,000 small bottles (200 ml) of seabuckthorn juice and 200 bottles (400 gm) of seabuckthorn jam will be manufactured and supplied to the army units stationed in and around Leh.

The total harvest potential of seabuckthorn for Ladakh is 200 tonnes per year. Only 10 per cent of the wild fruit can be harvested because it is perishable and the thorns on the bushes come in the way. The Council is short of funds and setting up new processing plants is not possible at the moment.

Private entrepreneurs are willing to fill in the blanks provided they can market the pulp themselves. Ashraf Ali of Top World Industries, Ahmad Husain of the Indus Berry Society and Tundup Tsering of Sindhu Fruit Processing Ltd. have processed and sold pulp to Delhi-based companies in previous years. Ashraf Ali has processed the fruit to produce 20 tonnes of pulp in 2007. Lifting of the ban on the private sale of pulp in 2008 should see these private Ladakhi entrepreneurs stepping up their production.

Tundup Tsering set up Sindhu Fruit Processing Pvt. Ltd. and for the past four years he has been extracting seabuckthorn and apricot pulp on a small scale. He has made seabuckthorn and apricot jam, juice and squash which he has sold directly in the Leh market and hotels. Leh has over 400 hotels and guest houses now, most of them family-owned and run.

Tundup has an FPO licence and sells in bulk through the Ladag Apricot Store in Leh's main market. In 2005 he sold 8,000 kg and in 2006 he sold 12,000 kg of apricot pulp. In 2005 he sold 20 tonnes of seabuckthorn pulp to Field Industries of Delhi owned by Aftab Husain.

This year with the announcement of a blanket ban on the private extraction and sale of seabuckthorn pulp by the Ladakh Council, he has refrained from processing seabuckthorn. Tundup hopes to find new markets, step up production and come out with nutritious and appealing products based on seabuckthorn and apricot in 2008.



**Sonam and Tundup.**  
Right: Juice being extracted



## The Masala Messiah

(Continued from page 22)

Can this operation be scaled up? "That is a big question. The problem is disabled people are sometimes lazy and expect sympathy. They are normal human beings and once they see opportunity, they too leave. I have to make sure that I don't lose my credibility," he says.

Life has been harsh for Gulati. His father, an iron rod trader, died when he was very young. Gulati's four sisters are visually impaired too. His mother moved into her parent's house. Gulati had to get up at 4:30 am to get milk from the government booth because it was Rs 2 cheaper per litre than the Mother Dairy milk. "There used to be street dogs around. But then that is our country. We could not wait for things to get better and let life pass by," he says philosophically.

People advised his mother to admit her children into special schools for the visually impaired which offered boarding and lodging. When she visited those schools, she was appalled.

She read an advertisement for an integrated government school in the President's Estate and enrolled her children. For several years she took them by bus from Tilak Nagar in West Delhi to Rashtrapati Bhavan and back. Her grit

changed her fortune. She got a job at a telephone exchange in the estate and that got her government accommodation there.

Gulati is extremely grateful for his school experience. "This was in 1975," he recalls. "The school had two special teachers and a resource room. We got braille training, books and scribes."

He was determined to make a place for himself. When other boys played football, he kicked the ball against the practice wall. He graduated with high grades and an award for being an outstanding orator. That got him a place in Hindu College.

In the early 1990s, if you were visually impaired, you were expected to opt for a BA in education and then get a secure, reserved government teaching job. Three of Gulati's sisters opted for that.

But Gulati wanted more. He learnt French at the Alliance Francaise and graduated from the Delhi School of Social Work.

Reality hit him after graduation. "I wanted to work in the development sector. I was determined not to limit myself to working only for the disabled," he says. When he went for interviews, most employers advised him to carve a career in academics. "That was demeaning. I did not go to them for career counselling. Not one employer was curious enough to ask me what I could do for them. When I interview people, I do not tell them what to do," he says. These experiences got him to work more imaginatively for the disabled.

# Reviewer

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## THE FINE PRINT

Get behind the scenes. Books, films, theatre, street plays, posters, music, art shows. The one place to track creative people across the country.

# The nation through the media

Umesh Anand  
New Delhi

THE media mirrors what we are. It also drives and shapes us. Opinions differ on how much it should do of either and in the best of times it is a delicate balance. When economies lurch in transition and seek new trajectories of growth, the media invariably gets caught in the flux.

In the past decade in India, as economic liberalisation has brought market forces into full flow, the media has been subjected to large doses of commercialisation. It is no secret that advertisers and business interests that own media have been increasingly deciding what gets put out as news and views. There is a rush to be celebratory and an unwillingness to cover inconvenient issues.

The result is a steady fall in the skills of journalists. There are more journalists reporting on the social sector beats today than there were 10 years ago. But there is less and less worthwhile output to show for their efforts. The quality of coverage of health and medicine, environment and education doesn't address the current complexities of these areas. It is not as though the coverage of companies and stock markets is any better. We know very little about companies though they dominate our lives more than ever before. The business journalist seems satisfied with drawing heavily on what corporate communications departments have to say.

In times of such drift, Nirmala Lakshman's anthology of Indian journalism since Independence, *Writing A Nation*, is an important contribution. Ms Lakshman is one of the editors of *The Hindu*. The book has carefully chosen articles by India's leading intellectuals, activists and journalists. It is divided into six themes: Constructing a democracy, Nurturing a free press, A divided society, Corruption and culpability, India and the world and A wealth of spirit.

The anthology will serve as a lighthouse for the profession and stimulate and hopefully widen the discourse on the role of the media in getting democracy to work for everyone. Excerpts of an interview with Ms Lakshman.

**What inspired you to bring out this anthology of Indian journalism? The first perhaps?**

While editing *The Hindu's* Sunday magazine I always felt that there is a lot of space in the media for background pieces that really reflect the state of the country. These are invariably on issues that don't get discussed in the news pages for want of space so it was very fortunate that Rupa and I came together.

It was always in the back of my mind that such a collection was needed to understand the media and the nation better. A lot of voices and excellent stories are lost in the daily grind of news and deserve to be preserved for posterity for what they tell us about our country. So when Mr Mehra of Rupa asked me to do such an anthology, it was something that I already wanted to do and I was happy to take it up.

**How long did it take you?**

It took me about two and a half years to put this collection of articles together.

**Your emphasis seems to be on development journalism.**

I have made it very clear that this is my vision and the choice of pieces is subjective. This collection in my view reflects what India is all about. There is a great need to go beyond mere superficialities of what political parties are saying and go deeper into issues.



Nirmala Lakshman at the release of her book by the Tamil Nadu Governor, SS Barnala

Its my vision of what journalism should be.

**What were the criteria for selecting the pieces?**

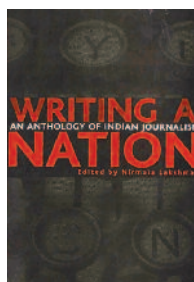
Democracy is work in progress. And it has always interested me to know how democracy works for everyone. Especially where there is a great diversity of people how do you give everyone a voice? Keeping this overarching theme in mind I chose six sub themes and looked for pieces. In the 60s and 70s I found very little. And so you will see my selection from these years is thin.

**Why is that so of the 60s and 70s?**

It is perhaps because of the continuing euphoria of independence which continued for about two decades. There was the excitement of India's liberation, of becoming a world player, of the idea of non alignment. There was also this thing about the jute press monopoly so there weren't so many players in the media. There were refugee issues, floods, drought, starvation, but all these were brushed under the carpet. The media saw itself as a partner of the government. It was the Emergency which provided a wake up call to the media.

**Yes that's true. People in the media of those years and people in the government were much closer than they are today. It is a general perception that newspapers have been moving away from core areas as you mention. What are the trends you see emerging?**

I think culture has been so manipulated by mass media and the strength of advertisements TV, in particular, that there is a definite consumerist orientation. I think because of that people have become passive partners whether it is in rural and urban areas.



Writing a Nation  
An Anthology of  
Indian Journalism

Rs 795

Edited by Nirmala  
Lakshman





Patang's school programme in Orissa



Child in Arunachal Pradesh goes to school. A Sneha project.



Chalo ho gaon ma, a citizen's radio programme in Jharkhand



Mahila Vikas Samiti's reproductive health project in Bihar

# NFI celebrates 15 years

**Manisha Sobhrajani**  
New Delhi

**T**HE National Foundation for India (NFI) celebrated 15 years of its existence on November 5 and 6. Along with a seminar, NFI chose to show the work it has been supporting through an evocative photo exhibition titled, '15 Years of Making a Difference.' Sudharak Olwe, former NFI Media Fellow and winner of several awards shot the pictures.

The photo exhibition is part of a larger effort by NFI to document the work of the NGOs and community groups it supports. Many men, women and children worked tirelessly under difficult conditions to organise and acquire skills for the upliftment of their communities. NFI thought 15 years was a good time to reflect on its achievements and showcase the impact of its work.

The pictures depict diverse achievements: a group of women in Orissa built their own toilets, and did not need to venture out into the beach and face the ire of hotel owners; mohalla residents in Orissa who bought and installed their own transformer after years of waiting for government support; the first school ever in the community of the Mushahar tribes in Bihar; a citizens' radio programme, 'Chalo ho gaon ma!' ('Let's go to the village!'), recorded by and for villagers in Jharkhand; tribal women's self-help groups in Bihar, and a travelling school for shepherd children in Meghalaya.

Founded in 1992 by Kamla Chowdhry, MS Swaminathan and C Subramaniam, NFI has been funding several development projects all over India. Its current focus is on community health, local governance, elementary education, peace and justice, development journalism, citizens and society, and livelihood securi-

ty. Certain basic principles cut across all programme areas: gender equity and justice, participation in development, and institution and knowledge building.

The foundation focuses on making grants to groups working in the northeastern and eastern states as well as in remote poverty endemic areas across the country.

Apart from money NFI helps grassroots groups connect with donors, experts, academicians, and policy makers. It promotes setting up institutions run by local citizens that would be able to develop and change in response to the community's needs and skills.

At the launch of the photo exhibition, Susan V. Berresford, President of the Ford Foundation said philanthropy was serious business, and it ought to be taken in all earnestness. As president of the foundation, she has focused on supporting programmes around the world that strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation and advance human achievement.

Chief guest Anu Aga, chairman, Thermax Ltd, talked about the significant social role that big corporate houses and industry associations can play in philanthropy and strengthening civil society. In 2002, she decided to put aside one per cent of her company's profits for the social sector. She is chairperson of the NGO Akanksha, which runs education projects for underprivileged children in Mumbai and Pune.

A seminar titled, 'Partnership in Development: Philanthropy and Public Action', was organised at the India Habitat Centre on November 6. The seminar concluded with a plenary session titled, 'The Way Ahead for the National Policy on the Voluntary Sector 2007'.

# Mapping UP's water history

**Sonal Rekhi**  
Meerut

IN the old days, India had a rich tradition in water harvesting. Ancient engineers built tanks, wells and ponds after meticulously studying local ecology. Some of these structures, now in ruins, continue to amaze modern minds because of their sophisticated engineering and management systems.

But local people have forgotten the water wisdom of their forefathers. The Janhit Foundation has now undertaken a systematic documentation of historical water bodies in Western Uttar Pradesh so that people, after understanding how these structures were built and managed, can try to revive them.

The 100-page book entitled, *Pashchimi Uttar Pradesh mein Jal Vigyan ki Sanskratik Viraasat* has brief histories, along with 70 pictures of 60 water bodies from the Mahabharata period, the Mughal era and the British Raj.

Western UP is a significant area for this type of study. It lies between the Ganga and Yamuna and is the fabled land of the Mahabharata. If you drive through the district you will spot ancient *talaabs*, wells and *johads*, all indicating a rich past tradition of water harvesting.

Ironically, people here are now starved of water. Though this region has many rivers most are dry and dirty just like the old water bodies. For instance, Salava village near Sardhana had 37 water bodies. Now it is dying since there is no water.

The British replaced traditional water harvesting techniques with modern systems unsuited to Indian conditions. India's first canal, The Upper Ganges Canal, was formally opened in Western UP on April 8, 1854.

Without patronage, old water systems went into decline. In Meerut district, 80 percent of water bodies have been encroached. Out of 663 villages, 12 have lost all their ancient water harvesting structures.

According to a 2003 study by Janhit Foundation, *Paani Ghano Anmol*, there are 3062 ponds in Meerut district alone, as mentioned in the government revenue records.

Western UP has historical water bodies named after well-known personalities from the Mahabharata like Rani Gandhari, King Dushyant, and Bheeshma Pitamah. There are towns here with names like Hastinapur, Parikshitgarh, Barnava, Shukrataal and Bhaisuma.

Janhit's book takes you on a tour of these historical structures. Some of them are: **The Gandhari Talaab:** Located at a distance of 25 km from Meerut, this pond lies near Kithore. In the Mahabharata, when Yudhishtir was handed over the throne, Gandhari told him she wanted a place to meditate. Yudhishtir asked her to meditate in the Parikshitgarh forests. It is said that Gandhari collected water from 100 different sources to create the pond for the *shradh* of her sons, and therefore this pond is known as the Gandhari pond. In 1798, Gandhari Talaab was reconstructed. The pond is located in Kila Parikshitgarh, historically the capital of the Pandavas. Arjuna's grandson Parikshit had established this town.

**Pucca Talaab:** The Pucca Talaab is located between Mawana and Hastinapur. There are two caves close to this pond dating back to the Mahabharata. One cave leads to Parikshitgarh, while the other goes to Hastinapur. Bharat, son of



**The Gandhari Talaab**

Shakuntala and King Dushyant, is said to have had a bath in the Pucca Talaab. This pond is mentioned in Kalidas' famous work, 'Abhigyan Shakuntalam'.

**The Holy Gangol Pond:** The Gangol pilgrimage and the Vishwamitra ashram lie at a distance of around 10 km from Kharkhoda and 5 km from Partapur in Meerut district. According to the Ramayana, this region had meditation grounds and scientific laboratories of many holy saints like Vishwamitra and Bharadwaja.

**The Nawabon ka Talaab/Neherwala Talaab:** The residents of Kairana village believe that a vaidya/hakeem had cured a genie's daughter, and in return the genie made this pond for him. Spread across 10 acres of land, the pond is bordered by stairs. On two sides, ghats have been constructed while in the centre there is a raised platform (*chabootra*). There are tunnels beneath it to channelise water from the Yamuna to fill the pond. A canal, routed from this pond, carried the polluted water from it to another *kuchcha* pond known as Baba Pinti Talaab. The water collected in this pond was used for irrigation. This way the water in the Neherwala talaab was automatically cleaned.

Unfortunately local people are not even aware of these historical water structures. Places considered sacred once have now become dumping grounds. "It is not the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) that is responsible for the state's upliftment. It is also the community which needs to wake up, act wisely and maintain this gifted heritage before it is lost completely," said Anil Rana, director of Janhit Foundation.

(Sonal Rekhi works with the Janhit Foundation  
e-mail: info@janhitfoundation.org)

## The nation through the media

(Continued from page 22)

It's now largely a receiving passive culture that we see and this is worrisome. People are accepting whatever the media dishes out.

**How good do you think is the quality of Indian journalism?**

Sometimes excellent work is done in the niche. But I think in daily journalism there is the danger of falling prey to clichés and taking up the causes of NGOs who may or may not have the right orientation. There is a lot of politics involved in the NGO community as well. I think this is particularly dangerous because young journalists coming out of journalism school wanting to report on development issues aren't equipped to deal with the politics and economics of certain activities in the community.

We have a lot of people coming to us wanting to write on these issues but I think development journalism should be seen as a part of journalism in general and not as something exclusive.

**You would say there is a need to mainstream skills to look at these issues?**

Yes I think so. These issues should be dealt with across the board in publications and treated as news and not relegated to magazine sections and supplements.

**Companies play a big role in our lives and in the media through advertising and so on. What is the challenge for journalists and publications?**

I think you can't ignore commercial considerations. Media is as much about survival as anything else. Media needs advertising but it cannot be led by advertising. This does not mean it should not be open to corporations and their points of view. Nevertheless to mortgage content to advertisers is clearly the wrong way to go. So the challenge is to strike a balance in the relationship. I think it's important to draw a clear line between advertising and corporate interests and editorial content.

**Do you see the challenges before journalists changing in as much as they need to know how companies function so as to understand consumer and shareholder rights better and so on?**

It is essential. I understand that at some of the newer journalism schools like the Asian College of Journalism in Chennai, they apparently try to ensure a nuanced understanding of issues and that is a good trend. I think young journalists especially need to figure out the role of corporations and their interests in the media.

As increasing corporate orientation is likely to dominate issues in the future, including corporate interests of the media itself, young journalists need to learn and develop skills to understand all this and that would certainly involve an appreciation of the workings of corporations themselves as well as an understanding of shareholder and consumer rights.

# Perspectives

## CATCHING TRENDS

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

## Nandigram in the long run

MILINDO CHAKRABARTI

PEOPLE of West Bengal witnessed an event that perhaps cannot happen quite often in one's lifetime. It unfurled just a few hours before I sat down to write this piece. People in thousands – representing no political outfits, raising no political slogans, raising no flags either – walked silently down the road to protest against the mayhem that West Bengal and the rest of the country saw happening in Nandigram. Sandwiched between the struggle of two political parties – West Bengal has long been polarised between 'we' and 'they' – common people had to bear the brunt as they ended up not only losing lives in scores but also their properties and dignity. Human rights were violated with impunity.

Indians are often praised globally for having painstakingly maintained a vibrant democratic culture since Independence. Our country's achievements look more prominent when they are compared to the failure of a democratic ethos taking roots in neighbouring countries like China, Pakistan, Myanmar, Nepal and Bangladesh. In terms of size, India is the largest democratic country in the world and claims a legitimate position of global respect vis-à-vis the USA – the country practicing democracy for more than two centuries, spread over a large land mass.

Democracy lays emphasis on the State facilitating activities that are "of the people, by the people and for the people". But often situations arise where an action may not be beneficial to all citizens. A certain decision may well hamper the interest of one group of society with another group yielding considerable benefits. A simple operational rule to resolve such conflicts emerged in the form of the majority principle. If a decision by the state benefits more than half the population, the majority principle of democracy expects the decision to be implemented.

However, questions remain. The duty of the state is to protect the life, livelihood and property of each citizen. Should decisions be taken that are acceptable to the majority but capable of harming the interests of a minority group – their source of livelihood, their lives or their dignity? Unfortunately, no clear-cut rule exists to resolve such a crisis. The managers of statecraft are expected to use their wisdom and experience to arrive at a meaningful decision. They use their foresight and conviction to convince people to an agreement that has the capacity to ensure gain for all in the longer run, even if the short term implications of such a decision may go against the interests of the majority. The arguments of positive discrimination in favour of minorities are premised on such an understanding of society. Make no mistake! Democracy never expects a politician to be infallible. The powers that be who are not necessarily always on the right track stand the chance of being unseated in the next election. That's the beauty of a democracy

What if political leaders lack foresight or are interested in short term gains alone? They may well take decisions that are populist, short-sighted and often against the long term interest of the state. A powerful opposition to the ruling political party is thus a necessary, if not sufficient condition for the success of a democratic system. The opposition is expected to keep a thorough watch on the



**One is happy to find a spontaneous expression of concern and disapproval of the way the ruling party handled Nandigram. One is also unhappy to witness the abysmal failure of opposition parties to behave responsibly and identify a solution.**

activities and decisions of those in power. Their duty is to blow the whistle and when the ruling party is visibly off the track in managing statecraft. Quite logically, the opposition leaders are also expected to use their conscience, foresight, conviction and wisdom to protect the lives and properties of all the citizens of the state. What happens if both these groups behave irresponsibly? Nandigram happens. A huge rally with the spontaneous participation of concerned citizens – a guess estimate puts the figure at more than 60,000 spirited souls – takes place.

People of Kolkata witnessed many such big rallies earlier. But they were all organised by different political parties. There is a qualitative difference. Unlike

*(Continued on next page)*

# Malegaon's fake poverty

AHMED KARIM

THE French philosopher, Albert Camus, writing on modern society and its perils wrote, "In a curious transposition peculiar to our times, it is innocence that is called to justify itself." He could well have been describing Malegaon's fate.

How else does one explain the predicament Malegaon is in today: a town on the verge of bankruptcy where local taxes have increased manifold over the years. The house tax in Malegaon is reportedly more than that of Nashik Corporation. Today, it is difficult to believe that when Malegaon was a Municipal Council it would lend money to the Nashik Municipal Council.

Malegaon Municipal Council was the richest council in the country. Even today, it pays the highest octroi rates in India. In return, the citizens of Malegaon get zilch. There is only anguish in their daily lives.

Pot-holed roads, poor sanitation and mounting health problems have added to their daily miseries. They recall with fondness the days when representatives of local bodies were caring and eager to work for the people. Though the Malegaon Municipal Corporation has been the recipient of many benefits from government schemes, positive changes are hardly visible.

One such scheme made available to Malegaon was the AIDP scheme from the Central government drafted for Muslim minorities across the country. A massive amount of Rs 85,55,000 was sanctioned for the construction of 53 school rooms and 17 public toilets. Many irregularities were reported while allotting the rooms. The rates paid for construction of those toilets and school rooms were highly questionable.

The corporation started using the school rooms as ward offices and despite the school authorities complaining about a shortage of rooms the corporation was not willing to listen. The government forgets that when education is short-changed one gets overcrowded classrooms and underpaid teachers working without the zeal to get students to perform.

Surroundings play an important role in providing education. The government has to strike the right balance.

Despite the government's stress on quality education, more than 80 per cent of the corporation's schools have been built near public toilets. The toilets constructed are already in dismal condition forcing women to wait for nightfall so that they can use open grounds as lavatories.

Sanitation continues to torment the people of Malegaon. So much so that the Malegaon Municipal Corporation pays close to a million rupees annually to the

Maharashtra Pollution Board as penalty! There is an odd feeling among the residents that when it comes to paying taxes they are A-class citizens and when it comes to amenities they are treated like B-class citizens.

The communally-sensitive image of the city has always come to the rescue of non-performing administrations. On the debris of riots they have succeeded in shielding their shortcomings. But after the September blasts of 2006, citizens of Malegaon are voicing their concerns vehemently and the local administration as well as the state government will have to work sincerely to secure their faith.

To soothe the strained nerves of the Malegaonians the government started the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), a scheme that failed to realise its intent. Under it, the Cluster Resource Centre, the Urban Resource Center (URC) and the National Programme of Education for Girls were set up all of which generated massive funds for Malegaon to set up centres for training the youth in vocational skills.

How well these projects have been conceived and implemented can be gauged from the fact that only two NPGEL centres out of the seven proposed, were constructed. Of the 490 rooms only 176 were built and out of 90 new schools only 23 were made. Besides these serious lapses, around 100 schools were sanctioned Rs 50,000 per head for purchasing computers and other equipment as teaching aids.

Large-scale malpractices were observed in the purchase of computers. Massive amounts of public funds were misused in these seemingly vital projects.

But the quality of construction was so poor that within a year of being built some buildings are on the verge of collapse. In one of the schools which has 300 students, children have no drinking water and have to rush to nearby places to quench their thirst.

And in March 2006, when the School Board released its figures, there were celebrations amongst the administration over the fact that Malegaon had utilised all its funds under SSA!

It is sad that apathy and negligence on all fronts seems to be Malegaon's lot. Few remember or perhaps care to recall, that Malegaon was once a prosperous municipal, the richest, in fact, in Maharashtra.

Like Bhiwandi, another city with which Malegaon shares a similar history -- a township of looms and a predominantly Muslim population, it must also share a similar fate of decay and decline. It would be a tragedy, if finally, like Bhiwandi Malegaon is remembered in popular imagination only as a town marked by communal strife.



Malegaon's collapsing and dirty infrastructure

**Malegaon Municipal Council was the richest council in the country. Even today it pays the highest octroi rates.**

(Continued from previous page)

those big rallies organised by political parties in Kolkata earlier, this rally never involved ferrying participants in trucks and vans from different parts of the state. No food packets were arranged for the participants. As is often alleged to be the standard practice of political parties, no allurement money was paid to the participants either. The resultant traffic jam will surely not encourage public interest litigations in the Kolkata High Court.

Should we be happy with this historic event? Yes and no. One is happy to find a spontaneous expression of concern by common people and enraged disapproval of the way the ruling party handled the issue in Nandigram. One is simultaneously unhappy to witness the abysmal failure of opposition parties to behave responsibly in identifying a solution to the Nandigram issue.

Civil society reactions have forced many a ruler across the globe to go down on their knees and relinquish power. Some such ousters laid the foundations of a better future for their society. A good number of such reactions ended in ultimate disaster. Several factors determine the future impact of a civil society intervention. The capacity of civil society to identify the political leadership that will guide the masses through the turmoil and channelise their energy towards a brighter tomorrow is one very important requirement to sustain the

onslaught against an erring ruling power.

Civil society upsurges can ignite the initial spark. But they cannot ensure sustained burning of the candle. The fuel necessary to keep the flame burning continuously has to be supplied by the political system. Civil society protests against the Iraqi war brought thousands of Americans together. We were enthralled to see footages in the electronic media. Michel Moore's interpretation of 9/11 provided important clues about the wrongdoing of the Bush administration. However, the arrogance of the President could not be chained in any perceptible degree. Maybe the opposition political group will be reinstated by the forthcoming election. Maybe not, if they are not strong enough.

Civil society had to take up cudgels against the present government in West Bengal because of the perceptible vacuum created by the opposition parties. What if a strong political opposition does not emerge in time to fill this vacuum? The juggernaut will roll on for years to come and the people will surely lose confidence in their capacity to undo the wrongs perpetrated by an arrogant ruling party. The driving force of a democratic polity may dry up for ever. Are we up to the challenge?

# The sex worker's reality

AMITA JOSEPH

**W**HEN the monsoon fails, drought and hunger stalk rural India. Hundreds of women from villages and small towns get on trains to the big city in search of work. It could be Mumbai, Pune, Delhi or Hyderabad. These women have one thing on their minds – not to let their families starve back home. In search of a viable livelihood, many of them end up in brothels lured by pimps and agents often from their own villages. From then on they get trapped into a never ending vicious cycle of exploitation.

Prostitution is the world's oldest profession catering to a need that has existed since time immemorial. Men visiting brothels are not stigmatised. Neither are several others who benefit in some way or the other.

A trip to GB road in Delhi is an eye-opener. The school for the children of sex workers run by JWP is an apology. It has no proper toilets or facilities. It is very different from the joyful nurseries run by Prerna in Mumbai. If you go inside the brothels in this area you will see dingy rooms, where physical intimacy is bought and sold, infested with people who live off the women – primarily men who trade in women and children.

I was told that if I stayed long enough I would be 'approached' and asked to quote a price. But don't we all have a price? For some it is affection, for others it is a sense of companionship, comfort, love and affection without conditionalities.

Attending a sex worker's conference in Kolkata opened my eyes. The women who do sex work are strong and have the greatest negotiating skills. They survive the most perverse situations and yet recount stories of pathos, humour, love and longing. This interaction opened my mind to the moralistic, hypocritical middle class morality I had been brought up in which looked down on women whose work existed because there has always been a 'need' throughout history for it by soldiers, migrant workers, adolescents, youth, widowers, bachelors all of whom patronised the brothel. I also saw the pathbreaking work of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Samiti at Sonagachi and the Usha Co-operative started by Dr Jana run for and by sex workers. These organisations treat women with the respect they deserve.

I sat with the women while they narrated stories of other women from WINS Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Sonagachi in Kolkata and the network that brought them together to address issues of health, education of children and their search for an identity. I wondered why nobody had channelised the women's fortitude and entrepreneurial spirit. The world wanted to pity them – when they are symbols of courage worthy of respect. If the brothels were dingy places without hope, the so-called 'homes' run by the NGOs and the government were much worse. Women were confined as they would be in a brothel, often locked up at night for reasons of 'security' and paraded before visitors and funding organisations, engaged in unimaginative programmes – the usual tailoring, block-printing, book-binding, even *agarbatti*

making! None of these trades are likely to give women self respect or wages to support their families.

One of the few projects that sought to make a difference was the Amul Pizza Parlour project. Having read about it, we approached one Mr Kurien asking him to give franchises to our migrant workers for a living. He agreed, trained women and extended support to IOM (International Organisation for Migration). The project, initiated in Andhra Pradesh with the local government's support, broke fresh ground. Exemplary collectors such as Jayesh Ranjan further helped organisations such as Sthree (one of the few working in the source areas) in Anantapur

to look afresh at new trades, beautician's courses, fashion designing and catering. Maanvi started by Odanadi in Karnataka set up a co-operative by and for the women. Networks of women sex workers gave moral support to one another in times of crisis.

What did UN organisations such as UNIFEM do with millions provided by organisations such as USAID? Build awareness through research, seminars and conferences? As manager of the South Asian Program to oversee anti-trafficking initiatives I travelled in South Asia attending 'talking sessions'. At the 19-course dinner hosted in one of Nepal's five star hotels after such an awareness-building conference I wondered how many women and children were selling themselves for the cost of the one meal we had.

Trafficking occurs due to reasons such as poverty and the lack of viable

livelihood options. Where are the good schools that will admit children based on the mother's identity? Where can a vulnerable woman find safe shelter? Very few women would sell their bodies if they had a choice...yet the problem remains untouched and continues unabated. Projects working on trafficking do not address the real issues unless they work with the women themselves. Women have to come on centre stage in their own development and be at the negotiating table from a position of strength. All the NGOs can expect to do is to facilitate such a process – not 'earn' funding over the issue and foreign trips.

Projects on trafficking must employ the affected community – this has been demanded by women in Sonagachi. Child prostitution for instance, has to be condemned and eliminated by larger alliances across society, the government, civil society, the private sector and the public sector. It has to take on the character of an urgent national mission – on the lines of the literacy movement or the polio campaign. Prosecutions must be done by a fast track court.

Trafficking programmes must find new allies. For example, transport departments, railway protection forces, guides and volunteers should be mobilised to stop child or forced prostitution. We know the routes and vulnerable areas. What stops the women and child ministries and the police (who are often accused of complicity) from launching campaigns on prevention, alternative livelihoods, and on protecting the vulnerable?

*(Amita Joseph is director-general of the Business and Community Foundation)*



A red light area in Pune

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# Living

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## 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.**

## Oyster Opera at Padanna



Gul Mohammed

**Susheela Nair**  
Kasargode (Kerala)

IN 1996, Gul Mohammed, a businessman, returned from the Gulf to his village in Kasargode district of Kerala. He found his people dejected and worried. Many families were on the brink of starvation. The flourishing *beedi* industry had collapsed and farm incomes had declined.

Gul Mohammed met the crisis head on. He showed people in Padanna, Valiaparamba, Cheruvathur and Trikkarpur villages of Kasargode how they could earn an alternative income from mussel farming. Incomes rose and everybody's morale got boosted. Gul Mohammed is now starting a theme village called Oyster Opera in village Padanna with waterfront cottages where you can amble around and watch fishing all day.

It is a fascinating sight to see women diving and fishing for oysters, wild clams and green mussels cultured on rafts along the Valiaparamba backwaters of Kasargode. The contentment on their faces is discernible as they fling their catch into their canoes.

Mussel farming has brought smiles on the faces of these women and their families who were once *beedi*-rollers and farm hands. They are grateful to businessman Gul Mohammed. He has boosted their sagging spirits. Empowerment of women transformed the mundane lives of the local communities and

brought prosperity. Gul Mohammed has been conferred the Ministry of Agriculture's Karshaka Shiromani Samman.

Gul Mohammed's enterprise is a saga of perseverance and hard work. Realising the vast potential in mussel farming, he experimented with growing spat (the larval form of marine mussel) in coir rags dipped in brackish waters. When it was successful, he encouraged the local community to opt for this livelihood by arranging Indian Rural Development Programme subsidies and Gramin bank loans. From an initial production of just two metric tonnes, mussel farming now produces 7,000 tonnes which is about 70 per cent of the backwater green mussel farming in India.

Supporting his pioneering spirit are 150 self-help groups of women under the apex Green Mussel Farmers Society Padanna. His thriving mollusc farm now takes care of over 3,500 families. Today, a 30-km stretch of the palm-fringed

Padanna Lake is strewn with green mussel farms. With its growing domestic demand and export potential and high profit returns, everyday more women co-operatives and local farming communities are joining the lucrative hunt for shell-fish. At present, Gul Mohammed is exporting a large chunk of the catch to the Middle East and other countries.

As mussel farming is a summer vocation and cannot provide a regular income throughout the year, Gul Mohammed experimented with mussel farming in seawater with technical assistance from the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute in 2004. "We have sown spats (seeds) 300 m from the shoreline where they cling to ropes held aloft by buoys out of the reach of waves and turbulence. These experiments brought in a better catch than the backwater variety as the spats have grown well in 60 days as compared to 90 days in brackish water. But to shift farming operations to the sea, the stakeholders in mussel farming need financial aid from the government to buy speed boats. I am optimistic that if mussel farming is popularised with financial backing from government institutions, it will metamorphose from an alternative source of income to an all-year occupation and provide livelihood to more people," said Mohammed.

After striking gold in aqua farming, he has struck upon another innovative concept – socially responsible and sustainable tourism by starting Oyster Opera. "The emphasis will be on generating greater economic benefits and enhancing

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# Boosting your child's memory

## GREEN CURES

Ask Dr GG



*My six-year-old daughter is a slow learner. She understands what we say and speaks a few words in our mother tongue. But she is unable to learn the language and do her schoolwork effectively. The problem is that she has a weak memory and cannot retain what she has studied. Can you advise some medication to boost her memory?*

Is your daughter having memory problems or is it a case of delayed milestone? How are her other activities? How is her appetite? If her appetite is good, give her three gms of paste of Brahmi (Bacopa monnieri), mixed with honey early in the morning on an empty stomach, and at night give her one teaspoon of Saraswatha gritham mixed with two

gms of Ashta choornam. Also give her 10 ml of Saraswatha rishtam after every meal, i.e., three times a day. If she takes a head bath every day apply 1-2 teaspoons of Ksheerabala thailam, half an hour before her bath. After drying her hair after her bath, apply a pinch of Rasnadi choornam so that she does not catch cold. If the child catches cold after the application of this oil, do not continue it.

Give her food with ghee and moong dal. Add nuts soaked in water to her daily diet. Do not give her very spicy, sour and salty food.

*My three-year-old son is very hyperactive and lacks concentration. He is unable to sit still for more than 10 minutes, and this affects his work in nursery. Please advice.*

Normally children of this age are very active and they can't sit still for a longer duration. If you still feel he is hyperactive, give him a body and head massage with warm Lakshadi thailam. Give food with ghee to the extent he can digest. Give him more water boiled with a pinch of jeera. Do not give him curd, bakery and deep fried food items. Give him more food, nourished with ghee and shoot vegetables, than what he is normally taking now.

*I have a 12-year old daughter who has developed epilepsy after she had high fever. What does Ayurveda say about epilepsy? Is there a cure in*

*Ayurveda for this problem?*

It is not clear that your child's fits are due to epilepsy. If it is epilepsy, then there will be changes in the brain cells or chemistry. If it is repeated again then only you should be concerned. However, as a precautionary measure give her for three months, one teaspoon of Kalyanagritham, warmed, on an empty stomach, early in the morning. She should sleep on time at night and eat on time. Avoid giving her deep fried junk food.

*I have a five-year-old son who lost his hearing in both ears when he contacted meningitis at the age of three. Can his hearing be restored? Do tell us what we should do?*

If there is no hole in the eardrum and the middle ear is intact, you can put two drops of oil made out of the wood of a tree called Devadaru (Brenyaia Patens). This is good for such a condition. Also give the child one tablet of Sapthamruthaloham twice a day after food. I can't say much without getting an idea of the structure of the middle ear.

*Recently, I developed a small swelling on my right foot near my ankle. After conducting suitable tests, the doctor said it was due to high levels of uric acid. I do not want to take allopathic drugs. Is there a cure in Ayurveda? What are the preventive measures I should take so that this problem does not happen again?*

This is a kind of arthritic change in your joints. You should avoid taking green salads for sometime. Take plenty of water boiled with a pinch of jeera. If you can get hold of a root of Kokilakshakam, (Hydrophila schulli) boil it and use the water for drinking. Take one Kaisoragulgulu tablet twice a day with Balarishtam after food. Do not take fried food. Take lots of fresh vegetables.

*I am 50, and having trouble going to sleep at night. I lie awake for a long time. I also wake up frequently in the night. Please tell me how much sleep I require at my age and what natural methods I can follow to get a good night's sleep.*

At your age you should have at least six hours of continuous sleep. This condition of sleeplessness can be due to many reasons. Do pranayama, deep breathing, before you go to sleep. Wash your legs with cold water. Drink a cup of milk before you sleep. Add two Manasamithra vatakam in the milk. Avoid spicy food in the evening. Taking head bath every day after applying some cooling oil helps in inducing sleep.

Dr G G Gangadharan is a Joint Director at FRLHT, Bangalore. E-mail: vaidya.ganga@frlht.org

## Oyster Opera at Padanna

(Continued from page 31)

the well being of local communities. We will also focus on maximising the positive aspects of tourism without causing any negative impact on the environment," he explained. Gul Mohammed is hopeful that if the venture clicks, local communities will get a regular income most of the year.

Keeping in mind the natural ambience of the area, locally available material has gone into construction of the theme village resort. It has simple, traditional structures with tiled roofs and laterite walls. These waterfront cottages offer a stunning view of the backwaters. There is also a cottage built on stilts and a floating one. There are no TVs or CD players to distract you from nature. You can sit in the verandah and watch women diving for shell fish or fishermen hauling in the day's catch. From their cottages or houseboats, tourists can see people doing seaweed farming, mussel farming on coir, cage culture and traditional collection of natural clam and edible oyster.

Some of the women of Kudumbashree (self-help groups) have been trained to receive tourists and cook mouthwatering authentic Malabar fare. So you can

### FACT FILE

**Address:**  
Oyster Opera at Padanna,  
'Thekkekadu',  
Padanna Kadappuram  
(P.O.), Kasargode District,  
Kerala-671345•

**Contact Number:**  
0091- 467-2278101,  
0091- 94471 76461

**Tariff:**  
During the  
season, packages  
range from Rs  
4200-5500 for  
two people for  
one night.

**Season for  
mussel farming  
and harvesting:**  
March to May



have an ethnic Kerala meal served on a banana leaf. Houseboat cruises on the placid Valiparamba backwaters, visits to tiny islands and North Malabar's rich offering of *theyyam* and other folk arts have been added to the holiday experience. If you want a sun and sand you must take a slow boat ride to the Valaiparama beach and estuary. If you have time, you can take a morning stroll down quiet country lanes and savour the taste of freshly tapped toddy brought down in black pots by tappers.

Photographs by LAKSHMAN ANAND

The Mesh shop in Delhi's Uday Park market stocks stylishly designed handicraft products from all over India. Most have been made by groups of physically challenged people from across the country. Mesh has changed its original charter to include products made by the able-bodied too. Mesh or Maximizing Employment to Serve the Handicapped has been around for 25 years. It is a fair-trade company which keeps a 15 per cent markup and exports its products to fair-trade organisations across the world.

The shop was founded by IM Soir, a Swedish company, to conduct a four-year design and development project. Gift your friends and relatives these wonderfully made products for Christmas and the New Year and watch everybody glow with joy.

# LOADS OF COLOUR



△ **Bracelets**  
Price: Rs 65



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△ **Colourful bags**  
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△ **Artistic drawer**  
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△ **Candle stands**  
Price: Rs 170

**Silk cushions** ▷  
Price: Rs 235





# The magic of water therapy

**Samita Rathor**  
New Delhi

**N**EARLY two-thirds of our body weight is water. Water is essential for the survival of human beings as it ensures the smooth functioning of our physical, mental and spiritual faculties. Water is considered a purifier in our day-to-day life. Most religions see water as being sacred.

In Islam, not only does water give life, but every life is made of water: "We made from water every living thing."

Water is often believed to have spiritual powers. In Hindu tradition water is one of the "panchatatva"s. The other four are fire, earth, space, air.

Lack of water in the body tends to cause dehydration thereby posing hurdles for the blood to circulate. The ill effects of dehydration cause the brain to become less active and the body to feel tired and fatigued. This could be the starting point of mental ailments like irritation, anger and depression.

Adequate water consumption can lessen the chance of kidney stones, keep joints lubricated, prevent and lessen the severity of colds and flu and prevent constipation.

Water also keeps the digestive system in order and flushes out waste products from the body. It helps to prevent skin from sagging after weight loss. Shrinking cells keep afloat with water which plumps the skin and leaves it clear, healthy and resilient.

Water is a natural remedy for healthy skin. Water acts as a body purifier by removing toxins and waste. Water also keeps the heart healthy.

How do we know if we are drinking enough water? An excellent method of finding out is to look at your urine. If it's clear or pale yellow, you're doing a good job of staying hydrated. But if it's a strong yellow, you need to drink more water. Think and drink small amounts.

Water does wonders for weight loss. It suppresses the appetite naturally and helps the body metabolise stored fat. Studies have shown that a decrease in water intake will cause fat deposits to increase, while an increase in water

intake can reduce fat deposits.

Water helps to maintain proper muscle tone by giving muscles their natural ability to contract and by preventing dehydration. Water helps the body to discard waste matter and helps relieve constipation. A well evacuated digestive system helps the body to function more efficiently than a constipated one.

How much of water should we drink? There is no clear-cut answer. It depends on factors like your health condition, your activity status etc. On a daily basis we tend to lose quite a lot of water through sweating, exhaling and urinating. It is here that it becomes necessary to consume more water.

It is not wise to drink water only to quench your thirst. It should become your habit to drink water at frequent intervals throughout the day. Our food contributes about 20 per cent to our total water intake. Apart from that, it is advisable to consume about eight glasses of water every day.

Water intake also depends on the place where you live and its climatic conditions. In hot, humid weather, you need to consume extra quantities, because there is a major loss of water through sweating that puts you at a risk of getting dehydrated. In the cold season or at higher altitudes, you tend to urinate more often, thus leading to a greater amount of fluid loss in the body.

If you are suffering from health problems like fever, vomiting and diarrhoea, then you will lose excessive body fluid and need to drink more water. Pregnant women should consume more water as they are at a higher risk of getting dehydrated. The amount of water you drink with food depends on the type of food you eat.

Ayurveda does not generally recommend drinking a large amount of water with a meal. If you drink a lot of water, you dampen the digestive fire or Agni and increase the possibility of creating Ama or toxins in your system that are a consequence of improperly digested food.

As David Thoreau says "Water is the only drink for a wise man." Think about it. We have a bath everyday and clean ourselves from outside, but when do we actually bathe ourselves from inside?

E-mail: samitarathor@gmail.com

## SOUL VALUE

*"The doctor of the future will give no medicine, but will interest his patients in the care of the human frame, in diet and in the cause and prevention of disease."*  
-Thomas Edison

*"It is more important to know what sort of person has a disease than to know what sort of disease a person has."*  
-Hippocrates

## 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](http://www.helpageindia.org) or send an email to [helpage@nde.vsnl.net.in](mailto:helpage@nde.vsnl.net.in)  
Address: HelpAge India, C-14 Qutub Institutional Area, New Delhi- 110016  
Chief Executive: Mathew Cherian - [mathew.cherian@helpageindia.org](mailto: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: [kcjccodev@rediffmail.com](mailto:kcjccodev@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, Swabhiman, etc.  
Visit Us : [www.smilefoundationindia.org](http://www.smilefoundationindia.org)  
Contact : Smile Foundation, B-4/115, 1st Floor, Safderjung Enclave, New Delhi - 29  
Phone: 41354565, 41354566  
[info@smilefoundationindia.org](mailto:info@smilefoundationindia.org)



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