

Civil Society



YOUTH 4 PEACE

Young people across cities join hands against violence and communal hatred

Read us. We read you



Suresh Sharma's mission is to rescue snakes from people. Here you see him introducing his snakes to children. *Civil Society* found him in Chandigarh.

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COVER STORY



YOUTH 4 PEACE
Young people across cities are coming together to end hatred and promote communal harmony

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Cover Photograph by SAAB Press

Civil Society

While there is time, listen to the young

NDIA is younger than it dares to admit. A premium continues to be put on respect for age and the established order. But population figures tell us it is the young who the nation should be listening to. What do the young want? Where do they hope to take the country? Would they like to live here at all or do they yearn to be in America? Many versions abound about the preferences of the young. Some are complete fiction. Others are transient realities. This is hardly surprising because the young come in several versions. A country that is serious about investing in its future creates the space in which all these versions can thrive.

Moyna, Sahil, Swapnil and Kandla, on whom our cover story is written, have chosen for themselves the mission of promoting communal peace and harmony in the country. Remember, three of these kids are in school and Moyna is in college. And yet their mission is a serious one and should not be trivialised. Even more interesting is the support they have found for their ideas in cities across the country. Evidently, there are more young people like them concerned about the scars that communal hatred leaves behind. When we interviewed them, they repeatedly talked of the need for newer ways of communicating with young people. They were dismissive of plodding NGOs trapped in paperwork.

Most certainly, the four of them have been able to express themselves because of the encouragement they have received from their families. They have found a guide, mentor and organiser in Shabnam Hashmi, who is also Sahir's mother and comes from a family that has stood for what it believes. Her brother, Safdar Hashmi, a leftist and a talented playwright, was killed by Congress goons.

It remains to be seen how far Youth4Peace progresses. Will it peter out as its four protagonists emerge from their wonder years or will it become the foundation for a bigger movement. Either way, it is a reminder that we need to listen to young people much more closely.

We caught up with Rajender Singh at Vatavaran or the annual green film festival held at the Habitat Centre in Delhi and quizzed him about his plans to rebuild the Lava Ka Bas dam that got washed away in Alwar. He says the local people will not only rebuild that dam, but six others, which gave way. Anupam Mishra has penned this edition's Essay on foreign funding in his inimitable style. He writes in Hindi and we hope too much has not been lost in the translation done by us. NGOs take up projects without seriously reflecting on what they want to achieve, says Anupam. Invariably it is money and alien preferences that dictate projects. His message is that foreign funding won't be an issue if we know what we want to achieve. Children studying at Literacy India, a school run by India's first woman airbus pilot, Captain Indraani Singh, experienced the joy of flying for the first time. Indian Airlines is celebrating 50 years and agreed readily to waive all charges. Gene Campaign completed 10 years this month. Dr Suman Sahay shared some of her organisation's memories and strategies with us. Our Chandigarh correspondent attended the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting and was impressed by the easy camaraderie and frankness at the meeting. Our Digital Divide section focuses on the government school at Carterpuri in Gurgaon where the children of migrant labour are learning to use computers. Are future software engineers being trained here?

We introduce a People and Events page. Our Review section features the Centre for Civil Society's Delhi Handbook, which shows how inefficient the state government is and suggests bold reforms. It was tough work piecing this research together and Partha J Shah's young team deserves special applause.

Umesh Anand

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CAUSE & EFFECT

Pictures by CSE put oil firms in fix

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE Supreme Court has told the Union government to respond to a report on fuel adulteration published in the Down To earth magazine.

The magazine had provided photographic evidence of the pilferage of petrol from tankers and its sale to casual customers in the vicinity of storage facilities on the periphery of Delhi.

The photographs were taken by the Right to Clean Air Campaigners of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

These photographs, (<http://www.cseindia.org/campaign/apc/fuelphoto.htm>) along with the Down To Earth cover story ('Overhaul'), were presented to the Court by Amicus Curaie Harish Salve. The Right to Clean Air campaigners had tracked this crime after being alerted by news pouring in from around Delhi and other parts of the country that a large number of new vehicles were reporting engine failures even before the expiry of their warranty period. Rampant adulteration was suspected.

Salve read out excerpts from the report to indicate how car companies such as Hyundai and Maruti panicked at the chronic and endemic engine problems reported in Faridabad early this year.

At the initiative of these companies, the Research and Development Centre of the Indian Oil Corporation in Faridabad and Indian Institute of Petroleum, Dehradun tested fuel samples from Faridabad and found traces of dry cleaning solvents like chloropentane. Salve pointed out that appallingly, almost anything --- waste oil, surplus or pilfered solvents from nearby industrial estates, even cheap imported kerosene --- is put into transport fuels.

Chief Justice V N Khare said the court was shocked because it had always been given to believe that the tankers were tamperproof.

Several contradictions exist. Perhaps the most glaring is oil industry's failure rate of one to two per cent for fuel samples and the 26 per cent reported by the adulteration cell of the petroleum ministry. The 26 per cent rate, says CSE, is also conservative.

Adulteration is a major cause of air pollution and is therefore directly responsible for harming public health. Under the law, oil companies are not held responsible for the quality of fuel sold at retail outlets. When adulteration is detected, it is the transporter or the retailer who is caught. The oil companies go unpunished.

The government also imposes lower taxes on imported kerosene makes it a cheap and easy diesel adulterant. This has led to a dramatic drop in diesel sales, but an increase in poor quality fuel in the market.

The CSE expose shows that not much has changed after the court's intervention in November 2001, when the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) was told to conduct an independent investigation into the problem of fuel adulteration in Delhi. CSE was selected by the EPCA to undertake this independent study and the findings were submitted to the Court in February 2002.

'People ready to rebuild Alwar dam'

Money collected, but work only after polls

Civil Society News
New Delhi

VILLAGERS of Lava Ka Bas, in Rajasthan's Alwar district, are all set to rebuild their dam which was washed away in the last monsoon.

In addition, they will insist that people be allowed to rebuild seven other government-built dams that were also washed away in the area.

"The dam will be rebuilt by villagers. We have collected the money," Magsaysay Award winner Rajinder Singh of the Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS) told *Civil Society* in an exclusive interview on November 18.

Heavy rains during the monsoon resulted in the earthen dam at Lava Ka Bas getting washed away. The local administration was quick to declare that the dam had been washed away because its construction was faulty. But this was out of pique at the dam having been built by villagers themselves and not by the government. The reality was quite different.

In an interview to *Civil Society* in August, Rajinder Singh said the Lava Ka Bas dam gave way after seven dams upstream, all of which had been built by the government, had collapsed. There was nothing wrong with the design or construction of the Lava Ka Bas dam, he insisted.

TBS has been the engine of community efforts in water conservation and use in Rajasthan. It has been the architect of the re-greening of Alwar district. The Lava Ka Bas dam was built to show that traditional knowledge can be used to create assets for the community at much less than what the government spends.

TBS has argued that if communities are allowed to manage their own water, they can conserve it, regulate consumption and deal with scarcities. Problems arise when the government interferes and people get used to looking to it for everything.

The construction of the dam was a major departure from practice in Rajasthan. Under the law, only the government is allowed to create such a structure on a river. The government wanted to dismantle the dam, but interventions by a team of

minister of Rajasthan with a petition. Nothing happened. We tried to meet him for a second time but could not. Now we will rebuild the dam with our own money.

When do you propose to do that?

SAAB Press



After the elections. You see water has become a political issue. But our dam was meant to be an example of community effort. We wanted to show that people have an inventiveness which gets dampened when the government interferes too much in their lives. What they do on their own far excels what the government is capable of. We want the dam to be an

example of this inventiveness. It should remain above politics and therefore we think it is better to wait for the elections to be over.

Do you propose to make any changes in design?

No. There is no need to change the design in any substantial manner. It was a perfectly viable dam the way it was built. It was certified by independent experts.

And what about the other seven dams in the area which were built by the government and gave way?

We are going to insist that the government allow those to be built by people as well. A dam built like the one at Lava Ka Bas is cheaper and more durable.

But the government is not going to take kindly to your wanting to build seven dams. It didn't want you to even build the one dam you built.

True. But we are going to insist nevertheless. You see it is not just the question of building the dam. It is a question of creating a sense of responsibility and awareness in the community and showing that people when they do things for themselves are more efficient than the government. Those seven dams will be rebuilt at a fraction of the cost that the government would incur.

Water has become a political issue. But our dam was meant to be an example of community effort

experts from across the country prevented that from being done.

Now the villagers of Lava Ka Bas are once again at the crossroads: eager to rebuild their dam but worried about what the government will do if they go ahead.

Excerpts from an interview with Rajinder Singh:

What is the status of the Lava Ka Bas dam after it was washed away in the rains?

It remains to be rebuilt. It was washed away because seven government-built dams collapsed and their load was transferred to our dam. The villagers felt that since the government was to blame it should rebuild the dam or at least make amends in some way. But the government has made no move. We met the chief

Indraani's kids touch the sky

Civil Society News
New Delhi

ONE hundred and thirty children had their first taste of a flight in an airplane on November 20, Child Rights Day. Escorted by three nervous teachers, they boarded an Indian Airlines Airbus aircraft for the first time in their lives. "The whole world seemed to be full of toys," recalls seven-year-old Jyoti, all agog with excitement. "The roads were like rivulets and the cars seemed to be dinky toys."

Captain Indraani Singh, India's first woman Airbus pilot, requested the Minister for Aviation, Pratap Rudy, for a free flight for the children so that they could experience the joy of flying. "I felt they should know about aviation and share my skills," says Indraani.

Her NGO, Literacy India, runs three education projects at Chauma and Samalkha villages in Gurgaon and one at Daulatabad in Delhi. The ministry beamed a green signal. Indian Airlines is celebrating 50 years and was happy to oblige. Airports Authority of India and Indian Oil waived all charges.

Waiting at the airport, the children and their teachers met Bollywood stars, Shilpa Shetty and Asrani. A staff member of IA tipped them off. "It was unforgettable," says Nisha, "they are so friendly. The children were completely star-struck. Asrani even mouthed dialogues from Sholay and sportingly signed innumerable autographs". Indraani's husband piloted the aircraft. They winged their way over Jaipur and landed back in Delhi, after an hour.

The children say they learnt many practical lessons. "When we look at the plane flying in the sky from our village it seems so small. Actually it is very big and powerful," explain Sunil and Bapi. "the wings are also large. It takes off horizontally and not vertically, as we thought.



Capt. Indraani Singh on board the Indian Airlines flight with the children

And it bobs up and down with the clouds." All the children want to become pilots.

The teachers would like the Indian Airlines staff to visit their school, in return. "They really looked after us," says Nisha, "we don't know how to thank them." Since Children's Day on November 14, Literacy India has been taking their young learners on several visits. They went

to Apno Ghar, to an embassy party and staged a play for the President of India.

These events build confidence and help children realise it is possible to pursue their dreams, according to Sheila. Even their worldview has changed.

"From above, man is just an ant," says little Jyoti, philosophically.

DO 100 IN 100,000 MATTER?

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A pre-election public debate in the Seemapuri assembly constituency in Delhi drew just a 100 odd people and three inconsequential candidates from the Smajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and the National Loktantrik Party.

The debate was organised by six NGOs — Campaign for Electoral Transparency, Parivartan, National Campaign for the People's Right to Information, Centre for Equity Studies, Chetna Welfare Samiti and Sahbhagi Manch.

The idea to have the debate follows recent concern for greater transparency and accountability during elections. After the intervention of the Supreme Court, the Election Commission has made it mandatory for a candidate to declare in an affidavit his or her financial assets, criminal record and educational qualifications.

The debate was intended to carry this process forward by bringing politicians face to face with their voters. Their decla-

rations before the Election Commission could be scrutinised in their own constituency. They could also be pinned down on promises.

The NGOs worked extra hard to make the debate a success, but, on the morning of November 19, the crowd which turned up barely filled a small auditorium. The



LAKSHMAN ANAND

Congress candidate, who is seeking re-election, refused to turn up, alleging that the NGOs are anti-Congress. The BJP candidate dropped out at the last minute apparently because of summons by the party's central leaders.

Seemapuri is in east Delhi and has an

estimated 100,000 voters. Forty per cent of the voters are Muslims, 18 per cent Harijans and the rest are a mix of various denominations. It is a constituency plagued by poverty, filth and problem of infrastructure. Sewers have not been laid, roads are in terrible shape and water is scarce.

Parivartan is one NGO which has worked extensively in Seemapuri and the neighbouring area of Sundernagari. It has tried to implement Delhi's right to information law and through it ensure better development.

With Parivartan's help, residents have used the law to uncover the defalcation of public money in municipal projects like the laying of roads and the installation of sewers. They have also questioned the records of ration shops.

But if the sparse crowd at the debate is anything to go by, much clearly needs to be done to create awareness and motivate ordinary people. The BJP and Congress candidates also seemed to think that the debate would not influence their fortunes, which is why they thought nothing of staying away.

Nevertheless a small and important beginning in political accountability was made. The SP candidate, Narain Singh's assets were read out and he was grilled extensively on what he would do for Seemapuri. Water, garbage, roads and pensions were top of the mind. Narain Singh was every bit the model politician. If he was elected, he would do exactly as people wanted, he declared. On every issue of concern, he told the gathering he would fix the problem if they chose him. Asked if he would throw himself in front of bulldozers used by the state government to demolish shanties, Narain Singh said he would cheerfully do so.

Candidates of the National Loktantrik Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party did much the same number. Finally all three pledged to use money from the MLA's development fund strictly according to the wishes of the people.

So, do a 100 people in a constituency of a 100,000 voters matter? The short answer is that they do not. The more seasoned and self-assured politicians realised that therefore didn't even bother to put in an appearance. But chances are that there will be many more people eager to question their leaders as time goes by and NGOs like Parivartan chip away at public cynicism about elections. The Seemapuri debate is the first milestone on that long road.

NOT SO ANONYMOUS

Deaddiction means facing up to one's problem

Rathi Menon
Chandigarh

Courtesy: INDIAN EXPRESS

I am Adarsh, an alcoholic, is how a person introduces himself in this unique organisation. The very fact that Adarsh admits openly that he is an alcoholic tells you he has already won half the battle against the bottle. This is the courage and strength that Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) has given him—the courage and strength to accept alcoholism as a disease much like, say, diabetes or asthma. Of course, since anonymity is a cornerstone of the Alcoholics Anonymous movement, Adarsh is not his real name.

I encountered this openness everywhere I went during AA's three-day meeting here recently. Whether management expert or doctor or ordinary bank employee, not one member hesitated the slightest in saying "I am Shafi, a drunkard" or "I am Victor, an alcoholic", or, on a poetic note, "I am Ranjan, Dilli ka sharabi".

Many of those whom I met had weaned themselves successfully from the bottle, some even as long as 10 years ago, but all of them still refer to themselves as alcoholics. According to the AA philosophy, there are no former or ex-alcoholics, only sober or recovered alcoholics.

AA's strictly imposed condition of anonymity works against the stigma attached to drunkards and is responsible for the movement's success across the globe. AA members introduce themselves by just their first names. This ensures them privacy and the image of the organisation does not suffer. AA does not recognise any social distinctions. A rickshaw puller sits at the same meeting as the CEO of a multinational company.

AA was founded by two alcoholics, Bob and Bill, in the United States in 1935 as a voluntary fellowship of men and women who acknowledged that liquor had incapacitated them and rendered them incapable of handling their lives. The movement came to India in 1957, to Mumbai initially. Though AA does not keep any data or records of its members, it is estimated there are more than one lakh groups and 21 lakh members spread across 150 countries. In India, there are more than 10,000 members in around 500 groups that hold 750 AA meetings every week. The General Service Office (GSO) in Mumbai coordinates the Indian groups.

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Fund-raising is generally done within each group; each member contributes a nominal amount. "We do not seek or accept outside contributions. Within AA, a member can contribute as much as he can afford and the ceiling is Rs 20,000 per year," revealed a jeweller, who is an AA office bearer in Mumbai.

The AA's 32nd national level conference held here recently was presided over by Elaine McDowell, a non-alcoholic voluntary activist from the US, who is heavily



Elaine McDowell, a non-alcoholic voluntary activist from the US

involved in the field of mental health there. It is due to McDowell's assiduous efforts that the AA movement has become a public service programme in the US.

"We conducted a rigorous public service campaign with banners and boards in buses, trains and subways, all saying, 'If you have a drinking problem, contact AA'. Every AA committee and group followed the same style of campaigning; explaining what AA is, what it is not and how to contact us. It is more important to remove misconceptions than to make people understand. People think AA is a treatment programme. Yes, we do work with those

undergoing treatment in hospitals, but our movement is more about sharing with one another," said a member of the US GSO at the conference.

This concept of sharing is another reason why AA succeeds where others fail. "There are no rules or commands, no superior or inferior. All that one alcoholic can say to another is, 'This is how I got out of my drinking problem and I am feeling good about it. You should try it.' Since recovering alcoholics know that there is no cure for the illness, we are also helping ourselves to

remain sober by helping others who are suffering," said another veteran AA member, who has suffered two relapses in the 16 years that he has been sober.

The AA modus operandi is a practical pointer to helping a person out of any addiction. It follows the principle of ODAT, or One Day At a Time, and puts an end to the addict's constant worry about what will happen tomorrow. Says the tall, dark, handsome young man who's busy arranging tourist trips for the AA members' families,

"Stay away from a drink one day at a time. There are no pledges—that tension itself will drive a person back to drink. Just stay away from that first drink of the day. I had the best doctors and technology available to me, but I found my refuge in AA. I have been off liquor for four and a half years. AA has given me a purpose in life, it has restored my self-esteem."

Since alcoholism affects immediate family members just as much as it does the alcoholic, AA has three sister groups: Al-Anon for family members, Al-a-Teen for children and ACOA or Adult Children Of Alcoholics.

Said a chirpy volunteer, whose husband of 21 years was helped by AA, "The family of an alcoholic is usually dysfunctional. There is no set formula at Al-Anon. We just learn to take care of ourselves in a more relaxed atmosphere." Al-Anon's Fourth All-India Convention was held at the same time in Chandigarh.

A 17-year-old girl said: "My father is an alcoholic. I never had the kind of family life most families enjoy. I never knew my father's companionship. He tried to make us believe he was still the head of the family. But I could see his guilt in all his actions. There is no relationship between us."

How do you know if you are an alcoholic? AA uses a questionnaire that was developed by the Johns Hopkins University Hospital in the US. "There are 20 questions in it and they say that if you have answered yes to even one, you should stand warned," said a newcomer who had been drinking for 40 years and stopped one day at a time recently.

AA relies on helping its members garner the spiritual strength to turn their lives around, and to recognise that they are fallible human beings. Maybe that's why their Serenity Prayer is worded, "God, grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can and Wisdom to know the difference.

Alcoholics Anonymous at gsindia@vsnl.com or at its Mumbai number, (022) 3075134.

GENE CAMPAIGN IS 10 AND NOT OUT OF STEAM

Civil Society News
New Delhi

If you are a woman with a cause, how do you get to level with Mahender Singh Tikait, the formidable Jat leader of the Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU). For Dr Suman Sahai, the opportunity came when she wrote to him and he mistook her for a man and asked her to address the panchayat of farmers at Kasauni, in Punjab.

Those were the early days of Gene Campaign, her organisation, which completed 10 years this November. Dr Sahai was eager to enlist the support of farmers for Gene Campaign's position on the patenting of genetic material. At a time when no one in India quite understood the nuances of an emerging world trade regime, Sahai was convinced that, for the Indian farmer, nothing could be worse than patents.

"I come from a rural background. I understood at once that I would not be able to speak at the panchayat. It would look like Tikait was taking lessons from a woman."

So, when Dr Sahai reached Kasauni she first met Tikait's mother and borrowed her shawl. After that she attended the panchayat meeting but did not speak a word. During the lunch break, Tikait met Sahai and her colleagues in a separate hut. He could see she had paid her respects to his mother. Dr Sahai explained her purpose.

"I told him the country is in danger. Do you remember the East India Company? They came for trade and enslaved us for 250 years. Now another set of companies are coming, saying they are here for trade. It's all in your hands. Please stop this."

Tikait cursed the companies and asked her what she wanted him to do. Sahai told him Gene Campaign was organising a rally at Red Fort and they would like him to lead it. He agreed. The farmer's rally of 1993 was a huge success. Tikait raised his large hand and simply said, "No Dunkel". It had an electrifying effect.

Ten years ago, Dr Suman Sahai, with a PHD in genetics, returned to India from Europe to fight for the rights of farmers and tribals to their genetic resources. "At that time we were the only organisation discussing the effect the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) would have on agriculture. The debate so far was on the drug industry."

India began liberalising and globalising its economy in the early 1990s. At that time GATT, its Dunkel Draft and the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) were being talked about. As a signatory and a member of WTO, India had to introduce a system of patents. These would be granted to companies that introduced new varieties of seeds and would prevent others from making cheap imitations.

Dr Sahai started Gene Campaign to oppose patenting of genetic material. She said patenting threatened the food security and livelihood of millions of India's small farmers. For centuries farmers have invented, bought, sold, exchanged their own seeds. The government led the agricultural sector. Gene Campaign wants the science of agriculture to continue to remain with the government and

be freely available to society.

A patent regime would throw this social balance into disarray. Farmers would be trapped into iniquitous arrangements and would be unable to use their seeds for fear of violating patent rights. Multinationals could introduce seeds, which cannot be reused, or seeds which are environmentally harmful.

Dr Sahai explains that farmers and tribals are the main innovators of genetic material. Multinationals could buy their expertise cheap and then patent their knowledge.

She has questioned the introduction of genetically modified cotton into India. When farmers in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh planted Mahyco-Monsanto's Bt Cotton, Gene Campaigners turned up to conduct scientific assessments of Bt Cotton's performance and whether it was really the wonder seed the MNC made it out to be. Her studies establish that Bt Cotton was a sad failure and that local hybrids were cheaper and performed better.

She has now demanded that the GEAC make public its secret field trial data of Bt cotton. "Monsanto must compensate those farmers who have suffered losses. This is required under the Indian law, the Protection of Plant Variety and Farmers Rights Act 2001".

Gene Campaign's successes over the years are its insertions on Farmers Rights in the Plant Variety Protection and Farmers Rights Act, the first draft of the Biodiversity Bill and an alternative to UPOV called the Convention for Farmers and Breeders, (CoFaB). It has got protection for indigenous knowledge in the Indian Patent Amendment Bill and succeeded in blocking gene and cell patents.

"We didn't have much experience to begin with, but we developed as we went along," she says. They started by organising a meeting to discuss GATT. Several researchers, activists and scientists came. But Dr Sahai, realised that these issues would have to be discussed with farmers. "We had no money and had decided not to take any," she says. "Instead, we sent out postcards to all the contacts that we had." Replies trickled in. Gene Campaigners travelled wherever they were invited.

"Whether it was 15 farmers or 50, we spoke to them. We explained very simply what a patent is and what it will do to you," says Dr Sahai.

The support of Tikait was critical. "GATT became a political issue. Gene Campaign had established a point."

Dr Sahai went on to network other political leaders. She organised meetings with a range of political leaders and received good support from Mulayam Singh Yadav and Laloo Prasad Yadav.

"One group which really wooed us was the RSS," she says.

Sahai declined to work with them. She comes from a village near Shahjahanpur where Hindus and Muslims have always lived peacefully together.

"They were angry, but never vindictive," says Sahai.

Along with educating political leaders, Gene Campaign continued to educate and mobilise farmers. After that, they decided to enter into policy decisions. "We said that farmers rights must be recognised first. They must be there in the title of the law," says Sahai.

While Gene Campaign has criticised the government, it always worked with political leaders and also provided constructive criticism. So, even while Gene Campaign opposed India joining UPOV, it drafted an alternative treaty called the Convention for Farmers and Breeder (CoFaB) with help from scientists in the developed world. "It is a good indicator of the way to go," says Sahai. The UN recognised CoFaB as a better alternative for developing countries.

Similarly, Gene Campaign drafted the Plant Varieties Protection Act. The same strategy was used for the Biodiversity Bill.

"We began by saying the government is insensitive, they just don't care.

Then we appealed to President Shanker Dayal Sharma to please issue instructions to the Union Cabinet. We got

the chief ministers of the north-eastern states to write a spate of letters to the

Ministry of Environment and Forests saying

the north-east is

a centre of biodiversity and there should be legislation". Since the chief ministers knew about Gene Campaign's work in the north-east, they obliged

The environment minister called her and asked her to put an end to this. The bureaucrats in the ministry were told to put together an expert committee to examine the proposal. Despite hostility from the bureaucrats, Dr Sahai was included in the committee. That's how Gene Campaign got involved in drafting the country's first Biodiversity Bill.

Similarly, when the Plant Varieties Protection Act ran into trouble, Gene Campaign asked friends in Parliament to request for a Joint Parliamentary Committee. "Now the government cannot refuse a JPC. After that we began asking MPs to volunteer for the JPC and managed to get some good people in," says Sahai. "It was then easier to put up the issues. We made sure that the JPC said the things we wanted them to say." It's all part of advocacy work, she says. Gene Campaign is now working on protection of indigenous knowledge.



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Shabnam Hashmi, whose organisation Anhad, helps students express themselves

PEACE PLEASE

The story of four youngsters in Delhi who began a campaign for harmony and found many supporters

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHAT does it take to bridge the three-km gap between Shah Alam Darwaza and Tagore Hall in Ahmedabad, Gujarat? A small step in the mind. And a march by young people to follow it up. On November 18, 150 college students crossed into Shah Alam Darwaza, a predominantly Muslim area of Ahmedabad, to begin a walk organised by Youth 4 Peace (Y4P) and Anhad (Act Now for Harmony and Democracy).

"It was their decision to start the Walk for Peace march from here," says Shabnam Hashmi, social worker, activist and the driving force behind both groups.

"They wanted to know what was happening. The students protested against communal violence and extended a hand of friendship."

Saloni Parekh, an undergraduate from St Xavier's College, remarked, "People think the sole purpose of youngsters is masti and maza. We wanted to convey through Y4P that we cannot allow madness to go on forever in our city."

A section of Gujarat's upper middle class youth is tuning into peace and communal harmony. "We always wanted to do something for society," say Jinal Shah, Akash Sanghvi and Dhaval Bhansali of UV Patel College of Engineering, Mehsana. "Though we are open to new ideas, the problem was that there was nobody generating them."

Shabnam Hashmi is the sister of Safdar Hashmi, well-known playwright and Communist Party of India (CPI) activist. Safdar was beaten to death on January 1, 1989.

by Congress Party goons, while he and his drama troupe, the Jana Natya Manch, were performing a street play, Hulla Bol (Attack), in support of striking workers in Sahibabad, near Delhi. Safdar was only 34 years old when he died.

On November 4, a local court convicted 10 people for Safdar's murder. "Safdar Hashmi always defended the right to freedom of expression. He worked to strengthen and uphold the pluralistic and composite culture of India," said Rajen Prasad, spokesperson of the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (Sehmat).

Shabnam continues to carry forward his work. Along with Harsh Mander, Country Director, Action Aid, Professor K N Panikkar and singer Shubha Mudgal, she founded Anhad in March. Anhad means without limits. It is a democratic institution for anyone who stands for democracy, secularism, justice and peace. Y4P is one of its programmes.

"We are not a political force, a political party or even a political formation," says Shabnam. "We are just individuals who are disturbed by what is happening in the country."

One of Anhad's aims is to fight the ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) the rightist organisation that believes in creating a Hindu rashtra and rejects the idea of a multi-ethnic state. Over the years, the RSS has assiduously mobilised the country's middle-class youth and built a network of activists to spread its philosophy.

"What Anhad is doing is just the counterpart of what the RSS is doing," says Shabnam.

Communalism has deepened among the middle-class, she explains, so Anhad mobilises middle-class youth to spread secularism, democracy, peace and egalitarianism.

"They are to a great extent very communalised in the kind of prejudices they harbour. Whether you like it or not, they are your future media, your IAS officers and your opinion makers. I feel it is very important to work with them."

The founders of Y4P are four students from Delhi-Sahir Raza, Swapnil Gupta, Kandla Singh and Moyna Manku. Sahir, Swapnil and Kandla are 17 years old and study in Class 12 at Springdales School in Delhi. Moyna is 21 and an undergraduate at Gargi College, also in Delhi.

On July 1, the four helped organise a concert in Ahmedabad. For seven hours, people from different communities forgot the strife in their city and came together to listen to Shubha Mudgal and rock band Mrigayaa. Students of the

National Institute of Design (NID) had fashioned a backdrop of twisted wires for the concert. "It all looked very hip and happening," recalls Moyna. "If you want to attract the youth, you have to get the message across without boring them."

The journey to Ahmedabad began on the day the United States began bombing Iraq. The Springdales School assembly met under a pall of gloom. The founders of Y4P could feel the suffering of innocents thousands of kilometres away. They lodged a distant protest.

The idea of Youth4Peace was born then and has grown since. The first unit was started in Ahmedabad. More units followed in Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Patna, Bhopal and Pune. The Delhi branch was started on September 27 with a rock concert by Indian Ocean.

"We invited Indian Ocean because they are very popular among the youth, and they use sounds and words that have their own unique universal meaning and relevance. It is new and might even be incoherent for some, but it is decidedly honest and secular," say the Y4P founders.

Youth4Peace's credo is to bring change through things that young people like to do. In Ahmedabad, for example, every Sunday, its members jog for peace through the city's parks and gardens. "Every now and then, we have young people enquiring about us and wanting to join us," says Swapnil. "We have a form, which costs Rs 104."

HARMONY OF BRIGHT IDEAS

Y4P's message is straightforward: peace, communal harmony and justice. "We are concerned. We are not indifferent. We are disturbed more than our elders by the violence around us-the violence we face every day on the streets, at home, in college, in the country and in other parts of the world. We are worried and want to bring about a change," say the founders

Y4P's plans are ambitious. The young volunteers plan to visit about 50 schools and colleges in Delhi to organise workshops and educate students. They will collect data and conduct a scientific survey among 2,000 young people to gauge the kind of prejudices they harbour and their understanding of communalism.

The Y4P members feel very strongly that small children spend a lot of time playing computer games. Most have a great deal of violence and indirectly suggest brutality as the only method of survival. The Y4P members feel that there is a need for games conveying a message of peace and harmony and they plan to talk to software companies to invent such games. A national level competition with attractive prizes will be announced for the best inventions.

Y4P plans to approach cartoonists and children's writers and bring out a monthly



There are many crusaders for harmony. A peace march was taken out in Ahmedabad on November 18 bridging gaps between communities. Below: Indian Ocean in concert with messages of peace in Delhi



LAKSHMAN ANAND

LAKSHMAN ANAND



“If you want to attract the youth, you have to get the message across without boring them.”
— Moyna



“Look at the RSS. They are very organised and have lots of activities for young people.”
— Swapnil

cartoon book, a magazine on peace and harmony and a newsletter. "All around us, people of all ages are addicted to cartoons such as Tintin, Asterix and Calvin and Hobbes," say the founders. "We feel if we are able to create something that is humorous and well-illustrated, then it will click; after the first six months, it should become independent and run on its own subscriptions."

The Y4P founders are dismissive about the usual debates and painting and essay writing competitions. "Being the computer generation, we decided to announce a competition where students will make PowerPoint presentations on peace and harmony. They will be given five or six topics and can choose one of their liking." A panel of eminent judges will select the best entries. Prizes and certificates will be awarded. Y4P will hold the copyright for all the entries.

"Delhi has at least 25 student bands. Most are not professionals. We want to invite

school. Springdales. Kandla Singh's mother is a Russian translator and her father teaches Russian at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. Swapnil Gupta's father is a consultant for a trade union, his mother is a doctor who studied in the former Soviet Union. Moyna Manku's dad is a professor of English literature, her mother a social worker in the US. Sahir Raza is Shabnam's son and his father is a scientist with the Indian Council for Scientific Industrial Research (CSIR) and writes Urdu poetry.

Shabnam says that if India had more schools like Springdales, half the battle would be won. The school was founded to promote Nehruvian ideals of secularism, democracy and liberalism, says principal Jyoti Bose, and it encourages its students to think. Students from Africa, Romania, Palestine, Iraq and Japan, study here. All their national days are observed. The school gives its humanities section due importance. Swapnil is a science student but he wants to study human rights law. Kandla is interested in sociology and history. Sahir too wants to study history.



This picture was shot by Sahir when he visited Ahmedabad after the riots in 2002

them to write new lyrics for peace and harmony and send us recorded cassettes," say the youngsters. The best five will be invited to perform. In this way, new music on peace and harmony will be generated and a large number of students will be involved.

Y4P has decided to contact a few well-known designers with a request to design special T-shirts and other clothes with a message of peace and harmony. The clothes will be moderately priced to suit a range of budgets.

Funny and thought provoking resource material, films, video cassettes, documentaries, songs and short stories on democracy, superstition, peace and harmony will be circulated to NGOs and youth groups. A regular street theatre group will perform plays. And finally, Youth 4 Peace will organise a national youth festival.

MAKING LEADERS

Family and school are powerful influences. So are personal experiences. The idea of a youth movement for peace in India began with the American war in Iraq. But it was the communal conflagration in Gujarat that confirmed the founders of Y4P in their belief that a youth movement was needed to fight communal hatred.

The concerns of the founders of Y4P have been shaped by their families and their

EXPERIENCES

ON February 27, 2002, the Sabarmati Express, bound for Ahmedabad from Ayodhya, was burnt at Godhra, allegedly by a Muslim mob, as it was crawling out of the station. Fifty eight kar sevaks (Hindu pilgrims) travelling in one coach were burnt alive. The majority community retaliated and Gujarat went up in flames.

Sahir, Swapnil, Kandla and Moyna were shocked at the carnage that followed. Sahir wanted to go to Ahmedabad immediately. Shabnam was already there helping the riot victims. So in March 2002, armed with a camera, Sahir arrived in Ahmedabad. He trudged through relief camps and devastated neighbourhoods clicking photographs. His pictures are powerful images of trauma and destruction. They were exhibited in Delhi later and received much critical acclaim.

But that was not the end of the road. In June 2002, Sahir went to Godhra. A year later, Shabnam suggested he take his friends along. Kandla and Swapnil were keen to join him during their summer holidays. Moyna met the group for the first time on the train. Sahir had stayed with her mother when he visited the US to hold an exhibition of his photographs.

In June this year, the founders of Y4P arrived in Gujarat. In Ahmedabad, they visited the Gulbarga Housing Society where Ehsan Jaffrey, a Congress MP who was killed during the communal carnage, used to live.

Next they went to Naroda Patiya and then to Godhra to examine the burnt train. Their verdict was that the ill-fated train was not set on fire from the outside. "Nothing much had changed since I last visited the place," remarks Sahir.

Swapnil and Kandla travelled to Nopania village, a two-hour drive from Godhra, to work with an Action Aid project. "People knew about the incident, but the villagers were going about their work as usual," says Kandla. They perked up an abandoned hut with peace posters and invited the villagers for an interaction. Kandla persuaded the women to enrol for skill development courses. Swapnil played cricket with a team of Muslim and Hindu boys.

They observed that communalism was growing because people from different faiths did not share public spaces. "Lack of intermingling is a major reason for stereotypes in beliefs about the other," says Kandla. The only time children from various communities got to meet was in school.

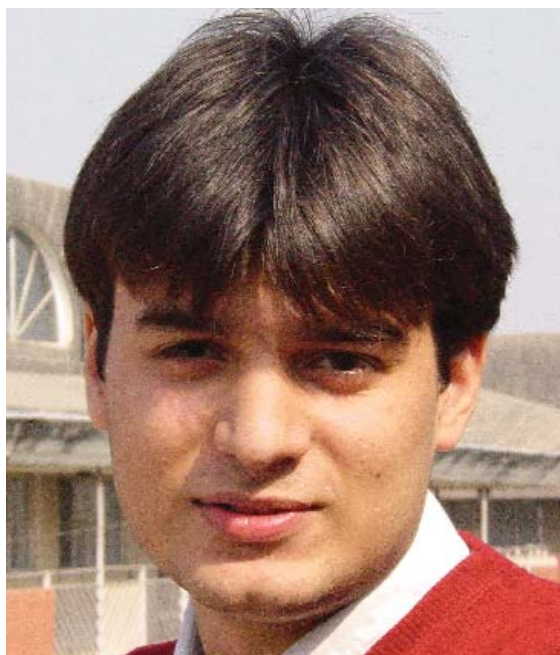
"We were looking at this book given to government schools, which we thought was really biased," says Swapnil. "The book was in Sanskrit and children were reciting from it. And this was supposed to be a community school."

They also noted that the young people in these rural areas did not have access to



“Lack of intermingling is a major reason for stereotypes in beliefs about the other.”

— Kandla



“NGOs do a lot of work, some are brilliant, but they spend days discussing who wrote which paper.”

— Sahir

activities that were fun, interesting and secular. "Look at the RSS," explains Swapnil. "They are very organised and have lots of activities for the youth." The RSS has a huge network of shakhas (branches) modelled after the akharas where young men congregated to exercise. Most adolescents join the shakhas, attracted by the games and the spirit of camaraderie.

"My grandfather attended the shakhas when he was very young just because it was there. Kids start going and then realise 10 years later, hey, that's not what we wanted to do," says Swapnil.

They concluded that youngsters need activities more attractive than those provided by the RSS. "We think the youth who join can be reconverted," they say, "but the movement for peace is dispersed. In contrast, the RSS is a well-organised outfit."

REACHING OUT

Meanwhile, Moyna and Sahir visited schools in Ahmedabad. "Being the educated elite, we thought maybe there are others who want to start a movement for peace, but are unable to come out with it," says Moyna. They found small groups scattered across the city, doing their own thing for communal harmony. None of them were in touch with each other.

After the riots, the Muslims started withdrawing into separate neighbourhoods. Kandla, Swapnil, Moyna and Sahir saw homes built for them by certain NGOs. "The houses were badly made. There was no staircase connecting the second floor to the ground floor. There were no toilets," notes Sahir. "A board is put up stating the homes

are made by so and so for the community. And then everybody knows which community. It's really gross."

On a busy street, they saw a red placard, titled 'Ten Commandments', with warnings to people not to do business with the minority community inscribed on it. "It's interesting how they freely borrow ideas from other religions," remarks Sahir.

"We don't want parallel economies and parallel cultures," say the four youngsters. But when people live away from each other, how do you get them together?

"We wanted to do something hands-on," says Swapnil.

They knew a number of NGOs working in Gujarat, but did not want to join them. "We were bugged by their work style," explains Sahir. "They do a lot of work, some are brilliant, but they spend days discussing who wrote which paper."

"We don't like paper," says Swapnil, "and NGOs produce reams of it."

Y4P decided to help organise a cultural programme for the city. Anhad had declared July 1 2003, Communal Harmony Day. They returned to Delhi to raise funds. But none of the business houses in the Capital was interested. Shabnam nearly cancelled the programme. Then, on an impulse, she sent 100 SMSes to friends and succeeded in raising Rs 80,000.

The event began with an umbrella painting competition. Y4P had been to 50 schools to invite young people to paint a message of peace on umbrellas. About 80 children turned up. Prizes were given to the best three.

The musical programme followed. People came from all walks of life. And Y4P's first unit with some 60 youngsters was formed.



'We are not a political force, or a political party. We are just individuals who are disturbed by what is happening in the country'

'It's very important to have a vocabulary the youth understands. Today's youth are glued to their computers and SMS'

'We can change political discourse in 10 or 15 years'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

SHABNAM Hashmi, co-founder of Act Now for Harmony and Democracy (Anhad) and Youth4Peace is a well-known activist and social worker. She is the sister of Safdar Hashmi, well-known playwright and activist with the Communist Party of India (CPI) who was beaten to death on January 1, 1989, by goons belonging to the Congress. Shabnam spoke to *Civil Society* about Anhad and Youth4Peace's plans to mobilise all sections of the middle class to fight for secularism and peace.

The movement for secularism is dispersed and disorganised. How are Youth 4 Peace and Anhad going to strengthen it?

It is not a magic wand. If we work like this, we can change political discourse in 10 or 15 years. We have failed because we took secularism for granted. And all along the RSS was working overtime. What Anhad is doing is just the counterpart of what the RSS has been doing.

On one hand, you have organised political forces, the RSS, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal and so on. On the other hand, you have small groups like ours. We are not a political force, a political party or even a political formation. We are just individuals who are disturbed by what is happening in the country. There is no way we can match the right wing, though I consider myself equal to 20 RSS people. I am committed to what I am doing for peace and harmony.

Unless political parties and political formations take this fight seriously, I don't see India winning the war against hatred. I don't see any urgency in anyone. Fascism is here, it is knocking at your door and you have to do something urgently. Our efforts are naturally going to be very limited. We are not a mass-based organisation, we don't have funds but we are trying our best.

How do you propose to expand the movement for peace?

As far as my family is concerned, Gujarat has changed our lives. In the last one and a half years, we have not had even a day together. We are working round the clock on this, 18 hours a day.

We started first in Ahmedabad, then Delhi, Bhopal and Mumbai. Recently, we organised a workshop in Patna, which was attended by nearly two and a half thousand people. We talked about education, too. We are getting a good response. There are students from Pune who want to start a group there. We have achieved a lot. We have organised 14 training camps in six months, because we are crazy. Unless you have this craziness inside you there is no way you can do this work.

One Anhad is not enough. We need lots more. In every state, when we did one workshop there would be a demand for ten more. We have recorded our Delhi workshops. We are going to produce 40 CDs half in English and half in Hindi, countering every single aspect of communalism and along with them primers. For instance, a CD on Ayodhya will have a primer explaining the whole controversy. We hope to have this material in the next four months and it would be available to groups in India and to the Indian diaspora.

What is your target group?

I feel no one has really touched the middle-class and the upper middle-class youth. They are, to a great extent, very communalised in the kind of prejudices they have. Whether you like it or not they make your future media, your future IAS officers, your future opinion makers, and I feel it is very important to work with them. It is a myth that people living in bustees are communal. Communalisation has seeped into every segment of society. Perhaps it is the least among the very poor.

The Youth 4 Peace programme is not aimed at the lower middle-class. It is for educated college and university students and the middle-class who have become absolutely indifferent to what is happening. It is for political party workers and activists

and for anyone who wants to join us.

What has been the reaction of political parties? Are they interested in participating in your activities?

We need a pracharak in every village, who would counter hatred and spread our view of India and the kind of nation our forefathers had conceived of. I approached all the political parties. I told them we would be happy to train your cadres. Through our camps we are training political activists to counter RSS propaganda. For the first time, the Congress sent 24 youngsters from the NSUI and the Youth Congress. They were intellectually so bright. I was surprised. I told them I never thought you have vibrant people like this. They asked serious questions and were totally moved. They had never been exposed to something like this. They do have camps, they said, but the political leader gives a speech and leaves. We also have political party workers from the CPI, the CPI-ML and a few from other political parties.

How will you attract urban middle-class youth to your movement?

We think it's very important to have a vocabulary the youth understands. We have friends who have taken out candle-light processions, done wall-writing and all that, but today's youth are glued to their computers and SMS messages. We seriously invite people to work on cartoons and computer games, which will not propagate violence but have messages of peace and harmony. That's a much bigger challenge. It's much easier to invent games of destruction.

How will you spread secular values to parents and teachers?

You have to believe in the basic humanness of people and in peace and justice. Unless you practice it, there is no way you can transfer these values to your children. A secular education helps. If we had more schools like Springdales, half the battle would be won.

Teachers can do a lot. Mohit, a tutor who runs a coaching institute in Delhi, attended our workshop because he wanted to educate himself. He said that 4000 children have spent time with him and from now on he is going to sensitise children. Children from his institute put up posters for our concert in Delhi. There are a lot of organisations sensitising young people on their own.

But I believe the majority of Indians are peaceful by nature. It is only recently that this hatred has been started by organisations like the RSS and the VHP. It has started seeping into people because it has been repeated so many times.

Have middle-class people been largely supportive? How has the Muslim community reacted?

So far we have involved more than 200 organisations who have funded us. Friends, journalists and ordinary people have contributed. For the concert in Ahmedabad, we had invited 10 artistes to perform for a seven-hour show. I messaged about 100 people and collected Rs 80,000. Within Gujarat a number of organisations helped us financially. It's tough. We are not hiding what we are doing. We are not saying we are spreading peace and harmony. We are fighting the RSS ideology. Once you say this, you are not likely to get funds.

I have never found support for any secular activity from any of the so-called progressive Muslims. I have always been

zapped by that. You want money for relief or for opening a school or a madarsa, you will get it. But if you say you want to fight communalism you won't get money. I am a non-believer. I come from a leftist background. You organise a meeting, invite the chief minister, put ten of them on the dais and they will all come. One understands the community is backward and has been kept that way. But there is money among a section of them. Yet I don't find enough people among them who are ready to fight against communalism. They would never fund what Sahmat and Anhad are doing. I find this very painful.



'I have never found support for any secular activity from any of the so-called progressive Muslims. I have always been zapped by that'

'There are several ways to teach peace'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

SPRINGDALES School was founded in 1955 to uphold Nehruvian ideals of secularism, liberalism and a progressive worldview, says Jyoti Bose, the school's feisty principal. She spoke to *Civil Society* about how the school promotes communal harmony and peace.

The school practices its philosophy

We live our ideals. We want to make thinkers. Humanness comes from the strength of our convictions. Everything discussed in school is thought-provoking. Is gender equality a myth? Where have we reached with our rivers? Is peace a utopia? These are some of the topics discussed during the school assembly.

Students come from different nations and communities

We have students from different communities and cultures. There are 20 children from Africa, students from Iraq, Palestine, Romania and Japan. We observe all their national days. When we ask diplomats why they want to admit their children here, they say they want to expose them to Indian culture. We probably have the largest group of children from the minority community. We also have many children of inter-marriages.

Children are educated on global and national issues of concern

There are several ways to teach peace. The US invasion of Iraq resulted in a boycott of US goods in school. The initiative came from the students. Children are

concerned about their future. They are aware of global conflicts, whether it is Bosnia, Kargil, Afghanistan, Iraq or Palestine. It's very easy to be closed.

We have student exchange programmes. Our children have travelled to Wisconsin, Kyoto, Russia, South Africa and received awards. We have had visitors like Nelson Mandela and the first lady of Vietnam for whom we enacted the Mylai massacre. She was deeply moved.

When Gujarat happened, it was discussed in the school. The students enacted the Godhra episode. In the junior school, children learn sharing. For instance, we ask what have the poor eaten today? And the children will want to keep something for them. If we don't build on this, they will be apathetic later.

A secular culture is promoted

Peace has to be internalised and lived, not only for awards. Our religion is humanity. All holidays are given. But our songs are about communal harmony and peace, so our choir is always in big demand. We sing for the citizens of the city. For our annual day we invite people who are liberal and outspoken.

Children are integrated with different sections of society

We have children with special needs who study here. We have three school counsellors and educators. We also have a tradition of community service. Classes 11 and 12 go to work for the community everyday and we run the largest literacy programme in Delhi. Books given as



Jyoti Bose, principal of Springdales School

Annual Day prizes are chosen with care and reflect differing viewpoints.

The school gives importance to the humanities

I don't want more than one section of commerce. We have a large section for humanities. We want to create academics and intellectuals who will serve society. Four of our students are doing their BA in Peace Studies in the US, others have enrolled in development studies and environmental law. Some are social workers.

Teachers undergo an orientation programme

Teachers, who are attracted by the school's values, tend to join. There is an orientation programme so that they understand the school. Religious observances like karva chauth are personal. Leave them behind. What counts are work ethic and ideas.

Parents are chosen for their values

At home, the child becomes the teacher. Children can co-exist happily in the school without any show of hatred and violence. Parent and teacher forums highlight this. Parents know what we stand for. We try to choose those who appreciate our philosophy and think like us, so that children are not confused. If parents can choose the school of their choice, then we have the right to choose liberal parents.

UNESCO has a peace syllabus

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A syllabus to teach peace in schools, drawn up by UNESCO, is gathering dust in the corridors of the Ministry of Human Resources. "The ministry believes the syllabus needs to be more Indian," says Prithviraj Perera, Chief Administration Programme Coordinator of UNESCO, New Delhi. Pakistan is implementing the peace syllabus in schools and madarsas and Sri Lanka has already done so.

According to UNESCO the syllabus consists of several guidelines to help teachers integrate peace education into various subjects. "Schools can adjust the syllabus to suit their

needs," says Periera. The guidelines are broad enough to allow innovation.

"Peace has to be caught, rather than taught," says UNESCO. The guidelines define peace as inner peace, social peace and peace with nature. The guidelines attempt to broaden horizons and provide children with a worldview. Teachers can identify peace values in lessons. In history, care should be taken to avoid rousing hatred against oppressors and invaders. Instead teachers can explain the social, economic and political background to the event. The French Revolution can be seen from a people's perspective. Alternative viewpoints should be presented and debated.

Secondary school maths could

include calculation of percentages and ratio of population growth, infant mortality, literacy and other indicators. This will broaden the student's social view. Pupils can also examine different maths systems in the world and thereby learn to appreciate other cultures.

Science should be a friendly subject. The teacher can emphasise that the universe is interlinked and interdependent, that science is concerned with the needs and interests of mankind, every form of life is precious and science is not above morality. Knowledge in science is always evolving, and everybody can participate in taking our understanding of science forward.

Social studies can include a

weekly presentation of global news during the morning assembly, community surveys, debates on social issues. Wallpaper in the classroom gives an opportunity to students to express themselves. Peace mottos are also attractive methods of communication. To resolve conflicts, a peace mediator should be appointed by the class. Mediators can also act as peer counsellors and help fellow students to work out their problems.

As a facilitator the teacher is in a position to show students how they can reach solutions. For instance, a puzzle can be related and students asked to figure it out. Or a story can describe a given situation and students can be asked to find a

happy ending. Co-operative story-telling is another tool. One child begins a story and then other students add to it.

For primary school children, pantomime, making funny faces, imagining a trip to an exotic place, making sounds like rain, thunder or a railway station and playing cooperative games creates an atmosphere of fun and camaraderie.

The guidelines also tell teachers how they can develop positive thoughts in children, for instance through reading success stories of inspired deeds. Or by being more personal and talking about a quality which a student is proud of. The guidelines also help teachers to evoke compassion among students and respect for human dignity.

Neighbourly hand launches students into cyber space

A computer lab helps Carterpuri's government school catch up

Civil Society News
Gurgaon

THE computer spins a yarn from the Panchatantra as children listen in rapt attention. The session over, the children can't wait to fire questions at their teachers. We are at the Government High School in Carterpuri, Gurgaon, where a new computer lab, with 22 personal computers, has just been added.

"This is one class they don't like to miss," say Sujata and Inglesh, their enthusiastic computer education teachers. "The younger ones love to paint, using the mouse," says Inglesh. "After that, we lure them into Word, Excel, Power Point and other applications." The course is job-oriented. The teachers say their students are as bright as those who attend private schools, only "they don't know where they are headed".

The computer lab is part of the transformation wrought in the school by Friends of Carterpuri and Choma Villages, a charitable organisation started by the 83-year-old Colonel Taneja and other elderly residents of Palam Vihar, Carterpuri's wealthier neighbourhood. They were concerned about the surrounding villages and their lack of access to health, education and infrastructure.

The school has 1,200 students. Their parents work as migrant labour and vegetable vendors or are small shop

owners. Nearly a quarter of them are from Bihar, lured here by Gurgaon's construction boom.

Three years ago, when Friends of Villagers conducted a survey, they found Carterpuri's school in ruins. "There was no water, electricity or toilets," says 67-year-old A K Varma, a retired engineer. "About 100 students studied in four dilapidated rooms. The school didn't even have a gate!"

The headmaster in charge at the time was interested in reform, so the residents got down to work. Money was raised from private and corporate donors. Hughes Software Systems (HSS) provided the computers. A borewell was dug for drinking water. Electricity was restored. Medical camps were held. About 11 classrooms were built, as also a library.

The result is amazing. Some young ones are neck deep in a jigsaw puzzle. A student of Class 6 looks for his favourite book, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

A new primary school, with slides and swings, is coming up on land given by the village. A vocational training centre has also been set up, where tailoring, fabric painting, toy-making and mehndi application are taught. "The girls are starting home-based businesses after learning these skills," says administrator Saroj Brar. "Some even return to teach others at the centre."

Friends of Carterpuri and Choma Villages is also trying to improve co-curricular standards by introducing the children to sports such as table tennis.

Earlier, says Varma, the emphasis was on book learning.

Of course, there are still plenty of problems. The school does not have a headmaster since the last one got transferred. The government's teachers are apathetic, says Varma. Much energy is spent on convincing villagers about the value of education.

Gurgaon's government schools fare

"The younger ones love to paint, using the mouse, After that, we lure them into Word, Excel, Power Point..."

worse than others because of the area's rapid urbanisation, Varma explains. Villagers, who sold land at market rates, own cars and send their children to private schools. It is the children of migrant labourers who come to the government school.

"They are more concerned with survival," says Prakash Sharma, who teaches in the primary section. "They don't put any pressure on the teachers to perform."

In a bid to improve standards, the Haryana government introduced English in Class 3, but forgot to educate the educators. "Most primary school teachers have poor knowledge of the subject," says Sharma. To compound the problem, many of the children are first generation learners who find they can't cope with English and Maths. "But English is vital for achieving proficiency and getting a job," interjects Sujata.

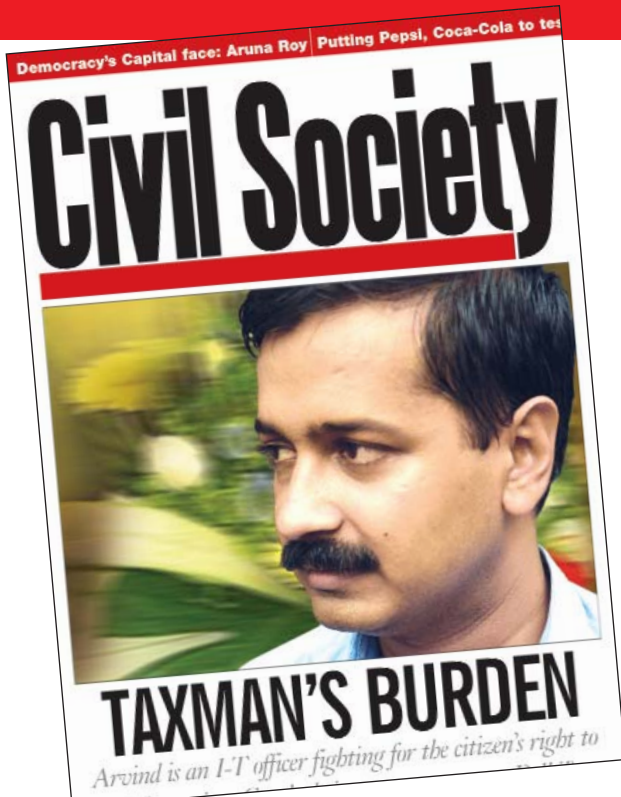
"Computers can definitely help with Maths," say the teachers, "but with English, the students opt for the blackboard."

The government has decided some education is better than no education. Schools have to admit children of migrant labour, even if they travel back and forth to their villages. Sharma supports the government's initiatives. "At least, the children don't while away their time roaming the streets."

According to Sharma, if the Central government can ensure that 90% of the syllabus at the primary level is the same throughout the country, the children of migrant labourers would not lag behind in their studies. "They can study here and in their local village school," he says.

But the students of Carterpuri's government school are not complaining. They know the new computer lab is a huge step up on their way to the future. If more well-wishers like Friends of Villages come forward to help them, the transition will be that much smoother for them.

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MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh NGOs are split down the middle

Barun Roy
Kolkata

THE NGO community in Bangladesh, one of the most active in Asia, appears split squarely down the middle, and when the Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB) claimed at a 17 November 2003 meeting in Dhaka that it had approved 350 new members to take its total membership to 922, it was clear that the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), the original parent body, was in for some tough battles ahead.

Even in its better times, ADAB didn't have more than a thousand NGOs as members in a country that has anything between 10,000 and 15,000 of them, big and small. But it had the clout and was able to draw huge amounts of donor money. Then in July 2002, a group of dissident NGOs, led by Fazle Hassan Abed of BRAC, got together at a convention, which 1,850 other NGOs also attended, and openly accused ADAB's leadership of a pro-Awami League political bias.

FNB was officially formed in April 2003 and its quick progress since last year's convention has led its opponents to suspect it has the patronage of the ruling government of Begum Khaleda Zia.

Their suspicion deepened when the government blocked the foreign funds of five of the country's larger NGOs – PRIP Trust, PROSHIKA, International Voluntary Services, BNPS, and the Centre for Development Services – on the charge that they had diverted donor money to finance Awami League's election campaign in 2001. All five happen to belong to ADAB.

All five have vehemently denied the charge and their foreign donors have said they

have found no evidence of misuse. But the government isn't listening. Until now, the NGO Affairs Bureau has conducted two investigations into the matter – the last in December 2002 – but nobody knows what the findings are.

Funds have been blocked and this has badly affected the work of the ADAB five. PROSHIKA, for example, is unable to proceed with its mammoth five-year programme, launched in 1999, to benefit an estimated 700,000 rural children.

It is expected that the government might use the case against the ADAB five as an excuse to impose new restrictions on NGOs. At a roundtable conference in October to mark the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's second year in power, speakers demanded that the government must introduce new measures to control NGOs after they are registered.

The demand got a further boost when Dr. Atiur Rahman, chairperson of Credit and Development Forum (CDF), on November 18 accused NGOs of deviating from their commitment to poverty alleviation.

According to CDF executive director Abdul Mannan, NGOs had distributed around Taka 3,900 crores in revolving funds as of December 2002, and 20 big NGOs dominate 82% of the country's micro-credit programme. "But the fate of the poor hasn't changed," Dr. Rahman told a news conference.

Life is already tough for NGOs in Bangladesh and even the World Bank feels the government does too little to support them. Clearances for projects and funds have to be renewed annually and some of the foreign donation forms and procedures are extremely cumbersome.

The Raj comes full circle

THE flight to India, was a recent headline in a British daily, outlining a great wave of layoffs facing the British population as payday for their colonial past catches up with them. Two hundred years after British industrialisation had pretty much destroyed India's manufacturing potential by banning the import of cotton products, history is completing a full circle.

As a result of British colonialism English grew to become India's primary language. Today it has - with great historic irony - become one of its major assets. It is English that

Indians have mastered, that is bringing about a reversal, as technology allows customer services over the telephone to be halfway across the world. Large public sector companies like British Railways, HSBC Bank, British Telecom, Lloyds, Standards Chartered, Reuters, are moving their Call Centres to India. What started as a trickle could develop into a

deluge as over 30,000 executive jobs in the financial and insurance sector could move to India in the next 5 years according to Evening Standard.

Predictions from the USA are even bigger. The majority of the 3.3 million jobs they expect to lose by 2015 will come to India. All this gives substance to a pithy remark flippantly made by a close friend returning to India in 1984, after a 2 year stint with Tata TCS in New York. When asked why he had not stayed back in the USA, as many Indians do, he replied, "I decided to come back in hope that someday, perhaps my grand-children will be immigration officers who will subject Americans trying to enter India to the same humiliating experience we Indians face when entering the USA".

It would be prophetic if, as the consultants Nasscom and McKinsey say, India will be earning \$17 billion from outsourced jobs by the year 2008. The daily continues to say, "All those concerned about global justice and the distribution of wealth around the world should rejoice". I for one, surely will!

THE famous "Toxic Fleet" heading across the Atlantic to a small port in the UK called Hartlepool, Teesside, started earlier this summer and is now competing with the "Royal scandal" for coverage. What is shocking is that the usual story of toxic waste dumping from the industrialized countries into poor underdeveloped ones changed

this time. Shipbreakers Able, UK was unable to resist the temptation of big bucks and signed a deal with the Americans on July 28 for 13 rusty, derelict US Navy ships carrying highly toxic material containing PCBs and asbestos to be dismantled in England. The deal was done in secrecy even though it contravenes International regulations on transporting dangerous goods. It has now emerged that the Americans even offered baksheesh to the British company in the shape of two new 'oiler' vessels that can be sold further - an incentive not

available to US companies. Eighty similar 'ticking bombs' would follow if this deal went through smoothly.

Thanks to the Environment Agency (EA) and others like the Friends of the Earth, the deal is now on hold as per the High Court's ruling even as the first couple of ships approach English shores. On the other side of the Atlantic, five years ago, Bill Clinton had

ruled it illegal to scrap such ships in poor countries after some accidents and deaths. As you might have guessed by now, George Bush pushed the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to lift the ban for this contract. How could Blair refuse permission?

I have to admit that despite my great appreciation of French cuisine I occasionally sneak off for a plate of deshi curry and onion baji whenever opportunity presents itself. In Montmartre, Paris there is a downtrodden microcosm of India, reminiscent of Brick Lane in London, with a collection of restaurants, which amply satisfy my nostalgia for dhaba fare for a few measly Euros. Here, I recently ran into a film shoot of Delhi's Vijay Singh making "One Dollar Curry", a low budget film that incorporates French, Hindi and Punjabi into an otherwise English film. The storyline of this film depicts the travails of a young Sikh immigrant and his remarkable survival skills in the underworld he inhabits in the heart of Paris, where Jean-Marie Le Pen and his National Front scared the daylight out of every Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité waving Frenchmen last year. Without giving away the story I think I can safely say it's going to be a good crossover film like Salaam Bombay, East is East and Monsoon Wedding. We'll have to wait and see after it is released next May in Cannes. Meanwhile, I'll continue to sneak off to Ganesh Café whenever I can.

LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

Maiti Nepal vigil earns its accolades

From A Correspondent
Kathmandu

IT was a moment of triumph and glory for Maiti Nepal, an NGO fighting to end trafficking of women and children, when Dolma Waiba received the Reebok Human Rights Award in Salt Lake City (US) last year for her exemplary role in rescuing 40 women from brothels in Mumbai. She is one of the 389 Nepalese women whom Maiti had rescued from various red-light districts in India, since its inception in 1993. Dolma opted to work as a volunteer for its office in Mumbai where she had earlier spent nearly three agonising years after being sold off to a brothel by an acquaintance for Indian Rs 50,000.

Maiti Nepal came into existence because of noted social worker Anuradha Koirala's determination and tireless efforts to fight the menace of girl-trafficking that began in Nepal many decades ago. There are an estimated 250,000 Nepalese women and girls in brothels across India.

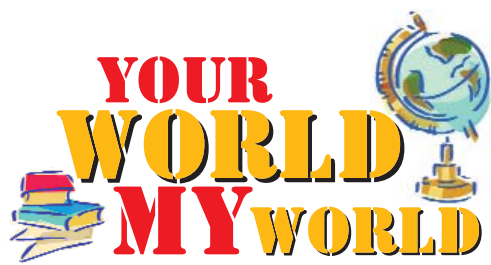
About 6,000 women are trafficked to India every year. "We've even rescued girls from faraway places like Oman, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia," says Maiti Nepal information officer Prakash Gurung.

In 10 years, Maiti Nepal has grown into one of the world's most widely acclaimed organisations. Last year, Queen Sylvia of Sweden presented it the prestigious International Children's Award in recognition of Maiti's crusade against trafficking of women and children in

Nepal. On the list of its supporters are Nepalese Queen Mother Ratna and Prince Charles and Princess Ann of Britain and American movie star Robert Redford.

Though founded with just 10 volunteers in a rented house, Maiti Nepal now has a sprawling complex of its own. It has set up branches in most parts of Nepal and deployed monitoring groups at 12 of the 22 official exit points to India.

Maiti Nepal volunteers, mostly young girls, keep a close watch on vehicles and rickshaws heading towards India. So far, they have intercepted over 1000 women and girls being taken to India for the flesh trade. They have handed over about 300 pimps and traffickers to the police.



Make schools relevant

By Kamini Mustafi

In today's India, with excessive competitiveness and the constant striving to get ahead, space for true development in children is overlooked. Academic excellence is given far too much importance and the real person, the student, is lost in the process.

But strangely enough this so called academic excellence is neither training nor a skill for reasoning and analysis and presentation but a mere acquisition and retention of information. Effective communication is not being encouraged in the classrooms. Multiple choice questions test knowledge of facts. One word answers or at the most a phrase, is what is required. What about being able to put thoughts down coherently so that they make sense? What about speaking one's thoughts? What about being able to defend an idea or promote one? What about willingness to enter into an argument about what one feels or thinks? Where does the Indian psyche, which believes that it is impertinent and unnecessarily hostile to be the one who says "No" to someone else, fit in to this? How are we to cope with this pressure of trying to balance ones ideas and ideals with what we perceive to be our social role?

The system as it exists today encourages a gathering of numerous facts which for all their exhaustiveness have no relevant meaning in the students' lives.

This is the information age and thanks to the ubiquitous computer and the internet, vast items of information are available easily. All it takes is a little while at a computer. But are we teaching our children how all the information knits together to make sense? Are we teaching them that everything has a cause and effect? We have to teach and prove to them how good actions, feelings, thoughts and attitudes have a good effect on others, and also how negative actions, feelings, thoughts and attitudes breed and encourage bad reactions.

Are we too scared to teach morals and values to children in our homes and schools? Is this because we know that our morals and values cannot stand up to scrutiny?

And where are the children in the midst of all this?

Burdened with a meaningless syllabus.

Wasting twelve years in school after which they have no real skills.

Scrabbling about post school trying to deal with the real world, learning the skills, trying their hardest to make sense of a reality which they haven't been prepared for. Some surviving at a great cost to their individuality, becoming yes men, relinquishing dreams to make two ends meet. And some not at all.

Who is responsible?

We are.

Parents who pressure children to study subjects so that they can fulfil the parents dreams and ambitions.

Teachers who merely teach the syllabus, not taking into account the child's aptitude or interests or who do not think it is worth their while to earn their students' respect.

Schools that keep children in the classrooms till class VIII and then ask them to leave because the grades are not good enough for the school's image.

Schools who choose not to offer career counselling services because of the costs involved. Why is it that children who cannot get into colleges with the subjects of their choice because of high cut off rates, get admission into colleges abroad and are placed on the Dean's list for academic achievement in their first few months of undergraduate study?

Is this due to outdated education policies, formulated by people who were in classrooms several decades ago, who have no idea of what children think, want and relate to today? Aided and abetted by parents who are bewildered by parenthood and parenting responsibilities, and schools staffed by apathetic teachers just waiting for the bell to ring so they can catch the bus and go home?

How do we deal with this? What will it mean in the years to come?

Who are the people responsible for education? And so who needs to change?

Parents, Teachers, Children, Society?

Interlinking only as Prabhu can

FEW politicians out of ministerial office enjoy the same personal credibility as Suresh Prabhu, the Shiv Sena MP. At a symposium on water in Delhi, Prabhu as chairperson had Medha Patkar on his left and Rajinder Singh on his right. Both are as far removed from him politically as anyone could possibly be. Prabhu heads the commission set up to implement the interlinking of rivers. Singh and Patkar are staunchly opposed to the interlinking of rivers. Yet they were happy to share the dais with Prabhu and made it known

and young people queued up for her autograph. Das, who has none of the airs of a film star, always finds the time for a good cause, be it environmental awareness or Action Aid's Karma Mitra donor programme.

Anti-Modi protests at WEF

WHEN Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi turned up for the World Economic Forum meeting in Delhi, protesters were not far behind. Shabnam Hashmi, Harsh Mander, and Nafisa Ali led a demonstration against Modi, accusing him of doing nothing about giving the minority community in his

Pune University campus. NARI is ready to pass on the design and technology to other NGOs.

Remembering Sanjoy Ghose

ON July 4, 1997, social activist Sanjoy Ghose was abducted by ULFA militants from the riverine island of Majuli in Assam. There has been no news of him since. His father Shankar Ghose recalls, "When we were dissuading Sanjoy from going to terrorism ridden Assam, he asked, "then whose son will you send?"

Among the causes this courageous activist espoused was the Charkha Development

SAAB PRESS



Suresh Prabhu flanked by Rajinder Singh and Medha Patkar

that they were doing so because of the personal regard they have for him.

Prabhu's assignment has so far earned him more criticism than praise. There are few serious takers for the interlinking of rivers and he is often the target of much bashing by environmentalists. But this hasn't deterred Prabhu from reaching out to all shades of opinion. At the symposium he handled harsh criticism from the audience with generosity, emphasising that he was eager that everyone was heard and that the commission had created mechanisms for this. "If you have a suggestion I can assure you it will be examined," he assured critics in the audience.

The real proof of Prabhu's intentions was, of course, in him having Rajinder Singh and Medha Patkar on stage with him.

Nandita Das

NANDITA Das was the centre of attention on the day she visited Vatavaran, the festival of environmental films at the Habitat Centre. Das featured in an awareness ad film on water which was shown at the festival

state a sense of security. The demonstration took place just as the state government failed to have its way in the Supreme Court on the transfer of riot cases out of Gujarat. The protesters wanted to know how the World Economic Forum could entertain a politician under whose regime innocents had been killed and then denied justice. The demonstration, however, had little impact on the WEF proceedings. CII ensured Modi was feted so as to make up for past criticism of him by industrialists who are CII members.

A new rickshaw

A cycle rickshaw improved through redesign is being offered by the Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute (NARI). There are two versions of this redesigned rickshaw. One is the straightforward pedal rickshaw which is easier to propel. And the other is the improved pedal rickshaw aided by a motor. The new rickshaw is to be put on roads in Agra and Hampi and can be a useful addition to inner city transportation in many Indian cities. Five motor-assisted cycle rickshaws are running on the

Communications Network. It is a voluntary organisation, which he set up in 1994, because he felt that the issues of rural India were not being adequately covered in the mainline media. Charkha's mission has been to highlight grassroots news. The Charkha-Sanjoy Ghose Fellowship for Peace and Development is for journalists from the Kashmir Valley who can write in English or Urdu. Interested applicants should be between 25 and 45 years old with a proven track record in development writing. Two fellowships will be awarded. The value of each is Rs 50,000. Interested applicants should submit a brief bio-data, clippings of three published articles with a by line, a write-up in 1000 words and an outline of the subject to be researched. Also, applicants should submit details of fellowships or awards held in the last three years, if any, and explain why they think they should be selected for the fellowship.

What Charkha needs most of all is recognition and financial support for the important role that it seeks to play.

Contact Charkha at 011-26680816, 26680688. Fax: 26680816 or E-mail charkha@bol.net.in

Vital stats of a fat government

State of Governance
Delhi Citizen Handbook 2003
 Author: Centre for Civil Society
 Price: Rs 400

By Rita Anand

THE government is a mysterious creature for most citizens. Viewed from the outside it looks large, inscrutable and formidable. People approach it with trepidation.

Queues, forms, rude officials, delays, are words that come to mind. The Delhi Citizen Handbook 2003, published by the Centre for Civil Society, dissects each sarkari department working for the city and suggests reforms for better governance.

Some of the book's findings are truly startling. The Prevention of Food Adulteration Department (PFA) has 28 inspectors to oversee 1,50,000 registered food establishments. If the inspector examined one outlet every day it would take him 17 years to make a second visit.

The Delhi government's expenditure in the social sector is the highest in India. The Department of Social Welfare spends Rs 1,798 on a male beggar and only Rs 7 on a female beggar in its homes for them. The book proposes the government pass on its copious welfare schemes to NGOs with a good track record and put in place a system of evaluation and monitoring. For instance, exit polls by users of services can tell whether beneficiaries are satisfied with services.

The department should tell poorer people about their schemes, through "information melas" other methods. The book recommends that municipal licensing be removed and poor people be allowed to run small businesses without harassment from local authorities. This would increase their income and make them less dependent on social welfare.

There are over 500,000 children in the capital's 1,200 slums who do not attend school. About 1,000 new schools are needed. A study by Social Jurist found 80% of students, who passed Class 5 from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi's, did not know how to read and write. But to open a school till Class 8 requires 14 licenses and costs about Rs 14 lakhs.

The book says the government should stop running schools and pay others to do it. Education vouchers can be given to parents to cover the cost of their children's education. This would give them choices and create competition. The voucher could be encashed from the government. Bus passes could also be issued.

The Public Distribution System (PDS) incurs huge losses. These could be minimised by issuing food vouchers. BPL card-holders could receive vouchers worth the subsidy amount.

If the city's slums disappeared, so would the Slum and JJ department. A time-bound programme for in-situ upgradation of slums could be implemented along the lines of Dharavi in Mumbai. Here, multi-storied buildings are being constructed for slum-dwellers and the surplus sold to other families. Only 2,800 hectares are required for solving the slum problem. Delhi has 32,000 acres of wasteland within city limits. The book

proposes the Slum and JJ Department be merged with the Ministry of Urban Development.

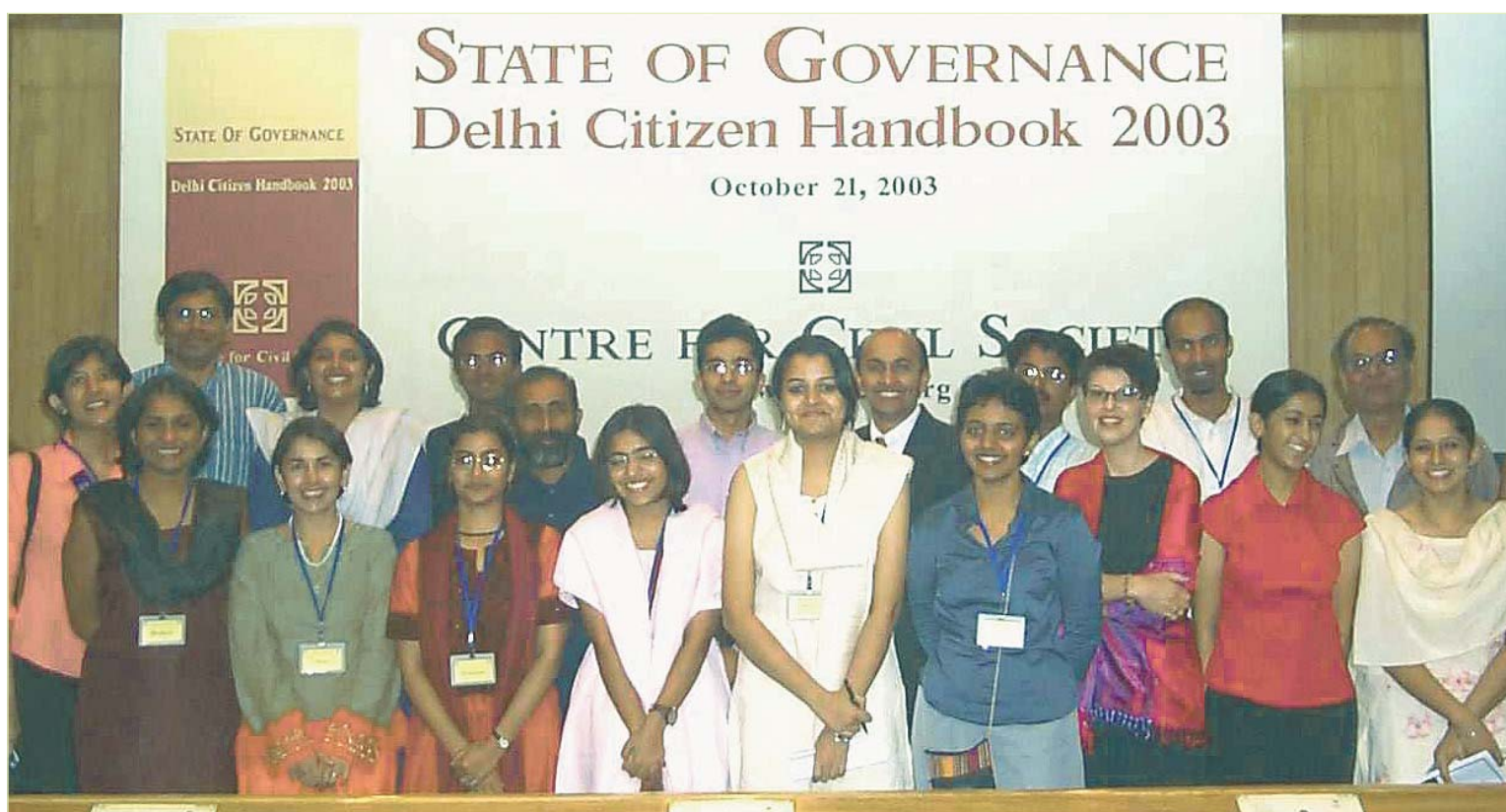
The Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) employs 12 people per bus and incurs a monthly loss of Rs 25 crore. Private bus operators employ six persons and make a profit. To improve transport, the book recommends privatisation of DTC and deregulation of this sector. Kerb rights or pick up points for passengers can be leased out to private parties. Bus operators should be allowed to price fares according to the premium passengers are willing to pay.

Delhi households pay 6.5 times more for water, than what they pay to the DJB, to make up for shortages. The poorest households pay more in proportion to their

incomes than richer homes.

The book recommends ward level user associations (WUA) for water, power and sanitation. Each ward can decide which agency they would like to contract the service to. Storm water drains can be used by WUAs to harvest rain. For collection of garbage, they could either have an agreement with an NGO, do collection themselves, or contract only transport and disposal.

The book suggests the role of the government should be as a regulator and not as a deliverer of services. The proposals should trigger a debate. More talk could force the government to re-examine its labyrinthine departments, agencies, boards, schemes and programmes, and agree there is room for improvement.



18 researchers, 8 interns, 3 months

It took eighteen researchers, eight interns and three months to piece the data for this handbook. They trekked from one department to the next identifying officials who would give the information they sought. Often phone numbers and addresses were wrong.

Officials did not always know what data their department had, or could not corroborate it. There were departments which had four different names. Centre for Civil Society applied the Right to Information Act four times, once to get the Delhi government's Annual Report.

Parth J Shah, President of CCS says the government should publish all relevant information and place it on a website, rather than put the onus on citizens.

CCS has some useful tips for NGOs seeking government data:

Identify the right official. The people who know are often the busiest. It is important to track them down. Normally, three or four visits are needed.

Bigger departments are easier. Government departments which deal with power, water, transport are more forthcoming with data. They are in touch with citizens and familiar with inquiries. The problem arises with smaller departments and agencies.

Multiple sets of data. Departments sometimes provide different data on the same subject. Corroborate your data from other sources, for instance the Census of India is a good source. Several NGOs also conduct independent surveys and these can be useful for checking conflicting data given by government departments.

Use data which is readily available. For instance, CAG reports and Inquiry Commissions set up by the government have lots of information. Departments are however not always ready to release reports of Inquiry Commissions.

Sadhya, Sadhan aur Sadhna

ANUPAM MISHRA

AT the very outset I must confess that these three Hindi words are difficult to translate. They represent the means, the ends and a kind of penance. I did not choose this title to score a point or satisfy my ego. I chose it because all NGOs, their coordinators, workers, generous funding agencies—whether *desi* or foreign—and people's movements, regardless of size and reach, should ponder over these three words.

A debate rages over the question of funding. It gets particularly stormy when it comes to foreign funding. Invariably the debate centres on the ends and the means. Perhaps there would be some clarity if we stopped for a moment to consider *sadhna* or penance as well. For only penance will tell us what the people really want. And, when we know that and direct our energies at achieving it, the means and the ends will fall in place.

In my opinion the source of funding is not very important. The money can be raised from the local village, *mohalla* or city. It could be sent across the seven seas. There can be divergent opinions on the best sources of funding.

What is more important is the outcome. The end result must be what we the people want. Apart from a few exceptions we don't have a clear idea of what we wish to achieve. NGOs or civil society movements keep shifting their focus.

Most of us will recall at one time social forestry fetched a high price on the environment stock market. Funding came from four corners of the globe and we rounded up a few million dollars. The best among us started implementing social forestry projects without first debating what precisely was "unsocial forestry".

And then suddenly this flag was brought down. In its place, one fine morning, the brand new flag of wasteland development was unfurled. This time, too, nobody cared to define wastelands. A lot of money, energy and time were spent by eminent members of society in the wasteland development venture. Initially, a small department in the central government handled the idea. It was replaced by a new ministry. Lots of NGOs, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, began doing wasteland development.

But like its previous avatar, wasteland development died in its infancy. There were no condolence meetings to mourn the death of this "marvellous" scheme and we soon started celebrating the birth of a new movement called watershed development.

This programme has been translated and adapted into various languages. In Hindi-speaking states, watershed development is called "Jalagam Vikas". In Maharashtra, it is termed "Panlot" and elsewhere it is called "Pandhal". Despite the *desi* badge, the programme does not touch our hearts.

For the moment, our best NGOs are putting their most talented people, from urban and rural areas, into developing a few watersheds here and there. Nobody knows when we will begin shedding tears over this programme.

Running neck and neck with watershed development is Joint Forest Management (JFM). Here, too, some NGOs are ahead of the rest in providing a *desi* touch. So JFM is called "Sanyukt Van Prabandh" in some regional dialects. Grassroots NGOs who object to the Sanskritised word *sanyukt*, opt for the more colloquial *sanjha*. But essentially JFM is a programme and its end result has been dictated by the World Bank or some similar institutions.

I do not wish to narrate all this to poke fun. These are serious matters. If our society really needed the JFM programme, we should have first seriously reflected on the administration of forests by individual agencies and their managers. Who were they? How long did their authority last? Whom did they snatch these forests from? How did the country's forest cover dwindle to 10% when it should have been 33%? We have paid a price for deforestation. Floods in Orissa, Chattisgarh and Bihar and drought in 18 states are the net outcome.

The people who mismanaged these forests and the political leadership which protected them should have apologised publicly before JFM was launched.

We must also remember who the true managers of the forests were, how they were dispossessed by the British and looted of their green gold.

It is much the same story with programmes in areas other than the environment. Numerous plans exist on women's empowerment, child rights, reproductive health and formation of self-help groups. Every NGO implements the same programmes, regardless of political ideology. The leftists, the rightists, the Gandhians, the missionaries, even the RSS display a rare consensus. The monoculture of ideas is alarming. It seems there is an invisible mint somewhere in the West, which constantly coins new terms for us to fill our pockets with.

So should we believe everybody has sold out? No, there are some heroes who have bravely fought the idea of monoculture. After the Emergency in the 1970s, a few drove out Coca-Cola and IBM.

To commemorate this great victory, a cold drink called Double Seven was introduced. But Coca-Cola re-emerged, in the garb of our heroes, drowning Double Seven and our original champions. This is a beautiful example of co-existence.

So this debate on ends and means, funds from here and there, will lead us nowhere. The answer is to find a good mission and for that to happen we have to look within. Once we have our own ends, the means will follow.

A small example can be narrated from a village near Jaipur. In this drought prone area a routine NGO constructed a tank to harvest water. It invested some 30,000 rupees in the project. The tank narrowed the distance between the NGO and the community. At one of the meetings an elderly person suggested constructing a small temple and a *chhatra* on the embankment of the tank. But the cost of constructing the *chhatra* and the temple was not in the NGO's budget.

The NGO explained that it could get a grant for the tank but not for the *chhatra*. But the elderly person politely replied that the village was not asking for money from the NGO. Within a month the villagers collected the amount and the *chhatra* was constructed.

Most of our NGO friends will consider the money spent as wasteful expenditure, but for the villagers this is the difference between a house and a home. They need water structures that belong to them. And when they own something they protect and maintain it. Otherwise it's a kind of PWD structure.

We should not forget in this land of 500,000 villages and few thousand towns there were two million water structures before the British came. There was no water mission, no watershed development programme. Society created these structures using its own resources. There was no Zilla Bank or World Bank at that time, but the Village Bank. There was an invisible and invincible structure to carry out this job in a country that has a Cherrapunji as well as a Jaisalmer.

Now we talk about people's participation and PRA – Participatory Research Appraisal. We get funds from within and outside, but our aims and ends do not represent the needs of the people. We keep on pushing a different agenda. If we were to invest half our energy in understanding our society, we would generate enough means from within. But that requires a kind of penance.

Anupam Mishra works for the Gandhi Peace Foundation in Delhi



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