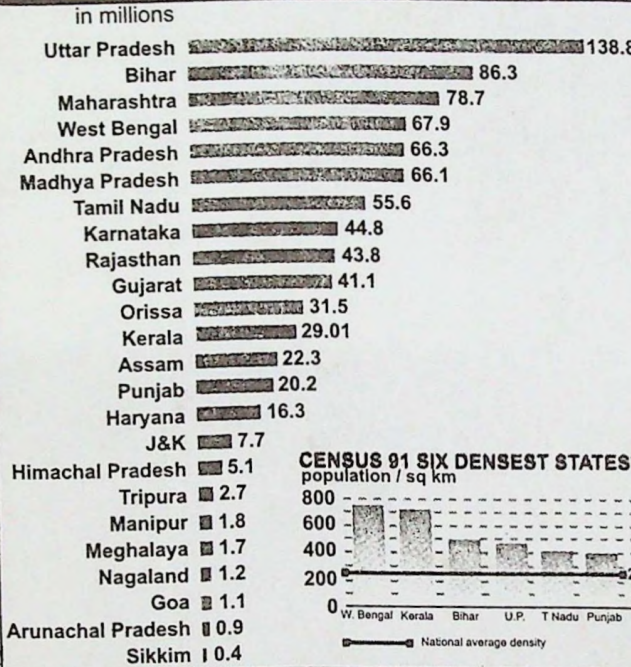


MARCH - 2000

News You Can Use a development mediascan

CENSUS 91 POPULATION OF STATES



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Deccan Herald 12 March 2000

**A monthly publication from
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NEWS YOU CAN USE (NYCU) is a specially formulated development mediascan directed to meet the specific information needs of NGOs. Published on a monthly basis, NYCU presents a comprehensive compilation of selected media clippings of news that could be direct use to NGOs working at the grassroot level. This publication can also serve as a ready reckoner for development news on a monthly basis.

NYCU includes a selection of newsitems/feature/articles/editorials/ letters from leading national newspapers and newsmagazines. Each newsitem carries the source, name of publication and date of publication. The compilation is categorised under appropriate heads with an index for easy reference.

This issue : Rs. 30.00

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'2001 will be Women's Empowerment Year'

By Anita Katyal

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Finance minister Yashwant Sinha appears to have a slogan or a scheme for every budget.

In his last budget speech, Mr Sinha had proposed declaring the year 1999-2000 as the "Year of the Gram Sabha" as he dwelt at length on the need for making panchayats effective bodies in the implementation of the schemes in rural areas.

This year round, he announced the launch of a new scheme — the "Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana" — to undertake time-bound programmes in rural areas like provision of housing, drinking water and roads. Added to this is promise of observing the year 2001 as "Women's Empowerment Year."

Last time, the finance minister had proudly announced the launch of the National Human Development Initiative (NHDI) which sought to empower the more vulnerable sections through access to five basic requirements — food, health care, education, employ-

ment and shelter.

The emphasis on the rural poor remained quite pronounced in this budget as well as Sinha promised to improve the quality of their lives, listing five critical areas in this connection: health, education, drinking water, housing and roads.

And if last year, the minister announced the replication of Madhya Pradesh's education guarantee scheme (EGS) at the national level, this time Sinha allocated Rs. 350 crore for an ambitious and revamped scheme — the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan — for achieving universalisation of elementary education.

The government's priority focus on elementary education was quite clear as the outlay for this sector has been raised from Rs.2,931 crore to Rs.3,729 crore.

Though the overall budget for elementary education has gone up, the budgets of several schemes considered essential for achieving universalisation of elementary education have been reduced. The midday meal scheme, for instance, was introduced to improve enrolment and retain children in schools.

Yet, the allocation for this scheme has been slashed from Rs 1,500 crore to Rs 1,090 crore.

Human resource development (HRD) minister Murli Manohar Joshi has, on several occasions, declared his commitment to make the right to elementary education a fundamental right. But the budget allocations indicate the government is backtracking on this promise for even the token amount of Rs five crore provided for in the last budget has been dropped with no provision being made under this head. The ministry has estimated if the states are to be helped to make education a fundamental right, it will cost the exchequer Rs 136,000 crore.

Higher and secondary education, on the other hand, continued to be given step-motherly treatment with the allocation for it being increased only marginally from Rs 4380 crore to Rs 4650 crore. Even the token amount of Rs 20 crore provided for in the last budget for the upgradation of libraries and laboratories has been scrapped. The budget also reflected the government's shift towards vocational education as the outlay for this sector has been hiked from Rs five crore to Rs 35 crore. With IT being a buzzword, the budget proposals have hiked the allocation for computer education in schools from Rs five crore to Rs 35 crore.

Like his last budget speech, Mr Sinha spoke at length on providing succour to the rural poor with a special allocation of Rs 5,000 crore for the newly-announced "Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana" which is the used for improving infrastructure in the rural areas. The specially-created department of drinking water supply in rural areas has been allocated Rs 2,100 crore as compared to Rs 1,807 crore.

However, this hike seems to be at the expense of the other rural development schemes as the budgetary allocations for the department of rural development has come down from Rs 7,237 crore to Rs 6,778 crore. For instance, the outlay for rural employment has been reduced by Rs 1074 crore while the amount for rural housing has come down from Rs 1,659 crore to Rs 1,539 crore.

The Times of India
01 March 2000

The Indian Express
01 March 2000

Rs 5,000 crore for rural uplift



New Delhi, Feb 29: A new Rs 5,000 crore scheme — Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana — is being launched

to undertake time-bound programmes to fulfil basic rural needs of primary education, health care, drinking water, housing and rural roads.

Presenting the Union Budget for 2000-2001 in the Lok Sabha today, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha said of the Rs 5,000 crore provided separately in the budget for the scheme, Rs 2,500 crore would be earmarked for launching a nationwide

Stating that there would be a new initiative in elementary education, Sinha said the scheme for its universalisation would be called 'sarva shiksha abhiyan.'

The scheme would enable enrolment of all children by 2003 and expansion of the district

primary education programme to cover the remaining districts in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa and Gujarat, he said.

Besides, the National Literacy Mission (NLM) will be revamped so that literacy rate could be raised to 75 per cent

The National Literacy Mission will be revamped so that literacy rate could be raised to 75 per cent by 2005'

by 2005, he said.

He said the plan allocation for elementary education had been increased from Rs 2,931 crore to Rs 3,729 crore.

Sinha said the outlay for the department of drinking water supply in the Ministry of Rural Development had been enhanced to Rs 2,100 crore from Rs 1,807 crore and it was proposed

to cover around 60,000 habitations and 30,000 schools in the next year.

The reproductive and child health programmes would receive Rs 1,051 crore against an allocation of Rs 695 crore in 1999-2000, he said.

For rural housing schemes, he said a provision of Rs 1,710 crore has been made.

As many as 25 lakh dwelling units will be constructed in the rural areas next year under the 'housing for all' scheme, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha said today.

He said Rs 92 crore was provided for construction of one lakh houses under the credit-cum-subsidy scheme for families with an annual income below Rs 32,000 per annum.

The minister in the Budget said the National Housing Bank would provide re-finance for construction of 1.5 lakh houses under the golden jubilee rural housing finance to construct about nine lakh houses in rural areas. PTI

Reducing population growth

By Devaki Jain

BY A curious and perhaps auspicious coincidence, the Government of India released its Population Policy 2000 on the same day that the Indian Association for the Study of Population was closing a three-day colloquium, The Millennium Conference on Population 2000. Over the three days, demographers and social scientists took a close look at the changes taking place at the ground level on the Indian development landscape, especially as it impacted on the quality, the size and other aspects of the composition of the population.

The perspectives were varied — the population in relation to the natural resource base and the economic situation; the profile of poverty and unemployment/employment; the social relations between gender, between castes; the disparity between regions and between categories of people. One view was that the relationship between availability of food and the growing population is not alarming. In fact, a couple of speakers suggested that a growing population acts as a stimulus to growth. Another view was that poverty was neither on the increase nor was consumption expenditure across different income deciles changing significantly. A third finding was that every forecast of population size made in the last 50 years had been disproved by India's population growth — it was in each case lower than that what was anticipated. The argument was that there was a downturn across the board in the rate of growth of India's population largely due to a lowering of the birth rate.

Some of the papers broke new ground, showing that, more than any other factor, geographical location had been the strongest determinant of a particular fertility rate. This could be tautological in that certain areas in India have entrenched convergence of poverty, unemployment, high rates of mortality and high rates of fertility. But the paper had gone beyond the "black heart of Mother India", and found that by and large these rates were locationally constant despite education, better health aspects etc.

A paper from even a socially-advanced State such as Kerala showed that more than half the posts of service providers in public health centres were unfilled. This

and other papers — which described the condition of the public health system, the reasons for unmet needs for contraception, and for birth rates differentiated between castes and classes — revealed an alarming neglect of the health and social development services sector. The Conference called for greater Government attention to public health, both in terms of financial support and in terms of streamlining delivery.

Almost all the detailed papers dwelt on what is called gender. The difference between men and women in terms of literacy or health, mortality or morbidity. What emerged was that ultimately the real issue

is social and political matters, so that they may then translate this into power in the domestic theatre.

Community health groups are able to bridge the various sectoral and departmental and sub-departmental divides which plague the health delivery system. What is needed is rationalisation of financial assistance patterns with a greater emphasis on untied funds being given for achieving some specific outcomes — such as reduction in female infant mortality, increase in enrolment of girls into secondary schools, and reduction of maternal mortality. This could be a better monitoring system than expenditure heads or targets.

The national population policy needs to have a deeper look at administrative structures and procedures, apart from finances for public health and devolution of powers to communities and local governments.

between men and women was one of power. Men by and large still had control over women's lives. In a study on violence against women most respondents suggested that the prime cause was disobedience of male authority. It also emerged that across class, caste, location, differences in awareness, education, income levels, and availability of contraceptives, women could not fulfil their need or desire for contraception because of male authority. This inhibition of women's reproductive choice pointed to the importance of shifting power, giving women the capacity to say no. This power seemed even more relevant given the AIDS epidemic.

Empowerment of women will require collective affirmation of their rights which can be translated into their presence in structures of power, structures which have control over finance. Money is associated with power and it was pointed out that in the panchayati raj institutions women hardly had any access to spending power since all the social development schemes were ultimately delivered by functionaries of the departments. The need is for institutional arrangements for enabling women to have power in society, power in finan-

Other alarm bells were rung throughout the conference, calling attention to the macro-economic policy and its neglect of social development as well as environment and food security; and how this would impinge on the quality of the population and social justice.

Interestingly, the new population policy document released by the Government details the need for increasing funding for and improving delivery of health services. It focusses on devolving this power — to deliver, manage and hold accountable — to the local governments and on the need for human resource development — orienting and training service providers, linking them to the new approach which is target free and underlines reproductive health. The policy moves away from the incentive-disincentive approach.

One of the problems with Indian public opinion and the media is that there is a knee-jerk reaction to public statements. If the policy had brought in the ugly clauses of conditionality or of technologies of contraception which are dangerous, such as invasive contraceptives, there would have been an uproar. On the other hand, when there is a policy statement which renege-

tiates the approach and excludes conditionality and exclusion, many newspapers labelled it a population policy without teeth, knowing fully well that population policies with conditionalities put their teeth into the worst-off and the most powerless. Another Indian, and perhaps international, fallacy is that a policy statement is required on every issue and that national structures with the Prime Minister leading them will give it the importance, money, political and social support to see it through. This has never been the case. Such structures which have the Prime Minister in the chair have invariably found themselves hampered in performance or in speed of action as the Prime Minister's time is scarce.

The one advantage of making a declaration like the national population policy is that it might set an ethic or an approach which could be used by advocacy groups as a peg to critique and deconstruct regressive policy approaches taken by some of the States. Since this is a State subject, the influence of the Central Government is limited. However, it might trigger the energy of public opinion to remove the blots from some other State-level policies which are using ideas such as restrictive entry, knowing very well that it not only discriminates between classes, but it has the most minimal impact on fertility.

The national population policy needs to have a deeper look at administrative structures and procedures, apart from finances for public health and devolution of power to communities and local governments. If it is to have a dramatic impact, steps must be taken, initially in the States with the highest rates of reproduction, to lay a base of social and economic security for the poor, to create institutional arrangements for women's empowerment, and to set up auditing frameworks.

Instead of once more playing football with the population policy, it would be wise for both the state and civil society to address how it can be worked and join forces to ensure, in the national and State-level budgets, investments in public health and the use of the community approach which has worked well in India.

(The writer is member of the Swaminathan Committee on population policy)

A woman's work is never done

Women's work is becoming visible. On the first International Women's Day of the third millennium which falls on March 8, one of the most proud achievements of the women's movement worldwide, is that women are not only emerging from the more restrictive aspects of homes, they are finally successfully asking for recognition of their economic productivity within their homes.

In 1993, the World Bank released a revised 'System of National Accounts,' worked on jointly with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU). The 1993 revision recommended, for the first time, that production of goods for household consumption be included in the measurement of national economic output. This accounting system has been supported by the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC).

With the revised accounting system, the World Bank not only admitted to having ignored the vast army of the faceless creators of wealth in households worldwide, for generations, it acknowledged that wealth includes goods beyond commerce.

The UNSC commented that the new accounting system would ultimately provide planners and policy makers "with a complete picture of ... important activities ... outside the production boundary."

If national governments compute the value of such activities, the officially reported level of global wealth would jump significantly. The first country to undertake such an exercise was Germany (in 1994), which found -- predictably -- that the main creators of household wealth are women.

According to the revised 'System of National Accounts,' measurement of the value of household products that do not



enter the marketplace may be computed either by time or by comparable market rates for the same production.

A compilation of scattered national studies on time-use, by the UN Secretariat in 1993, found that, overall, women worked longer hours than men, but were paid for less.

UNDP reports show that while women in the USA put in an average 56.4 hours of work a week, against 59.5 hours by men, they were paid for just 24.5 hours, against men being paid for 41.3 hours.

In Lithuania, women put in 72.2 hours of work a week but are paid for 47.5, while men work for a total 66.6 hours every week and are paid for 50.6.

Indicators for Japan show as retrogressive a trend as the backward Central Asian country: women work 46.6 hours a week and are paid for 19.5, while men work for 43.6 and are paid for 40.8.

The country with the best record (for 1986) was the former Soviet Union, where women were being paid for 56% (38.5 hours) of their total weekly working hours (68.6) against 75% (49 of the total 65.1 working hours) for men. Surveys (quoted in the UN Secretariat compilation) have shown that men least share responsibilities in preparing meals and in childcare, participating more in shopping and other housework, where they do share household responsibilities. This, in fact, points to one

significant lack in the revised 'System of National Accounts' -- the exclusion of production of services for the household. Intra-household services, especially childcare and care for the elderly, provided generally by women, have real-time economic value. The same services are marketed by private and government organisations. Yet, these have not been rated for accounting purposes by the World Bank and its partners.

(The Women's Feature Service)

The Observer

05 March 2000

HOURS PER WEEK OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY		Paid	Unpaid	Total	Hours per week of housework	Total work hours per week
BANGLADESH	Age 15+	14	3	22	31	33
	Men	36	3	41	5	46
INDIA	Age 15+	28	7	35	34	69
	Men	43	4	47	10	57
NEPAL	Age 15+	16	17	33	42	77
	Men	29	12	41	13	54

Source: Compiled by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat

MAHESH BENKAR

Banking on illiterate women

ADITI KAPOOR

KURNOOL, ANDHRA PRADESH: She may be illiterate but she is a competent executive of a commercial bank.

Nagalakshamma, founder president of Bhramaramba Mahila Cooperative Banking Society, is giving the local branches of the State Bank of India and four rural banks stiff competition. During the last five years, government banks have given loans to just 421 of the 4,000 families officially categorised as living below the poverty line (BPL) in the district. In the same period, Nagalakshamma's bank has given loans worth almost Rs. 50 lakhs to over 730 poor families. The recovery rate is a whopping 98 per cent.

Nagalakshamma, resident of Talamudapa village, has worked hard to set up and operate this bank that is best described as a financial institution of the women, for the women and by the women. Registered under the State's Mutually Aided Cooperative Society Act, 1995, on August 15, 1998, the bank has 2,400 women members. Only women sit on its 22-member Board and banking operations are handled by an all-women staff.

"We wanted to create our own *Kamadhenu*," said Rehmabi, the bank's treasurer. "Commercial banks are like huge boulders. It is impossible to push them to give us loans. We had been borrowing from local moneylenders who charge anything between 48 and 60 per cent as interest. Worse, we have to do their household work for free and send our children to tend their cattle. All our energies go towards repayment."

The seeds for the Bhramaramba bank were sown in 1995, when poor women in 22 villages of the Midthuru mandal (administrative block) were encouraged to form thrift and micro-lending self-help groups. This social mobilisation initiative, part of the United Nations Development Programme-funded South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP) implemented jointly by the UNDP and the State government, has taken root in 20 mandals across the district of Kurnool, Anantapur and Mahabubnagar. The entry point is thrift and credit, but the pilot project has successfully demonstrated that rural poor, especially women and the landless, can be empowered through social organisation, skill development and capital formation to pull themselves out of poverty. People's institutions, or community-based organisations, have been key to the empowerment process.

Members of the self-help groups, each comprising 15-20 members, have internalised the concept of self-help. Many groups have perfected fund rotation mechanism, prioritisation of loans, fixing of repayment schedules and close monitoring of recoveries.

Sound management of group dynamics has led to asset creation and management at the household level. Take Parautamma of Krishtipara village, Anantapur. Advised by her group to take on lease 1.5 acres of land with a loan from the self-help group to grow high value betel leaf, Parautamma is well-off today. Her husband, earlier a drunk and a wife-beater, was convinced by the group to enter into partnership with an experienced betel grower. The husband has become a teetotaler and Parautamma has opened a fixed deposit in her 11-year-old daughter's name.

The Bhramaramba women have used their self-help groups to mobilise resources from the government. The district authorities have contributed Rs. 19 lakhs towards share capital from the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) wherein 20 per cent of the funds is earmarked for infrastructure development. Over Rs. five lakhs was mobilised from the women's savings in just a week. The fact that South Asia poverty alleviation programme is implemented by a project team comprising committed bureaucrats on deputation and private professionals working directly with the women has helped access to government agencies. Indeed, several village

F O C U S

organisations have evolved into rural financial intermediaries though Rehmabi pointed out that setting up the Bhramaramba bank was not a bed of roses: "Our cooperative is like a piece of paper with a stone (paperweight) kept on it. The paper indicates the huge amount of paperwork we had to do to set it up. The stone symbolises the bribes we had to pay and the influence we had to use."

The ability of women to take critical decisions has come to the fore in the whole process. For instance, the women of Bhramaramba bank discussed the issue of staff recruitment and concluded that "outsiders" could exploit the women. "We are illiterate," explained Manikyamma, a Board member. "We may also appear crude in our expression. Outsiders are not familiar with our norms and our culture. So we decided to recruit our educated daughters and daughters-in-law to run the bank." Subbalaxmi, 21, a commerce graduate, is the cashier-cum-accountant and Sushanti, 24, a trained graduate teacher, is manager. Anuradha, with an intermediate (class XII) qualification, is employed as a field officer.

Significantly, the recruitment process mirrored that of any nationalised bank - only it

was more transparent. Candidates - 47 had applied - were asked to appear for a written test and interviews. Apart from assessing their English, general awareness and skills to undertake bank-related operations, the candidates were questioned on their understanding of self-help groups. The selected candidates have paid security deposits and submitted their educational certificates in original to the Board as an insurance against quitting the job without any notice. "We members have paid for the staffs' training from our hard-earned savings and put our trust in them," said vice-president Khajabi.

The Bhramaramba bank is one of the successful outcomes of the UNDP-AP experiment which has initiated over 4,000 self-help groups, grouped at the village and mandal-level. There are about 430 village organisations. These community based organisations have become the foci of many government poverty alleviation schemes and private enterprise. For instance, village officers conduct house-to-house surveys to identify beneficiaries and form marketing cooperatives. They liaison with government functionaries and employ village youth as specialists on community health, livestock and education. They efficiently manage and utilise the micro capital assistance received from the project for productive enterprises. Most consumption needs are satisfied with collective SHG savings. The Bhramaramba members have utilised loans for animal husbandry (48 per cent), agriculture and allied activities (28 per cent) and for petty business (16 per cent).

The UNDP project comes to a close this year. The State government has plans to scale it up to six districts, excluding Kurnool, with donor funds, including from the World Bank. The Bhramaramba women display confidence. Manikyamma and Rehmabi have opted to supervise the bank's overall functioning and have been trained for this. They are equipped for interface with outside agencies. "We have the grounding and the self-confidence now to articulate our concerns to anyone, anywhere," said Venkatnarsimha, 58, member of the loan appraisal committee. "We are united by our purpose so we are able to make our voice heard."

Venkatnarsimha and many other members have set their eyes on the forthcoming panchayat elections this March. "We have gained a lot of experience in handling big-wigs while setting up this cooperative," said Rehmabi. Mehbubi, the bank's secretary, added, "We have gained the confidence to ask for benefits due to us and to pull ourselves out of our poverty." ■

The author is a freelance journalist who writes on development issues.

The Hindu
05 March 2000

In His Own Tribe

TWENTY-SEVEN years ago, on a chilly December day, Baba Amte and some of his associates pitched a tent in the forest of Bhamragarh, in Maharashtra's tribal region of Gadchiroli. The surroundings were hostile, infested as they were with reptiles and man-eaters. There was no electricity, and no motorable road. But the indomitable Baba decided to make friends with the inhospitable terrain so that he could work for the Madia Gonds, the tribe that inhabits this corner of the country.

But before long, Baba Amte had to leave for London to be treated for spondylitis. Yet, today his now-famous Lok Biradari Project (LBP) at Hemalkasa has achieved the goals he had set for himself. His success in *absentia* was made possible by his doctor son Prakash and daughter-in-law Manda, who have helped change the face of the Madias.

Today, LBP has become a pilgrimage centre of sorts for those with humanitarian instincts. It has a well-equipped hospital which caters to over 40,000 patients from 1,000 villages every year, a sprawling school building, a community hall and a small zoo. Recognition has come gradually but surely and now even the principality of Monaco has issued a postal stamp with a picture of the Amte couple.

It took an arduous journey of nearly three decades to get there. From reclaiming the forest land for agriculture to winning the superstitious tribals' trust, the Amtes had to bear with innumerable problems. "During the monsoon, no vehicle could go beyond

Nagepalli, which was LBP's base camp. So, we had to walk nearly 60 km into the forest to reach Hemalkasa," recalls Sadhanatai, Baba's wife. "No one has suffered like Prakash and Manda," she adds.

Prakash had to skip his studies midway to join LBP in 1974. His wife Manda, then a lecturer at Nagpur's Ayurvedic College, and Baba's daughter Renuka joined him. Leading an austere life, the team began its mission. Malaria, diarrhoea, tumours and animal bites were common among the Madias who had an average life-span of 50 years. Added to it was the exploitation by *Bhumkas*, the native quacks. In the midst of this, the Amtes started coaxing the tribals to go in for medical treatment. The couple even learnt the Madia dialect to win their trust. The turning point was when Baba Amte successfully treated a patient with burn injuries. Since then, an endless stream of tribal patients has been visiting the LBP Hospital. At times, the rush would force the Amtes to skip their sleep. And all this was undertaken mostly in the poor light of the hurricane lamp, because power came to Hemalkasa only in 1988. The spirit soon rubbed off on the visiting doctors from urban areas. Today, they also help by holding free medical camps at LBP, which has diversified into many areas, the most outstanding one being education. In 1976, Gopal Phadnis, a follower of Baba, set up a school. "It was difficult, as we had to go from house to house convincing the parents and children," he says. But his re-

lentless efforts paid off. From a modest 25 students, the school now has a strength of 485. And the crowning glory came when two students from the school, Kanna Madavi and Pandu Pungati, graduated as doctors, the first from the Madia community. What's more, the story of Kanna Madavi is the theme of a Hindi feature film shot recently in Hemalkasa.

Prakash and Manda now

have some respite as their doctor son Digant has taken over. Today, their project is bustling with activities ranging from teaching modern farming techniques to repair of hand-pumps and fish farming. Not to forget an informal court of justice that Amtes organise to solve the tribals' family disputes. With the Prakash and Manda's quest to win the trust of the Madia tribals has come a full circle.

The Indian Express
05 March 2000

After a dip, infant mortality rate is on the rise again

By Kalpana Jain

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: In contrast with the rosy predictions being made on the economic front, recent data reveals that India's infant mortality rate (IMR) is actually rising. After coming down to 72 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1996 and then 71 in 1997, the IMR—a crucial indicator of the population's well-being—climbed back to 72 in 1998, the latest year for which information is available. In some states like Kerala and Karnataka, the rise in infant mortality has been quite dramatic.

The plateauing of the all-India IMR at the 1996 level raises serious questions about the efficient implementation of programmes concerning the welfare of women and children. The infant mortality rate is an indicator of the social and health status of women and children in the country and a proxy

for the economic condition of a community. It is also a reflection of the availability of health services at the grass-roots level.

Until a few years ago, the results achieved on the infant mortality front had been positive. From a high of 139 during the early 1970s, the rate had declined sharply to 79 by the early 1990s. This was expected to go down further, especially with Kerala achieving a low IMR of 12. However, recent data suggests that something is going wrong.

Infant mortality in Kerala—India's best performing state in all social indicators—has jumped to 16 deaths per 1,000 live births. In Karnataka, the IMR has risen to 58 from a low of 53. Other states showing an overall increase are Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Orissa and Punjab.

The Times of India
05 March 2000

'Social uplift NEEDs a gender-sensitive approach'

By Partha Maltra
The Times of India News Service

LUCKNOW: Villagers continue to stay in the vicious cycle of penury, trapped in the intricate web of moneylenders and landlords. However, a silent revolution is sweeping UP — the instrument is micro-credit and micro-enterprise. To be precise, the concept of *Grameen* banks which has struck a chord with women.

Dasheri village in the Kakori block of Lucknow is a model village where residents have broken the stranglehold of moneylenders building self-help groups. Over 15 to 20 women from the village have been sensitised to form a self-help group bringing about a change in education, health and economics.

They pool in their savings collectively at the end of the month, which is then cycled by way of inter-loans among members of women's organisations. The loan repaid in easy instalments at a minimal rate of interest, boosts the principal amount.

The man bringing about this cultural revolution in UP's villages through women's emancipation while catering to market-driven forces is Anil Singh, a Fellow of the Ashoka Foundation, Washington, and chief executive of NEED (Network for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development), a non-government organisation. He wants to turn the hourglass of development upside down.

Development from the micro to

the macro is his mantra. "I am trying to implement the economic principle of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen," he says. His development module has received international acclaim, and plans are afoot to implement it in the Latin American countries of Chile and Mexico.

He and his wife, Pushpa Singh, development manager, NEED, have been selected to represent India at an international seminar in Berlin on economic empowerment of women. Significantly, NEED has formed self-help groups in over 32 districts in the state.

From ploughing the fields with his father in a remote village in Ar-rah district of Bihar to winning the prestigious Ashoka fellowship and

Best Citizen's award, life has come full circle for Anil Singh. A research fellow with the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, Anil spurned the glitter of the corporate world and strove to use his technical skills for social upliftment.

During his earlier stint with the IDBI block adoption project, he roughed it out in the difficult terrains of the Naxalite-infested Gaya district before he quit his job to form his own NGO (NEED) in 1995. "NEED has changed the traditional income generation process through a gender-sensitive approach to entrepreneurship linked to income generation for self-employment," he says.

Earlier, tea bags used to be imported from Calcutta at exorbitant rates and supplied to tea dealers. It was here that NEED tapped the opportunity for micro-enterprise training villagers to make tea bags from jute, thus creating scope for self-employment through resource generation. Now inter-state import has fallen and jute products is a flourishing micro-enterprise at Dasheri village in Kakori, where the women are making school bags, bottle covers, and travelling bags of jute and making profits.

Interestingly, the United Nations Fund for Women's Development New York, has made a film on the NEED model on women's empowerment and has strongly recommended implementation of the model in south-east Asian countries.

The Times of India
07 March 2000

Here illiteracy is not an obstacle

THEY can barely manage a few words of English. In fact, many have never even been to school but mention the words computer and cyberspace and some Indian slum children are completely at home. This is thanks to a unique experiment in computer literacy for slum children in northern India, initiated by Sugata Mitra, senior vice president of the prominent up-market computer education Institute, NIIT Ltd.

Mitra has won international recognition for his experiments in getting slum children, hooked to computers and the Internet, using "minimally invasive" techniques. "If we presume that basic computer literacy is a desirable thing, then it requires a lot less money to implement than what we earlier thought. But it also needs a totally different approach," said Mitra. In fact, he himself had not bargained for the tremendous

success that his programme achieved in northern India, including Delhi. "After three months of using computers, the slum children (many of whom don't attend school and have hardly any knowledge of English) were downloading MPEG3 files to play songs from the internet," he reported.

Mitra said a free-to-access computer had helped slum kids find their own way around cyberspace, despite seemingly unsurmountable odds like illiteracy and language handicaps. A computer was kept in a neighbourhood near a slum and children were allowed to access it through a touchpad.

Interestingly, they were not given any instructions and had to find their own way around. A video camera was fitted nearby, so that the moves of children could be monitored without their knowing it. Within minutes, the children were seen discovering the relationship between the

mouse and the screen, and moments later, they were found to be familiarising themselves with the internet. "That is eight-year-old Rajendra, the paanwalla's son. And the little girl by his side is his student," Mitra said proudly, pointing at a video clip. Showing immense ingenuity, the youths began to learn operations like clicking the mouse, cutting-and-pasting, viewing picture files and even surfing the internet and downloading music files within a few months. "Students reached the same level of competence they would have by spending two hours a day at a top-end computer training institute, paying a fee of Rs 4,000 to 5,000," he said.

Mitra also said that there was a "special relationship" between a computer and a child, which adults didn't seem to understand.

The Observer
07 March 2000

Frederick Noronha / IANS

'Now everyone in the village knows me by name'

By Anita Katyal
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: * *We were like birds in a cage but now we have been set free.*

* I used to do all the work at home and help in the fields, yet I had no identity of my own. Now everybody in the village knows me by my name.

* We have learnt there is strength in numbers.... if we stand together, we can fight all the injustices heaped on us.

* Nobody took us seriously - the village pradhan, the daroga or the BDO — all ignored us when we went to them with our problems. But all that is now changing.....

Truly, there is change in the air. Though not dramatic, nor a headline grabber, it is a slow and quiet transformation that definitely is underway in remote and far-flung villages. Women, who so far, had been diffident and withdrawn, are gradually shedding their earlier reticence and stepping out of the four walls of their homes to acquire an identity of their own.

Evidence of their newly-found confidence is on display in the capital as 1,400 women from Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have gathered to share experiences, and to debate and decide their future plans. In fact, the Bharateeyam Gram, where the participants are housed, crackles with energy as the women, high on their successes, narrate their stories — eagerly and passionately.

Bela from Chitrakoot district (UP) is so excited that she can barely stop talking about her experiences. "I used to be so ignorant, and barely stepped out of my house, but now I know where the BDO sits and where the Collector's office is located. If the village pradhan does not listen to our problems, I do not hesitate to go straight to the higher officials to lodge my protest," she says, stating her confidence stems from her involvement with the Mahila Samakhya programme, operating

in her village for over five years now.

The programme, initiated by the human resource development (HRD) ministry in 51 districts, seeks to empower women in rural areas, particularly those belonging to socially marginalised groups, mobilising them into *sanghas*. The effort here, say officials, is to enable women to move from a passive state where they accept their predicament to one where they become active agents in their own transformation.

The women explain how they discovered their inner strength since their involvement with the *sanghas*. For instance, they say it is no longer possible for anybody to short-change them by paying them less wages. "Now we are armed with information. We know what the minimum wage is and demand it without hesitation," says Gyana from Sitapur (UP). Earlier, the pradhan would bring in cheap labour from neighbouring villages to work on government projects. "This is absolutely illegal. we fought against it and battled it out to ensure that the work was allotted to our villagers and that they were paid their rightful wage," she adds proudly.

Hadisan from Muzaffarpur, Sarsoon from Sitamarhi and Kashmira from Rohtas (Bihar) are equally excited about their newly-acquired powers. They tell you about the high incidence of violence against women in their villages and how they managed to bring rapists to book, take on families found harassing their daughters-in-law for dowry and husbands who deserted their wives. Sarsoon proudly narrates how her 15-year-old daughter fought off an eve-teaser as she had been trained in karate. Not willing to let matters rest there, Sarsoon virtually forced the village into holding a meeting where the mukhiya and the eve-teaser were forced to sign a bond of Rs.50,000 to insure against recurrence of such incidents.

'Recognise women as equal partners'

MUMBAI: "Only when women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge," Baha'u'llah, founder of the Bahai faith, has observed.

International Women's Day will be observed the world over on March 8. While this celebration of womanhood might appear to be a contemporary concept, a glimpse into the writings of spiritual thinkers and the texts of different faiths reveals that a celebration of this kind is just a reiteration of what several scriptures have emphasised—the need to accord equal status to women.

The Holy Koran, for instance, has compared woman's role in the family or society to that of a rib in the human body. It further explains that men and women are equal before God and that the roles of both complement each other.

The rights and responsibilities of both are equal and balanced in their totality.

The Bahai faith, too, gives considerable importance to equality of the sexes. Baha'u'llah has said that society must reorganise situations to give practical expression

to the principle of equality between men and women. He said, "The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged, pre-requisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population."

Feminine qualities like compassion, co-operation and empathy have been described as extremely crucial in creating a peaceful, just and sustainable world civilisation. Jesus Christ, in his teachings, has described both sexes as equal in honour and grace and has said that both are endowed with equal gifts and responsibilities.

Although treating women with respect is important, they must also be treated as equals. Although women have been given due recognition in our texts, society as a whole still needs to recognise their social, economic and personal worth as equal to that of men.

The ultimate recognition of women, some say, will be when there is no need to celebrate a woman's day to reinforce their identity and status in society.

—Roli Srivastava

The Times of India
07 March 2000

The Times of India
07 March 2000

Towards new directions

TECHNICALLY, since the National Population Policy 2000 is a policy statement of the present Union Government, it does not apparently have to be approved by Parliament. However, to ensure wide support, the Government intends to place it for discussion before Parliament. This has been delayed by the intervention of the Union Budget, the political scramblings in Bihar, and the furore in Parliament over the RSS issue. Now, however, with the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister having stated that the State would focus on introducing disincentives targeted at "specific groups and communities which have a higher rate of growth of population", population policy is once again the focus of attention.

Disincentives

The Union Government's National Population Policy (NPP) has been keenly awaited by many in part because of the concern over the last few months, while it was being drafted, that it might contain electoral or other disincentives like those that the Uttar Pradesh Government appears to want to impose. Such disincentives would once again open up a Pandora's box of ethically questionable practices. The Government of India (in a remarkable consensus with the other members of the United Nations) firmly repudiated such practices in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. It is now well known among population scientists that most disincentive schemes have had only marginal impact on fertility, and in some cases have been counter-productive. Governments therefore are now generally agreed that it is more effective as well as morally defensible to focus on education and voluntary measures instead.

The Uttar Pradesh Government and other state governments that may be tempted by ill-informed reasoning to coerce people through disincentives would do well to think again. Moving

towards disincentives would direct population programmes away from what is the heart of the problem in the country: poor quality and inaccessible health (including family welfare) services, the desperate need especially in States like Uttar Pradesh for effective public health including reproductive health services, and the gender inequality that leaves women with so little control over their health and lives.

Fortunately, the Union Government's own approach appears to move in a more humane direction. A reading of the short summary of NPP 2000 indicates there is little to fear in terms of imposition of disincentives. Apparently, the issue was heavily debated within the Union Cabinet itself, and also with key members of Parliament from other parties. The opening sentence of the NPP summary states clearly and unambiguously "...that the most effective development policies are those which are socially just and focus on the well-being of all people." This approach attempts to achieve a balance between the Government's stated goal of stabilising population growth and the need to make reproductive health care accessible and affordable to all, increase access to education, extend basic amenities such as safe water and sanitation, and empower women and increase their employment opportunities.

Laudable

Furthermore, the immediate objective of the NPP is clearly stated to be addressing existing and unmet needs for contraception, health infrastructure and personnel, and integrating the service delivery for basic reproductive and child health care. Insofar as "unmet need" is meant to focus on providing good quality, safe and effective family planning services to meet people's own child-bearing aspirations, this

By GITA SEN

approach is laudable. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare deserves to be congratulated for foregrounding an ethical approach at the very front of the document, and for side-stepping the pressures to bring in electoral or other disincentives which would only serve to distance ordinary people from the policy. We hope also that the NPP will be linked to a comprehensive health policy in an effective manner.

There is need, however, for an even stronger emphasis on promoting gender equality and equity in programmes; strengthening the quality of family planning and health services on a priority basis; ensuring serious implementation of a participatory approach based on community needs assessment; and training and motivating service personnel and their supervisors at all levels towards ensuring gender equity and service quality improvements.

Mechanism

The NPP also needs to ensure an inter-sectoral approach with a strong institutional mechanism, and a clear and time-bound mandate to evolve workable procedures and operational guidelines, and to ensure that such coordination between departments and ministries actually occurs; collaboration between NGOs and government should take the form of genuine and mutually respectful partnerships; increasing institutional deliveries rapidly is neither feasible nor desirable unless their quality and access can be dramatically improved; re-focussing on strengthening the capacity of traditional birth attendants and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) to provide safe services will be much more in line with ground realities and also with women's preferences; emphasising the "diversity of health care providers" should not lead to an uncontrolled legitimisation of the

large number of questionable health providers especially in the rural areas, and contraceptive technology and research give strong priority to women-controlled and safe methods.

It is essential that the National and State-level Commissions and especially the proposed Technology Mission within the Department of Family Welfare include those from within and outside the Government who are clearly committed to and knowledgeable about women's health needs and women's empowerment.

Responsive

To help NPP genuinely become a people's and particularly women's policy, it needs to move in a direction where people appreciate and respond to its goals and methods without a need for either disincentives or incentives. While many of the specific "promotional and motivational measures" are unobjectionable, there is reason to be seriously concerned about the following: the proposal to reward panchayats and zilla parishads for exemplary performance should not translate into ground-level coercion of (especially) poor women towards unwanted and unsafe sterilisations or IUD insertions...

The ethics of rewarding those "below the poverty line", whether through health insurance or anything else provided they accept sterilisation, is highly questionable. Poor people and especially poor women and girls need access to safe and good quality health services on a priority basis, placing conditionalities on this reinforces a mindset among providers and politicians that poor people deserve nothing better. Such measures should be dropped from the policy.

The writer is Professor, Indira Institute of Management, Bangalore, and Member, Steering Committee of Health Watch that monitors the National Population Policy.

Deccan Herald
07 March 2000

AIDS control programme to focus on men

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 6

THE FOCUS of the AIDS control programme this year will be on men, both young and old.

The theme of Year 2000 World AIDS Day campaign of the Joint United Nations Programmes on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) is "AIDS: Men make a difference." It aims at including as many men as possible in the war against AIDS.

Addressing the campaign launch ceremony here today, UNAIDS Executive Director Peter Piot emphasised the need for "striking a careful balance" between recognising how men's behaviour contributes to the epidemic and "pointing a finger at all men" and their actions.

Stating that the need of the day is to see men as part of a solution rather than the problem, Mr Piot said there were some very concrete reasons to work with men. These, he said, were the inadequate attention given to their health; their behavioral patterns which made them, as also women, vulnerable to HIV; unprotected sex between men, posing danger to both men and women; and, finally, encouraging fathers and future fathers to consider the likely impact of their sexual and drug-related behaviour on their partners and family.

Confident that working with men can make considerable difference in responding positively to AIDS, Mr Piot said it called for encouraging men to take care of their partners, ensuring that young men were empowered to live healthy

lives and respecting the human rights of each.

Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare N T Shanmugham, who was the chief guest at the function, welcomed UNAIDS decision to select India to launch the campaign.

Mr Piot said that India had been selected because of the complex nature of the epidemic here, which involved outbreaks among injecting drug users, and the extensive spread among female sex workers in several regions.

"Surveillance now shows that the epidemic has reached the critical point when it spreads out into the population; more than one percent of women attending antenatal clinics are positive in South," Mr Piot observed while hammering the need to shake off the complacency.

The launch of the campaign here is to signal the fact that a "significant difference" can be made to the numbers here.

The Minister said that men had a special role and responsibility in the control of the epidemic in this region because of their special status in society.

Later at a Press conference, Mr J V R Prasada Rao, Project Director of the National Aids Control Organisation (NACO), said that in the next five years the government hoped to cover at least 90 per cent of schools and colleges with sex education programmes.

At present, it is estimated that HIV has what is being seen as a "significant grip" on the urban population in India with over one in every 50 pregnant women testing HIV positive.

The Hindustan Times
07 March 2000

Rain-fed farming effective for eradication of poverty

Dhar (MP), March 4

THE WESTERN India Rain-fed Farming Project (WIRFP), aimed at enhancing the living conditions of communities living below poverty line, has opened new vistas of poverty eradication for the tribal communities living in the hilly areas along the borders of Madhya Pradesh.

Sponsored by the Department for International Development (DFID), United Kingdom and being implemented on a project cost of Rs 200 crore, the project was started in 1993 in three States, including Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

The central thrust of the Wirfp is to enhance the living conditions of the communities living below the poverty line and dependent on subsistence agriculture. Burdened with staggering debts, the communities are compelled to migrate each year or sell their labour in advance to contractors.

Says the project manager for the State, Mr P S Sodhi, "Prior to the initiation of the project, a campaign for rapport building was conducted in the MP villages." A group of community organisers here stain the villages in the nights

to interact with the villagers in order to understand their problems and prioritise them more closely."

These nights camps and video shows were organised in all the villages and the newly identified clusters of Dhar district, he added.

The programme has encouraged village-level planning, formation of saving and credit groups, skill development for local specialists, attention to the needs of women to help them secure a better deal

The government, before implementing the Wirfp, kept into consideration, the issues discussed in the various villages meetings including the repayment of loans, starting of income generating schemes, usefulness of Giriraja and Girirani poultry birds, seed

distributed under crop trial programme and boring of wells.

With the implementation of the project there has been a substantial improvement in agriculture productivity which was possible through improved crop varieties, water conservation and forestry projects.

Another achievement of the project was the cultivation of upland rice and chickpea, two of the main crops grown locally, and methods related to participatory plant breeding in which local farmers were involved jointly with agricultural researchers.

Apart from improving farming systems, the Wirfp has encouraged village-level planning, formation of saving and credit groups, skill development for local specialists, attention to the needs of women through creation of women-only groups and development of a migrant labour support programme to help them secure a better deal.

The co-operatives implementing the Wirfp programmes include the Krishak Bharti Co-operative Limited (Kribhco), Gramin Vikas Trust and Indian Farm Forestry Development Cooperative (UNFDC)

Website on women, child development

NEW DELHI, March 7 (DHNS)

The Minister of State for Women and Child Development, Ms Sumitra Mahajan, today (the eve of International Women's Day) launched a website of the Department of Women and Child Development (wcd.nic.in/mos). The website has all relevant information about the activities and programmes of the department, and also has a suggestion box.

Deccan Herald
08 March 2000

The Hindustan Times
05 March 2000

Women storm male bastion with sickles

By Narayana A
DH News Service

CHANNAPATNA, March 7

As a zipping Cleo or Maruti screeches to a halt near Madapura Gate, a 75-year woman emerges from behind a heap of fresh tender coconuts with a sickle in her hands. As thirsty people inside the car get out, the woman selects the tender coconuts, and cuts them with

dexterity and speed which matches that of a man in the same job.

She is Chennamma, and has been vending tender coconuts for the last 40 years under a tamarind tree on the roadside near Channapatna-Maddur border on Bangalore-Mysore highway.

For, a long time Chennamma was the lone woman to be spotted among the tender coconut vendors dotting the busy highway. Now, there are Jayamma, Lakshmi, and a few other women selling coconuts. For the travellers on this road who see only men vending tender coconuts, this stretch offers a difference, with women manning the small tender coconut vending points with a homely smile on their face.

Chennamma stepped into the business — which was a men's domain — forced by poverty. The income of her husband, an agricultural labourer, was not dependable. A mother of nine-children, Chennamma one day hit on this idea of offering tender coconut water to the thirsty travellers, and did not look back. Hardships continued with all her four sons meeting untimely death one after other, but the "tender coconut" business kept her going.

But, Chennamma is too old now to stand on the roadside for hours on end. One of her daughters-in-law, Yeshodamma, assists her now.

Following Chennamma's footstep, Jayamma started a similar business under another tamarind tree, just a stone's throw away. She has been there for the last 25 years. Jayamma's daughter Sudha and her sister have taken over from her now. "Is there a law that only men should sell tender coconuts?" asks Sudha when questioned why she has been into the business. "It was sheer poverty which forced us to try this out. Somehow, the idea clicked, and we have been able to supplement the family income a little," she said.

BUSINESS HIT: Over the years, the number of vehicles plying on Bangalore-Mysore highway multiplied rapidly. Does this not mean more business for these women?

Unfortunately not. Recent times have seen hundreds of restaurants and dhabas coming up on either side of the highway, luring travellers. KSRTC buses no longer stop near Chennamma's or Jayamma's *yelneer* shops. When buses used to stop earlier, Chennamma had sold 500 to 1,000 coconuts a day. Now, buses stop near big restaurants. People travelling in cars, says Chennamma, prefer to drink "coloured juice in bottles" (soft drinks). Now, each of these vendors is hardly able to sell 40 to 50 tender coconuts a

day on an average. Is it an example of globalisation-driven consumerism threatening the livelihood of self-reliant rural women?

Well, why not women like Chennamma, Jayamma, and Bhagyamma try to diversify and sell some soft drink bottles and cigarette packets along with the tender coconuts? They do not have a definite answer. They said they have not thought of it so far. They do not know how to go about it.

Tender coconuts are available right here, and there are people who supply them regularly, whereas they are unaware of modern business routes. "At present, this is the way I have been able to sustain the family," says Chennamma.

Deccan Herald
08 March 2000

ATTENTION NGOs

LOOKING FOR INCOME GENERATING
OPPORTUNITIES FOR POOR WOMEN?

WRITE TO
DIRECTOR
MINISTRY OF SSI&ARI
UDYOG BHAVAN
(ROOM NO. 254)
NEW DELHI - 110011

TO AVAIL BENEFITS UNDER THE SCHEME
"TRADE RELATED ENTREPRENEURSHIP ASSISTANCE
AND DEVELOPMENT (TREAD)" FOR WOMEN

- Provision for grant upto 1/3rd of the total project cost
- concessional loan from Small Industries Development Bank of India
- In order to participate in the Programme a NGO should:**
 - be a legal entity with a minimum registration of three years.
 - have experience in thrift and saving programmes with Self-Help Groups (SHGs)/individuals.
 - be engaged in entrepreneurship and income generation activities with women.
 - have basic infrastructure, qualified support staff and services to undertake micro enterprise development for women.
 - willing to mobilise poor women/SHGs, prepare project proposals on behalf of them, borrow from SIDBI to lend to SHGs.

davp 8022(98)99

The Pioneer
07 March 2000

Institute of Rural Management, Anand

HISTORY

Fiercely proud of its 'autonomy', the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA), which is neither affiliated to any university nor to the University Grants Commission (UGC), was established in 1979. Supported by the government of India, the Gujarat state government, the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) and the erstwhile India Dairy Corporation (IDC), the institute aims to promote sustainable, eco-friendly and equitable socio-economic development of rural people through the "professional management" of their institutions.

ADDRESS

Institute of Rural Management, Anand, 388001, Gujarat

AMBIENCE

Locating the campus is not difficult once you reach Anand. It stands out as much for its tranquility and perfectly manicured lawns as for its beautifully designed buildings. Squeaky clean roads wind their way through the 60-acre campus and any noise beyond the acceptable decibel level leads to raised eyebrows and pointed looks.

The atmosphere is low-profile, as though preparing students for the hard life ahead. "A management institute with a difference," says professor G. Krishnamurthi. "The ambience is, after all, created by students. Here you have those who want to change the way things are. We design tests to ensure that only those stay back who are prepared to spend years in remote areas with temperatures soaring to 46°Celsius, without electricity or running water."

VITAL STATISTICS

The aim is to create rural managers with appropriate ethics, help rural organisations professionalise their management, empower villagers through self-sustaining processes, and build rural management theories through action-oriented and problem-solving research. A major area of emphasis is public policies.

IRMA offers a two-year residen-

tial programme in rural management (PRM). Students have the option of completing the course either at a stretch or in two stages. They can opt for the certificate in rural management (CRM) at the end of the first year and rejoin the PRM within three years and complete the second year. Having successfully completed the second year, candidates receive the post-graduate diploma in rural management (PGDRM), recognised as

equivalent to a master's degree in rural management by the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) and approved by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). The programme offers flexibility to working executives sponsored by IRMA's client organisations. It comprises three aspects — classroom, fieldwork and management traineeship. While the first involves exposure to skills and knowledge in classrooms, the

other two focus on first hand experience of villages and rural organisations. As director Katar Singh says, "It is difficult but it helps you understand the real India, takes you there and gives you a chance to change it for the better." There are short-term refresher courses and management development programmes for practising managers. Also on offer is a six-week management appreciation programme.

WHO IS THE BOSS?

Professor Katar Singh, director

EASY TO GET THERE?

You must be a graduate in any discipline with a score of 50 per cent. You can also be an employee (including a trainee), of a co-operative or a development organisation and be sponsored by your employer. Candidates take the written test on English, quantitative techniques, analytical reasoning and social issues. Those who qualify are interviewed by the faculty at Anand. There are 27 examination centres, including Calcutta.

GLITTERING ALUMNI

Vidyanand Jha, professor at the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, Sanjay Tripathi, sales manager (east), Leo Mattel Toys, Gautam Roy of Mother Dairy, Ashvini Hiran of Hindustan Lever Ltd, Calcutta, Dipal Basu of GROFED, among many others.

CHEAP TO LIVE IN?

Not exactly. The entire programme costs about Rs 1,05,000. However, partial aid is available to a few candidates from low-income families under a merit-cum-mean-scholarship scheme.

CAMPUS NEWS

The 15-day campus recruitment programme draws almost 600 companies during March/April. Sports are popular, as is the Thursday Afternoon Seminar Series (TASS). *Jatra*, the seven-day festival, and *Terra Firma*, the institute's magazine, are other major areas of interest.

Flashback: Shankar Narayanan

THE WORLD BANK SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST ALMOST MISSED OUT ON A PLACE AT IRMA

It was a stroke of luck that helped Shankar Narayanan enrol for the course in rural management at IRMA in 1983. Having appeared for the written test and the interview, he received no subsequent intimation from the authorities. "I assumed I had not been selected and was ready to accept a pending job offer. But a senior IRMA student ran into my father and told him that rejected candidates always received a letter of regret. He followed it up and I soon received a telegram asking me to join the course. It turned out that the earlier call letter was lost in the post."

Narayanan, then a naive 20-year-old, liked the lush green campus, but, like a few others in his batch, was not sure what the course offered. "Some of us were from the voluntary sector, others looked on IRMA as a second rate management institute," he says. The course structure was similar to that at the IIMs but one had to spend two-and-a-half months on fieldwork, a month in a village and another one-and-a-half months with the dairy or oilseed sectors.

The classroom ambience was extremely informal. "I remember Dr Sanjeev Phansalkar, who taught us managerial analysis and communication.

He was a stern taskmaster but I think he taught us the most useful course in the syllabus. I also remember professor Mukesh Bhargava, who taught us to love marketing," says Narayanan. "We stayed in a hostel and were the first to move into the new campus. Earlier, students stayed at the NDDB campus. The mess was run by students like a co-operative," he adds. There was a lot of extracurricular activity. "We played carrom, cricket, volleyball and football. Some of us even broke our legs playing football," he says. Once he completed the course, Narayanan was selected for the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme and put in charge of Bharuch district. However, he kept coming back to IRMA every weekend. "It was to tell the faculty what I was doing and possibly to look for encouragement," he says. Narayanan feels while his theoretical grounding at IRMA was invaluable, the field experience gained during his first job was equally crucial. "Those going through the programme need not to feel a sense of emptiness at the end. Once we start on our jobs, what we have studied begins to make sense," he says. Indeed.



Avijit Ghosh

Anand Sundar
The Telegraph
08 March 2000

Centre urged to include 'disability' as a category in census

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Six per cent of the Indian population is estimated to be affected by disabilities. However, real numbers are not available as the census has not included disability as a category for data collection.

To protest against the non-inclusion of disability as a category in census, the Disabled Rights Group, an advocacy group of disabled and non-disabled people, took out a rally in the capital. Convenor of the group Javed Abidi said the decision of the census commissioner not to include disability as a category for data collection in the coming census had come as a big blow to the disability movement.

"Over 65 million people in the country are affected by various disabilities. We cannot afford to ignore this population. No country can ever progress or develop in the true sense leaving such a vast segment of the population behind," he said.

Disability was taken up as a category during the census exercise conducted in 1981. However, Mr Abidi said, the figure arrived at during the census was a mere 0.9 per cent of the disabled population and in the subsequent census the category was completely dropped because of the drawbacks in conducting such an exercise.

While an assurance was given to include the category during the census exercise of 2001, last December the advocacy groups for the rights of disabled people were told that this could not be done. Minister of social justice and empowerment Maneka Gandhi too had made a statement that census 2001 should incorporate the number of people with disabilities to ensure that a database was available to facilitate welfare planning for the deprived sections of the society.

Collecting data related to disabilities dates back to the very inception of the Indian census. In fact, the questionnaire of 1872, called the House Register, included questions not only on the physically disabled but also the intellectually disabled and people affected by leprosy. According to the disability rights group, this practise was discontinued after the 1931 census.

The reason for conducting the exercise during 1981 was that it was the International Year of the Dis-

Little Sweepers

Have you noticed how people respond to the little urchins in the train, who try to earn a few coins by taking the shirt off their backs and sweeping the floor with it? Given the record of the railways and the uncivic-minded pigs who travel on it, there's invariably plenty to clean up—mountains of peanut shells, orange peel, plastic bags that held chivda and chikki, paper packets that once held bhel, sandwiches, chips, and god knows what else.

Despite one's protesting that here are kids trying to earn an honest living, instead of stealing money or doing drugs, people don't get it.

No, they insist, the boys do it only for show, look at that one grape-seed under the bench, he hasn't cleaned it, the dishonest rascal. Or, he's raised so much dust, we can't breathe.

Does anyone have any suggestions? For one, I think the railways could initiated some sort of programme to pay these urchins for cleaning services—and the money could be raised by fining people for littering and spitting, instead of merely painting boards that



pompously proclaim 'CST is a plastic-free zone' or some such, right above a plastic litter pile.

The Times of India
06 March 2000

abled.

However, the scope of the exercise was limited to including categories like "totally blind, totally crippled and totally dumb." It left out categories such as mental disability, hearing impaired, speech impaired and visually impaired, Mr Abidi said.

The Times of India
09 March 2000

Welcome move

Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Women's Empowerment Maneka Gandhi's proposal to review the Juvenile Justice Act (JJA) to empower the Juvenile Board to hand over abandoned children to recognised institutions for rehabilitation through adoption has not come a day too soon. The Government needs to go ahead with the proposal because there is a general impression that a lot needs to be done to improve the adoption rate in the country. And this would be possible only by reviewing the JJA and streamlining the work of both the Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA) and the Juvenile Board. The JJA, in its present form, has several loopholes. These have come in the way of improving the rate of adoption in the country. According to Ms Gandhi, the new Act will have the provision that while declaring a destitute child as abandoned, juvenile boards at the Centre and in the States would have the authority to directly hand over such children to recognised institutions for their adoption. Adoption is a legal and legitimate activity with a social and humanitarian purpose. There are an estimated 30 million children in the country in the age group of 6-18 years living in conditions of neglect and destitution. The Government has to take effective steps to popularise adoption of these children so that the problem of destitution could be solved.

At the same time, voluntary organisations and philanthropists too should come forward to supplement the government's effort in tackling this gigantic problem. Very often poverty and societal attitudes of parents are exploited to make them part with their children. The tendency of foster parents to prefer boys instead of girls for adoption is a pointer to the prevailing attitude to the female child. Most unfortunately, some unscrupulous organisations are believed to be violating the norms and rules of adoption. Documents are reportedly forged about the babies being given in adoption. There have also been reports about child export rackets by fake welfare associations and some adoption agencies certified by no less than the CARA. The Government should step in and intensify efforts to identify the culprits, plug the loopholes and punish the guilty. Clearly, once an organisation is given a licence for facilitating adoption, there is also the need for continuous monitoring of the working of the organisation.

Deccan Herald
07 March 2000

'One maternal death every five minutes'

ONE WOMAN dies every five minutes from pregnancy-related complications which claim 1,21,000 lives every year in the country, experts said today.

The number of maternal deaths could be reduced significantly through proper training of midwives who work at the village level, they said at a seminar on Safe Motherhood in India here.

The major cause of maternal deaths in India are sepsis, haemorrhage, anaemia and obstructed labour, all of which are preventable, they said at the meeting organised by the White Ribbon alliance for safe motherhood — a group involving 23 organisations.

Highlighting the importance of midwives in rural areas, Indu Kapoor from an Ahmedabad-based NGO said the government should support 'dais' (midwives) who work at the grassroots level.

PTI, New Delhi

The Hindustan Times
08 March 2000

Managing weeds in cereals

WITH THE increasing spread of modern dwarf and semi-dwarf varieties of cereals coupled with high input oriented intensive agricultural practices, the weed problems have been aggravated considerably.

Investigation was carried out in India for the identification of herbicides for a wide range of crops under different agro ecosystems to supplement the traditional practices of hand weeding and economizing the production costs.

Considering the diversity of problems no single method of control whether it is manual, mechanical or chemical could reach the desired level of efficiency under all situations though the effectiveness of herbicides was more pronounced under assured irrigation.

This calls for a holistic approach to evolve integrated weed management packages for a cropping system as a whole.

Based on three decades of research, major components of IWM have been identified as off season village, stale seed bed technique through presowing village, maintaining optimum crop stand, use of improved tools and implemented, mixed or inter cropping system involving smother crops such as legumes and lastly supplemental use of herbicides at lower rates combined with manual weeding.

For developing an integrated weed management programme in maize based pulses in inter cropping system an experiment was conducted at Department of Agronomy, Agricultural College and Research Institute, Madurai during summer and Kharif seasons of 1998 by taking four intercropping systems viz., sole maize, maize + soybean maize + blackgram and maize + cowpea as paired row system.

The weed management methods adopted were pre-emergence application of alachlor 1.5 Kg ha⁻¹, metolachlor 1.25 Kg ha⁻¹ and metolachlor 1.5 kg ha⁻¹ and all herbicides were combined with one hand weeding on 30 days after sowing and these were compared with hand weeding twice on 20 and 40 days after sowing and unweeded control.

Among cropping system maize + cowpea system effectively checked the weed competition. All integrated weed management practices were more effective in controlling weed and increas-

ing the yield of maize and intercrops.

Among the IWM practices pre-emergence application of metolachlor 1.5 kg ha⁻¹ combined with hoeing on 30 days after sowing was found to be superior in controlling all category of weeds and recorded higher weed control efficiency of 84.0 per cent and increased the maize yield by 76 per cent over unweeded control.

Interaction between intercropping system and weed management practices was noticed. Among these, interaction maize + cowpea system and pre-emergence application of metolachlor 1.5 kg ha⁻¹ followed by one hand weeding on 30 DAS gave higher weed control, higher maize yield and net return to the farmer.

• S. Kannan, C. Ganache
& K. Vairavan.
The Hindu
09 March 2000

Women's participation has benefited politics: study

NEW YORK: Male politicians hold their tongues in the presence of a large group of female colleagues, a study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) revealed.

The study was presented in advance of the International Women's Day on Wednesday, which will be celebrated at the UN headquarters with meetings of various non-governmental organisations to advance professional careers of women.

"There has been a virtual elimination of sexist language," a respondent from a North American country told the study. "There used to be incidents in our Parliament where women MPs were called 'slut', 'bitch', 'baby'," she said, adding, "Once, a woman MP was laughed at for raising the issue of violence against women. There is still a tendency to discount the contribution when women raise issues of particular relevance to women."

According to the study, 86 per cent of the respondents said women's participation had changed the nature of politics by causing positive developments in both the form and the substance of political behavior as well as in the methods used and the result achieved.

Respondents from Western Europe said female participation in politics had "humanised" the political world. However, the study showed that 81 per cent of women interviewed believed that their perception of politics was different

from that of men and 92.6 per cent agreed that their participation would bring about changes in politics.

"Women's long march towards parity and a place in the political arena does seem to have made some important differences to society," the study said. A West African woman told the study that the qualitative effect of women's political action had forced men to acknowledge the role of women. "Women today are becoming actors and even leading actors on the political stage," the woman said.

Those interviewed for the study were not identified by names. The Geneva-based IPU, which groups most Parliaments around the world, gathered the data for the study from interviews with 200 women politicians in 65 countries.

"Women are, all in all, less adversarial and more consensus-driven (than men), seeking solutions to problems rather than scoring points," a Western European woman said.

The study quoted a respondent from the Pacific region as saying that women focussed more on community rebuilding, creating real security and opportunity for citizens.

It said women had four specific motives to enter politics: A natural interest in or a vision for society, the family background, the current political circumstances of the country or region and the desire to transfer locally-acquired experience to the national level. (DPA)

The Times of India
08 March 2000

Sound scheme

The controversy brewing in Kerala over the State government's plan to launch the "People's Police Scheme" from May is more a result of the government's failure to convince the Opposition of the merits of the scheme than of any negative aspect associated with it. The basic idea behind the scheme is sound. It is that there should be constant interaction between the people and the police at the lowest level and that there should be greater community participation in policing. The scheme envisages constitution of people's police committees at the ward level in panchayats, municipalities and corporations. The committee would have as its convener the head constable of the local police station and the prominent citizens of the area would be its members. The committee would meet regularly and the people can vent their grievances relating to crimes and the law and order situation in their locality at these meetings. Complaints against the police can also be made and it is expected that the committees would help to prevent crimes and to create legal awareness among the people. They can also help in identifying criminal elements in society and in preventing the outbreak of serious law and order situations if the plan is implemented effectively.

The plan is a positive and innovative one but the government has not been able to convince the Opposition of its bona fides. The Opposition parties have charged the government with trying to bring in "cell rule" by local CPM units and to establish control over the police. Politicisation of the police is a fact of life in any State, whichever party is in government and Kerala is no exception. The scheme should in fact be used as an attempt to reduce political interference in the functioning of the police. If enough safeguards are available to prevent the domination of the committees by members of any political party or communal or caste groups, the scheme can help in establishing a bridge between the police and the people and make policing more positive and easier. The alienation of the police from the community is one reason for its brutalisation and ineffectiveness. The Opposition in the State should try to plug any loopholes in the scheme and try to make it effective, rather than criticise and oppose it blindly on political considerations.

Deccan Herald
09 March 2000

Safe motherhood

● **NEW DELHI (PTI):** Speakers at a seminar on safe motherhood said with 1,21,000 women dying every year from pregnancy-related complications, the number of maternity deaths could be reduced through proper training of *dais* (midwives), who work at the village level.

The Telegraph
08 March 2000

IARI develops 4 high yielding rice hybrids

New Delhi, March 7

THE COUNTRY'S premier agricultural research centre Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) has developed four rice hybrids which will yield 30 per cent more than the best existing Basmati rice varieties.

The institute has been conducting trials for the last three years in different parts of the country. It is now ready to release them next month, IARI director Dr P.K. Singh told newsmen here today on the eve of Krishi Vigyan Mela, beginning in the Capital from tomorrow.

"Four Basmati rice hybrids namely Pusa RH10, Pusa RH12, Pusa RH18 and Pusa RH22 have established their overall superiority in the national hybrid rice trials," said Mr Singh.

These hybrids would have a yield advantage of about one tonne per hectare over the highest yielding check variety Pusa Basmati he added. "These hybrids have a potential for expanding our export market," he commented.

The institute recently released an

improved wheat variety HD2402 for the entire wheat growing belt of northern India which is suitable for cultivation under irrigated and very late sown conditions.

The variety is an early maturing one, resistant to rust and having tolerance to high temperature, Mr Singh said.

IARI has also developed another wheat variety HD4672 (Malva Ratna) which is suitable for rain-fed and limited water availability condition of central zone, Mr Singh said.

He said this variety was suitable for export and good for suji and noodles.

For spring and summer seasons, the institute has released a "moong" bean variety Pusa 9531 which is tolerant to yellow Mosaic virus. It matures in 60-65 days and its yield potential is 14 quintals per hectare.

In chickpea, an extra bold seeded true kabuli type variety BG 1053 has been released for cultivation for the states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh under irrigated agro-ecosystems. (PTI)

The Hindustan Times
08 March 2000

India, Bangladesh research: New Delhi - India and Bangladesh will carry out joint research projects in leather technology, information technology and disaster management to solve some of the socio-economic problems faced by both countries, Union Science and Technology Minister Murli Manohar Joshi said on Wednesday. "We can provide technology at a much lower cost than what others offer," Joshi said after a meeting with Bangladeshi counterpart Lt Gen Md Nooruddin to discuss the deal. • PTI

The Indian Express
09 March 2000

Manual for municipalities to manage solid waste

Rahul Datta

New Delhi

CONCERNED OVER the rising volumes of solid waste in urban India, the government has drafted a manual for the municipal bodies to effectively manage solid waste.

The 900-page manual prepared by an expert committee of the Ministry of Urban Development is aimed at providing proper guidance in the planning, designing and management of solid waste. It will also serve as a practical tool for urban local bodies.

The document, circulated only among a few officials and departments concerned, has covered a whole range of issues. It points out that there has been no major effort to build up informed community awareness about the waste due to poor waste management.

The municipal authorities, over the years, have also not educated the masses about the steps they can take in reducing waste generation and promote effective management of solid waste generated. The document also laments that fact that the degree of community sensitisation and public awareness is low. Moreover, there is no systematic segregation of organic, inorganic and recyclable wastes at household level. Door to door collection of waste is not practised in most of the cities,

the manual says.

It is estimated that the total solid waste generated by 300 million people living in urban India is about 38 million tonnes every year. About 1,00,000 metric tonnes of municipal solid waste is generated daily in the country. Per capita waste generation in major cities ranges from 0.20 kilos to 0.6 kilos, as per the manual.

It is alarmed over the collection rate of the dangerous solid waste. The collection ranges between 50 to 90 per cent leaving the balance unattended. It is also estimated that the urban local bodies spend about Rs 500 to Rs 1,500 per tonne on solid waste for collection, transportation, treatment and disposal.

About 60 to 70 per cent of the amount for collection is spent on collection, 20 to 30 per cent on transportation and less than five per cent on the final disposal of waste. The manual says this process indicates that hardly any attention is given to the scientific and safe disposal of waste.

Most of the municipalities of the country have not yet identified landfill sites while in others the sites have been exhausted and the respective local bodies do not have the resources to acquire new land, the manual underlines.

The management of municipal solid waste involves development of an insight into the impact of waste generation, collection,

transportation and disposal methods adopted by a society on the environment. The other principle, according to the manual in managing the solid waste, is the adoption of new methods to reduce this impact.

Barring a few progressive municipal corporations in the country, all other local bodies suffer due to lack of adequate expertise and experience, leading to environmental pollution and health hazards.

The purpose of the Manual, according to the experts associated with its preparation, is to create an understanding that municipal solid waste management is part of a broader urbanisation problem. The document also strives to create an awareness of need for competent management of municipal solid waste in urban areas and to provide operational guidelines for efficient management systems.

The Expert Committee, which drafted the comprehensive manual, was constituted by the Ministry of Urban Development in February 1998.

The manual has covered aspects such as composition and quantity of solid waste, storage at source, primary collection, transportation, composting, energy recovery, emerging technologies, sanitary land filling, community participation and legal aspects.

The Pioneer
09 March 2000

Bangladeshi women stage a motorbike rally in Dhaka to mark the International Women's Day on Wednesday. They called for equal rights for men and women in jobs and an end to all discrimination against women -

Reuters

The Indian Express
09 March 2000

Reward for saving plastic: More milk

Ponda, Goa, March 2: The Goa State Co-operative Milk Producers Union provides half-a-litre milk free to consumers who support plastic-free environment.

Goa Dairy provides consumers half-a-litre milk on return of 100 empty packets. The consumers can handover bundles of 100 packets each to the milk booths, being operated by the Goa Dairy, on prescribed dates every month. And the response is overwhelming. UNI

The Indian Express
09 March 2000

Wiring women's welfare

New Delhi, March 8: A website on welfare programmes for women in India was launched today to mark the International Women's Day. www.Sandeshindia.org hopes to bring all NGOs working for the welfare of women and children to a common forum, creating a network among them. UNI

The Indian Express
09 March 2000

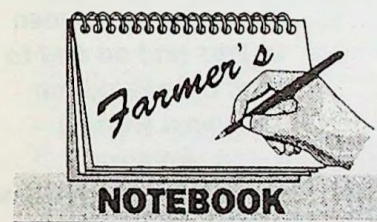
High-yielding rice for samba

By Our Agriculture Correspondent

SCIENTISTS AT the Tamil Nadu Rice Research Institute (TNRRI), Aduthurai, have developed a long-duration, high-yielding rice variety suitable for growing in 'samba' season (August 15 to September 15 sowing). The new rice variety has been released for commercial cultivation by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) recently.

Christened "ADT-44", the improved rice variety has a duration of about 145

days, and it has a record grain yield of 6.2 tonnes per hectare. Endowed with good tillering, the total biomass of the variety was put at 14.3 tonnes per hectare (6.0 tonnes, grains and 8.3 tonnes, straw), and it has a potential to go up to 15.8 tonnes per hectare, according to the scientists, who bred this variety.



It has been found to be resistant to green leafhopper and blast, and has shown field resistance to stem borer and brown spot disease. It is also tolerant to the attack of leaf folder. It produces white, short and bold rice with high head recovery of 61.5 per cent. When cooked the rice gets well separated, and it is moderately soft with desirable taste. It has very good linear elongation of 1.68 times.

ADT 44 is a selection from OR 1128-7-S1 (IET 14099-IR 56/OR 142-99). It is a medium-tall (112.7 cm) variety with a maturity duration of 145 to 150 days, and average duration of 148 days. The variety has been found to have high nitrogen use efficiency. It has a tendency to lodge at maturity, and it has low shattering. It is ideal for irrigated (wet) condition as a transplanted crop in 'samba' season throughout Tamil Nadu.

It performed well in all the trials conducted, and it has been recommended as an alternative to CR 1009 for 'samba' season. Farmers have taken to growing this variety on seeing its good performance, and it has spread among more than 320 farmers in Thanjavur, Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur, Cuddalore and Trichirapalli districts. A total quan-

ty of 4802 kg seeds have been distributed to the farmers already, according to the scientists. A seed rate of 30 kg per hectare is the recommended seed rate, and the nursery of 20 cents will be enough to cover a hectare. The seedlings are ready for planting on the 25th day of sowing, and a spacing of 20 cm by 15 cm should be adopted to keep a plant density of 33 hills per square metre. The nutrients should be applied based on soil testing results. Liberal quantities of farmyard manure and other organic amendments should be applied.

The application of biofertilisers such as azospirillum and phosphobacterium would prove beneficial. One kg of azospirillum should be used for treating the seeds, and another two kg may be applied to the nursery. The main field should be treated with two kg azospirillum per hectare. The entire quantities of 60 kg phosphorus and 30 kg each of nitrogen and potash should be applied as basal dressing.

The remaining nitrogen is applied as top dressing on four equal splits of 30 kg each on 25th day, 50th day, 75th day and 100 days after planting. A remaining 30 kg potash should be applied on the 75th day of planting. Zinc sulphate at 25 kg per hectare should be applied at the time of planting, and blue green algae at 10 kg per hectare may be inoculated on the 10th day of planting to get good results, according to the scientists.

The Hindu
09 March 2000

Union govt. decides to involve more women in forest management

NEW DELHI: If women have a greater say in the management of forests, will it help? The Union government certainly thinks so.

Its latest guidelines on the joint forest management (JFM) programme, conceived a decade ago to create a people's movement by involving village committees in the protection, regeneration and development of degraded forests, say there is "immense potential" and "genuine need" for women's participation in this programme.

So from now on, at least half the members of a committee general body have to be women. At least half the women members should be present for any meeting.

At least a third of executive committee members should be women — the quorum for a meeting in this case will be a third of women members present or a minimum of one, whichever is more. One of three posts — president, vice-president, secretary — should be held by a woman.

This move to empower women has been welcomed by the World Wide Fund for Nature-India as have the other steps taken to streamline and "democratise" this programme, adopted by 22 state governments — 10.24 million hectares of forest land is being managed under the programme through more than 36,000 committees.

The other measures:

- * All states should register JFM or village committees under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, to give these legal backing. This process should be over by the end of this month.

- * Memorandums of understanding, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for different work or areas should be assigned separately and signed between the state governments and the committees. Give the committees a uniform name: JFM committees. All adults in a village should be eligible to become members. In certain states, community groups are already performing the essential functions of forest protection and regeneration; these should be verified and registered as JFM committees.

- * Dependency on forests should be the main criteria for allowing a JFM programme in an area. This programme will henceforth cover not just degraded forests but good forests (defined by crown density) as well. The treatment plans and MoUs will be different for the two types.

But implementation of JFM in good forest areas will be done in a phased manner, initially on a pilot basis. The results may be monitored for a few years before considering an extension of this part of the programme.

- * Micro-plans prepared by forest officers and village forest protection committees should reflect the consumption and livelihood needs of local communities and provisions to meet them in a sustainable fashion.

The Times of India
09 March 2000

Much to be done

Another International Women's Day has been marked with speeches, rallies and workshops. Programmes celebrating the 'new woman' have been organised and awards given away to women in recognition of their contributions in various fields. Panels have been set up to chalk out action plans to improve the status of women and scores of programmes announced for their uplift. This has been the routine observed on Women's Day year after year and March 8, 2000 was no different. And as in previous years, little will be done to improve the lot of women. While this may seem a cynical view of efforts launched on Women's Day, persisting gender disparities and the continuing discrimination suffered by women are evidence that much remains to be done.

Women are subjected to discrimination and violence at every stage in life. In fact, this is the case even before the child is born. Despite stringent legislation banning female foeticide, abortion of female fetuses continues. According to one estimate, around 20,00,000 female fetuses are aborted every year. Violence against women is widespread and it is reported that a woman is molested every 26 minutes, while a rape occurs every 36 minutes. These shocking statistics do not include the large number of incidents of domestic violence. Discriminated against within the family too, women suffer from malnutrition, poor health and illiteracy. The adult literacy among women stands at 36 per cent compared with 64 per cent among men. Gender bias in employment is evident in the low employment rate of women. At the lower income levels, for instance, the female participation rate is 45.4 per cent compared with the 85.7 among males. Of course the scenario is not all bleak. Women, especially in the cities, have forged ahead, despite numerous social, legal and institutional hurdles and gender discrimination. But the success stories are few and far between. The battle against discrimination and violence has to be comprehensive. By increasing their representation in Parliament, women can hope for more empowerment and better participation in the democratic process. Awareness of their rights will increase when women gain access to education. Piecemeal plans will not deal with the issues that lie behind the violence and discrimination.

Deccan Herald
10 March 2000

SC: Women daily wagers entitled to maternity benefits

IN A significant ruling coinciding with the International Women's Day, the Supreme Court said today that the women daily wage earners are entitled to maternity benefits. The decision is expected to benefit such women workers in the unorganised sector.

"Women, who constitute half of the society, have to be honoured and treated with dignity at places where they work to earn their livelihood," the Apex Court said

, while directing the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to pay maternity benefits to the female wage earners.

Dismissing an appeal by the MCD, a Division Bench comprising Justice S. Saghir Ahmad and Justice D.P. Wadhwa noted that a social order could be achieved only when irregularities are obliterated.

"To become a mother is the most natural phenomenon in the life of

a woman."

"The employer has to be considerate and sympathetic towards her and must realise the physical difficulty which a working woman would face in performing her duties at the workplace while carrying a baby in the womb or rearing up a child after the birth," the Bench said.

The Court said that the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, aims at providing all these facilities to

Website offers inputs on hostile gender reactions

Sunita Aron
Lucknow, March 8

THE WOMEN'S Information Network (WIN) programme, launched by the Institute of Management Development, Uttar Pradesh (IMDUP), is a novel way of undertaking gender sensitisation on the Internet.

The programme seeks to counter several sites "dealing exclusively with hostile gender reactions".

According to Mr A K Rastogi, director, IMDUP: "We thought it would be interesting to focus on this aspect to assist in introspection so that necessary sensitisation may be provided to people, who are giving feminism and the female gender an unnecessary harsh image. It is our gift to the fair sex on International Women's Day."

Hence log on to the <http://www.imdup.org>, click on WIN and information pours in at the touch of a mouse on various subjects related to women, also touching upon the socio-economic and psychological status of Indian woman. Even details of relevant legal cases have been put up along with their interpretations. Thus, it

is site that is extremely educative and informative for all those concerned about gender issues.

There is a classified index listing information on sexual harassment and the topic Affirmative Approach is especially informative. The subhead offers advice on how to deal with victims of sexual harassment such as: Support victims of abuse, speak up for them, form associations, do whatever it takes to put pressure on the perpetrators of such abuse, approach the topic openly at home, reaffirm support to your daughters, listen to your children and employees.

Another topic, Problem Sharing, reveals the findings of a survey. "In the workplace or at home, as many as 60 per cent of the respondents talked to their friends rather than family members or someone in authority. The story in the workplace is not any different. Women largely confide in friends; only occasionally in colleagues, and authority, almost never. The figures read 60, 33 and 7 per cent respectively. Most women prefer talking to their contemporaries, many of whom would have had similar experiences," he said.

The Hindustan Times
09 March 2000

the working women to help them overcome the "stress of motherhood honourably, peacefully and undeterred by the fear of being victimised for forced actions during the pre and post natal period."

The MCD had petitioned the Apex Court against the Delhi High Court judgement upholding an Industrial Tribunal's order.

The Hindustan Times
09 March 2000

Rajasthan adopts woman policy to empower them

HT Correspondent
Jaipur, March 8

RAJASTHAN BECAME the first State in India to announce a woman policy which envisages the empowerment of women, eradication of gender bias from society, equal rights in property, participation in the political set up and their economic independence.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot today unveiled the women policy at a function that was organised by Harish Chander Mathur, the Rajasthan State Institute of Public Administration and the Department of Women and Child Development in the conference hall of the institute. He also inaugurated a women resource centre, an autonomous body that would develop strong resource base to highlight the issues related to women in Rajasthan.

The State Government will adopt a three pronged strategy to implement the new women policy. This would include change in the mental attitude of men towards women, redressal of the grievances of oppressed and suppressed women and involvement of non-governmental organisations in enhanced manner in Rajasthan.

As per the new women policy, there would be no discrimination against the girl child. Women must get constitutional rights to live with

honour in society. Second, women would be made economically self-reliant which would give them the confidence to fight against social taboos prevailing in the State. Third, the Government would make efforts to increase the low percentage of literacy among the women. This would lead to population control in the State.

Fourth, proper atmosphere will be created at all levels in the administration to give recognition to the women to have equal rights. Finally, there is urgency of participation of the women in political set up besides ensuring their involvement in the activities of non-governmental organisations, govern-

mukhpati.

Mr Gehlot strongly felt that literacy percentage must be brought at par with men that would help in population control, equal constitutional rights, economic self-reliance etc. among women.

The Chief Minister said that the new women policy could be implemented only if NGOs, social organisations, social activists, women organisations jointly launched a campaign. Otherwise it would remain confined to papers only.

Mr B. D. Kalia, a senior Minister said it would not be possible for government alone to implement this policy. We would require the contributions from one and all to make it a success.

Mrs Zakia Imam, Social Welfare Minister said women were not paid daily wages at par with men in Rajasthan. This was unconstitutional and illegal. She said 96 percent of the culprits involved in rape cases did not get punishment. She pleaded for stringent laws to handle them.

Mrs Kanta Kathuria, chairperson of the Rajasthan Women Commission, said they had received 550 applications from the women that pertained to crimes, dowry, land disputes, murders etc. She said they had disposed of 200 cases. She resented the negative attitude of some people who were in a position to help the aggrieved women.

The Hindustan Times
09 March 2000

Women's Day

ment departments, social organisations, etc.

Mr Gehlot spoke about the age-old tradition of wearing a *ghungat* (veil) by rural women which covers their faces. He said, "Women need to discard such social practices which make them inferior to men in society. He said Rajiv Gandhi was responsible for giving reservation.

Ridiculing the attitude of men towards women, the Chief Minister said three new breeds of husbands have come up in Rajasthan. They included *sarpanchpati*, *pardhanpati* and *par-*

Rs 9 cr okayed for M'rashtra wasteland development

Observer Economic Bureau

MUMBAI

THE Government of India has sanctioned funds to the tune of Rs 4.52 crore for Ratnagiri district and approximately Rs 4.71 crore for Sindhudurg district, under the Integrated Wastelands Development Project in these two districts of Maharashtra.

This follows relentless efforts of Union minister for chemicals and fertilisers Suresh Prabhu to expedite the disbursal of funds by the ministry of rural development under the scheme. Both the schemes have been granted funds for the development of watersheds.

The money will be spent by the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) of both districts.

These funds will be spent during the five-year period starting from 1999-2000 to 2003-2004.

In the first year, approximately Rs 67 lakh will be spent in Ratnagiri district and about Rs 70 lakh in Sindhudurg district.

The total treatable project area is 11,320 hectares in the Langa block of Ratnagiri district.

During 1999-2000, in Ratnagiri, approximately Rs 14 lakh will be released for training, around Rs 18 lakh for community organisation and Rs 68 lakh for works. During 1999-2000, in Sindhudurg, approximately Rs 14 lakh will be used for training, approximately Rs 18 lakh for community organisation and approximately Rs 71 lakh for works. □

The Observer
10 March 2000

Women's rights remain 'unfulfilled promises'

[L]ONDON: WOMEN'S rights throughout the world boil down to a lot of rhetoric and unfulfilled promises, Amnesty International said in a statement published to mark International Women's Day. Despite promises made five years ago in Beijing during the fourth World Conference on Women, there have been very few positive developments in women's rights and protection, the London-based rights group said in a statement. Only 165 of the 188 UN members have ratified the declaration on the elimination of violence against women. The Beijing meeting had set the end of 1999 as the target date for full ratification. Until the rest of the nations, including the US, ratify the treaty and start honouring their commitments "universal human rights for all women will remain an unattainable and distant goal," the statement continued.

The Observer
10 March 2000

The Third Sector

By ANDRE BETEILLE

THE non-governmental organisation or NGO has emerged as an important feature of the Indian social landscape, and the last decade of the 20th century may justly be described as the decade of the NGO. This development is not confined to India. It is a world-wide phenomenon, although it has become particularly conspicuous in the less developed countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. In some of these countries, the NGO is seen as the main driving force in economic development and social change. NGOs are now active in practically every field: literacy, education, health, sanitation, child-care, nutrition, habitation and so on.

False Inference

There is also a growing body of literature on NGOs, although much of this takes the form of advocacy rather than detached and objective analysis. Here they are coming to be represented as the Third Sector of society in which the state and the market are viewed as the first and the second sectors. This is a very large claim, for there are a great many things in the life of a society that are not covered by the state or the market, and it is doubtful that NGOs, no matter how numerous or versatile, can do all the things that are not done by the state or the market.

The NGO is distinct from the state because it is a 'non-governmental organisation'; it is distinct from the market because it is a 'non-profit organisation'. But there are many institutions in contemporary Indian society, such as the University of Delhi, the National Library or the Indian Institute of Science that cannot be justly described as creatures of either the state or the market. To the extent that it is inferred that the functions of such institutions can be better performed by NGOs, that inference is false and needs to be repudiated.

The advocacy of NGOs has grown in part from the disenchantment with the state and the statutory institutions that depend for support on it. Some have turned that disenchantment into enthusiasm for the market, and others into enthusiasm for the NGO. In the decades immediately following independence, the state, by over-extending itself and its bureaucratic apparatus, stifled both economic

and social initiative. In seeking to take over the commanding heights of the economy, it created a regime of licences, controls and permits which left less and less room for initiative in economic action. In seeking to extend its patronage to all sectors of society, it narrowed the space for voluntary effort in autonomous institutions.

No one will deny the great significance of voluntary action in the life of a democratic society. To the extent that they release the impulse for it, voluntary associations and non-governmental organisations make a valuable contribution to public life. But it will be a mistake to believe that there is room for individual initiative and voluntary effort in only the NGO and none in the university, the laboratory or the hospital. The universities in India, no matter how debased their present condition, are neither governmental organisations nor organisations for profit. If they, and other public institutions of their kind have failed to live up to our expectations, that does not mean that they must now be written off, and public support and sympathy directed away from them and into the NGOs.

State Funding

Voluntary action if it is to be socially effective, must acquire some kind of organisational form. When an association becomes successful and expands its activities, it has to contend with the problems inherent in all organisations, namely, administration, funding and accounting. These present challenges to its self-reliance and autonomy. In the Nehru era, universities and other public institutions yielded all too easily to the temptations of official patronage, and expanded beyond their capacity to deal with the objectives they were created to achieve. They thundered about autonomy, but did everything that leads institutional autonomy to be undermined.

In the larger social perspective, institutional autonomy can only be relative, and never absolute. Every institution does not need to be autonomous in every respect, but it has to safeguard its autonomy in those respects that are crucial to its chosen or designated form of activity. Too much should not be made of the need for financial autonomy in public institutions. The universities of England and Holland have

maintained substantial autonomy in teaching and research, despite having to depend on the state for funding. On the other hand, the NGOs themselves do not secure all their funds from the voluntary contributions of their own members. They depend for funds on the government, and, increasingly, on international agencies. Their autonomy from the agencies on which they depend for financial support cannot simply be taken on trust.

There are other questions besides those relating to the sources of funding. While it is true that the component of voluntary action in our public institutions has steadily declined, it is also true that that component is not equally strong in all voluntary associations. In some NGOs, the component of voluntary action is very weak indeed. In a landmark study in Britain, Lord Beveridge had pointed out that voluntary action is propelled by two distinct motives, which he called the mutual aid motive and the philanthropic motive. There is not much evidence of the salience of the mutual aid motive in the working of NGOs in India. As to the philanthropic motive, that is more readily directed into religious than into secular institutions. Where NGOs in India have benefited from the philanthropic motive, the philanthropy has come more often from outside than from within India.

Wholesale Denigration

In the end, while the claim that the NGOs constitute the Third Sector of society has to be taken with a large pinch of salt, it still remains true that many of them are engaged in useful and productive work. There are many things that the government could have done for the people, but did not do or did badly. If the NGOs can do some of these things and do them better than the government, they deserve public support and sympathy. But if an excess of zeal for their actual or possible contributions leads to a continuous and wholesale denigration of the work done by the agencies of the government and by autonomous and semi-autonomous institutions or to the withdrawal of public support and sympathy from them, that will act against the well-being of society.



Women panchs in UP all set to end 'proxy rule'

Sunita Aron
Lucknow, March 9

THE WOMEN representatives of the Panchayat in Uttar Pradesh are finally coming out in the open to end the 'proxy rule' by their spouses and are now ready to enter a keen contest in the forthcoming Panchayat elections.

Some years back, women empowerment in the rural segment was certainly a dream, but now it's fast becoming a reality in Uttar Pradesh.

Mr Om Prakash, Secretary, Panchayat, says, "Merely two years ago, I had gone to Pipraich block in Gorakhpur district to address block development training programmes. To my astonishment I found men occupying the front chairs while their spouses, the elected 'pradhans', were meekly sitting on the floor in the last row with their faces covered by 'ghoonghat' (veil). The next day, majority of them were found sitting on the chairs, taking part in discussions." "Today, some of them even visit me in Lucknow," he adds enthusiastically.

Pipraich is one of the blocks in UP which symbolises women empowerment with 60 per cent of the 2.5 lakh woman representatives of the Panchayats finally coming out of their 'ghoonghat' to end the 'proxy rule' of their 'pradhan patis'.

In contrast to the 1995 elections, when majority of the women representatives were literally forced by their male family members into the electoral arena so that they retain control over their 'traditional' seat, today more and more women are aspiring for the independent control of the 'seat of power'.

Significantly, despite the lack of exposure and illiteracy, the women representatives have utilised the funds in a proper manner, further adding a feather to their cap.

The Hindustan Times
10 March 2000

The Times of India
10 March 2000

Feminists furious at MP population control measure

Sanjay Sharma

BHOPAL

MADHYA Pradesh government's decision to make ineligible those having more than two children for government jobs and contesting civic body and panchayat elections as a population control measure, has drawn flak from feminists. It is argued that the ban would discriminate against women, because it is not women who decide on the number of children to be had, but men. And the first voice of displeasure has been heard from Rajya Sabha member Shabana Azmi.

The state cabinet chaired by chief minister Digvijay Singh decided that any person having more than two living children, of which one child is born after January 26, 2001, would not be eligible for the government jobs or for contesting civic body or Panchayat election and declared that Madhya Pradesh Civil Services (general conditions for service) Rules 1961 would be amended in compliance with this decision.

Sources said that Shabana in a letter to Chief Minister had expressed her displeasure over the ban saying that the ban would discriminate against the women and would lead to women being 'kept out' of politics because it was not the women but their husbands who decide on the number of children they can have.

Earlier, the Cabinet in January had decided to have a population stabilisation policy aiming at achieving stabilisation of population by middle of the next century and to bring down the population growth rate to 2.1 by 2001. For implementation of the policy effectively a population and development council, it has been decided, will be constituted under the chairmanship of the chief minister.

And to ensure proper coordination between different departments in its implementation, a state population policy implementation committee, headed by the Chief Secretary will also be constituted. The principal secre-

tary health will be the secretary through Samitis and active participation of the community will be ensured at every level in formulation and implementation of the programmes.

Further, practice of marriage registration will be started, incentive and priority would be given in rural programmes to the panchayats doing outstanding work in this field and training will be imparted to improve the efficiency of the works and officers working at different levels.

These and other decisions have been taken by the cabinet to stabilise the population. The population of Madhya Pradesh was 2.60 crore in 1951 which increased to 6.60 crore in 1991. In the middle of 1994, it has crossed 7 crore mark. If this trend continues, the population would cross 8 crore by 2001 and would be doubled in next 32 years.

The mission of the policy, according to the sources, is to ensure balance between population, resources and environment which is possible only when there is a fast decrease in the reproduction and death rate. The rate of eligible couples using contraceptives would have to be increased to prevent 42 per cent to 65 by 2011. The infant mortality rate needs to be lowered from 97 per thousand to 62 by 2011 and the maternity death rate from 498 per lakh births to 200 by 2011.

But Azmi also doubted the feasibility of the proposed ban which would be effective in the state from January 26, 2001. She said that on the population issue, the focus seems to be on bringing down the total fertility rate (TFR), which according to her is a 'grave error.'

She said that there was a tendency among politicians to regard such social issues as being 'soft'. □

Besides, Self Help Groups would also be constituted in each panchayat by 2003 and primary education would be universalised by year 2005 in the state. All women in the 15-35 years age group would be made literate

Govt effects changes in FCRA

Observer Political Bureau

NEW DELHI

THE home ministry on Thursday modified citizens charter relating to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), which has been simplified in the process. A web-site has also been launched for the purpose.

As per the provision, all institutions and NGOs receiving foreign assistance or public servants receiving foreign hospitality are required to seek permission of the Centre under the Act. "At present there are around 18,489 organisations registered under the FCRA, of which 12,198 organisations have filed their returns," sources said.

Sources said most of the donation were in the field of health, family welfare, rural development, educational trusts for the development of poor, old age and destitute in the country, adding, "changes in the procedure would effect expeditious processing of applications both prior permission and its verification."

The FCRA changes would help various organisations and it has been mandatory for the government departments to take a decision about the application within three to six months time.

All organisations have also been asked to file their return by July 31 every year. "Any organisation having definite cultural, economic, educational religious, health or social programme may receive foreign contribution after getting itself registered with the Central government. □

The Observer
10 March 2000

The Observer
10 March 2000

Villages make their own kinds of schools

Jamudi, a village on the Amarkantak-Shahdol road in Shahdol district of Madhya Pradesh has risen to fame for its unique educational experiment. It houses Shram Niketan Sansathan (SNS), set up by Shyam Bahadur Namra, a progressive Hindi poet and his wife, Anuradha Singh, who launched Apna School Pariyojana in the adivasi-dominated district on November 1996. It is funded by Madhya Pradesh Government's Rajiv Gandhi Prathamik Shiksha Mission aimed at involving students, teachers and villagers in all activities related to the school.

Villagers have pooled resources for setting up schools. Teachers were appointed from the local communities. Shifting to formal system of instruction, the curricula's main thrust is not only to impart the students with three R's but also to teach them the native skills so that they could make best use of it without migrating to cities in search of jobs.

The large influx of population from village to the cities has reached a saturation point. Migrants from-village live in sub-human conditions. Says Anuradha Singh, the Director of the Apna School Pariyojana, "Before setting up the schools Namra and I visited the villages. Villagers asked us what is the use of sending their children to the schools? They felt students passing out from schools would only add to the swelling tribes of educated unemployed." The villagers in rural countryside see their children as income-generating assets as a large part of their time is consumed in cutting firewood, arranging fodder, grazing cattle and tending their siblings.

But SNS fixed up the school timing in such a manner that children had sufficient time for domestic activities. The school is not more than four hours a day. Apna school does not follow any dress code or impose any uniform.

Going to school can be an arduous journey for children in remote villages. In Kandhuwa Tola a government school was opened in Kansha village after rich peasants put pressure on the local authorities. Children going to the school from Kandhuwa Tola had to wade through the slushy muddy paths in the rainy season. Faced by numerous such hardships parents were compelled to withdraw their wards from the government school.

Besides the extreme poverty made many avoid school. Rural activists running night schools to teach the adults could not make much headway among the villagers.

They could not mobilise a larger number of adults. They felt exhausted to come to school so late. But after Apna school came up in Kansha things have changed. Parents have responded positively by admitting their wards in the Apna school.

Lalla Prasad Yadav, senior teacher of the school

teaches students through educational games. "The Adivasis have taken to the school. Children studying in class III and IV in government schools cannot even read or write a sentence. But

In villages, the city-based formal education system does not work. An alternative system which reflects the fears and aspirations of the villagers functions better. Tarun Bose writes about such an experiment in Madhya Pradesh

in Apna schools they are fluent enough to read *Bala Babli ki Kahani* and *Apni Kitab. Aao Khelain Aur Geenain* has made arithmetic simple and easy. Students use domino cards to learn addition, subtraction, division and multiplication," says Yadav.

"We find the pedagogic process adopted in the schools easy, comprehensible and interesting. We could generate interest among the students as we thoroughly grasped the process. Apna schools have minimum dropouts. In our school regular students have finished their primers within a span of nine to 10 months. Interest in learning of our students has increased as they borrow books from library for reading. The relationship between students and teachers is healthy. We have been strictly instructed by SNS not use the cane," says Amardeen Rohini, a post graduate teacher of Apna school in Kholi Tola village.

Apna School Pariyojana, which completed three years has earned the appreciation of the villagers for its curriculum and educational games. Initially, parents and teachers had shown their apprehension. But seeing the children learn faster than those studying in government-run formal schools they changed their opinion. Sarosh Koshi, a researcher who was conducting a study of 20 different schools imparting alternative education spread over the country visited Apna schools also. He said, "Since October 1997 I have keenly observed different schools giving alternative education. I was astounded at the creative skills in developing the books. Teaching methods are excellent. The set of books developed by SNS helps

children to explore their creative potential through exercise and games interspersed with Namra's literary talent. It has come as a glimmer of hope for the people living in this neglected district."

Prior to Apna school, Namra and Anuradha taught the labour working on their three-acre farm. Without any institutional support they developed a process which linked farming with formal education. The curriculum was designed around seasonal agricultural activities including production, planning and marketing. Two learners were drawn from Kol, Gond and Migi Oraon tribes. Moving away from any instruction of the formal system. The experiment was within the framework of man-nature and man-conflicts in the region.

Learning included activities and tours to actual sites of agricultural production and marketing. The goals of Shram Niketan, started in 1977, was to provide wider understanding of local conditions in a holistic perspective to the regional, small and medium-sized farming communities. Landless peasants were directed towards understanding wage and quantity calculations, price mechanisms in the market. The educational thrust was towards application of scientific techniques and increased production. It was kept in mind for all the groups that the essential requirement was to give them a scientific world built upon materialistic philosophy.

Enriched by over two-decade long experience the Sansathan now thinks that education to the marginalised section of the population can be successful if development programmes covering all spheres in rural society are launched. A frontal attack on poverty and ignorance has to be unleashed. Only then would Apna schools really benefit the rural countryside.

**Charkha Features
The Pioneer
10 March 20**

Rajasthan will set up information technology institute and centres

By Prakash Bhandari
The Times of India News Service

JAIPUR: The state will focus its energies to leverage the benefits of information technology (IT) for the benefit of the people. The state cabinet on Wednesday approved the IT policy. The state government will set up Indian Institute of Information Technology in the state with the help of private sector. Incentives will be offered to make Rajasthan an attractive location for IT investments. The state government is keen to reap the benefits of the IT based service industry whose turnover is expected to be around Rs 81,000 crore by 2008.

"The state will take the benefit of a number of job opportunities in the field of IT. It is the aim of the

government to create an IT friendly environment for integrated participation by all in the developmental process by implementing the IT policy. This shall be for the improvement in the quality of every human life, emergence of a competitive society and a vibrant economy through transparent governing systems, sound infrastructure and skilled human resources," chief minister Ashok Gehlot said.

The state government has decided to create an integrated IT centre at each of the 32 districts. It is also envisaged that IT shall be introduced by the government at all points of contact between the government and citizens positively by the year 2002.

Rohit Singh, director department of information technology said electronic governance will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government's delivery systems and administration, "Special focus will be made to develop competence through IT in rural areas and for this customised training programme in educational institutions will be imparted. Computer training facilities will be established in all the panchayat samitis' headquarters in the next two years. Rajasthan will be the first state to undertake such a comprehensive statewide training programme", said Mr Rohit Singh.

Unique methods for unemployed developed in UK

London: The British government is to provide free transport, money for new clothes, internet access and advice on drug problems to the long-term jobless from areas badly affected by unemployment.

A mixture of public and private partnerships will run 15 employment zones across the country, in a project the government hopes will benefit 50,000 unemployed people.

One of the companies involved says it will employ specialists to help people with drugs and alcohol. (DPA)

The Asian Age
10 March 2000

AIDS internet site for South Asia

● In the first of its kind in South Asia, the internet portal site "You and AIDS" -- was launched in the capital on Thursday night by the joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), reports UNI from New Delhi. Union Minister of State for Rural Development Subhash Maharia, who was chief guest at the launch function, said the new portal site would play a major role in disseminating vital information about the dreaded epidemic, especially among the poor sections who were hardest hit due to little or no information on important health issues.

Deccan Herald
11 March 2000

UP to take special steps for population control

Parminder Singh

NOIDA

THE UP government is consulting experts to evolve a new population policy and will shortly launch an effective strategy to arrest the population increase.

An expert committee which met in Lucknow in first week of March has advised the methodology to be adopted. While ever 6th person in world is an Indian in India every sixth person is from UP. With a population of 16 crore in UP the state government is quite concerned about it. All its development programme and achievement are going awry due to increased number of mouths to feed and to provide education, employment, health care etc. According to Chaudhar Sardar Singh, UP minister for family welfare "we are seriously considering ways and means to make the lower strata of couple in productive age particularly in rural areas and workers, labourers, those in urban slums and minority community to adopt two child norm. Help is being sought from NGO's, social organisation and others bodies.

UP with Rs 1,000 budget under family welfare has another Rs 1,000 from an American organisation SBSA. "But budget is no constraint as more fund can be allocated if needed for the success of the programme," the minister said. A multi-media approach for mounting an education and awareness campaign is being finalised by the government while village panchayats and social organisations are also being roped in for launching public campaigns for the purpose Sardar Singh added. □

The Observer
11 March 2000

ICAR launches World Bank project on food security

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

THE Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) on Friday launched a three-year mission project on household food and nutritional security for increasing production and productivity of crops, livestock and fish in tribal, hilly and backward areas.

The Rs 38.65 crore World Bank supported project, launched by eminent agro-scientists M S Swaminathan here, envisages enhancing the economic viability of farmers in harsh environments through a holistic approach of development in many spheres of farming by addressing six areas and tasks.

The project aims at enhancing the productivity of 11 selected life support crop species embracing minor and pseudo-cereals, indigenous pulses and oilseeds, improving livestock productivity and expanding scope of horticulture and vegetable gardening for broad basing food and nutritional security.

The programme will also focus on enhancing fresh water fish production, expanding utility range through value addition and post harvest technology for improving market potential besides monitoring sustainability through

assessment of technology intervention impact.

Speaking on the occasion, ICAR director general R S Paroda said besides providing the much needed food and nutritional security for these areas, the mission would help in widening the food basket of the country. The project will demonstrate the potential of underutilised species of agri-horticultural crops, choice of suitable variety, production of quality seeds and adoption of improved agro-techniques.

The activities of the mission also include rejuvenation of declined orchards, improvement in the production, productivity and availability of animal and fresh water fish production systems, enhanced opportunities for post-harvest processing and value addition and impact assessment of technology interventions and diversifications.

The 11 selected life supporting crop species include amaranth (chola), buckwheat (kuttu), finger millet (ragi), little millet (kutki), kodo millet, foxtail millet (kangni), ricebean and lathyrus (khesari).

The mission is divided into six programmes to be supported by National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP). The work will be carried out by 50 cooperating centres including ICAR Institutes,

state agricultural universities (SAUs), Central agricultural university and NGOs.

The activities will cover all the major tribal and backward areas of the country, including the North Eastern hill regions. Highest priority has been assigned to the transfer of technology-related activities and fine tuning of techniques for effective transfer and adoption.

In the programme on 'increasing production and productivity of life support species', it is proposed to intensify research and development efforts on identified coarse grains, indigenous pulses and oilseeds for the development of promising varieties and suitable agro-technologies.

The programmes on specific crops will be executed through the All India Coordinated Research Project networks.

The project on horticulture crops and vegetable gardening for food and nutritional security, will focus on popularising the improved hybrids suitable for specific situations having multiple disease resistance. Standardisation of production and protection technologies, application of integrated Pest Management and the transfer of these improved technologies to the farmers through training will top the programme. □

The Observer
11 March 2000

Japanese grant for NGOs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, March 10: Consul General of Japan, Ryuichi Ishii yesterday signed a grant contract with the Sevai Society, Madurai, extending it 80,831 US dollars to help the needy through self-help programmes. Contracts were also signed with the Werner Wolff Foundation for Rehabilitation of the Mentally Disabled (WWRMD), Tiruchi for a grant of \$ 79,150 and with the Madurai Jesuit Downtrodden People Welfare Trust (MJDPWT) for US \$ 79,020 for empowering 100 young girls.

Sevai Society will use the fund for constructing a primary school building for orphans and rural children, with the aim of providing them education and eradicating child labour.

The grant to WWRMD will be utilised for accommodating, educating and training 36 mentally disabled children. MJDPWT will use the grant for setting up a home for the girls belonging to the lower classes.

The Telegraph
11 March 2000

MP tops in rural electrification

Bhopal, March 11

THE CENTRAL Rural Electrification Corporation has assigned Madhya Pradesh top position in its assessment of rural electrification carried out by different States in the country.

The State has also topped in the electrification of Scheduled Caste localities and energisation of irrigation pump sets, an official release said here today. According to the 1991 census, Madhya Pradesh has 71,526 villages and 50,000 majara tolas. By the beginning of the current year, 68,259 villages and 27,743 majara tolas had been electrified. (PTI)

The Hindustan Times
12 March 2000

Best amateur video

● A documentary titled 'The ground above: Unearthing the Mangalore tile,' produced by Manipal Institute of Communication (MIC) and directed by Rupali Mehra, a student from 1999 batch, has won the 'Best amateur video production of the year' award at the 12th UGC-CEC National Educational Video Competition. The award carries a citation, a trophy and cash prize of Rs 10,000. The film is about the eco-friendly Mangalore tile and its replacement by concrete, the dwindling reserves of quality clay, fuel wood and lack of government support. Two other students, Nikhil Narayan and Susim Mohanty, of MIC, have secured first place in the national level 'Media Melange 2000' paper presentation contest on media issues, organised by Communication Studies, University of Pune on March 4 and 5.

Deccan Herald
12 March 2000

Narmada needs a historic judgement

BY JAI SEN

THE SUPREME Court's final hearing on the Sardar Sarovar case, which began on February 29, constitutes a historic moment. For, the case has a long civil and political history, and the issues it has raised are fundamental in nature and have universal relevance.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) filed the Sardar Sarovar case in 1994. Since 1985, the NBA movement has received widespread support from those affected by the project. This includes both the adivasis or tribals, who live primarily in the hills bounding the river immediately behind the dam, and the prosperous Patidar farmers and traders, who constitute the majority of the population in the Nimar valley further upstream. Also, the movement has received fairly extensive support from other Indian movements and from the intelligentsia in cities.

Outside India, the NBA consciously built links in those countries which are the major shareholders in the World Bank. The NBA's supporters abroad mounted sustained pressure on their governments to force the Bank into pushing the Central and state governments in India to meet social and environmental standards they had agreed upon. It was because of this pressure that the Bank ultimately withdrew from the project.

The NBA has been at the crest of a wave of independent civil movements incorporating environmental, developmental, social, and human rights issues that have risen in India and abroad. And precisely because of its success in mobilising this kind of support, the issues the NBA has raised have become symbolic of a much wider universe of concerns.

The NBA has played a key role in precipitating policy reforms in institutions such as the World Bank. Public access to information on Bank-related matters, and the rights of project-affected peoples to appeal to a semi-independent 'Inspections Panel', for instance, were

accepted. The campaign also played a central role in triggering the formation in 1998 of WCOLD (World Commission on Large Dams), a collaboration of the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), an international civil body based in Geneva, and the World Bank, to look at the very future of large dams.

Large dams such as the SSP affect the lives of millions worldwide. They are also, however, major money-spinners. The stakes involved in the final hearing consequently have both financial and social implications.

Gujarat proposed the SSP immediately after it was carved out from the larger Bombay state and made into a separate entity in May 1960. The project was expected to lay the foundation for development in agriculture and industry, and help Gujarat assert its identity. In the late Sixties, farmers of south Gujarat launched an important but short-lived movement in favour of the project.

Then, the Madhya Pradesh government had strongly opposed the project, demanding that the height of the proposed dam should be lowered in Gujarat, and increased in Madhya Pradesh. This contentious issue was referred in 1969 to an inter-states disputes tribunal — the Narmada Waters Disputes Tribunal — which arrived at its award in 1979. The early Nineties saw the state government demand a reduction in the height of the dam, willing as it was now to forgo its gains from the project in exchange for attenuating its harsh impact.

It is erroneously believed that the formation of the NBA sparked off the popular movement against the dam. In fact, the first protest dates back to 1961, when Adivasi farmers protested for a more just compensation package than what they had received in lieu of their villages being demolished and cleared for the dam and the project's township, Kevadia.

Landowners in the Nimar valley, Madhya Pradesh, which is located on the wrong side of the dam, too began protesting against their possible displacement in the late Sixties, and organised themselves into the Narmada Bachao,

Nimar Bachao Samiti. Mobilised by Rameshwar Patidar, till recently a BJP MP, the Samiti even approached the Prime Minister. The late Seventies saw another protest against the dam's height in Madhya Pradesh, and this time the farmers came together under the banner of the Nimar Bachao Andolan, which the Congress had floated.

The issues associated with the Narmada were first articulated by a civil organisation in Gujarat, ARCH Vahini, which began working in 1980 in the 19 Adivasi villages in Gujarat affected by the dam. Some years later, SETU, an Ahmedabad-based civil organisation that included Medha Patkar, started providing relief to affected villages in Maharashtra — and this organisation later became the now famous Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Both the NBA and ARCH Vahini initially wanted just rehabilitation for all: the NBA, though, also demanded the right of affected people to information about the project that threatened to change their lives forever.

In the course of their sustained campaign, the NBA also exposed environmental devastation, displacement, and extensive violation of human rights in the implementation of the project. They argued that full and adequate resettlement of those displaced was not feasible, nor was the project economically viable.

And they also accused the project authorities and the World Bank of mismanagement and deception, which the Independent Review (or Morse Commission) found to be true. Arguing that the project could only be completed 'by unacceptable means', the Commission recommended that the World Bank step back from it.

The NBA, obviously, faced intense opposition from the project's proponents, and were subjected to severe repression from time to time. But all this has contributed to the democratisation of project planning and implementation, at local, national, and international levels. Underlying this was the recognition

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Game with a noble aim

Pioneer News Service

Mussoorie

IF A recently organised competition here, of manual pit-husking of paddy, was uncommon in any respect, it was not because the all-women participants beat apart large quantity of rice in a allotted time interval. It was because the competition was meant to inculcate among the hill women old habits of working with the locally available technologies and to help rejuvenate the fast declining traditional art of rice-hulling in the hills.

This unique competition was held at village Sainji of Jaunpur development block near Mussoorie on Monday last, in which 23 groups of women from 10 neighbouring villages registered their participation.

The competition was organised by Society for Integrated Development of the Himalayas (SIDH), a Mussoorie-based voluntary organisation to motivate

local residents revert to user-friendly old technologies. The various technical innovations made here have become a thing of the past.

There has been a growing acceptance of concepts, alien to the hill culture, by the locals while ignoring the traditional technologies as a direct result of which the development and growth of the hill societies has been impeded, Surendra Pundir of SIDH told *The Pioneer*.

It is only by making the hill societies self-reliant by holding such competitions that they can be made economically self-sustaining, which would ultimately lead to their growth and development, Mr Pundir said.

Here, in the competition, each group of participants is required to shell nine "patha" (a local container) full of paddy in half-hour time during which they must also take care of proper separation of rice from the husk, and also spillage from the pit.

These added conditions ensure

that women develop proficiency in the art of manual paddy-hulling while keeping this time-tested method alive, Mr Pundir said.

Earlier, a customary puja was also performed before the start of the competition, which was witnessed by a large number of local residents and from the neighbouring villages.

The event was characterised by the presence of women competitors who said that they no longer practiced hand-husking of paddy and consumed mechanically husked rice instead.

"Earlier, we used to mill our floor and beat paddy into rice but now use mill-ground floor and buy milled rice from the market", said Paro Devi of Sainji, the host village.

Another local woman resident said that paddy shelling not only ensured a superior rice quality but was also good for health. "Pregnant women practicing paddy hulling deliver easily than those who don't. As such,

they are saved from the trauma of having caesarean sections for child-birth", she said.

Later, a panel of five judges comprising old women residents gave their verdict on the final outcome of the competition. But the names of the winners were announced by the judges only after they had scrupulously checked with the qualifying standards. The women team from village Bherian was adjudged as the winner while the one from village Ghandiyal was declared as runners-up.

The team from village Talli Kanda was declared as the second runners-up.

Kunwar Singh, pradhan of village Sainji, said that the competition had acted in a morale booster for the local women-folk. Anuradha Joshi of SIDH said that her organisation plans to organise similar activities in the area to spread the underlying message of growth of traditional practices in the hills.

The Pioneer
12 March 2000

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of the notion that society and civil actors have a crucial role to play in planning and governance.

The Sardar Sarovar's long history makes one hope that the verdict of the judges would contribute to the ongoing global dialogue on the kind of development we need, and who should decide its parameters.

The main actors in this case are the marginalised Adivasi communities and the middle and large farmers and traders; those supporting the project are contractors, politicians, and industrialists. The victims and beneficiaries are more or less the same in other such projects worldwide. The case, therefore, has global implications.

True, the judgement would have no legal bearing in other countries. But what must not be forgotten is that development issues in India have been of tremendous interest to people and governments outside the country, especially

in the context of decolonisation in the Fifties and then the Non-Aligned Movement. For all our other weaknesses, India remains, as Professor Ignacy Sachs says, one of the 'whales' in the developing world.

This is also true of the civil world. The Narmada movement has now become a global symbol of the struggle for sustainable development. My own research in other countries has shown that the Narmada movement is widely known among activists and politicians alike. The judgement in the Narmada case could become historic. Just as the courts in India periodically cite cases from the House of Lords in Britain, or from the US Supreme Court, it is quite likely that this particular case too could achieve that status.

Obviously, this can happen only if the judgement addresses the fundamental issues and the universal concerns that the Narmada agitation has raised.

The Hindustan Times
12 March 2000

Fight plastics

SIRSI:

■ All of you who hate plastics, but do nothing except wish that somebody would do something, will be glad to know that the Tattisar Group Seva Shakari Sangha at the Salkani Road, about 12 kms from Sirsi, has come up with a new scheme to fight them. And they decided to rope in people who are rather on level with the ground - children.

The society issued identity cards to about 800 schoolchildren around the area, so that they could collect plastic wastes, for which they were paid Rs 5 per kilo. It will be credited to their account.

Rajiv Ajibai
Deccan Herald
12 March 2000

Making up for lost time

KUNHI AKKA is 42 years old. When the Neoliterates Development Society (NDS) of Dakshina Kannada district meets every month, Kunhi Akka satisfies her appetite for anything readable that she can lay her hands on. At the meeting are dozens of women and men from all over the district, who feel the same way.

Until eight years ago, Kunhi Akka was like millions of others, about whom it was always asked, "Why should Ramakka learn to read and write?" She would have then nodded sagely and agreed that reading or writing were of no use to her.

Born in a family that depended on her father's meagre earnings as a labourer in Guttigaru village, Sullya taluk, Kunhi Akka had no expectations about being sent to school. She stayed home, minding younger siblings, including the only son in the family, who was also the only child to go to school. When she was old enough, she joined the family work-force, adding her mite to the family's meagre income. Soon she was married off, the second wife to a labourer. She carried on working.

She had four children, and life was a straight line from work to wage and food until 1991 when the Karnataka Government initiated the literacy campaign in Bijapur and Dakshina Kannada districts. Learn and Teach - "Kaliyiri Kalisiri", reached out to the five lakh people in these two districts, whose lives could change with literacy.

Kunhi Akka signed up. She ignored the barbs. When Kunhi Akka proudly signed her name at the ration shop, people stopped laughing. The literacy campaign has come a long way since 1989, even re-inventing itself when the first forays to break the jinx of four decades failed to erase the image of sad little films that took the moral high-ground on the bane of illiteracy, but failed to make an impact all the same. Ten years of the Total Literacy Campaign has touched 35 lakh people across the State, including women who have come out of their homes for the first time, held a book in their hands or written a postcard for the first time. Women who are now determined to send their daughters to school and keep them there. Women who are articulate, and seek to understand the world outside through the window of literacy that has suddenly opened new vistas for them.

Kunhi Akka is today counted among the 3.5 lakh volunteers who till eight years ago, never held a book in her hand, but went on to help scores of others like her to join the campaign, become a part of the process. Such is the success of the campaign, the high-point of which was a massive *jatha* that went to every village last year, demonstrating the power of literacy to all who stood and stared, that

neoliterates like Kunhi Akka are not only generously sharing their experiences at meetings, but also celebrating literacy in their cultural activities, in articulating their views on every subject under the sun, from politics to the environment and pollution.

When Kunhi Akka attends the monthly meeting of the neoliterates in Dakshina Kannada, held each month in one taluk, she is struck by the fact that the district is crawling with women and men like herself, who want more out of literacy than to read and write.

Kunhi Akka's children go to school. She spends every minute she can spare from work in motivating women to join the literacy campaign. The woman who used to scurry for cover at the sight of an autorikshaw driver thinking every khaki-clad person was a policeman, today calmly takes delegations to meet the Superintendent of Police, the Zilla Panchayat CEO, the tahsildar.

As a taluk representative on the zilla panchayat CEO's citizens' committee (a neoliterate from each taluk is invited to be on this committee), Kunhi Akka is no longer bashful in discussing social evils like drinking, fighting nuisance elements, and discussing women's safety. Mostly, though, she talks about the importance of self-help. And how literacy is the only means to get there.

Ramakunja gram panchayat president Ratnavali S. Gowda, another neoliterate, feels she has been more effective in her job, thanks to literacy. She helps women organise self-help groups, having six in her bag already. Dairying, and other income-generating activities find eager takers after she goaded a few stubborn residents to join night school. There are 426 neo-literates in her village, and she has plans to build an office for NDS. Literacy has made her more vocal, and self-confident, she thinks, as she moves on to another dream of hers - the village is divided along caste lines, and she wants to remove them, and bring every child to school.

A study by social workers Sheena Shetty and Krishna Moolya for the sociology department of Mangalore University, on the impact of NDS at various levels shows that the innovative methods adopted have paid off. The visits to government offices have ensured better rapport between the neo-literates and officials. Neo-literates are making the most of information booklets on schemes meant for them. A monthly journal for neo-literates, *Akshara Karavali*, is avidly read, and even contributed to.

The NDS has chosen to lend emphasis to the benefits of literacy for women, and the study finds that literacy has promoted greater participation by women in the decision-making process at various levels. It notes that nearly 80 per cent of

participants in NDS meetings are women, who actively participated in welfare-oriented programmes. Much of the motivation for work in environmental protection, repair of roads, school buildings, came from women, who also confidently contest the panchayat elections.

What lingered as the neo-literates stood waving goodbye, looking like a defiant surge of sea, was Kunhi Akka's dream, the dream, perhaps of every neoliterate, which they at once hoped and feared would come true - a political party for the neo-literates that would teach corrupt politicians a lesson. Just once, they would like to say no, and slam the door in the face of the vote-seekers.

★ ★ ★

HAD Nagalakshmi lived anywhere but in Puttur's Mardal village in Dakshina Kannada, she would probably be married, and minding a couple of infants at home. Or been at the receiving end of abuse from her husband, driven to suicide. Happily, young Nagalakshmi is none of these things. She is, as she ought to be, a promising student of law at the V.B. Law College, Udupi, aspiring to excel at criminal law.

Nagalakshmi's father chose to comply with "family traditions" that frowned on education for girls, and pulled her out of school when she ought to have gone ahead to middle school. Besides, he could not afford to waste money on education for a daughter, his salary being meagre. Nagalakshmi was not pleased, particularly as she herself had enjoyed studying. But there was little she could do about it, and she began to help her younger brothers with their lessons when they came home. Until the year she turned 15.

That was when the literacy campaign was blazing new trails and volunteers were swarming the district, fishing out everyone from age 15 to 35 and roping them in for night school. Younger children who had dropped out of school were talked into enrolling again. When K. P. Mohan, a campaign manager in Puttur, visited Nagalakshmi's home, he prevailed upon her parents to send her to night school, at least.

Nagalakshmi signed up, and within three months, topped her class. Everyone wanted her to resume regular school, and so she did. She took tuitions and passed the seventh standard privately. At school, one of the teachers who seemed to have taken a dislike to her began to make school life difficult for Nagalakshmi. She bore this harassment silently, but when the master refused to allow her to take her eighth standard exams on specious reasons, it was the last straw. She reported this to Mohan. By this time, Deputy Commissioners and most district

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UP farmer finds his fortune in book trade

By Mazhar Farooqui
The Times of India News Service

VARANASI: It's a typical rags to riches story — the kind which you read in books only. And books it's all about. Son of a small time Lucknow farmer, Ramanand Tewari, set up a book stall on the footpaths of Varanasi during the '70s and earned enough to rent a shop near the tourist bungalow. But just as the sales picked up, the landlord doubled the rent. Mr Tewari packed up and headed for Kathmandu in Nepal where he opened another book shop.

This time he had better luck. The shop became popular and went on to become the biggest book shop in Asia. Riveting stories of Mr Tewari's successful transition from farming to book business have already appeared in several international publications.

Spread over 20,000 square feet on Thamel road in Kathmandu, Mr Tewari's five-storey Pilgrims Book House is a literary oasis of sorts, frequented by the likes of Ricky Martin, Gulzar and renowned director Bernardo Bertolucci of *Little Buddha* fame.

Besides a wide range of books on various subjects, the shop also has a garden restaurant serving vegetarian delights and traditional Nepali dishes to discerning tourists and visitors who wish to combine the pleasure of browsing with eating.

Prompted by the stupendous success of the Thamel road shop, Mr Tewari has recently opened two more bookstores — one at Kupondole in Kathmandu and the other near Durga Kund in Varanasi — the city where he started it all. In association with its sister company *Book Faith India*, today, Mr Tewari not only just sells books, he publishes them as well.

Fittingly, the publishing house is based in Varanasi itself. Run by Chaitanya Nagar, managing editor, and his wife Sasya, art director, the plush Varanasi store is designed in the traditional old-world European style and is a veritable treat for bibliophiles.

From mountaineering and fiction to spirituality and religion, it has books on all subjects. While Chaitanya selects the manuscripts, his wife designs the jackets.

"This is perhaps the biggest book store in the eastern region of the country. In the one year that have rolled by since we opened, the store has become immensely popular with tourists who come to Varanasi," says Chaitanya. "In fact, we are thinking of starting a small cafe and meditation centre here shortly," he adds.

The publishing house has several projects up its sleeves, the chief of which is a series of Haiku, by John Brandi.

The Times of India
11 March 2000

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officials had been co-opted into the literacy programme and word of Nagalakshmi's harassment reached his ears. "The Deputy Commissioner, Rajnish Goel, asked me over to his office, and I wrote my exams in his presence". She wrote her tenth standard exams in private, and went ahead to pre-university classes. That was when she decided to study law. By this time, Nagalakshmi had become the new icon of the literacy movement, the success story that everyone wanted to emulate. An article in *Taranga*, a Kannada weekly published from Manipal in Udupi district, caught the eye of a Indian in the U.S. and so it was that Chandrashekhar Shetty offered to see her through law college. Nagalakshmi left Mardal to study in the prestigious V.B. law College. Now in her third year, only a film and a documentary on her achievements, made by a Bangalore-based film-maker used extensively by the Directorate of Mass Education in the State to inspire neoliterates, convinces her of her achievements.

While she plods through copious volumes on law, lapping up lessons on the Indian Penal Code, and tort law, Nagalakshmi makes no secret of the fact that she has much to thank Shetty for. "I'd like to go and study in America," she says. Why? "Because I have a debt of gratitude to repay. I have someone to help me realise my dream. One which I never thought would come true. Going to America would mean an opportunity to do well and earn more. Then I can help other students like me."

What of her other dream? To become a women's rights lawyer? Well, that too. Dreams that come true, only make more dreams happen. And every dream begins with going to school. Ask Nagalakshmi, who almost never did. ■

The author is fellow of the National Foundation for India and this article is part of the fellowship series.

ALLADI JAYASRI

The Hindu
12 March 2000

Weddings are a mixed blessing for these adivasi families

By Meenakshi Shedde

SAVARSAI, PEN (RAIGAD): Weddings are a mixed blessing for these adivasi families, as they take loans of about Rs 15,000 for a single wedding. With earnings of Rs 20-60 for a day's labour in season, they take up to a decade or more to square it off, and often force their children to labour on the thakur's fields or brick kilns to help pay up. In order to break this exploitative cycle, the Family Planning Association of India, the Rotary Club of Pen, and the gram panchayat of Savarsai jointly sponsored and organised the simultaneous weddings, which cost each bride's or groom's family only Rs 500.

Gynaecologist Usha Malgaonkar, the dedicated chairperson of FPAI, Pen, says, "I was with the BARC in Mumbai. But with more than a lakh gynaecologists in the city, who needs me? These people really need us. I have been in Pen for 22 years and am very happy here. We hold marriages only for couples legally old enough to do so—18 years for women and 21 for men. For six months prior to the marriage, we counsel them about family planning and spacing children, and do follow-ups. The weddings are a great way to get our prime targets concerned about family planning. The three organisations have spent Rs 80,000 on this community wedding, and we think it is worth it. In fact, some under-aged couples are delaying their marriages because if they wait until they are older, they can get married through us so cheaply."

Dr M.L. Sharma, director of projects, FPAI, sums it up thus, "In keeping with FPAI's philosophy of family planning through integrated development, we assist the villagers through a number of programmes concerning overall health, income-generation and legal awareness. We find that when women earn some money, they often tend to spend it on family welfare and become aware of the importance of family planning." The 16 couples are not entirely aware of this concerted strategy, but gauging from their broad beams, it seems to have been worth it.

The Times of India
13 March 2000

A headstart in computers for tribal 'know-nots'

Bhopal, March 12: A tribal child in a remote hamlet in Madhya Pradesh will soon become computer savvy and be able to make optimal use of knowledge services, thanks to the innovative "headstart" scheme.

Amid a "hi-tech flu" sweeping the urban metropolis, the project has outlined a novel strategy to bridge the schism between the 'know' and the 'know-nots.' The method planned is cost effective and will make

use of a judicious mode of interactive computer learning.

Operationalised by the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission as part of its comprehensive strategy to raise the quality of equality, the project will start functioning in 1,000 schools by August this year.

The proposal aims to give a "headstart" to children in the primary and middle schools of the State in terms of computer-enabled education.

While the students of middle

schools will actually use the computers for learning, at the primary school-level a basic familiarity with computers will be ingrained.

Observing that the project was motivated to inculcate computer education from 'below', mission co-ordinator R Gopalakrishnan said the scheme would spell a paradigm shift towards computer enabled education.

"The central theme was on how to push the learning front-

ier in an interactive format of self learning. Instead of using the computer as a machine, we aim to prudently use it as a platform for interactive learning," he said.

The challenge was to create the right kind of academic software where the potential of a sophisticated technology becomes the interactive child-friendly pedagogy, he said.

The State has 6,500 Jan Shiksha Kendras or JSK (cluster resource centres) located in the middle school premises in 48 districts. These kendras would be used to impact computer-enabled education to all children in those middle schools. Besides, it will familiarise primary school children in the catchment of the JSK with computers.

Students of Classes 1-5 will be brought to the JSK for appropriate demos, including computer games. The choice of games will be carefully made so that students are enthused to think and learn. • UNI

The Indian Express
13 March 2000

Sex-related queries: Field workers wary of this year's census

Ambarish Mukherjee

CALCUTTA

SEX is taboo for the average Indian and questions regarding one's married life is all set to pose this year's census as a difficult job to field workers collecting primary data from households.

Census work in West Bengal will begin from March 17 and according to government guidelines, most of the workload this time is being shared by school teachers and other departmental workers of the government coupled with a handful of freelancers on assignment basis. And these questioners are, to a certain extent, apprehensive of the impact their questions might make.

The census workers in West Bengal are already complaining of the embarrassing situation

that they anticipate they might run into while trying to get answers for the 34 questions in this year's form.

And this is because of the nature of this year's census, which tries to capture the socio-economic positioning of respective households along with the population, their sex and age profile.

Says Subimal Sanyal, this year's census worker and a Calcutta school teacher in his early 40s, "I wonder what will happen when I will be asking questions like — Do you and your spouse spend the night in the same room? or, Does all the couples staying in the building have a room for them or they share a room?"

"You see," he continues, "We will mostly be visiting people's residences during office hours when the male members remain

outside their homes and mostly it is the ladies who stay at home and answer our queries. It is not only that I will feel a bit awkward and uncomfortable to ask a lady such a question but she too may find it quite offensive? What happens to me then? If they refuse to answer on such personal matters, what should I do?"

The answer has been provided by the deputy director of the census department of the Union government and his answer is highly interesting. According to Sumita Chatterjee, another school teacher based in Calcutta, who has already undergone a training, "When we asked what we should do if someone refuses to answer, all we were instructed were "Don't try to act smart when you ask such questions but somehow manage it and get the information". □

The Observer
14 March 2000

Scholarship for poor women

Akshara, a women's resource centre, will launch a scholarship programme titled *Run With Your Dreams* for poor women between 13 and 25.

The centre aims to empower women through education and help them get better jobs, training and attain independence. Most applicants are from families with only one earning member whose average income is between Rs 1,200 and Rs 1,500 a month.

A donation of Rs 5,000 will see a woman through three years of college; Rs 2,000 will cover the expenses for a vocational training course and Rs 1,500 will cover college fees for a year. Donations may be sent to Nandita Shah/ Nandita Gandhi, Run With Your Dreams Scholarship Programme, Akshara, Neelambari, 501, Road 86, Dadar West, Mumbai 400028.

The Telegraph
15 March 2000

Women gear up for panchayat polls

By SHOBHA MATHUR PANDIAN

Chennai, March 13: Rural women from various districts in Tamil Nadu are gearing up for 2001 Panchayati Raj elections. Hailing mostly from the Dalit communities and working predominantly as agricultural labourers, they will be contesting for the posts of president, vice-president, ward members and district counsellors.

Stakes are high - at least 50 'all-women' member panchayats are being aimed in the next round of polls.

Over 2000 self-help groups from the State Women's Collective Organisation (WCO) are busy training prospective heavyweights in 15 districts of Tamil Nadu, through programmes. Training focuses on the responsibilities and rights of panchayat members. Ways to tackle local problems relating to civic and land issues, illegal brewing of arrack in the villages and the threat of MNC entry into the rural sector are

some of the areas that are concentrated on.

MNC's have been increasingly marginalising unsuspecting farmers with the lure of high prices for lands as well as technology. In the last five years alone, 5000 acres in Madurai, Dindigul, Ramanathapuram and Gummridipondi village, 40 kms north of Chennai, have been taken over by MNC's (Dupont, Monsanto, Ford Motors and Hyundai), says WCO member F Sheelu. To counteract this, women are being educated on 'genetic warfare' like Monsanto's 'terminator technology' which threatens the livelihood of farmers and on weedicides that destroy all crops other than Monsanto plants. These weedicides are available in the markets despite stiff opposition by NGO's, she says.

Women panchayat members

are also being initiated in self-sufficiency - ecofarming techniques using bio-pesticides and bio-fertilizers as well as food and seed preservation method-

ologies, to ensure food security at family and community level.

The 33 per cent reservation extended to women in

Over 2000 self-help groups are busy training prospective heavyweights in 15 districts of Tamil Nadu through programmes

the 1996 local body elections strengthened the women's role in the administration, says coordinator WCO, (Tiruvallur) V Chandra. More than three lakh women were elected with a thumping majority. Interestingly, only half of them were educated but this did not stop them from picking up the ropes any less faster. Illiterate and semi-literate women fare better than their educated counterparts (read till school-level), she says. They are more eager,

quicker to learn and less tied down by social constraints.

However, only one lakh women panchayat members have so far been successful in taking on the strength of the menfolk. The remaining are still functioning in the shadows of their husbands and other family menfolk. A new post has been created - the panchayat president's husband's co-ordinator WCO (Kancheepuram) Shenbagavaly. Sometimes the husbands even attend the trainings instead of their spouses giving excuses for their absence. There is just nothing we can do about it, she laments. Till date, no 'All-Women' panchayats have been elected in the State. The maximum women strength of 50 per cent exists only at Vadapuzhur in Tiruvanamallai, says Sheelu. Panchayats are continuously faced with fund shortages with minimum support from State Government. The rest has to be raised from local resources, she says.

**The Indian Express
14 March 2000**

Use of water to be monitored in Maharashtra

By Our Special Correspondent

MUMBAI, MARCH 14. The Maharashtra government has decided to set up an authority for planning and monitoring the use of water and review all irrigation projects in the State.

On the first day of the budget session on Monday, the Governor, Dr. P. C. Alexander, said in his address to the joint session of both houses of the State Legislature that the proposed authority would lay down policies regarding fair distribution of water.

The State has already set up a committee to study the present

system of operation, maintenance and repair of the rural and urban water supply schemes and suggest appropriate arrangements for sustainable operation.

Dr. Alexander expressed concern over the excessive exploitation of ground water and said the State Government was determined to implement and enforce the ground water legislation.

The Government would pay Rs. 600 per month to every project-affected family which had lost its land, till irrigation facilities were made available on the substitute land in the command area. Each family would also be paid a special grant of Rs. 10,000 for the construction of a house in the new settlement.

A corporation would be set up to strengthen water conservation

activities and it would raise funds through bonds.

This move comes in the backdrop of the declared policy of the Government not to rely on bonds. The ruling Democratic Front's had earlier charged that the State had landed in an internal debt-trap because of market borrowing. Unable to roll back the bonds, the Government has though declared that it would maintain the ratio of open market borrowing to the contribution of the Government at 50:50.

Dr. Alexander said the Government had decided to set up a Malign Acid Arthik Vikas Mahamandal, a corporation for the welfare of unemployed Muslim youth. The corporation would provide financial assistance to them for self-employment.

**The Hindu
15 March 2000**

Treatments prescribed for healthier cities

By Bindeshwar Pathak

It is no exaggeration to say that sanitation will be one of the main issues of the 21st century. With the world population touching the 11.2 billion mark as indicated by the United Nations projections, urban areas worldwide will face greater stress in this regard. This is because most cities in the developing world will have neither adequate water to carry effluents nor enough funds to build an efficient sewerage system. This in turn will hamper a healthy and hygienic living.

Out of the 4.4 billion people residing in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, nearly three-fifths of the population are deprived of safe drinking water and more than a quarter of them are yet to get adequate housing. One-fifth have no healthcare facilities and one-fifth of the children here are school dropouts, according to a 1998 report. Of the estimated 3.5 million children who die from diarrhoea each year in the developing countries, nearly 600,000 alone succumb to sanitation-related diseases. Moreover, refugees and children suffering from malnutrition are the main victims.

Inadequate sewerage

In India, unfortunately about 750 million people defecate on open railway tracks or in open parks and community toilets. The severity of the problem can be judged from the fact that only 20 per cent of the urban population has access to flush toilets connected to the sewerage system, 14 per cent are equipped with water-based toilets linked to septic tanks, 33 per cent have bucket latrines and the remaining 33 per cent have no latrine facilities.

The safe disposal of faeces is vital for improving health and environment. Over 50 infections can be transferred from a patient to a healthy individual through direct and indirect routes — human excreta being the main source, and causing almost 80 per cent of diseases. Unless appropriate human waste management is accorded top priority, a healthy society and cleaner environment will continue to be elusive goals.

Good scavenging

The task force on scavengers formed by the planning commission in 1990-91 reported that the number of bucket privies in India was about 7.6 million and of these, 5.4 million were located in urban areas. The Tata Energy Research Institute reported in 1998 that "nearly half the country's population does not have access to drinking water; about 90 per cent of the water supply is polluted and only 10 per cent of the sewage treatment plants are in working order".

Though India and China have approximately the same birth rate, the mortality rate of children is three times higher in India. Some experts have even observed that India loses \$ 10 billion (half the total currency reserves of the Reserve Bank of India) in annual productivity because of workers falling ill amid deteriorating physical conditions. However, with sanitation gradually attracting the attention of the Centre and affluent citizens, hygiene and living conditions should improve in the future.

The Telegraph
15 March 2000

Learning how to be free political agents

By Radhakrishna Rao

Discrimination against women has remained an inseparable part of social dynamics all over the world. While women in many parts of the world including India have made it to the top of the power structure, at the grassroots level they are yet to be empowered.

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments ensuring 33 per cent reservation of seats for women in local bodies grant women their due in grassroots level governance. Now a non-governmental organization has moved the Supreme Court to give teeth to the legislation.

The Dehra Dun based NGO, Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra, moved the apex court to direct states which never held *panchayat* elections under the new dispensation of the *panchayati Raj* system to hold elections soon. Accordingly, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Orissa were directed to dissolve their panchayats and hold fresh elections.

Motivation of a community

The RLEK has also taken up educating and motivating rural women to participate in elections and have at least some knowledge of their role in local self-governance, especially in the rural areas in the Dehra Dun district of Uttar Pradesh.

In the "pre-election phase" of the training, a team of community motivators is built up in each village of the district. These teams educate women voters on the salient features of panchayati raj as well as on the intricacies of voting.

The awareness campaign resulted in many women contesting the elections and a large number of women coming out to vote. In many panchayats several women got elected in the general seats as well. However, one disquieting trend was the apprehension that women's empowerment in this manner would lead to men's disempowerment.

Against all odds

According to Avadesh Kaushal, chairperson of the RLEK, the local bureaucracy which had all along treated the rural areas as their virtual fiefdom is disturbed over women entering the local governance matrix.

After the elections, the organization trained women panchayat members and *pradhans*, the basic thrust being to impart information on how to conduct and participate in the process of self-governance and how to put forward their demands. Training material brought out by the RLEK describes the salient features and provisions of panchayati raj.

The pre-election educational campaign and post-election training programme went a long way towards helping women like Natho Begum, *pradhan* of Enfield Grants in Vikas Nagar block of Dehra Dun district, to effectively take up the cause of the poor and underprivileged. Against several social odds, Natho Begum emerged as one of the most popular panchayat *pradhans* because of her ability to deliver the goods in the face of non-cooperation from the bureaucracy.

The Telegraph
16 March 2000

Greening of the Gulf

ALIGHTING from the car outside the splendid National Theatre complex in Abu Dhabi, I was startled to hear birdsong from the trees standing tall against the pale blue sky. The familiar, clear voices of robins and warblers belonged to kinder western climes. Are they residents or tourists passing through ahead of the scorching, soggy summer, I asked myself.

They are natives, I learnt. Breeding well due to the greening of the Gulf. On my first trip to the UAE last winter, I was amazed to see thick blocks of mature trees along the road between Dubai and Abu Dhabi. On my second journey, I found new plantations of tiny saplings stretching in straight lines into the desert. In the distance a lonely water lorry dispensed a daily ration of life-giving fluid to everyone. West Asia is suffering its fourth year of drought.

Peter Hellyer, a 20 year British resident of Abu Dhabi and an environmental campaigner, told Foreign Panorama, "I am always reluctant to say something is the work of one man. But this is the case here. It is Shaikh Zayed's vision. He began planting trees and gardens in the late 40s when he was made the ruler's representative in the oasis of al-Ain. He planted trees before laying streets. Al-Ain is a garden city today."

Mr Hellyer believes that Shaikh Zayed, now the ruler of Abu Dhabi and president of the federation, was inspired by the "Muslim view of paradise as a place of running water and trees" and by the "bedouin desire for greenery." While a young man Shaikh Zayed roamed the desert with the tribesmen, learning their ways and hunting gazelle. But at the age of 25, after a day 69 of these graceful creatures were killed, he stopped shooting and became a conservationist. Since he succeeded his brother in 1966, Shaikh Zayed has established wild-life reserves and used Abu Dhabi's oil revenues to "green" less wealthy neighbours.

"One hundred and twenty million trees of many varieties and 26 million palm trees have been planted in naturally fertile areas, on rolling dunes and on land

reclaimed from the sea", Mr Hellyer said. "Although some people believe the trees are changing the climate, meteorologists are not convinced. But the micro-climate has been changed in particular locations. Birds breed where they never bred before, wintering birds stay and migrating birds stop. The habitat is different," he remarked.

"Mistakes were made", he admitted. Eucalyptus drank too much water, so neem and other native trees were planted. Too much fossil ground water was pumped so wells became saline. The Agriculture Ministry switched to recycled sewage water. Today all gardens in Abu Dhabi and Dubai are watered by recycled sewage. Tomorrow desalinated water will also be used for trees and gardens.

Maan Nadeem, an engineer at the Jebel Ali power and desalination plant, described how the combined facility produced both electricity and potable water using natural gas and some oil for fuel. For the time being, all the desalinated water produced is for human consumption, but he believes that once domestic needs are met, excess desalinated water will be used for irrigation.

A technical expert at the Ministry of Agriculture, Muhammad Abdullah al-Ali, said that there are 40 dams in the country, 10 supervised by his ministry. A modern irrigation system supplies 87 per cent of needs. Seventy per cent of the water provided to vegetable farms is distributed through the drip system and only 12 per cent by sprinklers which allow for too much evaporation.

He revealed that the planting of neem trees, native to the area, has had a major side-benefit. The small, oval neem fruit, used in Indian medicine, is collected, dried, crushed and stored at a low temperature away from sunlight until it is mixed with water and used as a pesticide. "All the spraying in Dubai is with neem", he stated. "It's particularly effective

in winter (the rainy season) and it does not kill birds and animals. We've stopped importing chemical sprays. Abu Dhabi is in the process of adopting neem. Soon it

will be used in all the UAE." The simple recipe was picked up in India by German experts who took it home and thence to Sudan where Mr al-Ali, a Sudanese, learnt the formula before bringing it to Dubai.

Shaikh Zayed also endeavours to populate parks and reserves with local and foreign endangered wildlife. His most ambitious project is an "Arabian ark" on the island of Sir Bani Yas, which lies off the coast between Abu Dhabi and Qatar. The barren and arid island's only advantage was its natural harbour. Its rugged mountains and man-made pastures and tree plantations provide a home to rare sand gazelle, nearly extinct Arabianoryx, wild cat, lynx, leopard and cheetah, Arabian wolf and striped haeyna as well as imports from the west and Africa.

Three veterinary surgeons reside on the island to look after the animals and birds.

Shaikh Zayed, the first ruling head of state to receive the World Wildlife Fund's Gold Panda award, promotes both domestic environmental education and global awareness. In February Dubai hosted a major international conference on desertification while next year Abu Dhabi is cooperating with UN agencies to stage a conference entitled "The Environment 2001". The Zayed International Prize for the Environment, offering a 1 million dollar purse, will be awarded in 2001. By then at least another million and a half saplings will join the ranks of trees greening the UAE.

Michael Jansen
in Abu Dhabi-Dubai
Deccan Herald
16 March 2000

Babu Varsities

This refers to Andre Beteille's article on NGOs (The Third Sector, March 10). It is wrong to argue that universities in India are not governmental organisations. Central and state universities depend on government hand-outs. Their heads are appointed directly or indirectly by the government. University employees, too, enjoy lifetime employment and inflation-indexed wages. As in the government, merit plays a negligible role in promotions and seniority is everything. Finally, like *sarkari babus*, university employees believe that more pay and less work is their birthright.

The choice is not between autonomous institutions and NGOs, but between the state and the market. The former is now unable even to fund the mess it has created in higher education.

Shreekant Gupta, Delhi University

The Times of India
17 March 2000

'Rubber' band around this MP district

Abhilash Khandekar
Bhopal, March 15

RABRI MAY be brimming with 'confidence' in Bihar, but here, it is the 'inflated' rubber that's doing the rounds. A unique campaign to curb population explosion in a backward district of Sidhi is gaining momentum.

An exceptionally large number of married couples are now showing greater interest in using condoms distributed by senior Government officials, including the District Collector, Mr Vishwamohan Upadhyaya.

The first of its kind, this population control programme was launched in Chitrangi Development Block in January, with six "motivating couples" spreading the 'good word' among newly-wed and semi-literate couples.

Bordering UP, the Sidhi district in Rewa division—with a good measure of tribal population—has a fairly high birth rate at 39.2 per cent which is at least 11 per cent higher than the national percentage of birth rate. Like other backward regions, awareness about the dangers of burgeoning population is negligible in this pastoral community. But with the rubber being available in Government offices and across bank counters, things are changing fast.

The special action plan—to be emulated by other districts soon—

turned into an instant success. Within a week of its launch, the six 'motivating couples' not only approached 300 others but also convinced them to use condoms. Now every village seems to be thriving on the rubber blubber scheme. According to the Health Department sources, the message of making safe sex has spread very fast and "a large number of people are now showing definite inclination to make use of condoms" circulated by Health Department officials and other senior officials.

The birth spacing programme, with specific stress on promoting use of condoms, is being underlined in small meetings of men and women in villages. The meetings are not only being addressed by the District Collector but Mr Upadhyaya distributes the condom packets to the target couples. The district has over 18 lakh population out of which a staggering 2.95 lakh couples have been targeted for use of condoms in the next few months.

Speaking to *The Hindustan Times*, Mr Upadhyaya said that the target of the scheme is to bring down the birth rate from 38.2 to 25 per thousand by the year 2004, besides curbing the mortality rate of 110 (per 1,000 deliveries) to 70.

Mr Upadhyaya said that checking the growing menace of AIDS was also among the main objects of launching such a scheme.

The Hindustan Times
16 March 2000

AP draws up map of AIDS-prone areas

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Hyderabad, March 16: The Government has identified over 20 lakh people in the high risk groups in different parts of the State who are prone to get infected by the HIV virus that leads to the dreaded AIDS disease.

In a first of its kind experim-

ent in the country, the Government has prepared a map giving the precise location of sex workers, truck drivers, street children, slum dwellers and other high risk categories in 21 districts of the State. The details of vulnerable groups in Hyderabad and Khammam are yet to come.

As of now, an estimated four

lakh people have been affected by the killer virus in the State, second only to Maharashtra.

As many as 9.93 lakh slum dwellers in 48 different locations in the State, 4.54 lakh industrial workers (50 places), 2.5 lakh migrant labour (67), 1.71 lakh truck drivers (64), 66,638 sex workers (67) and 40,478

street children in 19 areas had been identified as prone to the killer disease. Mapping in the categories of men having sex with men (MSM) and trans-gender was also taken up.

The Indian Express
17 March 2000

Thimmakka gets Indira Vrikshamitra award

DH News Service

NEW DELHI, March 16

Saalumarada Thimmakka was today conferred the Indira Priya Darshini Vrikshamitra Award 1997 in individual category by Planning Commission deputy chairman K C Pant while Karnataka's MolaKalmuru range and Kadamakal revenue forest Kodagu district too bagged prizes.

Thimmakka, who created awareness among the people of Karnataka by planting sapplings and protecting them, was given a citation and a plaque "in recognition of zeal and lifetime commitment to the cause of afforestation by her."

The citation which was read out in the presence of environment and forest minister T R Baalu, said Thimmakka and her late husband Bikkala Chikkaiah had started planting of banyan trees about 40 years ago on each side of Kudur-Hulikal road over a length of four km. So far 287 banyan trees have been planted. These trees show a healthy and uniform growth as compared to the other avenue plantations. Motivated by the work of Thimmakka, the other villagers have also carried out plantations work on their own lands.

The Molakalmuru range in Chitradurga forest division received the Vrikshamitra award in government category and it was received from Mr Pant by Mr J N Raj, division forest officer, Chitradurga for raising 8.69 lakh seedlings in seven nurseries and distributing 1.17 lakh of them.

The citation said the work by the range had created asset in the form of trees which will have a lasting socio-economic impact. The staff of Molakalmuru range should be appreciated for their unique and pioneering effort, the citation said. In recognising the award the effort in increasing tree cover and restoration of barren land, the award for 1997 has been conferred, the citation said.

The Kadamakal revenue forest in Sampaje range of Madikeri taluk was given the award in "Mahavruksha" category for ensuring proper growth and protection of 21 metre high Barga tree. Conservator of forest M Munireddy received the award.

Deccan Herald
17 March 2000

Social sector spending on decline

By Soma Basu

NEW DELHI, MARCH 17. It is generally assumed that the Government is focussing increasingly on the social sector by way of enhancing the sector's budgetary allocation each year. But actually the opposite is true. In fact, the Government spending on the social sector and rural development in percentage terms has been stagnating since 1996-97. While the Budget Estimate (BE) presented each year has remained more or less static with only negligible increase during certain years in between, the decline in the Revised Estimate (RE) on social sector has been steady.

Quoting statistics related to the Central Plan outlay for major schemes of social sector and rural development from successive Economic Surveys, an Ahmedabad-based group, People's Budgetary Information Services, has concluded that "the percentage of GDP at current market rate is decreasing in the Revised Estimate constantly for the past four years".

"This is a highly concerning phenomenon as the Government tries to paint a picture while presenting the BE each year that despite mounting revenue and fiscal deficits and borrowings, the Government is not neglecting the social sector spending. But its own data proves contrary to its claims," Mr. Madhusudan Mistry of the group told *The Hindu* here.

For comparison purpose, the BE for social sector during 1993-94 was 1.09 per cent of the GDP and in the RE it increased to 1.17 per cent of GDP. In 1996-97, while the BE was 1.2 per cent of GDP, it became

1.07 per cent of GDP in the RE. In the subsequent year, the social sector spending was 1.21 per cent of GDP in the BE which reduced to 1.09 per cent of GDP in the RE. Again during the financial year, 1998-99, the RE reduced to 1.09 per cent of GDP from the BE of 1.18 per cent. In other words, speaking in terms of money, the RE has seen a decrease from the BE by Rs.1,707 crores in 1996-97, Rs.1,948 crores in 1997-98, Rs.1,601 crores in 1998-1999 and Rs.1,782 crores in 1999-2000.

The Government's major schemes of social sectors and rural development are broadly categorised under education, health and family welfare, women and child development, welfare, rural employment and poverty alleviation and other central programmes of employment generation.

The employment generation schemes such as the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana — which was recently renamed as Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana in April last year, or other Rural Employment Generation Programmes, the Million Wells Scheme, the Integrated Rural Development Programme and the education schemes have seen highest reductions in this gone decade, and moreso during the past four years.

Since 1996-97, Central education schemes such as the Free Education for Girls, District Primary Education Programme, Operation Blackboard, Non-Formal Education have seen a reduction in the RE from the BE at a average difference of more than Rs.550 crores. In 1996-97, the elementary and adult education outlay came down by Rs.814 crores in the RE, while in 1997-98, the difference was of Rs.745 crores.

The Hindu
18 March 2000

Another wind power project in Rajasthan

By Our Staff Correspondent

JAIPUR, MARCH 17. As part of the initiative to develop non-conventional energy sources, the Rajasthan Government has undertaken the task of establishing the second wind power project at Deogarh in Chittaurgarh district after installing a similar plant in Jaisalmer.

The Energy Minister, Dr. Chandrabhan, laid the foundation stone for the Rs. 8.5-crore project at the tribal-dominated Deogarh village this week. Addressing the gathering, he said the State expected to generate at least 100 MW power through the wind power plants in the next two years.

To be established jointly by the Rajasthan Energy Development Agency (REDA) and the Rajasthan State Power Corporation, the Deogarh project would become operational by May 31 and generate

62 lakh units of power every year.

The Chennai-based Asian Wind Turbine Private Limited — which has been assigned the task of setting up and operating the project — will install three generators each at a height of 55 metres. This will be the first time that generators of this capacity would be installed at the proposed height.

Deogarh, situated in the Dharmatar-Pratapgarh belt in Chittaurgarh district, was selected for the second wind power venture of the State because of the availability of 21.30 km per hour wind velocity at a height of 30 metres during six months in a year. The Rajasthan State Electricity Board (RSEB) has signed a power purchase agreement with the State Power Corporation to buy power at the rate of Rs. 3.03 per unit.

Dr. Chandrabhan said the State Government had announced a wind power policy aimed at encouraging private investments in

this sector. It had exempted the electricity produced by wind power plants from duty till March 31, 2005. He hoped that the success of the two projects would fetch an investment of Rs. 500 crores to Rajasthan.

Underlining the need to develop the non-conventional sources of energy, the Minister said the solar, wind and bio-mass sources had provided viable alternatives.

The 140 MW Mathania solar power project, pending since 1988, had been approved recently by the Centre, and Rs. 872 crores had been sanctioned for establishing it, he added.

Work on the much-awaited Mathania project would begin this year and the plant would become operational by 2003, Dr. Chandrabhan said and added that it would be a unique project of the country.

The Hindu
18 March 2000

Okha in Gujarat logs on as India's first online village

By Ambar Basu

The Times of India News Service

CALCUTTA: Okha is a tiny coastal village in Gujarat. An all-weather natural port, barely 50 nautical miles from Karachi across the Arabian Sea, it has a higher secondary school equipped with a computer laboratory and concrete roads lined with sodium vapour lamps.

It is also the only village in the country to have a website of its own.

Log on to www.okhaonnet.com.

Spread over 15 sq km, the village found its way into the dotcom world, courtesy Mansukhbhai Barai, sarpanch of the Okha panchayat since 1995. Mr Barai launched the website in August 1999 to "put this prosperous village on the map of the world" and attract investments.

Today, the village has a computer laboratory at the village higher secondary school, and computer education is a part of the curriculum for students, right from the primary level up to class XII. The Sarvodaya Mahila Samity, a welfare organisation for women, also has a computer centre. One-and-a-half hour classes are held here everyday for men and women. "There are 20 students, each of whom pay a monthly fee of Rs 300. More people are keen to join the class and we are planning to expand operations soon," Mansukhbhai told TOINS over phone from Okha on Wednesday.

The panchayat too has a computer and plans to go online with its routine administrative work.

An agency has been hired to develop the software needed to computerise day-to-day administrative functions. "It should be ready in a couple of months," Bharatbhai, Mansukhbhai's son, said.

Mansukhbhai and his panchayat colleagues are however, not willing to stop at this. In the next 10 years they envisage Okha as a model infotech village on the world map, built on the lines of Bangalore, Hyderabad and now, Gandhinagar. "Funds are not a problem," Mansukhbhai says. "What we need is a

comprehensive plan to channelise our money and energy." And he is clear about one thing: the panchayat will not brook political interference and will hold out till it can.

The Okha panchayat is also on its way to complete construction of an English-medium school. Classes I to IV are already functioning and by the end of this year, the panchayat plans to extend it to class X. In two years' time, the village should also have a higher secondary school for girls, an auditorium and a college of arts and commerce.

Introducing a ferry service between Okha and Kutch in Saurashtra is also on the agenda of this well-knit 30-member apolitical panchayat team. "By road, we take 20 hours to reach Kutch. The ferry service will cut this time to two hours," a panchayat member said.

"The 20,000-odd residents of our village are a happy lot. Mainly into the fishing business, families are well-off and the crime rate is close to nil," Bharatbhai, who is involved in the functioning of the panchayat, said. The village also boasts of a 24-hour water supply, which is significant, considering the fact that the area is plagued by a scarcity of water.

But for a village never short of funds, the situation was not the same even five years ago. Ravaged by the war against Pakistan in 1965, entrepreneurs kept shying away from this once very prosperous industrial port. The Calcutta-based Hindustan Motors wound up its assembly plant in Okha, as did the Railways. Petroleum companies like Indian Oil, Burma Shell and Caltex, too closed down their depots. "All these civic facilities, which even larger cities can only dream of, have been possible mainly due to proper management of the octroi or chungli tax collected from the port. We started doing it from 1995 and collection of chungli has gone up from a mere Rs 35 lakh to Rs 1.35 crore," Bharatbhai pointed out.

Today, the panchayat is hell bent on regaining Okha's past glory as an industrial hub.

The Times of India
18 March 2000

New birth control plan launched in M.P.

By Our Staff Correspondent

BHOPAL, MARCH 17. A novel scheme for controlling population that lays special emphasis on the positive role males can play in spacing children and controlling births has been launched recently by the district administration in the backward Sidhi district falling under the Rewa division of Madhya Pradesh.

The initiative to implement the State Government's Population Policy, announced on January 13 this year, has been taken up for the first time by the Sidhi District Collector, Mr. Vishwamohan Upadhyaya. This scheme has been lauded by the Chief Minister, Mr. Digvijay Singh, and the State Minister for Panchayat and Rural Development, Mr. Ajay Singh.

Under the new scheme, a special team of 1000 motivators has been selected from the remote rural areas whose members have fanned out into the villages to spread awareness among the target group on the benefits of using condoms.

The message being given to the villagers is that condoms help prevent the spread of the dreaded AIDS as also in controlling child birth.

The Sidhi district is yet to catch up with the globalisation process and lacks proper communication facilities. The previous census showed that nearly 40 per cent women in this district had more than four children and 4.2 per cent women above 40 years were still bearing children. The birth rate in Sidhi district is 38.2 per cent, which is 11.2 per cent more than the national average.

The campaign for promoting the use of artificial birth control methods has not produced the desired results so far and so the new birth control campaign was launched.

A report on the latest campaign reveals that 50 per cent women in Sidhi district are suffering from some disorder or other. It has been said that the "tablet" used as an oral contraceptive has failed to catch on in the rural areas of the district mainly due to its side effects. Also there are few takers for copper-T because on the one side there is a dearth of trained nurses for implanting it and on the other the general health of women also does not permit them to go for this.

The Hindu
18 March 2000

Slum kids yearn for education

EVEN as slum dwellers in the capital continue to be deprived of education facilities and clean environs, there has been a perceptible shift in their aspirations especially children, who now want to go to school and strive for a better atmosphere. According to a recent survey by Vastav, a non-government organisation working among the slums in South Delhi, children in the jhuggi jhopri (JJ) clusters, even though half of them are illiterate, nurture an ardent desire to learn and attend school.

Initial studies on a group of 250 jhuggies in South Delhi have showed that adult illiteracy rate is around 55 per cent and as many as 76 per cent of women cannot read or write. Out of the 360 children surveyed, non-school going male children constituted 55 per cent and 67 per cent female children did not go to school, a rather significant point however, was that the children yearned to go to school, says Usha Rani, project manager of Vastav.

Around 160 children surveyed did absolutely nothing and understandably lived very close to the state of delinquency. "There is an obvious willingness to undertake schooling by children of all age groups, who have missed out of formal education due to an economic crunch or due to some other problems", says Usha Rani.

Unfortunately for the children, most of the time activists are constrained in their work because both parents and their

children don't understand the need to pursue formal education, says Rani. But for occasional help by government in terms of medication and prescription, the health of slum dwellers too is in a bad shape with most of the occupants suffering from tuberculosis, respiratory and other water borne diseases. Another startling finding of the survey was that despite exposure to the mass media, slum dwellers interviewed had no awareness of AIDS and other diseases arising

nical intervention through her services.

With 76.47 per cent of the dwellers earning around Rs 3000 a month, sanitation and hygiene are not given much importance as the families have to spend on other important living support systems, reveals the survey. Urban influx had led to inter-caste marriages in the clusters and also to an increase in child marriages on the flip side, says Dasgupta.

According to Dr Dasgupta, Vastav is planning similar surveys in different jhuggi clusters in the capital. "We hope to carry out similar projects in other parts of the capital and provide a holistic solution to their socio-economic problems. Meanwhile, we have chalked out a plan for slum dwellers of the Jai Nehru Camp", says Rani. Children from all age groups would be informally taught basic subjects and after some time would be put through formal schooling which would help them in their orientation, says the project manager.

There is also a move to educate slum dwellers over the need for proper sanitation and hygiene. "It's difficult to communicate the need for maintaining a proper atmosphere. But, we are going step by step by educating women groups and distributing medicines for small diseases, says Dr Dasgupta. But the government also has to step in to provide the much needed resources, says she. (PTI)

Deepika Vij

**The Observer
17 March 2000**

Studies on a group of 250 Jhuggies have showed that adult illiteracy rate is around 55 per cent and as many as 76 per cent of women cannot read or write.

out of unsafe sex practices, says Gita Dasgupta, president of Vastav.

The health of women, presented a grimmer picture with almost all women complaining of gynaecological problems. These women do not come forward to report the cases in the face of severe economic crunch, their health not being on the list of priorities, says Dasgupta, who also offers cli-

Site for women

The Delhi Commission for Women has launched a website, www.empoweringwomen.com, to educate women on their rights and to provide information on various welfare schemes. Sheila Dikshit, chief minister of Delhi, who inaugurated the site, stressed the importance of education for women.
— Press Trust of India.

**The Statesman
18 March 2000**

Child resource directory released

"Fingertips" — a child resource directory providing information about more than 400 organisations and individuals working for children, and children-related services offered in Bangalore, was released by Rotarian and entrepreneur Madhura Chatrapathy at a function here today.

The directory also gives information regarding adoption agencies, alternative schools, artists, hotlines, associations, counsellors, educators, funding agencies, government agencies, hospitals, libraries, magicians, nature camps, non-governmental organisations, orphanages, puppeteers, recreation centres, resource centres, special needs, teachers' training institutes and yoga centres.

The directory, which is the first of its kind in the country in its focus on children, is brought out by Sutradhar, a Bangalore-based educational resource centre.

The directory comprises six sections — child development, education, health, disability, recreation and support services.

Sutradhar Director Mandira Kumar told Deccan Herald that the directory has been compiled to create awareness, and bring co-ordination among various organisations that are working in the field of child welfare in Bangalore.

Besides, the directory is aimed at making the existing children-related services better known, she added.

Each listing in the directory provides — apart from details on address and phone number — a short profile of key services and opportunities for help, she said.

Those interested in purchasing "Fingertips", could contact Sutradhar at 599, 17th 'A' Cross 7th Main, Indiranagar II Stage, Bangalore 560038. Phone: 080 5288545. E-mail: sutradha@vsnl.com

**Deccan Herald
19 March 2000**

NICMAR to launch training programme for rural women

Kiran Thakur

PUNE

THE National Institute of Construction Management and Research (NICMAR) here has decided to undertake an ambitious Rs 30-lakh programme to train rural women in computer and other vocational skills required by the construction industry. The training would be given free of cost. Matriculate girls in villages will be trained in computer applications that are used by builders and contractors beginning this July. Currently, software engineers and graduates in computer applications are employed to do these jobs that prove to be waste of their high level of skills, according to NICMAR director general Prof K N Vaid.

The National Institute of Construction Management and Research will also launch another programme to train women in

skills of plumbing, wiring, white-washing, plastering and the like. These skills are required by the building and construction industry. The trained women would be able to earn also from providing services to people who need repairs and maintenance services, he said. The decision to launch these programmes was taken at the 5th National round-table on HRD, organised by the NICMAR. Representatives of leading corporate houses of the construction industry promised that they would provide jobs to these trained women.

The round-table on 'Redefining Priorities For Human Resource Management in Construction' was attended among others by Hudco chairman and managing director V Suresh and top executives of corporate houses like Gammon India, Shapoorji Pallonji and Bechtel International Inc, besides top bureaucrats from the states.

The representatives also evolved a consensus on introducing a system to certify plumbers, electricians, carpenters and other technicians offering them grades depending upon their level of skills. Such a system is non-existent at present. Similarly, there is no prescribed bench-marking practices for the construction industry, although some companies have gone in for ISO certification.

The round-table authorised the National Institute of Construction Management and Research to form an association to evolve the bench-marking practices.

Addressing the media, Suresh said the bench-marking practices and quality standards are considered essential now, since international companies have entered the country in a big way, adding the domestic construction industry would have to adopt these standards if it wants to

remain in business in competition with the international giants.

The industry has woken up from slumber when it realised that not a single domestic company could reach recent pre-qualifying bids for tenders in infrastructure sector, he said.

The companies realised that they would have to adopt modern technology, quality management practices, transparency and employ skilled manpower as a prerequisite to bid for contracts of national importance, Suresh said.

He also wanted the states to follow the lead given by Andhra Pradesh, which had imposed a levy of 2.5 per cent of contractual amount, which would be utilised for training of construction workers. Vaid said the NICMAR would institute 'Millennium Award' to a distinguished academician engaged in research and development relating to the construction industry. □

The Observer
20 March 2000

New waste-disposal method evolved

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 17. The Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI) has developed a high rate digester for fibrous and semi-solid municipal waste with the promise of revolutionising the waste disposal industry.

Described as TERI acidification and methanation process, for which patent has also been filed, the digester is said to be quick, economically viable and suitable for food and agro-based industries and markets.

In the face of evident environmental drawbacks of waste disposal methods like land-filling and incineration, the process of biomethanation of waste by anaerobic digestion has economical and social benefits apart from being environment-friendly. The technology is recognised internationally.

According to the experts who had been working on the project since 1996, research in the field of biomethanation has revealed that organic fractions of solid waste have high biochemical methane potential. Their high moisture content and availability of nutrients make them good substrate for biogas generation by anaerobic digestion.

The process produces both energy and compost from waste. Further, the land requirement is comparatively less than that for the aerobic composting process. For, it involves extraction of a high organic strength liquid waste from the vegetable waste in an acidification reactor and its treatment in an upflow anaerobic sludge blanket (UASB) reactor.

Moreover, the reactor is so designed that it takes care of the conventional problems of floating feed, scum formation and feed

material flow. While the acidification phase has a retention time of six days, the UASB reactor operates with a retention time of 16 hours and that makes the process cost-effective. Biogas generated in the UASB reactors has a methane content of 70 per cent and can be used either for thermal applications or for power generation. Good quality organic manure, it is claimed, is another by-product.

This process could be utilised for disposal of waste from major vegetable and fruit markets which are seen as a potential source of biodegradable waste. All cities, towns, districts and tehsils have major vegetable markets producing significantly large quantities of waste. In Delhi, the Azadpur Mandi produces about 15 tonnes of vegetable waste every day, experts connected with the project say.

The Hindu
18 March 2000

Solar energy lights up home, lives of Sunderban villagers

Calcutta, March 19

A BOUT two lakh people in the remote villages and hamlets situated in Sunderbans in the Gangetic delta of West Bengal would have been still groping in the dark, but for the rural electrification programme of West Bengal Renewable Energy Development Agency (WBREDA) using non-conventional sources.

Prohibitive costs and technical problems made it difficult, if not impossible, to extend grid electricity to these areas, separated from the main land by wide rivers or creeks.

In order to overcome the power problem in the Sunderbans, WBREDA along with the Union Ministry of Non-Conventional Energy, has undertaken a major programme to generate 8.5 MW energy from non-conventional sources including solar power and bio-mass by 2003.

Five solar power plants are already providing electricity to 500 consumers in 11 villages and three more are up coming in the Sagar Island of the Sunderbans area, WBREDA sources said.

"Sales have gone up in my shop," says Santosh Das, who owns a sweet shop in Haradhanpur village.

For Bharati Acharya, a house-

wife having five lights from solar power, it has become much easier to sort out betel leaves and pack them properly. "I do not have to pester my children to sit down and study in the evening. My mother-in-law can enjoy her spare time watching TV in my neighbour's house."

Anil Barik has opted for solar power purely for economic reasons.

"For consumption of 120 watts of solar power for six hours, which means keeping on three lights, one fan and one TV, you have to pay Rs 120 per month. For 60 watts, the cost is Rs 70 only. While electricity from diesel generator set for only one point costs Rs 4, you can have as many as five points at same cost for solar power," says Barik.

The only other alternative is lighting lamps with kerosene, which costs Rs 15 per litre.

The only problem is the initial investment of Rs 1000 to get solar power connections, which sometimes becomes difficult to pay at one go. "But once you compare the costs the initial investment will seem insignificant," says Sachindranath Acharya. While cost per unit from a private diesel gen set is Rs 14-16, that for solar power is Rs 8-10.

"The solar power project has changed our lives and we are very

possessive about it," says Susanta Mondal of the local panchayat samiti, adding that there is no hooking in the village as "we are always on our toes."

Besides, Sagar Island, renewable energy has been tapped in other parts of Sunderban as well, WBREDA sources said. Nitai Bera, a tailor in Gosaba, has been able to double his income as he can stitch even after sunset.

WBREDA has already set up a 500 KW gasifier-based power plant in Gosaba along with an energy plantation covering about 100 hectares of wasteland.

The biomass-based plant converts fuelwood, agricultural and agro-industrial residues, etc into a combustible gas mixture normally called producer gas that is fed into internal combustion engine for production of electricity.

Work has also started on a 500 KW biomass-based power plant at Chotamollahpur Island of Sunderban.

Mnes and the West Bengal Government are funding a wind power project and a one MW wind farm will be commissioned at Fraserganj by may this year. A proposal to set up India's first tidal power plant of 3 MW capacity has also been conceived in Durgaduani creek of Sunderban.

(PTI)

The Hindustan Times
20 March 2000

Bank launches credit scheme for farmers

Chandigarh, March 22

THE HARYANA State Co-operative Apex Bank (Harcobank) has launched a new scheme known as "revolving cash credit limit for socio-economic and consumption needs of farmers" to make them self-dependent.

Under the scheme, loans up to Rs two lakh for three years will be made available to farmers owning five-acre or more land. The agri-

cultural land would have to be mortgaged as security for the loan.

A bank spokesman said here today that 332 branches of 17 central co-operative banks in cities and towns of Haryana catered to credit and finance needs of the villagers through a network of 2315 Primary Agriculture Co-operative Societies (PACS). The aim of the scheme was to create more alternative resources and avenues for the farmers.

(UNI)

The Hindustan Times
23 March 2000

Award for scientist

M.S. SWAMINATHAN, noted crop scientist and the father of India's Green Revolution, has been selected for the prestigious Franklin D Roosevelt Four Freedoms medal for 2000 in recognition of his leadership in the field of agriculture.

PTI, New Delhi

The Hindustan Times
22 March 2000

US scientists develop 'water saving' crops

Vasantha Arora

Washington

FARMERS AND scientists are innovating new crops like 'miracle rice' and 'hardy corn' to help ensure food production for the 2.7 billion people who will be living in water-scarce regions by the year 2025.

Scientists from the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) have also helped create a new user-friendly database called 'World Water and Climate Atlas for Agriculture' that will serve as a high-tech tool for managing water resources for farmers, agronomists, engineers, conservationists, meteorologists, researchers and government policy makers.

"The world is facing a deadly water gap: some 20 per cent more water is needed than is available to feed the nearly three billion ad-

ditional people who will be alive by 2025, and there is no way to manufacture new water," says Ismail Serageldin, CGIAR chairman, as well as World Bank Vice President for Special Programmes.

"Crops that are improved to flourish in low water environments, together with this powerful new tool, the Water and Climate Atlas, make up one key component in an overall global water strategy," he says.

Serageldin is also Chairman of the World Commission on Water for the 21st Century, which was formed to call public attention to the water crisis and to find solutions. The World Commission will present its report on a vision for the future of global water resources and their management at the ongoing Second World Water Forum in The Hague, the Netherlands, from March 17 to 22.

The innovations that CGIAR is

developing to help a water-short world include 'hardy corn'. Researchers at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre, known as CIMMYT, one of 16 CGIAR centres, have created hardy new breeds of tropical corn that can increase harvests by 40 per cent in the tough environments of the developing world.

One of the new corn varieties was specifically developed to grow under drought conditions, with a much higher yield than traditional corn gives in the same conditions. Drought caused the loss of an estimated 24 million tonnes of corn in 1993 in the developing world, a drop of 15 per cent from the potential crop without any drought.

The new corn will also help the environment by allowing farmers in the developing world to stay on what was becoming non-productive lands, thereby saving virgin rain forests and other fragile

tropical lands.

Similar is the 'miracle rice'. New water-saving techniques are being developed that could save up to 25 per cent of the water now used to grow rice, according to scientists at two CGIAR centres -- the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), based in Manila, the Philippines, and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The link between water and rice is crucial, especially since fresh water is becoming more and more scarce. The number of water-scarce countries is expected to increase to 48 by 2025, peaking at 55 countries by mid-century, 2050. More than half of the world's population will depend on rice as its principal food source in 30 years. Rice production must increase by more than 40 per cent from the present production to avoid a rice shortage. But available land for cultivation is expected to decrease because of erosion, desertification, salinisation and rapidly increasing urbanisation.

Researchers have also developed 'durable wheat', by modifying wheat, once mostly restricted to temperate and subtropical zones, to make it productive even in hot climates. One main reason for growing wheat is it requires less water than rice. Wheat is also a cash crop that has relatively few natural insect enemies. Thanks to years of intensive plant breeding work, modern wheat varieties now have strong built-in resistance to major diseases.

That means poor farmers in developing countries are assured of stable yields and can more easily adapt pest management procedures that make maximum use of biological control measures, minimising chemical use.

IANS

The Pioneer
22 March 2000

These women are successful water campaign managers

By Parul Chandra

The Times of India News Service

THE HAGUE: Curiosity yes. But there is certainly no diffidence in their manner as Poona, Kunvarben and Shantaben walk about the vast and sprawling Netherlands Congress Centre here where the Second World Water forum meeting is presently on.

And illiterate though they may be, they can hold forth on the benefits of watershed development projects just as confidently as the scores of water experts, professionals and officials milling about at the centre. After all, the three women from Gujarat are successful water campaign managers in their respective villages. And they have been sharing their experiences with those gathered here at two sessions on "Women, Work and Water."

Success hasn't come easy to these women who got guidance and assistance from the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA). But they aren't complaining. Rather, there is justifiable pride in their tone and their visage as they give details of the work done by them.

And their work only lends further strength to the words of Klaus Toepfer, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme who told journalists on Sunday, "Without integrating women, we cannot deal with problems concerning water."

Take Poona Bharwad from Dhokawada village in the dry and rocky Banaskantha district who would walk nine km daily to fetch just one pot of water. The average water consumption by a person in her desert village—merely 200 ml. Or Kunvarben from Surel village in the Surendranagar district of the same state where the water is saline and the water table extremely low.

While Poona led the village women in digging a pond which was then lined with plastic, Kunvarben who would otherwise dig out saline water from the dry river bed spearheaded the building of underground tanks for harvesting rain water. In fact, in Kunvarben's village, women themselves dug earth to make underground water storage tanks. And the tiny and frail-looking Shantaben from the Sabarkantha district not only trained to repair hand-pumps but learnt to instal new ones too.

The Times of India
23 March 2000

'Sanitary marts' to rehabilitate scavengers

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, March 22: The Department of Adi Dravidar Welfare is considering setting up 'sanitary marts' to rehabilitate scavengers following the Tamil Nadu Government's decision to abolish dry latrines and manual scavenging in the State by March 31.

The proposal pending with the Union Government envisages forming co-operatives and enabling them to set up ceramic sanitary ware production units at a cost of Rs 5 lakh each with funding from the National Safai Karamchari Finance

Development Corporation (NSKFC).

To be implemented in the coming financial year, the project will not only repatriate about 40,000 scavengers, who were hitherto engaged in clearing night soil in the State, but also help them avail loans from nationalised banks. Since 'scavengers' have been defined as only those who carry night soil on their heads, the banks have been refusing loans to them. Enquiries reveal that the State Government has written to the Union Ministry of Social Justice in this regard.

Adi Dravidar Welfare Secret-

ary K Sampathkumar said once the Centre clears the project, tie-ups would have to be effected with industries and monitoring and steering committees set up at every level.

The Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidar Housing Development Corporation (TAHDCO) is also inviting scavengers to register for rehabilitation schemes. The enlisting process is expected to be completed by May. However, about 600 scavengers under the Department of Municipal Administration and Water Supply have opted for jobs of street sweepers, it is learnt.

About Rs 15 crore has been

spent by the Municipal Administration and Water Supply Department to convert all the public dry latrines in the 611 town panchayats into flush ones.

Although there are no dry latrines in Chennai, quite a few exist in Nagercoil, Tindivanam, Tirunelveli and Coimbatore. While 329 public toilets are dry latrines more than 13,000 are in households. In town panchayats alone, 6,780 households still use dry toilets, the largest number being in Nagercoil.

Following the enactment of the Tamil Nadu Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1999, the State government adopted the Centre's deadline of March 31, 2000 for the abolition of dry latrines and manual removal of night soil.

While government sources confirm that all public dry latrines have been converted, they are unsure as to how many private households have met the deadline. The local bodies are empowered to issue notices to those households that have not complied with the order. Non-compliance is a cognisable offence. The process of prosecution has begun.

The Indian Express
23 March 2000

Nod for rural water scheme

By Our Staff Reporter

CHENNAI, MARCH 22. The Union Government has approved the implementation of a community-based rural water supply scheme in Coimbatore, Vellore and Cuddalore districts.

Each district has been sanctioned Rs. 40 crores to execute the scheme in three years, official sources say.

The project has been formulated to benefit 28 lakh people in 3,100 habitations in the three districts.

To be carried out under the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP), the scheme's emphasis is on people's participation by involving them from the stage of planning to designing to implementation, and even to operation and maintenance (O&M) of the water supply systems.

As part of the ARWSP, the beneficiaries have to contribute 10 per cent of the capital cost and 100 per cent of the O&M cost. For the three districts, a sum of around Rs. 90 lakhs has been mobilised.

The sources say a decision will be taken shortly on extending the Programme to Perambalur district.

All over the country, the ARWSP is now implemented in 58 districts.

The Hindu
23 March 2000

Education web site launched

● Education Secretary Mr M K Kaw on Wednesday launched the web site of the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) in New Delhi, DHNS reports. The web site provides a lot of useful information relating to teachers' education. It has profiles of over 2,000 teachers' education institutions which have been recognised/conditionally recognised by the Regional Committees of the NCTE.

Some important NCTE publications useful for teacher educators and student-teachers as well as procedure for applying for recognition, online access to application forms are available on the site. The site could be reached at the address :www.ncte-in.org.

Deccan Herald
23 March 2000

LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT NEW DELHI

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PROTECTION OF PLANT VARIETIES AND FARMERS' RIGHTS BILL 1999

The protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Bill, 1999 introduced in Lok Sabha on 14.12.1999 has been referred to a Joint Committee of both the Houses of Parliament. The Bill seeks to provide for the establishment of an Authority to give an effective system for protection of the rights of plant breeders and farmers and to encourage the development of new varieties of plants; to register extent and new plant varieties; to develop characterisation and documentation of varieties; to provide the compulsory licensing of protected varieties if the right holder does not arrange for production and sale of the seeds to ensure that protected seeds are available to the farmers; to collect statistics with regard to plant varieties, seeds and germplasm for compilation and publication.

The issue of enacting a law relating to Plant Varieties Protection and Farmers' Rights in India has also become important particularly on India's signing of the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) 1994.

The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Bill, 1999 as introduced in Lok Sabha, was published in the Gazette of India, Extraordinary Part II, dated 14th December, 1999.

With a view to hold informal discussions with the representatives of the various associations/ organisations and individuals interested in the subject matter on the proposed legislation on the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights, the Parliamentary Joint Committee will undertake a study visit to Bangalore.

Those desirous of expressing their views, are requested to meet the Joint Committee on March 26th, 2000 from 1500 Hrs to 1700 Hrs at Conference Hall, Room No. 334, Vidhana Soudha, Bangalore.

Deccan Herald
25 March 2000

Women Power on the Net

BY the number of women's sites that are proliferating in the Indian Internet one would imagine that women are a major chunk of the surfing population. Not exactly so, because even in the US, the Internet heaven, women attained a position of online parity only recently. In India, women becoming an online majority is a far-fetched idea, atleast for now. However, the promoters of *fabwoman.com*, launched this week in New Delhi by Mrs Maneka Gandhi, don't think so.

One of them, Sudipto Majumdar, asserts that the site is different from the other sites on the net for the Indian woman, in three different ways: "The site is based on e-commerce from the start. So we do not believe in a site which is high on valuations but loses money. Second, we would promote payment through cash rather than credit which keeps in mind the Indian psyche." The third is services obviously.

So, three cheers for the Indian woman.

The Observer
25 March 2000

An effective form of weed control

WHILE CONSIDERING various methods of weed control, soil solarisation proves to be a simple, cheap and more over highly efficient method too.

In soil solarisation the only price input involved is of plastic sheets.

To solarise the soil, first the soil must be in moist condition and covered with 0.125 mm thick black polyethylene or 0.1 mm thick transparent polyethylene sheet for 4 to 6 weeks.

The sheet should be in a full stretched condition and the edges buried in the soil to hold the sheet in place.

Due to solar radiation the soil under plastic sheet gets heated up and the temperature inside the sheet around 45-50°C.

Due to heavy heat, weed seeds present in the soil under the polythene cover gets affected.

The effect of this soil solarisation mainly depends upon the exposure time of the soil and soil temperature that is to be maintained.

In addition to weed control the other advantages of soil solarisation are — it controls plant diseases, it alters some of the physical and chemical properties of the soil to promote better crop yield.

• A. Karthik & C. George Thomas
Department of Agronomy,
College of Horticulture
Kerala Agricultural University
Trichur 680 656

The Hindu
23 March 2000

\$6.5 b GEF funding for water programme

■ HAGUE: GLOBAL Environment Facility (GEF) has announced funding of \$6.5 billion to be used for addressing global water and related land degradation issues in developing countries. The increase in GEF funding comes at a time when water and related land degradation are increasingly recognised as major barriers to global sustainable development, GEF chief executive officer Mohamed Elashry said. There have been many conferences and declarations in the last decade with little progress and, unless action replaces rhetoric, the number of people experiencing water shortages and stress will rise to 2.3 billion and devastating effects on human health and the global environment will continue to grow, he said. Without better policies, the large sum of money needed to reverse current degradation of water resources will not materialise, Mr Elashry said.

The Observer
25 March 2000

Shree Venkatram

Finally, Haryana learns to care for its daughters

THE HARYANA GOVERNMENT'S Apni Beti Apna Dhan (ABAD) scheme has had tremendous impact. Launched six years ago, Haryana then had the second lowest female ratio — only 864 women for every 1000 men — in the country. Particularly worrisome was the rampant female foeticide, and that even in the prosperous districts of Sonapat, Rohtak and Hissar, girls were not being sent to school. Viewed as *paraya dhan*, girls were expected to be married off as early as possible.

The ABAD scheme was launched on October 2, 1996, and promised to the mother living below the poverty line a cash award of Rs 500 were she to bear a female baby, and another Rs 2500 to be kept in fixed deposit for 18 years. The sum of Rs 25,000 at maturity was to be handed over only if she was unmarried till then.

In its recent review of ABAD, the Population Council, a non-government body, says among the scheme's positive effects is the fact that the mother is no longer made to feel as if she has committed a grave crime by giving birth to a girl. The very fact that the state honours her with a cash gift — in the initial years the government organised public functions to honour such women — has made a discernable difference in the way families look at girls.

Girls here are no longer named Batheri (enough of girls) or Sukhni (thin) or Rukri (stop being born) and Mooli (radish). Instead, they are now named after prominent women such as Indira Gandhi or Kiran Bedi or after women officials in the district. Their mothers now dream of educating them.

The Council found a perceived reduction in the number of female foeticides and an improvement in the registration of female births. Immunisation follow-

up, and future benefits of ration and voting rights are the other unintended benefits of the scheme.

Families now ensure that daughters receive proper medical attention. No wonder, in Kurukshetra district infant mortality declined from 54.3 in 1994-95 to 39.2 in 1996-97. Moreover, the death of an ABAD has the state demand explanations from families and the scheme's field staff.

Also, women are beginning to handle money — a substantial number invest the Rs 500 award in saving schemes in their own or daughters' names. Of course, an equal number of women hand over the cash to their husbands or mothers-in-law.

The government has yet to evolve a foolproof method by which the deposit certificate is encashed by the girl and not others — and that she alone controls the money. When the scheme was devised, it was proposed that this amount should be utilised by the girl for further education or starting business. Now, though, the deposit money is being viewed as funds the government provides for her marriage.

Six commandments

ADITHI, AN NGO, has Six Commandments which the five-to-10-year-olds who collect for its non-formal education classes in Bihar have to repeat daily. These are:

- Girls and boys are equal.
- Girls and boys can and should work.
- Girls should have income generation skills and should be able to choose whom they want to marry.
- Girls should not marry with dowry.

- Girls should get a share of assets or money in a bank account instead of dowry.
- Girls should not suffer violence.

The girls do repeat these spontaneously, but the boys can't get themselves to say they are equal to girls.

Rediscovering a hero

THE DISPOSSESSED find their own symbols. One such is Tania Bhil, the man labeled a murderer and dacoit by the British and hanged by them in 1889. For the Bhils, Tania is a revolutionary. Last month they marched to his memorial to seek his blessings before launching a protest against the exploitation by landlords, corrupt government officials and moneylenders.

The Adivasi Ekta Parishad is concerned that even after 50 years of independence, there are no wide-ranging development and employment programmes for them; the health and education systems are in a shambles; and that projects like the Sardar Sarovar and forestry schemes are alienating adivasis from their land. And when they raise their voice, false criminal cases have been registered against them.

The Hindustan Times
26 March 2000

Aid for Internet link

By Our Staff Reporter

HYDERABAD, MARCH, 24. The U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, announced an aid of \$ 5 millions to bring Internet to schools and businesses in under-served areas in rural India.

Speaking at the Hitech City here on Friday, Mr. Clinton said that the State of Andhra Pradesh was doing a "remarkable job" in providing Internet facility all over the State covering all the villages.

The Hindu
25 March 2000

They defeated death with ingenuity

By MUKESH BHARDWAJ

Passiawal (Kapurthala), March 25: It took the death of one villager to prod the others, but today the residents of this remote village have what no neighbouring village has: its own water supply system, organised and financed by the villagers. With a little help from brethren overseas.

This village, and those around it, has always suffered the problem of contaminated water. Water-borne diseases are a common occurrence, as are fatalities caused by them, says former sarpanch Jaswant Singh Sodhi. The latest victim was Paramjit Kaur, whose death shocked the villagers into action. They realised that the only way out of this cycle was clean water to save themselves.

With Jaswant Singh's wife Inderjit Kaur - the new sarpanch - at the helm, wheels began to move. The first move came when

one of the sarpanch's six sons returned home from the US. As he heard the villagers speak of contaminated water, he arranged for a separate water tap to be installed outside the house (the sarpanch has the only other submersible pump in the village). This was soon transformed into the idea of a pump for the village.

The pump was sunk, 350 feet deep, with Rs 37,000 loaned by the Sodhi family. That meant the villagers could go to the pump to fetch water, but they weren't satisfied with that.

That's when one villager, Sadhu Singh Ahluwalia, came up with the idea of laying down a pipeline to provide safe running water in every house. The cost of the project worked out to Rs 2 lakh approximately. This time the village gurdwara chipped in with Rs 51,000.

Today, the villagers can drink the water without fear of disease. It's a confidence

that has inspired the district administration to initiate similar effort for other villages. District Deputy Commissioner Vijoy Kumar Singh says they plan, in the coming financial year, to provide seed money for similar projects elsewhere. It's cost-effective when done privately, he says. Through the government, the system would cost approximately Rs 25 lakhs; the village panchayat managed on Rs 2 lakhs.

In Passiawal, meanwhile, they're not resting on any laurels. The villagers have already worked out how to repay their loan to the Sodhis: The Rs 1 lakh reward they will get from the government for electing the sarpanch unanimously will be handed over to the contributors.

And they're already working on the Next Big Thing: 24-hour electricity supply to the 60 houses in the village. That will, hopefully, light the beacon for all the neighbouring villages.

The Indian Express
26 March 2000

Clearing The Air

■ GREEN POLITICS

Edited by Anil Agarwal, Sunita Narain and Anju Sharma
Centre for Science and Environment
Price not stated

IF the plethora of conferences on environmental negotiations were just names for you and you wanted to know where exactly the environmental debate was poised, the first report in the series Global Environmental Negotiation, *Green Politics*, is handy reference. For this is more than just a report, it is a reasonably comprehensive study of major global environment negotiations since the Rio conference in 1992.

There are few books which are written from the perspective of the South, so this is a welcome addition to green literature in the country. The inequality of global environmental negotiations is what has added to the feverish intensity of debates, deadlocks and deals in environmental issues. Understanding the divide, how one country's stand influences the other, would make our policy-makers and negotiators a little more organised, helping them speak louder and clearer on the negotiating table.

The book has been divided into nine chapters — framework convention on climate change, convention on biological diversity, convention to combat desertification, global treaty on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), convention on forests, trade and environment, Global Environment Facility (GEF) and battle for turf since Rio.

The book has also successfully revealed that though these issues and various conferences seem far removed from our immediate concerns ("we have to care about hungry stomachs first"), this is a fallacy. It is imperative that now —

when the rules are being set for future global governance — developing countries be more alert and aware.

The preface says that there will be two more volumes in the series completing the picture. Whether they will spark off a debate or not is difficult to say but at least this book will lead to better informed interventions in global negotiations in the future.

— SONU JAIN

Carry-over blades

Sir—AIDS and other killer diseases like Hepatitis B are spreading fast across the country. We must take preventive measures at the individual and collective level. Government agencies must step up the monitoring of such efforts.

One such area crying out for attention is the ubiquitous barber shop, usually located in dingy areas without any care for cleanliness and hygiene. More often than not, blades are not changed for successive shaves and hair cuts. Municipal authorities must ensure cleanliness at these shops; barbers must be trained. Till then, it is advisable for patrons to carry their own blades.

Rajendra Sharma

The Indian Express
25 March 2000

The Indian Express
26 March 2000

Nayala goes hi-tech with IT kiosks

K. S. Tomar
Jaipur, March 26

WITH THE establishment of Rajnidhi Information Kiosks, Nayala has become the first hi-tech village in Rajasthan, which had been appreciated by US President Bill Clinton during his visit to this village recently.

Through these kiosks, villagers will have easy access to information about health, family planning, immunisation schedules for children, employment, transportation, agriculture, water and electricity connections, birth and death registration etc. Printouts of the forms for obtaining the driving licence, vehicle registration, etc can be

obtained through Rajnidhi Kiosks. Mr Rohit K Singh, director infor-

These kiosks will give information about health, family planning, immunisation schedules, employment, transportation, agriculture, water and electricity connections, birth and death registration.

mation and technology depart-

ment, said here today that he had explained to President Clinton about State government's plan to install such Rajnidhi kiosks in all 9,184 panchayats in Rajasthan by the year 2003.

Smart Card system introduced by Smart Chip Limited at Dhabaloi Dairy Development Society has benefited the village women. Smart Card was also presented to President Clinton, which made him honorary member of Dhabaloi Dairy Development Society.

This Smart card acts as electronic passbook, which contains comprehensive details of name of producer of milk, address, district and picture of each member of dairy society.

The Hindustan Times
27 March 2000

State-of-the-art fisheries unit opened at Kochi

KOCHI, March 25 (PTI)

A Rs 20 crore materials and transducers-simulated test centre (MATs), the first of its kind in Asia-Pacific region and one of the very few in the world, was today dedicated to the nation by Dr V K Aatre, scientific adviser to the defence minister.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Aatre, who is also the secretary, Department of Defence Research and Development and Director General Research and Development, stressed the need for optimum utilisation of the under water resources.

Exploitation of the resources was absolutely necessary for humanity to survive in years to come, he said adding India had a long way to go in exploiting the resources. The country had utilised only 10 to 15 per cent of the fisheries resources of its waters, he said.

India had also the potential to utilise the vast seabed nodules in its waters for which "we have to develop excavators which can go up to 5,000 metres below sea level to pick up the nodules," he said. Mats, established at the Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory (NPOL) here, is designed for undertaking any static/dynamic measurements, evaluation, calibration of any materials/sensors or transducers for under sea use.

Deccan Herald
26 March 2000

Women rid MP village of liquor

YOGESH VAJPEYI

Bhopal, March 27: There's no official prohibition in Madhya Pradesh. Yet there will be no sale of liquor in Mahidpur tehsil of Ujjain from April.

Mahidpur will be the first tehsil in the State to go off liquor. "It's victory for women power," says local MLA Kalpana Parulekar now that the State Government has given in to her demand that all the 14 liquor shops in her constituency be closed down.

Mahidpur was declared out of bounds for contractors when the district administra-

tion auctioned liquor shops in other parts of Ujjain recently, fetching the State Rs 38.2 crore. Officials claim the decision vindicates the State's new excise policy which gives women a say in the location of liquor shops in their gram panchayats. "More than 50 per cent women of the area had opposed these shops," they say. "We may have won a battle but the fight to win the war will continue," Parulekar cautions. Having freed her constituency from the clutches of the liquor mafia, she now plans to repeat the Mahidpur formula elsewhere in the State.

The Indian Express
28 March 2000

3,000 NGOs blacklisted

THE CENTRAL Social Welfare Board has so far blacklisted 3000 non-government organisations (NGOs) in the country, chairperson Mridula Sinha has said. Admitting irregularities in the functioning of NGOs, she said in Patna on Friday that the board had blacklisted 3000 NGOs from 1991. About 700 NGOs were blacklisted during the past two years, she added. Measures have been initiated to trace fake NGOs which had pilferaged several crores in the name of social work. Asked about the gross irregularities prevailing in the Bihar State Social Welfare Board, Ms Sinha said the annual allocation of Rs two crore to the board had been banned for the past three years.

UNI, Patna

The Hindustan Times
26 March 2000

Rural women in Rajasthan turning bold entrepreneurs

Dungarpur, March 26

AT NAYALA, when US President Bill Clinton was feeling "astonished to see how India was using its democratic institutions to tackle its problems", the rest of the world was wondering whether what was showcased was actually the real picture or just a facade.

Nayala might have been "sprucely packaged" for President Clinton and the consumption of the rest of the world but the whole idea about the emancipation of the rural women was indeed realistic and a matter of fact.

Seeing the perceptible changes in the communities visited, one tends to admit that a silent revolution hitherto unknown and unheard of is taking place in the backward areas of Rajasthan, a picture of real India that lives away from the din of realpolitik.

Thanks to micro-credit scheme of the Central Government, illiterate and poverty-stricken women here are increasingly donning the mantle of small-time entrepreneurs. Now they have become aware of the fact that "money" rules the world and empowers their gender.

"These women who were earlier considered non-productive and non-asset worthy are today increasingly being regarded as agents of change and economic development," says Devlal Vyas who runs People's Education and Development Organisation.

When 30-year-old Mani of Mada here narrated how with the help of micro-credit she set up a roadside tea shop in the area, she only underscored the fact that micro-financing leads to benefit realisation for the poor.

With formal banking institutions out of their reach, the women here, mostly belonging to the Bhil tribe, find non-formal micro-credit lending institutions set up by Rashtriya Mahila Kosh easy to access.

RMK, created by the Centre in 1993 with a corpus fund of Rs 31 crore, has been working silently in the interiors of various states in partnership with 700 NGOs. The RMK has developed a strategy of extending credit through intermediate micro-credit organisations which in turn lend to the self-help groups comprising a maximum of 20 women sharing homogeneous background.

Today advancement in this district is quite visible.

Savita of Naya Gaon says, "Now men don't dare to beat us and they think twice before getting drunk, not just because our status within the family has risen but also because of the fact that group members come to one another's help whenever needed."

Because of the elevation of their status in the family and the society, these women have acquired a role in decision-making and are getting better recognition and respect.

(PTI)

The Hindustan Times
27 March 2000

Farmers to have say in water management

IN ITS continued bid for decentralisation process of governance, the Madhya Pradesh Government has decided to involve the farmers in both significant sectors of irrigated water -- management and distribution.

It will help farmers of the State to take up the whole irrigation system in their own hands. Keeping these views in mind the State will go for elections to various water consumer forums on April 18, a Government source said.

These elections are being conducted under "farmers' participa-

tion in the M-P Irrigation Management Act, 1999". The source added that. The motive behind the act is to strengthen the relationship among the canal-water consumers, channels the distribution of water among others.

An electoral roll of water consumers and farmers falling under the command area has been prepared for first time in the history. A total of 25 lakh farmers and other beneficiaries would cast their votes in the forthcoming statewide elections.

HTC, Raipur

The Hindustan Times
26 March 2000

HIV cases on rise in Goa despite campaign

DH News Service

PANAJI, March 26

Despite a sustained awareness campaign launched by the government and NGOs, and counselling facilities provided in this state, HIV cases have been on the rise here.

The 405 new HIV positive cases detected last year signifies that more than one person a day is being infected by the deadly virus every year.

Goa now has 1,631 cases recorded over seven years. The majority of HIV cases here have been detected in heavy growth centres like Mormugao (a port town) and Salcette and Bardez which have a concentration of tourism.

According to the state's Health Minister Suresh Amonkar, blood collected at the state-run blood banks was being tested for the AIDS virus.

But the Opposition Congress which took up the issue in the House on Friday wanted the government to deport HIV positive sex workers from this state.

Sex workers should be compulsorily tested and given health certificates, Congress MLA Nirmala Sawant said.

Deccan Herald
27 March 2000

Well worth it

■ For 35 year-old Gargi Banerji it is well-deserved recognition. Winning this year's £50,000 Whitley award — the largest conservation award scheme — will help Banerji in more ways than one. She hopes to plough back much of the award into her Himalayan scheme. Delhi-based Banerji founded Pragya, a group dedicated to saving the flora of the inaccessible valleys around Lahaul and Spiti in northern Himachal Pradesh. Her efforts to save the medicinal plants of these remote Himalayan valleys from extinction won her Britain's most valuable conservation prize, beating a field of experts dedicated to saving endangered animals. Organised by the Royal Geographical Society, it is the first major award to an expert in plant conservation.

The Telegraph
25 March 2000

Inside the twilight zone

AIDS has entered all realms of society. Anybody can become a victim. But there is a way out, as SHYAMALA NATRAJ discovered in a village in Tamil Nadu

RECENTLY, I accompanied a group of women from different regions in Tamil Nadu to Morappur, a village near Dharmapuri town, in the northern part of the state. We had requested an NGO known for its grassroots training abilities to assist us with strengthening our women's collectives. We were informed that the people here are still learning on how to deal with AIDS. Life has somehow pushed them into it. "People are beginning to fall ill and die in this region and we have no idea what to do, where to go, what to say", said a local health worker.

That is how one was able to enter and sensitise oneself to the world of community workers and their struggle with HIV related issues. Predictably, most of them were women, many had passed class ten, a few people had graduated and at least one couple had gone for higher studies. All of them were articulate, well up on basic developmental issues and committed to progress and dynamic action. There is a certain passion which lingers in their daily activities, in the way they talk and reach out to the world. The women weave the village into an arena of constant activity, unlearning old myths, injecting new hope.

At 45, a tenacious Mangamma has contested the panchayat elections — and won. She is now a ward counsellor. Sparkle eyed, 60-year-old Kanaka is the president of the local cooperative bank that manages a revolving fund of nearly Rs 1 crore; this is the precious sum that the villagers in the area have saved over the years. Ironically, the two Government banks here might just about shut down any day. There is a spirited awareness which has hit the village. Only last month, Lakshmi led her *sangham* to the consumer court in a fight against a corrupt public distribution outlet. And yet, it seems, the transformation is just about beginning. There are still miles to go for the women of this village.

Several years after organised efforts in HIV prevention in Tamil Nadu, not one of these women are still aware of several basic facts they can effectively use to help themselves or others. They acknowledge that "neighbours are ill, some have even died, but we don't know what to do, how to stay safe ourselves or how to educate others to protect themselves. All we know for sure is that AIDS is spread by lorry drivers and prostitutes, by blood transfusions and injections. And the only thing we can do is live with *Ozhukkam* — moral discipline".

PLATFORM

There is equal confusion regarding what is safe (touch, clothes, mosquitoes, toilets etc). Most significantly, not a single person is aware that treating reproductive tract infections and sexually transmitted infections (RTIs/STIs) is absolutely critical to prevent HIV infection. Quizzed on the subject, almost everybody agrees, that many women in this area suffer from symptoms of possible RTIs/STIs. As long as these remain untreated, they are perfect conduits of HIV infection.

Because HIV thrives mainly in blood, seminal and vaginal fluids, and because infection occurs

proven presence of HIV in rural populations and you have the perfect recipe for an epidemic that is well in place.

We returned from Morappur to find a message waiting from a leading voluntary organisation in Trichy district. "Though we were against starting awareness programme on AIDS, now we feel the necessity. With Karur and Dindigul — two business towns close by, we are experiencing deaths due to AIDS in our project area. In a few villages, we observe significant deaths among young men. Certainly, the situation is serious."

The epidemic has spread among commoners in a large section of rural and urban society but it is strange that our national policy responses continue to target principally women who are in prostitution, truck drivers, migrant labour and others considered vulnerable. While it is important to narrow down on certain possible areas of awareness, this is certainly not enough.

It is crucial to realise that the AIDS phenomenon cannot be wished away by locating it into narrow zones of the "other society on the social margin". Active social or policy interventions will now have to include the bulk of sexually active people — old, young, married, single, gay, straight, men, women, perhaps even children. Because the truth is that the rate of new HIV infection is increasing more rapidly among those sections of society who were hitherto supposed to be outside the realm of danger.

Equally important is a media strategy. It has to focus on RTIs/STIs care rather than on "AIDS". When I asked the women in Morappur to choose how they address HIV among their people, every single one of them unhesitatingly chose to address it as an issue of reproductive health. As Sarojamma explains, "Now that I know that RTI treatment is a very important part of HIV prevention, I can talk to people in a positive manner. Earlier, I really didn't know what to say about AIDS, there are no specific symptoms and you need to have an expensive blood test to even know if you have the infection. Everybody says if you get AIDS you will die."

Besides, it is considered very shameful. But now I can relate it to reproductive health problems which we are all familiar with. In the past I could only say, 'Don't do that'. Now I can say, 'Do this'. And what's more, she's absolutely right.

The Hindustan Times
28 March 2000



most easily when the virus has easy access to the blood stream of an individual, any unhealed cuts, sores or inflammations caused by RTIs/STIs are open invitations for HIV.

Empirical evidence the world over suggests a dramatic decrease in infection rates wherever comprehensive care against RTIs/STIs is taken by people. Indeed, reproductive health care is the first line of defence against HIV.

The single largest reason why HIV is spreading so rapidly in our country is the widespread presence of RTIs/STIs among our people, the grossly inadequate "care mechanisms" at primary health centre levels and the total absence of practical information in the exorbitant, Government-run media campaign on the issue. Add unhealthy levels of sexual activity and the

Women as entrepreneurs

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Thanks to micro-credit scheme of the central government, illiterate and poverty-stricken women in Dungarpur are increasingly donning the mantle of small-time entrepreneurs. Now they have become aware of the fact that money rules the world and empowers their gender. "These women who were earlier considered non-productive and non-asset worthy are today increasingly being regarded as agents of change and economic development", says Devilal Vyas who runs People's Education and Development Organisation (PEDO).

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institutions out of their reach, the women, mostly belonging to the Bhil tribe, find non-formal micro-credit lending institutions set up by Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) easy to access.

RMK, created by the Centre in 1993 with a corpus fund of Rs 31 crore, has been working silently in the interiors of various states in partnership with 700 NGOs. Kosh has developed a strategy of extending credit through Intermediate Micro-Credit Organisations (IMOs) which in turn lend to the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) comprising a maximum of 20 women sharing homogeneous background.

In India, about 25 per cent of the rural women devote their time to activities which can generate some income. As they do not have any significant assets and literacy level amongst them is quite low, they do not have easy access to credit

Savita of Naya Gaon says, "now men don't dare to beat us and they think twice before getting drunk, not just because our status within the family has risen but also because of the fact that group members come to one another's help whenever needed".

This statement by Savita and many others of her ilk goes to prove that credit programme can be transformed

into a movement of women's self-empowerment, of course, through their collective strength.

But ironically, Dungarpur -- where 86 per cent of the population is tribal with 90 per cent classified as below poverty line -- has already been declared 'economically viable', as per a recent state survey. Contradictions end up not just there.

As per Vyas, "the literacy rate in this tribal belt is barely ten per cent whereas the state government this year washed its hands off all responsibilities by showing 100 per cent literacy here".

Elucidating about the purpose behind the scheme, RMK manager S S Sharma says, "in India, about 25 per cent of the rural women devote their time to activities which can generate some income. As they do not have any significant assets and literacy level amongst them is quite low, they do not enjoy easy access to credit.

"But the micro credit facility, though in small doses, is made available to them at their doorstep which helps them in acquiring some income-generating assets".

No doubt that with the help of micro-credit facility, the needs of the tribal women in Rajasthan are increasingly finding expression. Because of the elevation of their status in the family and the society, these women have acquired a role in decision-making and are getting better recognition and respect. No longer is the saying valid that poverty has a female face! (PTI)

Karuna Madan

The Observer
29 March 2000



Negotiating Water Rights: Edited By Bryan Randolph Bruns, Ruth S. Meinzen-Dick; Published By: Vistaar Publications, 32, M-Block Market, Greater Kallash-I,

New Delhi-110 048; Price Rs 475; Pages 394.

WATER is becoming an important component in the world. Future wars, it is said, would be fought for water. A key element in this involves negotiating water rights between local states and national bodies. Recently, states have recognised the role to be played by researchers and policy-makers over property rights on natural resources.

However, attention to water rights has received a back seat. This is because water is a mobile resource and staking an ownership over it involves different types of rights.

This book tries to address the various issues involved in evolving rights over water. The chapters show that water rights are not static, but as fluid as the resource itself.

Through apt case studies, the authors have put together some of the findings and approaches.

The case studies in this book are interesting. It shows how water rights, conflicts and resolutions can dispartate. Water-users too have a major role to play.

The book is a collection of studies of key negotiators and researchers in the fields of water rights and management. It is a valuable asset for people involved in water rights and negotiations. It is central for persons dealing with irrigation management and watershed issues.

The cases are so diverse that they build up a reservoir of knowledge based on examples. The chapters are comprehensive and highly focused.

It provides different perspectives on water rights and does not focus merely on state laws; it recognises claims that are based on customary law and practices.

The introductory chapters lay down the broad framework that help researchers understand and manage conflicts over water education. And

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Water for all is still a pipe dream

THE name of the game is "play with water." A new multi-lingual interactive internet game on the WWF website takes us to a lab where a "crazy" professor has to solve the world's water problem. The visitor has to assist him with his experiments. Water is to be taken out of the track between the tap and the sponge. It is to be put into a reservoir by placing pipes and dikes, by straightening crooked pipes and evaporating and condensing water. The player earns points if he plays well. If not, he will lose the water available to him.

The game, in a sense, symbolises the challenge before us all — the looming freshwater crisis and the need to address it before it is too late. That freshwater is vital for all life forms is well-known. In fact, it is recognised today as a basic human right. Yet, how many people have access to safe drinking water? It is estimated that over a billion people in the world do not have adequate water supply. Not many realise that water, though renewable, is a finite resource.

Freshwater ecosystems provide food, employment, pollution control and flood management. But these ecosystems are threatened today by human overuse, as are the species that depend on them. Almost half of these species are in danger of extinction, indicating the extent and scale of damage to the freshwater ecosystems worldwide. Climatic change is already compounding these effects through increased frequency of extreme weather events. The environment is sending a warning signal that is being largely ignored at present, says WWF.

An attempt was made to address the problems of dwindling resources and non-availability of freshwater by the World Waterforum, which met at the Hague from March 17 to 22. The objective of the forum was ostensibly to discuss all aspects of water resources management and raise international awareness of the issues involved. The forum featured a ministerial conference, water fair and a technology exhibition. Governments, NGOs, the private sector and the general public participated in the deliberations.

The challenge before us all is meeting the human requirement for freshwater equitably and in a sustainable manner so as to protect the ecosystem for safeguarding water resources and biodiversity for the future. This precisely was the challenge before the forum.

The forum, however, failed to integrate environmental conservation into its "framework for action" which set targets to ensure "safe and adequate fresh water worldwide."

WWF has said that the "framework" is flawed, built as it is on a "basic misunderstanding of the role of nature in meeting human needs such as water for drinking and food production".

The regional frameworks that draw on the overarching "framework for action" are weak. In the case of South Asia, it is felt that instead of looking at alternatives, the "framework could end up as a blueprint for unnecessary construction of more dams at high financial and ecological cost". A review of the existing framework by August this year has been called for to ensure that the "targets better meet the needs for drinking water, food, sanitation and energy, while conserving the environment."

As WWF has said, the need is for national and international action. Improved land-use planning and better managed and protected terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, for instance, could lead to avoiding flood damages. Levying water prices to suppliers and users incorporating environmental costs and benefits is a way out for reducing water wastage. Also, it is essential to fund technologies and practices that protect the quality and quantity of freshwater such as rain-fed agriculture, fish caught in the wild, and renewable energy production.

A lot was said at the forum about water being a social and economic good, or a human right, but one thing water is definitely

not is a "resource to be exploited at the expense of the poor and nature," said Dr Biksham, Gujja of WWF's Freshwater Programme.

Clearly, the need of the hour is to recognise water as a finite resource, failing which its very sources, be they river, lake or forest, will be lost forever. Only if nature, the ultimate source of water, is protected will we have water to drink.

C. Shekhar Namblar

The Observer
29 March 2000

Contd...

then, the authors transport readers to experiences in various countries, including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Spain and New Mexico. Putting all this together, the book concludes with implications for research and action.

A good book for researchers involved in water management, rural development and common property resources management.

It can also be an ideal research and reference material for students of sociology, anthropology, water resource engineering, environmental studies and agricultural economics.

The Indian Express
28 March 2000

Lucknow's cows die agonised deaths due to plastic bags

The Times of India News Service

LUCKNOW: Increasing use of polythene bags is not only wreaking havoc with Lucknow's drainage system but also posing a deadly threat to stray cows. The government, however, continues to sit over a proposal to ban their use in the city.

In Gausadan, a voluntary shelter run by a non-government organisation for stray cows spread over three bighas in Jankipuram, some 20 cows are dying every month from consuming discarded polythene bags. There are currently about 200 homeless cows in the shelter.

The recurring deaths made Gausadan's management suspicious that the cattle were being poisoned, so it began conducting post mortem examinations on every dead animal.

"What came to light was shocking. Ninety per cent of the cows died because they had swallowed an enormous amount of plastic bags while foraging for food. The plastic mounds and mounds of it, had blocked their alimentary canals," said Rakesh Ranjan Dube, Gausadan's manager, adding, "They must have died agonised deaths."

The Times of India
29 March 2000

AIDS stalks this remote UP village

From Subodh Ghildiyal
DH News Service

PRATAPGARH (UP), March 28
Far from the hustle and bustle of the city and covered in a green blanket, the only sign of 'modernity' in this predominantly rural belt is a huge hoarding on the edge of a kucha road, preaching the virtues of Rakshak (saviour) condom. One wonders at the relevance of the advertisement in these safe environs.

But a quick round through Patti region makes one change his opinion. The discussion at tea-stalls and chaupals (where villagers gather) these days veers around the death of a taxi driver which has sent shock waves through the district. Having acquired AIDS and passed it on to

his unknowing wife, Shyamsunder Tiwari (40) wiped out his family of four to avoid the 'humiliation of society'. The dead include Pushpa (38), son Mithesh (11) and daughter (14). The area's most-talked about death in the last few decades has left behind a broken Tiwari family, wary of fellow villagers, a conservative society ready to talk about 'safe sex' and grown-ups wondering if El Dorado Mumbai is just a mirage.

Shyamsunder had left Orain village as a young boy of 15 to join his maternal uncle in Mumbai. The hardworking boy moved up fast, driving taxi in the cosmopolis and went on to own a cab, still recalled with pride by few. Everything was fine until he indulged in some 'timepass' (pleasure-seeking) as the villagers

suspect. The family recalls that when he returned on March 9 for Holi, he was in poor health.

"He did not disclose it to anyone. Not in Mumbai either. Probably only the doctor knew about it," said Mr Sadashiv Tripathi, a neighbour and a family friend.

On the morning of March 24, Shyamsunder did not open the room till late. Even the children, who were sleeping in the open, had been taken inside by him at midnight. "When he did not reply after repeated knocks, the Tiwaris informed the police who broke open the doors," said Mr Ram Shankar Tiwari. The wife and children lay dead on the cot while the man was on the floor, with an empty bottle of sulphas in his hand.

A suicide note, recovered from his pocket, said "I and my wife have AIDS. I am killing the children to save them from humiliation at the hands of society."

The news has spread like wildfire. And that is troubling the bereaved family. "He has taken our name to the remotest village," sobs an inconsolable mother. Even at Mujahi, a good 15 kms away, people are huddled together, talking about the mass suicide-cum-murder. However, AIDS is no longer unheard of. Dr Aswin Srivastava, a small-time medic, reveals that three cases of AIDS-death have come to light.

What has sent the jitters across is that a large populace from the district is settled in Mumbai, driving taxis, running pan-shops or working as milkmen.

Deccan Herald
29 March 2000

Village gets environment work award

By OUR CORRESPONDENT

Alwar (Rajasthan), March 28:
The meaning of *Sujalam Sufalam Malyaj Sheetlam* is rightly portrayed by the people of Bhaonta-Kolyala village by saving the Arvari village, President K.R. Narayanan said while felicitating the village community with the Down To Earth-Joseph C. John Award for an outstanding environmental community at Hamirpura.

This is the first time that a village community has received an award for outstanding environmental work.

"While it is the responsibility of the government to create a situation where people can develop, it is up to the people themselves to work for the achievement of true Gram Samaj," the President added.

The Centre for Science and Environment chose the Bhaonta-Kolyala village of Thanagazi Block of Alwar for the award from 149 entries for reviving the Arvari river. The award carries a citation and a cash prize of Rs 1

lakh. The award has been initiated by Down to Earth, the environment magazine. It is funded by the family of environmentalist Joseph C. John, who is known for his work on the environment and for his contribution against the Silent Valley Hydroelectric project.

"Water is a basic need of life. It is realised by all that the non-availability of water is becoming a very grave problem. The Arvari, which flows through Gopalpura and Bhaonta-Kolyala regions, was absolutely dry. Lack of water had destroyed agriculture and forced people to leave the village to earn their livelihood elsewhere. In such a situation, Tarun Bharat Sangh and the villagers paved the way resourcefully. The villagers asked the Tarun Bharat Sangh to start building johads instead of talking about plans. The johads and the check-dams became a perennial source for the villagers," the President said.

The President added: "They have also introduced a democratic set up called Arvari River Parliament, which deals with problems regarding water management and invites ideas from the villagers. This has proved the concept of real Gram Samaj, which functions on its own without the help of government."

Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot said the villages of his state have started understanding their problems. "The President's visit will provide great encouragement to the environmentalists of the state," he said.

Rajasthan governor Anshuman Singh, speaking at the function, lauded the efforts of the villagers and Tarun Bharat Sangh. The vote of thanks was proposed by the chairman of the Arvari project.

The Asian Age
29 March 2000

Victimised Bandipur tribals plan struggle

DH News Service

CHAMARAJANAGAR, March 29

The Girijan Shreyobhivridhi Sangha of the taluk has expressed discontent over the way in which the Girijans, who were residing in and around the Bandipur forest area, were thrown out by the government but never rehabilitated.

At a meeting held here recently, the sangha members discussed the plight of the victims who were driven out of the forest area in the name of Project Tiger. The Forest Department has remained tone-deaf to the plight of the tribals who have been rendered homeless now.

The meeting passed a resolution to keep up the struggle against the injustice done to the hapless tribals and apprise the situation of the tribals to the chief minister and the district MLAs.

The meeting also decided to organise a State-level convention in May this year after mobilising the tribals at taluk and district levels.

Sangha President Cheluvaraju presided over the meet.

Deccan Herald
30 March 2000

Villagers turn arid lands of Rajasthan green

Satyen Mohapatra
Hamirpur (Rajasthan), March 28

THE FACE of a number of villages in arid Rajasthan is undergoing a sea change with community effort in water harvesting through traditional methods.

President K.R. Narayanan, in recognition of the work done by a community, presented the Down to Earth-Joseph C John Award for India's Best Environmental Community to the villages of Bhaonta-Kolyala in Alwar district of Rajasthan.

The award carries a citation and a cash award of Rs 1 lakh.

The award has been instituted by the family of environmentalist Joseph C John who is best known for making the first legal move in Kerala High Court against the Silent Valley hydro-electric project, the first successful environmental movement in India.

Small earthen check-dams called 'johads' were the life blood of drought prone villages in the rugged hilly Alwar district traditionally, but over the years those had gone into disuse.

The 'johad' prevents rainwater from running off, allowing it to percolate into the ground, recharges groundwater aquifers and improves the water balance of the earth.

Praising the villagers for their achievement, President Narayanan said the initiative taken by the villagers gives a direction to the whole country. Their self-dependence sets an example and inspiration for others.

"Similar work has been started in several other states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Orissa and rest of Rajasthan, I learn," he said.

He said the villagers of these areas had really achieved 'Gram Swarajya' by not depending on the Government but trying to work for their own upliftment. He referred to the fact that nearly 75 per cent of the money for the works undertaken by the villages was raised by the villagers themselves.

He said, "You have shown how development can take place without harm to nature and environment."

The village community in the Alwar district was facing chronic drought, distress migration and poverty in mid 1980s when a voluntary organisation called Tarun Bharat Sangh under the leadership of Mr Rajendra Singh started the work of reviving the 'johads'.

Soon wells and other ground water sources got charged leading to a greening of the area and a return of economic prosperity. It took only 20 per cent of the rain water that was trapped by the check dams to regenerate the ecology of the area.

People of Bhaonta-Kolyala not only built these check dams but went ahead to build a huge stone masonry dam above the village for which they were collecting money from village for a year. This served as a percolation tank and recharged the dead river Arvari, which started flowing again. It became a perennial river in 1995.

Talking to journalists, Mr Rajendra Singh said that while mobilising people to co-operate in this field they had to simultaneously struggle and agitate with the bureaucracy over the years which refused permission to build dams and asked for penalty for planting trees.

When river Arvari started flowing again and there were fishes in it, the Fisheries

Department banned fishing. A campaign launched by the villagers helped to stop contracts being given by the department to outside agencies for fishing and it also made the Government accept the peoples' right over the river, he added.

Several neighbouring villages started building 'johads' inspired by the success of Bhaonta-Kolyala.

Interestingly, even though for the past three years it has rained poorly in the area but the 70 villages of the Arvari basin have enough water to drink and for irrigation.

All the agricultural land is under cultivation, which is five times higher than in 1985. Milk production has increased ten times and diesel expense has been reduced by half due to the rise in water table.

According to an estimate, every rupee spent on a 'johad' increases the annual income of a village by about three times.

Showing great social awareness, the 70 villages of the Arvari river basin have formed an Arvari River Parliament and have come up with strict rules regarding use of both ground water and river water, urging people not to plant water intensive crops like sugar cane. This parliament also mediates in any dispute on water among villages.

Rajasthan Governor Anshuman Singh said that the effort of the villagers was creditable keeping in mind the drought prone areas of Rajasthan, where even today 26,000 gram sabhas were facing drought.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot stressed the need for utilising the modern scientific and technological inputs like data from Remote Sensing Centre, which had come out with a Watershed Development Atlas to find out where to build water harvesting structures.

The Hindustan Times
29 March 2000

Rehabilitate tribals

The report that the Girijans, who were thrown out of their dwellings in and around the Bandipur forest area, are yet to be rehabilitated is most unfortunate and a matter of serious concern. It speaks volumes for the authorities' lackadaisical attitude towards the problems of tribals. In the first place, the eviction of the tribals itself cannot be justified if the matter is to be viewed strictly from the humanitarian point of view. This apart, the tribals' fundamental right to eke out a living in their own natural surroundings too has been violated. In the name of implementing Project Tiger, the authorities may have justified the need for evicting the poor Girijans. But surely, they should have made suitable alternative arrangements for housing them before throwing them out of their dwellings and leaving them high and dry.

The decision of the Girijan Shreyobhivridhi Sangha to launch a struggle against the Government for prompt rehabilitation of the affected tribals should be seen in the context of the

continued sufferings of these people following their eviction. At a meeting at Chamarajanagar on Wednesday, they voiced concern over the Government's inaction and decided to organise a State-level convention in May. As the issue in question is one of helping the tribals, there is a need for the Government, the Forest Department in particular, to intervene and formulate a plan of action to rehabilitate them as early as possible. The matter should be treated with a sense of urgency and the authorities, in close co-operation with the people's representatives, should rise to the occasion and try to alleviate the sufferings of the Girijans by rehabilitating them. The authorities could also explore the possibility of providing assistance to the victims in cash or kind to build houses.

Deccan Herald
31 March 2000

As we drive on, there are enough indications that we are leaving Bangalore far behind. The metro spreads its scum and stench to the villages around - even as it tries to remain clean and tidy!

When we reach Bellandur village after a 20-km drive, there is nothing special on display. It seems similar to other villages in the country. The roads are badly maintained; cattle and chicken are straying here and there; and a foul smell seeps out from the vast tank of Bellandur....

Stop! The reeking smell is not from this village. Nor are the mosquitoes that hum around us in the daytime. Because the village does not have open drains. Bellandur is different from other villages of India.

We had planned the visit to see the computers in the gram panchayat there. The panchayat building could be seen from a distance. As we approached the building, the words, 'the first completely computerised gram panchayat in India', carved on a stone panel, became visible.

The president came out when he heard that we'd arrived - a young man called K Jagannath. (He must have by now made way for another enthusiast following the recent gram panchayat elections.) Proudly, he takes us to the computer room.

T S Shobha, who is entering some data, calls some files on the screen to show us the work that is going on. So if a farmer, say Mayanna, comes to the panchayat

to know how much tax he should pay, printed information rolls out in two minutes flat, after Shobha types out his name.

In the print-out, apart from the tax Mayanna has to pay, there is other information such as his house address, the number of his family members, his farm survey number, number of wells, total property, the cattle count, previous tax records and tax proposals for the future...

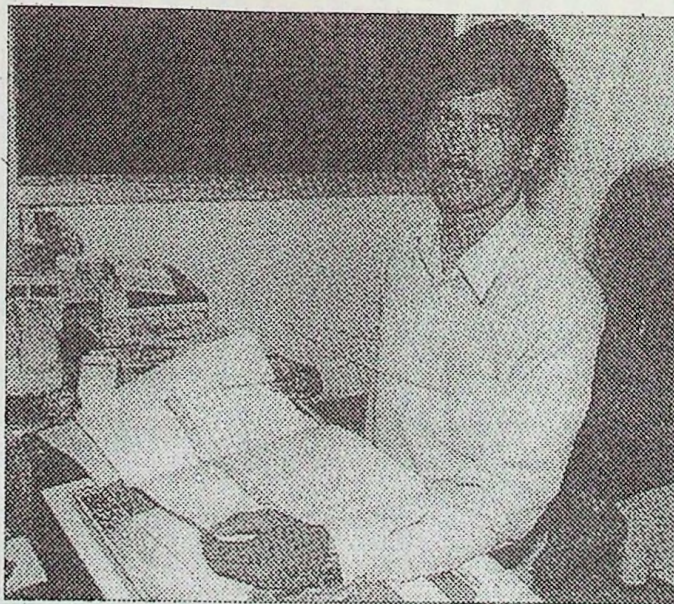
We had wrongly assumed that only Bangalore's stench is swept here by the winds. The waves of Bangalore's modernity too touched the village three years ago!

You get to Bellandur after crossing many villages big and small beyond Varthur, in the direction of the airport. Last December, the village got internet and e-mail links - the first in the nation again.

There is a small story behind how it all started:

Three years ago, to get a letter typed or photocopied, one would have to go to Bangalore. To avoid this hassle, a computer was purchased by the gram panchayat. "It arrived, all right. But we did not know why we should use it. There was opposition from the people. They were thinking that the computer was a sort of television. They started supporting us when we began using it for the village's work," recalls Jagannath.

When the news that a computer had arrived in the village was published in an English newspaper, Compuser, a software



Bellandur.com

company came forward to provide additional help. The company gave us a software package free of cost. It trained the staff and taught them 'Baraha' (a Kannada keyboard operation software). Then followed the internet and e-mail.

Keeping a computer is not enough. Information has to be collected about the people and animals in the village and the machine has to be fed. A private census was held to achieve this. Details regarding the people, birth-death certificates, tax and

property details, government projects undertaken, money sanctioned, pending projects, the Jawahar Kamgar Yojna, panchayat budget details... information was either culled from records and ledgers or collected from the people. Every villager has an identification number. You may forget your name, but your number will zip all the details concerning you.

Of course, it need not be presumed that everything is fine merely because there's a computer. Electric power cuts often

The telephone cable has not been repaired for 15 days and, leave behind e-mail, there is no phone. Thus, there are many troubles plaguing the village boasting of a computer.

Even then, this is the first village in the state to have a complete underground drainage system. All the 600 houses here have toilets. There is no liquor shop in the village. "Most of the villagers have stopped drinking," says Jagannath. Another claim to fame is cent per cent tax collection.

There is fame. There is a computer. But does the village have autonomy? Would the computer help the villagers in setting up their own electric connections, cooking gas and clean drinking water sources? Would the farmer here e-mail to Bangalore and get to know the price of vegetables and then crop the harvest? Let us see.

The primary school children here study computers with the aid of Lions Club. If there were help from similar organisations, this could become an ideal village.

Whether Bellandur becomes an ideal village or not, it may well become an ideal laboratory for researchers. Health, education, economic conditions, agriculture, other professions, the rise and fall of population index... if all these are fed into computer, the researchers can tell the world how Indian villages can step right into the 21st century from the 19th.

(Translated by Prabodha S V)

Deccan Herald
31 March 2000

Communication for Development and Learning (CDL) is a Bangalore-based non-profit voluntary organisation working to integrate communication more effectively into the development process. Realising the importance of working closely with the mainstream media, CDL works closely with professional journalists to ensure that issues related to social justice and development are given a planned and sustained exposure in the media.

CDL also undertakes:

- Media research to study patterns in development news in the mainstream publications
- Documentation of NGO experiences
- Design and production of communication support material
- Public service advertising
- Media management of development events.

CDL is the Regional Coordinator for Charkha - a national level network for development communication.

For more information, please write to:

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email : cdlblr@bgl.net.in

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