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BOOK REVIEW

Review: Making A Difference



^[1]Making A Difference

Edited by Ritu Menon

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Never mind which city of the world it is, streets come alive when a SlutWalk is held. Quite often, the audacious garments (not so much on display in Delhi's version) steal the show from the bold message being conveyed (a protest against the culture of blaming the victim in cases of sexual violence in public areas). And then, once the linguistic subversion of the word 'slut' has been amply debated, the question veers to the inevitable: has the fashionable (but so facile) feminism that is busy championing the short skirt gained primacy over old-style feminism that fought long and hard to change laws and make living slightly easier for women? To remain relevant and acceptable to market-led living, will feminism have to be less grrr, and more prrr, to borrow an expression frequently bandied about?

Making a Difference: Memoirs from the Women's Movement in India does not answer those questions. As the title suggests, it is a compilation of personal accounts from some of the leading feminists and women's rights activists of the country. The editor Ritu Menon had asked these women to talk about their forays into feminism (when, and how, exactly do you realise that you are a feminist), the struggles they waged and causes they promoted, and how they managed to sustain themselves through the difficult years. In this book, those direct, conversational narratives start speaking to you, devoid of academic jargon, their

different voices amalgamating the major strands of the women's movement through the fervent 1970s and 80s.

Most of these activists are contemporaries, and certain incidents that touched lives and changed perspectives keep recurring through the book. The Emergency was a major galvanising point, bringing many of these women into contact with underground socialist movements; some, like Pamela Philipose, would discover that within these groups, it was the male intellectuals who discussed weighty matters while the women would merely cook the khichdi and type out speeches. The custodial rape of Mathura, a tribal girl, by two policemen was another defining point: movements against rape and dowry-related violence would, after all, be the two major fields of activity in the 1980s wave of feminism, as feminist economist Bina Agarwal points out in her account. And yet, women are also perpetrators of violence — apart from the archetypal abusive mother-in-law — as Ruth Vanita, founding co-editor of *Manushi*, found out when surrounded by a group of women during a communal riot; perfectly capable, as photographer-activist Sheba Chhachhi realised to her horror while hitting out at a policeman, of dealing out a counter blow for every blow.

The post-feminist SlutWalk generation, of course, stands accused of making the most of the progressive legislations hammered out by earlier generations and then ironing out the creases to present a chic avatar. It is a mistake to assume that reform legislation must leave a visible birthmark on the generations that reap its dividends, or that they might not exercise their choice of rejecting what might appear more militant. Interestingly, a potent yet intriguing play of choice is found in an essay on the 19th century Bengali stage actress Benodini Dasi in *Framing Women: Gender in the Colonial Archive* (Marg's latest issue). In her serialised autobiography *Amar Katha (My Story)*, Benodini had stated that her career choice of becoming a 'barangana-abhinetri' or prostitute-actress was clearly her own. Pramila, an early 20th century Hindi film actress, too was exercising her choice to portray women who rode horses

and wielded swords, though the movies she acted in would still treat her as the antipode of the ideal bharatiya nari.

Regressive identity politics and incipient majoritarianism caused unforeseen setbacks to the feminist movement, Menon points out in the Introduction to *Making a Difference*. In spite of the hurdles though, the movement matured; with many of its concerns addressed, its energies were often channelled into other civil society movements. “The trouble with feminism is that it goes straight... into the sanctity of the home, the bedroom”, Menon writes — as long as it keeps doing so, its relevance will not be doubted.

CORRUPTION

'Corrupt' babu's home seized

Faizan Ahmad

PATNA: The [Bihar government](#) on Sunday confiscated the palatial house of an [IAS officer](#) accused of graft.

The house is likely to be turned into a school. The state government is close to completing the formalities for handing over the property to the human resource department and the Cabinet is expected to clear the proposal on Tuesday, government sources said.

The three-storey house on Bailey Road belonged to suspended IAS officer Shiv Shankar Verma. Sleuths of the special vigilance unit had raided it on July 6, 2007, and seized assets worth Rs 1.5 crore.

At today's rate, the house alone would fetch upward of Rs 5 crore. The 1981-batch IAS officer, a secretary in the minor irrigation department, was facing investigations into assets disproportionate to his sources of income.

Come Teacher's Day, and Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar may fulfil his promise of turning illegal properties into much-needed schools.

In keeping with a provision included in the Bihar Special Courts Act, 2010, suspended IAS officer Shiv Shankar Verma's three-storey house may soon be open to schoolchildren. Patna DM Sanjay Kumar Singh confirmed the takeover of Verma's house: "I locked the building today. I have acted on the direction of the court."

HRD principal secretary Anjani Kumar Singh, who is authorized to sanction the school on residential premises, said, "We can open the

school tomorrow if the building is transferred to the education department."

Revenue department officials, too, were tightlipped about the move to open the first-ever school in a confiscated building. Singh said Verma's building is now government property and the revenue department will decide on its transfer to HRD in a legal manner. Verma pleaded innocence but the court refused to entertain his application. Verma also urged the court to allow him to live in the building as a tenant but this too was rejected last week. Nitish has sought to take credit - and some may say justifiably so - for waging war against corruption much before anybody else through the route of legislation.

HINDU 4.9.11 CORRUPTION

The Lokpal and the CBI

R. K. Raghavan

The Hindu Social activist Anna Hazare and his team members at the Ramlila Grounds during his fast in New Delhi. File photo: V. Sudershan

The ushering in of a Lokpal should in no way dilute the CBI's legal authority or operational effectiveness.

It is a happy turn of events that there is, at last, a kind of truce between the Central government and the Anna Hazare Team on the Lokpal issue. Both sides have displayed a measure of maturity that augurs well for the future of public life in India. The stage is now set for some animated but objective discussion of the law that will concretise the idea of a strong ombudsman. It is not enough for the two sides to say that they are for a credible Lokpal. They need to go the extra length to accommodate each other's sensitivities. Otherwise things will be back to square one. This is why a lot of importance should be attached to the meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee scheduled in the next few days.

The Anna Team's focus is rightly on the status of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the future scheme of things. With all its faults — some real and many imaginary — the CBI is still the best bet to strike at the venality that marks public life in India.

To say that politicians alone are guilty of corruption, an impression given by the Anna Team, is greatly skewed. Civil service misdeeds are equally enormous and cannot be ignored. Take, for instance, the recent arrest of a senior Income Tax Department official who allegedly demanded a sum of Rs.50 lakh to overlook the suppression of unaccounted income by a company. Instances are legion of top officials of enforcement agencies asking for a bribe without any sense of shame

or fear. The magnitude of corruption in the Central government departments is mind-boggling, and this is why we first need an effective anti-graft machinery at the Centre, rather than in the States. The corruption in the States could be tackled subsequently. If the Lokpal is unable to cut at the roots of the civil servant-politician nexus in promoting dishonesty, it would have hardly justified its creation.

The ushering in of a Lokpal should in no way dilute the CBI's legal authority or its operational effectiveness. This should be the starting point for any discussions of the Standing Committee. A former Union Minister, referring to the plea for total autonomy for the CBI from the Executive, asked this writer some time ago as to who exactly the organisation should be answerable to if it wants to be autonomous — particularly when monitoring of all CBI cases by the judiciary was impractical. This query by an otherwise well-meaning public figure summarises the political perspective of the whole issue of the CBI's autonomy. It reveals the unconcealed desire of the average politician to somehow retain at least a semblance of control over the CBI.

It is generally known that the senior bureaucracy is also not exactly unhappy with the current state of affairs wherein the CBI is under the thumb of the Department of Personnel. Perhaps the most significant move that came in 2003 was the insertion of Section 6A in the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946, making it mandatory for the CBI to get prior government permission before it can even proceed with a preliminary enquiry (PE) against an official of and above the rank of Joint Secretary. This was a dubious amendment to the Act, based on the specious ground of saving civil servants from needless harassment by the CBI. But it amounted to deliberate emasculation of an organisation that requires teeth to tackle public servant corruption. The provision has been questioned in judicial forums as violative of the fundamental right of citizens to equality before law. Let us hope that this issue is resolved soon in favour of maintaining the integrity of the public services.

It is against this backdrop that the Anna Team's demand to bifurcate the CBI, attaching its anti-corruption wing with the proposed Lokpal machinery, should be examined. This is ostensibly in order to remove the organisation from the clutches of the Executive. The rationale is unexceptionable. The practicality of the proposed arrangement is, however, highly debatable.

The CBI does not operate with any watertight compartmentalisation of its numerous wings. No doubt there is a distinct Anti-Corruption Wing functioning at its headquarters. In the field units the distinction is, however, blurred. There is a pooling of resources at all levels when a major case, invariably a sensational conventional crime, is investigated by the CBI at the request of a State government or on the orders of a court. This will no longer be possible if a large chunk of the CBI representing the anti-corruption staff is removed and tagged on to the Lokpal. The current top brass of the organisation are reportedly opposed to such an arrangement, which would deny them the substantial manpower needed for non-anti-corruption work. The CBI's resources are already quite slender, making it difficult to cope with the nearly 1,000 cases registered by it each year and about 7,000 cases that are on trial.

Following the Vineet Narain judgment (1997) by the Supreme Court, the superintendence of the CBI's anti-corruption work is with the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC). This is a nominal arrangement which has worked reasonably well, because we have had some non-interfering and mature Central Vigilance Commissioners, and an equally responsible and self-effacing CBI leadership. Under an aggressive and egoistic CVC this arrangement could have become untenable. If, however, you want to disturb this stable state of affairs with a view to yielding to the demand of the Anna Team, the whole process of transition will have to be carefully conceived and worked out. As one who has headed the CBI, I am totally against any dismemberment of the organisation. That would cause more harm than good to the objective of rooting out corruption. If the Lokpal becomes a reality, the most sensible thing to do would be to

transfer the existing authority of superintendence of the CBI from the CVC to the Lokpal. Any other arrangement would result in the creation of two separate investigating agencies, namely, the CBI, and the small unit envisaged for the Lokpal. That would lead to confusion and a clash of functions. Along with such empowerment, the Lokpal could be conferred the authority (that currently vests with the government) to sanction the prosecution of public servants. This can be done by suitably amending Section 197 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 and Section 19 of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. The power enjoyed by the government under Sections 377 and 378 of the CrPC to deny or accord permission to the CBI to go on appeal or prefer a revision petition against the orders of lower courts could also be vested in the Lokpal.

It should be remembered that we have been witness to totally political decisions in such matters. Finally, the entire budget allocation for the CBI could be placed at the hands of the Lokpal, so that the CBI enjoys freedom from any tendentious holding up by government of sanctions of money required for its day-to-day running and implementing its long-term projects.

All these suggested moves may be viewed as being too drastic. But, then, without them the CBI will remain tied to the apron strings of the Executive. The former Chief Justice of India, J.S. Verma, must be a disappointed man. His bold judgment in the Vineet Narain case was aimed at insulating the CBI totally from political caprice. If, however, in the public perception this has not materialised, both the organisation's leadership and the executive will have to bear the cross.

The opportunity that is currently available to improve the image of the CBI through a thoughtful fusing of the agency with the Lokpal should not be frittered away. A lot of magnanimity on the part of the current Executive is called for. At the same time, the role of the media and the

citizenry at large in bringing enough pressure for a reform of the system can hardly be overemphasised.

(Dr. R.K. Raghavan is a former director of the Central Bureau of Investigation.)

TELEGRAPH 5.9.11 CORRUPTION

BALANCE OF POWER

- Anna Hazare's agitation has set an example for the future

S.L. Rao

Jayaprakash Narayan's movement in the 1970s was met by Indira Gandhi with mass arrests and the Emergency for two years. Anna Hazare, a much less educated leader with a record of successful anti-corruption fasts in Maharashtra, got the Central government to recommend his suggestions to Parliament. Manmohan Singh appears meek compared to Indira Gandhi. He does not have a loud Sanjay Gandhi to egg him to strong reactions. But he did have two distinguished lawyers as cabinet ministers who want initially no, and then tough, government responses to Hazare. This led to harsh comments from Hazare and his associates, but no violence, and delayed the settlement for many days. The Emergency made harsh reactions to public non-violent agitations unacceptable. Hazare's agitation will, over the years, spawn many similar local, and some national, agitations to redress specific public grievances about which there is widespread discontent.

Some say that Hazare has diminished Parliament and democracy. I think he has restored the right relationship between government, legislature and the people. If many people who feel strongly about an issue are led with determination and single-minded objectives, and agitate non-violently, it will be difficult in future for any Indian government to refuse to consider their demands. This has lessons to the public for tackling all kinds of issues, from unchecked inflation, to security — physical and social — and problems in Manipur and Kashmir. If the Maoists evoke little sympathy, it is because of their brutality and violence. People also distrust governments that meet Maoists with

matching brutal responses. But a non-violent mass movement on issues that will attract broad support, led by people who also understand mass communication and the media, will draw others in the country into its fold and more nuanced responses from governments.

Is this a negation of democracy? Such mass movements are not easy to mount. Anyone can fast (as in Manipur, for ten years) and even die (like the *swami* protesting against sand depredations on the Ganga), but with no influence on outcomes. The one who fasts must be a person with a public record of service, having a team of dedicated planners, communicators, organizers and volunteers to keep order and cleanliness, and for a national movement, many such people spread across the country. Such teams will come together for a few national causes; not for every local problem. However, local issues could have similar local teams being formed. What such teams do is expand democracy by taking public opinion (now called civil society) to the law-makers and forcefully pushing their points of view. They must be highly disciplined and completely non-violent if they are to be effective. The additions today are mass media support and the use of social media.

Legislatures are the final authority for the enactment of laws. However, public opinion has rarely participated in formulating them, except in instances like the Right to Information Act. Specialized and less controversial legislation like those on independent regulatory commissions have little response from government to suggestions made by public opinion, even by experts. The Anna Hazare movement has demonstrated that mobilizing concerned citizens and the media can compel government response to public concerns. This gives life to the phrase in the Constitution, “We the People”, as being the supreme authority under the Constitution, whose will has to be expressed through the various arms of government. Parliament and legislatures are supreme in that only they can pass laws, but proposals can come from anywhere.

The primacy of the executive and the legislature in formulating

appropriate legislation now has two additional actors in tandem — public opinion and the media. This is all for the good since we have wrongly taken it for granted that it is the prerogative of the executive and the legislature to formulate laws and others have no role. We now realize that public opinion has had no role because bureaucrats and powerful ministers have denied it that role. Public opinion must now educate the more open-minded members of the legislatures, saturate the media and get the legislature to consider changes in legislation. Competition among news media is a new factor. However, the media must be careful to not take positions themselves.

Hopefully, members of the legislature, at least some of them, will do more homework on the legislation they pass, so that they have considered all aspects before passing them. Our legislatures have many members who have criminal charges against them, are accused of corruption, have served terms in jail, and then are free to express themselves and vote against institutions like the lok pal being created with strong powers.

The Hazare movement raises serious doubts about the dynastic leadership in the Congress and the separation of political power from the leadership of the government. The dynasty, and especially the young successor, had a great opportunity in this political crisis. It was handled for some time as a legal and bureaucratic procedural challenge. The absence of any political sensitivity and the depth of feeling in urban India led to the shameful spectacle of the government changing its position every day and sometimes twice a day. The dynasty was deafeningly silent.

A striking feature was the old age of ministers in government and the youth of most of the agitators led by Hazare. It is time that this age disparity is removed and we get ministers closer in age to the people they govern.

The experience also underlines the need for the leader of government to either be leader of the main party in government or the dominating figure in that party. This has not been the case with the Congress for the last seven years. An economist-turned-bureaucrat-turned-prime minister was more comfortable with the sharp legal minds that dealt with the issues procedurally, and made a huge mess of it. As Arun Jaitley perceptively remarked, he cannot conceive of the Bharatiya Janata Party in government being led by someone without political authority. There was no coordination within the government and the Congress, and conflicting messages kept being given until an experienced politician (the finance minister) and a Marathi-speaking former chief minister facing corruption charges himself were brought in.

The main Opposition party, the BJP, tried to gain political advantage out of the Congress's and the government's embarrassment. It did not succeed because of its own involvement in corruption and reluctance to accept a strong lok pal that could turn against it when it came to power. Their actions in Karnataka, where the Lokayukta was not given prosecuting powers and in Gujarat, where the government has stalled for 7½ years in appointing one, did not leave the BJP with a strong anti-corruption record.

Hazare himself was fully focused and determined. He was a powerful negotiator who showed flexibility only when he was sure that he had the government on its knees. His core group frittered away Hazare's clarity and simplicity by making wild charges against government, with their insulting language and intemperate reactions. The experience will become a classic of political negotiation and lead to many other such movements.

The author is former director general, National Council for Applied
Economic Research

EDUCATION

TIMES OF INDIA 4.9.11 EDUCATION

Teach head, hand and heart

Dada J P Vaswani

"Judge a tree by its fruits," said the great teacher of [Palestine](#). Judged by its fruits, our current [education system](#) has failed miserably. A new type of education is needed, an education which should be related to life, real life.

Education must not be merely academic or abstract: it must not aim at stuffing the student with information acquired from dead books or a set of sterile moralities and superficial values. True education should equip the student to cope adequately with life, with what lies ahead of him so that he may become a worthy participant in the adventure of life.

Intellect has developed but reverence is lacking. Critical faculties are given free play and sympathy, the power that binds and builds, is receding. Knowledge without sympathy does more harm than good. It makes us suspicious and cynical.

Ideals that inspired education in ancient India must be rediscovered and introduced in our educational institutions, if we are to make our contributions to civilisation and to the freshness of human life.

The number of schools and colleges and universities in India is multiplying. Graduates and holders of doctorates are increasing. Knowledge has spread. But have we grown in freshness, vitality and strength? Have we become more appreciative of the deeper values which alone give meaning and significance to life? Or do we feel bored, cut off

from great ideals, hearts bereft of the song of sacrifice?

A new type of education is needed - an education which will not merely develop brain power, but an education which will give a triple training of the head, hand and heart.

Nation-building is character-building. What is wanted is not mere intellectual improvement but education that helps us become whole. The final end of education is not the gain of scholarship or erudition, power or financial independence. For all these without self-discipline and self-control could well transform to becoming anti-social forces. The object of education would be to form character.

Ancient Indic guru-shishya parampara was a beautiful blend of discipline and emotion. Today, students receive information but not much by way of training of emotions. Communion with nature was another part of ashram life. It developed the aesthetic side of the student's life; it purified the heart. True education is not dead knowledge; it is pulsating with life. Vidya or education is the search for the spiritual centre of life. Vidya is culture and this is possible with mental and physical discipline.

Today, knowledge has made us cynical. Education is analytical and critical, but lacks power for the creative life of society. It has made alliance with secularism, with utilitarianism, with "getting on". The problem of education will not be solved unless knowledge is related to a Spiritual Synthesis of Life, to what is called Adhyatma Vidya.

There has been too much organisation of the machinery of education. We have given too much time to the study of processes and too little time to their ends and values. Organisation has brought with it officialism, and officialism is the death of true culture.

A sound theory of education is a theory of ideals - the values and means

by which they may be secured. The ideal is a vital idea. It is dynamic. The ideal shows the principle of infinite vitality. Thus ideals shape our lives.

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POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

A case of political intolerance?

Gautam Chikermane

The timing is terrible. So is the scale of the error — all of \$2 trillion. And as far as implications go, the removal of Deven Sharma as president of Standard & Poor's (S&P) — an agency that rates corporate as well as sovereign debt — raises issues of political intolerance in the land of the last superpower. In less than three weeks after S&P downgraded the US debt to AA+ from Triple-A status, Sharma's resignation has been accepted. "There is no relation between the US downgrade and Mr Sharma's departure," S&P vice president marketing and communications Catherine Mathis said in an emailed response.

The \$2 trillion error that changed the US' debt to GDP ratio — an important aspect of risk on the bonds the country issues — to 79% from 87% in 2021 did not have any bearing on the S&P downgrade. "The company said it looks at three to five years, not 10. The government feels the country's paper is a longer-term instrument. So, it could be over a difference of opinion — and not facts — that Sharma has lost his job. Four years after the agencies lost credibility over whether the ratings they gave were 'opinions' or 'facts', they have come to haunt the business, all over again.

Of course, the press release words it beautifully, almost as if it's doing Sharma a favour. "Deven Sharma," it said, "will take on a special assignment working on the company's strategic portfolio review until the end of the year when he will leave the company to pursue other opportunities." This apparent face-save is underlined with graceful

words from Harold McGraw III, chairman, president and CEO of The McGraw-Hill Companies, that owns S&P.

Having interviewed both men, I found they live by their beliefs and share an intellectual honesty about the business. When I met the gentle and completely transparent Sharma in August 2009, the ratings industry was emerging from the 2007 crisis of confidence. Ratings are an ‘editorial opinion’, the agencies had said in their defence, forgetting the conflict of interest between their principals (companies that got their debt rated) and their profits. The allegations against the industry were that it did not take an independent view of the complex products that companies sold in the market leading to the ongoing credit crisis, the biggest since the Great Depression.

Why should we take you seriously, I had asked Sharma. “Point taken,” he said. “But we rate \$32 trillion of debt, of which subprime was just \$2.5 trillion. Our assumption on the correction in the housing market did not pan out. The level of declines turned out to be more severe than our assumptions. We did not assume as strong a relationship between different housing markets as it was.” And risk? “In 2006, we analysed how the mortgage risk was getting more problematic and in April 2006 we changed our analytics methodology. But the change was not enough. We did not assume the situation will change dramatically.”

In November 2010, as part of US President Barack Obama’s delegation, I asked McGraw III the same question. “I’m sorry you feel that way,” he said when I asked him why credit rating agencies had shirked their responsibility in the subprime crisis. “We budgeted for a 15% fall in property prices because that was the worst decline in the past 30 years. But the market crashed by 40% on average.”

By taking the blame on their chins, both Sharma and McGraw III, showed courage and a desire to bring change. Unfortunately, Sharma’s untimely sacking has put bigger question marks around the credibility of not only S&P or McGraw III, but on the way the capitalists system

works in the land where it has been perfected. Had this happened in 2007, nobody would have raised any questions.

But today, it is happening in the land of a superpower whose financial and political wrinkles are beginning to show, on a system whose sense of justice and fairness is being questioned, over a regulatory architecture that's crumbling.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

TRIBUNE 3.9.11 RURAL DEVELOPMENT

WHY PUNJAB IS COOL TO JOB SCHEME

Sucha Singh Gill

THE Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme (NREGS) has been a major flagship programme of UPA-II in its efforts to make growth inclusive in nature. The programme is aimed at the rural population, especially the poor, for employment generation, which is expected to add productive capacity, save environment, recharge ground water, improve soil fertility and common property resources.

Under this programme 100 days employment is ensured at least for one member of a family holding a job card. Under this scheme 90 per cent of the expenditure is financed by the Union Government. In order to ensure employment generation, the use of power-operated machines/equipment is not allowed and material cost is restricted to the maximum of 40 per cent in order to keep the labour cost at 60 per cent of the total project cost.

Although any one living in the rural areas can apply for a job card and demand work, yet this programme is aimed at the rural poor doing manual labour. The programme at the same time is aimed at the empowerment of women as 33 per cent of the employment is reserved for them. The wage rate for a maximum of 100 days is provided at the national or state level of minimum wages, whichever is higher. The wages are paid through a bank/post office account in a transparent manner. There is no discrimination between the wages of men and women. This is the only programme in which women get a wage rate equal to that of men according to the piece work done recorded in the muster roll.

This programme was started in selected districts in 2006 and was extended to all districts in the country in 2008. The states and regions within the states where this programme has been effectively implemented it has added to the income of the rural poor (in lean seasons) helping them to cross the poverty line. This has led to an improvement in the environment, water conservation and soil productivity. This has added to agricultural production and productivity, leading to a higher growth rate in agriculture. The direct payment of wages through bank/post office accounts, especially to women, has led to the empowerment of women, a better access to food, health and education of children.

Among the major states Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have generated the highest average man-days per participating households – ranging between 48 days and 70 days. Consequently, the impact on poverty reduction has been more in these states. Also, the share of women employment in the rural areas is higher. States like Punjab, Bihar, Gujarat, J&K, Orissa and Haryana have generated minimum employment.

Sleepy and active panchayats

An analysis of the implementation of the scheme reveals that the key to success or failure of the programme lies in the rural power structure. The entire scheme is implemented through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) ranging from the planning of work for approval by the higher authorities to the issue of job cards, allotment of work and employment, keeping of records and payment of wages. In the villages and states, where panchayats are active, well aware and favourable, this programme has done well.

Along with the panchayats, the states/regions where the poor are organised they are able to generate pressure from below on the leadership of panchayats to start the NREGS in their village. In some of

the cases where panchayats were led by a pro-poor leadership or were under control of the poor through the reservation mechanism in elections the implementation has been better.

In fact, the implementation of this scheme helps generate employment, provide right-based employment, raise wage rates and earnings of the poor helping some households to rise above the poverty line. This process empowers the poor, increases their assertion and frees them from the domination of large, rich farmers. Therefore, it is not liked by the dominant rural power structure. In fact, this programme intends to change the local power structure.

Encroachments on common land

The evaluation of this programme in Punjab shows that in a large number (nearly half) of villages the programme has not been started. In some villages gram sabha meetings, a statutory requirement, have not been called for starting the programme. While in other villages resolutions have not been allowed to be passed by dominant class/caste groups for starting the NREGS. The villages where the resolutions have not been passed, it was found that the village common land on which public works were to be started were under the occupation of powerful persons.

In some villages, common village land has been encroached upon by the traditionally dominant families. There are cases in which the common land is neither occupied nor encroached upon by the dominant families yet the NREGS has not been started. In such cases the village panchayats are dominated by people who are against starting this programme. In some villages the panchayats are controlled by sarpanches belonging to the Scheduled Castes but they are ignorant of the benefits of this scheme.

The cases where the NREGS has been successful a combination of factors has played a positive role. These include an enlightened and pro-

poor leadership of panchayats, availability of village common land, pressure of the bureaucracy, especially BDPOs who were able to persuade the panchayat leadership to initiate the scheme.

In some of the villages the existence of a workers' union, a club or some other organisation has created enough pressure from below, especially in the Moga and Jalandhar belt. In these areas some influential leaders from leftist organisations have played a positive role. There are also examples where representative of the PRIs, who got training and became aware of about the programme, took the initiative in this direction. Organisations like the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) and the Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID) have played a positive role in creating such awareness. In the districts of Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur, Bathinda, Amritsar and Muktsar the deputy commissioners took a keen interest in the programme and produced better results.

It is evident that programmes like the NREGS and social security schemes like the Old Age Pension and the Dal-Atta Scheme involve the inclusion/exclusion of deserving persons and families. The process of inclusion helps the poor and exclusion deprives them of the benefits. The working of the power structure in the rural society, the existence of organisations of the poor and a favourable/ committed bureaucracy makes a qualitative change in the situation.

No increase in minimum wage

The minimum wage of manual labour has not been revised in Punjab for the last three years. It stands at Rs.123 while prices of food items have increased at the rate of more than 10 per cent a year and in some cases they have doubled during this period. The minimum wages have been revised to Rs.170 per day in Haryana and Rs.169 per day in the UT of Chandigarh. Investigations have revealed that the Labour Commissioner is supposed to revise the minimum wages every year. But this has not

been done due to pressure from the industrial lobby and some factions of the farm lobby which operate through the ruling alliance.

It is argued by them that the revision of the minimum wage raises the cost of production affecting profitability. This section opines that the implementation of the NREGS in other states like U.P. and Bihar has created labour scarcity in the state and pushed up wages in the busy season. They are against the revision of the minimum wage. Therefore, NREGS workers, especially women and labourers, continue to get lower wages although the entire burden is to be borne by the Union Government.

There is need to take up such programmes seriously. Efficient officers at the state level can sensitise their middle-level colleagues, especially BDPOs, for making the programme effective. At the same regular monitoring can produce positive results. A positive intervention from the top in the form of securing the release of common land from influential families, spreading awareness among panchayats and involving people's organisations can make the NREGS and other social security programmes more meaningful and effective, and consequently, make economic progress inclusive in nature. A regular revision of minimum wages indexed to food inflation can increase the effectiveness of the inclusion process.

The writer is the Director General, Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh

TERRORISM

HINDU 3.9.11 TERRORISM

The Other Half - Unearthing the truth

Kalpana Sharma

For thousands of 'half widows' and families in Kashmir whose members have gone missing, the SIT report confirming the presence of mass unidentified graves may finally bring some kind of closure...

Imagine a day when your husband, brother, father steps out of the house and never returns. Imagine some member of the family being taken off by the police or army for questioning, and they never return. Imagine living for years not knowing — whether they are alive or dead, whether you should mourn or live in hope, whether you should give up or fight for the truth.

This is the reality to which thousands of families in Kashmir wake up each day — families of the estimated 8,000 individuals who have disappeared since the beginning of militancy in 1989. This is not a new story. It has been told, and retold many times. Yet, despite the retelling, nothing seems to change.

Glimmer of hope

Today, there is a small glimmer of hope that the truth might finally come out. Despite 'civil society' — yes, that same 'civil society' that kept all our media busy for over two weeks to the exclusion of all other news — producing reports and investigations that suggested that literally thousands of unidentified bodies lie buried in unmarked graves across Kashmir, that these graves might hold the key to the mystery of the thousands who have disappeared, the state government took no action.

Last month, a special investigation team (SIT) of the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) produced a report that confirmed much of

what was already known, but not accepted. The SIT's 11-member team took three years to follow through on information that had been placed in the public domain by groups like the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) and the Indian People's Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Kashmir (IPTK). Its findings, made public through the use of the Right to Information and released to the local media, are explosive. They confirm that in 38 locations in four districts — Bandipora, Baramulla, Kupwara and Handwara — there are 2,730 unidentified bodies in unmarked graves. Of these, the SIT has already confirmed that 574 are local people and not the 'foreign militants' as the gravediggers, ordered by security forces to bury these bodies, were told. That still leaves 2,156 bodies to be identified. The SIT has concluded that “there is every probability that these unidentified dead bodies (2156) buried in various unmarked graves ... may contain the dead bodies of enforced disappearances”.

The SIT report confirms what the IPTK 2009 report, “Buried Evidence: Unknown, Unmarked, and Mass Graves in Kashmir” revealed through photographs and eyewitness accounts. It surveyed 55 villages in three districts and identified 2,373 unidentified bodies in unmarked graves. The SIT figure is higher. It reports that many of the bodies were disfigured beyond recognition and several were charred. The majority were men and most had bullet injuries. This horrific secret lay buried in graveyards that local people knew existed but could not report for fear of reprisals. Now finally the truth is out. Or at least a part of it. A thorough survey in all districts would probably reveal many more such graves and unidentified bodies. And if they were matched with the DNA of the 8,000 or so who have disappeared, it is possible that after decades there would be a closure to the terrible and lingering loss that thousands of families in Kashmir have had to bear not knowing what has happened to their loved ones.

The worst off have been the women, whose husbands were pulled out for questioning, or just picked up, and who never returned. These

women, 'half widows' as they are called, are stuck in a unique situation in Kashmir. In July, APDP came out with another report that reveals the gender dimension of this tragedy. Titled "Half Widow Half Wife? Responding to Gendered Violence in Kashmir", the report documents the plight of the estimated 1,500 such women that APDP has identified. The number might look small but it represents just a small part of a larger problem in the state.

Heart-rending

The individual stories in the APDP report are heart-rending. Most of these women are ineligible for pensions or government relief because they cannot produce a death certificate. There is confusion about whether they can marry again after four years or seven years. Many of them face problems with their in-laws while they wait for confirmation one way or another about the fate of their husbands. They live with high levels of mental stress and have to deal with children who also have deep psychological problems.

Insurgency, militancy, separatists, 'stone-pelters', India, Pakistan — these are the words that get repeated in reportage from Kashmir. Yet another reality is what thousands of ordinary families suffer when their loved ones literally vanish into thin air. How can there be closure to the grief you experience when you have no idea whether the person you love is alive or dead? How can you mourn?

If, once the SIT report is handed over by the SHRC to the state government, action is taken to deal with the unidentified bodies buried across the state, perhaps there will be some kind of closure to this terrible story. Families can then, through DNA sampling, confirm whether the person they have been looking for all these years lies in one of these graves. This must also be followed up with steps to prosecute those responsible for these extra-judicial killings.

Yes, we need an India without corruption. But this violation of human rights, this terrible travesty of justice where people are picked up, killed and buried without anyone knowing about it is a more hideous form of corruption. It represents the misuse of powers granted in the name of fighting militancy. This type of corruption must also be addressed.

Indians in the so-called 'mainland', those who filled the Ramlila grounds in Delhi, for instance, are only too ready to assert that Kashmir in the north and Manipur in the northeast are an 'integral' part of India. If this be so, then the concerns of these half-widows, of the mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters of the 8,000 disappeared persons in that state, should also be an 'integral' part of our concern for a just and democratic society.

Email the writer: sharma.kalpana@yahoo.com