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A childhood lost, and a future almost stubbed out

Kunti Majhi is 12 and goes to school. But for five hours every day she is rolling *beedis*. Her mother, who rolls *beedis* as well, believes education is not for her daughter – for books and study will not fetch money, but rolling *beedis* will. The child wants to study but now she is a worker without any rights because legally she is not of employable age. There are many children like Kunti who are facing a situation fraught with danger and hopelessness. Unless there is immediate action by government and civil society, hundreds of girls will not only continue to wear out their fingers rolling out a toxic product but also face a dismal future

SARADA LAHANGIR, Jharsuguda (Odisha)

Photos: Sarada Lahangir/WFS

In Odisha's Jharsuguda District, hundreds of children, most of whom are girls, are often urged to give up schooling to become beedi-*rollers in order to help supplement the meagre family income.*

Compare the daily regimen of Kunti Majhi, 12, a student of Class Seven in Odisha's Jharsuguda Girls' High School, with that of other schoolgirls in the country. She gets up early in the morning to make sure that she puts in two hours of *beedi*- (local cigarette) rolling before leaving for school. The moment she is back home, it's *beedi*-rolling time again – sometimes for three hours at a stretch. Barely in her teens, the one preoccupation in Kunti's life is making sure that she completes 500-600 *beedis* every day, so that she can get a sum of Rs 25 to supplement her family income.

Kunti's father and elder brother are daily wage labourers, but a good part of their earnings go in alcohol. This means that her mother, Taramani, has to bear much of the responsibility of keeping the six-member household going and does this mainly by *beedi*-rolling. But even with both mother and daughter doing their best, it is difficult for them to roll more than 800 sticks a day. And because Taramani has a perpetual cough, young Kunti has slowly had to roll more and more *beedis* over time. She wants to study, she says, but asks poignantly, "Where's the time?"

While Kunti may worry about her lack of time for studying, her mother doesn't understand the big fuss being made over education. "Will her books feed us? My daughter should devote more time in *beedi*-rolling because it is our main source of income. Let her roll *beedis* and at least we will be able to save something for her marriage," says Taramani.

Kunti continues, however, to cherish her dream of scoring at least 40 per cent marks in the final examinations so that she can get a scholarship of Rs 940 provided by the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment and stay on in the classroom. But that dream seems impossible to achieve at the moment. In fact, what seems more likely to happen is that she will soon drop out of school altogether and take up *beedi*-rolling full-time.

That, at least, is the trajectory of hundreds of children like Kunti, who because they can't keep up with their studies, just give up. In the process, they become workers but without any rights. Kunti has been rolling *beedis* for the local Meghana *beedi*-manufacturing unit for five years now, but the company has not given her an identity card because employing children below 18 is illegal. As a result she is not only being deprived of an education, but even the few benefits that *beedi* workers are entitled to, like medical support reimbursement up to Rs 7000 in case of tuberculosis, and Rs 10000 as group insurance in case of death.

In fact, even her mother doesn't have such benefits. Complains Taramani, "I have been rolling *beedis* for 15 years now, but don't have an identity card. They come, take our photographs – supposedly to make a card – but so far have not issued one. In fact, we don't even have a BPL (below poverty line) card. Sometimes I wonder how we will survive."

Kunti's is a true example of a childhood irredeemably lost. Some girls get sucked into the industry very early, others after some tragedy or other befalls their families. For instance, life for young Himadri Oram, 16, took a turn for the worse, when her father, who worked as a construction worker, died unexpectedly. The family, especially Himadri's mother, had rolled *beedis* at home to supplement the family income and Himadri would chip in sometimes. But once her father died, there seemed no recourse but for Himadri to take up *beedi*-rolling full time. Her schooling has become secondary; her dreams of becoming a teacher are fading fast.

In my random visit to a few hamlets in Odisha's Jharsuguda District, I found that many schools in villages like Orampada, Sarverna, Kutrachua, Amlipali and Jharianal, reported that they have had children dropping out because of *beedi*-rolling. Interestingly, the majority were girls and were contributing directly to their family income. Says Minaketan Pradhan, a retired schoolteacher of Jharsuguda, "Schools can't retain these students because most of them are from very poor backgrounds with their families struggling hard to get two square meals." He added, "Surprisingly, the state labour and employment department doesn't seem to have any specific data that can tell you exactly how many children are involved in this hazardous profession and how many children have dropped out of school to work for the local *beedi*-rolling units."

According to Pradeep Sahu, secretary, Kendupatta Karmachari Sangh, who is also a member of the local *beedi* workers' union, "There are 27 registered *beedi* companies operating in western Odisha, units like Meghna, Bharat, N Beedi, Badsha, Jay Bharat, Gola, Gopal Beedi, Janata Beedi, and so on. But there are at least an equal number of unauthorised *beedi* companies operating in the area, who are making huge profits and exploiting about 1.5 lakh impoverished workers." These workers are more likely than not to be women and children. Admits Durga Charan Ojha, labour officer, Jharsuguda District, "Our department is running 40 schools in this district for these child labourers through different civil society organisations. Each school can enroll at least 50

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INSIDE

FOCUS

A new chapter in the life of Afroza Khatun

Bangladeshi child Afroza Khatun's story was part of a documentary film called Flickering Angels, which was featured in the July 2013 issue of *Grassroots*. The film focuses on some of the girls, ages six to 16, living in a home called Dayabari in West Bengal. One of the girls is Afroza from Bangladesh, who was in prison with her mother. The girl is in a sort of crisis situation when her mother dies during the prison term. Read on, to find out how Afroza's life continued from where the story was left off in the documentary

SHOMA A. CHATTERJI, Kolkata

Photo: Gaurang Jalan

A wistful Afroza bids a final goodbye while departing for Dhaka.

Little Afroza Khatun has gone home to Dhaka. No, this is not an upside-down report that begins at the end. Afroza's return to Dhaka marks the end of only one chapter in the Bangladeshi child's life. Afroza Khatun and her mother, Manowara Begum, had been in prison in West Bengal after they were caught crossing the border from Bangladesh into India illegally in 2009.

Manowara, wife of Akaram Hossain, a Bangladeshi national from Daspara Village, Laldanga Narote, Bangladesh, was arrested in South Dinajpur, and convicted under Section 14 A(b) of the Foreigners Act, which deals with unlawful entry into the country. Manowara was accompanied not only by five-year-old Afroza Khatun but also by her nine-year-old son Md Munna Pervez when she crossed over into India. As the boy was over six years old, he was separated from his mother and sister, as per the provisions of Indian law, and sent to a children's home.

Afroza, however, was allowed to stay with Manowara at the Balurghat District Correctional Home, where Manowara was to undergo rigorous imprisonment for two years. (A fine of Rs 10000 was also slapped on her). But soon, the mother-daughter duo was transferred to the Berhampore Central Correctional Home in Murshidabad, as Manowara was ill, and she could receive better treatment in Berhampore. As fate would have it, Manowara passed away in October 2009, leaving little Afroza an orphan for all intents and purposes.

"Afroza Khatun had nowhere to go," says B.D. Sharma, IPS, additional DG (East) of the Border Security Force, Kolkata. "At that time, I was her custodian as additional director general of Correctional Services, West Bengal. I felt it my duty to arrange for her education. I issued an order requesting the superintendent to take steps for her education as the whereabouts of the child's father were not known and the process of repatriation could take some time."

Arrangements were made for Afroza to be admitted to Dayabari, a home for girls run by the Sisters of Charity of Saint B. Capitation V. Gerosa, at Ranaghata on the Indo-Bangladesh border. "It was not easy because Afroza is a foreigner and red tape came in the way of her admission to any Indian mainstream school," recalls Sharma. But she was lucky to come under the tender care of Sister Marietta, the superintendent at Dayabari.

The low-profile NGO looks after the girls it is given charge of and provides them elementary education as well as training in some technical skill which will give them financial independence later on in life. The aim is to protect girls like Afroza from the evils that dog daughters of prisoners and under-trials. Chief among such evils is trafficking.

The years passed. Munna was repatriated to Bangladesh in 2011, but Afroza remained behind, at Dayabari. Then came the documentary film, Flickering Angels, which tells of the trauma in the lives of the children of convicts. Among others, it told the story of little Afroza, who hardly ever laughed and rarely talked, despite the love that Sister Marietta lavished on her. At the recent DG-level talks between Border Security Force, India and Border Guard Bangladesh in Dhaka, Sharma handed over the first copy of Flickering Angels to Major-General Anwar Hussain, director general, Border Guard, Bangladesh, and requested him to arrange for the safe repatriation of the child at her native village. Hussain was touched by the film, and Afroza's plight. He assured Sharma that he would take charge of Afroza's education till she graduated, and also take care of her marriage expenses.

Afroza was officially repatriated on September 14, 2013. Sharma accompanied her to Dhaka. The West Bengal Human Rights Commission had awarded both Afroza and Munna a sum of Rs. 1.5 lakh each after Sharma informed the Commission of the custodial death of their mother, Manowara. The money was handed over to Afroza at the time of her repatriation.

The turn that Afroza's life has taken is a heart-warming sequel to Flickering Angels, directed by Subhrajit Mitra and produced by Gaurang Films. Flickering Angels is film filled with hope because the brief narratives of the little girls' lives are inter-cut with shots of people who really care for them. Afroza's story is a sterling example of the power of cinema to change lives and mindsets. The film has been selected as a competition entry at the Utopia Film Festival, Greenbelt Maryland, Washington DC and at the 30th Teheran International Short Film Festival, Teheran, all in October. It will also be screened at the Kolkata International Film Festival in November. Meanwhile, a new chapter has begun in the life of Afroza Khatun. ■

An activist who believes you never stop learning

Nalini Nayak is based in Kerala and has been involved with coastal communities and their issues for over three decades. She is a founder member of the International Collective in Support of Fish Workers, where she has taken the initiative to collectively evolve a feminist perspective in fisheries. She is presently general secretary of the Self Employed Women's Association, Kerala, of which she was a joint founder. She is particularly concerned with issues of women workers in the unorganised sector. An excerpt from *Memoirs From The Women's Movement In India: Making A Difference*

Photos: Women Unlimited

Nalini Nayak.

Although I was born and raised in Bangalore, I have lived my working life in Kerala, based in Trivandrum. This life has revolved/evolved around two major movements: the fish workers' and the women's movements. Both have led me through a range of related subjects, understanding myself as a woman and the way I see and do things in relation to the men I work with; the complex relations between human dynamics and the environment in the context of modern science and use of technology; the otherwise unspoken complexities of sexuality and religion and the way they shape our thinking and interactions; besides, of course, the new knowledge of the otherwise forgotten or deliberately suppressed role that women have played in the development of society and how overarching patriarchy has appropriated it all. All these discoveries and experiences have simultaneously filled me with wonder, made me seethe with anger, stimulated me to react and deepen my social involvement, linked me with others whose commitment and vision have inspired me, widened my horizon and, finally, filled me with humility as time keeps advancing, creating a history of which I do not feel a part.

I had already been living and working in the fishing community for over a decade before I became a feminist. It's not that I wasn't working with women specifically in the community, helping them organise – working in a mixed team that had helped build a successful cooperative movement among fisher-folk, I was very convinced that women in the community occupied a significant space and needed to be organised as women, as well. There were many firsts in this organising initiative – women on church committees; the local women's organisation running the village ration shop and controlling cash offerings at the prayer shrine; and women organising to demand the right to travel on state transport buses instead of walking miles to the market with their fish. I didn't really understand what more there was to 'women's empowerment' as I felt the women we worked with were an integral and important part of the fishing economy and had begun to take matters into their own hands. I also didn't think it was important to participate in the first meeting of the autonomous women's organisations as I had questions about the very concept, 'autonomous'. We were living and working in a mixed team of men and women, building up a process in the fishery where both participated. So what more? Moreover, we were in

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Spreading the good word about sanitation, personal hygiene

SEETHA GOPALAKRISHNAN, Chennai

Photos: Seetha Gopalakrishnan

(Clockwise from left, above): Kokila, the community health worker in Thathamangalam; and the water and sanitation promoters of Vaalikandapuram in Perambalur, Velappudayanpatti (Maheswari) and Palandampatti (Backiam).

The water and sanitation promoter believes there is a spirit of ownership among villagers that can be tapped by someone within their own community. Sanitation is a familiar term. It is often misunderstood to mean the building and use of toilets. The truth, however, is that it covers a whole range of thought and action, both pre- and post-latrine use, which includes cleanliness, personal hygiene and the safe disposal of urine and faeces. Getting the message across in rural areas where open defecation and overall lack of hygiene is widespread is really important to tackle to the problem.

So, who is a water and sanitation promoter or a WSP? One, the woman has to be a resident of one of the villages in the panchayat; two, she has to be enthusiastic because she is the key to building a foundation for a strong and motivated field force. The WSP's role is based on the belief that there is a spirit of ownership among villagers that can be tapped by someone within their own community. For hardly Rs 1000 a month, the WSPs walk and talk non-stop – well, almost. She is a popular figure in the village and converses regularly with every family, individually as well as in groups, and explains the benefits of having a toilet at home. She cycles, walks and takes the bus to villages near and far. People have come to trust her and make informed choices about having toilets in their houses.

Once a week, the WSP visits the local panchayat-run primary schools and spends an hour or two with the children. She acquaints them with the concepts of personal hygiene and sanitation through interactive games and action songs. To get the children's attention, she uses a host of educational material. Flip charts detailing how infections spread from a person relieving himself out in the open to someone who is initially infection-free are commonly used. Sanitation memory games and toilet-snakes-and-ladders are also a part of the game-based approach to teaching children.

Over time, the children are acquainted with the concepts of toilet and hygiene and no longer look at them as alien elements in a village home. The time and effort put into the exercise has already borne fruit. Many children now wash their hands without fail after using the toilet or before eating. Some have also managed to convince their parents into building separate toilets in their houses.

The women of the house are more sensitive to the difficulties of open defecation as they find it much more difficult than the men. Mothers want their children to relieve themselves

Women have been chosen to spearhead the sanitation revolution in rural Tamil Nadu. The organisations working to promote sanitation in the region (in this case Leaf Society, Namakkal) recruit motivated women to work as water and sanitation promoters in the villages they live in.

with dignity and this is one of the main motivating factors behind the improved toilet penetration. The child-mother communion seems to be working wonders in the villages where Gramalaya, Annai Trust, Indo Trust and Leaf Society have been working.

Gnanasekaran from Annai Trust in Pudukottai says that the organisations themselves were surprised by the motivation and initiative the women had have shown. He calls them the 'hidden resources of the villages'. Even after the organisations associated with water and sanitation projects leave the villages, they ensure there is an individual who can take the movement forward. The good news is: open defecation is dying a slow death in some of the villages in Tamil Nadu. ■

(Courtesy: indiawaterportal.org)

Children in Sanarpudur are all smiles.

A compact soak pit toilet in Palandampatti Village.

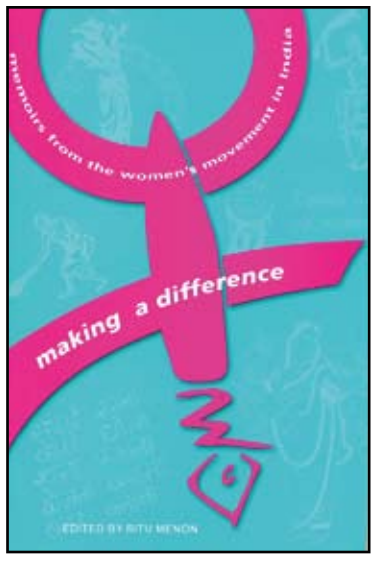
An activist who believes ....

(Continued from page 2)

Kerala, a highly politicised state where autonomous groups and movements were not only almost non-existent but also highly suspect. Better to keep away from such 'autonomous' outfits. I did, however, participate in a women's discussion group called Prachodana in Trivandrum where we read and discussed various books – *The Family* by Engels, *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, all of which I found very interesting.

In 1980, I took up a full-time job as a social worker in a high-specialty hospital. This was my first regular job and for the first time I was being confronted by other women and men about my status as a single woman: why didn't I wear a chain around my neck, why did I walk so fast, didn't I have parents? – implying that they should have seen to it that I was married off by the ripe old age of thirty-two! These stereotypical questions didn't put me off; what really shook me were other questions from women activists who met me through my fisheries work: "Why do you think women should not fish?", "Why do Christians call God Father/ Lord?"

It was only in 1985, I think, when I participated in a discussion in Bombay where Chhaya Datar presented the work she had done at the Institute of Social Studies (The Hague), that things changed for me. Presenting her study of the Nippani workers, conceptualising women's exploitation,



Making A Difference: Memoirs From The Women's Movement In India *is edited by Ritu Menon and brought out by Kali for Women - Women Unlimited.*

she analysed the concept of patriarchy as a category with a material base, operating to the disadvantage of women in all the institutions that make up society. Being analytical myself and having used the Marxist social analysis framework developed by Francoise Houtart and Geneviève Lemercinier, this hit me like a great flash of light. Eureka! I could not stop my mind whirling as I saw all our work in fisheries in a new light – how patriarchy not only controlled women through all the social institutions, but also basically controlled their labour. Yes, it made sense. Though there were a number of blank spaces and doubts, the desire to struggle through them was strong because I had understood the logic. There was no turning back now.

I shared all this with my women colleagues – Aleyamma Vijayan, Mercy Alexander, Vanitha Mukherjee, to name a few – insisting that we orgnaise a discussion in order to understand patriarchy. Though some of them were sceptical, we decided to invite Chhay, Gabriele Dietrich and Nandita Gandhi to Trivandrum to expose the others, including our male friends, to a session on patriarchy. That session changed the thinking of my women colleagues, and from then on we worked with a totally different consciousness, began to engage much more politically in our work with women. Although it took us a while (we kept distinguishing ourselves from liberal feminists), we finally became quite unapologetic about saying, "yes, we are feminist."… ■

(Courtesy: Women's Feature Service. Excerpted from Memoirs From The Women's Movement In India: Making A Difference, *edited by Ritu Menon; Women Unlimited, 2011/386 pages/Softback; Rs 350)*

From voiceless homemakers to confident moneymakers

From helping their families tide over the tough, violent times of the 1990s to securing a suitable career for themselves, Kashmiri women's foray into the tailoring and apparel sector have transformed them beyond recognition – each one stitching a story of survival and strength. All thanks to courage in the face of heavy odds, and initiative: pitted against a huge threat to the lives of their men, the women decided to do something to save their families from monetary ruin

BISMAH MALIK, Srinagar

It all started during the years of the late 1980s and '90s. Those were the dark days of civil unrest and regular *bandhs* (curfews) and *hartals* (strikes), which made it difficult for the men, especially those living in and around Srinagar, to step out of their homes and seek regular work. Under the shadow of violence and unemployment, women like Tehmeeda Bano, now in her mid-40s, decided to break norms – social customs had prohibited them from taking on any kind of remunerative work outside the home – to ensure their family's survival.

Recalls Bano, a housewife who started her own dressmaking enterprise in the 1990s, "In those days, there would be more *hartals* than working days in a week. In the wake of a huge threat to the lives of our men, women like me had to take a decision and do something to save our families from monetary ruin. Dressmaking was the natural livelihood option, as it could be done from home." So, even as guns boomed in the streets below, this mother of three daughters and a son, would quietly work along with a couple of tailors she managed to rope in, to produce functional, good quality salwar-kameezes and other made-to-order clothes.

The violence that raged on with the passing of the years accelerated a much-needed professional shift in the tailoring business: The once all-male profession slowly passed into the very capable hands of local women. In the process, something interesting happened – a sector that once had only low-scale jobs for men, was turned into one that supported profitable businesses. It was, incidentally, the only sector that flourished in the turbulent times and continues to do so even now.

In fact, with peace returning to the Valley, families that had started their own small ventures back then, are doing very well for themselves. Even Bano's initiative, which started off as a small-time community shop, became a full-fledged enterprise. She has been able to do this as several of her friends, who had little or no knowledge of tailoring, wanted to collaborate with her to open their own small boutiques in various localities within Srinagar. Today, Bano works with three such off-shoot centres on a profit sharing basis. As for her own shop, she now has a group of five women tailors and one male *masterji* (professional tailor) – who takes care of the embroidery and design – catering to at least 50 to 60 customers on a monthly basis. Of course, during the wedding season, the work increases exponentially. Besides this, there is also a group of young women who come to her shop to brush up on their stitching skills.

Srinagar resident Arifa Jabeen is another success story. The businesswoman and busy mother owns Libaas Boutique, one of the most popular clothing stores in the Kashmiri capital. She employs more than 100 women, who look after the stitching, designing and manufacturing aspects of her business. And, with a turnover of more than Rs 50 lakh a year, Jabeen has emerged the success story within the family. Nothing captures this better than the fact that her husband has now joined her business and is playing a supporting role in it.

Reveals Jabeen, "My husband got a premature retirement from the government department where he was working as an engineer. His salary was equivalent to the profits we make in our business right now and so he decided to join me instead. Fortunately, he does not have any ego hassles and helps me wherever he can."

Like Bano, Jabeen would not have made it big in life had it not been for a small, but prudent, decision she took in 1994 when she was a newlywed and her husband was jobless. She recalls, "Financially, we were doing badly. So I convinced my in-laws and husband to let me start a small business with a couple of my female friends. They agreed and we established our own small shop in one of Srinagar's suburbs. I had no knowledge of designing or stitching then and learned this craft from a *masterji* who hailed from Bihar. I also roped in some talented young girls into my business."

For both Bano and Jabeen the initial challenges were many. Unlike today, when it's not difficult to get loans to the tune of Rs 2.5 lakh from the Jammu and Kashmir Women Development Corporation – till date the Corporation has funded around 132 women-led businesses under two of its schemes, the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation and Empowering Skilled Young Women – these women had no such institutional support. They had to dip into their meagre personal savings or borrow at a high interest rate. Their early customers were friends and relatives and it's through word-of-mouth publicity that their work caught on.

Nowadays, Jabeen's Libaas boutiques cater to a wide spectrum of people, women and men, young, middle-aged and even the elderly. In keeping with the demands of the market, she produces everything from uniforms to party wear to casual outfits. While the cloth is sourced from bigger centres such as Delhi, Mumbai and even Dubai and Pakistan, the outfits made are still very much traditional – Kashmiris prefer to don their local styles and so it's the salwar-kameez for women and khan suits for men.

Talking about her store's specialty Jabeen points out, "Our basic Kashmiri embroideries like Tilla, Aari, Zardosi and Moti work, popularly known as *kashidakari,* on salwar suits and shawls are a must-have. Every Kashmiri woman wants some outfits like these to be a part of her wardrobe. They are also very popular with the tourist crowd. Of course, the prices vary depending on the amount and style of work and also whether it is handcrafted or machine made.

" Interestingly, Jabeen is a strong supporter of Kashmiri women artisans and feels that it is these women who have put Kashmir's rich clothing heritage on the world map today. "Usually, it is the women in Kashmir who specialise in doing fine embroidery work. Therefore, the great reputation that Kashmiri fabric and embroidery has earned today has to be attributed to the women of the region," she asserts.

Of course, Bano and Jabeen, are inspirations for others. Bano has motivated her daughters to value financial independence and they are keen to join her and take their mother's venture to newer heights. The two that are still in college intend to enrol for high-end tailoring and stitching courses. Says Mabruka, one of Bano's girls, "Although most of my friends want to pursue engineering, medicine and other such professional courses, my interest lies in the apparel business. For me, my mother is the biggest influence in my life and she constantly amazes me with her attitude and spirit."

Jabeen has a long list of admirers as well, many of whom are her employees. She has handpicked each one. Since not many of them are literate or very skilled, they are happy to take home a regular salary of anywhere between Rs 5000 to Rs 8000 a month. She sums it up this way, "Tailoring in Kashmir has become an all-woman business because it is the women who sustain this profession here. Despite the odds, thanks to their deft needlework and an inherent flair for fashion, women have successfully been able to not just eke out a living for themselves but support their families and communities as a whole." ■

(Courtesy: Women's Feature Service)

The tailoring and apparel business in Kashmir draws hundreds of women every year for employment. Here, two women are about to stroll past a set of mannequins in Srinagar.

Photos: Bismah Malik/WFS

Kashmiri embroideries such as Tilla, Aari, Zardosi *and* Moti *work, popularly known as* kashidakari, *on salwar suits and shawls are a must-have for most Kashmiri woman. And boutiques cater to a wide spectrum of people, women and men, young, middle-aged and even the elderly. In keeping with the demands of the market, everything from uniforms to party wear to casual outfits are produced.*

Reaching out and making people aware of, and fight for, their rights

In various pockets across India, groups of youngsters working with zeal in the face of all kinds of pressure awaken the masses through song, dance and theatre performances to counter violations of human rights and civil liberties. They also bring to the fore specific cases of sexual abuse of children and caste discrimination. Committed as they are to the cause of creating awareness and inspiring ordinary men and women to stand up for their rights, the lives of these young people are far from easy. Lack of money is one and constant harassment being just two examples

PUSHPA ACHANTA, Bangalore

"We have been forced to vacate our homes at short notice as the land has been allotted for a mall. Promises of jobs, money and new homes have not been kept. We cannot take such injustice lying down." That's the message powerfully conveyed by a musical play, put up by an amateur group of actors from Pune – the Kabir Kala Manch. Taking messages to the masses is what the Manch does. The troupe of performing artistes has been travelling with its meaningful plays to socio-economically marginalised people in Maharashtra. It has stirred the conscience of many, and jolted others out of inertia.

Photos: Pushpa Achanta

A shot of SPACE Theatre Ensemble's performance at the Dissent Conference.

The Manch was born around a decade ago, drawing its talent from the *bastis* (low-income neighbourhoods) of Pune. Today, it has some ten young people as members, all from economically challenged families. Rupali Jadhav, 28, a member of the Manch, says: "Most of us are Dalits. Deepak Dengle, a 38-year-old *adivasi*, who co-founded the group in 2002, is a self-taught playwright, singer and drummer. As a matter of fact, none of us have any formal training in music or acting. However, we contribute our time and talent to the activities of the Manch."

"Being a girl who grew up in a *basti*, my parents and brother resisted my desire to earn a graduate degree in Economics. I was able to fight their opposition, and worked part time to pay my fees. I am the first to go in for higher studies in my family," says Rupali, proudly. Rupali is married to 26-year-old Sagar G. He and his cousin Sheetal Sathe were already members of the troupe when Rupali joined.

Twenty-six-year-old Jyoti, who is doing her post-graduation in Clinical Psychology, is another Manch member. She was inspired to join the troupe after she watched a performance as an undergraduate student six years ago. Jyoti is now married to Ramesh Gaichor, also a part of the Manch.

Committed as they are to the cause of creating awareness and inspiring ordinary men and women to stand up for their rights, the lives of these young people are far from easy. The least of their problems is money. Jyoti says most of them cannot afford to live on what the troupe earns through audience contribution. They have to find other jobs to subsist. A more serious issue is harassment from the powers that be. Many of their songs and skits question the actions of those in authority.

Sagar, Sheetal, Deepak and Ramesh have all spent time in jail on one flimsy charge or the other because they dared to dispute the paths of officialdom. Yet, despite these challenges, the youngsters continue their work with zeal as they realise the significant role they play in rousing the masses to counter violations of human rights and civil liberties. Besides, Rupali and Jyoti both feel that their involvement with the Manch has been personally liberating.

Andrea Pereira and a group of others from Goa, all in their late teens or early twenties and belonging to families that barely qualify as middle-income group, have chosen to engage in cultural activism rather than pursue regular academic paths. They are members of the Society for Promoting Arts, Culture and Education (SPACE) Theatre Ensemble started by Hartman D'Souza, well-known writer, director, environmentalist and crusader for the rights of communities whose lives have been adversely impacted by unregulated mining.

"Many people are not aware of the destruction caused by mining. We try to highlight these and other social issues through shows in educational institutions, government and private organisations, residential neighbourhoods, etc. For instance, in Clowns, a work-in-progress production, we use simple questions to urge spectators to think whether transgenders and religious minorities must be included in mainstream society," says Andrea. She is happy that the events they have staged have evoked positive responses from people.

In Tamil Nadu, the Makkal Mandram is made up of youngsters who express themselves through songs and theatre. Drawn from a variety of backgrounds that have the experience of social exclusion in common, it is based in Mangalapadi Village in Kanchipuram District. Geeta Charusivam, a long-term Makkal Mandram member, says: "Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam are projected as the main classical performing art forms of Tamil Nadu. But there are also folk arts in the state. One such is the beating of the drum known as the *parai* (made from cow hide and wood), done mainly by people from the Dalit community during funerals.

Deepak Dhengle and Rupali Jadhav.

Jyoti and a friend.

Mahesh, another veteran of Makkal Mandram, adds that the young men and women in the troupe have managed to bring to the fore specific cases of sexual abuse of children and caste discrimination prevalent in government schools and places of worship. For instance, on one occasion, the Makkal Mandram cultural team beat drums loud and long in front of a local police station to pressure the police to take action in a complaint of sexual assault. This also alerted residents of the area and they compelled the police personnel to discharge their duty.

Youngsters ready the parai, and seem to enjoy doing it.

Makkal Mandram encourages its young members to learn their traditional arts, crafts, practices, history and identity in addition to obtaining academic qualifications. Significantly, the members do not baulk at assisting their parents in traditional occupations such as agricultural labour, and provide financial support to their families once they complete their studies and get jobs.

Another example of how performing arts can touch young and vulnerable lives is the work of Janabimba, a group launched in Bangalore in 2010 by Aruldass Vijaya, a young man from a financially challenged home. "I realised that music and acting allow children and youth to engage with peers and express their struggles and hopes. Learning and practising the arts has managed to keep us youngsters away from crime, substance abuse and idleness. Our troupe comprises a handful of economically backward adolescents who are committed to making their lives purposeful. We spread messages regarding contemporary societal challenges and urge the public to fight them in a united and pragmatic way, while continuing our studies or jobs," he says.

Arul, who plays the *parai* and teaches the skill to others, has also composed and sung songs on subjects as wide and varied as the lives of street vendors, runaway and trafficked children and the dangers of privatising water supply.

There are many Rupalis, Andreas, Jyotis, Geetas, Maheshes and Aruls in the *bastis* and remote villages of India, young men and women who dare to break artificial ceilings and find fulfilment not only in exercising their natural talent in music and theatre, but also in affirming their indigenous identities, in reaching out to the marginalised, and in awakening the social conscience of the masses.

Greeting every newborn daughter with fruit trees

There is a small, nondescript village in Bihar that has found a great way to tackle declining sex ratios, global warming and climate change, all in one go. Theirs is a solution that incorporates tradition as well as knowledge of farming and it has been in practice for decades now. Girls are no more considered a burden on the family and dowry deaths that were once so common here no longer make the news. The birth of a daughter is welcomed by the community planting fruit trees

SAADIA AZIM, Bhagalpur (Bihar)

The daughters of Dharhara are treated as avatars *of Goddess Lakshmi and inherit the fruit trees as they grow up.*

Photos: Saadia Azim/WFS

For years now, girls in the village of Dharhara in Bihar have been welcomed into the world in the most novel way. By the local community planting at least 10 fruit trees - traditionally mango – in celebration.

Generally, the flood-ravaged districts of eastern Bihar present a scenario of abject poverty and poor development. But Dharhara is an exception. Located about 20 kilometres from the district headquarters of Bhagalpur, the village is one of the greenest pockets of the region. And that's not all. Unlike elsewhere, for years now girls in this village have been welcomed into the world in the most novel way: by the local community planting at least 10 fruit trees – traditionally mango – in celebration. New daughters here are treated as *avatars* (incarnation) of Goddess Lakshmi and stand to inherit these fruit trees as they grow up.

Owing to the tradition, the green village – which is surrounded by the River Ganga to the south and the unpredictable River Kosi to the northeast – is today nestled in the midst of more than 20000 fruit-bearing trees. Sukriti, the young daughter of the village *pradhan* (chief), Parmanand Singh, says, "Even as the world is frantically discussing how to deal with issues like sex selective abortions, global warming and the carbon footprint, planting trees when girls are born is our simple solution to all these complicated problems."

In the highly prejudiced Bihari society, where girls are generally seen as a financial *bojh* (burden) on the family, dowry deaths that were once so common here no longer make the news. Planting trees to celebrate the birth of a girl child is essentially a move to build an asset base for her, which can eventually be utilised by the family to finance her education and future development. Former pradhan, Pramod Singh, puts it this way, "She inherits the trees and over the years the fruit not only helps support her family it also helps them bear the expenses of her wedding. We plant the trees at birth because as our girls grow up, so do the trees."

Pramod had planted 10 mango trees about 12 years ago when his daughter, Niti, was born. Niti now goes to school and neither her father nor other family members consider her school fees a burden since the money comes from selling the fruit from her trees. Of course, her very traditional mother, Rita Devi, has taken to planning for her marriage already and sees Niti's trees as an asset in that context.

The unfortunate social practice of dowry may take many more years, or even generations, to overcome, but Madhurani, 20, who got married a couple of years back and is a proud mother of a three-month-old daughter, chooses to be optimistic, "Of course we know we cannot completely remove the practice of dowry from our social system, but at least having some assets in their name have given our girls and their families a better life." Adds Gul Afsan, an activist with the NGO, Her Initiative, which works for the empowerment of poor women through entrepreneurship, "Although the purpose of planting these trees is to build an asset for the future of local girls, it has also helped them develop a sense of ownership – rare among women of this region."

For now, the 8000 villagers of Dharhara, including scores of young girls, are enjoying the fruits of their labour. In Bhagalpur, a district well-known for mangoes, a tree takes around four to five years to mature and then, with some care, they start yielding bumper crops every season. While the greater part of the produce is sold, some of it is kept aside for the children to enjoy. Says Nirmala Devi, a mother of three, "My daughters love to eat mangoes and I don't stop them since it's good for their health." Planting mango is also profitable because once the trees become old they can be felled for wood, which is in great demand in the low-cost furniture market. "We cut the trees over a period of several years for the wood and all the furniture that is customarily presented to girls during marriage is made from this," adds Nirmala.

Nivedita Singh, 20, who recently got married to a schoolteacher working in a nearby village, explains, "Another reason for this trend is that the amount of labour needed to work in orchards is much less. One only needs to be patient for a few initial years and then it only gets better." Her parents, too, did not have to worry about money for her education or marriage, as her trees were there to support them.

These trees have also impacted cultivation patterns in this region. Notes Parmanand Singh, "People in our village have been tilling land as a means of livelihood for generations. But, of late, there has been a shift from conventional farming to fruit tree plantation, as it pays better." While the mango is still the preferred tree for fruit plantation, it's not always easy to maintain and sometimes they are not cost-effective either. Therefore, many farmers here are now opting for guavas, litchis and papayas since they are cheaper to grow and take less time to mature.

Shatrughan Singh, an octogenarian, has planted more than 600 trees in Dharhara for his daughters, granddaughters and other village girls. Most of his trees are mango, but even he has taken to planting litchis over the past few years. His daughters are now married, and his two granddaughters, Neha and Nisha, go to school. Both the girls are excited at the prospect of owning 20 trees among them once they grow up.

Trees for girls is an innovative practice and one that can potentially check the decline in Bihar's child sex ratio, if the idea catches on in other parts of the state. According to the 2011 Census, at 933, the state's child sex ratio may be better than the national average of 914, but it has dropped sharply from the figure of 981 that the state had registered 30 years ago.

The success story of Dharhara has even caught the attention of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who has visited the village to plant trees and ensure that a girls' school is built there. During a public meeting in the village, some years ago, he said that the Dharhara residents' age-old practice of planting trees to mark the birth of girl child is worth emulating at a time when the gender ratio in the country has been on the decline. He added that local people have, in their own novel way, addressed two concerns with this one move: Environmental conservation and gender justice. Treat the girl child as a blessing and trees as bank deposits – that's the message from this tiny village. ■

(Courtesy: Women's Feature Service)

A childhood lost...

(Continued from page 1)

students. Now there are 1914 working children and school dropouts enrolled in 40 schools. Out of these, more than 70 per cent children are girls."

The problem is of attendance. Says a teacher from one of these schools, off the record, "Although we can enrol up to 50 students, we have only 35 students on our rolls, and of these only five to six students attend classes. Sometimes we have to close the school because no student has made it. Parents get irritated with us when we try and explain to them the importance of educating their children."

The *beedi* industry in Odisha is marked by low wages, sub-human working conditions, and no rights. According to the state law, the minimum wage for a *beedi*-roller is Rs 65.78 for rolling 1000 *beedis,* which would require an entire day. According to *beedi* union leaders, usually employers release just Rs 45 or so per day to the middlemen who in turn pay only Rs 42 to the *beedi*-rollers. In fact, contractors, known locally as *munshi,* play an important role in the general exploitation. Sometimes they provide them with poor quality *tendu* leaves and then discard the *beedis* after they are made. They also do not hesitate to take away the finished *beedis* without paying for them. Often, *beedi*-rollers and their families fall into a vicious cycle of debt because they are forced to borrow from the contractors themselves.

"We are very concerned about people, especially about children, getting drawn into this hazardous occupation," says Sushama Sahu, coordinator of western Odisha Pragatisila Sramika Manch, a local NGO. Her organisation has conducted protests on the issue, even surrounding the collector's office on one occasion.

Kunti Majhi, a student of Class Seven in Jharsuguda Girls' High School in Odisha's Jharsuguda District, gets up early in the morning to make sure that she puts in two hours of beedi-*rolling before leaving for school.*

According to her, opening schools for children working in the *beedi* industry does not solve the problem. The community and especially parents need to be sensitised on the hazards of the occupation and the importance of schooling for their children. ■

(Courtesy: Women's Feature Service. This article was written as part of Panos South Asia's media fellowships.)

Now, here's a cradle to welcome abandoned girls

Post the eye-opening first episode of Aamir Khan's chat show, Satyamev Jayate, which brought the reality of sex selective abortions to national television, various state governments as well as civil society organisations were stirred into action. But long before it became the cause of the season, an initiative in Rajasthan's tourist haven, Udaipur, has been doing its bit to save newborn girls. The Mahesh Ashram not only takes care of abandoned baby girls, it also finds loving, stable homes for them

RENU RAKESH, Udaipur (Rajasthan)

Photos: Renu Rakesh/WFS

The Mahesh Ashram in Rajasthan's tourist haven, Udaipur, has been doing its bit to save newborn girls - the home based in the city's Bhuwada locality, today, has 19 abandoned baby girls who are getting quality professional care.

In August 2006, within a period of two weeks, two female foetuses were reported to be found floating in Udaipur's famed Fatehsagar Lake. Almost simultaneously, another similar incident was reported from the neighbouring district of Chittorgarh. The incidents changed the life of a city businessman forever. An inquiry into Rajasthan's child sex ratio revealed that there were only 909 girls in the 0-6 age group for every 1000 boys in the state, according to the 2001 Census. Unfortunately, the number has only declined over the last decade – the 2011 Census reports just 883 girls for 1000 boys.

Why do Rajasthanis reject daughters? Where have all those missing girls gone? What can be done to turn the dismal situation around? Devendra Agarwal, 38, had no answers to these questions that were troubling him. But one thing was clear in his mind: he had to do something to rescue such girls. Recalls this once-successful marketing professional, "I was moved by the visuals of foetuses floating on the water. I thought if someone could take care of the unwanted girls, they would neither be killed nor abandoned or dumped in hedges and dustbins."

Agarwal started by putting up a cradle outside his home in the city's busy Surajpole area. Within a week, he had three baby girls in his home. He smiles, "We were looking for one sister for my two sons, and suddenly we had three." The three girls gave a new direction to Agarwal's life plans. When the Udaipur's Child Welfare Committee came to know that he had abandoned newborns in his home it decided to take them away, saying that they needed to be put up for adoption. When he tried to stop them, legal hassles followed. "I fought the case right up to the Supreme Court where, too, I lost. I couldn't save these girls. In the meantime, I was charged with contempt by the Rajasthan High Court and arrest warrants were issued against me twice," he recalls.

Those were tough times for Agarwal and his family but that's when he decided that saving newborn girls was going to be his new calling. He instituted an organisation, the Maa Bhagwati Vikas Sansthan, under which the Mahesh Ashram was set up. Built with a loan of Rs 23 lakh, the home based in Udaipur's Bhuwada locality, today has 19 abandoned baby girls who are getting quality professional care. Says Agarwal, "I realise that a lot of women are compelled to give up their daughter because of family and social pressures. In fact, many a time, the mother is not even aware that the girl she gave birth to has been taken away from the hospital bed and dumped. We want to save such live. All we say is: 'Don't throw them, give them to us'."

To make that happen, the Mahesh Ashram has put up two cradles – one outside the busy MB Hospital and the other at the ashram's doorstep. An alarm sounds after two minutes of a child being placed in the cradle, giving ample time for the mother or any other family member to leave. In the five years this ashram has been functional, Agarwal and his team have been able to save 67 girls. "Unfortunately, we lost six girls, who were very sick when we found them. One of them was thrown from a running car. She was bleeding profusely when my team found her. We rushed her to the hospital, where three units of blood were given, but she couldn't survive. Another one was left under a running tap in a hospital's bathroom on a cold winter night. She was on a ventilator for nine hours before she succumbed," he recounts with sadness.

To give the particularly vulnerable children the best of healthcare, the Mahesh Ashram has acquired photo-therapy machines, warmers and oxygenators besides a dedicated staff of 20 ayahs (local nurses) and one general nurse and midwife. "Now, we are gearing up to start a neonatal care unit at the ashram itself so that complete care can be provided within its premises. The construction of this unit is in full swing at the moment," informs Agarwal.

Of course, saving the little ones is not Agarwal's only mission. The Mahesh Ashram has also taken on the responsibility of finding loving, stable homes for them. Says Agarwal, "I failed in my first attempt – with the three girls – because I had no knowledge of what the law said regarding the adoption of abandoned babies. But once we started the ashram we are more organised in our approach." He formed a childcare committee, comprising senior government officials – an IPS officer, an IRS officer, the vice-vhancellor of a university, a chartered accountant and Agarwal himself on the board – to conduct the ashram's adoption-related activities.

In fact, in 2009, Mahesh Ashram became a specialised adoption agency after getting a licence from the Social Justice and Empowerment Department of the Government of Rajasthan. To date, they have found parents for 41 babies, although Agarwal admits that it's not easy to find homes for them because people in the state are still fixated on boys. "It takes us a lot of time to ensure a stable life for these girls. Even now, we have 30 applications pending for adoption, but all of them are for a male child and, sadly, our search for suitable parents for 17 beautiful girls continues. Of course, one has to point out here that when couples do come forward to adopt girls they do so unconditionally. In fact, those who come looking to adopt boys are more choosy – most often they want 'fair, good-looking' kids," he says.

Commenting on actor Aamir Khan's much publicised move to save the girl child, he says, "It's really ironical that at the time when Khan was holding a meeting with Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, a girl was abandoned in our ashram's cradle."

Whether it's a call on national television to save India's girl children or an individual's efforts – like that of Agarwal and his Mahesh Ashram – the fact is that there is no hope for India's abandoned girl children unless everybody, including those in the medical profession, work towards making change happen. ■

(Courtesy: Women's Feature Service)

To give the particularly vulnerable children the best of healthcare, the ashram has acquired photo-therapy machines, warmers and oxygenators besides a dedicated staff of 20 ayahs *(local nurses) and one general nurse and midwife.*

Grassroots

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Natural custodians: Tribal women save their forest

Baripada's tribal women are clear. They will stand united in the exercise of their forest rights and any move to encroach on their territory will be met with strong resistance. The women protect the forest by guarding it all day in rotational groups. The first to perceive any danger to the forest, they successfully managed to halt an eco-tourism project

SUJOY DHAR, Baripada (Odisha)

Under the green canopy of towering Sal trees, a small white shrine is home to a clutter of baked earth animal idols. Phoolmani, 45, a tribal woman in eastern India's state of Odisha, worships here every day. In the silence of this forest, which is a primary source of sustenance for Phoolmani, who lives in the Budhikhamari cluster of villages on the edge of Baripada town in Mayurbhanj District, faith meets livelihood options.

For women belonging to local tribes like Santhal, Kolha and Lodha, making Sal leaf plates is one of the key income-generating activities. They also collect *mahua* flowers, mushrooms and other non-timber forest products. "This forest belongs to us. It offers us our livelihood. Here, among these trees, we also pray to our gods. They protect us, just as we, in turn, protect the forest by guarding it all day in rotational groups," states Phoolmani, emphatically. Phoolmani and her friends keep a strong vigil over the woods. They have organised themselves under the Budhikhamari Joint Forest Protection Committee, a pioneering land rights collaborative intervention that covers 100 villages near the Manchabandha Reserve Forest.

For Phoolmani, who lives in the Budhikhamari cluster of villages on the edge of Baripada town in Mayurbhanj District of Odisha, the forests around the Manchabandha Reserve Forest are the primary source of sustenance.

Usually, it's the women who are the first to perceive any danger to the forest. In January, for instance, when they noticed some unusual felling of trees they decided to investigate. What was revealed left them stunned. The state Forest Department, which is meant to protect the forest, had quietly given permission for the building of an eco-tourism resort there, in clear violation of the 2006 law that empowers the tribal people with forest rights.

The Indian Forest Act, 1927, which is the country's main forest law, is a colonial one, and since it was enacted to serve the former British rulers' need for timber, it does not speak of conservation. This is what makes the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, popularly called the Forest Rights Act, a key piece of legislation. The Act secures the rights of forest dwellers to land and other resources.

While the local body elections were taking place, the Forest Department began fencing off the entire forest and also knocked down as many as 1500 trees in the first phase of construction for the eco-tourism park, reveals Rights and Research Initiative (RRI), an international non-profit group, and its local partner, Vasundhara, which works along with the tribal communities here. The RRI is a global coalition of organisations working to encourage forest land tenure and policy reform as well as the transformation of the forest economy so that business reflects local development agendas and supports local livelihoods.

When the women realised that their control over the 118 hectares of forest land was slowly slipping away, they decided to raise their voice. Lilima, 23, from Gaudadiha Village, took the lead in the fight to stop this project. She says, "We cannot allow outsiders to come in our forest. It makes the local women vulnerable." Sarla Devi Singh, 23, another woman leader from the village, echoes Limila's concern, "Eco-tourism can make us vulnerable and take away our rights. Our womenfolk can be attacked; our culture can be threatened."

The duo mobilised a large number of people to lead a protest rally outside the district collector's office in March. "We ensured that the collector gave written instructions to the divisional forest officer of Baripada to stop the project," says Lilima. By the end of March, the communities living adjacent to the forest managed to halt the eco-tourism project through the political processes defined under the Forest Rights Act. This has been seen as the triumph of the tribal people's power, especially that of the women. But they are not resting easy.

Ever since the 1992 Earth Summit took place in Rio de Janeiro 20 years ago, the world had set for itself the key objectives of sustainable development, protection of the rights of indigenous peoples and local community management of forests. "But somehow the Forest Department in India is yet to come to the terms with the fact that the right to the forests are now with the local people, especially since the new law," says Tushar Dash, who leads Vasundhara's thematic group on Forest Rights Act.

Sudhansu Sekhar Deo has spent many years working directly with communities within the Similipal Biosphere Reserve for the protection of their rights over the natural resources in the biosphere. The reserve lies 15 kilometres outside Baripada and is home to tigers as well as the dreaded Maoist rebels whose power, according to Deo, is derived from the fact that poor people, especially tribal communities, have been at the receiving end of urban greed. He says, "The felling of trees to make the road is in itself an illegal act by the Forest Department which is supposed to be the custodian of the forests and here they got a young man of a tribal family arrested and imprisoned for the protest."

Photos: Sujoy Dhar/WFS

Phoolmani (extreme right) and her friends have organised themselves under the Budhikhamari Joint Forest Protection Committee, a pioneering land rights collaborative intervention that covers 100 villages near the Manchabandha Reserve Forest, and they keep a strong vigil over these woods.

When Bijay Kumar Panda, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Baripada, was approached with the demand to stop work on the resort, his first reaction was to say that the tribal people were being instigated by a few individuals. When confronted with the facts he went to on to explain why in the first place the Forest Department had tried to fence the area and start an eco-tourism project without the permission of the local 'gram sabhas'.

According to Radha Krushna Rout, sub-collector of Baripada, the views of the local tribal communities are taken into account when any kind of infrastructural work happens in the area. "If the tribal people approach me I definitely recognise their concerns. I did receive an application on this earlier and had since sent it to the DFO," he says. Lilima sums up the mood, "We go and pray in our sacred grove - known as *jahira* in tribal language - for the well being of the villages and the forest. We will never allow the destruction of our forest." ■

(Courtesy: Women's Feature Service)

K.N. Shanth Kumar is new PTI chairman

Photo: D H

K.N. Shanth Kumar.

K.N. Shanth Kumar and Mahendra Mohan Gupta were today elected chairman and vice-chairman respectively of the Press Trust of India. Shanth Kumar, a senior editor and photojournalist belonging to the Bangalore-based Printers (Mysore), and Gupta, chairman and managing editor of the Jagran Group, were elected unanimously at a meeting of the PTI Board following the company's 65th annual general meeting in Delhi.

Shanth Kumar is the editor of the leading Kannada daily *Prajavani* and director of Printers (Mysore), publishers of *Deccan Herald, Prajavani, Sudha* and *Mayura* publications. He succeeds R. Lakshmipathy, publisher of Tamil daily *Dinamalar*.

Shanth Kumar is also the chairman of the board of trustees at the Press Institute of India. Long associated with media industry bodies such as Indian Newspaper Society (INS), where he was a member of the executive committee for more than 15 years, and the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) of which he is a former chairman, he has keen interest in photography, especially in sports photography. He has covered the last seven Olympic games as a photojournalist.

Gupta, a former member of the Rajya Sabha, heads one of the largest media conglomerates in the country. He has been president of INS and the Indian Languages Newspaper Association besides having been chairman of United News of India (UNI).

Besides Shanth Kumar and Mahendra Mohan Gupta, members of the PTI Board are: Vineet Jain (*The Times of India*), Vijay Kumar Chopra (*Hind Samachar*), N. Ravi (*The Hindu*), Aveek Kumar Sarkar (*Ananda Bazar Patrika*), Hormusji N. Cama (*Bombay Samachar*), M.P. Veerendra Kumar (*Maathrubhoomi*), R. Lakshmipathy (*Dinamalar*), Riyad Mathew (*Malayala Manorama*), Sanjoy Narayan (*Hindustan Times*) and Shekhar Gupta (*Indian Express*).

The directors from outside the newspaper industry are Prof E.V. Chitnis, Justice S.P. Bharucha and Fali S. Nariman. ■

(*Courtesy*: Deccan Herald)