



African Grey Parrots have vocabularies of over 200 words

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Monk burns himself to death for peace

Saigon: A 28-year-old Buddhist monk, Thich Lang Chi, burned himself to death today — his way of answering a call from President Nguyen Van Thieu for a national day of prayer for peace.

As members of South Vietnam's several religions — Buddhists, Catholics, Hoa Hao and Cao Dai — flocked to churches and pagodas, the monk silently poured petrol over himself and died alone in the courtyard of a Saigon pagoda, police sources said.

The President had called on citizens to observe a day of prayer today for peace and for the government troops and civilians who died in the Viet Cong's lunar year offensive.

The monk left a note saying he was making himself "a holocaust unto Buddha" who might thus answer his appeal for peace.

The police said the monk also left a second note in a sealed envelope but would not disclose its contents.

Self-immolation was adopted as a fiery protest by Buddhist monks when they began a struggle movement which finally led to the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem in November, 1963.

They used the dramatic symbol several times against successive regimes and immolations was a central part of the mass demonstrations by militant Buddhist against the government of the then Premier Nguyen Cao Ky in 1965 and 1966.

BRIEF

Pak aims to revive glory of ancient Mughal city Lahore

Lahore, Pakistan: Perched on scaffolding, restoration experts chip away at decades of grime and repair broken mosaic tiles in a bid to save the colossal murals depicting historic battles and regal ceremonies on the walls of Lahore fort. The painstaking work is part of efforts to preserve Lahore's crumbling architectural history as officials juggle conserving its diverse heritage with building modern infrastructure in Pakistan's chaotic second city. The metropolis, which once served as the capital of the Mughal empire that stretched across much of the subcontinent, has been subsumed into a myriad of civilisations across the centuries. This rich past is most visible in the milieu of architecture salted across the Walled City of Lahore — from Hindu temples and Mughal forts to Sikh gurdwaras and administrative office built during the Raj. "You get a history of a thousand years, 500 year-old houses and monuments and mosques, shrines and a very peaceful atmosphere," says Kamran Lashari, director general of the Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA). Prime among them, and dating back to the 11th century, the Lahore fort was first built of mud and was then later reinforced with stone over the centuries by a long cast of Mughal emperors who oversaw its expansion and the accompanying artwork. But periods of conflict along with searing heat, monsoon rains and years of neglect have taken a toll on the fort. Despite the onset of decay, experts suggest the city's vast Islamic architectural heritage could make it a contender to rival more established Silk Road travel destinations. "Lahore can easily compete with Samarkand. It nearly matches Isfahan," says Sophie Makariou, president of the Parisian-based National Museum of Asian Arts. Makariou adds that its failure to shine is more to do with safety concerns that have plagued the nation after multiple attacks. "Due to the bad reputation of Pakistan, it remains unknown," she explains. But as security across Pakistan continues to improve, officials are hoping to revive Lahore's lost glory. More than 40 conservationists with the the WCLA — including engineers, architects and ceramists from across the globe — are currently working on restoring the mosaic mural on the fort's exterior. — AFP

UDAT ABIR GULAL... HOLI HAI!



Alka Raghuvanshi

artscope

While *sahitya* or literary aspect has been inextricably woven with the *sangeet* or music, poetry takes a humorous twist on Holi, with poets regaling audiences and vying to evoke laughter at the plethora of *hasya kavi sammelans* specially organised on the occasion

party and as I do it, I am amazed at the sheer plethora of Bollywood numbers about the festival. I also see the way the songs and their picturisation has evolved over the years. From the rather shy, enticingly lyrical and understated *Holi aayee re Kanhai rang chhalke suna de jara bansuri* from *Mother India* to the overt sexuality of *Balam pichkari jo tune mujhe maari in Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani* to the relatively brazen *Sholay* number *Holi ke din dil mil jaate hain* and of course the immortal *Silsila* number *Rang barse bheege chunar wali* to beautiful *Holi Khele Raghuvveera* in *Baghban* the entire gamut of film music has dictated how popular culture in the urban milieu will perceive and play the festival.

But then all cultures do have such festivals where they let their hair down — they may be called by other names, might happen during different times of the year but have linkages across cultures: For instance I find Halloween so akin to Holi where people paint their faces and appear almost ghoulish is no different from Holi as we must be appearing to the Westerners. Or for that matter even the Tomatina festival from Spain when tomatoes are the mode of mass destruction rather than colour or the Water Fight festival in Thailand and many others that one may not even have heard of.



Holi in Bollywood

Holi preparations are afoot in my home, with niece insisting that we must make *gujiyas* and I am sarcastically reminding her of our last year's *gujiyas* that resembled weapons — stones thrown at Majnu for falling in love with Laila — and having to buy *gujiyas* to eat! Water pipe long enough to reach Timbuktu has been acquired and balloons are already filled and kept ready to demolish the unsuspecting. I have taken it upon myself to download songs of Holi from Hindi cinema to play at the neighbourhood



I have often wondered why visual artists don't make so much of Holi as the performing artistes — the answer stares me in the face as I look at the piles of enticingly vibrant colours on the *thelas* in Vrindavan. It almost makes me feel I am in my studio looking at the beautiful rows of jars of colours and as a visual artist, I understand that every day is Holi for us in so many ways: It is because we play with colours all the time. In the plastic arts there are any number of Holi scenes depicted in the Pahari, Deccan and Rajasthani miniatures. Whereas the classical tradition did not reflect life cycles and major festivals, but was more preoccupied with time, seasons and *nayika*, with the sole exception of "Hori" as it is known in the Braj region, the folk tradition on the contrary found expression for moods and lifestyles. A Hampi stone panel dating

to the 16th century has men and women celebrating Holi with *pichkariis*. In the musical tradition, *chaiti* and *hori* idioms have provided the bridge between the little and the great tradition or the folk and the classical, with Hori being akin to the *dhruwad* genre. The complex inter-relation between the two is epitomised with the classical being withdrawn and inward looking and the folk having enough gung-ho to sweep off by sheer force of the earthy spirit.

Images of Holi, Krishna, Radha, *gulaal*, *bhanga*, song, *abir*, dance, et al — imagery as difficult to separate as the Shavite and Vaishnavite traditions in

the north. On one hand is the playful Krishna teasing Radha and the *gopis* spraying *tesu* water and on the other is the powerful presence of Shiva mixing his *bhanga*. Perhaps this is why the first *gulaal* is smeared on the Shivalinga and only after partaking *bhanga*, his *prasad*, can festivities commence. A classic case of intertwining of two completely diverse streams. The traditional burning of Holika, Prahlad's aunt is reminiscent of the Vaishnavite tradition as Prahlad was saved by the manifestation of Vishnu as the Narasimha avatar, the *bhanga* and "playing" with the Shivalinga, harks back to the Shavite tradi-

tion. The *pitambar* or yellow is also the colour of *phagun* while the *bhanga thandai* is white, associated with Shiva. Kathak maestro Birju Maharaj's father Bindadin Maharaj and uncle Shambhu Maharaj were past masters at enacting Holi related *thumris*. Their progeny too do them proud. And who can remain untouched when Birju Maharaj sings and dances *Aaj khero shaam sang hori guyan*, can one really remain untouched by the Holi spirit? Or for that matter, Birju Maharaj singing and simultaneously enacting *Dekho hori ke khelaiya, kaise ban-ban aaye...* rather like the *barat* of Shiva.

Holi or Hori, is intrinsic to the Krishna lore and finds innumerable manifestations in the cultural ethos. Be it Radha's village Barsana, where the *lath-amaar* Holi is played with gusto by women actually hitting the men, amid singing of traditional songs, who are hard put to defend themselves, or Krishna's village Nandgaon, whose inhabitants go to Barsana to play Holi with the *gopis* a la Krishna. In Vrindavan, the festival itself was known as *phaag*. And *phaag khel* is not restricted to a single day in the rural areas but could last as long as two weeks. Music and dance replete with literary references to Hori abound. Poetry has been intertwined into the perform-

ing arts in an inseparable form. Having experienced the spirit of the playful cowerd in the people and the ambience, it is no exaggeration that Radha and Krishna seem to lurk just out of sight and in that sense Krishna of Vrindavan epitomises the playful element of childhood and adolescence so dear to Indian motherhood. While *sahitya* or literary aspect has been inextricably woven with the *sangeet* or music, poetry takes a humorous twist on Holi, with poets regaling audiences and vying to evoke laughter at the plethora of *hasya kavi sammelans* specially organised on the occasion.

The Phool Dol festival in Nathdwara too glorifies the Krishna legend. On the full moon of Phagun month Krishna and Navneetpriyaji's silver statues are bedecked in golden yellow flowers — the colours of Phagun and rocked in a flower bedecked swing from which the festival Phool Dol takes its name. In fact, it is here that the Holi festivities begin with *ladoon ki Holi* played with Srinathji.

In Manipur, the Dhol Choloms are specially played for Yaosung as Holi is known there. Dance troupes or *palas* from all over the Manipur congregate at the Govindji Temple in Imphal for Yaosung and vie with each other to perform *raas*, *sankirtana* and *chalom*. Preparations are made months in advance with pride of place accorded to the Singh *pala*, or the royal troupe. Singing and dancing was considered a must for the royals as both part of ritual and culture. Yellow predominates again and it is a sight indeed fit for the Gods!

In Gujarat too, the *raas* performed on Holi is replete with the Krishna theme in both dance and music. In Rajasthan the *chaang* or the large single frame drum is the accompaniment for the *phaag geet*. In the cow belt, the light banter peculiar to Holi and the entire lore of the *gaali* tradition is a socially recognised validation of relieving sexual desire. According to one interpretation, the shape and usage of the *pichkari* too has sexual connotations. But who cares... it is Holi after all!

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Investing in Bihar goats to improve rural poor incomes

Usha Rai focus

A new cadre of health workers, Pashu Sakhis, popularly known as *bakri didis*, are transforming the lives of poor rural women in four blocks of Muzaffarpur district of Bihar by improving the production and productivity of their goats. While the rich farmers invest in dairying, the marginalised have to make do with goats, often called the poor man's cow. The new importance given to the small, sturdy Black Bengal goat was visible in Shantipur village of Bochocha block. Raised goat sheds, kitchen gardens with a plot reserved for growing grass for them, large bowls filled with the nutritious green fodder azolla for improving the health and weight of the ruminants and tethered goats being taken for grazing reflect the new status they enjoy. With Bihar having the third largest goat population in the country, Project Mesha (the Sanskrit name for a ram) is being implemented since mid-2016 by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In fact, this is the first livestock development programme being supported by the foundation in India. Spread over five years, the Mesha project intervention is in 351 villages of Muzaffarpur. With the support of the Bihar rural livelihood project JEEVIKA, there are plans to upscale it to other districts. Since 70 per cent of the landless in Bihar supplement their livelihood through goat rearing, this livestock development programme benefits the animals and the women who rear them. A women's empowerment component has also been woven in and the money from goat rearing is expected to go directly to the women. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of those rearing goats are the nucleus for

imparting new knowledge and skills in goat rearing as well as empowering women to reach out to the gram panchayats for their job cards and assert themselves in the family. The Pashu Sakhis were selected from the SHGs on the basis of their potential and interest in the work. Family consent is also sought since the Pashu Sakhis would be out of their homes for long hours for training and to tend to goats. So far 107 women have been trained as Pashu Sakhis and another 143 are to be trained. Each Pashu Sakhi has the responsibility for the welfare of goats in about 200 households. Till Project Mesha was initiated there was a high mortality rate among young goats. In the absence of government veterinary support, women turned to the local, unqualified goat healers. Now there is growing confidence in the Pashu Sakhis who have been trained in three phases over 15 days. They deworm goats, vaccinate them, castrate young bucks, assist the SHGs to improve the feed of the goats and weigh them periodically so that a good price is assured. Earlier, women sold the goats when they needed money or they felt it was sick and would die. Now, they have been trained to improve the weight and quality of the goat and sell around Holi and Id when goats are in demand and prices are good. The Pashu Sakhis are initially supported by the AKRSP which provides various tools of their trade like the brudizzo or castrator, the weighing scales as well as ₹1,500 a month — ₹750 as their stipend and an equal amount for doing various jobs like vaccination, deworming, etc. In the second year they get the stipend and are supposed to be paid per service by the goat owner. In the third year they are entirely on their own earning per service provided. So far a vaccination a Pashu Sakhi charges ₹8 of which ₹5 is the cost of vaccine and ₹3 her service charge. Similarly, she earns money for deworming. Their



Poor local women in Bihar are being trained as Pashu Sakhis to care for goats and improve their production and productivity

largest earning is from castration — ₹50 per buck. Pashu Sakhi Sheela Devi of Shantipur village, who was in the first batch trained in August 2016, has done 150 castrations and says with pride "not a single buck fell ill or bled". Earlier, castration was done by men using a knife. This sometimes resulted in toxemia or the animal bled. "Respect for me has increased in the village after I became a Pashu Sakhi. Now people come to me for advice," she says. Ragini Devi, another Pashu Sakhi, was thrilled to meet chief minister Nitish Kumar at an orientation meeting at Jharan. Almost 15 per cent of the Pashu Sakhis are from the minority community and at Sakhra village where there was some resistance to women doing the castration there was a fear that the castrated *qurban* *bakri* (sacrificial goat) may not sell. Fortunately, the Maulvi spoke to the community and the role of women as well as bloodless

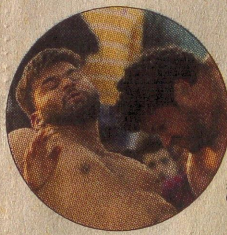
castration was accepted. At Rohua Birnarayaan village, Mushahri block, feisty Munna Devi reflected the changing face of the Pashu Sakhis. With 300 households and 900 goats under her care for a year and a half, she was confident as well as articulate. When the Mahila Samakhya programme that she was working with folded up, she was bored and desperate for a job. However, she admits that her role as a Pashu Sakhi was tough initially. Catching goats and giving them injections was a new experience. "My hands were trembling when I held the syringe for the first time, but with each training session I attended my confidence and dexterity increased," she says. "I have given over 60 injections in the last year and a half and don't hesitate to visit a home at dead of night if a goat is ill". Though not trained for dealing with fractures, having watched vets putting splints, she was able to set right a fracture.

With four to six goats of their own and their earning as Pashu Sakhis, the women are earning anything from ₹1,500 to ₹5,000 a month. In the coming years Munni Devi is confident her earnings could soar to ₹10,000 a month. After becoming a Pashu Sakhi, Munni Devi has bought and registered one *katha* of land in her name and constructed a house.

Earnings of the goat rearing women have also increased. With the construction of raised bamboo and thatch goat sheds instead of the urine drenched *bhussa* or grass, goats are healthier and the mortality rate has dropped. Goats are fed a nutritious mix of wheat and oil cake residue, green fodder azolla and kitchen garden remnants. Many of the women are making the mixture and selling it to others at ₹125 for five kg. In the monsoons, the goats are not allowed to wade into water bodies from which they can contract liver flu and other infections. The goats are healthier and fatter. Earlier buyers would guess the weight of a goat and pay less. Now after being weighed on scales, a goat earlier sold for ₹7,500 is now fetching ₹12,000 to ₹13,000. Most women have a minimum of three goats but some have six to eight goats. The Black Bengal goat breed of Bihar, though small in size, has two to three kids at a time as against the one kid produced by the bigger Jamunapari and Sirohi goats of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan respectively. The meat quality of the Black Bengal goats is good and its skin can be used as high quality leather.

As a part of the upscaling of Mesha project, a study on breed improvement is being conducted by Nimkar Agriculture Research Institute, Pune, and support provided by AbacusBio, New Zealand, an international leader in agribusiness. Also on the cards are improvement of the goat chain value and marketing.

The writer is a veteran journalist based in New Delhi



Much before the Olympic sport of wrestling came into being, *dangal* was the accepted test of a man's stamina and power **SPORT page 5**



French President Emmanuel Macron's memoir, *Revolution*, reads more like a political manifesto. It hardly reveals anything about his personal life **BOOKS page 6**



A 28-minute award-winning documentary on cerebral palsy patient Jeeja Ghosh holds out a ray of hope to the differently abled as well as the abled ones **ENTERTAINMENT page 8**

Recording a new challenge

By their sheer grit, these differently abled bravehearts have achieved glory by setting new records in some daredevil feats

USHA RAI

IT is not just the physically fit who love taking up a challenge and setting records like climbing a mountain or pulling a truck with just their teeth or their moustache! Those with disabilities, too, feel elated and get a high when they create records in challenging activities like sky diving, running a full marathon with an artificial leg or driving a car with just their feet.

The *Limca Book of Records* features several such heroes in its 2018 edition. These heroes belong to different parts of the country, come from different age groups (nine to 50 years) but have similar gritty stories to share that inspire people to rise above their disabilities.

Two of them, Sai Kaustuv Dasgupta and Raghurama Bhat live in Puttaparthi near Bengaluru. Bhat (30) is a quadriplegic having no sensation below the neck. But in March 2017 he skydived from 12,000 feet at Mysuru. Bhat, in tandem with his instructor Pavel, had a free fall of 5,000 feet and then came down with the parachute. Falling at a speed of 200 miles per hour was an amazing experience, he says.

The first-of-its-kind skydive by a quadriplegic was done after Bhat had a year's training and various dry runs supported by a team of professional sky riders of Kakini Enterprises Pvt Ltd. Bhat is a radio jockey (RJ) at Sri Sathya Sai Baba Radio Station at Puttaparthi and also does voiceovers. Dedicating his achievement to all the disabled people, he says, "Disability is in the body not the mind. People with disability should live their dream." He now wants to do paragliding.

At 19, this RJ was a cheerful teenager. But life changed for him forever in November 2005 when he went with friends to see River Chitravathi in Puttaparthi, which was flowing after a decade. It looked so inviting that he dived in not realising it was not deep enough. His head hit the ground and he felt his neck snap. He could not move his limbs. Fortunately, his friends pulled him out.

Bhat was paralysed below the shoulders. The next two years went by in a haze of pain for him and his family. Apart from the physical pain, there was psychological and emotional upheaval as well. However, with the support of family and friends, his smile returned and life picked up. Though confined to a wheelchair, he first completed his B. Sc. and then MA in English literature. Bhat has also authored a book, *Rainbows Over My Sky*, which has been translated into Hindi.

Another such person is Dasgupta who is also confined to a wheelchair with 80 per cent disability due to a brittle bone disease and 50 fractures. He is a graphic designer, singer, composer and a motivational speaker. As his right hand is not functional, he does graphic designing operating the mouse using just the two fingers of his left hand. He types using a virtual on-screen keyboard. Like Bhat, Dasgupta has also written a book, *My Life, My Love, My Dear Swami*, which has been translated into many languages.

Last year, Dasgupta received the Cavinkare Mastery Award for excellence achieved against all odds. He has also received the Dishari award for the best child singer of West Bengal and has composed 140 songs. Recently a DVD of his compositions, *Sai Sangeeta Sudha*, and an

Nine-year-old Swayam Vilas Patil of Pune, who has Down Syndrome, swam five km in the sea from Sun Rock Light House to Gateway of India, Mumbai, in one hour in February 2017. Swayam did that just to prove to his parents that nothing could keep him down. According to the Maharashtra Amateur Aquatic Association, Swayam is the first child in India with Down Syndrome to accomplish this feat.



GEETA S RAO



MAJ AVNISH BAJAJ



SAI KAUSTUV DASGUPTA



RAGHURAMA BHAT

MP3 audio volume on Lord Hanuman, *Jaya Vijayee Bhava*, were released. In July 2016 he won the wheelchair wanderlust competition for which he had to travel to Goa where he was driven in a wheelchair-friendly car. Winning this contest was a lucky break for him as he had been confined to a room since 2009.

Travel options are still limited for the wheelchair bound, he says. Train journeys do not allow him to enter with his wheelchair and his condition does not allow him to travel by air. The disabled should be allowed to sit in their own wheelchair, says

Dasgupta.

Maj Avnish Bajaj (30) of the Infantry Brigade became the first Indian amputee to have run the full marathon (42.195 km) in January 2017 in 7 hrs 2 min and 16 sec. With a prosthesis on one leg, Major Bajaj was competing with 20,000 able-bodied runners in under-35 category in the Mumbai Marathon.

After losing his leg in a grenade accident, he met a retired major who was India's first blade runner for half marathons. He encouraged Major Bajaj to take to running instead of agonising about being unable to do his bit for the Army or the nation.

Hardly able to walk after 19 surgeries, running a marathon seemed a distant dream, but he hung on to it. Despite injuries, blisters and bleeding, he contin-

chauffeurs his proud parents around.

In 2015, he bought the car and as there was neither a driving school nor a trainer for hand amputees, he used to watch foreign videos on handless driving. In just three months he learnt to drive using his feet. His effort was appreciated by the Indore Road Transport Office but his application for a licence was rejected as there was no provision in the Motor Vehicle Act to issue one to a bilateral amputee. After a year of chasing the government, the Act was amended and Agnihotri got his licence. He now plays football and swims. A successful businessman, he operates the computer using his toes.

Geeta S. Rao (39) of Ahmedabad had 45 per cent disability in her polio-affected left leg. The girl who had to be carried to school, through her sheer determination and help of physiotherapy became an athlete in 2016. Rao completed the triathlon (1.5 km swim, 40 km cycling and 10 km run) in the open category at the Chennai Trekking Club in less than seven hours. In the same year, she also completed the half triathlon (1.9 km swimming, 90 km cycling and 10-km running) below the stipulated 10 hours.

Geeta's athletic life began in February 2016 when her parents gifted her a cycle. Her first cycling event was a 14 km green ride, followed by the 115 km 'the impossible ride'. She participated in the 375 km cycling tour of Aravallis and has completed 6000 km in cycling.

Geeta recalls her parents carried her to school since there was no wheelchair. When she was in the eighth grade, she overheard a woman, "It's better not to have a daughter than have one like this." The remark crushed her. She even contemplated suicide but it also ignited a spark in her. She decided not to depend on people.

Overcoming her low self-esteem with physiotherapy she began to stand and walk with the support of crutches and shoes for the handicapped. Geeta worked as an IT manager in a corporate company, with her brother in the family's travel business and even started a hotel business of her own. But it was the gift of a cycle that changed her life!

Baburaj T Divakaran (53) of Alappuzha, Kerala, despite 40 per cent disability in his left hand, swam 26 km from Champakulam to the Alappuzha Punnamada finishing point in January 2017. He did that in 7 hrs and 10 min only. It was to create awareness on global terrorism and water pollution.

An LIC agent and part-time swimming instructor, Divakaran was accompanied by a doctor during his marathon swimming which was witnessed by the district sports council president besides a large crowd.

Divakaran's left hand was damaged when he was 12. He had fallen off a tree and suffered a fracture. Medical negligence compounded the problem. Divakaran learnt swimming when he was eight.

Disturbed by photographs of the drowned refugees from war-torn areas, he started an awareness drive on global terrorism. He felt that they could have been saved if they knew swimming. His second focus on water pollution stemmed from his own experience of being entangled in plastic bags thrown in ponds and rivers. At least 50 species of fish have disappeared from Vembanad backwaters at the mouth of the Pamba because of pollution. This spurred him to take up this cause.

The gritty stories of these heroes should inspire not just others of their ilk but every one for they have not just made a difference to their own lives but are doing their bit for others and society as well.



SWAYAM PATIL

COLLECTIVE EFFORT

Water from revamped irrigation system quenches thirst of tribals in Nimar region

For centuries, the Bhils have been dependent on a traditional irrigation system where water from a tributary is diverted to a field through small, temporary channels.

USHA RAI
MADHYA PRADESH

Rojanmal, Guradpani, Bhalabedi and Palashpani villages of the Balwadi cluster, Sindhwa block of Barwani district of Madhya Pradesh are rejoicing over the uninterrupted water supply available for irrigation and their homes after the tweaking of their traditional water system by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) India. With an uninterrupted supply of what seems like manna from heaven, these villages have taken their first baby steps to a new economic horizon.

In this rain-dependent tribal pocket of Central India's Nimar region, for centuries the Bhils and other tribals have been dependent on a traditional irrigation system called *pat*, where water from a *nalla* or tributary is diverted to a field through small, temporary open channels. It was not a satisfactory system and women and cattle had to walk long distances to collect water and quench their thirst. In the absence of sustained water supply, the returns from the fields were inadequate and there was considerable

migration.

In 2016, the AKRSP stepped in and drawing on traditional tribal knowledge as well as the gradients of the hilly terrain, developed a "diversion based irrigation" (DBI) system in the four villages, and lives have been transformed. PVC pipes now carry the water instead of an open channel. The system is permanent, does not require electricity or pumping sets for water flow, there is no maintenance cost and zero wastage of water. With DBI, water can reach fields located far from the source through water pressure, the flow generated and through sprinklers and drip irrigation. It's a system that enables "water to walk" and the farmers, excited over water availability, contributed with their labour. For each DBI system, the labour contribution was estimated at over Rs 1 lakh. At Guradpani village alone, three DBI systems were installed. They dug tanks and laid the network of pipes. In the four villages, 6,730 metres of pipelines have been laid with 56 water outlets irrigating the fields of 42 farmers.

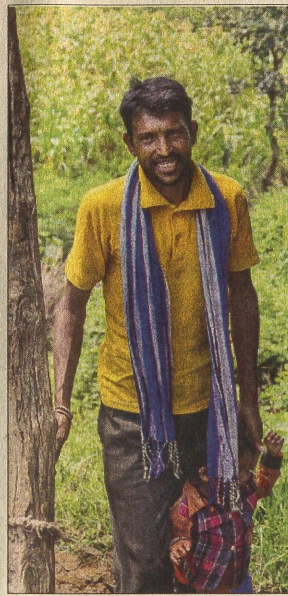
The Azim Premji Foundation and the Jamshedji Tata Trust supported AKRSP on



Somibai and daughters with bricks they have made.

the DBI initiative. Benevolent eyes turned to Guradpani, and with support of villagers three tanks were constructed, each with capacity to hold 1,200 litres of water and these in turn were connected to PVC pipelines snaking out to irrigate the fields. The gush of water is controlled by valves and taps to ensure there is no wastage. With water came the boom in the economic prosperity of the village. The PVC pipelines at Rojanimal village were provided by the Tata Trust. Presently, 10 such schemes

have been implemented and 64 farmers and around 300 acres have benefited from the diversion based irrigation system. In all, AKRSP is working in 22 villages in the Balwadi cluster of 35 km of Barwani district. Though the DBI system's work began in 2016, integrated watershed management programme began in 2013 with government support. Earthen dam, stop dams, gabion and gully plugs were constructed to rejuvenate the area to reduce soil erosion and run off velocity. Dharam Singh of Gurad-



Dharam Singh

pani village has two acres of land and two wives and nine children to feed. Earlier he harvested just one crop of channa (gram) in a year. With water availability doubling with DBI, in addition to channa, he is now harvesting cotton, wheat and vegetables. Crops are cultivated on both sides of the pipeline. For the first time in 2017 and again this year, he did not have to migrate for work. Earlier three months in a year, he travelled to Maharashtra for work as agricultural labour. Ever since he can remem-

ber Dharam Singh has been in debt. For the last two years, however, he has been able to save Rs 5,000 a year. An added benefit was the improvement in the education of his four school going children because he no longer migrates. Dharam Singh is able to sleep through the night, leaving the valve in the pipeline open for irrigating the fields. Buoyed by his economic growth he has become a member of the Farmers' Interest Group to improve his prospects further.

There are 20 other farmers at Guradpani who have been able to irrigate 57 acres of land and harvest three to four crops in a year through the DBI system. Most of them have one or two acres of land. A few have five acres. Sakaram, Gaja Baida and Chennai Baida have just one acre each and were completely dependent on rain. Though Sakaram's field is at the tail end of the pipeline network, cotton production has doubled over the last two years. He has also been growing vegetables and no longer goes to Balwadi to buy them. With home grown greens, he is saving Rs 100 a week and the nutrition of the family has improved. He is also inter-cropping

cotton with two varieties of lentils—tur and urad. He is saving Rs 4,000 a year and has no loans to settle.

Bindabai, the articulate wife of Sakaram, said the women had worked shoulder to shoulder with the men in digging and laying the pipelines. Earlier, with open channels, a third of the water would dry en route to her fields. With the constant availability of water now, the fertility of the soil has improved. She has constructed two mud huts with bamboo roofs and is seeking an extra metre of pipeline to her house. "I am willing to pay 50% of the cost," she says persuasively.

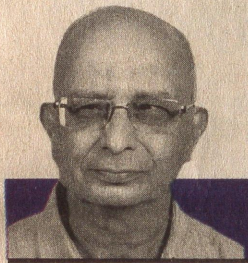
Somibai, Dharam Singh's first wife, holds the family together. After the birth of six daughters, the couple felt the family was incomplete without a son, so Somibai found him a second wife and they now have three sons too. This meant there were more mouths to feed. Though some of the neighbours sniggered about Dharam Singh having two wives, there is harmony in the large family and they find strength in their numbers. All homes in the village where the pipeline has reached have been able to reap benefits from the abun-

dance of water, but Somibai's engagement went beyond improved agriculture. With the help of a daughter she has made 12,000 bricks and hopes to make more to construct the village's first *pucca* house.

Her kitchen garden is another source of joy. She revels in the brinjals, spinach, coriander, bitter gourd and bottle gourd growing in her backyard. My life has changed, she says. No more treks of half an hour, thrice a day, to get a bucket of water. She has also constructed a tank for water for cattle.

Some 1,500 women in the Balwadi cluster have formed self-help groups. In addition to farming they are in animal husbandry, maintaining goats and poultry. Maize, jawar and soya beans have been the traditional crops. Now farmers are growing organic cotton and many of them are shareholders in the Farmers Producer Company.

In all, the villages where the DBI is in place, later this year, user groups will be formed and with each farmer depositing Rs 500, a fund will be created to look after repair and maintenance of the new irrigation system.



ON MY RADAR MAN MOHAN

#METOO MOMENT

TOP UPA MINISTER HAD GRABBED A WOMAN TV REPORTER

While pressure mounted on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to remove Union Minister of State for External Affairs and former editor M.J. Akbar from the Council of Ministers, not many are aware of an incident involving a top minister during the UPA regime. He was lucky as the #MeToo movement had not started then. It happened on the night of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. When the commercial capital of the country was burning, a young woman reporter of a major television channel reached the minister's official residence in the Lutyens Bungalow Zone to interview him. A large crowd of TV crews and print journalists was already there. When she announced her TV channel's name, a

personal staff member of the Minister immediately ushered her inside the residence to the surprise of other journalists. Her camera team was, however, not allowed entry. She was taken to the ante room and told that the "Saheb" would be there shortly. Excited, she sent an SMS to her boss that she was soon getting the Minister's sound-bite. The TV channel's main studio was put on alert, hoping that the Minister might give exclusive information for "breaking news" that "the nation wants to know".

As the journalist in her mid-30s was interacting with her studio, she suddenly jumped as someone grabbed her from behind. She turned and saw that it was the Minister. "What are you

doing?" she shouted. The Minister also shouted back. "Who are you? What are you doing here? Get out?" Trembling, the poor girl walked out. It was clear that the Minister was "expecting" some other woman journalist. Seeing her coming out so fast, other journalists noticed her being upset and inquired what had happened.

Angry, she went to a corner and tweeted the entire incident that had shaken her to the core. Within 15 minutes, her boss, who, at the time was in London, was talking to her, asking her to delete her tweet. She refused.

By now alarmed over her tweet, the Minister had obviously spoken to her bossy boss. The Minister also reportedly telephoned the owners

of the TV channel, run by a major newspaper group. After an hour, the woman journalist, under tremendous pressure from her boss and the owners, deleted her tweet.

Later, the Minister wanted the TV channel to "sack" her. It was not done as it was feared that she might go public. But she went "off screen"—she was rarely given any assignment till the UPA-II stepped out of power. She told this columnist about the shocking incident later.

Her *achhe din* returned when her boss left the TV channel to head a new one. Interestingly, she swung into action as the Modi government agencies began investigating (so far without much result) corruption charges against the Minister and his family members.

MORE TROUBLE

BIHAR'S MODI UNVEILS LALU LEELA

Are RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav and members of his family among the richest land holders in the country? Yes, if you are ready to believe Bihar's Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi.

Sushil Modi, who has made this startling claim in his new 198-page book *Lalu Leela*, told *The Sunday Guardian* that the Lalu family had "illegally" amassed properties to become the owner of "141 land plots, 30 flats and half-a-dozen houses" in Bihar and other states.

Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad released the book, which is a compilation of facts mentioned by the Registrar of Companies about the 10

"sham" companies with which Lalu's sons and daughters were associated. This is Sushil Modi's second book. His first book, *Beech Samar Mein (In the Middle of War)*, was released two years ago and centred on his imprisonment during the Emergency.

Sushil Modi says that Lalu started his journey from a *chaprasi* (peon) quarters and went on to get convicted in four cases of the Rs 1,000-crore fodder scam. Lalu is currently admitted to the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences in Ranchi under police custody.

Sushil Modi wants to know, "How come Lalu's 29-year-old son Tejashwi Yadav has become the owner of over

20 properties? The family had no ancestral land. Tejashwi remained unsuccessful in cricket. Another son Tej Pratap (a former minister) also owns 28 properties and daughter Misha Bharti, 23 properties. Lalu's wife and former Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi also owns 43 plots and over 30 flats."

RJD national vice-president Shivanand Tewary, however, laughs and says, "Why did Bihar's Chhota Modi have to write a book to tell the gist of his 40-odd press conferences. The BJP leadership is afraid of Lalu Prasad's huge political status in Bihar and that is why it leaves no opportunity to discredit him."

NOT SO LOYAL

INDIAN DIASPORA IN GULF UPSET WITH AIR INDIA

Air India has been dragged to the Delhi High Court as it has withdrawn the 50% discount and often free carriage (in case of poor families) on the transportation of mortals that the airline provided to Indians dying in the UAE. A lawyer, Jose Abraham, has filed a public interest litigation in this regard on behalf of an NGO, Pravasi (Overseas) Legal Cell.

It all started when the AI, on 19 September, put an end to the 50% reduction in fares that it was providing for the carriage of bodies of Indians who died in the UAE. The airline also put an end to the free transportation of bodies for the distressed and low-income Indian families living in the Emirates. Air India said that it was only following the air cargo tariff (TACT), with the standard rate specified by the International Air Transport Association. Air India had been following TACT rates everywhere except the UAE. Now, with financial

pressures, Air India bosses took the decision to levy charges as per TACT rates.

Air India's decision does not seem to have gone down well with the Indian Diaspora in the Gulf. The Indian Ambassador to the UAE, Navdeep Singh Suri, has been quoted by a Gulf daily saying that the embassy would help the destitute and be ready "to take on a larger responsibility and fill the void left by Air India. It would also assist where the sponsor, employer or insurance company fail to bear the expenditure."

Advocate Jose Abraham told *The Sunday Guardian* that the decision to hike fares had affected the fundamental rights of immigrants working abroad. He points out that low-cost carrier IndiGo carried bodies of residents of the Northeast who die in Delhi free of charge. A few countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc., have provisions

to carry the mortal remains of their citizens back to the country free of cost.

"Ferrying mortal remains by air has always remained a costly affair, especially for underprivileged migrant workers living far away from their home town," says the PIL. The Delhi High Court has asked the government to respond and point out the policy of several airlines, including Air India, to alleged charge of "exorbitant" rates.

Prof Bejon Misra, Founder, Consumer Online Foundation, says that "Air India should continue with the subsidy and the government should support the cost for free transportation of the mortal remains for families who cannot afford to pay."

According to a Parliamentary report, 7,694 bodies of Indians were stranded in foreign countries in 2015; 2,690 bodies were in Saudi Arabia and 1,540 in the United Arab Emirates.

FROM ACROSS BORDER

PAK WILD BOARS CREATING TROUBLE AT PUNJAB BORDER

Pakistani wild boars have started troubling Indian farmers on Punjab's international border. These boars have been playing havoc with the standing paddy crop across the barbed wire fencing in Fazilka district.

A deputation of farmers from the border villages of Teja Rohela, Mohar Jamsheer, Mohar Sona, Mansa, Mohar Khiva and Mauzam recently met the Border Security Force officers for help. "We are not allowed to go across the fencing from dusk to dawn," Dalip Singh of Mohar Khiva village, whose land is located across the barbed wire fencing, told *The Sunday Guardian*.

"Our crops are left unattended. Herds of Pakistani wild boars are entering Indian territory and destroying the paddy crop." It is not clear whether Pakistani Rangers are pushing these boars towards Indian crops.

Former sarpanch Mohinder Singh says that "the paddy crop is ready for harvest so the farmers are worried as wild boards damage the crops". Farmers are demanding adequate compensation on account of the damage to crops.

Farmers are not allowed to sow tall crops across the fencing owing to security reasons. Some farmers

used to put up the cobra wire around their agricultural plots but due to security reasons, this practice was discontinued. In the 1990s, a 533-km-long fencing was erected along the India-Pakistan border about 150 metres inside Indian territory with the aim to prevent infiltration and smuggling of arms and narcotics from the Pakistan side, as a result of which 54,721 acres of agricultural land came to be located across the fencing in Punjab. The Pakistani side of the border along Fazilka district is a habitat of wild boars.

FREEDOM AT RISK

'GOOGLE'S SEARCH ENGINE FOR CHINA CURBS LIBERTY'

A few days ago, Google held its annual product launch event. On this occasion, they proclaimed: "delivering information is why we exist". "But this isn't entirely true, Google is working on a major project

that would limit access to information for more than one billion people," says Dorjee Tseten, Executive Director, Students for a Free Tibet. "Recent leaked documents revealed that Google is building a

censored search engine platform for China," Tseten told *The Sunday Guardian*.

"Under this project, codenamed Dragonfly, a version of Google's search engine in China will censor

websites and search terms about human rights, democracy, freedom, religion, and protest," warns Tseten.

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