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JANUARY 2013

No Man's Land

Understanding rehabilitation and
co-existence in Sariska





Challenge of the Balance

(December 17, 2012 to January 5, 2013)

'Challenge of the Balance' is an interdisciplinary environmental orientation program involving participants from around South Asia. Keeping this in mind, the first phase of the program has been designed in such a way that the participants from various disciplines and background can arrive at a common understanding of contemporary environmental concerns including the climate change and **environment – development debates**. Experts from Center for Science and Environment (CSE) and other institutions came as resource persons and conducted interactive lecture sessions.

In the second phase of the program, a field visit was organized where the participants got the privilege to visit Alwar and Jaipur districts in Rajasthan to observe people-led traditional water harvesting systems and several lakes in and around Jaipur including the revived Mansagar lake. A safari inside the Sariska National Park and visits to villages relocated from inside the park provided important insights into the complexities of relocation and the conflict-ridden rehabilitation process.

The third phase involved preparing a journalistic product, in this case a magazine in which participants report their experiences from the field. This phase is significant as it helped participants dig deeper into situations and communicate their reportage to a wider audience.



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The countries of South Asia share similar concerns of environmental conservation, sustainable development and the impending threat of climate change. The programme 'Challenge of the Balance' organized by the Centre for Science and Environment gave us the opportunity to examine all these concerns keeping regional needs in mind.

Doha 2012 has been in the news, and there is tremendous debate about issues related to climate change. But to the communities we interacted with at Alwar and Jaipur, climate change was an abstract idea, and they were more concerned with their immediate situations. To villagers who have been relocated out of Sariska, they could not understand why they had to leave the land they had tilled for generations, for land that they cannot call their own. To those who live in what was once an arid water-less area, their concerns were more the proper use of the water they had so painstakingly managed to conserve. The extent to which they are involved in the processes of their environment demonstrate how traditional wisdom could be instrumental in formulating and implementing state policy.

It was through this exposition that we all came to understand that the environment is everything around us and we all need to act in our individual capacities rather than wait for higher authorities to take action. However, if any conservation endeavour that does not properly include communities, there is always the risk of not being able to balance developmental and conservation needs. This is best exemplified by the dissatisfaction and angst amongst the villagers relocated out of Sariska Tiger Reserve.

During the safari ride through Sariska, we saw a few villages within the core area which are currently doomed to be relocated. The very fact that such villages have existed in tiger inhabited area for centuries forced us to raise a question as to why conservation today requires 'involute spaces'. We received two contrasting viewpoints- that of a forest official as conservator and the other of a community representative calling for coexistence.

We observe that whenever a community has a stake in its surroundings and the resources it depends on, conservation becomes a part of its culture. This same principle applies in the cities. As seen in Jaipur, the absence of interest on the part of locals resulted in the deterioration of Mansagar lake and other urban lakes. The same trend is seen across South Asia.

With rapidly changing lifestyles and a culture of materialism, people in urban areas are becoming more and more disconnected from their immediate environment, and less empathetic towards the people and animals they share it with. This shows in the increasing trend of abandonment of pet dogs and the ill-treatment of domestic workers.

This magazine is a part of our attempt to reconnect with our environment, to question what we see, and to report the different issues that affect both cities and villages, people and animals. ■



PHOTO: SUBAS KARKI

Pedigree paradox

An excess of money and dearth of compassion often leads to pedigreed pets being abandoned

By Shreya Bhat, New Delhi

Chunky watches, stone washed jeans, shoes, perfumes, sunglasses and even handbags. In an upwardly mobile society where 'branded' is beautiful and 'designer' is in, it's not surprising that dogs too have been added to the list of must-haves. Dogs are the posh and wealthy Indian's new fashion accessory. And breed is the brand that rules the market.

Money can buy you doggy love

Exotic breeds such as the Beagle, the squash-nosed Pug, and large breeds such as Labradors, Mastiffs, German Shepherd, Siberian Husky, St. Bernard, and Great Dane are in demand not for their companionship, but for their value as status symbols. In Delhi, the National capital, people gift expensive puppies to their friends and corporate partners, without considering that a pet means hard work and responsible care.

Dr. Sunita Nauriyal, President of Cure and Care Animal Help Foundation says, "It now seems to be a social requirement to have a big dog to match a big house. These large breeds like Irish Setters, Mastiffs and Rottweilers are prized as guard dogs and status symbols, but most people don't know how to handle them."



PHOTO: BHARTI VERMA

Maxi, a Beagle, was abandoned by his owner at a shelter with maggot-infested wounds

The price tags on these dogs can border on the absurd. While ever-popular Labradors can go for anything around Rs.10,000, the more exotic breeds such as Chihuahua can go for anything between Rs. 50,000 to even Rs. 70,000. Some breeders also claim to have imported highly pedigreed Mastiffs and Danes for exorbitant rates running into lakhs.

Dear but disposable

However, it seems that a lengthy pedigree and a five-figured price tag do

not guarantee a life time of rubber toys and dog biscuits for these canines. Local animal shelters in Delhi are receiving a large number of abandoned pedigreed pet dogs on a daily basis, many of whom are found wandering the streets starved, diseased and traumatized. Most of them die painful deaths from disease, starvation or road accidents. They are attacked by territorial street dogs and suffer grievous injuries. Only a lucky few get picked up by animal welfare organizations, like People for Animals, Cure and Care Animal Help Foundation, Friendicoes and Red Paws Rescue which then try to re-home them.

A lucrative job offer in another city or abroad, or the addition of a baby to the family provide sufficient pretext for turning a dog out onto the streets. Sometimes pet owners do not have the patience to get their dogs treated when they fall ill or get injured. Maxi, a handsome two-year-old Beagle, was brought to a vet with maggot infestation in his ear and mouth. After being told of the treatment required, the owner simply left Maxi on the street near the clinic and walked away.

Old dogs are the most prone to be abandoned. In a heart-rending case, Tabasco, a 14-year-old Daschund, was



PHOTO: SHREYA BHAT

Tara, a black Labrador, was abandoned because she grew too big for her owners' flat

sent to the shelter of Cure and Care with a driver, with instructions that he should be euthanized. The owner's reasons were that the dog's sight was failing, and it was too much trouble to care for him. Tabasco was fortunately later adopted by a family who were prepared to see him through his waning years.

Amin Khan, an animal rights activist, describes a case he was involved in where a Daschund was found left starved and weak in the compound of a house a couple of weeks after his owners had moved away. "Certain people who are frequently transferred from city to city, keep a dog in one and then leave it behind, only to buy another dog in the next city," he says. This practice of buying expensive dogs on a whim and later discarding them or replacing them – in the way one would upgrade one's car, computer or music system – points to the treatment of pets in purely materialistic terms and the absence of an attitude of genuine care.

Ill-considered decisions

Many prospective pet owners are clueless about the responsibility that comes with keeping a pet. There are several cases of people approaching animal shelters, voluntarily giving



PHOTO: BHARTI VERMA

Doll, a pedigreed Terrier, spent her last year in a shelter

up their pets for adoption because they can no longer provide the proper care for the dog.

Several breeds of dogs have specific dietary and exercise needs, and are of delicate constitution, unlike their sturdy 'indie' counterparts. "It has become a social requirement for a big house to have a big dog as either a guard dog or as a fancy item to show off to one's friends," says Dr. Nauriyal. Some people go as far as to buy dogs like the Siberian Husky and St Bernard which are not suited to the hot dry weather of Delhi. Many dog owners have these big dogs of large breeds, and these dogs are not given the exercise they need.

This can badly affect their gait and their psychological development, and they turn into aggressive and hyperactive dogs. A sad consequence of such ill-treatment and neglect is that when such dogs that have turned vicious end up at shelters, they sometimes have to be euthanized. This is not a fact animal welfare NGOs like to openly acknowledge.

The problem with breeding

To meet the high demand for specific breeds, unscrupulous breeders often breed the same pair over and over again. Such unregulated breeding not only affects the health of the female, but also that of the puppies. Inbreeding between closely related dogs and bitches produces puppies that are prone to genetic defects and psychological disorders.

Some activists claim that vets and breeders work hand in hand to reap profits from this thriving business of dog breeding. There is an increasing trend of unlicensed 'backyard breeding' wherein inexperienced and uninformed individuals, sensing a lucrative business opportunity, simply buy a pair of dogs and breed them. There are reports of vets who indiscriminately issue certificates of health and details of pedigree and vaccinations for the dogs. This is how unregulated breeding practices fuel the entire phenomenon of pet abandonment.

Scars of abandonment

The ailments and injuries these dogs suffer during their ordeal on the street fade with time. But the psychological effects of abuse and abandonment can be far more lasting. Danny, a 3-year-old Golden Retriever and a resident at the Cure and Care shelter for the last eight months, has been depressed ever since he was rescued. He does not socialize with other dogs, and gets aggressive when approached by visitors to the shelter.

Doll, a Terrier who was rescued last year, had apparently been so badly treated by her owner, that she would attack any man who tried to approach her. Three attempts at getting her adopted failed when she attacked the male members of the families she was sent to.

Cases of failed adoptions like these are rare. But Dr. Nauriyal vouches for the success of the adoption of adult dogs. "It is a misconception that adult dogs that have been abandoned cannot successfully adjust to a new home. They just need to be treated with patience," she says.

It is the responsibility of vets, breeders, and pet shop owners to properly inform prospective pet owners about pet care and the pros and cons of keeping a dog of a specific breed. "Education and consciousness are the most important factors that could prevent more such cases of abandonment of pets," says Dr. Nauriyal.

Better regulation of breeding too is required to ensure that the dogs are in good health and are of good stock. Customers in turn need to be sure about their reasons for keeping a dog, and must consider whether they have the space and resources to care for the dog. After all, a dog's whole world revolves around its owner, and if abandoned, it feels bereft.

In times where consumerism is king, it is surprising that such pedigreed dogs are not being meted out better treatment. Such cases of apathy and abandonment point to a fundamental lack of compassion and to the extraordinary prevalence of materialistic tendencies in our personal relationships and attitudes.

As imported cars trundle on the streets of Delhi, and malls fill with eager shoppers in pursuit of the best brands and bargains, these stories of dogs now out of fashion should not get lost in the cacophony of the Capital. ■

Constrained by concrete

Lakes in and around Jaipur face the squeeze from a burgeoning city and its needs

By Apoorva Bhatia, Jaipur



PHOTO: ADITYA BATRA

Jaipur's booming suburbs have started to encroach upon the Chandlai lake, once a haven for migratory wildfowl

Traditions of collective, community-led conservation of lakes, ponds and wetlands are increasingly under threat from rapid development and from narrow concerns of commercial gains. Urban waste adds to the agony of the remaining few while those responsible for action sit comfortably ignorant of nearing disasters.

For a dry region like Rajasthan, water bodies act as a reservoir that meet ecological and human needs. Barkheda lake, for instance receives only 500-600 mm of rainfall every year. The lake spreads across a massive 25 sq km during the monsoons. Post-monsoon, water levels in the lake recede, with most water percolating into the groundwater table or evaporating.

Agriculture, especially cash crops, thrives in close proximity to this important water source. According to the rules of *peta kasht*, a long-standing tradition codified in local law, the farmers of the area have rights to plough the dried up lake bed. However, in an abuse of tradition, local farmers now artificially pump out the water from

the lake to make more lake-bed available for growing cash crops.

Mr. Harsh Vardhan, a well-known ornithologist known for his activism for the restoring action of Bharatpur wetlands and Jaipur's Mansagar lake (see next page), sees little hope in protecting the region's many lakes. He says no government or local body is ready to stop this malpractice. Even the National Lake Conservation Authority hasn't shown any interest, he said. In his opinion, if this continues, Barkheda lake will disappear in five to seven years.

Incessant urbanisation has had immense impacts on the health of these lakes. The Chandlai lake suffers from massive sedimentation, so much that an island of silt has formed amidst this lake. Normally affecting river beds, siltation is most uncommon in lakes. But constant discharge of untreated waste from Jaipur has resulted in the occurrence of this unwanted process. The alkalinity of water in this lake has increased to a level significant enough to affect the natural growth of flora around the lake contours.

This has affected the ecological balance of the region with a decrease in the population of resident and migratory birds as the most prominent consequence. As a result, microorganism colonies have thrived in the lake since there are fewer birds to feed on these unwanted species.

Vardhan suggests some reforms for better management of the sewage that enters the lake. Firstly, dredging of the lake bed to scour out the sludge and solid waste is necessary followed by the creation of artificial islands with mound plantations of important tree species that attract birds. The trees should have artificial silt mounds around their trunks to prevent their contact with alkaline water. This would boost the growth and lifespan of these important bird habitats, and restore the lost ecological balance.

But Harsh Vardhan alleges that in spite of continuous activism for conservation, the government is unwilling to take any action. "The government is now more interested in political campaigns. Let the lake vanish in five years, let us all suffer. Then the authorities will take action", he said. ■

Lake, palace, restored

Jaipur's Jal Mahal is restored to magnificence through prudent use of the city's wastewater

By Apoorva Bhatia, Jaipur

The very heart of Jaipur lies in its history. Although there is plenty of evidence of thoughtful architecture, one monument still stands out – the Jal Mahal, also called the Jewel of Jaipur, which sits in the middle of the Mansagar Lake.

The Mansagar lake may now fascinate the beholder, but it has seen the most terrible times in the recent past. For decades, it has received the city's sewage channeled through the Brahmपुरi and Nagatalai Nallahs. By 2000, the lake looked like an excavated ground used as a dumping site for the city's wastes. The natural water had dried up completely and all that remained was a stench as a result of years of sedimentation of the untreated wastes. With no sign of water or life, the lake ceased to exist by 2005.

Since the 1990s, the government made many efforts to restore the lost lake, but all ended in vain. In 2002, the government floated the proposal to rope in private players to develop the lake through a PPP (public private partnership) mode. This attracted several private hoteliers, but all backed out when they discovered the high investments needed to bring the lake to life. Finally, Jal Mahal Resorts Pvt Ltd (JMRPL) entered into a partnership with the government and took much awaited revival measures.

The two nallahs were bypassed to prevent untreated sewerage from flowing directly into the lake. This sewage is now channeled downstream, treated partially and used for irrigation. Only stormwater now enters the lake. But as stormwater is



Custom-built boats to ferry tourists to the Jal Mahal

inevitably contaminated with the sewage from colonies unconnected to the city's sewage network, the project set up an in-situ settling basin with sedimentation tanks to reduce suspended solids. Only the overflow from the sedimentation tank is allowed to enter the lake.

New species of aquatic vegetation were introduced from the Bharatpur wetlands. Eight earthen islands were created using the dredged silt, and planted with vegetation to serve as habitats for resident and migratory bird species.

The results have been impressive, with project reports showing a dramatic decrease in both the biological oxygen demand and chemical oxygen demand (BOD and COD) to 11-21 and 65-90 respectively.

The deal with JMRPL involved the transfer of 100 acres land to the company on a 99-year lease, for which the company pays Rs. 3 crore each month. The floor space index, or the proportion of total built up area has been kept to a low 0.13, to prevent the area from becoming a concrete jungle.

However, today, after JMRPL invested heavily to restore the palace, the privatization of the restoration project has been challenged in the courts.

Allegations have been made of the promoters fixing the tendering process to win the bids. Promoters on their part insist that they won the project bids fairly, and that they have already spent upwards of Rs. 50 crore in restoring the lake and the palace.

The walls are adorned with miniature inspired frescoes. The terrace gardens, Chameli Bagh, has been restored in the style of the classic *char bagh* mughal style, with water ways and marble fountainery lit up from beneath by the latest LED lighting.

However, the legal wrangles have put a stop to all construction activities on the leased land. The site is open to visits by special invitation only. ■



Chameli Bagh, the rooftop garden at the restored lake palace

A river runs because of them

Members of the Arvari 'Parliament' enact rules to restore a river

By Bhavana Gurung

Elderly men in *dhotis* and *pagdis* are seated on a *durrie* in the dim winter sunlight. One by one, they step up to the centre of the group and speak. The meeting of the Arvari Sansad (parliament of the river Arvari) is taking place at the premises of Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS), an NGO working towards rural development through the restoration of local ecology. Rajendra Singh, who heads the organisation, sits in a corner and listens quietly.



PHOTO: SHOWIK DAS TAMAL

The 29th session of the Arvari Sansad in session in Bhikampura, Alwar

Arvari Sansad beginnings

The Arvari Sansad is a unique regulatory body comprising representatives from 72 villages in and around the district of Alwar in Rajasthan that have a stake in the river Arvari. In the 1980's, the area witnessed a severe drought that almost dried up the river Arvari. In 1987, local communities in association with TBS started to construct rainwater harvesting structures in an attempt to address the problem. They used traditional engineering techniques of water management involving the construction of *johads* or small earthen dams to collect and store rainwater. By 1996, the nearly dead Arvari had been transformed into a thriving river, its deep pools stocked with fish.

When the government tried to auction fishing rights to outside contractors, locals objected vehemently. A public hearing in 1998, which attracted much media attention, led to the establishment of the Arvari Sansad.

Kanhaiya Lal Gujjar, secretary of TBS says, "People worked hard to give life to the dead river, the dry, grey forests and a new life to themselves. But then a second party intervened. People made the dams, they stored the water, they did everything to conserve nature. But when the government came to claim the benefits, we decided to form Arvari Sansad."

By 1999, the Arvari Sansad had formulated its own rules to conserve and manage water and other natural resources (see box, below). The Sansad today consists of 250 members drawn from 72 villages in the Arvari basin, who meet twice a year, in addition to convening emergency hearings. A Coordination Committee observes the functioning in the villages.

The Arvari Sansad has helped revive six other rivers in Rajasthan, and has inspired other peoples' campaigns, including the national water awareness

campaign, save the rivers campaign, *Tarun Jal Vidyapeeth* (water university), and the *Rashtriya Jal Biradari* (water brotherhood), among others.

The 29th session

The 29th session of Arvari Sansad was held on December 28 at the premises of Tarun Bharat Sangh in village Bhikampura, about 80 kms from Alwar. Representatives from 72 villages that have a stake in the Arvari river attended the meeting.

■ Sansad members reported how certain farmers in the Arvari basin were over drawing water, such as over aterig their wheat crops. They agreed that greater control and monitoring of their water supply was required.

■ Some members reported the incidence of logging and illegal mining in areas around the Arvari river, which could potentially affect water quality. The Sansad agreed to encourage villagers not to cut down trees in the area.

■ Some pointed the silt load going up in the Arvari caused by the breaching of the Government-built dam at Hamirpur after the first rains this year. members decided to petition the government to carry out the desilting of the Arvari, and to ensure proper reconstruction of the dam. ■

Rules of the Arvari Sansad

- The Arvari basin shall not have sugarcane, paddy & chilly. People growing these will be penalized.
- No one shall draw water from the river from Holi (March to April) up to the monsoon (July).
- Bore wells are not to be allowed in the Arvari catchments.
- The recommended crops are barley, makka, bajra in the upper reaches and vegetables in the lower reaches of the river.
- No axe can be carried to Bhairondev people's sanctuary, which is the catchment of the source of Arvari River.
- Fishing in the Arvari can be done only for food.
- Large-scale trade of food grains and vegetables is banned. Local production and consumption are to be emphasized.
- Village people are to help people from other areas for implementing water harvesting structures.
- Cattle outside the region are not permitted for grazing.
- Rotational grazing is to be followed by farmers in their own pasturelands.
- Industrial units are prohibited within 450 sq km of the Arvari basin.

Fringe benefits

“Gaon ke logon ki jamin hai, kanoon mein likhne se farak nahin parta. Log vo karenge jo gaon ko fayada de” (Irrespective of its legal status, this land belongs to villagers. People will do what benefits the village)

By Tariq Mureed



The entire watershed around Sanwatsar was treated and tapped for rainwater

These are the words of Kanhaiya Lal, spokesperson of Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS), to the query whether they are allowed by government to build johads, or small earthen check dams, on government owned forest lands.

The answer reflected the strong sense of belongingness and ownership that the villagers harbor for their common property resources which legally belong to the government. And this can be understood through a short history.

New lease of life

Many villages in Alwar district in Rajasthan witnessed massive outmigration in the 1980's, following poor rainfall, the subsequent decline in livestock, and due to poor agricultural yields and drinking water shortages.

These villages were revived by the grassroots efforts of TBS working closely with villagers by building rainwater harvesting structures.

Sanwatsar village in Alwar, Rajasthan also adopted this traditional system of water harvesting. In this village of 100 families, a total of Rs 1.5 Lakh was collected while TBS contributed another Rs 4.5 Lakh. Families unable to contribute in cash, did so by offering their labor, which was calculated as being equivalent to digging 1500 sq ft of land per head.

Together, the local community could dam and treat their watershed in a year. Within a month of first monsoon showers, the Bawari stream that had dried up for years was revived. A walk through the watershed, from the uppermost structure to the valley floor clearly conveys the changed picture.

The sheer ingenuity of rural engineering is obvious. After careful planning, a series of bunds are constructed. The catchment-wide treatment method follows a 'ridge to valley' approach. The Parwala *bandh* (largest of the earthen dams) is the first built upstream. It is designed to allow excess water to flow out to prevent it from breaking. Next in the series is a *johad*, a smaller earthen check dam. About 400 metres downstream is an anicut, a smaller concrete check dam.

Here, the benefits of the catchment treatment are obvious – water seeps out from the ground, a veritable wetland set amidst the dry surrounding landscape.

How effective

Villages which have strived to catch the rain where it falls by making *johads* have seen revival of dead streams, regeneration of biomass and significant rise in agricultural productivity.

The *johads* have directly helped solve the water crisis, says Kanhaiya Lal. "The construction of dams recharged a large number of wells which were dried for last many years" he said. According to Rajendra Singh, popularly called the Waterman of India, the forests have increased by around 30 per cent because of the increase in the water table in the area.

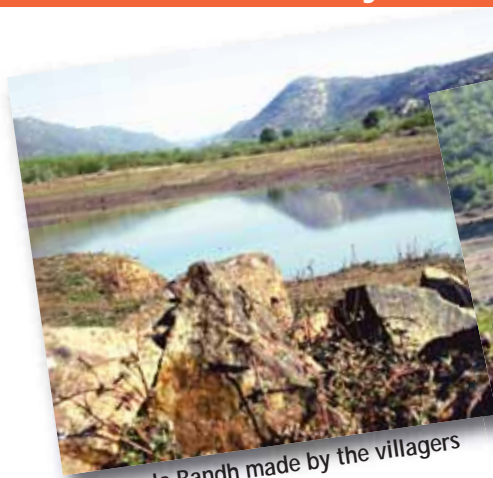
Johads, literally meaning a structure that joins two hills, also acted as social connectors between the villagers who work together in its construction, maintenance and usage.

Traditional caste divides are overlooked when it comes to water, which these villages have now in surplus after great efforts, confirms Tara Singh (ex- revenue officer) from Bhikampur. "Due to round the year availability of water, incomes from animal husbandry also increased manifold," he adds. In many villages, the real annual income from animal husbandry per family rose by three times more.

The *johad* experience has been transforming to the extent that villagers now question the effectiveness of government initiative to build a small dam in Hamirpur village. One made in 2003, worth Rs. 2 crore, broke just after the first rains and heavy runoff. While the *johad*, as Rodaram Gujjar boasted, made by villagers with only Rs. 2 lakh survived. The dam is being rebuilt again from December 25, 2012 onwards.

The villages of Alwar district are now transformed. With the availability of water every aspect of society is in the grip of villagers. Once dry villages are now seen with the plenty of trees. People are harvesting more than they used to harvest before. For this they have not done big things neither did they resort to modern technologies or huge investment. They only used their traditional knowledge and skills which were in practice since time immemorial.

Rajendra Singh of TBS says "Land, water, forests are being destroyed. So we need to act on our own and not wait for government to act." ■



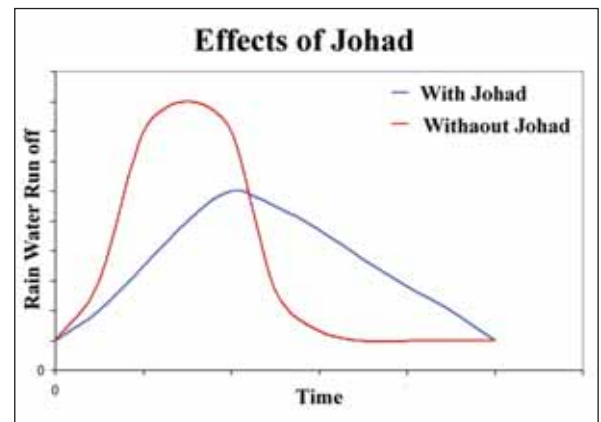
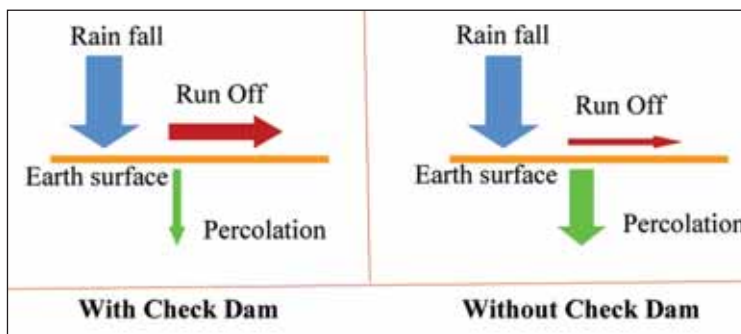
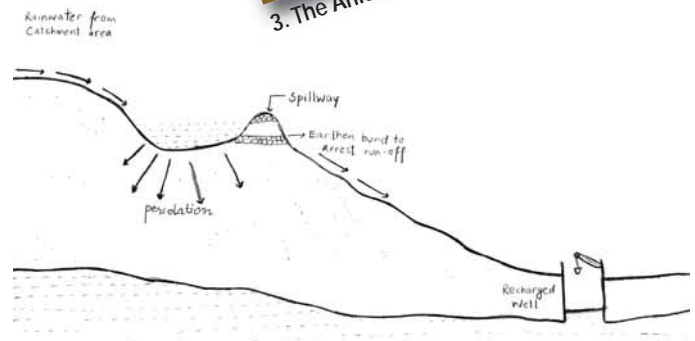
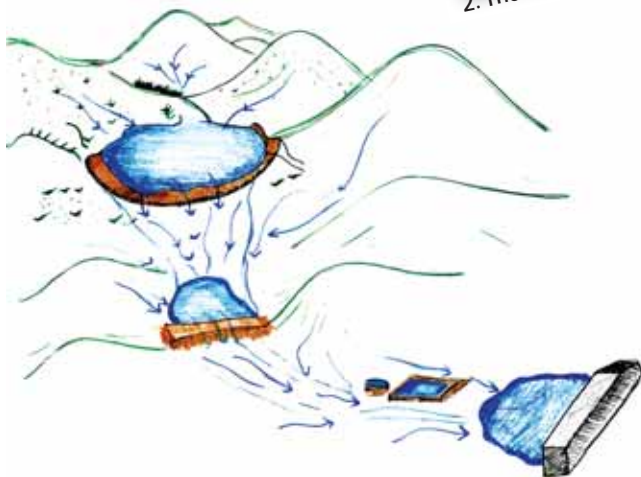
1. Parwala Bandh made by the villagers



2. The Johad (downstream), vegetated



3. The Anicut, which today stores water year-around



This Baoli, or traditional step well, has been revived

Wildlife has returned to these once barren lands





NO MAN'

The idea of wilderness or wild, uninhabited area left in its pristine condition, as conceived by colonial rulers, was instrumental in shaping the forest laws of India. Beginning with the Forest Act of 1927 till its amendment of 1980, the pursuit of pristine forests provoked the forced evictions and harassment of traditional forest dwelling communities over the years.

Indian forests, however, have never been unpopulated tracts of wilderness. Between the preservationists and those favoring cohabitation, 'People versus Parks' have become a contentious point of debate. Under Project Tiger, the conception of core area as an inviolate space further heightened this tension. As a watershed, in 2006, the Forest Rights Act recognized the traditional rights of forest dwellers, but it still awaits implementation. It was further circumscribed by the Critical Wildlife Habitat notification of 2007.

Although the Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) Act of 1893 applicable for protected or reserved forests is iniquitous, the R&R package for tiger reserves inhabitants based on recommendations of Tiger Task Force (TTF) seemed to be well framed. But an insight into the lives of villagers relocated out of the Sariska Tiger Reserve raises questions about the TTF recommendations as well as their implementation.

Can Delhi frame a single policy for habitats which are ecologically, geographically and socially so varied? Or should it?

S LAND

Can state define and maintain the limits of wildlife range which are interregional and vary with time? If not, then even with inviolate spaces man-animal conflicts will continue to arise. Is it then our failing that we still have not been able to conceive a conservation policy which ensures harmonious coexistence?

The issues that arise in relation to conservation-induced displacement of villages in Sariska indicate problems in the implementation of the R&R Act and the guidelines laid down by the National Tiger Conservation Authority. These problems and various other queries arise when one examines the ground realities. The answers are not obvious. But what is obvious is that a proactive role on part of policy makers and forest department, cooperation between centre and state, and involvement of communities in wildlife as well as habitat management is an immediate imperative.

The following articles examine the various issues concerning Sariska Tiger Reserve, its people, and the magnificent animal at the centre of it all – the tiger.

As part of cover story, the following three stories try to uncover the layers off the conservation debate.

- Broken Promises by Azam Khan and Krishna Kumar Saha
- Point Counterpoint by Shalu Agrawal
- Counterpoint by Shalu Agrawal





PHOTO: SHOWIK DAS TAMAL

Broken promises

One year after their relocation to outside the Sariska tiger reserve, residents of Devri and Umri still wait for compensation and a little hope

By Azam Khan and Krishna K Saha

Sariska Tiger Reserve has been in the news for all the wrong reasons in the recent past. The complete loss of tigers from the reserve, the reintroduction program that followed, and the program of village relocation that is in progress have all been very controversial.

“People are more worried about spotting the tiger than what we are going through here,” says an elderly resident of Mojpur Roondh village, of Alwar district in Rajasthan. Three years ago Sultan Gujjar, 60, moved bag and baggage from Umri to Mojpur Roondh, hoping for a better future. And now, he curses and regrets his decision.

The move was part of the Forest Department’s plan to relocate villages out of Sariska Tiger Reserve in an effort to protect the remaining tigers in Sariska. More than 350 people from 82 families in Umri, a village in the core area of Sariska tiger reserve, were moved to a new location a few years ago.

According to government officials, there are 11 more villages in the tiger reserve that have to be relocated to ensure the habitat is protected. However, in the process of relocation, there have been numerous altercations between the villagers and the government officials over promised compensation and land ownership. These issues still remain unresolved.

Forest officials are busy painting a rosy picture insisting that more people are ready to move. The recently relocated residents of Devri and Umri were quite happy with the

resettlement but now a year later, they claim they are getting less than what they were promised.

In his interview, Raghuveer Singh Shekhawat, the Field Director of Sariska, said that there were problems in the beginning but people are gradually moving out. “Initially at least, some families wanted more time. A little bit of persuasion from a visiting Forest Minister Bina Kak and the fact that the mustard crops they have planted in their newly allocated land are ripening, made them go — rather happily, I would say,” he added.

Almost three years after the first village Umri was relocated from the Sariska Tiger Reserve, a second village, Devri, was moved in February 2012. The population of about 250 Gujjars (84 families) and twice that number of cattle have moved to Mojpur Roondh. According to the Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Rajasthan, this has made available nearly 50 sq km of land for wildlife of the reserve.

Much has been said, argued and debated about whether relocation of villagers out of Sariska Tiger Reserve is necessary at all. There are also several issues related to the mode of compensation and its distribution.

Though forest officials insisted many a time during interviews that people are moving out voluntarily and are being compensated well, the people whose lives have been affected paint a completely different picture. “We were promised education for our kids, medical care for our people, and most

importantly, ownership of our land,” explains Gujjar, sitting in the courtyard of his new home. “But the promises made to us, have not been met.”

Not agriculturalists


The relocated villagers from Umri are livestock herders, and now are faced with the challenge of learning a new skill set – farming. Facing a vast green patch of agricultural land in front of his home, Gujjar says the land is “useless” to him. “My ancestors were livestock herders. And we are being forced to learn agriculture, which is like an insult to all those years of honing our skills,” he adds dismally.

Before moving to Mojpur Roondh, villagers were promised land, livestock, and cash worth 1 million rupees. However, the villagers said they are still waiting for compensation.

“Compensation money is being given to us in installments,” says Ratan Lal Gujjar, another villager. “Also, we haven’t yet got full ownership of the land we are living in.”


Showing what he called a ‘letter of rights’ (or *Adhikaar Pattra*) given to relocated villagers by the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Ratan Lal alleges that it is the only letter they have. And also, he is not fully aware of its legal value. However, there is one family that refuses to see the relocation in a negative light. Khushi Ram, 28, moved from Umri to Mojpur around six months ago. With his wife and one-year-old child in tow, he sees the move as a sign of “progress.”

कार्यालय उप वन संरक्षक, बाघ परियोजना सरिस्का
क्रमांक/ 12474 दिनांक 3/9/11



—: अधिकार पत्र :-

बाघ परियोजना सरिस्का में बसे गांव/गुवाडों के विस्थापन एवं पुनर्वास के लिये मौजपुर रूंध, तहो लक्ष्मणगढ़ जिला अलवर में 181.97 हेक्टर आरक्षित वन भूमि (राजस्व खसरा नं० 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) विहित की जाकर भारत सरकार के पत्र क्रमांक एफ 8-141/2006-एफसी दि० 29.04.08 से उक्त प्रयोजनार्थ उपयोग हेतु अन्तिम स्वीकृति प्राप्त हुई है। विस्थापन के संबंध में राज्य सरकार के आदेश क्रमांक एफ-11(2) वन/99 दिनांक 02.11.02 एवं भारत सरकार के पत्र दिनांक 29.04.08 द्वारा जारी दिशा निर्देश एवं जिला विस्थापन समिति की बैठकों में लिए गए निर्णयों की पालना करते हुये श्री सुल्तान पुत्र ख्याली गुर्जर के गांव उमरी से विस्थापित होने की एवज में मौजपुर रूंध तहसील लक्ष्मणगढ़ में 60'x 90' = 5400 sq.ft. का आवास के लिए आवासीय भूखण्ड व 6 बीघा भूमि कृषि कार्य हेतु आवंटित की जाती है। जिसका आवास भूखण्ड मय कृषि भूखण्ड सं० 27 है। उक्त भूमि का मानचित्र एवं माप पुष्ट पर अंकित है। मानचित्र अनुसार सीमा विवरण निम्नानुसार है:-



उत्तरी सीमा AB	- 159.40 मीटर	सीमा से लगता हुआ	रोड
पश्चिमी सीमा BC	- 97.37 मीटर	सीमा से लगता हुआ भूखण्ड सं०	सड़क/31
दक्षिणी सीमा CD	- 164.40 मीटर	सीमा से लगता हुआ भूखण्ड सं०	21
पूर्वी सीमा DA	- 45.74+51.83 मी.	सीमा से लगता हुआ	28, 29

उक्त आवंटन निम्न शर्तों पर किया जाता है:-

1. इस वन भूमि को आवंटित स्वयं व परिवार के निवास एवं कृषि कार्य एवं पशुओं के लिये चारा उगाने के लिये ही उपयोग में ले सकेंगे। इस भूमि को उक्त कार्य हेतु आवंटित की निरन्तर उपयोग में लेने की अनुमति रहेगी। आवंटित के स्वयं के द्वारा ही कृषि कार्य करना अनिवार्य होगा।
2. उक्त भूमि पर सिंचाई हेतु कुआं, टैंक के अतिरिक्त अन्य स्थाई ढांचा नहीं बनाया जायेगा।
3. इस भूमि का विक्रय नहीं किया जा सकेगा। यह भूमि उत्तराधिकार के द्वारा ही हस्तान्तरित होगी।
4. उक्त शर्तों का उल्लंघन करने पर आवंटन निरस्त करने का अधिकार अधोहस्ताक्षरकर्ता के पास सुरक्षित रहेगा।

उप वन संरक्षक
बाघ परियोजना सरिस्का

Sultan Gujjar's *Adhikaar Pattra*



PHOTO: SHOWIK DAS TAMAL

Mojpur Roondh: Sultan Gujjar's home

“We have got more land than we had in our village. I like the fact that there is a hospital nearby. In our village we used to walk for hours to get access to one,” Ram added.

As for learning agriculture, Ram said he is fine with it, as it will add “one more skill” to his name.

Disproportionate relocation

A few kilometers away from Ram's home, is the area where the residents of Devri village in Sariska are being relocated. Construction of homes is underway and small group of villagers sits and watches near a tea stall.

While relocating has been difficult for most villagers, the residents of Devri are not pleased that they got less land than those of 'lower caste.'

Moreover, they do not even have the 'letter of rights' that the residents of Umri have received.

Ramesh Kumar Meena, an elderly farmer, was quick to reject any argument for relocation. “We were fooled. Can you see any home or land worth looking at in this area, forget living in?” he asks pointing towards the nearby mountains and vast agricultural land. He adds that people of Umri are happy with the compensation package because they had nothing of their own to begin with.

Ramesh explains that out of the 28 villages within the limits of Sariska Tiger Reserve, 3 villages namely Rajorgarh, Devri and Indhok had their own land. The Meena caste, Ramesh claims, owned 2.5 hectare of land each. But after relocating, they have received only 1.5 hectare of land as compensation. “We lost even what we had in the bargain...” retorts Ramesh.

Is coexistence possible?

The decision to relocate the villages out of Sariska came about after several reported instances of conflict between the villagers and tigers. The recent poisoning of a tiger within the reserve, allegedly carried out by villagers in revenge for the attacks on livestock, created quite a stir.

Smirking, Ramesh denies any such “allegation” and said that they had no problems living with a tiger around. “What these forest officers refuse to understand is that we have been living with wild animals for decades. And there is no conflict per se that they (forest officials) are trying to create at present,” he adds.

Those who seem to know the issues on ground, have informed others back home to not relocate, Ramesh adds.

“What's the use? We lost our herds, our ancestral homes and everything that belonged to us. When we conveyed our grievances to the Forest Department, one official, said 'sorry, we probably made a mistake'...” ■

Point-counterpoint

Following the revelation that Sariska had lost all its tigers, it was clear that India's wildlife conservation strategy had collapsed. Shalu Agarwal captures the dilemma in separate conversations with R S Shekhawat, field director of Sariska Tiger Reserve, and with Aman Singh, founder of KRPAVIS, an environmental NGO in Alwar

Why the decline in tigers?

Citing poaching as major cause, Shekhawat said that the Bawariya community, in tandem with Kalbelia gangs of Haryana, is chiefly responsible for the killings of the big cats. These tribes form a crucial link in the organized poaching sector.



R S Shekhawat, *field director, Sariska tiger reserve*

More tigers often impact the livelihoods of villagers who are pastoralists. "Thirty years back, people were hard working, sincere and happy with only two to three cattle. In the recent past, families often keep 40-50 buffaloes and cows. So the chances of encounters with the tiger are high. When forest dwellers lose their cattle, tigers became their enemy." Villagers retaliate, for instance in 2010 when local villagers poisoned a tiger when it mauled two of their buffaloes.

Aman Singh of KRPAVIS however, has a seriously divergent view.

He argues that locals cannot be declared culprits for the declining tiger numbers. For centuries, forest dwelling villagers have coexisted with wildlife. As against the claims of the conservationists, forest dwellers consider the presence of tigers auspicious and this belief has existed for centuries. Many forest dwellers believe that tiger excreta protects their cattle from disease. Some believe the presence of the tiger keeps unwanted invaders out of the forests. The prey-predator relationship keeps the Neelgai and Sambhar population under check, which otherwise are destructive to agricultural crops in the buffer zone.

Aman Singh adds that poaching cannot occur without the connivance of the forest authorities. It is way too difficult for poachers to intrude into the forest and kill a tiger, especially when the security in the core zone is high.

Space for conservation

This is a contentious issue. According to Shekhawat, creating inviolate spaces of a minimum of 400 sq km, together with protecting the park boundaries, strengthening anti-poaching measures together with 'scientific' habitat management to maintain the ecological capacity of forests are the minimum prerequisites for wildlife conservation.

Shekhawat points out that in Sariska, even after an 'inviolat' core area was declared and breeding tigers brought into the park in 2004, no breeding happened as tigresses are self-aborting, and abort their pregnancy if they can't perceive conducive environment for raising their young. Inviolat space are therefore a prerequisite, he says. He also said cattle grazing and indiscriminate use of fuel wood destroys forest habitat.

Singh differs with this assessment. He argues forest dwellers have a direct stake in the well being of forests, and that forest management without community involvement is impossible. In fact, in the absence of the villagers, the state would have less compunction to divert forest lands for non-forest purposes to reap commercial rewards. Also, villagers keep poachers out by reporting on them or by taking collective action, he points out. He

agrees there have been some instances of connivance between poachers and forest dwellers, but this is because unthinking conservation measures have made forest dwellers the enemy of the tiger.



Aman Singh, *founder and chief coordinator, KRPAVIS*

Relocation and rehabilitation

With the push for creating 'inviolat' spaces for the tiger, the debate has become sharper on how to best compensate and rehabilitate forest dwellers relocated from the core areas of tiger reserves.

Shekhawat says those who chose land as compensation are the clear winners as land prices tend to increase manifold over years.

Singh however points out that many forest dwellers were given forest lands, without pattas to establish ownership, making it impossible for them to be eligible for loans.

He also points to how government authorities have consistently not fulfilled their promises of providing schools, roads, electricity and health centres in the resettlement colonies. Those who chose the Rs. 10 lakh cash compensation instead of land could not purchase good agricultural land given the high land prices.

Besides, says Singh, forest dwellers do not know how to manage large amounts of cash, and many families spent their compensation on wasteful expenditures. ■

Chasing stripes

How I very nearly caught a glimpse of the big cat

By Sumeet Sharma

It was a perfect morning for a chase. Fog drifted past our faces. Our hands, though feverishly gripping digital cameras, were numbed with cold. We were at Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan, and we were all keen to catch a glimpse of that elusive, majestic big cat – the tiger.

All 19 of us were piled into an open-top canter. Some of us were shivering – partly with cold, and partly with excitement, and we wrapped our scarves and shawls closer around us. I had heard many a tale of a tiger chase from wide-eyed friends and acquaintances, and had eagerly devoured details of thrilling pursuits. I hoped against hope that I would be lucky on my first trip into the wild and get to see a tiger.

We laughed, we chatted and we clicked photographs of nilgai and sambar. We giggled at the sight of podgy little piglets of wild boar, and whooped along with langurs that bounced from branch to branch, showering us with leaves. We marveled at the sight of tree pies and kingfishers, but there was no sign yet of the magnificent beast we had all hoped to see.

And then, a breakthrough.

There were excited whispers between the drivers of the three tourist jeeps. A tiger had been sighted, they said. And we were off! The chase had begun. Jeeps carrying groups of eager tourists screeched and swerved onto a dirt path



A camera trap



PHOTO: SHOWIK DAS TAMAL

Sariska: People excited by what the guides called 'alarm calls' by a *Cheetal*

and the whole convoy of four jeeps started to race to the place where the tiger had last been seen. The excitement was palpable. Finally, what we had all been waiting for. Trees and shrubs whizzed past, and my heart was racing.

On several occasions, the jeeps would stop and the forest guard would shush us, listening for chital alarm calls. Silence and we would be on the move again. This happened a few times, and



The 'beep beep' of the GPS tracker

my excitement began to wane. At one point, we found what looked like fresh tiger pug marks, and tourists that had just passed that spot a few minutes before we got there said that they had spotted the tiger crossing the path ahead of their jeep. And the chase was on again. I couldn't help but wonder – were we really following a tiger at all in the first place?

A researcher with a GPS tracker appeared in a jeep, and tried to

ascertain where the tiger was headed. During the weary hours that followed, we often heard the alarm calls of the various deer, but in spite of our technological assistance, we saw no tiger. All throughout, the driver of our jeep kept assuring us that we were hot on its trail, and we should remain silent if we wanted to spot it.

Finally after several 'near misses' and 'nearly theres', we gave up and returned to the gate of the reserve. The tiger, it seemed had played a prank on us, and had led us on a wild goose chase.

I was not annoyed, but I was most definitely skeptical. Were we really on the trail of a tiger, or was it all an elaborate hoax? Did the forest guards and drivers all fake the pug marks and manipulate us gullible tourists into believing we had just missed an encounter with the big cat? Nevertheless, believe we did. And hope we did.

Most of us who were in the canter are possibly more interested in the scandalous private life of Tiger Woods than the decline in the number of tigers in our country and the threats our natural resources are facing. But this experience of chasing stripes, I think, made us all realize how important it is to believe in change. To have faith that no matter what tragic extinctions and catastrophic events may await us in the future, there are no limits to human capability. All we need is a common vision, and the collective will.

Maybe next time, I'll catch a tiger by its tail. ■

PHOTO: SUBASH KARKI



Chursiddhi Oran, Alwar

Oran Puran

Community-managed sacred groves, vital biodiversity reserves, face extinction

By Adnan Faisal and Showvik Das Tamal

A walk through the mustard fields of the village Pagdandi, and one finds oneself in a lush green grove. The air is laden with the aroma of wet soil, and trees of khair, ber, ket and date flourish. One cannot believe that while a stream runs through the grove, there are parts of Rajasthan adjacent to this very spot where there is very little rain and no water. This forest is one of the 25,000 Orans or 'Dev van' in Rajasthan.

Sacred community forests

The Chursiddhi Oran, one of the many Orans in Siliser Cheend, near Bhakhatpura village of Alwar acts as a micro bio-diversity reserve and is a community managed ecosystem. These local forests vary in size from a hundred to five hundred bighas, and usually contain a source of water. Each Oran is associated with a deity, hence the name 'dev van' or abode of God. These community managed groves epitomise

a centuries old tradition of forest and water conservation.

Nanak Ram Gujjar (72) of Bhakhatpura describes a seven member elected committee, traditionally known as Thain, that makes rules and regulations to regulate the management and use of natural resources from the

The traditional practice of conserving Orans is in danger as many Orans have degraded, shrunk, dried up or been diverted for non forest uses

Oran. It is mandatory for all villagers to follow collective decisions.

A Saint (Mahatma), usually from another village, is entrusted with the

responsibility of guarding and preserving the Oran, and enforcing the rules laid down by the Thain. His primary duty however is to take care of the shrine of the deity of that particular Oran.

Orans have a series of water harvesting structures made by the community. An upstream dam of loose boulders, some earthen johads or bunds, and finally a masonry check dam are used to obstruct the rapid runoff after rainfall. As the area is usually dry sloping land prone to soil erosion, these bunds and check dams also help prevent soil loss. In turn, the increased percolation allows the recharge of the water table, and provides surface water which is used for agriculture or livestock needs. The ample soil moisture encourages plant growth and provides subsistence for fauna, and livelihood needs of the local livestock dependent communities.

Orans are a source of fodder, fuel,

timber, berries, roots and medicinal herbs. Grazing of livestock is done in turns and in certain seasons, and minor forest produce can be collected only with permission and not for commercial purposes.

Shrinking heritage

However, it is unfortunate that these Dev vans are facing a threat. The traditional practice of conserving Orans is in danger as many Orans have degraded, shrunk, dried up or been diverted for non forest uses. The Chursiddhi Oran is one of the few revived by collective efforts of community and with help from KRAPAVIS (Krishi Avam Paristhiti)

revenue land. Now, Orans are classified as being revenue land and communities have no ownership over them. Now, this land is often diverted by the government for mining or other non-forest purposes without consulting the communities dependent on these groves, rendering them devoid of access to natural resources and pushing towards further marginalization.

Silver lining

The Rajasthan Forest Policy, 2010 for the first time included a section on Orans. It recognizes Orans as community managed systems which would be provided necessary legal and financial support. It also envisages the

Legally Orans were once categorized as cultivable wasteland. Since the 1950's these were divided into protected forest land and revenue land. Now, Orans are classified as being revenue land and communities have no ownership over them

Vikas Sangathan), an NGO led by Aman Singh.

Singh explains that legally Orans were once categorized as cultivable wasteland. Since the 1950's these were divided into protected forest land and

preparation of a district-wise database and inventory of Orans. So effectively, communities have now acquired a bargaining power and a voice to prevent any future diversion of these sacred groves in arbitrary manner.

Gosainkunda lake of Nepal is a fine example of 360 degree collaboration of people and institutions for lake and biodiversity conservation, driven by the norms of religion, culture and socio-economic imperatives. Government of Nepal, district development committee and community based 'Gosainkunda Area Development Committee' work together through 'Tourism for the rural poverty Alleviation Programme' (TRPAP). Eco clubs in school, women associations manufacturing hand-crafts and campaigns by Lama Gurus further ensure that conservation itself becomes a norm rather than a need.

— Subash Acharya

However, the ownership complexities have not been addressed and the land continues to be government owned. Further, the policy allows formation of a committee consisting of local members or temple trustees for managing the Orans. This would institutionalize the committee as a body parallel to Panchayati Raj Institutions or PRIs which can give rise to conflicts. At the moment, Panchayat agrees to decisions of the committee in matters of Oran. This is also because of the fact that Thain also have representatives from Panchayats.

The committee mentioned is not mandated to be elected and therefore runs the risk of domination by socially dominating castes. In Chursiddhi Oran managed by two major castes Meena and Gujjar, conflicts have recently arisen. Notwithstanding these concerns, the Rajasthan Forest Policy has given. Further legislation and regulations to facilitate independent and fearless management of Orans are required. Orans are sacred and integral to the way of life of these communities. Their significance can only be understood by witnessing the landscape itself, and the close relationship its communities have with it. ■



PHOTO: SHOWIK DAS TAMAL

Mahatma's temple, Alwar



PHOTO: HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Domestic discord

Amidst the brouhaha around the Delhi gang-rape case, concerns are raised whether legislation alone will ensure the safety and rights of domestic workers across the country

By Saher Baloch, New Delhi

Sitting amidst friends and colleagues early on a Sunday morning, Phulkeriya Minz is busy making arrangements for the day. A domestic workers' meeting is expected to start any minute now.

Chota Nagpur Working Women Association (CNWWA), located in West Kidwai Nagar, has been a placement agency for domestic workers in Delhi since 1982. This weekly meeting is a chance for the domestic workers to talk. Mostly, they talk about the problems they face and the treatment meted out to them by their employers.

"Think of it as a way of venting," explains Minz. Most of these workers hail from Jharkhand. This is the only place where workers are allowed to fearlessly speak their mind. Their conversations and complaints get documented, she adds.

With the death of the victim of the Delhi gang rape incident recently, the debate at the association has shifted more towards ensuring the physical safety of domestic workers. Even though a recent inclusion of domestic workers in a long awaited Sexual Harassment Bill was lauded in August 2012, many workers at CNWWA think it has nothing to do with them.

"Who cares for us exactly?" asked a middle aged woman, introducing herself as Shanti, (last name not given).

"What can a piece of paper guarantee? I know for a fact that I have to take care of myself; no law can do that for me." Shanti's opinion is shared by most of her colleagues, who nod in agreement. They mention a host of other abuses that are not reported at all.

"You don't need a law to make people behave or to feel for the other"

Just last week Minz went to Gurgaon to meet an employer of one of the women from CNWWA. The complaint was that the woman was asked to sleep under a staircase with even a blanket or a pillow. In another case, a worker reported that she was beaten by her employer in Ghaziabad after she used the common bathroom in the apartment. "You don't need a law to make people behave or to feel for the other (sic)," adds Minz angrily, while the chatter in the room fizzles out.

It is to avoid such incidents that CNWWA pre-arranges the terms and conditions of employment before placing a domestic worker.

Minz negotiates every detail, right from salary to the domestic worker's meals and sleeping arrangements. This is done in the presence of both employer and employee. For instance, the initial salary is fixed at Rs. 6,000 a month and above. There is a clause specifying working hours, which is not supposed to be more than 8, and an added section about bedding. In another clause the employers are asked to give the employee a two hour break every day. Most of these clauses are accepted by the employers, Minz added.

However fiery and forthright these women are in their speech, they do not say much when it comes to sharing instances of sexual harassment at the workplace. Recently, a 13-year-old girl was rescued from an apartment in Dwarka after her employers had locked her in and gone on holiday. This is just one of the many cases that expose the vulnerability of the domestic workers to abuse and exploitation.

When asked whether or not workers report sexual or physical abuse, Minz was quick to clarify, "Look, so far we haven't come across such incidents at all. That's the only reason we don't place younger women, only mature ones."

This decision came after a recent incident, where one of the young workers in Kidwai Nagar quietly left her employment without citing the exact reason. One of her friends later reported that the girl was molested by her employer's husband. Though placement agencies insist they are in constant touch with the women they contract out for employment, it remains unclear whether they can ensure their safety from within the confines of an employer's home.

Jaya Iyer, a social activist, believes that no amount of legislation can bring security. However a legal framework is needed and is important. "Legislation is not enough. Mindsets and cultures have to be changed and the perception of privacy or '*ghar ki baat*' must be breached. It's high time," she says.

At the same time, she adds that efficacy of the law is impossible until a domestic worker reports abuse or poor treatment.

Big exodus to urban areas

With an estimated number of half a million domestic workers, Delhi has seen many phases of external and internal exodus. In the 70's, men from Nepal would come in hordes to the city looking for menial jobs, mostly as guards and servants. The 80's saw an influx from West Bengal, Orissa and Chattisgarh.

"From the 90's and onwards, there

from civil rights activists, the domestic workers' rights were included in mid-2012.

Citing an example, she said that, the Domestic Violence Act was passed in 2005 after being 'discussed' for eight to 10 years. "The fact of the matter," she adds, "is that the administration hasn't got its act together, even as abuse of workers increases. At the same time the laws can't work without the social support of people," citing the example of the recent Delhi gang rape incident, in which people from all walks of life took to the streets in support of the victim.

In the meantime, there are a lot of abuses taking place that go unnoticed. Out of these cases only a select few come out in the open, depending on the extent of barbarity.

"It is more about social intervention at every level. It needs to be about empowering worker's groups, validating intervention and for people like us to be more sensitive to such incidents," Jaya adds. ■

"Legislation is not enough. Mindsets and cultures have to be changed and the perception of privacy , or *ghar ki baat* must be breached. It is high time"

has been an internal migration going on," adds Iyer. Most workers were flocking in from Central India.

For the past one decade though, with natural disasters like the tsunami in 2004, and an overall unrest in some tribal areas, the city has seen an influx of migrants from Jharkhand and other connected areas.

With no knowledge of language and the life in cities, many women come to Delhi either to look for better employment to support their families or to support their own education. But somewhere in the middle they fall into the trap of people on the look out to earn a quick buck.

Minz's CNWWA is among the 2300 placement agencies in the city out of which only 269 are properly registered. Most of these agencies are on a tricky platform to redress abuses, thus demonstrating a need for a national policy or guideline for the rights of workers.

With the ongoing debate on domestic workers rights, activists like Iyer feel that it might take another decade to properly see the recently amended Sexual Harassment Bill through. The bill initially excluded domestic workers but after protests

- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Bill 2012 defines domestic worker as a woman employed to do household work in any household for remuneration whether in cash or through any agency on temporary, part time or full time basis but does not include any member of the family of the employer.
- An earlier version of the draft left out domestic workers provision in 2010.
- In 2012, it was unanimously passed in the parliament.
- Fine of upto ₹50,000 will be charged in case of non-compliance of the law.
- Unlike legislation in many other countries the bill does not provide protection to men.

Of rugs and riches

By Taslima Islam

It must be a scam is a thought that usually comes up when someone is discussing the work of a not-for-profit organization or a philanthropist. Ethics are questioned, and it is tempting for one to be skeptical and even cynical of any positive benefits that may result from corporate social initiatives.

It held quite true during a visit to the small village of Narhet, Rajasthan this December. Jaipur Rugs Foundation (JRF), a not-for-profit organization is working with the women of this artisan village, helping them earn by using the skills they inherited from their ancestors.

An obvious benefit of an association with JRF was that most people were making good money by working from home. JRF offers the women of the village free training in the process of weaving rugs, and also provides them each with a loom, or an informal community unit to work at. It also claims to provide health care, education for women and children.

Some people who were unhappy probably, and that is only my opinion, prefer a less laborious way of earning money. That is fine, as long as they make their choice. Because the whole point of this exercise is to empower them at the end of the day.

The women were usually the happier bunch and shared stories of how they can take care of their kids and earn money while sitting at home. A woman named, Mina Devi, 42, was comfortable with the fact that she doesn't need to spend any more time working in the fields, as weaving and working on a handloom is what she likes doing the most. Earlier, the cost of having a handloom to work on held her back. Secondly, she mentioned how she accompanies her husband to the market, to pick and choose what she wants to design, something she wasn't allowed to do previously.

Within minutes of speaking to a number of women who were either very happy to earn money or wanted more, most of us prepared to see the conflict. 'Why they are not questioning this forced labor?' commented one. 'They are probably too impressionable to even know the difference,' commented another. Without even trying very hard, we compartmentalized a bunch of people into a herd and thought they should be questioning the earnings they are making. And why not? Weren't they better poor and helpless? The way they are supposed to look most of the time?

Out of the many people that we met in Narhet in relation to rug making, only two families came up and said they are having problems. And the sad part was that everyone focused on those two stories, out of the many good and positive ones that we heard. Notes were quickly scribbled down, and the

thought that we have a 'conflict' of interests to report, overshadowed every other positive, rags-to-riches story that we came across.

A married couple, Sita and Rajesh, spoke about how they started off by earning Rs.6,000 with the help of JRF and went on to earn Rs.20,000 by gradually making their own contacts in the handloom market. And with more efforts, and meeting more acquaintances, there is a chance for them to earn more. Vijay

Singh, a middle-aged widower was quite pleased with working on the handloom instead of working in the fields, as it paid him more and "made use of his actual skills." At present, he is not only designing prints in Rajasthan, but his designs also go to other cities and are sold at a high price.

It must be added though, that one needs to question things, but selective questioning is of no use. We generally tend to be suspicious of big businesses, particularly those that profess to empower communities, or engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) exercises. What one needs to remember is that while a business may have to keep its eye on the bottom line,

it may well be possible that the occasional philanthropic CEO may genuinely want to reach out to the masses. We may be skeptical of his motives, but we cannot turn a blind eye to the good that comes out of such social endeavours. Organizations like JRF may not be doing enough for communities, I feel, but it is giving a proper leg-up to people who might not have had a chance to improve their lives otherwise. To ignore this fact would be a big mistake. ■



Gayasi Devi with her daughter working on handloom at home

PHOTO: SHOWNIK DAS TAMAL



Neelam, 26, is happy to work with her child in her lap

PHOTO: SUBASH KARKI



Romancing Rajasthan

If someone were to ask me for the one thing I remember most about Rajasthan, I would reply: its opulence.

We were greeted by thick fog at Alwar on our very first night. It was a new experience to stay in a *dharmshala* and to taste the mouth-watering food of road-side *dhabas* in Rajasthan.

The vast array of colours we have seen – in local markets, on our plates and in the forest – all reaffirm what we have heard of Rajasthan, and reflects the vibrant spirit of the people.

Whether it was the marvelously restored Jal Mahal we passed while going towards our guest house in Jaipur,

the clear waters of the Arvari River glistening in the winter sun, the endless yellow fields of mustard, or the lush green forest of Sariska National Park in Alwar – everything looked otherworldly. Rajasthan offers us city folk a reminder of the beauty we never get to see in the city, and memories which we can take home with us.

Long after coming back to New Delhi, the sounds and colors of Rajasthan continue to haunt me. Rajasthan has been in my travel bucket list for a while, and now I can finally cross it off.

Text by Razoana Moslam
Pictures by Subash Karki



Dicey decisions: Forest conundrum

By Shalu Agarwal & Showik Das Tamal

