





# Why is a national policy on voluntary sector needed?

— By *Arjun Kumar Phillips, Communication Executive, VANI*

## History of Voluntarism in India

The Indian story of the voluntary sector begins with the reformist movements taking shape in the late 19th century. The belligerent attitude of the English society on the Indian values and customs created the need for religious leaders to study the causes of deprivation and discrimination and come out with reforms that were universally appealing and exempt of orthodox practices. Combined with a mission to spread their reformist ideals these leaders also started free voluntary services such as opening schools, hospitals and religious clubs with a primary motive to infuse a modernist spirit at par with the British educational policies of Lord Macaulay. Thus was born an informal voluntary sector in India which even influenced Mahatma Gandhiji and the Indian National Congress to an extent in shaping their constructive programs revolving around 'khadi spinning', a symbolic gesture of championing the voluntary spirit. Gandhian tactics would later play an instrumental role in encouraging volunteerism and growth of activism in the respects of environment, tribal rights and farmer movements.

## After Independence

When India achieved freedom, the latent energy of the voluntary sector was released which had for long been subdued by the colonialism of the British. Reinforced by the will to create a new India, the voluntary sector took upon its shoulders to serve the poorest of the poor who had just emerged out of the dark years of suppression. The then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru whose economic bias tilted towards the public sector, was quick to realize the importance of voluntary organizations in partnering with the government and insisted on their complimentary role in the development paradigm. Early five year plans found a mention of voluntary sector organizations which subsequently saw the Ashok Mehta Committee in 1957 articulate the involvement of local voluntary sector organizations in the Panchayati Raj schemes of community development. The initial unfazed growth of the voluntary sector was later diluted by the

enactment of the FCRA Act '76 which brought a cessation to the activities of the sector. However with the formation of CAPART in '86 and references to the sector's contributory role in many five year plans, voluntary sector had been designated a positive role in development by the government.

## Government-Voluntary Sector relationship

To begin with, the voluntary sector has been dynamically involved in shaping the fabric of both the Indian society and economy. The sector's growth over the years has seen its transformation from being an agency of voluntary action to an agency of professional action. Overall this transformation has been positive and has significantly helped in the proliferation of the sector's endeavors. Voluntarism in India was perfectly suited, given the history of poverty and uneven development a courtesy of the British rule added by the inefficient bureaucracy and clogs that were unable to trigger development in the right direction. The failure of the state in directing development was able to churn a host of voluntary organizations that bought into view a myriad of problems that had remained untouched. The resourcefulness of the sector in immediately taking up issues by demanding their quick redressal through movements and struggles made the state vary of their role, leading to an acceptance of their existence and a denial of their legitimacy. However questioning their legitimacy cannot take place in our democracy as it invalidates Article 20 of the Constitution; yet punitive mechanisms through legislative measures have been instrumental in eroding their operability. This relationship between the government and the sector has been complex and in flux, with ebbs and tides widely discernible. This was apparent with after the '91 reforms which saw the private sector attaining new heights. The relationship over the years has become more strained especially following the amendments in FCRA Act of 2010 and the more recent stringent tax provisions. What majorly underlines the complexity in this relationship is the absence of any interface where there can be an



interaction between the government and the sector. Above all the voluntary sector constitutes as the 'third sector' and evolving a mechanism where both parties can officially converge is an exigency of today.

### National Policy on the Voluntary Sector

A favorable view from the side of the government came in 2002, when Shri. Atal Bihari Vajpayee made mention of drafting a National Policy on Voluntary Sector which later developed upon the approval of the Union Cabinet in 2007 to formally bring out a nuanced policy. This was a welcome step considering that earlier references by Shri. P.V Narsimha Rao on developing a sound policy on the sector were passing remarks. After the draft policy was announced in 2007 a calibrated move occurred when the 11th Five Year Plan encouraged partnership between CSO's and government and evolve models of governance in the PRI's. What pierced more as optimism for the sector was when the then Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Shri. Montek Singh Ahluwalia's remark on the need to bring a working relationship between VO's and the government. The deliberations on designing the policy were motivated to install a panacea which would secure an enabling environment for the sector. The Voluntary Action Committee (VAC) was also

convened to work as a sub department of the Planning Commission under the earlier government of the UPA. Subsequently these hopes were dashed owing to the mistrust that appeared between the sector and the government with the policy as of now remaining in the dock.

### The Need for a Policy

A policy is an agenda document which serves to function as a regulative advisory. Therefore a policy on the voluntary sector is attuned to serve as a provision for the sector and provide a basis for its various activities. The National Policy aims to make the voluntary sector a partner in development and work in progressive collaboration with the government as mentioned in the 11th five year plan document. This would enable a legislative provision for the sector and give it an official acknowledgement which indirectly finds a mention through FCRA, Registration and other acts. A national policy on voluntary sector would be able to bring out a support mechanism for volunteers by ensuring good working practices and define rights and responsibilities of voluntary sector activists. A table is given below which lists the reasons needed for a policy on the voluntary sector

Problem areas of the sector	How a National Policy will be helpful
Registration Laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A national Policy will be helpful in advocating a central law dealing with registration of organizations.</li> <li>• The complexity of state wise laws will be easily addressed in a National Policy</li> <li>• Regulatory gaps will be easily identified owing to the arbitrary usages of the law by corrupt officials</li> </ul>
Foreign Funding and domestic resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A National Policy will be helpful in easing the flow of foreign funds and help in mobilizing domestic resources</li> <li>• The bidding system of tenders which is detrimental to the interests of the voluntary sector may find a legal provision with certain caveats</li> <li>• FCRA which solely functioned under the Home Ministry may find a new place under the National Policy with relaxed provisions</li> </ul>
Provide a platform for Government-Voluntary Sector engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The policy will be able to help bring systems of mutual trust and respect and contribute to an engagement mechanism</li> <li>• It has been observed that the engagement between the two, government and the voluntary sector happens on other platforms. The National Policy on Voluntary sector will provide a direct one-to one communication process</li> </ul>



Problem areas of the sector	How a National Policy will be helpful
<p>Guarantees independence of VO's and confer legitimacy through a separate ministry/ portfolio</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The policy draft spoke of encouraging and enabling the work of the sector so as to contribute towards social, cultural and economic goals. With the enactment of this policy a direction will be in place for the sector minus the various departmental and regulative intrusions</li> <li>• The Policy also champions the creation of a separate ministry/department for Voluntary Affairs which will be able to act as a mentor to the sector</li> <li>• The policy will also demarcate between voluntary sector organizations and other institutions which are also registered as voluntary organizations</li> </ul>
<p>Ensure accountability and internal governance mechanisms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The primary source of problems for the whole sector occurs due to certain organizations not adhering to accountability standards. With legislation in place, a credibility system will weed out organizations not genuine in their motives.</li> <li>• The National Policy will be helpful in bringing voluntary sector at par with Companies in the context of regulation.</li> <li>• The National Policy will also provide accreditation to organizations which has been managed by third party private organizations up till now.</li> </ul>
<p>Give out tax structures for voluntary organizations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taxation policies for voluntary sector organizations have been managed under various headings for which there is a need for a separate taxation policy which will be simplified and streamlined for granting exemptions to charitable trusts under the Income Tax Act</li> </ul>
<p>Give a reference point to a three tier relation between Voluntary Sector- Government and Private Sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the emergence of Corporate Social Responsibility, various stakeholders such as the government, voluntary sector and corporates can function according to the provisions of the NPV, which can provide a basis for utilizing CSR and regulating it through an administrative mechanism</li> <li>• By this three tier structure schemes of government can be implemented by voluntary sector which are funded by corporates</li> </ul>
<p>State provisions regarding how voluntary organizations can help in decentralized governance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NPV will benefit PRI's and models of decentralized governance by giving them an assigned role</li> <li>• NPV will also give momentum in the implementation of 74th amendment as voluntary organizations at the grassroots and those working with ULB's have been actively participating and promoting democratic models of governance.</li> </ul>

**Conclusion**

A policy on the voluntary sector will be recognition of the sector's contribution and relevance in today's world. Through its enactment there will be promotion of an atmosphere of voluntarism which will lend it an official status as an activity recognized by the government. The new dispensation should look into studying the policy and examining the benefits it can deliver to the millions of underprivileged, downtrodden, backward and

economically handicapped. Through the policy a nationwide network of voluntary actors will be established which will help in exchange of resources and knowledge. Such endeavors will be able to help in poverty alleviation, remove social disparities and bring uniformity in economic growth. Overall a national policy will assure the voluntary sector of sustainability which is a prime requirement for ensuring the stability of our democracy.



# India's pioneering CSR law could have promise, but progress is slow

— By Alys Francis, DevEx.com

Earlier this year India became the first country to mandate corporate social responsibility by law in an effort to share the cost of development with the many companies growing fat on its economic rise.

The government first estimated CSR spending could top \$3.3 billion, exciting development actors who saw a significant source of new funding.

But more than seven months after the ambitious rules came into force, implementation is slow and officials are slashing spending estimates because companies don't expect to meet their targets in the first year.

Potential beneficiaries, including nongovernmental organizations, can still smell the money but are unsure when they'll see it.

India's biggest companies have practiced philanthropy for decades but giving has been "sporadic," and has not aided development, according to the government.

The new rules in Section 135 of India's Companies Act aim to change this, making it mandatory for companies of a certain size to spend 2 percent of their average net profit for the past three years on CSR, and forcing them to take a systematic approach.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who came to power in May promising rapid development, has thrown his weight behind the CSR law. His development priorities, like sanitation and vocational training, are influencing where many companies spend their money. After Modi used his important Independence Day speech to talk about the dire need for toilets, numerous companies promised to build them, including: Adani Group, Tata Consultancy Services, Coal India and Larsen Tourbro.

To get a piece of the CSR pot, NGOs like CARE India have been building internal capacity, hiring staff, and drafting corporate engagement strategies to suit the new legal landscape.

"We recognized there's huge funding potential, so we've done an inward-looking analysis on how well-placed we are to approach corporates, we've tweaked our strategy and we're employing more people for corporate outreach," said Niresh Kumar, CARE India's head of fundraising.



NGOs are approaching the companies that are required to spend on CSR — as per the law, this is all those registered in India with a net worth of 5 billion rupees (\$82.5 million) turnover of 10 billion rupees, or a net profit of more than 50 million rupees.

The Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs, which is facilitating the law's rollout for the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, initially estimated 16,000 companies out of the 950,000 registered in India would meet the criteria.

The total spend and work done by each company will only become clear after the financial year ends on March 31, 2015, when companies report their activities. Those that fail to spend the required 2 percent won't be fined but must report why they didn't comply.

The law requires companies to formulate and publish a CSR policy, and set up a CSR committee with three board members and an independent director.

CSR projects can be done by a company's own nonprofit foundation, which many large Indian companies have set up for philanthropy, or through NGOs registered in India that have been running for at least three years. Smaller companies can pool their funds or contribute to a government development fund.

A 2008 survey of 28 companies doing CSR, including Tata Chemicals, Coca-Cola India and Reliance Industries, found 37 percent implemented initiatives through a separate foundation, while 58 percent had a separate CSR department. The survey, the most recent one conducted



by industry body the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry in India, found NGOs were the partners of choice for 67 percent, while 58 percent worked with government departments and 21 percent with multilateral or bilateral organizations.

The act lists CSR areas as: hunger and poverty, education, health, gender equality and women empowerment, skills training, environment, social business projects and promotion of rural and national sports.

Work must be conducted in "project mode," and can't be one-off events like donations or marathons. Companies must also give preference to projects in their local area.

### How are NGO's setting up?

NGOs are boosting staff, doing research and creating strategies for CSR and private sector engagement.

CARE India has set up a CSR team of three people for private sector engagement and is hiring more.

"We're doing an analysis on where the companies that are eligible for CSR are having operations and then we are approaching them with our programs and our need of funding in that area," Kumar said.

CARE is targeting companies outside its operational area with programs that aren't geographically bound, like corporate gender empowerment. It's also expanding its CSR strategies for multinationals.

"It helps for them to have one single partner for both domestic and international CSR," Kumar explained. "Airtel is very big in Africa and so is CARE, so now we're looking at how our domestic partnership with Airtel can become an international one."

Finally CARE is positioning itself as an influencer in CSR spending.



"We're doing that by talking about issues, like gender rights within corporates and the social issues that prevail in this country," he said.

### Connecting the actors

Many NGOs are getting listed on databases set up by government and private players to connect companies with implementing partners. Ensuring these NGOs are credible is a key concern, as there are an estimated 2 million NGOs in India and the sector is widely unregulated.

The IICA has been tasked with building a "National CSR NGO Hub" to act as a "gateway" to CSR. To get listed, NGOs need to supply their Indian registration certificate, tax returns for the last three years and documents showing development activities.

However, the government issued the same orders for a CSR hub to be set up by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in 2010, when CSR was made compulsory for India's public sector companies. TISS struggled due to a lack of resources, and NGOs like CARE faced lengthy delays getting approved. It currently has a database of 300-odd NGOs registered in India, evaluated on technical and financial measures.

A number of private consultants and NGO listing websites have also emerged to serve the growing CSR market. Some more well-regarded ones are: Credibility Alliance, Give India, CSO Partners, NextGen and the Indian Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility.

Proactive NGOs like Deepalaya, which runs schools for underprivileged children, are using both government and private platforms to find donors. Deepalaya CEO TK Mathew registered with TISS and Credibility Alliance. He spends his days trawling the Internet for companies required to do CSR, checking their online policy and devising potential programs with cost predictions before making an approach.

Mathew said he has had discussions with a dozen companies, including Sony and Gas Authority of India, but has so far not secured any new partners.

Corporates don't understand the complexity of development issues and sometimes have unrealistic expectations about what NGOs can achieve, including one electricity company that wanted to stop people from stealing power, he said.

"They expect social organizations can wave a magic wand," Mathew said.

### How is the rollout going?

With no mechanism to monitor implementation, there is no clear view of how the CSR rollout is progressing. But



officials say many companies are struggling to set up and find partners for the large-scale CSR projects they need to do to comply with the law.

"Not a single project has gone online yet because companies have to completely reorient themselves," said Bhaskar Chatterjee, the director of the IICA, who helped create the rules.

Corporations are undergoing a drastic transformation from "sporadically pumping in money here or there, leaving no significant impact behind" to formulating projects with predecided outcomes and systems for measuring progress and results, he said.

The government is not imposing a deadline for companies to start projects but hopes they will begin rolling out by December, Chatterjee said.

"Right now the government attitude is more enabling ... we're trying to give them a little more elbow room to get adjusted to the new act," he said.

Large companies already involved in philanthropy are making sure their activities comply with the law and scouting for new projects if they need to scale up.

Give India, which vets NGOs and connects them with donors, is advising many large companies on how to plan, monitor, measure progress and mitigate risk for CSR projects.

"The corporates are still in discussions ... people are still trying to figure out how to create a working model," said Vikas Puthran, vice president of corporate alliances at Give India.

For companies with no history of giving or understanding of development, the task is harder. Small companies with limited budgets in particular can have unrealistic expectations and challenges.

The Confederation of Indian Industries, one of India's main business associations, is advising a company with only 500,000 rupees to spend that wants to build a school, but has nearly exhausted its CSR budget on salaries for two new CSR staff.

"There are people who want to do really good stuff but their budgets are really small — it's not viable," said Sachin Joshi, the director of the CII-ITC Centre for Excellence for Sustainable Development.

Typically those with less to spend are encouraged to pool their resources with others or contribute to a government fund.

Compliance has been patchy among public sector companies who had already been required to participate in CSR and contribute some of their profits to development projects. Coal India announced in March that it was hiring 120 people to work on CSR after it was called out for spending barely 15 percent of its required budget last year. It was among 41 central public sector enterprises that failed to spend the required amount from 2012-2013, according to India's comptroller and auditor general.

"There are some who are doing exceptionally good work, there are some who are catching up, there are some who have also not understood the concept of CSR and probably are not doing it the way it should be done," said Venkatesh Kumar, director of TISS, which was tasked to help public enterprises implement CSR but is increasingly helping private companies. The institute is also starting to map CSR projects across India to avoid duplication and enable collaboration.

TISS has worked with about 70 companies doing CSR in 800 villages over the past three years or so. Most of the money is being spent on health, education and

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livelihoods, but in less developed rural areas, basic infrastructure made up a large part of development projects, Kumar said.

Most companies were interested in "routine" infrastructure-driven development, building "schools, hospitals and toilets," said CII's Joshi.

Factories and manufacturing units were particularly keen on skills training, which "feeds into their workforce," Give India's Puthran said.

But there are also fears some companies will leave project implementation until the last minute in the financial year, or mask data to avoid compliance, Mathew said.

And the CSR rules may not stay the same. Companies have successfully pushed for amendments, including getting staff volunteering and training of NGOs counted as CSR expenditure.



“A lot of this lobbying and influencing is going to happen after one year” when results are reported and the nature of the game becomes clear, said CII’s Joshi.

CII and India’s other major industry bodies — ASSOCHAM and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry — hold regular stakeholder engagement and capacity-building seminars, and are helping their members form policies and find partners. FICCI and CII also plan on building NGO databases.

### How are companies setting up for CSR?

Many large corporations are handling CSR through their foundations while midsize companies are setting up internal teams to supervise projects carried out by implementing partners.

Aditya Birla Group, a \$40 billion multinational, set up the Aditya Birla Center for Community Initiatives and Rural Development 18 years to provide strategic direction on rural development initiatives. The center is headed by Rajashree Birla.

Each company within the group has a CSR head, implementing staff and board level CSR committee. Birla sits on each CSR committee with Pragnya Ram, the Aditya Birla Group’s executive president of corporate communications and CSR as a permanent invitee.

The company’s CSR policy has five focus areas devised by the center: education, health and family welfare, social causes, infrastructure development and sustainable livelihood. The group spends more than 130 crore rupees annually working in 3,000 villages near its factories,

partnering with government and NGOs, and engaging with CII, FICCI and ASSOCHAM.

The Aditya Birla Group works with CII on vocational training programs and with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and NACO, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare’s AIDS control body, for health care and AIDS programs, Ram said.

“It is not possible for a corporate not to reach out to partners because we simply don’t have the expertise in all these areas,” she said.

It will take time for CSR to be fully implemented across India’s corporate world and there are many uncertainties: Will companies comply without facing penalties? Will CSR be coordinated effectively despite scarce government resources? Will funds reach the least developed areas where few companies are set up?

Despite the challenges, the new rules do have many thinking about CSR for the first time. While it appears there may be foot dragging among corporates, it also seems the law will force companies to evolve and model projects may emerge down the road. Local actors will continue to engage and monitor progress, but they won’t be alone — those outside the borders will be watching as well to see if the model works.

— *This article is taken from Alys Francis’s article in DevEx.com*

Dear Members and Associates

This is to notify you three issues which have emerged in front of VANI.

- 1) It has been observed by our Accounts department that certain Members and Associates depositing their annual fees have failed to intimate the details of their fee payment to VANI leading to a failure in the update of their membership records. We request you to please inform us the very moment you make a deposit, which will ultimately help us in updating membership records.
- 2) It has been decided that the financial year for Associates of VANI will now be from April to March.
- 3) We have also decided to bring in some policy changes in regards to providing various services to our members. This issue was raised during the AGM-VOICE 2014, Nagpur. Therefore we ask our members to send us your esteemed suggestions regarding what kind of exclusive services could be provided to members by VANI.

Regards,  
VANI



# Voice from Gujarat

— A Study by VANI

Gujarat is one of the fastest growing states in India. Gandhinagar is the State capital of Gujarat which is named after “Gandhi” the father of the nation. Ahmedabad, Surat, Baroda, Rajkot are four major cities of Gujarat. The Census 2011 also revealed that it is fast urbanizing with more than 46 percent of the population living in cities and towns. This fast urbanization has also brought with it conflicts and problems of exclusions. Infrastructure development and urban renewal projects have led to large displacement in large cities without adequate rehabilitation or resettlement of the affected households. Many VOs have intervened to mobilize the affected people to assert to demand for better resettlement packages and resist displacement.

The VOs work on thematic areas namely health, education, water & sanitation and livelihood, social inclusion, environment and disaster management, governance and accountability apart from rights based approach as well as research and advocacy on development issues and policies. There are VOs that are “network” organization and provide platform for VOs, activists, individuals and development organizations to work together and address issues concerning the poor and the marginalized.

## Challenges faced by the VOs

- 1. Stringent laws by the government:** Funding compliances and scrutiny by the government are getting stringent. The government is regulating and tightening its control over grant making to VOs and the way its grants are invested in projects. The procedure for seeking clearance and sanction has become cumbersome and lengthy. Amendments in FCRA have made VOs access to foreign fund difficult.
- 2. Lack of Funding Sources:** In Gujarat the two major sources of funding for the voluntary sector are international NGOs, foundations and state government. With the global recession there is an overall reduction in volume of fund available for development work particularly from the INGOs and



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foundation. On the other hand the state government has resources but is selective in collaborating with this sector. Much of the fund available is for working on certain type of activities and it is difficult for the VOs to work on the agenda that is their priority. They are under pressure to mobilize funds from other sources like corporate, local philanthropists or to collect user fees. Even in this case the resource



providers expect to see quick visible and tangible impact. These funds are generally available for providing various services like water and sanitation, health care, setting up primary school; medical camps etc. and are not available to work on governance and accountability, social issues, land rights and human rights which are thematic areas of most of the VOs.



3. **Delay in getting funds:** Most of the VOs mentioned the delay in disbursements of government funds. The delay is due to the bureaucratic process involved in releasing the grants.
4. **Image of the sector:** The VOs faces difficulty in doing advocacy and engage in policy making at the state level. Any query raised is not taken in a positive manner but is treated as a threat. In many cases funds from the state government have been withdrawn and if the state government is the main funding source, VOs find it difficult to take up advocacy on social issues and social justice.
5. **Rights based approach:** The voluntary organizations that are working on rights based approach demand for improvement in governance and accountability of governing institutions. Mostly the VOs are accused of not being accountable. This is particularly true in the case of development organization founded by private sector and VOs working with activism approach. They feel that their response might adversely affect their relation with the state.
6. **Relation with the state:** Globalization requires greater participation of civil society in policy-making process, planning and implementation of development programmes. How the NGOs can partner with the State to improve accountability without getting co-opted is a challenge.

- Resource mobilization: The VOs need to mobilize resources and explore new ways to raise the resources.
- Strategies to tap individual donations and organizations and building a corpus for financial sustainability.

### Strategies to Engage with Government

The partnership and relation between the VOs and the government needs to be strengthened.

- It is required that VOs partners with the state to create platforms for increasing participation of civil society to address social issues. The State can partner with VOs to create models for increased civil society participation.
- With emphasis on good governance and accountability the state along with the VOs can develop mechanisms to improve transparency and make governing institutions more accountable to citizens.
- The government could help and support the VOs by giving them professional treatment in the government's development interventions.
- The government should adopt a more liberal stance and be flexible while allocating grants to VOs.
- To be more transparent in sanctioning, implementation and execution of programmes. 3

## Recommendations

### Funding

- Timely release of government funds so that organizations activities does not suffer. There is an urgent need to have dialogue with donor agencies and the government to simplify the process of allocating funds.



# Swacch Bharat Abhiyan: An initiative worth applauding

The propensity of development and well-being in any country is measured by the sensitivity towards cleanliness, sanitation and hygiene. The more a country invests in these areas the more likely is the country positioned for gaining leverage over development. Development solely does not mean creation of infrastructure and assets but also includes creation of 'clean spaces' which in turn contribute to the healthy growth of an individual. The old proverb of 'health is wealth' is applicable more than ever in today's world. When the well-being of an individual is compromised the entire economic edifice of a nation collapses. 60 years into independence and India has been able to reach towering heights if not the pinnacles of development. We have been partially successful in lifting the burdens that have recalcitrantly slowed us down and made stymied our growth. However one such area which is akin to a parasite for our nation is the lack of sanitation and hygiene. This was enthusiastically articulated by our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi when he earmarked this year's Gandhi Jayanthi (2nd October 2014) as a day of commencing a cleanliness drive throughout the country with an aim to create a Swacch Bharat (Clean India). The campaign with a budget of Rs. 62,000 crores covers over 4,000 towns in the next five years. The government's objective, however, is to make it a pan-Indian mission, one under which every individual is a stakeholder and sensitized towards developing a clean India. Preceding governments had sought some policies targeting this area but the energy directed by the current government certainly calls for applause. A review of some statistical data by UNICEF points to the dismal condition of sanitation and hygiene in rural as well as urban India. Only 31 percent of the population use improved sanitation facilities, with those in rural India using only 21 percent. A humungous 594 million or 50 percent of the population openly defecates, demonstrating that rudimentary civic provisions have failed to percolate to the lower segments of society. According to the Public Health Association, only 53 per cent of the population wash hands with soap after defecation, 38 per cent wash hands with soap before eating and only 30 per cent wash hands with soap before preparing food. Only

11 per cent of the Indian rural families dispose child stools safely. 80 per cent children's stools are left in the open or thrown into the garbage. Where water facilities are concerned 88 per cent of the population of 1.2 billion has access to drinking water from improved sources in 2008, as compared to 68 per cent in 1990. Sixty seven per cent of Indian households do not treat their drinking water, even though it could be chemically or bacterially contaminated. Such indicators paint out a worrisome picture for our nation and make it exigent on the state to address these issues.

## Open defecation: An impediment for the healthy growth of an individual

As earlier noted through the statistical data, open defecation is one of the primary causes of a number of diseases in the country. The various strategies evolved to mitigate or contain open defecation have not yielded success owing to a disruption in the supply of other inputs. Lack of water, disposal facilities and washing soaps have played a major role in prolonging the battle against open defecation. A distressing aspect is that open defecation takes place among 13 percent in urban centers. Open defecation is breeding ground for virulent diseases such as diarrhea, tuberculosis, encephalitis, eye infections and respiratory problems. In rural India, given the porous nature of Indian fields, the percolation of fecal bacteria into groundwater tables ends up in a large scale contamination of drinking water wells. Researching the impact of this malaise has revealed that children are the most vulnerable segments, as their growth in the puberty stage is affected. Malnutrition due to enteropathy, a





chronic illness that prevents the body from absorbing calories and nutrients is direct consequence of open defecation. All the more this practice can lead to communicable diseases when practiced in closed settlements. With a rapid growth in population and a short supply of housing facilities, access to latrines in India is considered a privilege and beyond the fiscal reach of many. Communal toilets are perceived to be unsafe for women, as molestation and rape incidents are frequently reported in their proximity. But sadly it is the age-old routine habits that promote open defecation. Studies have indicated that a majority of the uneducated people prefer to defecate openly, with some considering it a part of a whole some exercise when attending their crops or fields in the mornings. A disgusting ritual still followed is the employment of manual scavengers. Such inhuman practices existing in the 21st century are a blot on the nation and the vows taken by our constitution to end discrimination based on caste. It is shameful to note that India fares poorly in comparison to other poorer nations in this regard but the situation is changing with the endeavors of earlier government and the current to build more toilet facilities. It was welcoming to see the Prime Minister prioritizing the elimination of open defecation by allocating resources from the budget to build toilets by 2019.

### **Voluntary organizations and their sanitation programs**

The voluntary sector's active involvement in creating sanitation facilities are recorded achievements in promoting sanitation and hygiene. Various organizations have developed community based programs to build toilet facilities and proper disposal systems. Lack of disposal facilities have often accentuated problems for villages as water supply and piping systems are unavailable for the local populace to dispense off with the wastes. For example compost pits and liquid wastes management are certain initiatives taken up by voluntary organizations in rural areas. Mass public health education campaigns have attempted to educate people from all ages on the need to use toilets and maintain hygiene. The roping in of children to be educators has been a successful strategy on the part of organizations. Voluntary organizations have facilitated in teaching households to build their own toilets. This strategy has worked in creating a sense of ownership among the households, diverting them from openly defecating. Maintaining a certain hygiene level is also necessary, thus organizations have been instructing households to

maintain cleanliness of their toilets. Given the large amount of wastes generated by cities, voluntary organizations have also been involved sanitation initiatives in urban centers. Their continuous campaigns against open drains and construction of toilet facilities in slums and congested pockets have been instrumental in giving shape to a struggle against 'uncleanliness'. Voluntary organizations have rendered many schemes a success such as the Total Sanitation Program, Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan, Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission etc. They have worked in close cooperation with the gram level panchayats and convened community mobilizations. Our Prime Minister noted the potential voluntary organizations held in helping build this campaign and it is no wonder he invited them to join this initiative. Voluntary organizations are conduits which will supplement the cleanliness drive launched by the government. Through their wide experience of interactions with CBO's it will be easier for them to persuade and help building sanitation facilities. Already the Prime Minister has given the campaign the nomenclature of being a 'Jan Andolan' (people's movement), this would be a cue for voluntary organizations in motivating the people both in rural and urban areas. With CSR opening itself as an opportunity for voluntary organizations, The Ministry of Urban Development, Ministry of Human Resources and PSU's are bringing in corporate funding to sustain the momentum of the mission. The voluntary sector has made use of public tools of display in making illiterate and uneducated masses understand the importance of sanitation and hygiene. Considering the frequent usage of PR tools by the government, voluntary organizations may be helpful by taking this scheme to the last mile as evident by their proliferation across India. Last but not the least the government should involve local governance institutions to work in congruence with voluntary organizations for developing an effective strategy, with a primary thrust on community participation. This laudable campaign is designed to inculcate a sense of belonging to the people of India by making them realize the necessity of maintaining cleanliness and hygiene. Only through a partnership with the voluntary sector can this dream of a clean India be fulfilled even if it takes decades of perseverance and hard work.

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# Impacting Development Thought and Practice through Bhili Cultural Rejuvenation

— By Rahul Banerjee, Social Activist, Dhas Gramin Vikas Kendra

## Abstract

***The federation of Bhil Adivasi mass organisations in Western India, the Adivasi Ekta Parishad (AEP), has over the past two decades or so developed an innovative new tool of development in the form of cultural rejuvenation. The Bhil Adivasis under the aegis of the AEP have conserved and rejuvenated their traditionally rich cultural heritage to forge a new assertive identity for themselves to help them negotiate the complex social, economic and political milieu of a modern liberal democracy and have in the process developed an alternative framework of equitable and sustainable development. This paper details this brave new world of the Bhil Adivasis of Western India.***

## Impacting Development Thought and Practice through Bhili Cultural Rejuvenation

### Introductory Background

Activists and scholars have conclusively established that the institutions set up under the provisions of the Constitution of India for the protection of the adivasis have not functioned properly and the various laws and policies enacted from time to time for this purpose have not been implemented, primarily due to the wrong development policies adopted by the state which have tended to strengthen rather than weaken the political and economic power of the non-adviasis vis-a-vis the adivasis (Sharma, 2001). The state has also failed to provide good and adequate education services which has resulted in the adivasis remaining unequipped to negotiate the complexities of the modern centralised system of governance into which they have been forcefully integrated (Banerjee, 2003). The poverty induced by these wrong development policies has adversely affected the nutritional levels of the food intake of the adivasis and combined with the lack of good and cheap health services has led to a decline in their general health (Rahul, 1997a). Moreover the even greater lack of both education and health services for the women has meant that they have not been able to smash age old patriarchal structures and their consequent lack of reproductive rights has led to a population explosion putting further pressure on already scarce resources. All these factors have combined to produce a scenario wherein adivasis are being continually exploited by the improper functioning of the modern market system which has increasingly penetrated into their subsistence lifestyles and being forced to live on the edge (Rahul, 1997b). The condition of the Bhil adivasis of western



Madhya Pradesh provides ample evidence of this decay.

The Bhils have not only lost their natural resource bases but with the undermining of their subsistence agriculture based lifestyle that this has led to, they have lost confidence in their own indigenous culture too. Poverty has led to community links breaking down and there has been a continuous downgrading of their culture by non-adviasis oppressors. Even their Gods are losing their shine as more and more Bhils have begun to worship Hindu or Christian Gods and Goddesses. The final blow has come



in the form of dam building on the River Narmada which seeks to destroy completely not only the Bhils' habitat but also, by displacing them into areas populated largely by non-adviasis, their unique culture.

The Bhil adviasis have a rich oral folklore. There is the creation myth centred on the river Narmada in some cases and in others on the Goddesses and Gods Velubai, Rani Kajal and Indiraja which is sung during the Diwasa festival allowing the Bhils to partake of the products of their lands during the kharif season. Then there is the myth of the Goddess Kansari, who represents the staple cereal sorghum, which is sung at the time of the celebration of Indal which is a festival of thanksgiving to nature for having been bountiful with her harvests. Finally there is the myth of Kalorano the God of Rain which is sung to appease him when the rains play truant during the monsoon season. Apart from these major myths there are a number of other stories. Their contents reflect the close empathic relations that the Bhils have traditionally had with their habitat given the fact that their very existence is directly dependent on the munificence of nature. This rich and valuable oral literary corpus has the potential for reviving not only the belief of the Bhils in themselves and thus motivating them to better participate as equal citizens in political and economic processes but is also capable of providing theoretical and practical clues towards the formulation of a more sustainable agriculture based developmental model than the one that is dominant today. However, this valuable heritage is in danger of being lost forever as the younger Bhils today have little regard for the traditional Bhil culture and its rich oral heritage given its inability at present to secure them a viable livelihood.

### An Innovation that is Systems Changing

Historically a major medium for the positing of a strong identity by any community has been its language. All literate cultures have thrived by developing a rich literature to strengthen their language. However, adviasis



cultures being non-literate have not been able to do this and so have fallen behind and face extinction. Today the lack of entertaining written literature in the Bhili language has resulted in most literate Bhils switching over to Hindi instead. So transcribing the voluminous folklore of the Bhils and publishing it will provide the literate Bhils with enough reading materials of quality to entice them back to their mother tongue. New literature and the further development of the written Bhili language and a revival of their decaying culture will then follow as the night the day. The modern Indian languages have all developed in this way. Moreover the experience of using the traditional myths and tunes in conveying modern developmental and cultural messages has shown that they are extremely effective for this purpose. This innovation is being done by various social and political developmental organisations in the western Madhya Pradesh region which are all affiliated to the federation Adivasi Ekta Parishad (AEP) which is active in the four contiguous states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Transcription of the whole of the folklore will also allow a systematic study of it and thus offer many more opportunities for innovation. The folklore is amenable to creative interpretation and copious material in support of the theory and practice of alternative, decentralised and sustainable development can be culled from it.

There is for example the creation myth sung in the villages near the Narmada which detail how God was suddenly beset with the idea to build the universe and he looked towards Relu Kabadi the woodsman to go into the jungle and fetch him wood. Thus starts the whole story of how slowly all the animals and plants are created and finally the rivers Narmada and Tapti. These rivers finally meet up with the ocean Dudu Hamad in marriage and in the process of their journey all the various villages, hills and valleys are created. The whole song gives a sense of the vastness of nature and the strength of natural processes and inculcates a respect in the listener for these. This is in direct contrast to the hubris of modern man who has tried to subordinate nature to his own ends and given rise to the serious environmental problems that face him today. The adviasis have been sufferers of this process. Thus by popularizing their creation myth and emphasising that their worldview is much more "rational" in the present context of serious ecological degradation will go a long way towards increasing their self esteem.

Similarly, there is another story in one of the epic songs about a woman who has to answer for having questioned the authority of her husband. She is brought before the panchayat which is the traditional all male dispute resolution forum. There the panches decree that she be punished for her disobedience and order that her tongue be cut off and given to the husband to swallow. The



tongue then gets stuck in the throat of the husband where it has remained ever since. This story has been picked up to depict the extent to which the Bhil society is patriarchally oppressive of women. At the same time the fact that the tongue has got stuck in the husband's throat offers the chance to the woman to recover it and so establish her right to speak out for her needs. This is the motif that has been used to organise the Bhil women to fight against diverse patriarchies inside the home and outside. Literature especially religious literature of an allegorical character has tremendous power to motivate people to act to change their socio-economic condition. Unfortunately for adivasis in the central Indian region in general and the Bhils in particular there has not been any significant effort till now to transcribe and use their rich oral literature.

Thus what is being done here by the AEP and its affiliates is the systematic creation of a new written literature and performing arts of the Bhils not only for their value in themselves but more for their utility as a crucial DEVELOPMENTAL TOOL through the transcription of their rich oral folklore by their own organic intellectuals who have risen from the process of the struggle to improve their socio-economic condition. While in the case of other modern Indian languages such forums sprang up by themselves in the case of Bhili a special effort has to be made because it is not a written language and being the product of an indigenous culture which is under threat of extinction requires protective promotion.

The penetration of market oriented consumerist culture has led to the breaking down of traditional communitarian bonds not only in urban societies but also in remote agrarian societies like those of the adivasis. Thus the social system prevalent at present promotes cut throat competition among its members and hampers collective action. This in turn leads to violence and crime. This is extremely harmful for society as a whole. So it is of utmost importance that adivasi societies which still retain communitarian social practices be encouraged to thrive and creatively build on these practices so that society as a whole can draw on this valuable resource to counter the threat of evolving into a consumerist mono-culture. For instance there is no sense of belonging in the cities these days leading to the problem of alienation. This is then sought to be corrected through identification with fundamentalist religious organizations which tend to divide society further into narrow communities. Thus the present new intervention by conserving and positively developing one of the sources of rich communitarian culture, development and governance, that of the Bhils,



will be a radically systems changing one in the long run.

The form of politics that has come to dominate the globe now is that of first past the post competitive centralised electoral liberal democracy. In this system central governments of nation states tend to override the lower level governments. The local government institutions at the small town and village level suffer most as their needs and aspirations are sacrificed for the development of mega cities and industrial centres. The net result is that there is tremendous destruction of the environment and the livelihood opportunities of the urban and rural poor. This kind of political system is also extremely divisive socially as it tends to pit communities and groups against each other in the fight to gain control of state power which is crucial to secure a good livelihood. Thus it is imperative that a more decentralised and localised form of democratic politics be promoted which works through consensus rather than by competition. The present intervention will provide an impetus for the revival of the traditional village council led management of affairs which is central to the lives of the Bhil adivasis and the eventual evolution of an alternative decentralised political system globally as an antidote to the ills of the present centralised one.

At the micro level of western Madhya Pradesh this new intervention will over time contribute to the ongoing movement of the Bhils for attaining a strong self identity based on a rich written literature that is capable of contending with the literature and culture of the non-adivasis and thus give them social equality with their oppressors. This will in turn help them to negotiate the modern political and economic systems on equal terms with the non-adivasis and thus gain a fair share of the developmental cake.

At the macro level this new literature being the product of an agricultural society will first of all provide intellectual and cultural support for the ongoing national and worldwide efforts for the revival of agriculture which



is in crisis all over the world leading to serious problems of food and livelihood security. The modernisation of agriculture based on artificial inputs has proved to be a failed enterprise and there is a growing trend towards the revival of sustainable organic agriculture. This is especially important for India which is primarily an agricultural country. The main agricultural areas in India have all come under the sway of modern agriculture and have lost the traditional seeds and processes and are suffering from severe erosion of soil quality and water sources.

The Bhils still retain traditional knowledge in this regard and a strengthening of their culture will lead to a strengthening of their agriculture too. At present the worldwide movement for sustainable agriculture lacks a mass base and a supporting culture which will help it to thrive. Sustainable agriculturists are perceived as quixotic deviants rather than as proponents of a serious alternative system. The AEP has actively promoted a sustainable agriculture based socio-econo-political system as a comprehensive and viable alternative and the present intervention by strengthening its cultural dimensions will contribute positively to this movement. At a later point of time an alternative agriculture based system of development that is less destructive of nature can develop from these preliminary efforts.

Finally agricultural societies are all highly religious given their dependence on nature and the need to placate forces which are beyond their control. This is why despite the Nehruvian project of building a secular society and the specific injunction that the state will not function in support of any religion, in practice the majority of Indian society having rural agricultural roots has remained deeply religious and all the mainstream parties including the Communist Party of India in Bengal have to a greater or lesser extent promoted Hinduism. However, of late this has become overly problematical due to the aggressive fundamentalism of the Sangh Parivar. The Hindu fundamentalist organisations have embarked on a proselytisation campaign of the adivasis in violation of their fundamental right to follow freely their own religion as guaranteed under article 25 of the Constitution. The converted adivasis do not get an equal status with the high caste Hindus but are inducted into Hindu society as menials who are even today treated as untouchables by the latter.

The reality of the power of religion in pre-modern agricultural societies has to be acknowledged and fundamentalism has to be countered through promotion of religious diversity. Religious diversity is as much a desired value as cultural diversity for the survival of the human race. The revival of their literature which is traditionally highly religious will automatically lead to a revival of the Bhili animist and nature friendly religion and provide them with an effective antidote to the

proselytising thrust of the fundamentalist Hindu organisations.

### **A New Developmental Intervention**

The two broad prevalent modes of developmental intervention for the improvement of the socio-economic condition of the adivasis in particular and the rural population in general among NGOs, social movements and the government are that of service delivery and political empowerment. The interventions in the cultural sphere mainly through the use of audio-visual media like street theatre for the purpose of information, education and communication (IEC) have not been independent developmental interventions but have subserved the above mentioned two modes and the lack of a written literature of the adivasis has hampered these efforts. Thus despite over two decades of developmental and empowerment interventions the impact in terms of creating a self-confident Bhil population capable of pinpointing and solving their problems independently has been less than desirable.

The intervention of the AEP makes a quantum jump both horizontally and vertically from the current practice. Horizontally it makes the original assertion that the creation of a new living literature of the Bhils from their traditional folklore is itself a new and major developmental intervention that can parallel the prevailing two modes in the case of adivasi development because of their lack of a literate culture. Vertically this intervention will result in considerably improving the content and style of the IEC campaigns which are a necessary part of the prevailing two modes of intervention. Moreover, the experience of service delivery and political mass organisation has shown that these processes rarely become self-supporting and have to be constantly reinforced with funding and professional assistance by outsiders. In this respect the creation of a literature has historically been a self-sustaining process once the initial critical mass of writers and readers has been established either through voluntary efforts or by some organised action.

This brings us to the existing interventions in the field of culture. Anthropologists Amita Baviskar (Baviskar, 1995) and Engelbert Stiglmeier (Stiglmeier, 1970) have studied some Bhili myths from an academic anthropological perspective so as to better understand the social dynamics of the Bhils. Jyotindra Jain has also studied some of these myths to assess their aesthetic qualities and to determine their relationship with the mainstream Hindu culture (Jain, 1984). Christian missionaries too have transcribed some of the myths but not in any sustained manner and not with the objective of the creation of a new literature. Similarly the government departments of tribal development too have from time to time attempted to publish reading material in Bhili



dialects but these too have been haphazard and have necessarily lacked a mass character.

The decade of the nineteen nineties has seen yet another academic project launched by Ganesh Devy for the study of the languages of the adivasis of northern Maharashtra and Gujarat (Devy, 2003). In this externally funded venture a biannual journal is published by turns in four different Bhili dialects meaning that new written material is produced in a particular dialect only once in two years. Moreover, there is little attention being paid to the transcription of the folklore of the adivasis. Thus, this effort has spread itself thin by dealing with too many languages and so the output in terms of new literature in any of these is quite minimal and lacks the necessary critical mass of writers and readers to pose a strong challenge the hegemony of Marathi and Gujarati as the dominant languages.

The AEP effort, therefore, builds on all these previous interventions while giving them a new and purposeful thrust of reviving Bhili culture with the intention of positing it as a vehicle of sustainable development. The intervention thus seeks to protect and build on the fundamental right to culture of the Bhils guaranteed in article 29 of the Constitution of India. The Muslims and Sikhs have taken advantage of this provision but there has been no such specific cultural rights intervention among adivasis in the central Indian region. Thus what is being implemented by the AEP is a best practice framework for adivasi cultural renewal that can not only rejuvenate the living conditions of the Bhils but can be gainfully replicated for the development of other adivasi cultures.

### **The Over-arching Social Problem being Addressed**

This intervention addresses the serious problem that the culture of the Bhils is considered to be sub-human by the non- adivasis of the region and even the modern Indian state seeks to destroy the culture of the adivasis nationally by introducing a uniform modernising sweep through its developmental and educational policies. The problem assumes a vicious circle nature as the Bhils internalise this devaluation and tend to reject their culture. Given that most Bhils are not able to imbibe the modern non- adivasi culture in a successful manner this further reduces their ability to fight effectively in the

competitive political and economic systems that prevail at present and leaves them even more disrespectful of their own culture.

The extent of this de-humanization of the Bhils can be illustrated with an example. There was a great Bhil rebel named Tantia who fought the British and their subservient upper caste Hindu landlords valiantly in the latter half of the nineteenth century for over a decade and a half. He was a Robin Hood like character who used to distribute the loot from his raids on the British and the landlords among the poor Bhils. Thus Bhil women used to consider him to be their brother and used to tell their children that Tantia Mama (maternal uncle) would bring gifts for them. He was finally apprehended by the British through treachery and hanged after a summary trial.

Following the British the non- adivasis of the region regarded him not as a freedom fighter but as a dacoit. Later the term mama too lost its value and degenerated into a pejorative name for the Bhils. The Bhils who have lost independent livelihood opportunities over the last century and a half are today forced to migrate to nearby cities and rich agricultural areas for employment. Thus the Vadodara – Kota passenger which runs on the main Mumbai – Delhi trunk rail route is most of the time filled with Bhils going up

and down from their homes to their places of work and back and has come to be called the “mama gari”.

When the process of forming a forum for the revival of adivasi culture was begun, the major problem faced was the sense of shame that the educated adivasis felt about speaking and writing in Bhili in public places. A pamphlet in Bhili was published to popularise the whole idea. Even senior literate adivasis would go into peals of laughter on reading it. The process of reading the pamphlet itself proved to be laborious as there is no written literature in Bhili dialects. What more can be indicative of the extent of decay of a language than this reluctance of the literate Bhils to converse and write in it. Simultaneously the illiterate Bhil masses are being wooed away by television and they do not spend as much time as they used to do to celebrate their own festivals. There is an increasing tendency to celebrate Hindu festivals such as Ganesh Puja and Durga Navaratri instead.

***Given that most Bhils are not able to imbibe the modern non- adivasi culture in a successful manner this further reduces their ability to fight effectively in the competitive political and economic systems that prevail at present and leaves them even more disrespectful of their own culture.***



This lack of a positive self image is a major obstacle in the search for a viable system of livelihood for the Bhils. Consequently the core of the intervention draws from the glorious history of the European and modern Indian cultural renaissance movements and posits that the solution to this problem lies in the creation of a strong new literature using the rich classical resource of the Bhils' oral folklore as the cornerstone of the process of revival of a Bhili culture that can rival the dominant non-advansi culture in all respects and so provide the Bhils with an equal cultural footing in their struggle for emancipation. At a higher level the successful implementation of this intervention will provide a replicable blueprint for the strengthening of non-literate advansi cultures nationally and worldwide and so maintain cultural diversity. Indeed the whole point of the present intervention is to chart out a map for the revival and promotion of advansi cultures in a sustainable way through mass participation.

As mentioned earlier the problem of the marginalisation of advansi culture is closely linked to the proliferation of a consumerist monoculture worldwide which is proving to be dangerously harmful for future human development. Thus by seeking to strengthen advansi cultures the present idea seeks to address this serious problem of loss of cultural diversity on a global scale as will be described in detail later.

### **The Main Systemic Problem being Addressed**

The most serious systemic problem that the developmental initiatives in the western Madhya Pradesh region in particular and in advansi areas in general have been unable to resolve is that they have not been able to inspire the advansis to devise and then implement their own solutions to their problems of social, economic and cultural deprivation due to the culture of silence which stifles their articulation and innate genius giving rise to the problem of social devaluation described above. Invariably schemes and plans that have originated elsewhere have been dumped on the advansis with the result that not only has any sustainable process of development not evolved but that the advansis have continued to remain mute recipients of the crumbs thrown to them. This has meant that the age-old exploitative structures have continued to hold sway. In many cases new developmental initiatives have been sabotaged by the non-advansis who have been entrusted with their implementation.

For instance watershed development schemes have not addressed the basic lack of land resources with the advansis in the region which has meant that even after successful completion of these schemes the advansis have not been able to augment their incomes to higher levels sufficient for sustainable living from these small holdings

because the enhanced production is not sufficient for the purpose. The response of the government has been the introduction of jersey cow based milk production and vermiculture. These, however, have failed because there is insufficient wasteland available for fodder development enough to make these latter schemes successful. The net result is that the advansis who took government loans to start these projects are now in debt which they cannot possibly repay. This is in fact the situation with most subsidized poverty alleviation schemes of the government. The failure of the Integrated Rural Development Programme to bring about any widespread sustainable income generation due to this inability to take into account the views of the beneficiaries has been well documented.

Similarly political empowerment interventions have addressed agenda close to the heart of the activists without paying attention to the actual demands of those who are being organised leading to the eventual dissipation of these movements. A very good example of this is the Narmada Bachao Andolan. The movement initially started by addressing the genuine fear voiced by the advansi oustees of the Sardar Sarovar dam that they would be displaced from their lands without proper rehabilitation. Later, however, the movement was converted into a battle to stop the construction of the dam altogether mainly on the basis of the ideological predilections of the non-advansi activists who led the movement. The pressure of the movement forced the government to better the rehabilitation package on offer and the advansis plumped for this but the activists went on fighting for the no-dam option with lesser and lesser people. This lack of articulation of the advansis has meant that the two decades of work put in by various development and empowerment organisations has not been able to bring about self sufficiency in the Bhils.

This lack of articulation can be seen also in the lack of effective implementation of two very important statutes. The fifth schedule of the Constitution of India provides for special governance of the notified scheduled advansi areas in a state on the recommendations of the tribal advisory council comprised of advansi legislators. Similarly the Panchayati Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) provides for the advansi gram sabhas to be paramount in deciding on the use of the resources of the village and in resolving disputes. However, in reality these two powerful statutes are not being implemented in the way they should be because the advansis and their elected representatives are not able to press for this in any articulate manner (Banerjee, 2014).

The urgent need therefore is that the advansis be able to articulate their felt needs and act in an organised manner in accordance with their own genius so that they are fulfilled. The publication of literature in Bhili dialects



addresses precisely this problem of lack of articulation among the Bhils. The Bhils are now writing about their problems and their culture and history in independent public fora that are funded by their own contributions and a tremendous process of increasing articulation has been set into motion. The confidence created by this intervention among a new class of Bhili intellectuals has also lead them to write in other languages in the mainstream media.

The present intervention is thus an initial step in the direction of building up the ability of effective articulation of Bhil adivasis as a prelude to breaking the deafening culture of silence that muzzles them. The vast Bhil masses remain unheard because what they say does not carry enough cultural clout to make any impact.

There are many NGOs and people's organisations in western Madhya Pradesh doing worthwhile work in the spheres of service delivery and political empowerment. There is a significant population associated with these organisations either directly as beneficiaries or participants or indirectly as well wishers and supporters. Workshops organised by these agencies and the AEP to critically analyse the results of the work done by them over the past decade and a half have clearly brought out the need for a concentrated intervention on the cultural front to give a wider base to their activities and also to counter the negative attitudes of the administration, the Hindu fundamentalist organisations and the non-adviasi development workers and social activists. This is the basis of the present intervention in this direction, the most important being the researching of the history of famous Bhil martyrs like Khajya Naik, Motia Bhil, Tantia Bhil, Chitu Kirar and others. Sustained lobbying and mass celebrations of the martyrdom of these heroes has resulted in their being acknowledged as freedom fighters of repute and the recognition that the Bhils had played a major resistive role against the British. Similarly Bhili songs and stories and modern versions of these have been recorded and published.

### **Positive Local Impact of the Intervention**

A narrative will bring out the way in which people's lives can change from a cultural initiative. The adivasis in Potla village in Dewas district were held in thrall by the only sahukar in the village who used to rule their lives in all respects. Some of them heard of the plans for holding the martyrdom celebrations of Tantia Bhil and came and told the rest of the villagers about it and distributed the pamphlets and booklets on Tantia's brave deeds to the educated adivasi youth. The result was that the villagers decided to participate in the yatra to Tantia's Samadhi. For this they needed to hire a truck to carry their possessions and they contacted their sahukar who initially agreed to give them his truck on hire. But on the

day of their setting out the sahukar declined to give them the truck and also threatened not to give them any loans for the forthcoming cropping season.

This incensed the villagers so much that they decided to socially boycott the sahukar and his family and made alternative arrangements to participate in the yatra. There was no need for activists to go and organise the people as it just took a few pamphlets and a general milieu of cultural revival to bring about the end to generations of servitude. The emancipatory power of literature and its capability to bring about a positive change in the life of the oppressed has been established time and again throughout history and the French Revolution is the well known example in this regard. The American freedom fighters were influenced by the writings of Thomas Paine to rebel against the British. The freedom fighters for India's independence too were motivated by the publication of new and liberating literature. Indeed the dalits in this country have been far more enterprising in this regard as compared to the adivasis of the central and western Indian regions.

The important thing is that this new literature must be published as part of a general milieu of emancipatory socio-economic change. The work of the various civil society organisations of the Bhils over the past two decades in general and the activities of the AEP in particular have created such a milieu of change and it only needs a systematic and well articulated ideology for its further expansion which the present intervention intends to provide by encouraging the people to hark back to their rich oral folklore and their nature friendly animist beliefs and practices.

### **Potential for Wider Application**

All over the country and even worldwide adivasi cultures are on the verge of extinction. This has something to do with the decline of indigenous agriculture on which these cultures were based and with the homogenising culture of western consumerism which has been popularised through television soap operas, sports broadcasts and commercials. A global market is sought to be created for the products of the industrial west by washing away local cultural influences from the brains of people through this powerful cultural onslaught of western consumerism.

For instance the tremendous concentration of the audio-visual media on the Cricket World Cup in South Africa in 2003 seeped through to a remote adivasi village in the region where an old woman who did not know anything about cricket still lamented the fact that India had lost the final. The irony is that nationalism is being promoted through an unproductive symbol such as cricket when such poor people as this adivasi woman are on the edge of starvation because of a lack of viable livelihood opportunities just to sell various consumerist products of



industry. A victory in the final would not in any way have improved the living conditions of poor people in this country but a major improvement in their condition brought about by the adoption of more appropriate development policies would automatically ensure that we win more accolades in the international arena in sports which are played by more countries of the world than cricket.

This erosion of cultural diversity has come to be recognised as a serious impediment to the future of the human race. Thus my innovation by stressing that the adivasi culture and the agricultural base from which it springs have the potential to offer an alternative to this destructive homogenisation of culture and livelihoods has vast areas of application not only in the preservation of adivasi cultures but also that of the culture of more so called advanced societies. The AEP innovation provides a best practice framework for carrying out such a revival and preservation of cultural and livelihood diversity.

### The Larger Impact of this Innovation

It is difficult to state exactly how many people have already benefited from the implementation of the innovation so far. The people who are consciously involved with the various organisations that are a part of this process number about one hundred thousand. However, many adivasis who may not be openly supportive of these efforts due to various reasons secretly go along with the process and try to move it forward in many ways. Thus people even in remote areas have heard of the revival of the Tantia festival and have drawn heart from it without having participated in it. Many mainstream adivasi political figures from all parties have asserted in public fora that the revivalist movement of the Bhils is a positive development and some have even participated in the programmes of the AEP. The pressure created by the AEP so far has forced the government to take note of rising level of awareness of the adivasis and initiate beneficial development policies which have helped the whole of the adivasi population of the four states of Western India which is close to twelve million.

Today we have a globalized world with far flung nations and communities tied together by trade in commodities and services, cross border manufacturing, financial transfers and also a massive communications industry. Thus it is relatively easy for the more well endowed societies to press their social, economic and political thought on those who are not so advantaged. This process is happening at all levels from the village to the global. We have a situation in which cultural production is taking place in the affluent west and being broadcast for consumption by the world at large. The western cultural icons and agencies dominate the powerful medium of television, the newer and equally powerful

medium of the internet as well as the various printed media.

This cultural domination favours the economic interests of the various corporate behemoths that control the world economy. It is in the interests of these corporations that the cultural tastes of the population of the whole world are homogenised. This has created a critical situation for human survival with the loss of diversity in the biological, economic and social spheres in addition to the cultural sphere. As mentioned earlier the only way in which this dangerous cultural homogenisation and erosion of diversity caused by thoughtless industrialism can be challenged is by rediscovering the virtues of traditional agriculture and the culture that it gave rise to. Today it is the indigenous people worldwide who still retain the skills and knowledge of traditional agriculture and the accompanying culture. Thus the work of the AEP by reviving and conserving the indigenous Bhil culture will challenge the dominant system of development and governance which is increasingly being adopted at all levels from the local to the global. Since centralisation and homogenisation invariably necessitates violence which is so evident in various forms today the AEP's stress on decentralisation and difference presents a prospectus for peace and amity worldwide. This intervention, therefore, will impact development thought and practice and make it more amenable to the evolution of sustainable living and working patterns in the future at all levels from the local to the global.

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## Leader's Speak: Simon Brown

*In this interview we get to talk with Mr. Simon Brown, Country Director VSO (Voluntary Services Overseas)*

### How come you came to join the voluntary sector?

I came in a very roundabout way, having spent most of my career working in the corporate sector for twenty years in Europe, Asia and the US (with Barclays Bank and Procter & Gamble) and owning a guest-house (a small hotel) in the French Pyrenees. So this is really a third career, starting first as an international volunteer with VSO in Nepal and then joining the staff there, moving to China as country director, then Papua New Guinea and now here in India for a few months.

### What problems do you see in the functioning of the sector?

I see less of problems and more of opportunity; so much opportunity in engaging talented and connected youth and mature, professionally experienced people in volunteering; sharing skills and experiences and developing innovative solutions to improving peoples' lives; so much opportunity for the development sector to work with both corporate and public sectors in bringing those innovations to scale to fight poverty at scale; particularly in India which can reach a scale unimaginable anywhere else in the world.

### As a country director of VSO what are the emerging issues facing the sector?

As an organisation transforming itself into a local Trust and as a sector we need to adapt to new realities; particularly in developing cross-sector partnerships and in recognising how critical these are to scale. That means learning new languages and not using development jargon; of packaging solutions in ways that are attracting to corporate partners; of co-creating solutions that not only make development sense but also business sense; perhaps even new business models; of leveraging technologies and value



chains; and, of course, all the time thinking how solutions can be integrated into affordable public services.

### What opportunities do you see for the voluntary sector in the future?

There are unlimited in India; a huge pool of talented and connected youth who want to engage in development (an amazing twelve percent of the G20's graduates will come from India by 2020!); a CSR framework that encourages cross-sector partnerships; terrific government programmes of youth engagement (not least of all NSS and NYKS); equally impressive government commitments to rural and urban poverty reduction. All of these add up to huge potential for innovation and scale.



# Organization Profile: Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra

***SAHBHAGI SHIKSHAN KENDRA (SSK), a support organisation is a centre for participatory learning which works for the empowerment of socially and economically backward communities by promoting their participation for good governance through capacity building of CSOs, CBOs and institutions of self-governance.***

**Vision Statement:** SSK strives for a society which is based on equity and justice. It intervenes to enable the poor, marginalized women and excluded sections of the society by encouraging, strengthening and organizing them to enhance their participation in the process of their own development. In order to promote the philosophy of development, SSK is trying to build the capacity of CSO's and other change making groups, CBOs and other organizations to play an active role in positively impacting the lives of the poor and marginalized communities

**Mission:** The mission of SSK is to build and strengthen capacity of civil society organizations through an approach where people are placed at the centre of all development initiatives. Partnership and mutual sharing of ideas and information with the target groups are its core values.

SSK works with grassroots organizations that strive for social change. SSK provides support to grassroots level partners through organising training programmes, workshops, and intensive support in its programmes. **SAHBHAGI SHIKSHAN KENDRA (SSK)**, as a support organization and a centre for Participatory Learning and Action, was founded in 1990 to promote and strengthen civil society organizations of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and Jharkhand. SSK strive for building and strengthening capacities of CSOs through people centric approach placing people at the centre of all developmental initiatives. Partnership and reciprocal sharing of information with the target groups is the nucleus of our values. **SSK** works with grassroots organizations that strive for social change. We provide Capacity Building support to our partners through organizing training programmes, workshops and providing intensive support in their programmes. To

harmonize/supplement our efforts and enhance the knowledge base, we also undertake studies and disseminate information on vibrant and imperative developmental issues. SSK strives for a society, which is based on equity and justice. It intervenes to enable the poor, marginalised women and excluded section of the society by encouraging, strengthening and organising them to enhance their participation in the process of their own development. In order to promote this philosophy of development, SSK is trying to build the capacity of CSO's and other change making groups, CBOs and other organisations to play an active role in positively impacting the lives of the poor and marginalised communities.

## Emergence

Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra (SSK), a Center for Participatory Learning, was established in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), in 1990. The Kendra emerged in response to the development scenario prevailing then in the Hindi speaking belt viz, North India, especially Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The Voluntary sector had its roots from the movements of total revolution that had spread from Bihar in the late 1970s to other parts of the country in a bid to overthrow the existing social order and usher in a new society.

However, there was no blueprint of the means to the end and was a time bound projects without any sense of sustenance and development. The paradigm of "Development" was totally missing and there was an extreme dearth of awareness, knowledge and capacity to effectively manage projects/programs, manage resources, establish linkages, etc. In other words, management of Organisation was lacking which hampered the growth of a new social order and proved to be a hindrance for development. Responding to the need for strengthening the



capacities of Organisation working at the grassroots for lending efficiency and effectiveness to their Organisation and interventions, SSK emerged as a support Organisation, focusing its activities initially in Uttar Pradesh and South Bihar.

In its efforts to provide systematic program management support to Organisation working at the grass roots, it has established a commitment to strengthen the institutions of local self-governance through capacity building support to various actors of Civil Society. SSK, therefore envisions organisation of Civil Society towards accountable and transparent governance for people centered development. To attain this vision, SSK is engaged in strengthening the CSOs to contribute effective towards empowerment of women and other exploited and marginalised sections of the community.

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SSK Core Principles

In its efforts to provide systematic program management support to Organisation working at the grass roots, it has established a commitment to strengthen the institutions of local self-governance through capacity building support to various actors of Civil Society.

### SSK has ten thematic areas

- Civil Society Building
- Trainings & Workshops
- Governance Resource Center which comprises of GRC - Rural & GRC -Urban
- Gender Mainstreaming in organization and women Empowerment program
- Strengthening Citizen Collectives
- Disaster Management
- Education for Dalit, SC & Muslim Girls
- Migration Issues
- Health and Nutrition Issues
- Livelihood- Skill Building
- Forest Bill

### SSK Core values:

Partnership and mutual sharing of ideas and information with the target groups are its core values.

SSK has developed a number of training programs which are standardised with a package of modules learning materials, tool kits, exercise etc. These training programs are very popular, have received wide publicity and have been adopted by other NGOs at their organisation and areas of operation. The learning materials are also in high demand since they cater to other specific training programs of the other NGOs. SSK is also invited as a resource organisation at regular intervals at its Training Center.

Civil Society Building, to strengthen the civil society, capacity building of CSOs, CBOs and other players for effective management of the processes and efforts intended to bring positive changes in the society.

- Trainings & Workshops
- Governance Resource Center which comprises of GRC - Rural & GRC -Urban to strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies respectively.
- Gender Mainstreaming in organization and women Empowerment program..
- Strengthening Citizen Collectives - Mirzapur, Sitapur & Khairabad
- Disaster Management
- Education for Dalit, SC & Muslim Girls
- Migration Issues
- Health and Nutrition Issues
- Livelihood- Skill Building

Forest Bill - SSK with its partner organization Duddhi Gram Vikas Samiti (DGVS) is addressing the issues of Forest Rights of tribes and other forests dwellers. It is extensively addressing the issue of forest rights in 4 blocks (Duddhi, Maurpur, Babhni and Chopan) and has facilitated form "Van Adhikar Manch" at all Gram Panchayat Level, block level and District Level. It has also facilitated form "Rojgar Grameen Sangharsh Morcha" and conducting public hearings to address the issues of NREGA. Besides these, SHG groups, Bal Sanskar Kendra etc has been formed to strengthen the community. It has also established Help Line for easy access and guide the community to get their rights. The main focus of the intervention is to aware and establish rights of forest dwellers. The focus is on empowering women and paving a way for a life of dignity for the targeted group in a sustainable manner.



## IMPORTANT NOTICE

Dear Members, Associates and Friends,

This is a data collection questionnaire made by VANI for our internal records. Please cooperate with us and fill the form.

- 1) Do you feel there is a need for renewing the registration laws for voluntary organizations? Yes / No
- 2) Does your organization face problems in understanding FCRA laws and taxation laws relating to voluntary organizations? Yes/ No
- 3) Have VANI workshops on FCRA helped your organization in understanding its provisions? Yes/No
- 4) Is your organization following self-certification standards? Yes/No
- 5) Give your suggestions for improving our workshops? (Please elaborate)
- 6) What percentage of women are employed in your organization? (Please provide the percentage)
- 7) What percentage of women are there in your organization's governing board (For example 70% are males and 30% are females) (Please provide the percentage)

Regards,

VANI

*(You can tear this page and mail it to VANI. Please ignore if you have already sent through email)*

## BLOCK THE DATE ANNUAL NATIONAL CONSULTATION OF VANI

Annual National Consultation of VANI is scheduled on February 18-19, 2015, at Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, New Delhi. Every year VANI organizes National Consultation to articulate the contemporary concerns of voluntary sector.

**Kindly block the dates, and we will share the details shortly.**