

# RIPPLE EFFECT

SCM 08  
09

Social Communications Media Department  
Sophia Polytechnic



# Editorial

**H**ave you ever thrown a pebble into a pond and watched the patterns form? Initially, the pebble disturbs the stillness of the water but eventually the water settles down. The ripple effect of change follows a similar pattern. But the problem is that not everyone's willing to pick up that pebble.

We are getting closer to each other but simultaneously the world is narrowing in terms of communication, widening in terms of ideas and thoughts. Everyone has a different opinion on how to change the world if they want to change it.

When we joined the Social Communications Media Course of the Sophia Polytechnic we were constantly being told that we are supposed to be the 'change makers'. We all asked ourselves, am I capable of taking up this responsibility? Where do I start? What do I do? Before we knew it, there was really no time to do anything else except completing assignments and attending lectures. But assignments weren't just about writing an article to complete it or attending lectures to get brownie points. Something was changing. But we still wanted to hold on desperately to old perspective and stay in our comfort zones.

Some feel there is no need for change. To them we say: look around and ask yourself if you like the world you see. If you don't, maybe you want to pick up a pebble. You might want to throw it with as much force as you can muster for real change. This magazine is our pebble and we're not sure of how its ripples will fan out.

It brought us a little closer, towards the change we wish to see. This is our way of showing how we can all make that right change both from within ourselves and outside, thus enabling the ripple effect.

Make it happen!

**Kunjarani D'Souza**  
**Maithili Padukone**  
**Smitha Menon**  
**Yakuta Poonawalla**

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Jeroo F. Mulla, for being the incredible inspiration she is and will always continue to be for us. Also, P. Sainath and Smruti Koppikar, for always urging us to "be skeptical", and Gracy Vaz and Nilesch Correia for helping us unconditionally. We would like to thank our sponsor Anoop Bartaria, and Nishad Joshi for designing the magazine at such short notice. Lastly, and most importantly, we would like to thank Jerry Pinto for all his support, encouragement and unfailing dedication, without which the publication of this magazine would not be possible.

## **SOPHIA POLYTECHNIC**

### **Directress**

Sr. Cella Remedios

## **SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA DEPARTMENT**

### **Head of Department**

Jeroo F. Mulla

### **Core faculty**

Nirmita Gupta  
Sunitha Chitrapu

### **Visiting faculty**

Ajay Noronha  
Anita Khushwaha  
Anjoo Daswani  
Anupamaa Joshi  
Deepa Bhatia  
Geeta Rao  
Jerry Pinto  
Meeta Bajaj  
Monica Merchant  
Niraj Voralia  
P. Sainath  
Paromita Vohra  
Rabindra Hazari  
Sameer Sabnis  
Smruti Koppikar  
Sunayana Sadrangani  
Suresh Venkat

### **Administrative Staff**

Gracy Vaz  
Nilesch Correia

## **STUDENT TEAM**

### **Editors**

Kunjarani D'Souza  
Majhili Padukonè  
Smitha Menon  
Yakuta Poonawalla

### **Associate editors**

Anchal Mahajan  
Radhika Iyengar  
Tapti Ghosh

### **Marketing**

Himalika Yadav  
Kinjal Mehta  
Pooja Chauhan  
Smitha Menon  
Yakuta Poonawalla

### **Production**

Aryaa Naik  
Mugdha Singh  
Kunjarani D'Souza  
Shreya Ganguly  
Shuddha Dutta  
Smitha Menon  
Sruti Visweswaran  
Trupti Kanade  
Yakuta Poonawalla

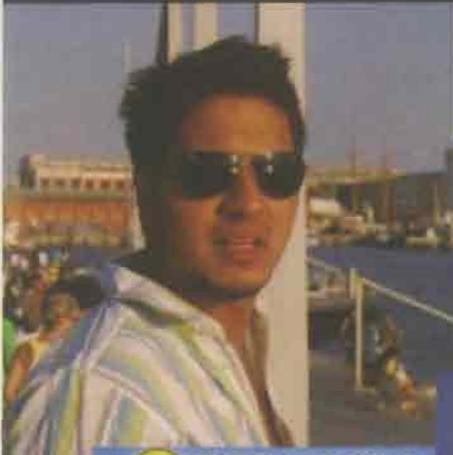
# Contents

What group am I today?	6
Home sweet home?	8
Her's by right!	9
We don't need no normal education!	10
Beyond education	12
Labour day	13
The dark night	14
Easy high	15
Strayin' alive?	16
Work in India	17
Every drop counts	18
Clear your plate	19
Plant more trees	20
Lungs of the city	21
Building green	22
Plastic fantastic?	24
What rot!	25
Bus karo!	26
Car seva	27
Pedal power	28
Freecycling	29
Adopt a child	30
Include me out	31
Know your rights	32
Halla bol	33
No vote, no voice	34
Power cords	35
Heal 'thy' mind	36
The green way out	37
Rubber up	38
Butt out!	39
Dance	40
Smile	41
Hug	41
Must watch films	42

# What group am I today?



How real are internet communities? **Monica James** explores community building both online and off.



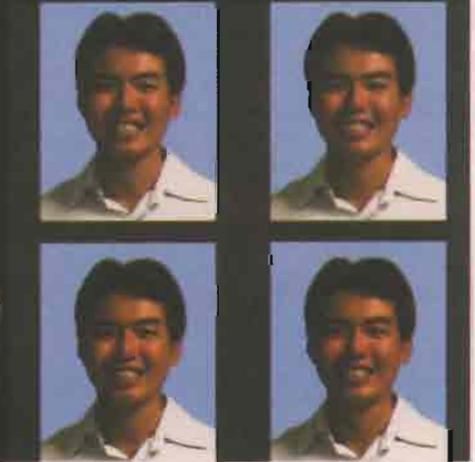
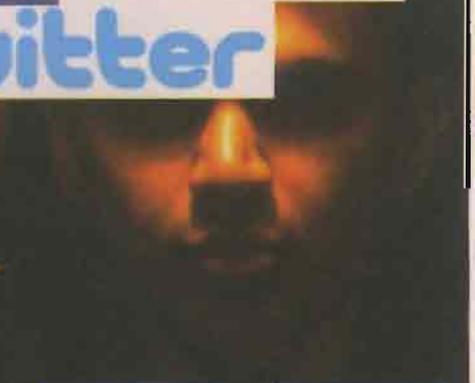
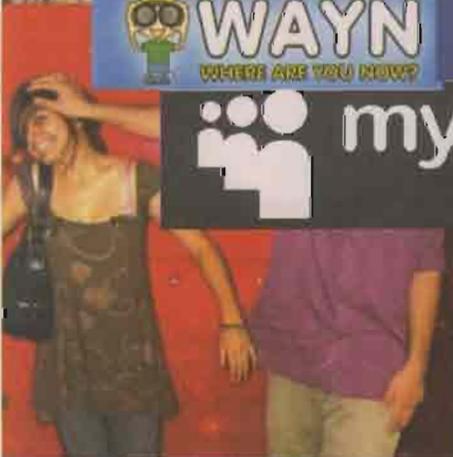
facebook

orkut



myspace.com

twitter



Long hair, tattoos, leather jackets, Gothic jewelry, imposing motorbikes and a don't-\*\*\*k-with-me attitude; the figure of the bad biker is ubiquitous in popular Americana. Over time, the paraphernalia related to the rides and lives of these mythic Johnny Strablers, the post modern anti-heroes of the '60s, have become symbols that non bikers identify with. These riding communities unite their members in a community. If for some bizarre reason a member were to find himself being forced to answer that age-old bouncer "Who am I?", all the associated ideas and attitudes might serve as cheat codes. These are often used to express social identity, to reaffirm or create a sense of place.

So you're no Hells Angel but all of us belong to some community or group. Even if we don't, we're often herded into one category or another on the basis of appearance, place of residence, the trace of an accent or the absence of one, something, anything. For example, if you have a Christian name or if you wear western clothes or have a night life, you might find yourself placed in that infamous, elusive sorority of "Bandra girls". Classifications like these ignore realities; they also ignore what the classified see themselves as. They are often based on poor logic, or prejudice. In a paper entitled *Is 'identity' a useful cross-cultural concept?*, Richard Handler, the renowned cultural anthropologist recently argued: "Groups are not bounded objects in the natural world. Rather, 'they' are symbolic processes that emerge and dissolve in particular contexts of action. Groups do not have essential identities; indeed they ought not to be defined as things at all. For any imaginable social group -- defined in terms of nationality, class, locality, or gender -- there is no definitive way to specify 'who we are', for 'who we are' is a communicative process that includes many voices and varying degrees of understanding and, importantly, misunderstanding."

Fortunately we can find an increasing number of communities being formed on the basis of common interests, visions and ideas. E-communities like Orkut, Facebook, Myspace and Twitter are becoming quite the rage with Facebook and Myspace attracting almost 230 million unique visitors in April 2008 alone. With groups like "Citizens for Peace" to "Tom Robbins is my personal hero", these online communities have something for everyone. However, not everyone is convinced about the merits of internet communities. "You can have 5,000 members on your group but you'd be lucky if five of them show up for a meeting," says Keith Menon, Co-

founder of Batti Bandh – an effort to create awareness about global warming by getting people to switch off all lights and electrical appliances for an hour on 15th December each year. He feels that the purpose of a community is to achieve concrete goals. "Sitting around and talking" evidently just won't do. "You have to know when you start out whether you are a talking community or a doing community," says Keith. The fun thing

If you have a Christian name or if you wear western clothes or have a night life, you might find yourself placed in that infamous, elusive sorority of "Bandra girls"

about these communities is that you don't have to look a certain way, belong to a certain religion, location or region to be a part of them. Abdeali Padhiwala of Explorers & Adventurers, a voluntary organization involved in popularizing adventure sports says, "Age and profession doesn't count at all. During our yearly Matheran trip we had a six-year-old girl trekking, we also had a 55-year-old uncle with a big paunch slogging it out with his family in tow." He says, "There isn't any type that dominates the group."

Being a part of a group or a community implies many things. Communities can provide a sense of belonging and identification, one can attempt to achieve commonly agreed upon objectives, or in case of exclusive communities just revel in the status of being a member.

Dhanya Pilo aka Decoy started the Wall Project, an initiative in which she and her group of friends went around coloring the walls of homes and shops in Bandra with wacky graffiti designs.

"The idea was to start a conversation, with no political or religious attachments," says Dhanya. When initiatives like these attract voluntary members, a community of like minded people is formed. These groups give us a chance to define ourselves in terms of what we finally choose to do.

Abdeali says, "Not everyone can do rock climbing, it has to run in the blood", For the most part, that's true. One must feel strongly about the aims of whichever group one joins, the operative word being passion. "You need to feel really passionately about something in order to

base a group on it or even join a group. People join communities because they think it's cool but most of the time they are not committed enough to do the work that needs to be done," says Keith.

But if you don't find a group which caters to your specific interests you can create your own.

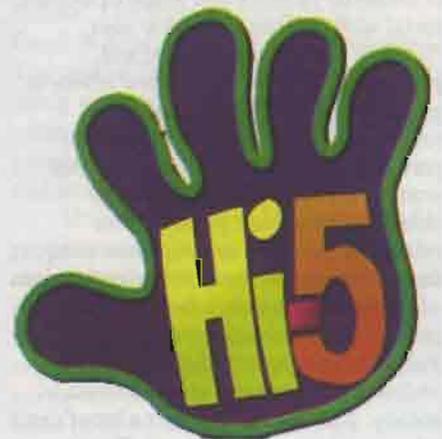
Have an idea? Interest? Discuss the idea with a group of like minded people, the objectives, and the way the members will stay in touch. If things click then you have your core group then and there! Make sure that everything is decided upon after lots of debates and discussions. "All the core members should feel passionately about the issue or else interest will flag half way down the line," says Dhanya.

How do you get more members? Simple – "If you want you can publicize the group by creating an online profile or your core members can introduce members to the group. It's basically networking," says Keith. However the old-fashioned word-of-mouth publicity is still considered the best recommendation.

The other problem is that of hierarchy. "In an informal set-up like a community you have your goals but because no one is going to get sacked for not doing their job, people often shirk responsibility. So it is important to make people accountable for their bit," says Keith. Considering the voluntary nature of the group, hierarchies can be tricky. If the members feel strongly for the cause, they will regulate themselves.

And should you meet? Or should you stay online and virtual? "Well you need to meet up with the group regularly. If not meetings then generally any way of keeping in touch regularly is important so that you can update the members on what's happening with work," says Abdeali.

Just do it! Once you are organized and the basic system is in place then you can go about doing what ever you want to do as a group. Paint the town red, climb Mount Everest, turn off all the lights...the list is endless.



# Home sweet home?

Is home really the safe haven it's supposed to be for women? **Aryaa Naik** investigates.

India recently welcomed the first woman president, Pratibha Patil; Sunita Williams literally reached for the stars; Aung San Suu Kyi is still showing immense courage and determination in her fight for democracy in Burma. The list of women with substance who have set an example of sorts goes on. It's all about women empowerment these days.

But, here's something ironic. A recent UNICEF study pointed out that a large number of women across the globe justify domestic violence. The UNICEF report, *Progress for Children*, shows this alarming fact. Almost 50% of the women felt that a husband or partner was justified in beating them under certain circumstances. The circumstances listed in the report for wife bashing were – neglecting the children, wife going out without telling her husband, she arguing with her husband, refusing sex and burning food, among others. The majority of the women who said that they did not condemn domestic violence were in the age group of 15 to 49.

Another report by World Health Organisation report called *The Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women* says one in six women worldwide suffers domestic violence. Women suffer broken bones, bruises, burns, cracked skulls, dislocated jaws, terror and of course rape. Domestic violence remains largely hidden as many women suffer silently. "Physically or sexually abused women are more likely to suffer long-term health problems, including depression," says psychologist Suchitra Date. "Emotional abuse tends to leaves deeper scars and more lasting effects than physical violence," she adds.

Identifying the main issues pertaining to domestic violence and abuse of women, social worker Renu Gawaskar says, "Victims of emotional, verbal and psychological abuse don't know where to go for help. Family, community and religious influences play a key role in preventing and reporting abuse against women, especially among minority women. Abuse takes place even in relationships before marriage however; though teenage women recognize the signs of relationship violence they feel isolated and unable to discuss it with peers." People largely believe that domestic violence only happens in lower strata of society. This is a myth. "I get a lot of cases where working women from affluent societies have been victims of domestic

violence. There are quite a few cases where the husband is from the IT industry and tends to take out his frustration on his wife or even his child," affirms Date. Advocate

"Emotional abuse tends to leaves deeper scars and more lasting effects than physical violence"

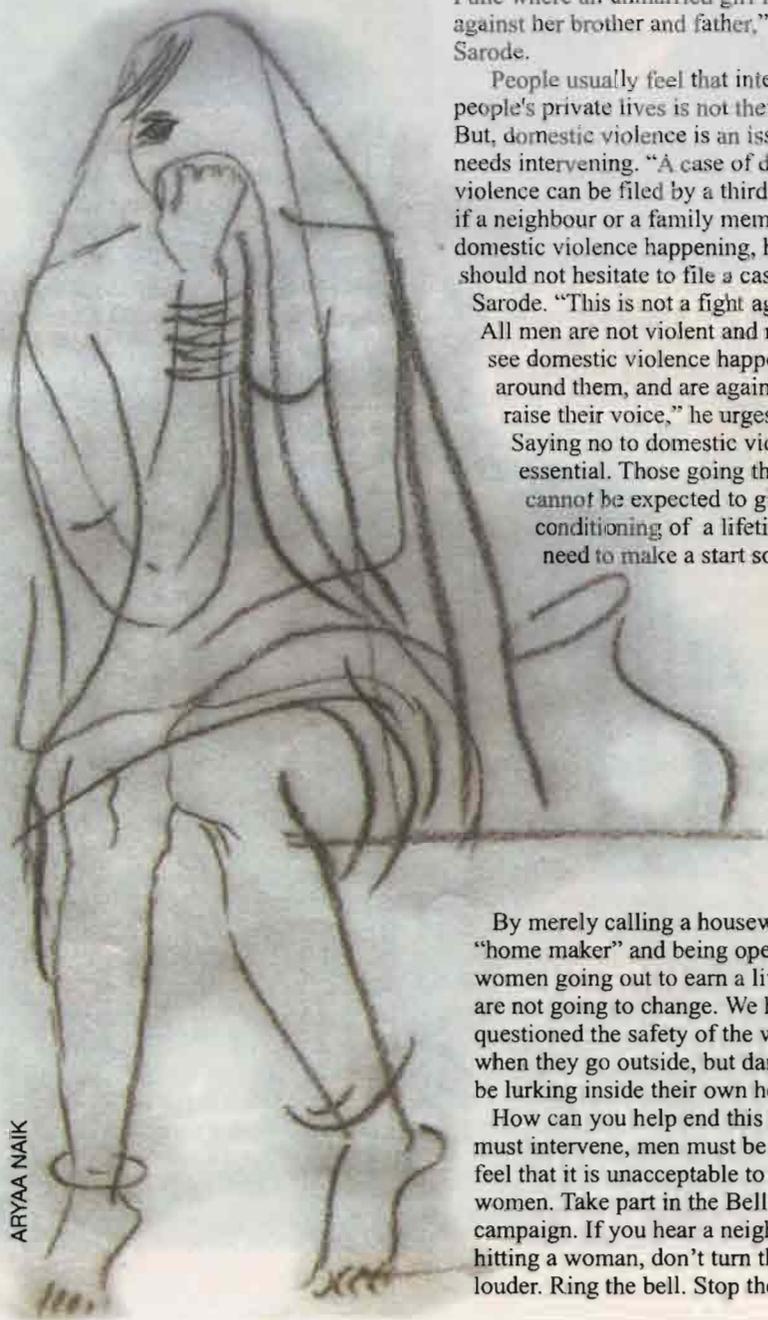
Aseem Sarode says, "We just settled a case of domestic violence where the husband had to pay the wife two crores. This just shows that domestic violence is not restricted to lower strata of society."

Domestic violence itself seems to narrowly focus on marital violence and not on violence perpetrated by men on women in their households, including sisters and mothers. Even initiatives that addressed verbal, mental abuse within relationships not 'sanctioned' as 'marriage', are ignored. "Domestic violence doesn't only pertain to married couples. We just got a case in Pune where an unmarried girl filed a case against her brother and father," says Sarode.

People usually feel that intervening in people's private lives is not their place. But, domestic violence is an issue that needs intervening. "A case of domestic violence can be filed by a third person. So, if a neighbour or a family member sees domestic violence happening, he or she should not hesitate to file a case," asserts Sarode. "This is not a fight against men.

All men are not violent and men who see domestic violence happening around them, and are against it, should raise their voice," he urges.

Saying no to domestic violence is essential. Those going through it, cannot be expected to give up the conditioning of a lifetime but they need to make a start some day.



By merely calling a housewife, a "home maker" and being open to our women going out to earn a living, things are not going to change. We have always questioned the safety of the women folk when they go outside, but danger might be lurking inside their own homes too.

How can you help end this? Society must intervene, men must be made to feel that it is unacceptable to hurt women. Take part in the Bell Bajao campaign. If you hear a neighbour hitting a woman, don't turn the music louder. Ring the bell. Stop the violence.

# Her's by right!

Know what you're rightfully entitled to as a woman, says Tapti Ghosh.

The Indian Constitution says, 'The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law... and the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.' Syed Khalid Rashid writes in his book, *Muslim Law*, "But it is vital to note that these injunctions are addressed to only state action and not to the existing personal laws." The right to succeed to property varies from one religion to the other depending on personal law. Ganesh Brahmachari, a well-known lawyer and member of the Bar Council in Kolkata, says, "The property rights given to an Indian woman is on the basis of religion. Under Hinduism and Christianity, laws are liberal for inheritance." There is no uniformity in the succession law relating to women following different religions. Dr G.B. Reddy's book, *Women and the Law*, says, "Women enjoy a secondary status with regard to the succession."

Hindu succession law has two schools namely, Mitakshara and Dayabhaga. Under Mitakshara, inheritance can take place after birth (mainly northern, western, and southern parts of India) but, in the latter school of law, it can be inherited after death of the owner (the eastern part of India) The book points out, 'There is no uniformity in the rights of the Hindus following different schools to succeed to the property of a Hindu who died...without leaving a will behind him.'

Brahmachari points out, 'It is the rule of the land that prevails in India. A family from Bangladesh had come to India to claim the property for their father in Shibpur. (West Bengal) They were opposed by the government to inherit the property because the father was still alive. The Dayabhaga law prevails in West Bengal.'

The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 was amended in 2005. Dr G.B. Reddy says, "In order to confer equal rights on Hindu women along with male members in the coparceny under the Hindu Mitakshara law...amended the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 to achieve the Constitutional mandate of equality.' For example, in the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, men had the right to inherit property in the joint family but, after the amendment, both son and daughter can



inherit it. Brahmachari says, "The laws for immovable property like the agricultural lands are still inherited by male members of the family. No amendment has taken place on this law." Married or unmarried daughters have the same right as sons to "reside in and to claim partition of the parental dwelling house." A widow can claim her right to inherit property of her pre-deceased son, even if she has remarried. Yet, there have been no changes in the old laws of succession like, "The heirs of both sexes have full right to alienate inherited property, and both men and women have full rights to will away their property." The Islamic laws of succession are based on Holy Quran.

Rashid further distinguishes between Shia and Sunni law of inheritance. He says that the distinction is "political rather than juristic." The difference found between the two is "Shias disregard the details of the Sunni system that rest on the decisions of the first three caliphs... Hanafis interpret Koran strictly, the Shias interpret it in wider sense...they interpret it as altering the old principles themselves, and as giving rise to a new set principles." The book says, "The Koranic provision that a daughter is entitled to succeed with the son is interpreted by the Shiites as applicable to all female heirs. The Shiite jurists take the provision of the Koran as not restricted to individual instances of the daughter or sister, as establishing a new principle for the benefit of females."

Brahmachari points out the changes in the Muslim law. He says, "Rules and regulations for women changed after Shah Bano's case. They relaxed some

laws. "No women are excluded from inheritance only on the basis of sex. Women have inherited property independently. They are absolute owners of the property." However men and women, though, do not have equal property rights. A male gets two shares whereas, a female gets only one.

Widows do not have any rights to inherit as per Hindu laws. Recently in Mumbai, a case was lodged by Sakina (name changed) against her brother. Susieben Shah, a lawyer who practises at the Mumbai High Court, recounts, 'After their parents' death, the brother and his wife were enjoying the property. When Sakina asked for her share in the property, they physically tortured her. She lodged a case against them. As they belong to a lower class, and the brother could not afford the money to continue the case, he gave her a share.'

Succession laws for Christian women are liberal. They deal with intestate succession. The property of someone who dies intestate goes to the spouse. The share of the wife is not fixed. It depends on the circumstances. The widow is made to share the property along with other relatives in certain cases. The widow gets one-third of the property and two-third goes to the children.

Brahmachari says, "Cases related to property come from either the lower classes or the upper classes. Due to poor economic conditions, the sons and daughters lodge complains against each other. The woman is usually deprived of her property. In the upper classes, it is more of competition between the two..."

What about the middle class? He says, "There is no middle class in India."

# We don't need no normal education!



MUGDHA SINGH

It's no longer about dark sarcasm in the classroom, some schools are finding ways to brighten up students' lives.

**Smitha Menon** and **Mugdha Singh** report.

In his previous school, Zeus Pestonji (12), was scared of speaking up in class as he was afraid of being mocked. Although he was a student of a reputed school in suburban Mumbai, something was just not right for him. "School time was a torture, and often like swallowing a bitter pill," says Parvez Pestonji, an adult trainer and expert in adult education himself. He realised something was amiss and it was time for a change. Eventually the Pestonjis found another school. Zeus, who has been in Tridha for three years now, couldn't be happier.

With increasing emphasis being laid on the academic education of children today, there has been an increase in the number of suicide cases among teenagers, who feel pressurized to perform. In times like these, an alternative method of teaching is a welcome step.

The Rudolf Steiner Education also known as the Waldorf Education is one such alternative education which focuses on the holistic growth of the child through the development of "the head, heart, and hands". What is unique about Waldorf education is stated in the goals of the schooling: "to produce individuals who are able, in and of themselves, to impart meaning to their lives".

Consistent with his philosophy called anthroposophy, Steiner designed a curriculum responsive to the developmental phases in childhood and nurturing of children's imagination. He felt that schools should cater to the needs of children rather than the demands of the government or economic forces. So he developed schools that encourage creativity and free-thinking.

Education through such a unique method will definitely help in saving the world which is just becoming more and more competitive as each day goes by. The rat race of who gets the best marks irrespective of the learning by the student has become the norm of the day. It is here that the Waldorf schools come in and make a difference.

Tridha: A Waldorf School based in Mumbai follows the Steiner Philosophy. Mrs Susan Menon, a teacher at the school elaborates, "At Tridha, each child is accepted and valued for what he or she brings, be it artistic or academic ability, physical or social skill. Children are measured not against one another but against their own potential, and competition is reserved for the games lessons in higher classes."

She goes on to say "much of the education is done through rhythm, reverence and repetition". In such a free and liberal environment, wouldn't kids tend to misbehave? On the contrary, states Mrs Menon, "with rhythm, comes discipline." A certain amount of routine is set through the use of song and dance. Often, this helps to control a class and

discipline them. Also, the learning material is treated with respect, and then passed onto the children. This is right from paper to crayons to beeswax. "Starting from kindergarten, a certain degree of respect is ingrained in the minds of the children."

Through recaps and fun exercises, concepts are grasped and fully understood by the children themselves. Through this method, children create their own learning guides and arbitrary text books are not imposed on them. Story telling plays an important part in Steiner education. Morals not pointed out, and through free drawings of the children, teachers are able to grasp what appealed to them the most. "Teaching at a Steiner school is also a learning profession. One is constantly learning more and more from students," she says. The school strives to provide an environment in which pupils find security, moral strength and confidence to face the challenges of life with initiative and

"It was all because of that horrid comparative nature of the education. Comparison and education should not be introduced so early in a child's life. Gradation, ranking, red crosses, all do serious damage to a child's confidence"

responsibility. All these characteristics of the students come alive in December, when the school has its annual Mela. "At the Mela, craft items made by students are sold and even activities and games are handled by the students themselves", states Mrs Menon. This is a Mela with a difference. She goes on to say, "Everything made and sold at it is eco-friendly and home made. There is a puppet show handled by teacher trainees (who make and dress the puppets themselves). Children entertain visitors with music recitals. Also, traditional Indian board games are made and sold at the Mela. It's a fun event, and everyone's happy – teachers, students and parents!

Homework time for Zeus Pestonji and the Pestonji household was always a pain. "Often it would result in tears, tantrums and shouting", says Schachi Pestonji, Zeus' mother. "Education should be a fun

process. A child must be motivated to learn, and should have his own sense of curiosity. That just wasn't happening with Zeus."

Zeus is now not only more confident, but is also able to express himself better, says Schachi. He is aware of many life skills and is also aware of the importance of nature and the environment around him. "At the other school, I felt like Zeus was being robbed of his childhood. But at Tridha, nothing is forced and the child is nurtured by the teacher," states Mrs Pestonji. In conventional schools, the medium of education is different. "It's concentrated on completing so many chapters in so much time, there is absolutely no rhythm."

As the teacher plays such an important role in the child's life (the same teacher goes up with the class, from the 1st to the 7th standard), the relationship between the parent and the teacher is very crucial. "Since the teacher has an open mind, parents automatically open up. There is a certain comfort level with the teacher, which was hardly present with his other teachers in the past. In his old school, the only time you saw the teacher was during open house, and only for five minutes. Longer than that and there was a long queue behind you!" says Mrs Pestonji. It is through the teacher that the world is revealed to the students. Story telling plays a large part in the learning process and often, concepts like numbers and alphabets are linked up with the environment. Children are taught the "M of the Mountain and the C of the Moon", using the shapes of these familiar objects. (The C of the Moon? Think of a crescent moon.)

Ask Zeus about school now and here's what he has to say, "School is fun now. In my old school, all my teachers were hyper; hyper about studies and homework. On my way to school in the bus also, I used to complete my homework. There was no time to play. In Tridha, I like everything! No one is hyper. I can play the flute and I love to paint. I even enjoy basketball. Lessons are fun and now I don't hate maths so much!"

"It was all because of that horrid comparative nature of the education. "Comparison and education should not be introduced so early in a child's life. Gradation, ranking, red crosses, all do serious damage to a child's confidence", says Mr Pestonji. "In Tridha, reports are a full diagnosis of the whole year and not just a few final exams. I would obviously gain a better understanding of my child through something like that than a bunch of numbers." He goes on to say that it is important, if not essential, especially in today's world, to learn how to cooperate and not compete. "Our wish is that he grows up into a strong, confident, mature and talented young man. We can already see that happening", he happily concludes.

# Beyond education



HIMALIKA YADAV

## Stretch out and learn more, say Kirti Hatiskar, Shuddha Dutta, and Himalika Yadav.

India is a country with multiple inequalities, where only 34.62% of the population is illiterate. It does seem that a large chunk of the population is literate but that is far from reality. In India a person is called a literate if he can spell his name and read numbers.

There is a section of the population which travels to their highly commercialized private schools in their air conditioned buses, whereas, there are others that have never got the opportunity to see what a school looks like, and have never touched a book in their lives. As a result of this, the rich is reaping the benefits of education and leading a much comfortable lifestyle. Thus, the underprivileged are still trapped in their grim reality of poverty and sufferings.

People like you and me are the ones who are fortunate enough to educate ourselves and lead a better life. Thus the need of the hour is to further educate those who are not as fortunate as us. It is said that one can double the knowledge one has learnt by imparting it to others.

There are certain organisations which are already working for this cause. One among them is Akanksha – a non governmental organisation which was started 18 years ago by Shaheen Mistry.

The organisation started with a group of 15 children but now has 3500 children across 61 centres and 4 schools. “We have two schools in Pune and Mumbai each. We have around 450 to 500 volunteers, some as young as 12 -13 years old. We want to teach our children skills they would need

In India a person is called “literate” if he can spell his name and read numbers.

for life,” says Ruchika Gupta, General Manager, Akanksha.

Is there a selection process for selecting a volunteer? “No, there is no selection process. But we do interview the volunteer to know their interests and assign them that subject that would interest them. We ask for a one-year commitment, if the volunteer fulfils that then they are awarded a certificate,” says Gupta.

On the other hand there are a few individuals who have taken the initiative to educate the underprivileged on their own without the assistance of any organisation. One among them is Indu Gahlaut, for whom teaching the underprivileged is not

just giving to the society, but fulfilling her own wishes as well. “I love teaching and it gives me immense satisfaction and enjoyment,” says Indu. A community garden in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi is partially occupied by Indu and three other volunteers every evening to teach the under-privileged children. The children are provided with pencils, books and clothes by various other residents of this locality. Then money is collectively raised to celebrate occasions such as festivals and birthdays with the motive of making these children feel the excitement of these special days. “It is the happiness on their faces that makes a difference. All thirty of them eagerly look forward to these small celebrations,” says Indu. According to Indu the children are thrilled at learning and knowing more. “Initially, I used to feel sad and cry a lot in class but the didis are very loving. Now I enjoy it. I feel curious before every class to know what I will get to learn today”, says twelve-year-old Bodhan, a student from Indu's class.

Many people are of the opinion that volunteering for a cause like this will take a lot of time and effort. However it is not true at all. All one needs is just one hour a week and one phone call to start contributing to the noble cause of spreading literacy. Work has already started, efforts are being made, but it is both urgent and important that each one of us teaches one more person.

# Labour day

Prachi Mujumdar talks to those that keep our cities clean without being recognised for it.

After wading through hills of stinking garbage, a group of men and women sit down to a meal. They eat with bare hands. The stench of rotten garbage surrounds them.

Every day in cities, tonnes of garbage are churned out. How many of these people actually know what happens to the bin full of dirt that they chuck out of their house. Does anyone know how it actually reaches the dumping grounds several miles away? How many of them are even remotely aware of a full-fledged system that toils in this dirt to make sure it reaches the right place at the right time?

Welcome to the world of filth. Here one works in order to make public and private places clean enough for others. Welcome to the world of Municipality cleaners. Their day starts within the dirt and garbage of the city and continues until place is sufficiently clean for the residents to walk around. The sweepers start their work at about six am and sweep the allotted area of up to 70,000 sq ft. They must sweep it as often as it is required. When these sweepers collect the garbage at one place they put it into the huge dustbins on the roads. After this, a team with municipality truck loads the contents of the bin into their truck and then takes it to the dumping grounds. During this process people around them twitch their noses as they find the stench unbearable. Laxmi Kamble, a sweeper at the Pune Municipality said, "People are rude to us. They are very inconsiderate. They twitch their noses at the mere sight of us sweeping the roads without even considering the fact that we have to work in that dirt". All this for slave wages.

During the monsoons, the manholes in the city choke and the only way to clear them is by a man diving into the manhole and manually taking out the rotten leaves, dead rats and other fecal waste. So a daily wage-earner gets into the manhole and moves his

legs around to clear it. Although the Pune Municipality claims to have provided masks and other protective gear, none of it has reached these cleaners. For several years *safaai kaamgaars* (cleaners) have been demanding sufficient water and antiseptic soap.

Under existing circumstances, people refuse to go near these men as they stink terribly. Of course, no one ever thinks of providing them few buckets of water to clean themselves.

What is ironic is that the person who creates this filth in the first place is considered socially 'up there' while the person who cleans up this dirt is extremely insignificant until the day that a dust bin is not cleared on time or a street is left dirty. Savitri Chimanbhise, another sweeper in Pune Municipality agrees with this. Savitri says, "It is disheartening when people throw garbage on the roads right in front of us even as we are cleaning up the road. It's okay if they don't care for our feelings but people should at least care for work that we do."

The cleaner's life is close to a misery as his/her employer does not care either about him or care about their existence. They do not have the job security. This is because cleaning is outsourced to contractors. Also there are no medical facilities available to them. So if a cleaner

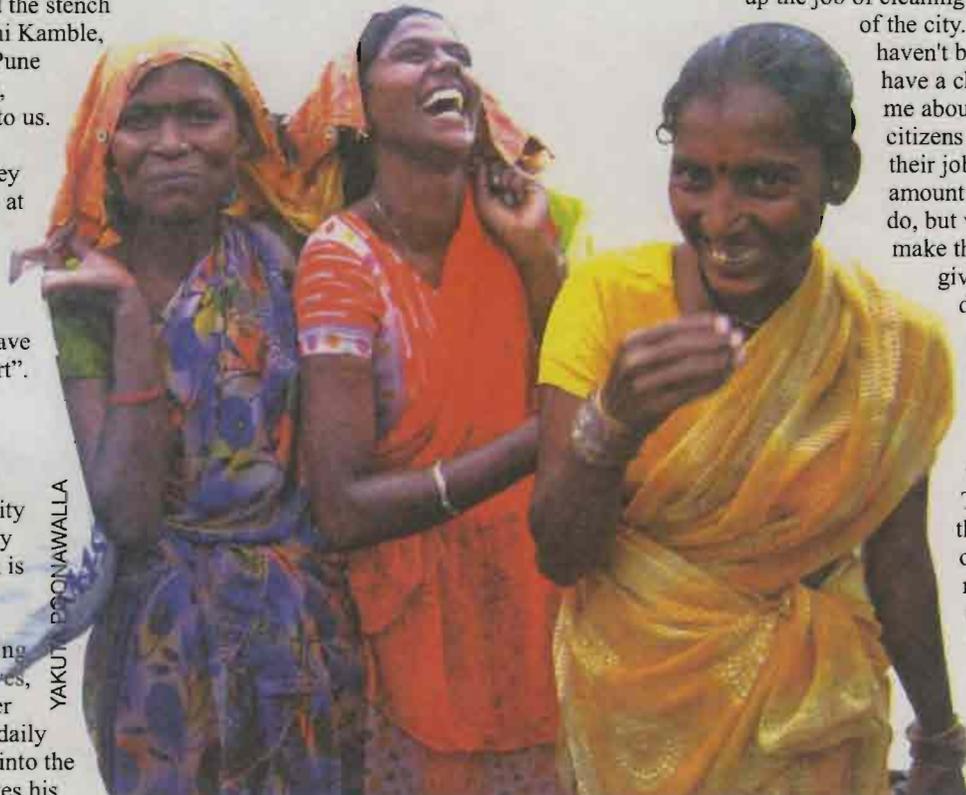
gets a skin disease due to the bare handling of the waste, it is solely his problem. Mangal Rajuraske, a sweeper in Pune Municipality agrees that at least medical help should be made available.

They are still considered to be the lowest of all the classes in society. Says Vajinath Gaikwad former *safaai kaamgaar* at the Pune Municipality, "through the years only the names have changed. Earlier we used to be 'untouchables' and 'bhangis' now we are called *safaai kaamgaars* but the treatment remains the same." They are not accepted as a part of society. There have been instances when they have been refused loans from banks because their job involves dirt.

The need of the hour is to create awareness and sensitivity towards the people who help us stay hygienically fit at the cost of their health. Acclaimed Marathi director Atul Pethe through his documentary *Kachara Kondi* (The Garbage Trap) tries to create awareness about the plight of municipality cleaners. He aims to create 'Garbage Literacy' through the movie. Pethe says, "I wanted people to know the kind of work that cleaners are compelled to do. The movie is about treating them with basic dignity and humanity. The garbage creator and the garbage collector are unfortunately poles apart and through this movie I seek to create awareness and care for the cleaners."

We must understand that it was not by choice that these people have had to take up the job of cleaning the dirt and excreta of the city. It is because they haven't been lucky enough to have a choice like you and me about their life. We as citizens cannot entirely undo their job difficulties or the amount of work that they do, but we can definitely make their life easier by giving them their deserved honorary status which would give them the much needed emotional support and encourage them to work. The recognition of their efforts is the only thing that can make them believe that their existence is a part of our society and that we need them.

YAKUB BOONAWALLA



# The dark night

How can you tell if your best friend wants to kill herself? Teenage suicide is a lot less uncommon than you might think, say **Yakuta Poonawalla** and **Aryaa Naik**.

**P**arvati, 21, a post-grad student, recently harmed herself. The reasons unknown to her friends and family, leaving behind only melancholy in the hearts of those who cared for her.

Parvati is not the only one. One gets to see quite a few cases of youngsters committing suicide in the news. Even though the parents of the victim don't give reasons for the act committed or deny a suicide note left behind, the reasons are quite apparent. Most of the suicide cases among youngsters happen due to overburden of studies, pressure from the parents, problems in love life and mostly depression.

Psychiatrist Dr Rajesh says, "Depression is a major cause of suicide. Depression has to be stopped in time to prevent it from turning into something fatal like suicide."

Dr Nataraj Ebnatum, another psychiatrist agrees, "Depression needs to be treated immediately or it could result in suicidal tendencies. It can be caused due to something that has happened in the past. It need not be anything horrible but may have repercussions without trying. It need not be an invasion but could be relationship with parents or other relations. The best way in treating depression, along with medication is to keep the person occupied either with something creative or work."

Student Yaminshar Suchitra Dote says that there are in fact children as young as 13 who are driven to commit suicide. The reason behind this she says is the lack of communication between the child and his parents. "Parents must communicate with their children openly. A father must give his child at least half an hour every day. He can start off from reading a book to his child, maybe at bedtime. As the child grows older it could turn into dinner-time conversation. This can develop a bond between them, which is absolutely necessary," she says. "It is important that the children can confide in their parents. This can prevent a large number of teenagers from feeling depressed and frustrated," she adds.

Sowdya youngsters have such a strong urge to put an end to their existence when they have their whole lives ahead of them. Psychiatrist Dr Hemant Chandorkar says, "The transition period between childhood to adulthood is very important in a person's life. This transition shapes up his personality and emotional responses. It is very important that he feels emotionally secure either through family or friends. A

## Some symptoms of suicidal tendencies:

Talking about feeling suicidal or wanting to die

Feeling hopeless that nothing will ever get better

Drug or alcohol abuse

Feeling like a burden to family and friends and that your contributions are useless

Putting affairs in order, as one would typically do when death is imminent

Deliberately putting oneself in harm's way

person who feels like he doesn't belong anywhere and cannot anchor himself emotionally sees no point in his existence and may try to kill himself. Family counselling is important in such conditions."

In spite of parents being aware of their child's mental instability these days, they refuse to take the child even to a counselor hearing the opinions of the anxiety around them.

Mithila Joshi, 22, has attempted suicide four times so far, for varied reasons. The last time was near-fatal, but thankfully she survived. In spite of these becoming incidents her parents hadn't taken her to a psychologist because they care too much about what people's speculations. "I suffered from depression and wanted to end my life, thankfully I survived every time I attempted to kill myself. My parents didn't want to take me to a psychiatrist because they thought it would be shameful, but my friends finally convinced them. The psychiatrist also had a session with my parents to make them understand it was okay and that I am normal," says Mithila.

Suchitra Dote explains, "Taking your child to a

psychologist or a psychiatrist is just like taking your child to any other doctor. The only difference is that a doctor treats physical illness and a psychiatrist treats mental illness. If parents show enough concern to take the child as a doctor why can't they show the same concern in taking the child to a psychiatrist or a psychologist?"



ARYAA NAIK

# Easy high

Aryaa Naik discovers that the chemist's counter is the new stairway to heaven.



MUJGDHA SINGH

For Uma, it was like no other party she had attended. At the age of 19, she was well aware of drugs like marijuana and hash which she had normally seen people her age smoke but what she saw at the party was something else. "People were drinking cough syrup as if it were juice. One guy came up to me and asked me if I had a Meftal or a Cyclopam, I thought he must be asking for his girlfriend but he took it for me and popped it right in front of me. It was absurd," recounts Uma Tate.

Gone are the days when one needed a dealer to score. Most teenagers indulging in drugs turn to none other than the friendly neighborhood chemist for resources. Over-the-counter drugs are most readily available and hence the most abused among youngsters who can access them without raising eyebrows.

"Fifty percent of the patients at our centre have abused over-the-counter drugs," says Dr Shirish Ratnaparkhi, psychiatrist and managing trustee of Manasvardhan Deaddiction Centre. "Most commonly abused over-the-counter drugs are cough syrups, sleeping pills, pain killers and anti anxiety drugs. It usually starts with them consuming marijuana or hash and then looking for easily available options taking to OTC drugs." Rahul Nair, 27 a musician says, "I started smoking weed in my first year of graduation. I got

introduced to marijuana by my batch mates. I liked the space it gave me. Later I turned to more easily available drugs like Corex (a cough syrup) and Meftal or Cyclopam (taking for spasmodic pain by women). It gave me a good high and was easily available. However once a graduated I quit."

Sheetal Joshi, 22 recounts, "When I got into junior college a lot of people I got

"Most commonly abused over-the-counter drugs are cough syrups, sleeping pills, pain killers and anti anxiety drugs."

acquainted to, were smoking weed. There were some who went a step beyond and did Ketamine (used medically as a veterinary and human anesthetic), Corex and popped Nitrosun (used for short term treatment of sleeplessness when it is severe or disabling). Some even ate Iodex sandwiches as they claimed it gave them a cheap and effective high. I never dared to go beyond trying weed and hash. Now, I occasionally smoke hash."

After initial experiments with weed and hash, getting the 'high' easily is what

becomes imperative. Youngsters seeking the state of euphoria become easy victims of OTC drug abuse. But, why in the first place does one need to feel 'high'? Dr Seema Darode, clinical psychologist feels, "It is curiosity, peer pressure or insecurity. The reason can be different for different individuals. Once a person gets addicted to drugs, it is difficult to get him out of it. As soon as the parents come to know that their child is consuming drugs, they should seek counseling or psycho therapy. It is very important to find out the root cause of why the person started consuming drugs in the first place."

Where can one draw the line between addiction, abuse and an occasional high? "When a person is addicted he or she needs to take the drugs to feel 'normal'," says Dr Ratnaparkhi. "It is easy to get addicted and the effects can be harmful. The adverse effects of the various OTC drugs include impaired judgment and mental performance, loss of coordination, dizziness, nausea, hot flashes, dissociation, and hallucinations."

So next time you are nervous and want to calm your nerves, try chamomile tea and or need some energy, try Ginseng. And remember sandwiches taste better with marmalade.

*(Some names have been changed to protect identities.)*

# Strayin' alive?



ANURADHA THAKURDESAI

**Anuradha Thakurdesai and Sruti Visweswaran** explain why stray dogs need your love.

She gazed into those eyes longingly. They bore an uncanny resemblance to pools of gold. Despite the pain, they refused to lose their spark. Anu was holding his hand, swollen from the saline. His eyes were wide open as he breathed his last. Her heart broke as she saw him lying still in her arms. Her only consolation was that she contributed, even if in the least, to ensure that he lived his 15 years healthily.

The myth that mad stray dogs jump at any opportunity to bite someone is something she firmly denied. But those that are cared for by people don't show any signs of aggression as it then becomes a mutually beneficial relationship. The stray animal is tended to, and people find an outlet for affection in someone who needs it the most. Anu's belief was confirmed when she came to know that people can actually take a stand on behalf of stray animals, in the middle of the road!

She was walking home one day when she heard a man cry out. "How dare you! Would you do the same if your own kid strays off in the middle of the road?" he said. He was shielding a petrified calf from a car owner. She had known this man or rather seen him around for quite some time. She often saw several dogs merrily following him around the marketplace. He would buy them some food, or kneel down

to remove ticks from a stray's ears. Or, he would run around making arrangements to rush an injured animal to the clinic.

Nagesh Rane was someone who she didn't know personally, but she knew him yet because of his love for animals. A lay person who chose to make a difference in a way that he best could, Nagesh, with his brother, has taken a stand for the well being of animals without the help of any association. They are now guardians of more than 25 animals. "Taking care of animals has been as much of a priority for Nagesh, as the rest of his profession. He has taken care of about 50 animals, which is approximately the strength of all the animals in our locality," says Anu.

Unlike his family, Anu's family didn't support the idea of playing with stray animals. Like many of us, they too considered stray animals a nuisance. But an association with Jimmy, an amber-eyed stray dog that Anu took in, changed the outlook of her family toward stray animals. She started taking care of Jimmy with Nagesh's help. His constant guidance on what to keep in mind while taking care of a puppy helped Anu to build a much closer bond with Jimmy.

Nagesh is deeply inclined towards taking care of stray animals. His journey too started as a kid from affinity towards pups which eventually extended towards

other animals. He is involved with Society for the Protection and Care of Animals (SPCA) Parel hospital. The SPCA, now a hundred years old, is actually standing because of a modest staff that runs it with great vigour with limited resources. Dr Khanna, a senior doctor, who has faced many hardships to keep this old institution alive and running says, "This place is old and dilapidated but we host treatment for injured dogs, cattle, horses, birds, pigs and also have 'Happy Home', for adoption of cats and dogs. It has sections for sterilizing, vaccination, operation theatres, X-Ray machines, wards for stray and licensed dogs and also ICUs. It is indeed very difficult to provide efficient medical aid as it mostly comes from donation or from people who don't give up on their pets. Nagesh got a dog here with a hopeless pelvic injury which left his hind side useless. His survival was held to be nearly impossible, but Nagesh pushed into it, and that dog has actually returned home with him after 10 months, heavily limping, but alive on his feet."

"After losing Jimmy in the same hospital, I was grateful for their attitude and support towards an old dying dog ensuring his death to be of lesser pain", Anu says. In response to the cruelty with which most animals are treated, Nagesh says, "I have seen a change in some people, especially my friends. They actually patted or fed one or two, also yelled at the people who harmed them. These were the same people who earlier were indifferent or spiteful towards animals. Since then I realised that a concern for stray animals just makes our living space a lot happier. Lucky are those who love animals, but luckier are the people whom animals love". Nagesh aspire to start an NGO for animals, complementary to SPCA and In Defence of Animals (IDA).

As citizens, avoiding others from being cruel to animals, reporting accidents, passing extra home food; these are things that each of us have genuinely obliged in time of need. The joy known to help the helpless is what we call humanity. Extending the same kindness that costs nothing but matters to a neglected integral part of the society is one of the tiny pieces that fit into the larger picture.



WSD (022)23060275

SPCA (022)24133598

Dr. Asha 9820058388

# Work in India



**Dipika Majumdar** discovers why young people are choosing to work in India instead of going abroad.

In the common run of life today it is very difficult to choose between economic prosperity, job satisfaction, and being rooted in ones own land. We all aim for the best and equip ourselves to face the fierce competition. Given our economic condition we choose to work outside of our birthplace for that extra amount of money at the end of every month. Students, at a very young age begin to seek career opportunities abroad. Chopra Consultancy, a well-known training institute in Kolkata states that 3,500 students per year apply either for work or studies abroad. This data applies to a single city, and with the youth of the entire country combined, one can only imagine the numbers. Mr S. Sengupta, an IIT Kharagpur alumni, working for the Aditya Birla Group feels employees are better off in India now. All major companies are investing in India. "It's

People are losing their jobs, others are striving to make a mark, so instead of following the old thought of working elsewhere one can always make a new beginning staying put where they are.

quite lucrative to take up jobs here and even IIT students are taking the option very seriously now. Anamitra Deb who has

been living abroad from the age of 15 is now working for the Monitor group as management consultant. She feels its "always better to be working in your own country. That way one can be home, as well as find job satisfaction. There should be no comparison, there is a good and bad side to both. There still are gender biases here, but in the social sector where I work, India is a great place to be in." This is the other side of the brain drain story and seems far more practical and sensible in the long run. There have been students who feel its tedious and emotionally draining. One cannot change perceptions and ideas but can only hope to put forth another option much ignored in recent times. People are losing their jobs, others are striving to make a mark, so instead of following the old thought of working elsewhere one can always make a new beginning staying put where they are.

Every country has its own drawbacks; we need to think again before making any decision which is of a lifetime.

# Every drop counts



Priyanka Talreja thinks you should turn off the taps before they run dry.

Seventy per cent of the earth is covered by water. That sounds like a lot of the stuff that is essential for our survival but there isn't too much that we can use. And clean potable water is getting scarcer by the day. Many scientists and ecologists have predicted that the battles of this century will be fought on the basis of access to this precious resource. Already, the first signs are here. The squabbles over the Kaveri's water, the problems in the Punjab, all have their source in one problem: water. And yet, we are profligate in wasting it. This crisis is not due to lack of water, but due to poor management in using water. Billions of people, animals, and environment have suffered because water has been wasted.

Adolf D'Souza, the corporator of Juhu, a suburb that gets flooded every monsoon, believes that people will not care about water or conserving it until they feel the pinch in their own lives. He took the initiative to conserve water in his area. He observed that there was an unused well near his building. To use the water from the well, he decided to install two water pipes in his building. One pipe would bring water supplied by the municipal corporation which can be used for drinking, and the other pipe would bring

the building the water from the well which was not potable but which was clean enough to be used for other purposes.

So you don't think you can find a well in your area? There are ways in which you can contribute to the conservation of water in a simple and straightforward way.

Each one of us can help with the problem of water conservation

Consider your own habits in the bathroom. After you brush your teeth, you wash your mouth. Most people allow the water to run as they gargle. Instead, you can fill a glass of water and use that instead. This saves at least three litres of water at each time. If you multiply this by four people in a family, that's twelve litres saved. Multiply that across a hundred families and you're already talking about a tanker full of water saved. If all of the city did this, we'd be saving a huge amount of water every day.

The other place you can save water is when you bathe. If you take a tub bath, even when you check into a hotel you're using hundreds of litres of water. (And

hotel tap or from your home tap? It's still the same Earth and the same sources of water.) Showers can also be wasteful. When we use a bucket to take bath, there is relatively less amount of water wasted.

Thirty per cent of household water is used when we use the flush; there is an easy way to curb it. If your toilet has an old large capacity cistern, place a plastic bottle filled with water inside. It will reduce the quantity of water used to flush the toilet. If you're installing a new cistern, opt for the double flush one. It offers two options: low and high quantities of water needed to flush, depending on the need.

"If you want to save the world, you just correct the water quality and that is the beginning of correcting all the problems of the mind" says Shantaram Shenai, proprietor of Green Cross Society, a non-governmental organization. He says that nitrates, found in many fertilisers, can build up and damage the brain. He claims that Green Cross has come up with a bio-sanitizer can reclaim polluted water. In Nagpur, this project has already taken off, and a huge amount of water is being recycled and used for irrigation.

It is important to understand that each one of us can help with the problem of water conservation. As Mother Teresa says, "We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop."

# Clear your plate



## Kunjarani D'Souza tells you why one wasted morsel of food is a big deal.

“Order for two: start with crispy spinach and Sichuan vegetables and one fried rice. Also Singaporean flat noodles, Buddha's delight vegetables and mushrooms in pepper sauce. Are we done yet? Not quite! Ice cream with fried honey noodles please!”

It's not like people in different places of the country have different stomach sizes. The purchasing power and the predominant consumerist attitude determine the length of the order. Moreover, there is no way you're going to be able to finish that meal. But then, it's a matter of pride to be able to have the ordered it in the first place. Right?

Wrong!

It's called over-consumption, wastage, greed and arrogance. It can also be called selfish. It's also a big waste of money if you think rationally. The growth of the fast food and restaurant culture in the main cities of our country may be a reason to rejoice for our taste buds. “It's a good thing. I don't know why you have to be so judgmental about it. If you have the money then you deserve every bit of it,” said Roshni Bhandari, 22, frequent customer at Golden Orchid restaurant, Bandra.

She could very well be right. If you can, then go right ahead. The act of eating

does satisfy you and increase your happiness quotient. But how can the act of disregarding half of your meal as leftovers and calling for it to be disposed give you peace in the mind. Especially while 233 million people of the country sit hungry without even half of that rice bowl to last them the full day.

It's called over-consumption, wastage, greed and arrogance. It can also be called selfish. It's also a big waste of money if you think rationally.

The idea is not to stop eating out or live a deprived detached life. That would be quite 'the central goal of life'. The hope is to become conscious of your wastage, whether it is in your own homes where the fridge becomes the air-conditioned dustbin. Or when the food you dispose of

at a restaurant goes directly into the dirty bin without a flinch of hesitation.

In Mumbai, there are a few self aware organizations who wish to fix the problem. They have created an easily accessible phone line where one can call and give away all the left over's of the day, whether you had a party or dinner. Marriage leftovers too fall into this category.

Madad, one such organization works in the night and picks up food from parties and restaurants and feeds the beggars on the roads at different locations so as to treat all of them equally. One needn't go all the way and do that while there are small portions of left overs. “You can simply pack the food in a plastic bag (not most preferred) or a leaf plate (cheap and available) and walk down to the nearest junction or temple. In India, one is never too far away from poverty and hunger”, said Kapil Das, a frequent leftover donor, as he would like to call himself.

It's not hard to do. It is not even time consuming. You can carry out 'the deed' at a restaurant too by just packing off the leftovers in a doggy bag. As simple as that. And to think you have the power vested in your hand to fill an empty stomach once in a while! It helps the conscience. Everyone loves to eat. It's just that, you have it, they don't. But what you can do is help them.

The next time you have a party, and the leftovers at the end of it-call MADAD-022 26455722

# Plant more trees

18 per cent of global warming is due to deforestation, discover **Mugdha Singh** and **Shreya Ganguly**.

**D**hruv Singh, owner of a wild life camp in Bandhavgarh, built the camp with a plan to regenerate 21 acres of over-grazed and barren farmland, "When you live in such close proximity to nature, it is hard not to notice the ill effects our lifestyles have on nature. We then asked the local people to come and be a part of our reforestation program, which is shaping up beautifully". Yet not all of us are as sensitive to the need of the hour, over the last few years there has been an immense depletion in the number of trees.

Trees are the easiest to compromise, be it for roads, buildings or malls. The best way to get more space is by cutting down trees. One might crack a lucrative deal by getting hold of that space, but one thing is for sure that every space that is cleared up leads to infinite amount of environmental problems in the long run. But that seems unimportant as for the moment a problem is sorted.

Our environment has taken a massive beating over the past few years. With the glaciers in Alaska melting and the recent flood situation around India, global

warming has already shown its effects in many a place around the world and has given us a warning about its lethal consequence.

Apparently, 18 per cent of global warming is due to deforestation. The heavy deforestation is one of the core reasons for the current state of

affairs and if planting more trees isn't one way to save the world, then what is?

Trees have always had a great significance as far as the ecological balance of the environment goes. They provide shelter, food and also attract clouds in order to bring rain. They check soil erosion and provide wood to a lot of villages for purposes of fire to keep them warm. The tribals in the villages also know which tree to cut and which to leave. They also act as noise and dust buffers.

Trees help us in medicine as well as protect many birds and insects from extinction.

Trees being cut for paper is also an alarming situation, with a lot of paper being wasted all the time. According to Swati Arun Prasad, environment consultant at Nature First says, "We need to cut trees to make paper but there are options of using bagasse for making paper as well, some paper making companies are making this effort". Many such activists have come out in support of forestation. "Another very important aspect of trees", says Swati Prasad "is that they can absorb around 13 tons of carbon dioxide in a lifetime. The best way to get rid of toxic around the industrial area

is by planting a tree. This process is called "carbon sequestration"

NGOs and self-help groups have paved the way to plant trees all over. If the government has seen taking no initiative, these representatives have made the effort to organize activities such as "Van Mahotsavs" – tree festivals. Atul Sinha, a retired IAS officer who has taken upon himself to make people not only aware of the benefits of planting more trees but also encourages them to actually plant. His strategy includes "Smriti Udyaan" wherein he uses the space of the community parks and asks people to plant trees in the name of their departed ones. "This ensures, in most cases, that the people come back and look after the plant, so that it survives, other wise people just plant trees and forget about them". He has been successful in getting 43 families to be part of his unique plan, and aims to rope in more.

The best way we can save our environment is by planting a tree and encouraging people around us to plant trees. Trees will help us for the use of medicine as well as protect many birds and insects from becoming extinct as it is their natural habitat. It will benefit us and the future generations in a huge way and make people conscious of our environment.



# Lungs of the city

Mangroves turn carbon dioxide into oxygen and help protect the city, discovers **Shreya Ganguly**.

According to Rishi Agarwal, the honorary joint secretary of the Mangrove Society of India, mangrove vegetation comprises 3,000 acres of land in Mumbai alone, and out of these 1,700 acres belongs to the Godrej group of industries in Vikhroli. Talking about the function of mangroves in the environment, he says, "In the urban context, mangroves help flood control. They also act as tsunami- barriers and control land erosion."

Mangroves form a very important part of our ecological system. They occupy the space between land and sea and perform innumerable functions that help our environment in a number of ways. With the city of Mumbai undergoing rapid industrialization and falling short of space to accommodate another set of buildings, roads and buildings again, these mangroves stand as the easiest targets for the builders. Huge stretches of mangrove vegetation are cleared up for recreational purposes such as malls and parks for children and this very act of clearing up of vast stretches of mangrove vegetation results in environmental unbalance. These stretches of mangroves widely include the Malad-Borivili area and the Vasai creek. Another unfortunate factor is that the areas where they yet have not been compromised upon, they are being littered with garbage and industrial waste on a daily basis.

The utility of mangrove vegetation is enormous. The biggest and most important function they perform is that they sink a great deal of carbon-dioxide from the atmosphere and in return give the same amount of oxygen into the air. The reason for performing this particular function better than ordinary trees says Rishi Agarwal is that because mangroves are comparatively more "bushy" and have more "leaf-area". As a result, they act as the "lungs of the city".

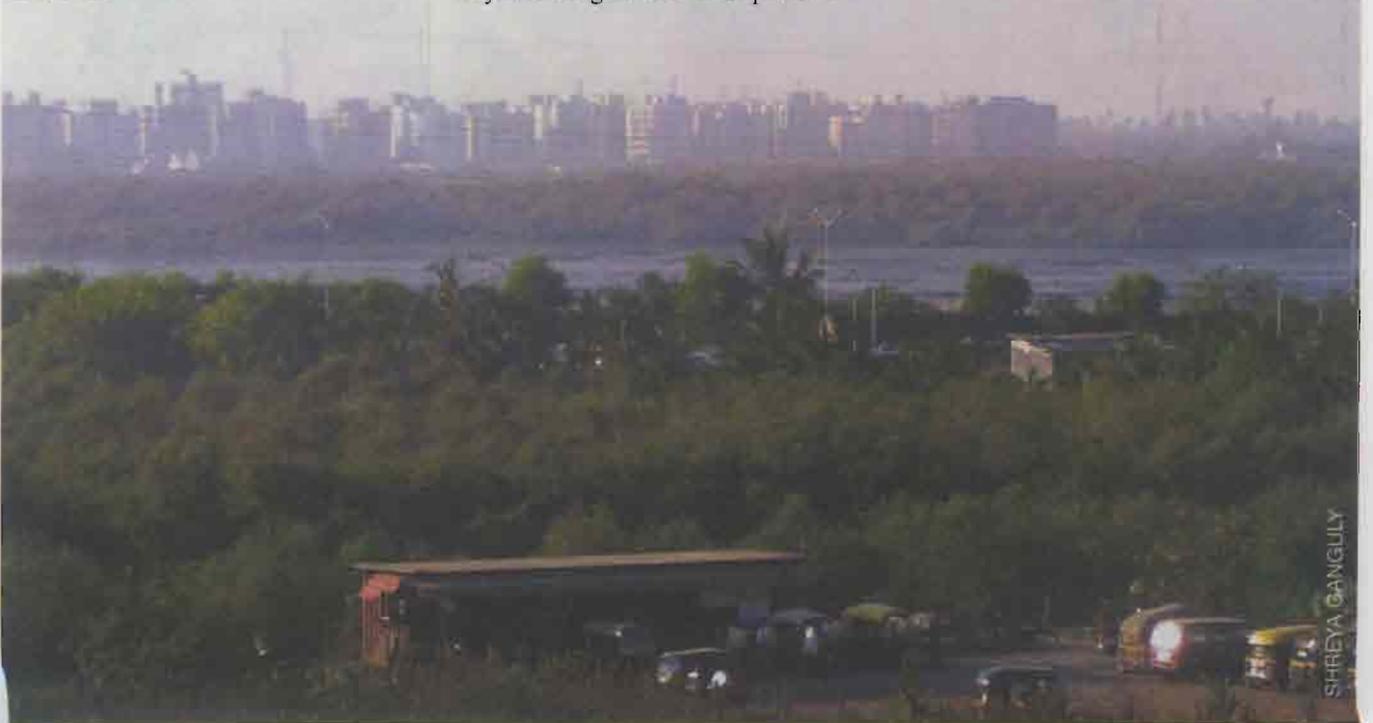
Mumbai should consider itself fortunate for having such a huge area of mangrove belt around it. Most respiratory problems in the city are caused due to heavy industrial pollutants and vehicle smoke.

Mangroves also help the marine life immensely. The fish lay eggs in the mangrove vegetation and these eggs are protected by them in return from heavy wave action and storms. "In a way, many fish start their lives from the mangroves," says Rishi Agarwal. But the problem

looming large at the moment is that a lot of industrial waste and debris get caught up in these areas. The mangrove type that is found in the area around the area around Mumbai is called, "avicennia marina". "This type of species", says Rishi Agarwal, "is a hardy species. They tend to survive because of their texture and nature. The orange and red mangroves do not exist in India anymore. They are found in purer waters such as Andaman and Nicobar islands and the Lakshwadweep."

Most of the attempts to save mangroves are being conducted by civil society and citizen groups. Agarwal being an active member says, "Whenever there is any violation caused to the mangroves, such as burning and cutting, the active citizens lodge a complaint under the Coastal Regulation Act and thereafter the matter is taken to court. Though very little help is attained from the government, we take it upon us to solve the matter". The Coastal Regulation Act says that there can be no construction within 500 meters from the sea and mangroves fall in this range and are bound to be protected.

Mumbai should consider itself fortunate for having such a huge area of mangrove belt around it. Most respiratory problems in the city are caused due to heavy industrial pollutants and vehicle smoke released into the air in a daily basis. The mangroves help in reducing these gases in the air by a great deal but the mangroves have unfortunately fallen prey to the same industries and building companies that cause harm to our atmosphere.





# Building green

Don't worry, you don't have to live under a banana tree. New technologies are making homes cleaner and greener places, as **Maithili Padukone** finds out.

YAKUJA POONAWALLA

“Save the Earth, it's the only planet with chocolate”. Thus spoke someone deeply concerned about chocolate and the fate of the planet, hopefully not in that particular order. But for all those who dream to build homes of chocolate, beware, it's up to you now to save the planet. And while you gather enough chocolate to make yourself a cosy, dark and bitter-sweet home, you might want to look at greener options to simultaneously save the world. So here's presenting Environmental Architecture's eco-friendly solution, Green Building, a joint venture of chocoholics and conscientious architects.

So what is Green Building? The Indian Green Building Council [IGBC] defines it as, 'A green building uses less energy, water and natural resources, creates less waste and is healthier for the people living inside compared to a standard building.' Roshni Udyavar, Head of Department of Institute of Environmental Architecture at Rachana Sansad's Academy of Architecture says, “Green buildings are eco-friendly, reducing the impact on the environment with use of energy resources, like those that do not produce green-house gases, such that the building consumes less energy during its life.”

Most buildings we live in or are under construction today consume enormous amounts of energy during their construction phase and then a lot more during their 'lifetime' that is from the time tenants occupy the building till it is demolished. The debris of the demolished construction is discarded and lands up in the city dump yard to further add to the municipal corporation's woes and no attention is paid to the 'reduce, reuse, recycle' mantra provided by the eco-buddies. Enter Environmental Architecture.

The overall energy consumption of Green buildings during their lifetime is lowered by 30%-50%, depending on location, availability of eco-friendly resources, site-planning, utilisation of reusable resources and most of all, eco-conscious intent. For a general overview of the techniques used by environmental architects, refer to the box above.

Traditional homes in most regions had a 'green value' far higher than that provided by the Green building technique as they used locally available material that did not disturb the composition of the surroundings in any way. Mud houses with bamboo roofs would certainly not pollute the environment, and as they came with their own limitations, one wouldn't generally build skyscrapers with them that would ravenously consume humongous amounts of electricity, water and other resources.

Green building aims at utilising every possible eco-friendly option available to ensure a higher Green value of the construction. Some of the novel concepts implemented, as provided by Roshni Udyavar and Siddhartha Ray are:

Incorporation of solar passive techniques to minimize load on systems like heating, cooling, ventilation and lighting

Minimal disturbance to landscapes and site condition

Efficient use of water and incorporation of water-recycling techniques

Use of renewable energy systems like solar photovoltaic systems, solar water-heating systems, and solar kitchens

Use of low energy materials and methods of construction and reduce transportation energy

**Urban farming:** residents of housing complexes located far from the markets can cut down on travel expenses and fuel to go to markets by growing vegetables in their backyards using waste water from kitchen sinks and wet garbage for manure.

**Water harvesting** during rains through percolated surfaces, use of simple purification techniques to treat waste water for reuse in flushing, gardening

**Sewage recycling:** use of dual flushes, and low water urinals

**Orientation** of building according to the solar path to effectively capture solar energy for solar water heaters, solar refrigerators, solar kitchens while minimizing or maximizing the amount of heat entering the building as per the climate of the region

**Glazed glass** for windows and other building surfaces to increase the amount of day-light entering the building, to avoid use of electric lamps during the day; whilst cutting the amount of associated heat entering the building, to avoid use of excessive numbers of air-conditioners for longer duration

**Innovative materials:** Use of albedo paints, filler slabs, aerated bricks, bricks made from recycled debris of previously demolished constructions, Aluminium Composite panels [ACP], china-mosaic chips for roofing

Though no residential building construction has been certified as Green by the IGBC, a number of residential complexes under construction have been registered under the IGBC rating system. States a brochure of CII, (Confederation of Indian Industry), that the IGBC is spearheading the Green building movement in India has over 150 million square feet of LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] green buildings covering 240 registered buildings constructed across the country. Registered projects in India include corporate office complexes, Information Technology parks, hospitals, Government

offices, educational institutions, airports, hotels, retail outlets etc. the first LEED Platinum rated Green building in India, and third in the world, is the CII-Sohrabji Godrej Green Business Centre in Hyderabad.

A green building project undertaken by the Lodha builders is the i-THINK Campus at Kanjurmarg, Mumbai. The 20,00,000 sq. ft. 'Green' campus under construction with two of its six buildings complete. Says Siddhartha Ray, KAPL [Kapadia Associates Private Limited], who is currently working on this project, “Though the basic material used is still RCL, the design of the structure makes an economical use of steel and double-glazing glass with storage spaces or 'niches' that act as buffering between the outside and inside of the building. The walls are made of aerated concrete blocks that curtail heat transmission to the interior. The double-glazed glass façade is treated to decrease heat within while increasing day-light tint. Vertical shading devices called 'fins' and horizontal ones called 'louvers' maintain the look of the building.”

With so many positive and environment-friendly options available and rating systems that recognise and provide guidelines for green/ sustainable architecture, the industry is still in its infancy. Says Roshni Udyavar, “Very few architects have opted for Environmental architecture though, in the last five years, there has been an increase in awareness among architects about the prospect and scope of Green Building. The business community was quick in recognizing the benefits of Green Building. Though some opt for it for incentives and carbon credits, industries can afford it as the construction costs are high, but maintenance is far cheaper in the long run.”

The ideal 'Green Home', according to Ray, should be like a leaf which provides shade, takes in carbon dioxide, and converts it to oxygen. Go Green! Opt for a Green Home.

# Plastic fantastic?



NITA DESHMUKH

Say no to plastic bags, they're not as cheap as you think, **Shuddha Dutta** and **Nita Deshmukh** discover.

“If we stop using plastic bags, we can save at least six plastic bags per week. That is 24 bags a month. That is 288 bags a year. That is 22,176 bags in an average lifetime. If just one out of 5 people in our country did this, we would save 1,330,560,000,000 plastic bags over our life time”, says Vinodini Lulla (Mumbai coordinator for Children's Movement for Civic Awareness).

Every time we go shopping we get a plastic bag which poses serious environmental problems. Plastic bags cannot be disposed off easily and take anywhere between 15 to 1000 years to break down in the environment. Around 80 million plastic shopping bags end up as litter in our environment each year. As plastic bags are lightweight and moisture resistant, they can travel long distances and cause environmental problems in many places over time. Hundreds and thousands of sea turtles and other marine mammals die every year from eating discarded plastic bags mistaken for food.

The environmental damage caused by plastic is enormous. Most of the drains are clogged with plastic and so the water cannot surge through them. This leads to the problems of flooding. Mumbaikars have already witnessed the trauma of flooding in July 2005. Clogged drains with stagnant water are an excellent breeding

place for mosquitoes, which further causes malaria and dengue. In August 2005, 66 people died of fever suspected to be leptospirosis. 749 people were admitted to hospitals with such fever, with 41 cases "unstable" and in an advanced stage of the disease.

Post the July 2005 floods in Mumbai the government imposed a ban on plastic bags. “I don't think any steps have been taken to reduce the usage of plastic bags. Even the little that has been taken is not effective at all. The government made a rule to ban plastics below 50 micron but they are still in use. No real steps have been taken,” says Hansel D'souza an active member of Juhu Citizens Welfare Group.

Juhu Citizens Welfare Group (JCWG) has launched a program to completely reduce the use of plastic bags in their area. This group encourages the use of cloth and biodegradable bags. They produce eco friendly cloth bags at Rs. 26 and sell them for Rs. 10. The difference is paid for by its members.

Although cost is the key factor of choosing plastic over cloth bags, D'souza has a rational argument in favour of cloth bags. “Firstly cloth bags can be reused. Most plastic bags can't be reused. We use them once and then use it in the dustbins, so we land up using more plastic bags. We are invariably spending more. But in case

REDUCE  
REUSE  
RECYCLE

of cloth bags we can use it repeatedly till it tears. So that means you can use a single cloth bag for a much longer time when compared to a plastic bag. Thus it becomes a lot more economical. Recycling and reuse is the best way to cut costs,” says D'souza.

The flipside argument for the ban of plastic bags is that the labour force in the plastic industry will face destitution. “We only want the ban on plastic shopping or carry bags. Thus the people who produce these bags basically do it with machines. It's completely mechanical. The labour cost is very cheap. But when you compare it to plants making cloth bags, people actually earn a lot more,” D'souza goes on to state.

Even if each of us uses only one or two plastic bags a day, the problem becomes massive in a city where millions of people live. The annual consumption of plastic in the world is 130 million tonnes. But this gigantic environmental problem can be solved by following simple actions at an individual level. Such actions would include using cloth bags instead of plastic bags, recycling plastic and re using plastic bags as long as you can, so that less plastic is added to the environment.



Make the most of dirt around you, say **Aneesha Henry** and **Kunjarani D'souza**.

**I**t's on the roads.  
In the tummies of cows.  
It's under your feet.  
And in your house.

Dirt is defined as matter in the wrong place. But how does one take something that is all around us, everywhere and put it in its right place?

In an age when garbage disposal is becoming a large problem, vermicomposting offers easy solutions.

"An experiment was conducted in 2001 where a new technology was developed in which mustard straw was decomposed to vermicompost in 95-100 days, after which good manure was obtained having several important nutrients helpful in the process of growing plants," said Mr. TK Gulati, Associate Professor, plant biotechnology, Rajasthan Agricultural University, Bikaner.

Before you ask what vermicomposting is, it refers to the decomposition of domestic waste into manure through the use of a bin and earthworms (See graphic on the right). It can be done in your own residential complex and manure produced could then be easily used for gardening purposes.

Yes, shit happens. But when life hands you shit, vermicompost.



What can go into the composting bin?

Straw, ground coffee, tea bags, rotting fruit, mouldy bread, vegetable peels, and finally... mud and worms.

# Bus karo! no voice

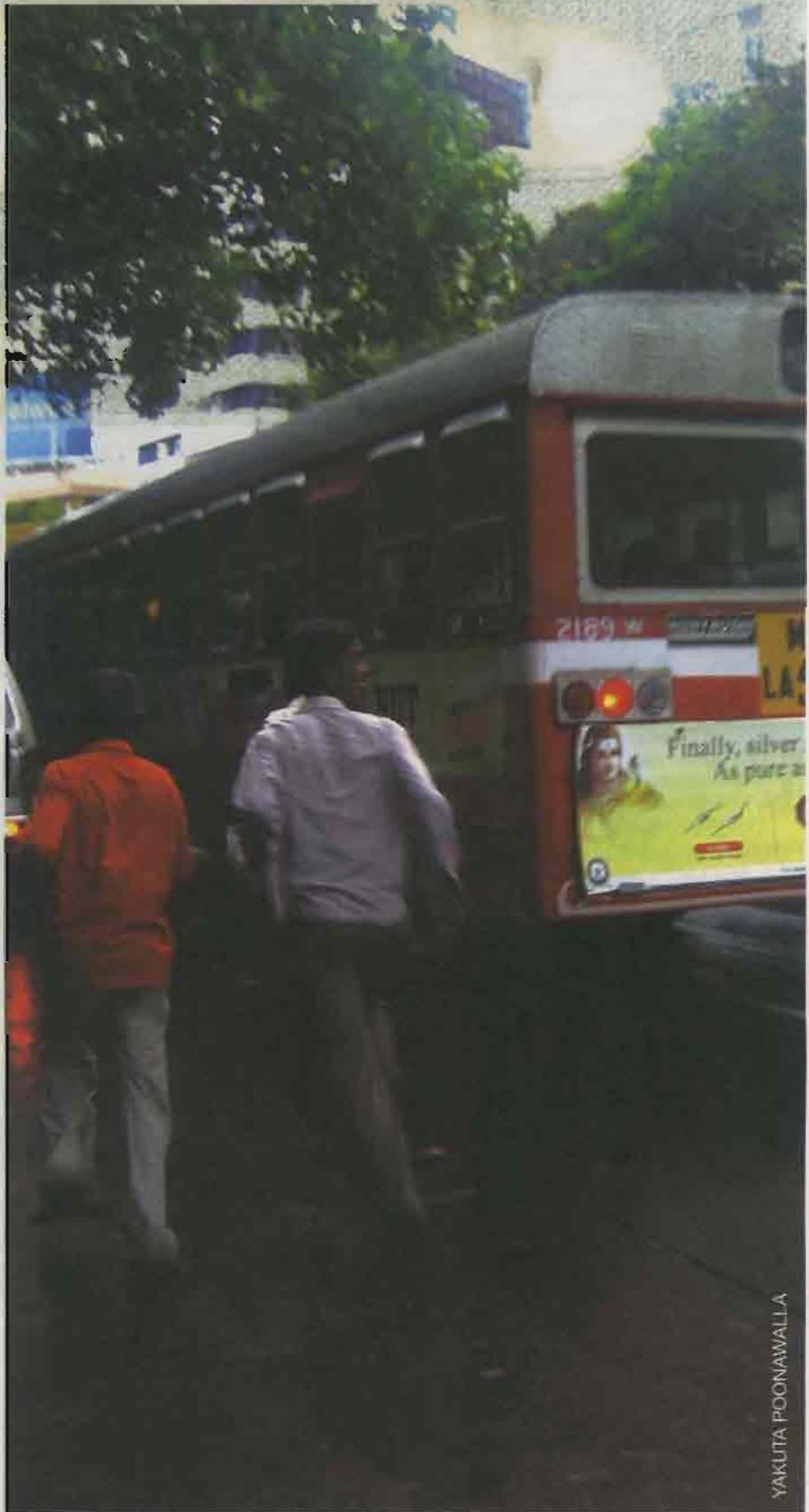
Enough of polluting vehicles. Get out of your car and try public transport says Ketaki Walawalkar.

Most countries in the world have a fairly sound public transportation system. However, these systems are not being used to their full capacity, especially in the developed countries. The intriguing question is that, though the public transport system facilities are available, why public is not ready use them? One of the reasons could be a common misconception, that only the poor use public transport.

With the condition that our earth is in, with global warming being a focal issue, can we really ignore the fact that we are destroying the earth? There are many ways in which, each individual can help and ensure that we don't obliterate our environment any more. One of the leading causes of air pollution is the smoke that motor vehicles emit, it would be better for people to reduce the number of cars on the road. The simplest way of doing this (apart from stopping the sale of cars) is to use public transport. If more people take the train, it would immediately reduce the number of vehicles on the road. Sharing a taxi, or taking the bus would reduce every individual's carbon footprint. For example, in China during the Olympics, pollution levels dropped because there were fewer cars on the road.

Public transport can also prove to be a lot less stressful. People do not have to buy a car, they do not have to meet the maintenance expenses, and petrol, etc. One wouldn't need to bother with leaving early so that they can find parking which is a problem in most cities across the world. It is not unusual to find that the time taken to find parking is more than the actual time taken to reach the destination! Additionally, one wouldn't get stuck in traffic for long periods of time.

Using public transport can be extremely cost-efficient. Mumbai, for example, officers, students etc. are entitled to subsidized public transportation passes. The public transport in Mumbai is fairly affordable, efficient, and reliable and covers the entire city, making it easy to use. (Where there is no public transport, we need to push for it.) Furthermore, walking or cycling short distances can be healthy options. Of course, one cannot expect everyone to use public transport all the time, but if everyone uses it once a week, it will make a world of difference. So, contribute to changing the city you live in! Use public transport and make the roads congestion free.



YAKUTA POONAWALLA



# Car seva

If public transport is not for you, at least you can share, say **Geetanjali Nerwani and Gunjan Chawla.**

**Y**ou don't like using local public transport. So what do you do? You buy your own car. You drive it every day. You increase congestion and pollution. But you don't care because public transport does not offer the comfort and the speed you want. But if you did have the option, would you do it? Until we have good public transport, there is a via media.

It's called car-pooling. For those who came in late, or have spent several years under a rock, car-pooling is a shared use of private car, by a group of people traveling to the same destination or a nearby.

Ashok Dattar, Traffic Solutions Expert, who started the concept of car-pooling in 2006 ago in Mumbai, put 20 lakhs of his own money into starting a car-pooling website. He hired employees, purchased software and started the website [www.mycoolpool.com](http://www.mycoolpool.com).

Don't look it up. It's dead. After a year he realized that it was going nowhere. "People in India are very individualistic. While they travel by car to offices, colleges etc they indulge in private work

conversations which would then be difficult if they were car pooling. Nowadays most families have drivers and they wish to either travel alone or with their friends. So in short it is the lack of co-operation from the public.



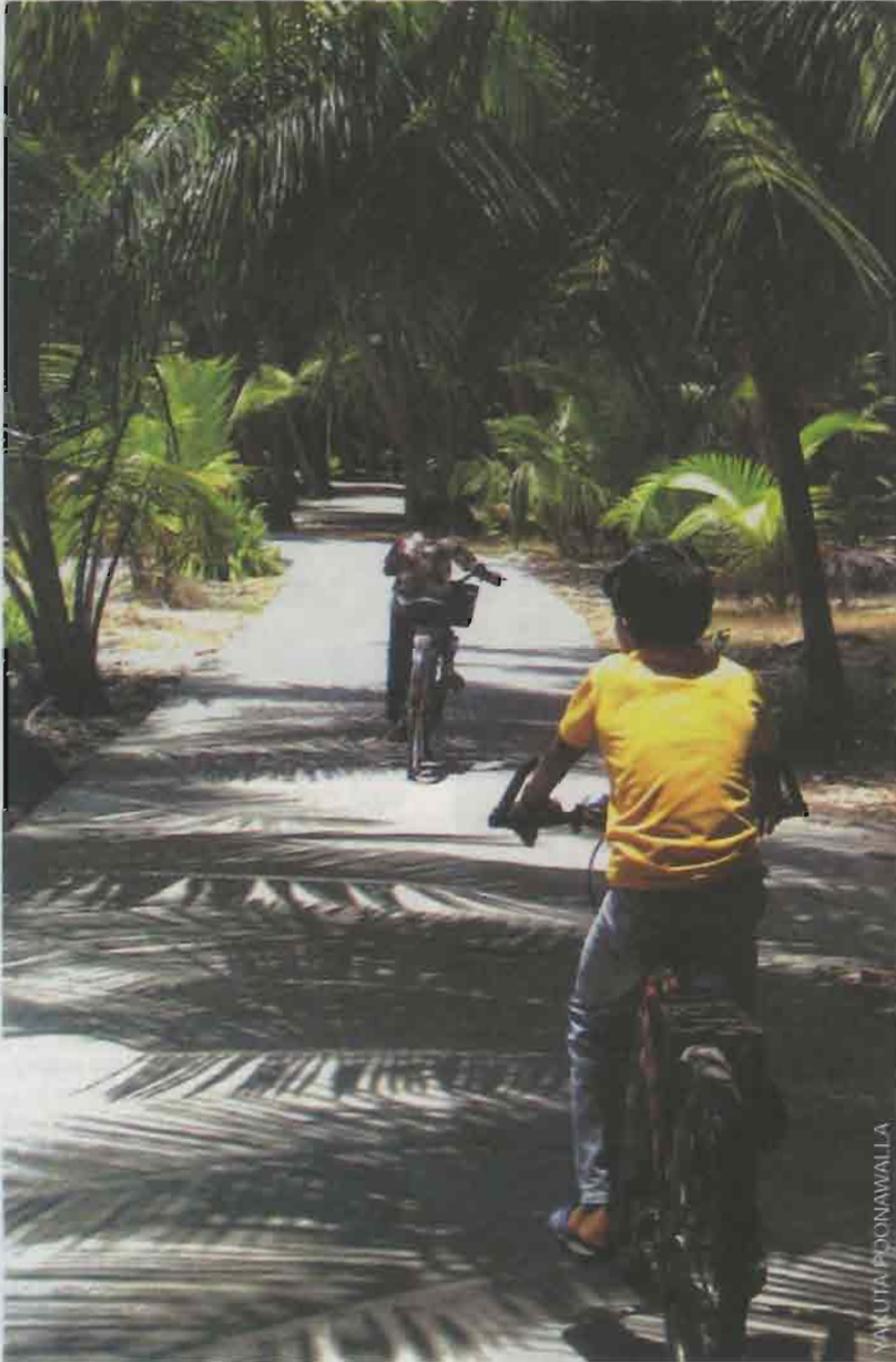
"When I started my web site, we did not have adequate members, while we were hoping for at least a thousand people signing up. It was a difficult process since people were scattered over different areas. For example, three people from Borivali, four people from Andheri and so on," he added. "India doesn't want to save money. There are no restrictions or discipline when it comes to car parking, lane cutting etc. If parking fees, for instance, were to increase it would then pinch the public and may be then the people could car pool in a particular society. The law should get even stricter especially after the launch of the Tata Nano and decrease in fuel prices to avoid or rather curb the problem of congestion in a city especially like Mumbai."

Perhaps, it was just one of those things that was launched too soon, a website before its time. Until and unless a society/community does not feel the pressure to change, it will not.

The only time Mumbai changed its attitude towards car-pooling was when the city was starved of fuel during the Oil and Natural Gas Commission strike in January 2009. Suddenly, the car commuters of the city discovered that they could take a few discomforts to get to work at time.

# Pedal power

Cyclists in Mumbai assert their rights on the roads saying, "We belong". Deepa Nair explores the advantages of cycling as a means of transport.



“The sense of freedom and joy that this simple machine, the cycle, brings is incredible and should be shared and multiplied,” says Anoop Rajan, 24-year-old webmaster and an avid cyclist, who cycles to work everyday from Malad to Andheri. Cycling can not just reduce the pollution woes of a city, but is a great way to be fit and a brilliant stress-buster.

On December 28, 2008, Anoop Rajan and his friends who have formed a bikers

association for cyclists in the city conducted an almost first of its kind cyclists meet for a cause called the “Critical Mass Mumbai.” Critical Mass is an event typically held on the last Friday of every month in cities around the world where bicyclists take to the streets to draw attention to how unfriendly the city is to its cyclists. The rally started from Shivaji Park in Dadar to Juhu Beach, with a group of around 50 cyclists.

According to Anoop Rajan, “The event was a celebration of cycling as an alternative means of transport and a symbolic event for us as cyclists to cycle during peak hour not for leisure but to assert our existence on the roads. It was not about blocking traffic or breaking traffic laws or fighting the motorists but a peaceful assertion of our right as cyclists to the road. Because, we too belong.” Though Mumbai has seen two such rides organized by college students in 2001, this is the first time that the event had around 50 participants including the regular cyclists and new cyclist enthusiasts from the city. The regulars expected at least 100 participants but eventually the numbers were fewer. Also, just raising awareness about cycling as a green alternative means

“The sense of freedom and joy that this simple machine, the cycle, brings is incredible and should be shared.”

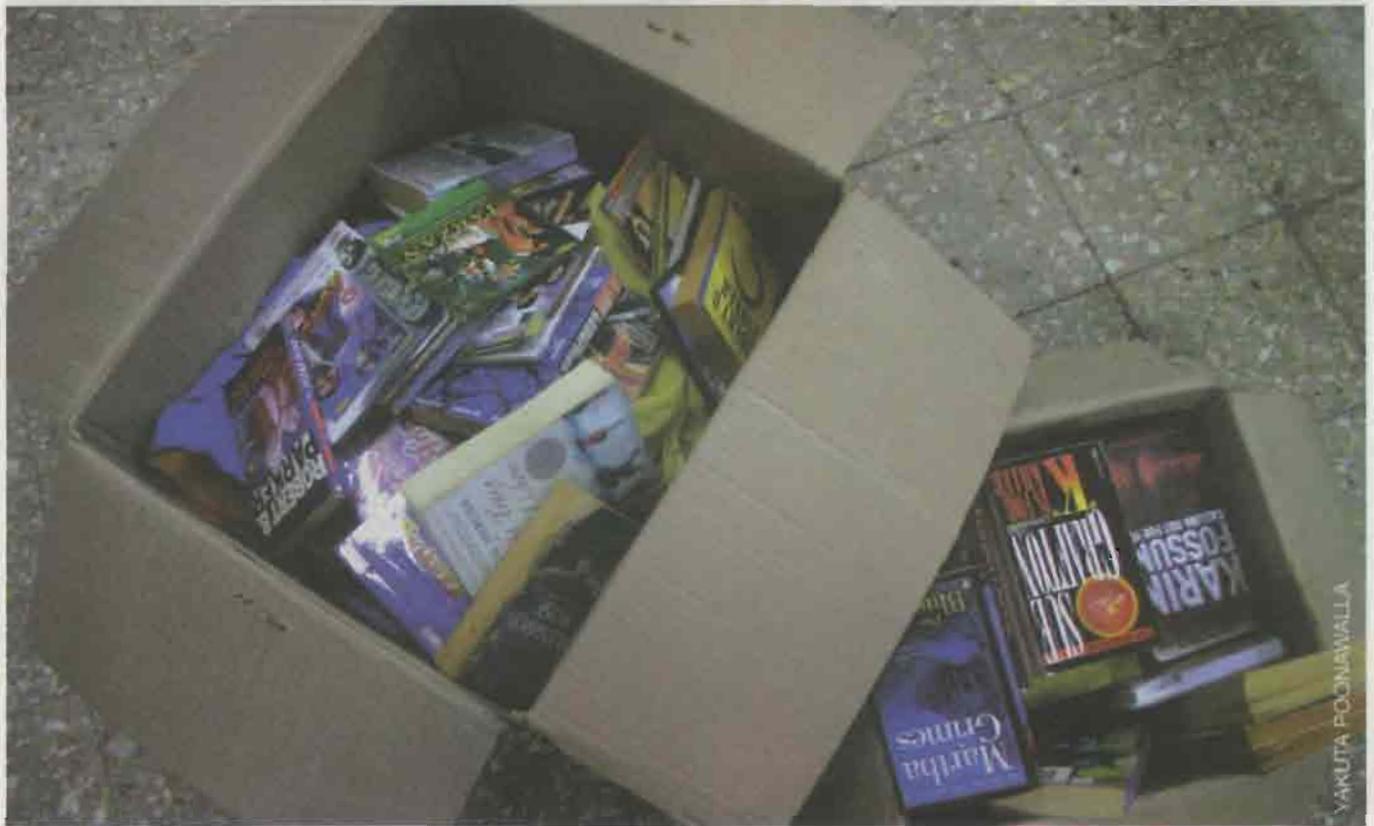
of transport is something that they want to instill in Mumbaikars to encourage more people to start cycling.

Pedestrians in Mumbai don't even have proper footpaths so demanding a separate lane for cyclists would be a distant dream but the silent message that they want to send out to the taxiwallas, rickshawwallas, bus-drivers and other motorists is that though they might be smaller and slower, Cyclists do deserve the road too.

Architect and participant in the event, Renny Varghese, who's also a part of the Bikers Association, which is a network of cyclists in the city, is active through their own Google group, blog and social networking activities says, “Whether it is environmental issues, social problems or cyclists rights, just the small act of riding together peacefully says that we matter and cannot be taken for granted.”

They've also been trying to spread awareness regarding the use of helmets for cyclists to be able to ride safely without worrying. Adds Renny Varghese, “Five cycles can take up a place of a car, cycling is not only the best way to decongest and get rid of pollution but also a great exercise to remain fit and healthy”

# Freecycling stojobA



Just give it away! **Yakuta Poonawalla** tells you how.

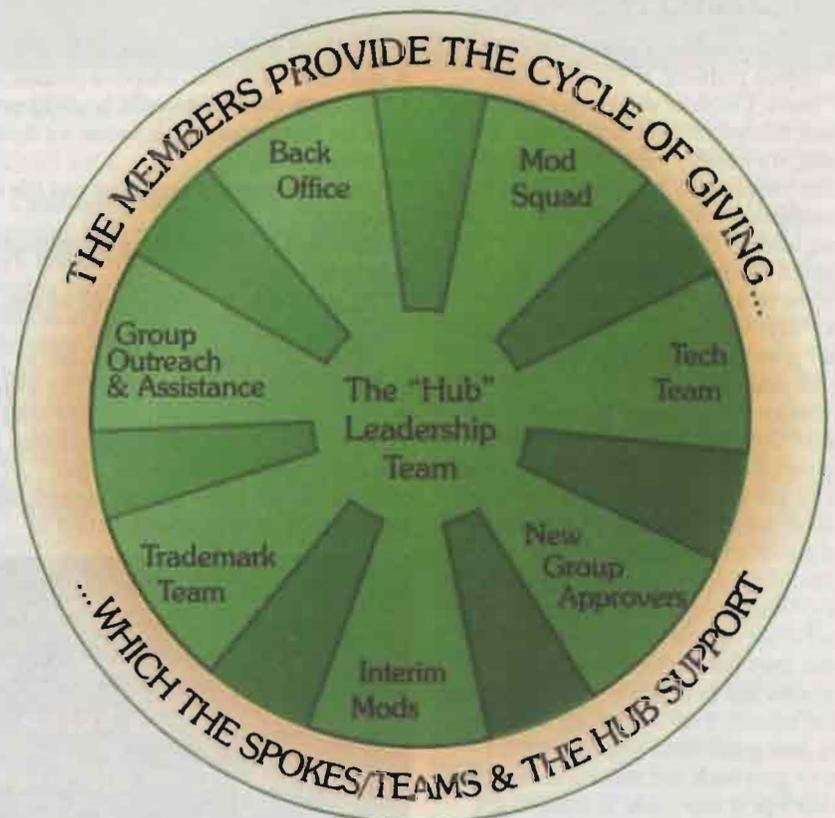
**H**ave there been times when you've opened your cupboard and said, "Oh my God! I need to get rid of this junk!""? Think about reducing the clutter by simply giving it away – after all one man's trash is another man's treasure! Welcome to Freecycling.

Started by Deron Beal in 2003, the Freecycle Network operates as an NGO based in Arizona, converting trash into treasure by simply making it easier for givers and receivers to find each other. The concept of freecycling has been catching on around the world, enabling people to give (and receive!) usable goods for free, as well as helping the environment by keeping unnecessary trash out of landfills.

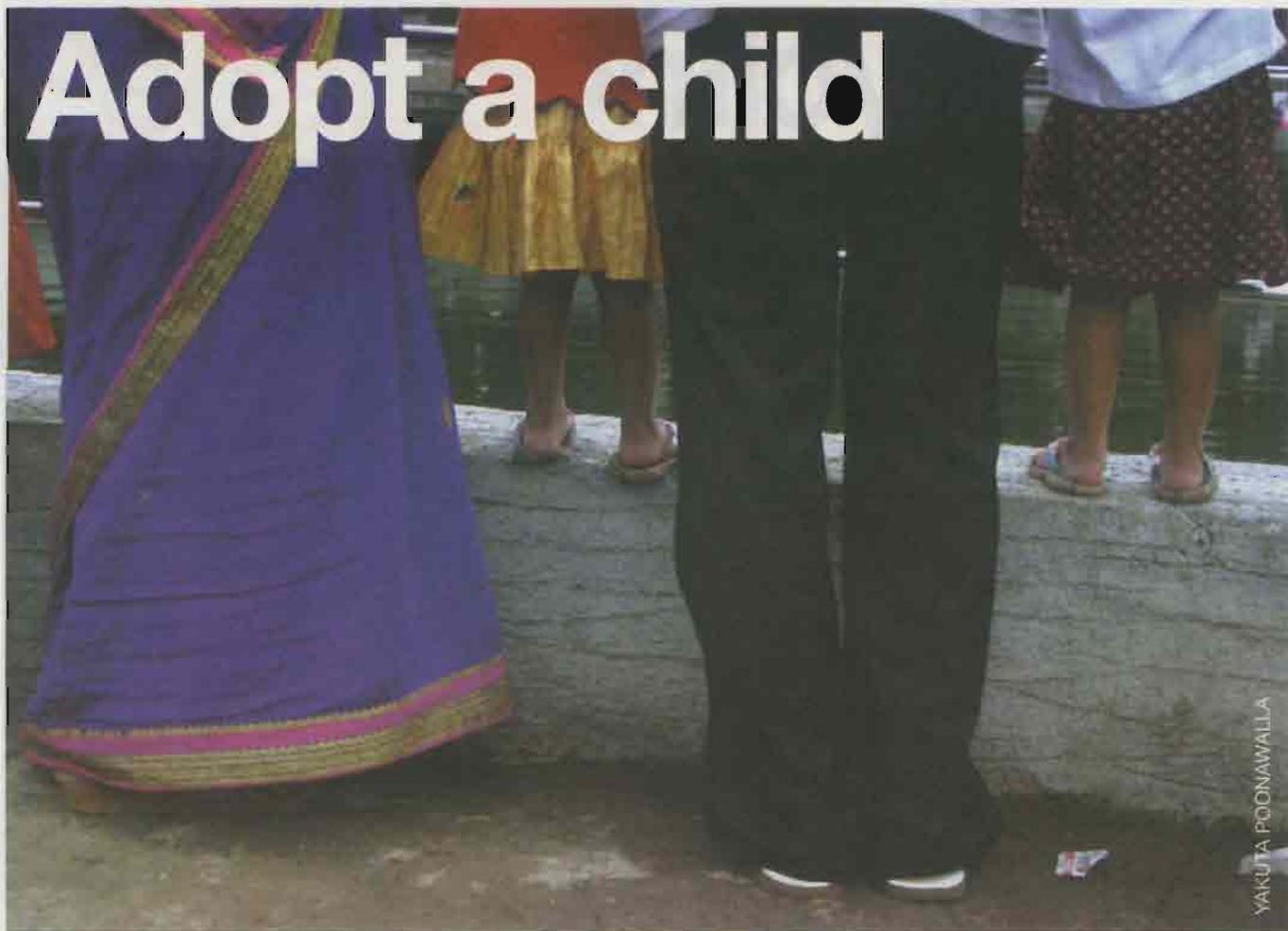
Although Beal has set up a widespread network, we can all apply this concept on a much smaller scale to help those in need. Give old clothes away to the maid, donate old toys to an orphanage, pass old books on to a school or library.

In Pune during Christmas, Austin D'Rozario holds a yard sale at his local Church, where he brings out an eclectic collection of unused stuff from his home and sells it for a token price.

"The goal is not to make any money, but simply to pass things on to those that have a better use for them," he says, "And in this age of rising prices there is no better way to spread the cheer."



Organisational model of the Freecycle Network  
as seen on [www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org)



# Adopt a child

Adoption gives the parents and the child a new life, says **Crisma Nazareth.**

“I was a mistake, I guess, left on the station platform at the age of two years. I wonder sometimes why I was not just thrown on the tracks, I was not wanted; it’s a really hard truth to accept that the people who give birth to you are not interested in your life. But it’s been a harder truth to accept that a bunch of complete strangers want nothing, but to have you as a part of as a part of their lives.” says Becky Bast, who was adopted by her grandfather Mr. Karl Bast who is now 87 years old,

“Becky is the biggest blessing to our family.” He says, “The only girl child amongst all my other nephews, and I thank God for her tremendously. She has loved cared for me more than any biological child has. Nothing and no one can separate us.” Hearing her grandpa, she now goes on to say, “Maybe my reason to be, was to be united to the real family that was cut out for me, they have given me more than I could ever ask or deserve. Today I can take care of myself. I am a graduate in biology and a post graduate in pharmacy, but I want to give back and make a difference to one life like it was made to mine, that’s what my family has taught me after all. I am now doing my B.Ed from Xavier’s and I plan to teach special kids.”

•“Sometimes we just look at each other

•and ask what we got ourselves into?”

A few comments from adoptive parents:

\* “We knew this child would be different from us. But sometimes it seems we don’t know him at all.”

\* “I’ve lost control of my house and life to this child.”

\* “Nothing I do or try seems like enough to help this child.”

\* “We wonder how much longer we can stay committed to these children.”

What we and many agencies fail to sometimes take into account are the ways in which adopted children manifest with a variety of psychological characteristics that differ tremendously from other children. Sadly, many parents embark on the task of raising an adopted child ill

prepared for understanding or coping with the behavioral manifestations of him who often feels like someone who is dispensable and can be disposed of.

Every child deserves a home. There are millions of illicit parents but not a single illicit child. Each child born to the planet and is an integral part of it, who will one day go on to be its future. There are millions of orphaned and abandoned children throughout the world who deserve the opportunity to have a home and a family.

However, being alone in this world is only part of their problem. These children are also in physical danger, having little to no food, clothing or shelter.

This is why we look forward at this as a mission; first, to save lives, then to build families and we will see this world transform little by little.

India has 30% of the world's births.

A child is born every 2 seconds in India.

Only 15-20% of Indian children grow to full potential.

India has more than 126 million child labourers.

More than half of India's children are malnourished.

India has 25% of the world's child deaths.

# Include me out



Another world is possible, says Koel Sen. Only it will take a huge effort from all concerned.

It is true that anything in the extreme is not sustainable. Everyone was very upset and thought that the West Bengal government would collapse when the Tatas withdrew their Nano plant from Singur. But was it really just to put the entire blame on Mamata and her Trinamool Congress, the rival party? Keeping in mind the breakdown of the US economy we need to question whether corporate capitalism provides the only path open for development?

Even after 60 years of independence social inequality exists in India, the cornerstone of the British Empire in India. In fact the whole world still functions on the principle of class divide such that the benefits of modern industrialization are mostly for only a particular 'class' of people.

Medha Patkar agitated against the building of the Narmada Dam for thousands of tribals who would have been rehabilitated as their villages would get submerged with the river water. Sudha Bharadwaj, an active member of the

Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha, a practicing lawyer and a member of the IAPL (International Association of People's Lawyers) feels strongly about the situation in Chattisgarh where the MNCs (Multinationals) are using all means to acquire tribal land. "Since Chattisgarh is rich in raw materials, companies like the ACC (Associated Cement Companies Ltd.) and Ambuja Cement have been bought over by French and Swiss MNCs like Wholecim and Lafarge. These companies get cheap labour here and can thus manufacture cement at a cheap cost and earn lots of profit", she explains.

India is forging its way ahead with massive development plans whilst overlooking the basic problems of poverty and illiteracy. Why forget the Union carbide gas leak at Bhopal in 1984 that killed thousands and cursed generations with the toxic gas? The Union Carbide Corporation, responsible for the disaster, has now been taken over by the Dow Chemicals.

No action has been taken against the UCC, instead more deals are being signed

with Dow. Locals are robbed of their resources both at Plachimada, Kerala where the groundwater from the entire village is being taken away for the Coca-Cola factory, and in Kashipur, Orissa, where all the Aluminium produced by Utkal Alumina will be used to manufacture aircrafts. Mass production of cash crops grown for commercial niche markets force farmers all over the country into massive losses and eventually into committing suicide.

Do we need development that leaves our fellow countrymen hungry and homeless or can we take a step forth in the direction of creating an equal world for all? Small scale co-operatives can be created in areas like Vidarbha to produce healthy indigenous goods like orange juice instead of selling land to companies to produce drinks like Coca Cola.

Small scale industries producing hydro-electricity can also be set up in these areas where the tribals can get employment and electricity.

We sure are not awaiting a market crash like that of the US, caused by free trade. Sudha Bharadwaj said, "This bubble had to break sometime...It could have been postponed but not stopped." Let us not follow suit.

# Know your rights

Can you be an empowered woman if you don't know your rights? **Priyanka Londhe** thinks not.

In India, being a woman is dressing 'decently' after puberty, being modest, working not for career but to pass a little time until she gets married. That way when a woman marries and conceives, she can leave her job and tend to her child. It's part of her socialization: even as an unmarried woman, she must learn to take care of the house and to cook, so that when her mother is not around, the male members of the family suffer no discomfort and no lessening of comfort. The girl child soon realizes she has no rights. She is only "allowed" to do what she wants as long as it fits in with how her parents, specially her father, think a girl should behave.

Many things here are given to a daughter as a form of indulgence — letting her wear jeans, letting her get that degree, laughing indulgently when she says she does not want to marry yet, smiling at her sky-high expectations from herself, even allowing her to talk with suitable men under strict parental supervision at weddings. These indulgences come with the statutory warning that any of them can be taken away, at any time, with no discussion.

In India, a girl is seen as a representative of her family. What she does, who are her friends, what is she wearing and studying is scrutinized a great deal. Boys are only judged on how much they will be able to earn. How many girls are encouraged by their parents to study and be career oriented? Very few.

When a girl doesn't do her homework or does badly at her studies, her parents don't mind too much. Most middle-class parents want their daughters to complete their graduation from a local college and get a normal nine-to-five job in the vicinity so that a benevolent eye can be kept on her.

## Property

This attitude, in which a woman is seen as unable to be a part of 'worldly' matters, has formed the basis of law in India. For example, for many decades, the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 says that only male members of a Hindu family that held its property under the Mitakshara system of family property could inherit. A daughter of the family who had got married would not inherit anything legally. The assumption was that what was hers had been given to her as a dowry anyway. That law was amended in 2004 but not enough. A woman may ask for partition of a joint family home but she still has no

rights to agricultural land. But why should that surprise you? All over the world, women own only one per cent of the land. The rest is owned by men.

## Marriage

Many women don't know their basic rights. This can be quite dangerous because it means women do not know when these rights have been infringed upon. For instance, few women know that the law does not allow a woman to be arrested after sunset, that she can be only arrested if a female constable present, that she cannot be held in an ordinary lock-up with other men.

But then few people know that they have the right to be presented before a magistrate within twenty-four hours of their arrest. This is called the right of habeas corpus and it is only suspended under Emergency and under Draconian measures relating to terrorism. There is also a great deal of ignorance about inter-religious marriage.

A matrimonial lawyer at a legal help centre for women says, "There is a provision in the constitution for women who want to marry men of other religions. It's called the Special Marriages Act (1954)".

This law lets a couple marry from different religions without either having to convert to the other's religion.

To avail this SMA certificate is very easy. You have to contact the Marriage Officer of your district. You fill out the forms, attach proof of your age and residence, to show that you are above 18 years of age (for a woman) or 21 years of age (for a man). The court needs 30 days advance notification. After 30 days, a notice is put up at the registrar's office. The notice is not sent to either party's house.

The law however cannot deal with social pressure. Nor does it seem to act when young people belonging to different religions marry. Sometimes families resort to desperate measures in order to prevent such "dishonour". Killing the young couple is not uncommon.

The law, if it is to be given teeth, must be protected.

And our rights must be enforced.

## Sexual harassment

Some women in India have attained economic independence through education. However, in a professional atmosphere, she is often looked upon as a sex object and unflattering, undesirable and obscene advances are made by her

male colleagues.

A young female lawyer says, "In many cases, women are not given their salaries and are over-burdened with work if they don't comply with the requests of their colleagues and seniors at work."

This terrifies the woman, makes her feel cheap and cripples her feelings of self worth. In most cases, the feeling of disgust, shame and fear of vengeance from the abuser is so much, that the victim of sexual or mental harassment never reveals her problem.

There is supposed to be a committee in every office which deals with corporate sexual harassment. It is supposed to be formed and led by women. If a woman registers a complaint in a visibly distressed state of mind, then immediate action is supposed to be taken.

However, the abuser only gets punished if the victim can prove the harassment with the help of evidence like pornographic mails, smses and the like. It is said that just a complaint from the victim is enough.

"If the offence is validated, then ideally the abuser should be strictly punished. He has not only psychologically damaged the victim but also has violated multiple fundamental rights in the Indian constitution, namely- right to live and livelihood (article 21), gender equality (article 14 and 15 (1)), work with dignity and protection against sexual harassment (article 32)," says the lawyer.

In reality, the abuser is either let off with a warning or transferred to another branch of the same corporate, or if the woman wants a transfer, it's given to her, so few things seem to work in a woman's favor. She must not only prove the harassment but also make do with superficial punishment given to her abuser. What must happen to women who are harassed by the head honchos of their company? Who will believe her? Where will she go, if she leaves her job on a bad note? It will not only cause her acute social stigma and make it difficult for her to work in the same office, but also, if she goes somewhere else to work, what guarantee does she have that she is safe?

## Blackmail

It was April 4 2008, when DNA newspaper wrote about a 15 year old girl whose boyfriend circulated MMS of their sexual act together. They had an affair, or relationship, if you will. The guy convinced the girl that he will eventually marry her. This is how he not only managed to have sex but also recorded it on his cell phone. Since she was a minor, the guy was convicted of raping her.

If you think that these things happen to

# Halla bol

kids, or 'really-dumb-girls-who-walked-into-trouble', then you have Raj Sharma's (name changed) case. He had a steady relationship with a girl; he was a performer at work, quite friendly and popular in his office. The couple was well liked in social circles. His fault was that he recorded some intimate moments with his girlfriend on his cell phone. He then transferred it on a pendrive. Many days passed and he forgot about it. Once his friend asked for the pendrive to watch a movie stored in it. He sent it through a stranger who happened to see it before handing it over to the friend. When he saw all the clippings, he forwarded them to the entire office consisting of around 200 people. The damage control was done by the IT department of the office and managers, but he suffered acute humiliation and depression. He never told his girlfriend and left the office soon after.

Many girls face moral dilemmas in India, when it comes to having pre-marital relationships, sexual or otherwise. There are cases where the boys/men have threatened to release sex tapes or videos, which explicitly details their private act together. It may happen in cases where the girl wants to end the relationship and move on with her life. However, the guy in his obsessive ness may threaten her or actually release videos, the way it happened with the 15 year old girl. There are many perverts who get money out of it as well but sometimes, both- the girl and the guy, can be victimized by a third person.

Lawyers suggest in such cases, a girl/woman can file a case in magistrate's court, civil court, high court or city court. She can press charges like- defamation (section 499), right to privacy (breach of privacy and confidentiality under IT act 2000- section 72), and charges against obscenity (section 19 (2) which curbs the fundamental right of free expression and thought when required).

However, filing a case and fighting for it can be psychologically, socially and financially taxing for a woman. We live in a country where people feel proud, if they never go to a police station and a court. They consider that as acutely humiliating. People have prying and questioning eyes to an extent where buying condoms or home pregnancy test kits from a chemist, feels like suicide.

So, even if a woman has laws that can bring her problem under control, yet the pain which she goes through during the process, is a lot. If she chooses to take the legal route to solve her problem, then she has to be prepared for what it brings along.

Make a noise for all the right reasons,  
say Kunjarani D'Souza and Nisha Samant.

We now know that the government spent over 30 cr on the new paver tiles all around the city for non-justifiable reasons.

That there is now awareness regarding the utilization of money by the obtained through the taxes of citizens and transparency can be called for

That all public services-be it police, public transport, passport offices and garbage disposal can be publically scanned and corrected by citizens.

This is the way we- public make our presence felt and make the government answerable to their people. It was one such a situation handled by conscientious citizens of the country – the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in rural Rajasthan that brought to the agenda of the politician – the Right to Information or the RTI Act.

The right to information (RTI) act was derived from the fundamental right of expression under article 19 of the constitution of India and was passed in the two houses of parliament as the act 22 of 2005. It thereafter became operational on the 12th of October, 2005.

"More often then not we citizens- especially the privileged residents of metropolitan cities carry forward a laidback attitude regarding political action and governance, usually raising voice only to complain and crib about a particular situation, be it poor roads or traffic congestion or more importantly the clogging of drains. Though these factors may seem small, they directly affect each and every person of society in a large way," explained Shailesh Gandhi, RTI activist.

Like every other governmental procedure, this too was expected to be a delayed, regressive response based act. But much to everyone's surprise; it has turned out to be a rather simplified process with a special committee setup just to address these issues and queries.

There are also several help lines and people who volunteer to manually guide you through the stages of the filing of RTI application. So the next time, you see a

discrepancy in the order or cleanliness of your area, have all the right to go right ahead and question him or her.

"Even if it ends up taking you Rs 70 and an hour of your time, it would always be an act in the way of progress since it questions the actions of leaders in high posts", said Mr Bhaskar Prabhu, an RTI applicant. You are and will be the only ones who they are fully answerable to. Make use of the power.

When does one use the right to information act?

RTI can be used to obtain transparency in the expenditure of money (budgets) in infrastructural as well as social projects

RTI can be used for any problem of the area that would ideally expect attention of officials

RTI can also question the behavior and current schedule and duty of the elected government

# No vote, no voice



MUJIBHA SINGH

Voting not only gives you the right to choose, but also monitor and criticize. **Pooja Chauhan** explains.

**T**oday the youth of India represent a major section of our total population. But only very few of us are able to fulfill our responsibilities towards the nation. This is clear from the data that only 17 per cent of the youth (18-23 years) participate in the elections. The rest of us do not even bother to register our names on voter's list.

Every time we blame our government for not doing what it is supposed to do. We always forget that by not participating in the process of selecting our own government, we are forfeiting the right to complain too.

"There are basic problems, why people do not vote in our country. To begin with, there is lack of information given to the citizens regarding to the process of registration", said Gerson Da Cunha, the founder of the non-governmental organisation AGNI (Action for Good Governance in India).

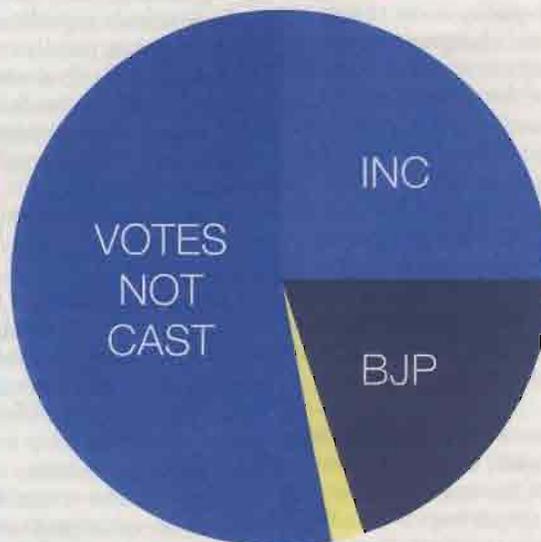
In Mumbai, less than 50 per cent of the people participated in the Lok Sabha 2004 elections. This clearly shows that there is great deal of ignorance among the citizens itself.

We happily sleep in our homes on the day of elections, considering it as a holiday. We don't cast our votes because according to us no candidate is eligible for the elections. But we never think that our absence can lead to impersonation or false voting by others, which is even worse. At least by participating in the elections, we can prevent this illegitimate use of our voting powers by others. Also, if we find

all the candidates ineligible, we can launch a protest vote by making a cross over the ballot paper or writing "none of the above". It might not bring a change in the government, but it will certainly act as a pressure on politicians to put up better candidates.

For the youth, who have not even registered themselves on the voter list, now the registration has become even easier with online registration. Also, there is a movement called "ivote" started by two girls, Natasha Kewalramani and Keya TK from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. They distribute voter registration forms in

different colleges and then recollect these forms from the volunteers and submit them in the electoral offices. So now, registration to vote has become even easier. Every time we have complaints about the administration of the country, we should remind ourselves that we can bring about a change to that situation by involving ourselves in the process of selection of government. This will not only improve the standard of politics in our country but also the other standards of living. Let's wake up and realize the importance of citizen's participation in elections.



Mumbai Lok Sabha Elections 2004  
(North East)

# Power cords

A great new source of a panacea we have all sought?  
The umbilical cord. Maithili Padukone reports.

**S**anjivani, the mythical herb that could cure any disease may still drive a few mendicants crazy looking for it. For all they know, the sure cure to almost any disease, as research has been in the process of proving, was provided to us right at birth and lies deep in our skin and bones. We are talking about stem cells- those magical little dots of tissue that can technically cure most major diseases.

So what are stem cells? The National Institute of Health defines them as- 'Stem cells have the remarkable potential to develop into many different cell types in the body. Serving as a sort of repair system for the body, they can theoretically divide without limit to replenish other cells as long as the person or animal is still alive. When a stem cell divides, each new cell has the potential to either remain a stem cell or become another type of cell with a more specialized function, such as a muscle cell, a red blood cell, or a brain cell.'

Two major types of stem cells have been identified by scientists- the embryonic stem cells and adult stem cells. Embryonic stem cells are derived from the embryo and adult stem cells in various organs and tissues of the body. Stem cells are found in highly concentrated amounts in the umbilical cord blood, which is generally cut and discarded after the birth of a baby. From the time scientists discovered the potency of these cells to cure previously incurable diseases, like almost any disease that has to do with replacement of organs

or neurons e.g. Cancer and Alzheimer's disease, and showed hope of curing many more, a number of research organisations and private companies set up 'banks' where the cord blood stem cells could be preserved by the parents at the time of birth of the baby and can be used by the child or family members with similar blood type anytime in the future.

but can also be made available to society through public banking of the cells. It is just like insurance cover, where we initially pay a lump sum followed by a smaller annual fee. The cell account gets transferred under the name of the child when s/he turns 21 years of age. Though there has been no history of thalassaemia or any such disease in the family, we decided to preserve the cells as medical research is coming up with more and more uses of stem cells.'

British scientists have developed a new stem cell technique that could help patients with advanced leukaemia or lymphoma. They genetically tinkered with donor stem cells -- master cells that can develop into virtually any cell type -- so that they can survive highly toxic chemotherapy. Other

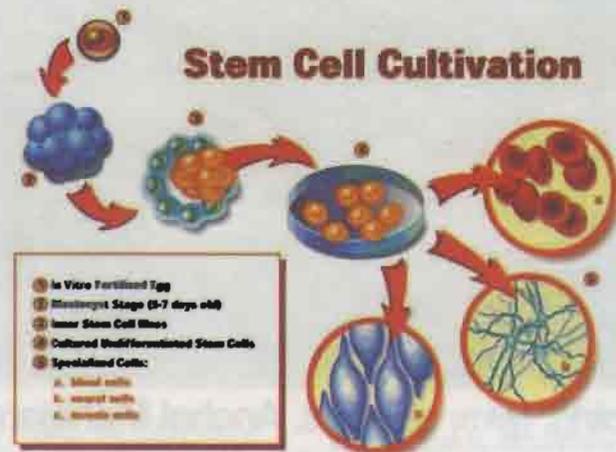


IMAGE COURTESY:  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Says Sameera Khan, a free-lancing journalist, who has preserved the cord blood stem cells of her second child- 'I heard about the process during my second pregnancy but was not too convinced about the benefits. The prices were high too, but have dropped now. I spoke to Dr. Feroza Parekh of Jaslok Hospital who assured us that preservation of the baby's stem cells is a worthy investment not just for the baby and members of our family

medical conditions curable by stem cell treatment are muscular dystrophy, heart malfunctions, diabetes, sickle cell anaemia, cancer and even to create brain cells.

Now that's reason enough to preserve your baby's stem cells! It may save your child's life, your life or the life of someone else out there, in grave need of this natural cure to many ailments. Save the cells, save lives, save the world.

Umbilical cord blood, like bone marrow and peripheral blood, is a rich source of stem cells for transplantation

There may be advantages for certain patients to have cord blood stem cell transplants instead of transplants with marrow or peripheral blood stem cells

Stem cell transplants may use the patient's own stem cells or donor stem cells

Transplant physicians would use donor stem cells to treat a child with leukemia than those of the child

The transplantation of blood-forming stem cells is an accepted treatment to restore the body's ability to make blood and immune cells

Cord blood for transplantation is collected from the umbilical cord and placenta after a baby is delivered

Donated cord blood that meets requirements is frozen and stored at a cord blood bank for future use

# Heal 'thy' mind



Yoga, cycling, gym, aerobics. Anchal Mahajan explores various routes to a healthy body and mind.

Nearly half of the Indian workforce is overweight and more than 1/4th school going children are obese according to the study done by AIIMS in 2008. 27% of our urban youth suffers from hypertension which can shorten life expectancy. The study says that 9% to 11% of people above the age of 45 in urban India have heart disease. Bus and taxi drivers, who are physically inactive, have a higher rate of heart disease than men in other occupations. People who remain physically active have a lower death rate than people who don't. In Mumbai, over 37,000 people have died only due to heart attacks in both private and government hospitals between 2004 and 2006. India is a diabetic capital of the world and its prevalence among adults in our country is 12%. Estimated 150 to 200 in every 10 lakh suffer from kidney problems. Is the solution to be found in a gym? Many people don't think so.

"I love doing yoga, but this is my profession," a reputed gym trainer Dev Dunga strongly believes going to gym is not complete in itself to get a fit body. Hardcore exercises at gym work on the outer most muscles of the body whereas rest everything remains untouched while yoga works to every square inch like a complete fitness package.

Another way to stay healthy is to practice laughter yoga, a complete fun way

to reduce stress. Laughter yoga controls breathing and each time one practice it, breathing becomes more readily and deeper. When one stimulates laughter, the body doesn't know that it is not real and reacts in the same manner as in your peak moments of joy. One minute of laughter is equal to 10 minutes on the rowing machine. It increases blood supply to the face, nourishes the skin and makes it glow. It also increases the level of endorphins - the body's natural pain killers and even helps to dump depression, anxiety and psychosomatic disorders.

The scenario today is, some people are reluctant to start exercising because they are afraid it will be too strenuous but Kajal Kathuria, diet consultant of a reality show *Biggest Loser* believes that one doesn't have to do such exercises to gain health benefits; moderate exercises are effective too. One must increase the amount of exercises and physical activity in order to induce endurance, strength, balance, coordination and flexibility. She believes there is no concept of best exercise as every kind of physical activity is good until we are doing it with passion.

In this healthy lifestyle which includes a balanced diet, regular exercise and a daily multi-vitamin food, there's another critical element which often gets neglected and that is sleep. Experts recommend a

uninterrupted sleep every night which does not only keep us healthy but even increases our longevity. Lack of sleep has been linked to emotional troubles, such as feelings of sadness and depression. Sleep plays a critical physiological function by slowing the body to re-energise it.

Better health is found in the integration of body, mind, and spirit; and meditation aids in the process. Doctors are spreading the good word about meditation, not because they think its cool, but because the studies have shown that it works.

Meditation increases intuition and clarity, which includes a sense of what is right for us at any particular time. There can be an increase in energy, vitality, lessening of a tendency toward sickness, and quicker healing if one does meditation regularly.

The benefits of exercise include:

1. An increase in bone density.
2. An improved mental state
3. Lowered blood pressure
4. Improved cardiac health
5. A flexible body
6. Improved energy levels and stamina
7. Better sex life.

As food choices changes in the progressing world, educating common public about the potential risks of fast food and other sugar, high fat food is more essential. Health care and disease prevention in particular are the areas that demand more time and resources for the government. In 2008-09 via NRHM (national rural health mission) the increase in the central health budget is 14% in sharp contrast to the overall increase in central government expenditure of 20% revenue increase. This year out of total budget of Rs 16500 crore for the health ministry, Rs12200 crore was allocated to NRHM, and 544 lakh was given for social health activities.

Modern lifestyle diseases are the price unfortunately, the developing India is paying for progress. Although India counts for 16.5 per cent of the world's population, it contributes to more than 20 per cent of the world's share of diseases.

Average 60 per cent income of an Indian family is spending on single hospitalized member every year. In the Indian Journal Medical Research report the team has said, the top 10% of spenders in the sample they have studied had spend about 150% of their annual income on a single illness involving hospitalization. This is the appalling face of Unhealthy India, all due to a lack of exercise, neglect of anutritious and balanced diet which is coming across us in the form of facts and figures, but the time is not far when we will end up another added number in these statistics.

# The green way out



A green way out seems like the only way to go, say **Deepa Nair and Mallika Kulkarni.**

**D**id you know that industrial production of meat or livestock contributes to 18% of greenhouse gas emissions? Doctor Rajendra Pachauri, chair of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), has advocated that people should have one meat-free day to reduce green house gas emissions. He also points out we can personally reduce global warming not just by using less fuel and changing our mode of transport, but also by simply reducing our meat intake, "Give up meat for one day per week initially, and decrease it from there."

Several studies of the IPCC show that the meat industry directly contributes to the process of global warming. Industrial meat production consumes large amounts of fossil fuels for manufacturing fertilizer, as well as for global transport of meat and meat products. In addition, deforestation around the world is a result of clearing and burning to create grazing land for livestock. This creates further damage by destroying trees that would otherwise absorb carbon dioxide and reduce the impact of climate change.

In order to produce meat as a 'commodity', factories require large tracts of land, usually arable land, to rear livestock. They would require a large number of animals, as well as an equal amount of flora, fauna and grain for the

animals to feed on. This gives a lot of stress on the soil. Fruits, vegetables, and grains, on the other hand, require 95% less raw materials to produce. Thus, in comparison, given 1 hectare, if one can produce 1 tonne of corn, the same hectare in general will be able to produce a mere 100kg of meat. By diverting the use of the land towards meat production, we are depriving people from using the land for

One hectare of land produces a ton of corn, whereas the same land would yield a mere 100kg of meat. By diverting land towards meat production, we are depriving people of food.

vegetable production.

Many nutrition experts also now question whether human beings are genetically built to eat meat at all. Anju Venkat, who runs Mumbai's Health Awareness Centre and advocates a vegetarian diet, says that humans were not

built to eat meat. "All food is species-specific, that is, all creatures are built to eat only certain types of food. For bees, it's honey, cows have four stomachs to be able to digest grass, carnivores eat herbivores and so on. However, the digestive system of human beings is not programmed for meat." She also argues that carnivores have acidic saliva because non-vegetarian food that is high in protein needs an acidic medium to break down.

Human beings however, have alkaline saliva. Carnivores have very large livers to instantly throw out all the toxins found in meats; humans have small livers. Carnivores have a small large intestine to allow the meat to digest as fast as it can, but humans have long large intestines. Thus, Venkat's theory believes that genetically, humans were not built to eat meat and ate it only during times of vegetable shortage.

Many non-vegetarians feel that a vegetarian diet lacks protein and hence makes one weak. However this theory has been disproved by scientists and doctors alike. It now stands that, a vegetarian diet does not lack anything, including protein as long as it is varied. Thus, a vegetarian cannot depend only on dal for their protein intake and must consume a combination of vegetables, grains and dals in order to get the necessary nutrition. Even though meat does provide enough protein, it also leads to high cholesterol and other lifestyle diseases like obesity. Join the Vegetarian Revolution to save the world!

# Rubber up



RADHIKA IYENGAR

life with pleasure, neither for yourself, nor for your partner. "Men are reluctant to use condoms, for a variety of reasons—they feel it's a threat to their manhood; often they just don't know how/where to buy a condom," says Sonalini Mirchandani, the Country Director of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (India), "Many believe that as long as they are having sex with their wives, it's 'okay'... The perception that condoms are only meant for those who 'visit sex workers', needs to be shattered." Aditya Handa, a college-going student adds, "Most of my friends refuse to use condoms because they feel they lose the pleasure, little knowing that not wearing one can make you lose your life."

## **You feel self-conscious while buying them:**

There is absolutely no reason to feel uncomfortable while asking a chemist for a packet of condoms. Sex is a natural process, and there is nothing to be pink-in-the-cheeks about it.

"I believe the reason why adolescents feel conscious while buying condoms is because sex is a highly tabooed subject in India," says Shifa Nagar, an Indian student studying at Queen Mary College, UK. "Since sex is not much of a taboo in UK, it's easier for young people to buy condoms. In fact, there are condom vending machines on each floor of the universities' dormitories."

Fortunately, the National Aids Control Organisation (NACO) plans to install condom vending machines all over India in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kanpur, Hyderabad, Chennai and Lucknow. These will be located in ATMs, public toilets and call centres. In Chennai and Hyderabad, condom vending machines have already been installed in the Sulabh toilets and the acceptance level has been pretty good.

"These vending machines save us the dread of walking up and asking someone for a condom. We don't need to feel embarrassed then," says Pranav Shetty, a computer engineer in Hyderabad.

For those who are uneasy about picking up a packet of condoms from a vending machine, Kshitij Handa, a student of media says, "If you're too shy to buy condoms for your own protection, then you have no business 'doing it'."

## **Your girlfriend uses a contraceptive pill:**

Condoms are as important as you believe your sex-life to be. Even though your girlfriend/wife does have a contraceptive pill to prevent unwanted pregnancies, it still does not prevent you or her from acquiring HIV/AIDS or other diseases. If one of you unknowingly do have HIV, you are most likely to infect your partner, whether you like it or not.

## **Safe sex is really the best sex these days, says Radhika Iyengar.**

“Hello, I love you, let's get tested for AIDS.. You know I trust you, but you can't tell these days”

Now, unless you have the time (or the inclination) to go around singing this to every other person you find yourself in bed with, you'll need to turn to Plan B. Sex is an integral part of human existence. In the 21st century, the desire to learn more about the opposite sex's body and to explore it, is something that has been rapidly increasing amongst the youth. However, what hasn't been increasing is the desire to consciously use protection, that is, condoms.

Over 35% of reported HIV/AIDS cases are seen in India's youth today (15-24 years). "It is important to inform and encourage the youth to accept, and use condoms, since the knowledge of HIV/AIDS is very low amongst the youth," says Sowmitri VR, Head of HIV/AIDS Initiatives, Satyam Foundation. In India, condoms still have to gain a 'trust factor'. "While it's okay for a man to be seen with a packet of cigarettes in his pocket, a woman on a date with him would react differently if she found a condom in his pocket, even though possessing a condom is far better than a packet of cigarettes. While one saves your life, the other takes it."

### **Now, if you believe that condoms...**

**Are unnecessary:** Those who choose to have unprotected sex are likely to acquire one or more Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). Women stand a chance of not only acquiring these diseases, but of also becoming pregnant. Some of the common STDs are:

**HIV/AIDS:** The most common mode of transmission is through sexual intercourse. The HIV virus spreads through the passing

of infected semen/vaginal secretion or blood, from one person to another. New-borns can inherit HIV if their mother has acquired the virus during the sexual intercourse with her infected husband.

**Syphilis:** Is a bacterial disease, that can lead to infectious skin lesion localized in the genital areas of those infected with the virus, along with extreme cases where soft tumour-like balls of inflammation, which may appear at any part of the body, including the skeleton, involving degradation of the immune system, infection of the central nervous system and well as the cardiovascular system.

**Chlamydia:** Is a bacterium, again contracted through sexual contact, which

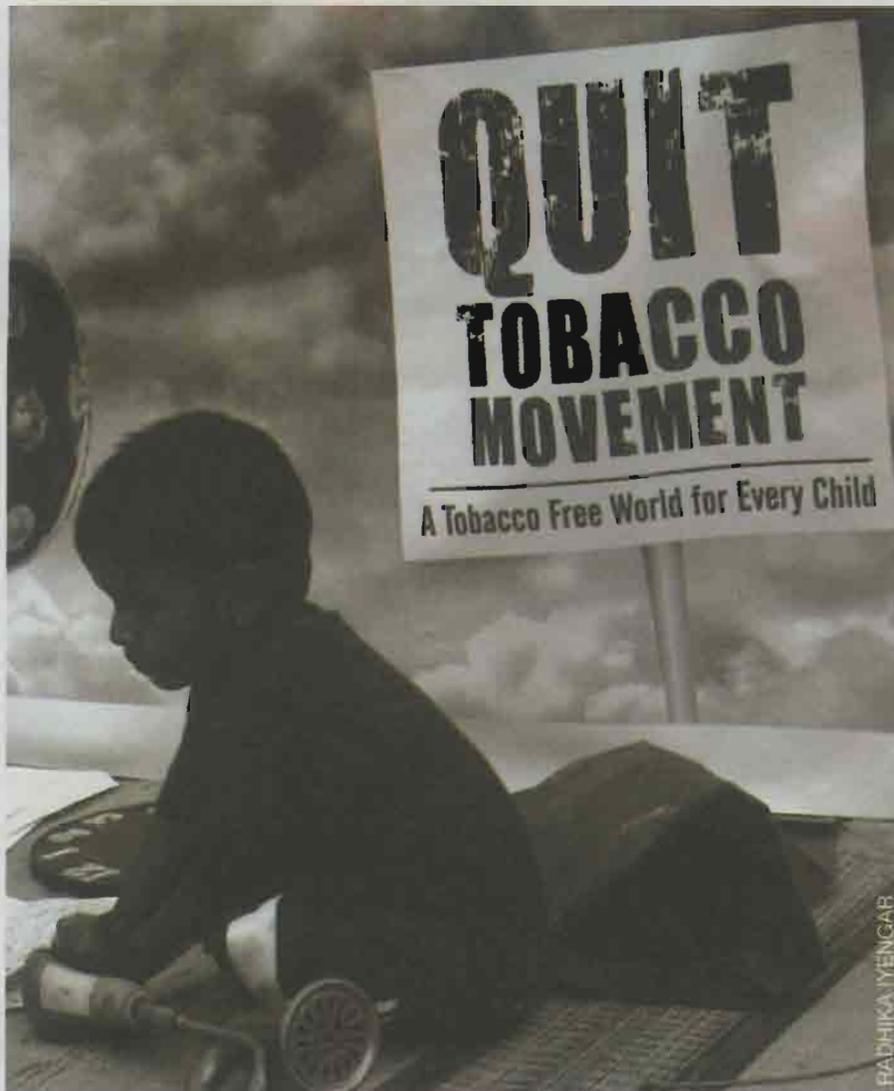
"Sex is not taboo in the UK, so it's easier for young people to buy condoms. In fact, there are condom vending machines on each floor of university dormitories."

damages a woman's reproductive organs. If untreated, it can lead to infertility and chronic pelvic pain.

**Gonorrhoea:** Infected individuals suffer from severe painful urination, and a slimy discharge which quickly develops into a substantial yellowish substance.

**Are unpleasurable and challenge your masculinity:** If you do believe so, you need to break out of that bubble of male chauvinism! Never compromise your

# Butt out!



Don't be so quick to light up, say **Rashmi Gour** and **Trupti Kanade**.

**F**or the young at heart, it's the symbol of adulthood, for the middle aged, it's a stress buster and for the old, it's a habit which will only die with their demise. For those who have not guessed yet, we are talking about one of the many things you most certainly will do when your parents ask you not to, the most deadly habit that ensures a coating of tar on the inner landscape of your respiratory tract, every Mother-of-a-teenager's nightmare, every oncologist's worst fear and what we ALL know is not the greatest of lifestyle choices made by mankind- Smoking-tobacco or otherwise.

"It is believed that a smoker is judged by the cigarette brand he uses," says Sumit, a student and regular smoker for seven years. When asked which brand he uses he proudly says, "I prefer Marlboro – it's cheap and best, tastes really good. Sometimes I experiment with new brands

in the cigarette shop next to my house. I hold a monthly account for it." 22-year old Sumit spends Rs. 2000 – 3000 monthly and Rs.24000-36000 yearly on cigarettes.

Medical research reveals that one pack of 10 regular sick cigarettes contains ....7 mg tar, 0.6 mg nicotine and 8 mg carbon dioxide. When cigarette smoke is inhaled, the tar settles on the minute air sacs, alveoli, present in the lungs. The alveoli allow diffusion of gases in our body, they bring fresh oxygen to the lungs by expelling carbon-dioxide from the cells. But the tar from cigarettes make it impossible for the alveoli to perform their function resulting in loss of elasticity in the , leading to emphysema and (COPD) Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, wherein narrowing of the lung airways leads to a limitation of the flow of air to and from the lungs causing . In contrast to

reversible and usually gets progressively worse over time.

Unfortunately, not every smoker knows what smoking leads to – coronary heart problems, that smokers are 3-4 times more likely to acquire than non - smokers, brain hemorrhage, arthritis, oral diseases, cataract, pregnancy problems, impotency and most important **CANCER**.

Smoking during pregnancy increases the risk of pregnancy complications, premature delivery, low-birth weight infants, still-birth and sudden infant death syndrome. The nicotine in cigarettes is found in breast milk and also reduces the amount of oxygen and blood being available to the foetus.

Devika Chadha, project director of, Salaam Bombay Foundation (SBF)- A voluntary organization working with children on issues related to tobacco abuse, treating it through awareness and personality development, says, "passive smoking not only leads to lung cancer or asthma but has more serious effects like heart diseases in children or sudden infant death syndrome."

"A recent nationwide ban on smoking in public place has definitely made people more conscious", says Lara Rebello, a 22 year journalist, "after the ban on 'smoking in public places' came into being, it has become awkward to light up in office. These days I go out of the premises to smoke and when I am around non-smokers I make sure to ask for their permission."

When asked about how effective the ban has been, Devika Chadha responds that "it's too early to comment but it is a welcome change for people like us, who have been working on this for years." She also adds that "this change is only seen in a certain class of people who frequently visit restaurants and lounges but there is a huge population that does not know about it and we have to make them aware."

Pollution caused by cigarettes is not only limited to our body or the air, it also affects the land we live in and the water we drink.

Millions of cigarette butts are discarded onto the ground everyday that decompose in an average of 25 years while all the additives and chemicals leach into the ground and pollute the soil and grass. So, smokers please consider this before throwing used cigarettes on the ground.

A survey by WHO states that, 3.5% smokers give up smoking, just by will power.....

Now, its up to you, whether you want to be among those 3.5% who gave up smoking out of sheer will power. "Life is too short to not to blow; but you can always make the process a little slow!"

# Dance



**Miskil Dharmadhikari** thinks you should start your toes tapping and save the world.

“When Lord Shiva gets angry, he performs the dance of anger, the Tandav,” tells Poulomi Fadnavis to her little students in her Odissi dance class in Vile Parle, Mumbai. As the 10-year-olds lean forward and listen with keen interest, Poulomi explains how Shiva did not destroy his enemy in war, but expressed his anger through dancing with great rage. You listen to music and you tap your feet. When you’re excited, you jump enthusiastically with joy. While one may not call that dancing and pass it off as a spontaneous reaction, those who know how to dance would think otherwise. They would argue, saying that, “no, that is a dance”, as dance, expression and gestures have one significant quality – expression of the mind.

Communication with gestures sans language has been in existence for centuries, even when there were no scripts, nor phonetics. Gestures played an important role in helping one express. Dance therefore, has been in existence for eons, even if not in its classical form as we know of it now. Though the dance form doesn’t leave any identifiable physical artifacts such as stone tools or cave paintings behind, but losing oneself in rhythmic movement with other people is an easy way to spirituality.

As Samuel Beckett aptly puts it, “Dance first. Think later. It’s the natural order”. It is impossible therefore, to believe that there is anyone who hasn’t tapped her/his feet or has not been touched by a compelling dance performance like Kelucharan Mohapatra or Birju Maharaj.

The world today, is a web of undesirable values, feelings, and theories.

Each day, children are brought into this world fraught with poverty, despair and war-mongering, devoid of hope. There is only one question that lingers in our mind: How can we bring about peace? The answer is simple: Dance. Dancing helps one vent her/his feelings, and functions as an essential instrument of expression.

Every person has a desire to communicate. Those who express themselves easily and uninhibitedly do not face mental block. Hurting others is driven by lack of communication. For an individual to live peacefully, she/he needs to be at peace with her/his self. Dancing is an intimate and powerful medium for therapy, and since dance involves direct expression through the body, it is the most fundamental of all art forms. It surpasses the barriers of age, gender, religion or culture. If we can harness this power to spread the message of peace, imagine the borders that can be crossed, walls that can fall, and eyes that can be opened.

Dance is a direct heart-to-heart experience, seeing ourselves in others, and realizing that we’re all part of a beautiful and rich humanity, dissolves the motivation to act against others, and, inspires for harmonious living. It creates a medium where each person can find her/his own peace, not by suppressing their emotions, but by celebrating them through creative outlets.

Dancing inculcates deep compassion within oneself, which can be shared with others. Let’s spread peace through dance, since dance is the way to the ultimate truth- salvation and reaching the almighty.

# Smile

**B**reak the chains, forgive quickly, kiss slowly, love truly, laugh wholeheartedly and never regret anything that made you smile in retrospect. Is there an art to all of this, possibly something you've got to work at?

Not at all! Just draw the corners of your lips back. Your mouth can be open or shut. Your teeth may be exposed or not. Fluff out your cheeks; crease the corners of your eyes. Hold that position for a few minutes and see if you start feeling any different.

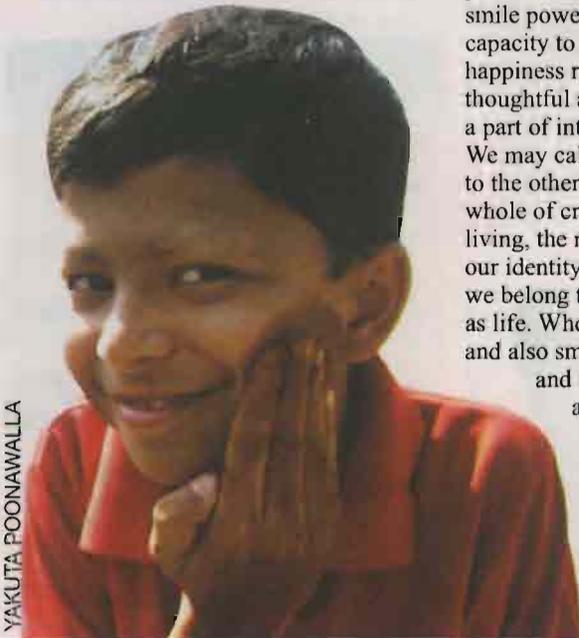
Chances are, you will. Because the body, psychologists tell us, can be fooled into feeling better. "By making yourself smile, no matter how you feel, your body will start to release all those endorphins, natural mood modifiers that make you feel happy," says Dr Uma Joshi, head of the department of psychology, Sophia College, Ajmer.

Perhaps the sheer idiocy of trying to follow rules such as those above will start to make you smiling.

We are born to be happy and smiley. Charles Darwin noted with great joy that his son started laughing at about 14 weeks old. "You'll feel more positive about yourself and the world," says Dr Joshi

"People get drawn to your energy. You will carry an aura and poise that will draw people around only because they feel great around you."

Although it's free, we often forget about how powerful a smile can be in several moments all throughout the day. We are often so engrossed in our lives, that we wouldn't spend a second to smile at our acquaintances. Nakul Tiwari, a 22-year-old Pune-based engineering student and model feels a smile plays an important role in his



YAKUTA POONAWALLA

life. "It's my way of relieving me of my daily stress," he says. "All strangers are (like) acquaintances for me. From my room, in the bus, in college, in the classroom, in the studio, I make it a point to keep it [a smile] on even when I don't get one back. It's not difficult but different! I am used to it! Try it out and see the change in you! Smile with your eyes! feel it genuinely and here you go, with a naturally sparkling smile."

Smile is heart warming and has the power to cheer up others instantly. "The smile power is infectious and we all have a capacity to build another person's happiness resource by just being thoughtful and accepting the other as also a part of integrating universal intelligence. We may call it God. Simply by connecting to the others who exist with us in the whole of creation- the living and non-living, the near and distant, we strengthen our identity. We should never forget that we belong to a large design that we know as life. Who says you can't have problems and also smile? You can be in a bad mood,

and smile and your mood will turn around. As mentioned in the scriptures, love others and love will bounce back to you!" says Fr Angelos of the Los Angeles Parish, USA. Smile before you sleep tonight!

*Aneesha Henry*

# Hug

“About a year ago, a bunch of us were sitting around one evening and someone brings up the topic of Juan Mann and the Free Hugs campaign. As we're discussing it, someone else says, it wouldn't work in India! So I say, "Hmmm. I wonder." I then forgot about the whole thing for a long time—until one fine day, I came across the topic online once again, I decided, "Okay. Let's give it a try." So while I do believe that a random hug is definitely better than no hug" says Arnold who started free hug campaign in Pune city.

It will be indeed bizarre if in an extremely emotional moment of a man on the road hugs you gesturing that someone cares for your emotions without expecting anything in return. This was indeed done by an Australian man known as 'Juan Mann' in 2004 where he stood in the busiest street to hug people as random acts of kindness. After this act of kindness towards strangers. in the year 2006 a video by an Australian Band called sick puppies was launched on You Tube which gave popularity to the ' free hugs campaign. Today this campaign has spread across 80 different countries.

In today's world we are often so busy that we miss out on saying how much we care and how much we love. In our busy lives most often we get griped by feeling of loneliness. Concern, carrying and affection seem to be lost. How do we then, connect to each other? A simple plain Hug can do wonders. It gives you a feeling of belonging and makes you feel cared. Sometimes all we need is a Hug.

In places like U.S. the concept of free hug has gain enormous appreciation among people cutting across different

*"As a free hug volunteer try to make people happy by giving them a hug"*

genders, cast, color, class etc. Though the campaign has been huge success abroad back home in India it is still in infant stage. Several social and cultural reasons can contribute to this infancy. In Indian society physical gestures have always been encountered with unappreciating glare. The thought of an HUG by complete stranger finds remote or no place. However love and affection cuts all the barriers.

A small gesture like a Hug can brighten someone's day can make somebody feel happy, teach us to believe that strangers are not so bad after all, and above all spread happiness around. For

most of us the feeling after somebody hugs you is something beyond word. "Anyone who gets a hug surely feels happy and cared... It surely helps to spread love. People feel that there are others who care for them without asking for something... I as a free hug volunteer try to make people happy by giving them a hug without asking anything in return" says vinit Mehta who started Free Hug campaign in Mumbai.

However many a times there are odds that best of your intentions may be doubted. "People laughed at me. Few asked if I was gay, few said I want to be physically close to girls, but among them there were quite a few how said I was doing a great and noble job and should continue to do so. After hugging me they took my contact number and now they call me up sometimes to discuss their problems, sometimes just to say HI! It is for these people I want to carry on with the campaign. One thing that makes me happy, is to see others happy."

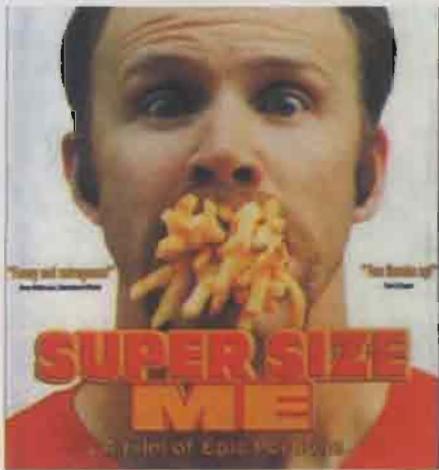
The campaign of free hugs does not attempt to offer solutions to your problems as each one has to deal with his or her own issues. A small momentary gesture in kind of a hug gives emotional support to face your life with a happier and positive attitude. A free hug if can't change ones life will definitely change somebody's moment in life.

*Nita Deshmukh and Prachi Mujumdar*

# Must watch films

For a change, watch movies that actually make you think as much they entertain, says Radhika Iyengar.

In a country where almost every Bollywood film is produced to 'machao dhoom', and is suffused with glamorous sets, melodramatic actors, meaningless plot and action-packed scenes, we give to you four must-see films (documentary and fiction). Made by socially conscious film-makers, these films are embedded with socially driven messages, which will force you to 'think'. If you're willing to be jolted out of your comfort zone and be challenged for the way you look at things around you, these films are a must-watch.



## **SUPER-SIZE ME (2004)**

Written and Directed by Morgan Spurlock  
Genre: Documentary/ Non-fiction

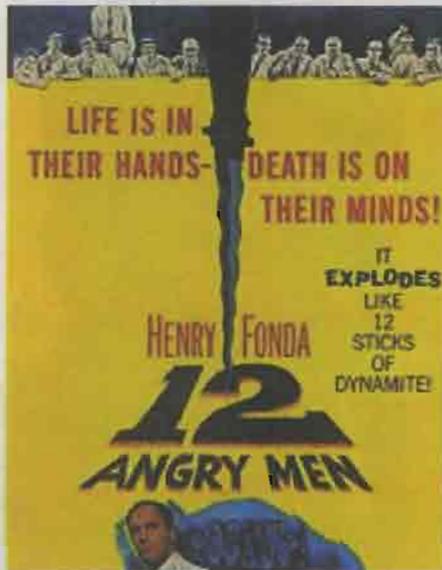
If you want to know how 'happy' you can get with a Mc Donald's Happy Meal, this film is a must watch! The documentary is a journey of a man, to prove to the world that eating high-cholesterol food products almost every day, is indeed injurious to health. He takes it upon himself to completely detract from his healthy vegan lifestyle, and take a detour to the big bad world of Mc Donald's.

In 2002, a bunch of Americans sued all the fast-food companies, blaming them for their obesity and related illnesses. Set in New York, this film is Morgan Spurlock's experiment to find out how much role do fast-food joints (like Mc Donald's) play in contributing to an individual's waist line.

Spread over a period of 30 days, the camera tracks Spurlock's fatalistic plunge into a strictly high-cholesterol diet (eating Mc Donald's products three times a day). It investigates how this approach to life adversely affects Spurlock's metabolism, initiates his sense of depression, and deeply affects his sex life.

The documentary functions as a proof to how unhealthy-eating, does

(surprisingly!) ruin your body, increasing your chances of diabetes, heart attacks, liver failure, and other fatal diseases, proving to the world and to Mc Donald's, that their food products are not human friendly at all!

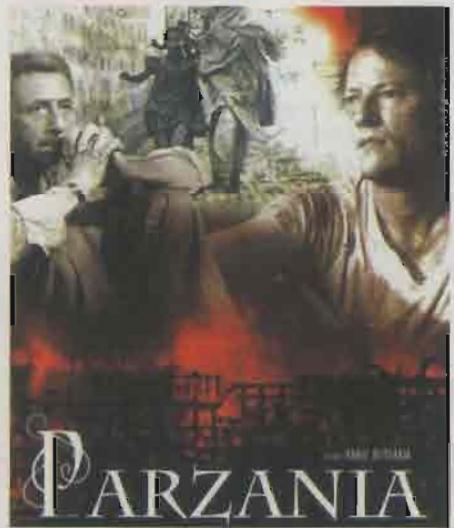


## **THE TWELVE ANGRY MEN (1957)**

Directed by: Sidney Lumet  
Written by: Reginald Rose  
Genre: Fiction (Drama)

Indicting the apathetic judicial system in America in the 1950s, the film is a powerful denouncement of the indifferent process of a jury arriving at a verdict, and questions one's sense of civic responsibility. Filmed almost entirely in a jury room, 12 (all-male) white jurors, are brought together after the hearing of a murder trial, to pass a verdict—a verdict which holds in balance the fate the defendant, a frightened Puerto Rican teenage boy from the lower strata of society, who has allegedly killed his father.

The film portrays how personal biases and apperceptive prejudices towards class and race, colour the decision making process. When 11 out of the 12 'angry men' vote for the defendant to be guilty, only one man, Juror#8 (Henry Fonda) stands up to offer the defendant the benefit of the doubt. As the film progresses, Fonda provides alternate situations and justifiable reasons as to why the defendant may not be the actual murderer of his father. Heated discussions, clashes of opinions, insults, irritation and anger suffuse the atmosphere. Will the jurors be able to suppress their prejudices and find the defendant to be 'not guilty', or will the film end with sending the Puerto Rican kid off to the electric chair? Watch the film, and find out!



## **IPARZANIA (2005)**

Directed by: Rahul Dholakia  
Written by: Rahul Dholakia and David Donihue  
Genre: Fiction (Drama)

Functioning as a diary of history, the film plays back the gruesome massacre that took place in Ahmadabad (Gujarat) in 2002. Based on a true story, the film depicts the simple life of a young Parsi couple (Naseeruddin Shah and Sarika) and their children, Parzan and Delshad. 'Parzania' is Parzan's imaginary world, where buildings are made of chocolates and mountains of ice-creams, and where one can play cricket all day.

The film triggers into action when, an angry mob of Hindus bursts into a Muslim locality, to brutally slaughter all the Muslims, as a response to the Godhra train burning incident, making that day a gruesome imitation of the 1947 Hindu-Muslim riots in India. In this atmosphere of fear, tension and chaos, Parzan disappears. To this date, the child has not been found. The film highlights how India, a secular country, is continuously scarred with inward terrorism due to the tension between many people of different faiths, and is a poignant cry to all Indians to accept and respect each other.

Though there are certain characters in the film, like Allan Webbing—a loud-mouthed American (more profane than profound) who has come to Ahmadabad to learn about Gandhian principles, functions as an outsider viewing the inner-state psychosis of a country, who ruthlessly slaughters himself. Though his existence in the film is close to being unnecessary, the only good thing he does, is write an angry text against the society—"The Parshad is this country's equivalent of the KKK (Ku Klux Klan)."

Parzania is a direct attack on the State-supported violence in Gujarat in 2002, and is therefore a film that aches to be viewed.

Social Communications Media Department  
Sophia – Shree B.K. Somani Memorial Polytechnic  
Bhulabhai Desai Road  
Mumbai – 400 026

[www.sophiacampus.org](http://www.sophiacampus.org)

Highest Rated Destination • Best Investment Opportunity

# INDIA TOMORROW

Some  
opportunities  
are big. This is  
the biggest

- more than 250 brand stores
- more than 30 restaurants
- more than 200 offices
- more than 1200 cars
- 4 schools
- 100 rooms
- and far and exhibition
- and retail
- and shopping
- and jewelry
- and leather
- and electronics
- and cybernetic
- and gift accessories
- and Fantasy Shops, and much more...

World Trade Park shall be the town of modern India. A complete urban precinct to be set in one. Construction of the park is in full swing on the most important J.R. Road at Jaipur. It has immense social, business and trade opportunities. A building that is destined to break all records of PUOTFALLS.  
Operational in 2008



WORLD TRADE PARK  
Jaipur, Rajasthan



## WORLD TRADE PARK JAIPUR

www.wtpjpr.com • mail: wtp@wtpjpr.com  
Tel: +91-145-2719677, 2719726, 2724774, +91-9829750222

Our strong corporate base

Shree & Associates

