

## Ignored pockets of India

A recent visit to various parts of India (I wish to thank Caritas India and Caritas Australia for providing me an opportunity to visit their project sites), largely untouched by growth and development that the country is experiencing, was an eye-opener on a number of issues. Continued to be plagued by lack of basic amenities, poor infrastructure and inaccessible primary health care, these clusters of human habitation seem to be frozen in time.

Among the many places that were visited, the villages of Navapada-Bhandariya and Bharod, Jhabua District, Madhya Pradesh (MP) are classic examples of how development has not been all that inclusive. This district is in western MP, bordering Gujarat and Rajasthan. It is one of the tribal districts of India, dominated by three endogamous tribal groups, viz. Patlias, Bhils and Bhilals, who derive their livelihood through hunting, gathering and subsistence agriculture. The Patlias are believed to be more progressive.

The district is part of the semi-arid zone of northern India and is influenced by desert conditions of Rajasthan. Hence the weather conditions are extreme in nature with intermittent drought years and the typical temperature range is 4–40°C.

Rainfall in this region is less than 1000 mm/yr. The landscape is representative of the Central Indian deciduous forest type called the Sal (*Shorea robusta*) forests. In addition to Sal, *Palasha* (*Butea monosperma*) and thick scrub plants are found in the area. The terrain is undulating with ravines typifying the landscape. Soils are mixed in nature, with red and black soils being predominant. Agriculture is rainfed with two cropping seasons. Extended and joint families with a family size of 6–15 individuals living in bamboo and clay huts is typical of the region. Hamlets are spread over vast areas in keeping with the traditional tribal mode of living. Health and hygiene conditions are poor, with tuberculosis and *falsiparum* malaria being endemic to the region. Unemployment and crime are rampant, and the villages are notorious for dacoity. Problems regarding natural resources of the region are due to severe anthropogenic/degradation of the local vegetation leading to decreased soil fertility and soil erosion. This in turn enhances the recurrence of drought conditions leading to food insecurity and increased levels of migration. Livestock suffer high mortality due to lack of adequate and balanced nutrition and veterinary support.

A series of discussions with the community covering all age classes, on what would be the most essential objects that they need, is by itself self-explanatory on how untouched these villages are. For instance, the most important object is a refrigerator that does not need electricity to operate for storing vaccines and medicines. For in March 2007, 12 members of a family died of tuberculosis within a week. A volunteer who was helping the tribals died of snake bite recently, since he could not be treated on time. Also on the wish list is a small cart that can take people to the nearest hospital, since buses ply to these villages once in about two months. One teacher to help children learn the alphabets also found a place amongst the list. Also included were objects such as sewing machine and a flour-grinding machine. The list is simple, and so are the demands of the inhabitants of the village. But sadly, there seems to be no Santa to fulfil their wishes.

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## Why does most of the Indian research work not reach journals?

Inclusion of a new chapter or a module on research paper writing in our syllabi at postgraduate and doctoral level was discussed in this journal<sup>1</sup>. In continuation with this and in response to a feedback received, it was felt pertinent to discuss as to why most Indians do not publish their research work or rather why we do not insist on publishing our work. We see a number of final consolidated project reports getting piled up with the various funding agencies without getting published in journals. The reasons could be that the Principal Investigators (PIs) do not take interest in publications once the project fellows (floating population) leave their laboratories. The same is true in the case of Ph D theses. Once the Ph D is

awarded, the supervisor does not insist on publishing the work. On the other hand, the research scholars also do not take interest in publishing their work. This could be due to several reasons, viz. shift of research area after Ph D or settling down in a job that is entirely different from the Ph D topic. The other reasons are lack of confidence or that the scholars do not know how to write research papers<sup>1</sup>. Information retrieval seems to be another problem.

Due to steep increase in the prices of journals most of the libraries have stopped subscribing to important journals. Though e-subscription is available with a few libraries, it is the information retrieval, which is a handicap for many research scholars. While some researchers send

reprints of their publications upon request, many do not do so. Without a proper literature survey, any research is incomplete. Financial constraints could be another reason. Many journals insist on the authors becoming members of respective scientific societies (by paying exorbitant fees), to which the journals belong, before accepting the manuscript for the review process. In addition, some journals levy page charges. Research scholars who cannot afford this expense take a back seat. The casualty in all these cases is the Indian research work that does not get published. The young research scholars should realize that if they do not take all efforts to publish their work or for that matter if their mentors do not insist on

publications, (i) we would be doing a lot of research work that never reaches the masses, (ii) we will lose the opportunity of getting feedback (constructive criticism!) from unknown reviewers. Nowadays many journals send a one-line reply, viz. the article 'Rejected' or 'Not suitable for publication', without providing the reasons. However, even now there are journals and editors who send the reviewer comments with which the individual researchers can improvise. Coming back to the topic: (i) Why are we shy of pub-

lishing our work? (ii) Do we lack confidence? (iii) Are we lethargic at publishing? (iv) Are we not insisting on publications? (v) Is change of research area or employment into non-research fields a reason for not publishing? (vi) Is financial constraint a problem for publishing our work? (vii) Is information retrieval a problem? (viii) Is lack of accountability in universities and other institutions a reason? These are the questions that remain unanswered satisfactorily. At least on the part of funding agencies, they should insist and

encourage publications coming out of the funded projects.

1. Sarma, V. V., *Curr. Sci.*, 2007, **92**, 1029.

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## Ph D entrance examination schedules

It is observed that every year various national institutions of repute organize entrance tests for admitting students to their Ph D programmes. Generally these

tests are scheduled during May and June. The dates of these examinations often pose difficulties. Table 1 provides the examination dates of different institu-

tions for 2007 that have already taken place. It seems the examination/interview dates of several institutions either overlap or have a narrow interval. This makes it almost impossible for a student to appear for different examinations at different centres, which he/she has already applied for. These inconveniences may perhaps be avoided if the examination and/or interview dates are declared much in advance.

**Table 1.** Examination schedules of different institutions for admission to Ph D/M Tech programmes in life sciences and allied disciplines during 2007

Entrance examination for various fellowships/Ph D programmes	Examination centres	Date of examination
NII: written test	Kolkata, New Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai	11 February
GATE	In almost all states	12 February
CDFD, Hyderabad	Hyderabad	14 May
JNU, New Delhi	In most of the states	15–18 May
CCMB, Hyderabad	Hyderabad	18 and 19 May
IIT, Kanpur	Kanpur	18–23 May
Central University, Hyderabad	In a few states	2–7 June
ACTREC, Mumbai	Mumbai	3–7 June
IISc, Bangalore: interview	Bangalore	4–8 June
NBRC, Hissar	Hissar	4–6 June
JNCASR, Bangalore	Bangalore	5 June

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## Oran: A sacred way for biodiversity conservation in Indian Thar Desert

The importance of the environment in sustaining life has been realized since the beginning of civilization. Sages, saints and forest-dwellers regarded plants and wildlife as important components of their lives. Worshipping trees and plants to propitiate Gods and Goddesses has been in practice in the Indian society. Conservation of wildlife has been an integral part of the cultural ethos of the country. Conservation of biodiversity for sustainable life in future is a difficult task due

to inadequate data on flora and fauna, conservation efforts and selection of areas<sup>1</sup>. In India, informal protected areas exist, including sacred groves, which exhibit rich floral and faunal diversity with some rare and threatened plant species<sup>2</sup>. In compliance with the requirement under the Trade Related aspects of Intellectual Property Right (TRIPS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO), India chose the *sui generis* system<sup>3</sup> under its Patent (second Amendment)<sup>4</sup> of 2002.

'Oran', a sacred grove in the Indian Thar Desert, is a piece of land that is held by the local community in honour and respect of a local deity. These protected areas harbour biodiversity of the Thar Desert, including endangered, rare and threatened plants and animals. Tanot Devi oran is located between the Pokaran field firing range and Indira Gandhi Canal. The oran has endemic plants such as *Prosopis cineraria*, *Capparis decidua*, *Zizyphus nummularia*, *Haloxylon salicorni-*