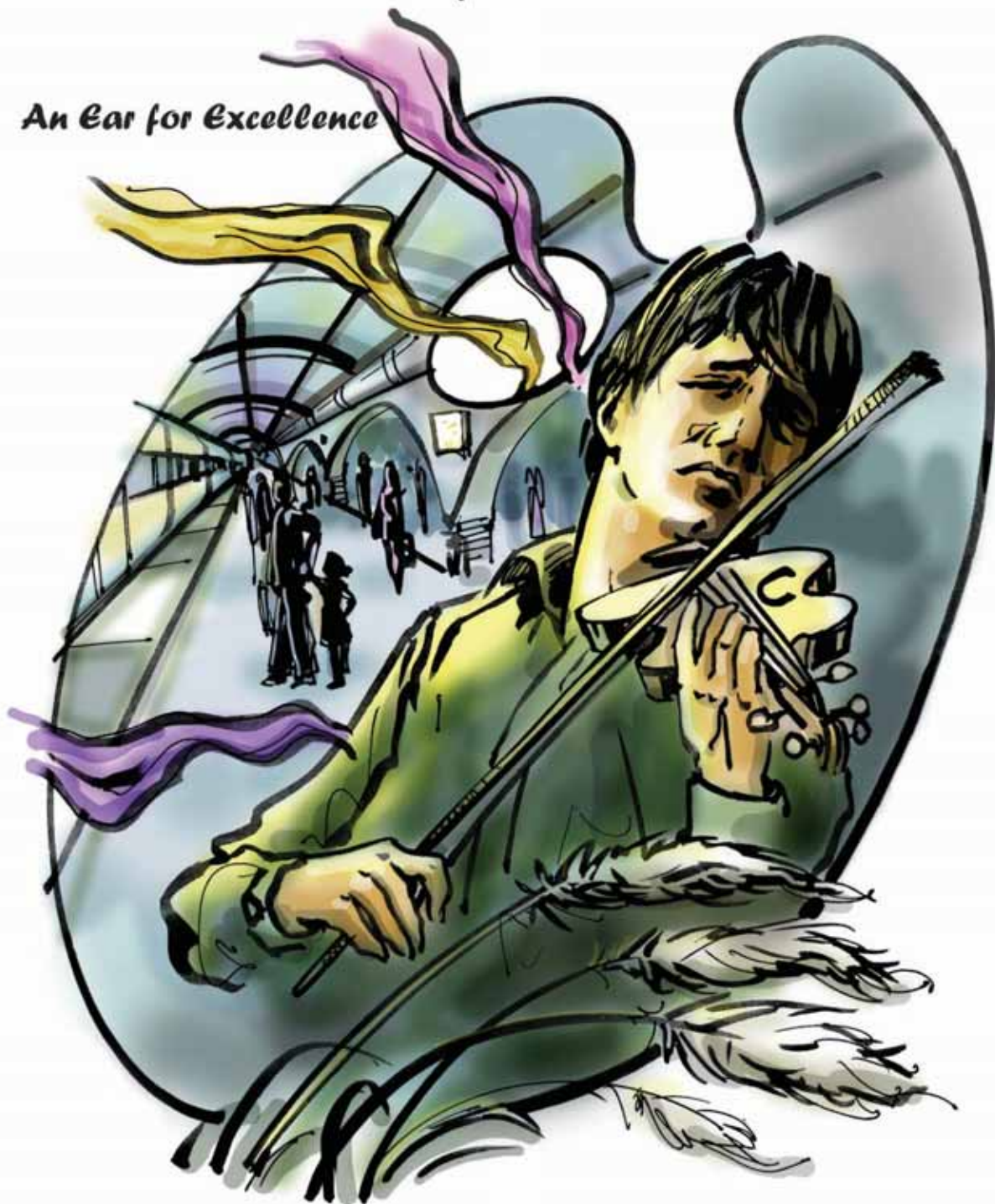


Honey Bee



Vol 20(1) January - March 2009

An Ear for Excellence



A Voice of Creative Grassroots Innovators and Traditional Knowledge Holders

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An Eye for Detail, an Ear for Excellence

A man sat at a metro station in Washington DC in the rush hour and started playing the violin; it was a cold January morning. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. Three minutes went by and a middle aged man noticed that there was a musician playing. He slowed down and stopped for a few seconds and then hurried up to meet his schedule. A minute later, the violinist received his first dollar tip from a woman who went after throwing the money in the till. A few minutes later, a man leaned against the wall to listen to him, but then he looked at his watch and started walking again. Clearly, he was late for work. The one who paid the most attention was a three-year old boy. His mother tagged him along and hurried, but the kid stopped to look at the violinist. Finally the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk turning his head all the time. This action was repeated by several other children. All the parents, without exception, forced them to move on. In the 45 minutes the musician played, only six people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk their normal pace. He collected \$32. When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition. Who was the violinist? Why was he there?

No one knew this, but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written with a violin worth 3.5 million dollars. Two days before his playing in the subway, seats were sold at an average of \$100 in a theatre at Boston where he had a concert. This is a real story. Joshua Bell playing incognito in the metro station was organized by The Washington Post as part of a social experiment about perception, taste and priorities of people. The implications were: Do we perceive beauty in a commonplace environment at an inappropriate hour? What will make us take a pause and appreciate it? Do we recognize the talent in an unexpected context? How can we develop an eye for detail, an ear for excellence (Ed.)?

Source: urbanlegends.about.com/od/music/a/violinist_metro.htm

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Laying the Foundation : Sowing the Seeds of Future

Indian dream to become a knowledge society depends upon India's ability to make knowledge assets more valuable and precious than physical assets. The lack of possession of physical or financial assets would then determine to much lesser extent the destiny of an individual or group than the possession of ideas, innovations and other knowledge assets. Asymmetry in knowledge market is just like in any other resource market. However, this asymmetry can be overcome more easily through initiatives and efforts of individuals or groups than any other asymmetry. Imagination backed up by institutional support for knowledge resources can transform India. But the problem is that old habits die hard. Unless we sow the seeds of imagination and innovation early in life, it is not easy to inculcate or nurture the creative spirit at a later stage in life. That is the reason that SRISTI started looking at the creativity of children a long time ago.

In the first biodiversity contest held at Ichikulam village in Madurai with the help of SEVA in 1992, a student of grade five who came first listed as many as 116 different species of plants along with their uses. The adult who was considered the best could identify 240 species. Two other contests were organized then in Gangagarh village in District Bulandshahar in 1994. Subsequently, thousands of children participated in the biodiversity competitions and revealed tremendous knowledge about their environment. There were always only a few kids who were far ahead of the rest. We also learnt that girls outperformed boys in the primary classes and so did scheduled caste and OBC children outperform the rest. But once the girls started taking care of their younger siblings and their going out alone became less frequent, they started losing out in their knowledge advantage of biodiversity compared to boys in higher classes.

In subsequent years when we started ShodhYatras, we started organizing idea competitions. Even in the traditional food festival (SATVIK) such competitions were organized. Amazing creativity and knowledge richness was found particularly among rural children in different parts of the country. But these kids did not always go very far. Their relative lack of excellence in English language or other subjects stifled their hopes. Their creativity did not come to their rescue. Nobody bothered whether a child was innovative, had the ability to independently think or could come out with an unusual way of looking at the world. And we still wanted to change the world. In the last decade, after NIF (National Innovation Foundation) came into existence, it started giving awards to children innovators in its Presidential Award Functions. However, the number of entries from children was much smaller. At this stage the Honeybee Network decided to intensify the search for creative children and IGNITE 07 became the starting point. Over the years many interesting questions have been posed by the children which have impressed upon us the need to pay special attention to nurturing creativity and innovation among children. But the inclusion of physically challenged children is still negligible though we have some innovations for them. Let me illustrate the point by first sharing a few cases of the kids we met in ShodhYatras.

When a class tenth student brought a list of 75 plants with their names and their uses in Alwar ShodhYatra in Rajasthan, we asked, why so few? He took the challenge and asked for two days so that he could make a bigger list. He came later with a list of 501 plants

with their uses. Similarly, some children asked us queer questions, which showed how perceptive they were. "If I have a limited quantity of farm yard manure, where should I apply it in the field?", asked a young class fifth student, son of a very small farmer, during an interaction during 22nd ShodhYatra in Champaran, Bihar. Through this question he had raised an issue on the edge of precision farming. Unless we know the nutrient profile of the whole field in grids of say ten by ten meters, how could one decide where will the little manure have the maximum effect in a small farm. As the manure becomes scarce, and cow dung for manure competes with its use as a fuel, this question will become even more important. Another sharp question was faced more than a decade ago, while I was addressing the students of a Mahila Gram Vidyapeeth (Women's Gandhian Institution, Nardipur), Gujarat. I asked the students to ask a question, answer to which they thought I might not know. Idea was to demonstrate in real life that teachers could be ignorant or fallible and that asking question is fun, it should not be considered a burden or risk by any one. A naughty girl asked, "Why does sugar grains attract small red ant where as jaggery attracts bigger black ants?" I was nonplussed. She had a question on the edge of the ant behaviour. Given the differences in their scents, different sugars perhaps attracted different kind of ants.

Similarly, when asked, what should be the best design of a television which can be seen by people sitting around it, came the reply in several meetings, square TV or four sided TV. Children did not have difficulty in imagining how product should be designed to facilitate culture of sitting in circular manner rather all of them facing a single screen, as is the practice in most houses or meetings. Rakesh Patra, a student of class seventh from Orissa made a crutch that has a foldable seat, a headlight, an alarm and even an umbrella holder-cum-stand. We need many more innovations by/for physically challenged people.

There are tens of thousands of such kids who have submitted ideas and innovations to Honey Bee Network signifying their ability to ask different questions and seek creative answers in many cases. What is special about these kids? Why do they see the world differently? Can we nurture their creativity and curiosity systematically?

What will take it to transform the curriculum of school education in India so that majority of children begin to ask crazy questions, make queer models of future needs (e.g. an umbrella which rains, or cell phone which uses unique gait of a person as a password) or solutions of contemporary problems? Will parental pressure reduce so that children are not forced to pursue only single track intelligence? Will schools be able to deal with the question of Farid, asked in Jammu and Kashmir ShodhYatra in Anantnag district, "why should one try to excel in all subjects, if I want to study only mathematics and science, why am I not allowed to do so?"

I hope we can ask ourselves these questions and create pressure on educational policy makers to let the children be, just be!



anil k gupta

BBC Documentary series-INDIA

Shruthi Rao

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BBC UK is producing a new exciting documentary series called – Jimmy’s World Farm. It seeks to examine and feature unique solutions that these countries are providing to various environmental and agricultural challenges. I came across NIF, SRISTI and Honey Bee Network during my research and am interested in this fantastic movement of sustaining agriculture through innovations and traditional farmer knowledge. We want to feature exciting stories that show ingenuity of farmer wisdom in coping with changing agro-climatic conditions. For example, the potato farmers in Gujarat.

(We will be very happy to help in making sense of grassroots creativity all across India. Peter Day and Richard Berringer have walked with us in one of the six monthly Shodh Yatras and may add their own personal insights: Ed.)

Documenting Innovations

Natasha Sahgal

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I’m a freelance journalist in Mumbai. I want to make a short documentary on people and actions/initiatives that have been taken around the country to reduce carbon emissions. National Innovation Foundation has felicitated many such innovations and I would like your help for information on the same. The idea behind my film is to spread awareness about people who have found ways to make a change around them, thus encouraging others to do the same.

(We will help you. This is the least we can do to contribute to the cause of conservation: Ed.)

Exploring Innovative Projects

Tarishraj Shah

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We congratulate you and NIF on achieving one lakh innovations. It has really ignited our minds as well, for contributing to the society equally. We are much keen into exploring innovative and unique projects by funding them and thereby executing the same.

(Our major problem is that most innovators and traditional knowledge holders cannot become or do not want to become entrepreneurs. We are actually looking for friends like you; get involved, show results: Ed.)

Thanks for Introspective Opportunity

Vidnyan Mundhe

acetex@gmail.com

HBN is providing a platform to display, develop and appreciate the hidden talent that are at par or even excel those of the highly educated elite. We as engineers were spellbound and were compelled to introspect and think for the betterment of this society with some contribution in the national interest.

(Why not take initiative to get involved as a 'friend of SRISTI' in blending formal and informal engineering? Ed.)

Innopreneurship

Deepak Menaria

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The two hours of listening to Honey Bee’s perspective will last forever in my memory as a source of inspiration. I have also been very passionate about convergence of Entrepreneurship and Innovation leading to Innopreneurship in youth. I visited sristi.org and nif.org and it’s wonderful to learn about grassroots innovations.

(I am happy to hear that you found something substantial in our philosophy. Please do see how your talents, social capital, social network and expertise can be harnessed, no matter to howsoever small extent: Ed.)

Schools to turn Community Enabling Centres

R Sreenivasan

sreeni@careerlauncher.com

I am inspired and humbled by the passion with which you have been pursuing your dream of building our nation in your own way - ‘Bringing Innovative

India into the open and Facilitating India Innovate’. We have been nurturing a thought of converting our schools into Community Enabling Centers and the interaction that I had with you, really helped to give a bigger perspective.

(I do see a lot of areas where some synergy might emerge. We could talk to children every month and provoke them to debunk some of the deep-seated prejudices of our society. Thanks for inspiring youngsters: Ed.)

Grassroots for World

Barbara Soalheiro

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I am a Brazilian journalist working for Colors Magazine, a thematic magazine, included in the list of best magazines in the world, produced in Italy by the Benetton Communication Center. We want to focus on how human beings can be extremely creative in order to solve real problems. I’ve found the National Innovation Foundation webpage and realized that you work with this exact thing: grassroots inventions that can be useful to the world.

(We are very happy that you wish to feature the creativity and innovations at grassroots in your widely read magazine. This might enable us to reach the segments, which we ordinarily might not have reached: Ed.)

Collaborative Promotion

Sundaramari Mariappan

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Gandhigram Rural University is starting a centre that intends to document, conserve, validate, standardize and further propagate indigenous knowledge/ practices not only among the farming community but also among the students, scientists, academicians, policy makers, extension workers etc. among whom most of the indigenous

knowledge/ practices have already become extinct due to modernization and globalization processes. To achieve further heights in this direction, we require technical and financial support from various agencies like yours and those who are working for the same cause. Such technical collaboration as well as financial assistance is very much solicited.

(I am very happy to hear about your centre and your willingness to enter into cooperation with NIF and Honey Bee Network. The students coming from rural and urban areas can be motivated to scout and document innovations and traditional knowledge with name and address of the innovators, organize idea competitions among students, ask students to benchmark various technical activities and also common property resource institutions: Ed.)

Dr Kalam's Presence

Sulekha Ali
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All the children and staff of the municipal school were enthralled at the event (Ignite 2008 award ceremony where Dr Abdul Kalam was the chief guest). Coming to IIMA and meeting Dr Kalam was a dream come true for them. They were speechless in expressing their joys.

(Keep up your good work. By helping these children, you are helping the whole nation: Ed.)

Top-down and Bottom-up Drivers and Regulators

Evelyn Nava Fischer
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I've been working for technical assistance agencies and international organizations for some years before starting my PhD and I'm very much interested not only in the efficacy of development aid, but also on the complementarity of innovative grassroots approaches. It is a challenge to try to put all pieces together regarding the international-local top-down and bottom-up drivers and regulators on animal health and biosecurity. However your program is of enormous inspiration for this task!

(Thanks for your interest in our efforts. I hope we together can bring some solution: Ed.)

Farmers Save Seeds

Michael Higgins
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I wanted to know how you have done so far with cross-breeding the wild and local varieties. I am

writing a senior thesis about the genetic engineering of terminator technology. One of the key points of the controversy was whether farmers would be able to obtain seeds of local varieties and breed them with wild species, if the genes for seed-sterility were engineered into all genetically modified seeds. Your article intrigued me because of the creativity of the farmers in developing new varieties, saving seeds, and going abroad to Japan, India, Vietnam, etc., to find local varieties.

(Farmers face no difficulty in accessing the plant varieties either from market (which is the easiest way) or other farmers or even Agricultural University (they also pilfer those varieties from research stations which are not officially released but seem to have potential). The state does not yet provide transgenic seeds directly, some public sector research labs such as NBRI Lucknow have licensed these varieties to private companies and these companies distribute, on commercial basis, the public sector developed transgenics. Farmers also use commercial transgenics and cross the parents (obtained one way or other) with local varieties and develop their own transgenics: Ed.)

Traditional Ways of Water Conservation

Braj Ratan Joshi
drjoshibr@gmail.com

I am a research scholar working on *Uttar Paschim Rajasthan ka Jal Prabhandhan or Sanrakshan* (from 15 to 18 Century). I want to know more about Traditional Water Bodies and Geo-Hydrological, Water Engineering.

(I am very happy to hear about your work and quest for more information. See sristi.org and look up knownetgrin data base of honey bee published practices. You can search library at sristi.org and if you find interesting papers, write to us: Ed.)

Learning From Ape

B Dharnidharan
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It is an age old practice in India to collect herb by following animals, e.g. *keeripillai* (mongoose) is rival to the snake. On seeing snake *keeripillai* fights with it and kills it. After killing the snake, the *keeripillai* runs in the forest and rolls over a herb to get rid of the snake bite, the healers follow the *keeripillai* and collect this herb for healing snake bite. Likewise different animals were observed and followed to get herb the specific for remedies. It is an age old practice in India.

(Thanks for sharing this insight. We hope to learn from readers about other examples of use of herbs by animals to self heal themselves: Ed.)

Authentication of Innovations

VLV Kameswari
vlvkameswari@yahoo.co.in

I am writing this mainly to know if NIF/Honeybee has any facility/mechanism for authentication of innovations (suppose X claims that a particular process of drying leads to greater shelf life compared to conventional method). If yes, may I know the process of getting such a check done, especially the finances involved? If no, can you suggest any agency which does work of this nature?

(Yes, claims have to be authenticated. NIF has MOU with CSIR and ICMR, besides they work with SRISTI natural product lab and several other research groups to validate the claims. That is very necessary for products to succeed in the market place. Let NIF or SRISTI know about the technologies of common people that you wish to have validated and if these are registered with NIF and are unique, then these will be taken up for validation: Ed.)

IGNITE 2009 has begun.....

SRISTI Yuva Yantriki Award/Young Technologist Award

School students may send their ideas, innovations and traditional knowledge practices to

National Coordinator
(Scouting & Documentation), National Innovation Foundation, Bungalow No. 1, Satellite Complex, Premchand Nagar Road, Ahmedabad - 380015 Gujarat
Fax: (079) - 26731903
email: ignite09@nifindia.org
www.nifindia.org

Technology students (B Tech/B Sc, M Tech, Ph D) can send their outstanding ideas, innovations and projects, full or summary, ideas and innovations to

B/h - Pharmacy College Mess, Nr. Boys Hostel Campus, University Area, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad - 380 009, Gujarat, India
Fax: 079-26307341
Email: innovation09@sristi.org,
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