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**Remembering
Shashi Rajagopalan**

Shashi Rekha Rajagopalan, member of the central board of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and also a member of the Malegam Committee on microfinance institutions, passed away on 5 August 2011. She had just crossed 60. In her passing away, India has lost one of the most ardent supporters of the concept of cooperatives.

Very early in her career, Shashi found her calling in the cooperative sector. The work life of Shashi was intertwined with that of M Rama Reddy and the Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF) – an organisation with which she spent a greater part of her working life.

Her first phase of work with CDF lasted till 1983. This phase was about replicating the multipurpose model of Mulukanoor cooperative with the existing primary cooperative structure. In addition, the CDF undertook an ambitious project of strengthening cooperatives along the command area of the Sriramsagar Project. The idea was that by the time water from the project came to Karimnagar and Warangal districts, the co-ops would be strong enough to absorb the changing cropping pattern (from maize to paddy) and set up their own rice mills so that the farmers could get better prices. They had also planned a federation that would process by-products and coordinate the levy and market information aspects. However this was abandoned on a matter of principle when, in 1983, the newly elected Government of Andhra Pradesh (AP) superseded the boards of all the primary cooperatives. This affected CDF significantly, because this threatened the core democratic principles on which the movement was based. The ambitious plan of working along the Sriramsagar project was abandoned and the work moved to restoring the cooperative principles in cooperative organisations and in law.

Shashi's next stage of work thus took the dual path of (a) advocacy for a better cooperative legislation, and (b) creating new structures based on cooperative principles.

In this phase they set up new paddy farmers' and women's thrift collectives to

build them into strong local institutions. They also worked with the government to reform cooperative law. A decade of work with the AP Government – conducting workshops, educating bureaucrats, engaging with legislators and informing the press – led to the passing of the seminal AP Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies' Act, a legislation that respects the cooperative principles. Their approach to get a new law in place was long, educative and inclusive – a demonstration on how good legislations could be made – and of the time and effort involved in getting it done.

While the entire work for the new law was done by CDF, the face of this was a cooperative initiatives panel headed by Verghese Kurien, with Mohan Dharia and L C Jain as members. The AP Act gave a fillip to advocacy with other state governments.

In the last phase of her career, Shashi withdrew from the CDF and evolved as a person who worked effectively as an independent consultant, working with small organisations and in the spirit of transparency that she always espoused.

Her contribution to the Board of RBI, NABARD and the Board for Financial Supervision was marked by her intellectual acumen, mastery over detail, forthright approach and empathy for the common person.

She was up on her feet till the last moment battling pain and fighting cancer without treatment, keeping her faculties alive.

If Shashi is not as well known as she deserved to be, it is because she worked as a loner, worked for effect than publicity, willing to be in the background when her work was celebrated. It was not that she did not enjoy the spotlight, it was just that she did not work for it. She worked more for principles than structures. In losing her we have lost one of the best advocates for cooperatives.

**Prakash Bakshi, M Rajshekhar,
Y V Reddy, Trilochan Sastry, M S Sriram,
Usha Thorat, A Vaidyanathan**

National Water Policy

Ramaswamy Iyer has made a commendable effort to draft a National Water Policy that tries to reform the current unsustainable approach to water

resource management in this country (“National Water Policy: An Alternative Draft for Consideration”, *EPW*, 25 June 2011). I would like to make a few comments on it to further the debate.

It is not possible to manage water resources effectively without a proper estimation of the availability and use of water. This is where a serious problem exists in this country. Reliably measured data on groundwater and surface water availability and use at the local level is absent in most parts of the country. While the central and state groundwater boards have done commendable work in fairly accurately estimating the availability and use of groundwater at the district level there is still a lack of information at the sub-district level.

The estimation of the availability and use of surface water is still largely based on insufficient hard data. To correctly estimate the availability of surface water we need much more detailed measurement of stream flows, run-off coefficients and evapotranspiration at the watershed level. As has been emphasised in the policy draft, the proper estimation of water availability and use requires a multi-disciplinary approach and has to be done in a campaign mode involving the people at large to enable good grass-roots level data collection. Thus, it is surprising that this lack of authentic data on water availability and use is mentioned, albeit in some detail, only towards the end in the section “Information System, Research”. The ad hocism in planning and mismanagement of water resources in this country has occurred precisely because of this criminal ignoring of the need to collect authentic grass-roots level data.

The trend in our food consumption habits is towards consumption of foods which require high amounts of water. Unless our food consumption habits change, it will be very difficult to change agricultural production and reduce water use in this sector. There is no mention of this important subject whatsoever in the draft.

There is, in fact, a tremendous inter-linkage between much of our consumption habits and an unnecessarily high water demand and subsequent wastage. Though, this has been mentioned in brief,

it again comes very late in the draft in Section 27 on “Water Quality/Pollution”. The important issue of recycling waste water is dealt with as a sub topic whereas this should be a separate topic by itself and given prominence. Recycling waste water can be done better in a decentralised manner and this again needs a campaign mode to be successful.

There is a brief Section 22 on the role of panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) in water management. However, for proper water management the PRIs have to be made the nodal institutions, provided with resources needed to identify and manage their watersheds completely both above and below the ground and plan water conservation and use scientifically and in a socio-economically just manner.

Coming to big dams there is no discussion in the policy whatsoever of the huge gap between the cumulative designed irrigation potential of these much vaunted projects and their actual performance. There is only a one line mention of this serious problem in the first section. There is a huge body of literature on the reasons for this shameful situation and the ways in which it can be remedied and this must be summarised and mentioned prominently in the policy if it is to advocate the adoption of a saner “ridge to valley to sea” paradigm of water management.

Rahul Banerjee

INDORE

Municipal Governance

This is in response to the article by Abhay Pethe, Sahil Gandhi and Vaidehi Tandel (“Assessing the Mumbai Metropolitan Region: A Governance Perspective”, *EPW*, 25 June 2011). The authors are making an

observation on the current nature of relations between service delivery governmental organisations in Greater Mumbai. In their view the current approach of organisational coordination is of “institutional polycentricism”. They go on to prescribe this as a desirable model for the governance of Mumbai. Using this framework, the authors explore one dyad relation between two organisations – the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA).

I would argue that the current form of government organisational arrangements appears to be of a network type. Further, that the government organisational identities and their relations have been historically created to maintain the excessive control needs of the state government. So although by law it is the urban local body, or the MCGM in this case, which ought to be the central node of the governmental network within the boundaries of Greater Mumbai, what we find is that the state government’s strengthening of MMRDA has resulted in a bipolar nodal network formation.

It would be valuable to map the government service delivery organisations active in Greater Mumbai and study their means of communication and methods of solving conflicts. This article does throw up a number of hypotheses drawn from the data provided on the inter-organisational relations between MCGM and MMRDA, such as, higher dependency/or lower independence of urban service delivery organisations on state governments and political parties appears to restrain cooperative behaviour amongst organisations.

Navtej Nainan

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Survey of Experimental Economics

Over the past few decades, experimental methods have given economists access to new sources of data and enlarged the set of economic propositions that can be validated. This field has grown exponentially but is still relatively new to the Indian academics.

EPW will publish in the issue of 27 August a 40-page survey on experimental economics that will introduce the field to the teacher and the student. The survey, prepared under the University Grants Commission-funded project to promote the social sciences in India, will provide a flavour of the state of knowledge in this field.