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'A wake-up call over water issues'

Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI: Noted environmentalist Vandana Shiva released a new book, "The Real Thing: Coke's Bumpy Ride Through India" authored by Nantoo Banerjee, at a function here over the weekend.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Shiva pointed out that sources of water across the country were either disappearing or getting polluted. "I want to congratulate Nantoo for pulling so much together. This book is a wake-up call on the water issue. I will recommend this book by sending it to all my colleagues. At railway stations one doesn't get tap water any more, therefore passengers are forced to buy either mineral water or a cold drink."

Describing the book as a well-researched look into the operation of a major multinational, Nantoo Banerjee said the cold drink plants in "water-starved" cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore couldn't have been set up without connivance of politicians and bureaucrats. "All the plants are exploiting and transporting precious

water for commercial use. Water is the lifeline of our country and it is sad that it is being exploited so cheaply without paying any revenue to the Government. ... We don't have a regulatory authority to stop cola companies from exploiting our resources. We need one million Vandana Shivas in the country to force people in the corridors of power to set up a regulatory enterprise.”

Stating that penning a book was always in his mind when he joined a cola company, Mr. Banerjee said: “I am not an intellectual; I am a reporter and an observer. I have been a business journalist for over three decades. When I got a job to work in the MNC I was really excited. What I saw during my working days was alarming. The balance-sheet in India and China of this MNC is growing because there is no regulatory authority.”

Described as a non-fiction real life story of the US-based cola company's long troubled business journey in the country, the book is a case study of the operation of a major multinational. It highlights the closure of its Kerala plant following its expose as a groundwater guzzler and the company's fight with environmentalists and social activists.