In consultative status with United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Civil Participation

Volume 2, No.1

New Delhi

January-March 2005

EDITORIAL

Door Boader

Dear Reader,

While there is a clamor for good quality education from the well-to-do in the cities and not so well-to-do even in the far-flung villages, the delivery system has been found wanting. Upper castes, whether belonging to Hindu, Muslim or other religions have maintained their hegemony over education and levers of powers and poor and down-trodden have received, if at all, only poor quality education.

During the last more than 60 years a number of experiments were conducted in the educational field. They included 'Shikshasastra' initiated by Rabindranath Tagore and 'Nai Talim' by Gandhiji. Both these were conducted under resource constraints. 'Basic Education' was designed by the Government of India as an alternative to the mainstream education with vocational training as a component of education for the commoners, but it did not find takers, because people did not accept dichotomy in education. The new initiative of the Government, Serva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) smacks of deceptiveness. Vinoba Bhave once wrote about primary education, 'It is the foundation, the base upon which the whole of our education, from beginning to end, has to be built, whether you call it primary, or middle, or higher. It will not do to have one kind of education for the villages and another kind for the towns'. There should be no double standards. For details see in the feature section entitled 'Another initiative in primary education' by Prof. Subhachari Dasgupta.

This issue also has a write-up about Ms. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay— a freedom fighter and a woman of courage. The upheaval caused by partition and uprooting of millions of people provided her the challenge and opportunity that her immense organizational gifts were waiting for. Vast numbers had to be provided shelter and food at the refugee camps, but that was not the end of the problem. Means of livelihood had to be provided so that the suffering could stand on their own feet. People who knew some craft were provided with tools and material and their products were sold through a refugee handicrafts shop. This was the origin of Central Cottage Industries Emporium which in later years came to be called the most attractive shop in the world and ensured that the most precious craft traditions of our land were preserved and gained world-wide fame.

The issue also carries many uplifting News stories which if replicated can change the face of the world and make it a better place to live in. Please read on and send any similar good News you happen to lay your hands on. Please also mention the source and date of its publication.

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FRONT PIECE

The slave and the lion

A slave escaped and sought refuge in the wilderness where he hid in a cave. The cave happened to a lion's lair. When the lion returned, the shocked slave expected the worst, but the lion meekly offered him an injured paw. The slave removed a thorn and the lion and the slave became great friends, sharing the cave for some while.

After a time, the slave longed to return to the society and bade the lion farewell. When he entered the town, he was recognized and thrown into the jail by the Governor. The Governor decided to make a public example of him by throwing him to the wild animals in the arena. On the fateful day, the slave was cast among the beasts, including one enormous fierce lion.

The lion approached the petrified slave and spectators gasped, but the lion quietly lay down at the salve's feet. It was his lion friend from the cave. The audience demanded clemency for such a show of loyalty and the Governor gave them both their freedom.

Moral of the story - Good deeds are always rewarded.



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FEATURE ARTICLES

Another initiative in primary education

* Prof. Subhachari Dasgupta

New initiative in Primary Education is a welcome feature in the agenda of the Government of India. We, as commoners and onlookers, who have looked at unfulfilled promises for nearly 60 years since independence have a few doubts. It is not a problem that cannot be solved. And therein lies the root of the doubt. So, to solve a problem one must know what is the problem?

Hunger for education is many millennia old. Shudras were denied education as we have learned from the Manu. They were not only debarred from religious or philosophical texts, but also from archery and war crafts. Ekalabya is a case in point. Dronacharya chopped off his thumb so that he could not compete with Arjuna, as he had developed confidence to challenge Arjuna, merely by observing Dronacharya teaching archery to Arjuna.

The control system on education pervaded all other knowledge systems by combining it to specific castes within the system. Knowledge and state crafts remained confined to Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Entry of a person like Ekalabya of lowly origin into this area was not permitted. The same system continues nationally even now for the same reason by denying education to the poor. An equivalent of this internationally is control of nuclear bomb or control over the UN.

Upper castes have maintained their control on education since time immemorial. It has shaped their attitude to education. The primary education is still looked as a social work and not as investment for future and a capital investment to enrich country's enormous population. This investment is much more significant and important than begging arround for foreign investment.

Upper castes, whether Hindus or Muslims¹, all are averse to providing education to the poor and lowly. This has been expressed adequately by the performance of primary education as well the literacy project. It is absurd to think that campaigns can achieve total literacy or primary education unless the activities are supported by an expanding school

system. After all, the population will keep on expanding as it should.

Much discussion has gone on these topics since the days of nationalism. Many of the schools and colleges, even Kanya Vidyalayas, were set up by public-spirited individuals. Rabindranath Tagore established coopratives to look after education of the poor peasants in Kushtia. Currently, a shadow teaching system of private tuition to supplement indifferent education provided in primary and secondary schools is operating. This is a system that helps the poor students, yet the whole public opinion has been turned against it. If the mainstream system fails, people have all the power to apply survival strategy. Private coaching is a hope to educate and prepare the children to face ever-increasing competitive world. There are also a large number of small coaching centers to supplement inefficient schools. The students of these centers are coming up throughout the country. Students of these centers are able to get certification from NIOS

Ability to respond to the demand is very special in this country. Government should do well to respond to it in a positive manner and build on the strength. It should develop education at all levels supported by direct public support. Even if it is slow, it is the only thing that will survive.

Recall the past

All sorts of solutions have come to provide education from 'Shiksasatra' initiated by Rabindranath Tagore, for taking education to village children. It was followed by 'Nai Talim' of Mahatma Gandhi. These path-finder missions were conducted under financial constraints. In the case of 'Shiksasatra' people paid for their children's education by a quantity of rice or even a day's labor.

Basic Education was designed by the Government of India, as an alternative education system to the mainstream education with vocational training as a component of education for the commoners. It did not succeed because people did not accept dichotomy in education. Their rejection of basic education was simply given a shrug, with a 'Oh well'. We have 'tried' attitude.

Basic Education, if cluttered with vocational education, will also fail. The Government of India cannot afford and will not afford it. Vocations are not limited to weaving or terracotta pots and recycling tin cans into pots and pans. Cell phones and battery-operated TV has reached villages. In the city slums, Radio and TV antennas are as frequently seen as in

¹ Working with Muslim population we can see caste-like attitude, existing among the Muslim religious groups.

the sprawling slums of Tokyo after 1950. Motorbikes and many other items need recycling as well as repair. Providing vocational education along with knowledge of 3Rs is necessary.

When will our politicians and academicians wake up to the fact of life of the poor? They will also accept that when the bodies of the poor are cut, it is blood that drips from them. That it is legitimate to have aspirations, the same as the young professionals. People do not protest because they are controlled by their leadership whether they are gun-totting or are totting other more dangerous weapon of politics and religion. I am sure that all these current efforts of provision of mid-day meals, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) or food for work to put up a sympathetic face will fail and the Government will not even know. These programs are nothing, but adding insult to injury. I hope people would reject these programs by following the method of non-cooperation as Gandhiji would have.

The poor people

SSA smacks of deceptiveness. People did not buy Basic Education when it was first introduced and people are not buying SSA even though they are sending their children from a sense of helplessness. I recall similar helplessness on the face of the starving peasants who came to the city in 1940s during the great Bengal famine. They ate morsels given to them by the philanthropists and died. They were no longer producers of food, but beggars for food. Education that the Government is pouring on to the poor will not liberate them from their bondage, from the traditional way of life and mindset, but will make them dependent on the external system in which they would be lucky to be on the grinding wheel.

Same school for all

Mahatma Gandhi always favored the concept of neighborhood school to be mandatory for all. It is also the American solution. Mao-tse-Tung favored it. Sri Lanka had such a policy in place for a long time. It certainly made people educated. I had the opportunity to work in villages on the outskirts of the forests and with a program of rehabilitation of Maoists. It was surprising that every one in the village was educated sufficiently to be able to conduct his business with ease.

With a policy of jurisdiction for schools, the large and palatial schools should become available to unfortunate slum dwellers. It has many virtues and may be a few drawbacks also. This system will vastly improve people's participation and strengthen the base of democracy. The failure of literacy mission, when some others succeeded adequately and some initiatives even gloriously. Why did it happen is a question public may ask. We quote below a newspaper report that provides a glimpse into the problem that faces squarely on the face of India, a nation that is struggling to come out of the darkness.

The New Delhi edition of New Indian Express Tuesday November 9, 2004 writes - India has done it again. In its
Global Monitoring Report, the UNESCO has ranked the country
with 34 others in the lowest category. It means that desptie
SSA, the UNESCO doubts that India would not be able to
ensure that every child goes to school by 2015, the target
date for UNESCO's 'Education for All' goal.

This year, as before, the UNESCO has prepared an EDI index or Education for All Development Index. India is ranked 105th, but the country can take heart from the rankings of some of its sub-continental neighbors. Bangladesh comes 107th, Nepal 110th and Pakistan 123rd. The number of countries in the UNESCO list totals 127.

A number of developed countries where Education for All was achieved long ago are not included in the study. A few other developing countries have been omitted because of lack of data or faulty statistics. What is interesting is that the Indian Ocean island nation, Maldives, is ranked 20th in the list. And China, with a larger population than India, takes the respectable 54th rank.

In this year's report, the UNESCO stresses on quality. The Organization points out that one of the key factors which promotes quality is the early pre-school care. In India, infants and children less than six who have access to early childhood care and education total a very low 29.7 per cent. One of the reasons why India has guaranteed free and compulsory education from the age of six is because it was sure it would not have enough money to provide the more expensive pre-school education.

Similarly, as far as the adult literacy rate goes, the country is lagging way behind not just the developed world, but ever other populous countries with similar multi-dimensional problems like China. And UNESCO argues that adult literacy is important because if the grown-ups educate themselves they will be able to motivate their children all the more. The UNESCO data really paints a grim picture of the adult education scenario in India. Of the 560 million adult illiterates

in nine of the most populous countries, India has 34 per cent (more than 180 million). Compare this to China's 11 per cent.

Dr. Amartya Sen speaking in a meeting of the 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (15 CCEM) held in 2003, in Edinburgh said, 'As it happens, widening the coverage and effectiveness of basic education can have a powerfully preventive role in reducing human insecurity of nearly every kind. It is useful to consider briefly the different ways in which removing discrepancies and neglects in education can contribute to reducing human insecurity across the world.

The most basic issue relates to the elementary fact that illiteracy and innumeracy are forms of insecurity in themselves. This is a reason that has made the poor weak and unable to assert their basic human rights. Interest in the lawmakers and distributors of sop find it useful to keep the vote bank in tact in coalition with the lingering feudal elements.'

Quoting from a study done by his trust in West Bengal Dr. Sen also said, 'As the results of our studies come in, it is remarkable to find how the parents from even the poorest and most depressed families long to give basic education to their children, to make them grow up without the terrible handicaps from which they, the parents, had themselves suffered'.

Contrary to general argument arising from the establishment we have found that there is no reluctance by parents to send their children - daughters as well as sons - to school, provided affordable, effective and safe schooling opportunities actually exist in their neighborhood. In our own experience, we have never found money to be real obstacle to education. With little encouragement, primary education centers spring up in the countryside and are maintained by public donations. However, the initiatives often do not last not because of lack of management support.

Teaching ten thousand lively children of some of the families that are poor, in Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh (now Chattisgarh) over 15 years we have found the centers that were run by volunteer teachers have now come under the patronage of SSA thereby undoing the volunteer effort of the teachers and undermining the community effort

to reach out. This method of usurpation will boost Government statistics, but little else.

There are innumerable problems created when the Government steps into community and undermines its effort. Looking at many administrative and educational objectives that have been spelt out, will lead everybody associated with the programs to powerlessness. They will be bound by rules, regulations and procedures that will move papers in and out of corridors. In this game, we wonder whether the education will have a role at all. Teaching and learning is a creative process that leads to adventures for every moment of learning time. Mao-tse-Tung was one who favored simplification of rules and procedures because he knew people and understood them. May be, the Government will wake up to the fact that people understand simplicity.

Third, when people are illiterate, their ability to understand and invoke their legal rights can be very limited. ³ Poverty has many a manifestation one of which leads to lack of political and economic power. We have also experience of conducting Non formal Education (NFE) which had a sad demise during the tenure of previous Government. Almost in a day, 40,00,000 children were thrown out of the scheme. The concept of time-bound schemes is not a tenable preposition. Because it does not provide any security of continued learning, it develops insecurity and mistrust and leads towards a learning system which appears whimsical and moves according to whims of ever-changing Governments. This approach of playing with life of children and their future is also a great disincentive and disappointment to the powerless poor communities.

In his speech, Dr. Sen has mentioned the likely effect of education on gender inequities and consciousness. We have observed in our areas the salubrious effect of primary education on increasing age of marriage in both Hindu and Muslim communities. Both Hindu and Muslim women are also keen on adopting family planning, because they are the sufferers in health and looking at the faces of dead children, when they die prematurely.⁴

However, to our politicians, Muslim women are of no consequence, because there are a few people who assume the role of leadership who are important for votes, thus voiceless women or poor are good for democracy. I mention this becuase it is closely linked to education. To the people who can work sums than I can, my request will be to examine what and how much economic activity will be generated by implementing continuous and compulsory education (though

² Dr. Amartya Sen

Dr. Amaratva Sen

Observation of the author – The most important support group for family planning exists amongst married women who have to suffer from various ailments and feel the brunt of heart breaking child deaths. Muslim women suffer even more than others as they can not even express their suffering.

not all free) up to the 10th standard. This economic activity may be large enough to pay for the national agenda.

The only virtue of democracy is that it even, if theoretically, keeps options open for change. The same applies to education. Education must provide options open for growth possibilities, hence it is disputable whether basic education is a goal at all without sufficient growth potential. In fact, primary education may act as disincentive to future participation in education. The concpt of basic education has once been defeated in this country. Demand and expectancy is real in India. Democracy does not end with a vote every now and then, it must lead to a socialist pattern of society that Nehru talked about and the path lies in Total Revolution that Jaya Prakash Narayan talked about. The guns from innumerable groups that are operating in the country can only be silenced by quality education.

Quo Vadis

Paul Gauguin has a famous painting which he named as

'Where have we come from? What are we? Where do we go from here?'

It is now time at this crossroad of pathways to ask the same question that baffled Gauguin.

'Where have we come from?

'What are we?

'Where do we go from here?'

Is it not necessary to ask these questions that one should ask every day? As a country that has struggled to free itself from dominationand has provided inspiration to many nations, we owe it to ourselves that the right path and right thought should guide us to freedom for a billion Indians who must discover their potential and meet their goal of self actualization. As we have come a long way on own inner strength, we should not imitate the ideas which are products of enlarged imperialist character.

The wisdom of India has lived since the 'Vedas' as 'Smriti' and 'Sruti'. The people who conceived the poems were not literate, as the writing had not been invented then. Material cultures of contemporary with the 'Vedas' have vanished into rubbles. Delhi had many rulers, none of them are there, and their culture has become rubble. We must look back and look at the foundation on which we are firmly rooted. Many of the Saints of middle ages who were not literate still guide people's lives. I am not negating the role of the 3R's, but to see how this will change the moral fiber of the country. How people live in peace and attain happiness.

The overlords of the country, the power hungry leaders as they were ones that divided the country, neglected the galaxy of sages of the twentieth century that illuminated the wrold. They left by the wayside messages of peace and welfare and looked up at the blood spillers who have devastated the world of wealth and moral and caused great human sorrow and misery to the world.

'Vinoba' had very strongly expressed his dismay three years after freedom which I quote here and a fuller version has been given in the end notes. 'It means that this is the foundation, the base, upon which the whole of our education, from beginning to end, has to be built, whether you call it primary, or middle, or higher. It will not do to have one kind of education for the villages and another kind for the towns. it will not do to have one kind of education for the first four years of school life, and afterwards some other kind that is quite unrelated to it'.

If Vinoba was impatient after three years of independence, sixty years is long enough time to experiment with all the people-oriented projects. And we really do not allow this to happen. It is now for them to accept the defeat. it has been a fact of history that the victors become hero of the defeated and slavery was more based on this principle than the swords.

Mahatma Gandhi had said, 'Craft, art, health and education should all be integrated into one scheme. 'Nai Talim' is a beautiful blend of all the four and covers the whole education of the individual from the time of conception to the moment of death Instead of regarding craft and industry as different from education, I will regard the former as the medium for the latter.' (H, 10-11-1946, p.394)

The quotation of Mahatma Gandhi is self-explanatory as to what is craft education. It should not be simplified by equating it with vocational training. Health education is not equivalent to AIDS and sex education.

Gurudeva recalled his own childhood education and said what may be the goal of education that I am trying alongwith my wife Aparna in our school and other educational intervention. Therefore, without Brahminical approach of explaining the Saints, I will end this dialogue with a quotation from Gurudeva.

'We, in our home, sought freedom of power in our language, freedom of imagination in our literature, freedom of soul in our religious creeds and that of mind in our social environment. Such an opportunity has given me confidence in the power of education which is one with life and only which can give us real freedom, the highest that is claimed for man, his freedom of moral communion in the human world..... I try to assert in my words and works that education has its only meaning and object in freedom—freedom from

ignorance about the laws of the universe and freedom from passion and prejudice in our communication with the human world.'

Where the mind is without fear And the head is held high, Where knowledge is free: Where the world has not been broken Up into fragments by narrow domestic walls Where words come out from the depth of truth: Where tireless striving Stretches its arms towards perfection: Where the clear stream of reason Has not lost its way into the Dreary desert sand of dead habit; Where the mind is led forward By thee into ever-widening Thought and action Into that heaven of freedom my Father, Let my country awake.

The legacy of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya

* H.Y. Sharada Prasad

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya played a significant role in the aftermath of partition by providing millions of uprooted people food, shelter and means of livelihood thereby making them stand on their own feet.

Fame came early to Kamaladevi. Her intellect, her many-sided talents, her self-assurance, daring and her dazzling good looks combined to make her one of the best-known younger leaders of the freedom movement. She was one of the six or seven women whose photographs appeared along with the portraits of the national leaders even in the early 1930s. She shared the honor with Kasturba Gandhi, Dr, Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Swarup Rani, Kamala Nehru, Nellie Sengupta and Basanti Devi.

i. Vinoba Bhave

- It puzzles and saddens me that three years should have gone by since we gained our independence, yet we have not found the courage to take a decision about this. What dearer proof could there be of our failure to understand the essentials, than that the very system of education, which was in use before independence as a means to keep people in subjection, should be allowed to continue after independence has been won? If you still feel that our new education is as yet in the experimental stage—it is still cooking, it is not ready to be eaten, and we will eat it only when it is properly cooked—if that is your idea, then I must ask whether we are to eat bricks and stones in the meanwhile? Are such things fit to eat, or fit to be thrown away? Where would have been the harm if you had thrown them away at once, and then said to us: We have not yet considered what the new pattern of education should be. It will take us a few months to think this out, and for that time we will stop all schooling. As it is urgently necessary to increase production, all the children will go out and work.' but we do not feel so keenly about our national education as we do about our national flag; that is what I mean by our failure to understand the essentials.

We have named this education 'basic education', but we do not understand the meaning of the word 'basic'. We imagine that it means merely the first stage of children's education. It means far more than that. It means that this is the foundation, the base, upon which the whole of our education, from beginning to end, has to be built, whether you call it primary, or middle, or higher. It will not do to have one kind of education for the villages and another kind for the towns. It will not do to have one kind of education for the first four years of school life, and afterwards some other kind that is quite unrelated to it. It will not do to regard this as an experiment to be tried out on refugees while the rest of the country has something else. We have a right to use the word 'basic' only if we are agreed that the whole education of the country should be built up on the foundation of 'Nai Talim'. Many even of those who are engaged in educational experiment, when asked what plans they have made for the towns, reply that this education is not intended for the towns, but for the villages. Nothing, in my view, could be a greater mistake. This education is for all, and in it there is no distinction between town and village.

Paul Gauguin

Paul Gauguin's early career was out of the normal. He first worked as a sailor for the French merchant fleet for six years. Then he turned to banking and became a successful stock-broker at the Paris stock exchange.

In 1871, Gauguin started to paint as a hobby. He had seen an exhibition of impressionist paintings and was deeply impressed. The passion for painting should dominate his life for the good and for the bad, but he was still firmly rooted in his bourgois life and he had a solid job as a banker. In 1873, he married Mette Gad, a Danish from Copenhagn. He had five children with her.

In 1883/1984, Gauguin's life changed dramatically. At the age of 35, he gave up his bourgois life as a stock broker and moved from Paris to Rouen. Financial difficulties of the company which employed him, may have made this step easier. His wife Mette, upset with her husband's plans, went back to her parents in Denmark. In 1884, he visited her and the children in Copenhagn, but soon returned to France.

In 1885, he separated from his wife and left his 5 children, the last ties with a bourgois as a young landlord managing his family's rural estates. In 1891, he could sell about thirty paintings. One of his clients was Degas Edgar. The money from these sales enabled him to sail to Tahiti in the South Sea. He lived in Papeete for two years in rather primitive conditions. During this period, the artist created some of his finest paintings. He stayed in Tahiti for two years. In 1893, he returned to France.

But in April 1894, he sailed back to the South Sea. He spent his last five years in great poverty and in bad health as the result of a venereal disease. His financial situation was depressing. In 1897, he tried to commit suicide, but he continued to paint until his death in 1903 on the Marquesas Islands.

It is in Tahiti he faced his questions, the three questions, that have baffled humanity from time immemorial. The impressionist painters of great repute never asked these questions which made the human kind. They were riding high on high life of the imperialist regime and satisfying the escapist society of Paris.

Kamaladevi was born in 1903 in Mangalore which was then part of Madras Presidency. She was married at 14, but was widowed a year later. Yet the enlightened family allowed her to continue her studies. She came under the spell of Gandhiji, hawked copies of his banned Hind Swaraj and gave proof of her tremendous organizational abilities in the Seva Dal. Sarojini Naidu's brother, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya fell in love and married her. 'The gods would envy us', he wrote in poetic flourish, but he lacked the constancy of temperament to make it work.

She became the General Secretary of the All India Women's Conference when barely 21. Her work as leader of the team of volunteers at the Madras session of the Congress in 1927 won high praise. She argued with Gandhiji himself and made him revise his decision to exclude women from salt satyagraha. She lead in the satyagraha of 1930 and 1933. She threw in her lot with the Socialist Wing of the Congress and presided over the annual conference of the Congress Socialist Party held in Meerut in 1936. She traveled and wrote widely. She was recognized as one of the few leaders in national politics who was interested in the theatre and had thought deeply about the arts in general.

When freedom came, she stayed with those socialists who spurned office like Acharya Narendra Deva, Jayaprakash Narayan, Yusuf Meherally, Achyut Patwardhan and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, while people like Minoo Masani accepted Nehruji's invitation, but the upheaval caused by partition and the uprooting of millions of people provided Kamaladevi the challenge and opportunity that her immense organizational gifts were waiting for.

An excellent organizer

Vast numbers had to be provided shelter and food at the refugee camps, but that was not the end of the problem. Means of livelihood had to be provided so that they could stand on their own feet. Kamaladevi gathered a band of workers who conducted a survey of the vocations that the refugees had followed. A telling instance throws-light on her method of work. She found that there were several thousand acres of vacant land near the Qutab Minar, but the officials had allotted that to their own favorites. She asked the refugees in the camp to occupy the land. She and Sucheta Kriplani followed it up with the all party conference which adopted the slogan 'land for the tiller and tools for the artisan'. A letter went to Nehruji who promptly ordered the cancellation

of the bureaucrats' plan to grab the lands.

As for the people who were no agriculturists, but knew some craft or the other, arrangements were made to provide them with tools and materials and their products were sold through a refugee handicraft shop. This was the origin of the Central Cottage Industries Emporium which in later years came to be called the most attractive shop in the world and ensured that the most precious craft traditions of our land were preserved and gained worldwide fame. Kamaladevi also became fairy godmother to the Indian Cooperative Union and the All-India Handicrafts Board.

Brooked no interference from high and mighty

The full story of these two organizations as also of the Faridabad township which owes its origins to the efforts of Sarojini Naidu, Mridula Sarabhai and Kamaladevi has been told by Dr. L.C. Jain in his books. Jain also says that when once she thought that Indira Gandhi was needlessly interfering in a matter, Kamaladevi wrote to Nehruji, 'You ask her to keep herself away from my areas of operation. It is none of her business'. There was always something of a lioness in her, but when dealing with innocent artisans, she was all mother.

A colleague recalls how when a potter fell ill she went all the way to his hut to give him money for his treatment. 'We walked the bylanes of Delhi to visit him and other crafts persons, never minding the filth or the state of streets. She would not think twice of hitching her sari to wade through the water even in her autumn years. Another former aide recalls, 'Each journey with her was a voyage of discovery and education in the fullest sense. While touring Bengal, during the day we visited the craft centers and in the evening the jatra performance, the old puppets in Murshidabad and the patta painters and singers.

'In Orissa, while searching for weaving centers, jewellery makers and visiting the painters of Raghurajpur, we also saw the Sahi Jatra at Puri, the puppeteers of Orissa at Kantil and Cuttack and visited the NGO working on fibre research and adivasi welfare. At Sonpur in Bihar, we saw the thick Bhagalpuri waste silk chaddars used by the villagers as an inexpensive wrap during the winter. We tracked down the producers, and for the first time, Kamaladevi ordered the producers to make yardage. A waste cloth became an important export item'!

The extracts I have given are from a publication brought out by the Crafts Council of Karnataka a few months ago by the way of a 'tribute to the mother of handicrafts on her birth centenary'. It contains articles in both English and Kannada. My inquiries show that no comparable book was brought out at the all-India level on a person to whom the nation owes so much. Was at least a commemorative stamp brought out which is a common form of tokenism? The Kamaladevi centenary and the golden jubilee of the Indian Handicrafts Board would have been a wonderful occasion for bringing out a set of stamps in various denominations of some of the most eye-catching and colorful handicrafts of our land.

Come to think of it, crafts constituted only a small portion of her world. Her political contributions and the work she did for the theatre and the Sangeet Natak Academy and for individual institutions like the India International Center all need to be celebrated.

An old friend remembers PIDT on its Silver Jubilee

New Delhi: Mr. Steven Shepelwich, Senior Community Affairs Advisor, Oklahoma City Branch, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, US has written on the occasion of PIDT's Silver Jubilee:

Through a chance encounter, I saw word of PIDT's Silver Jubilee celebrations to be held today (7th February, 2005). I was so glad to find your contact information!

Years ago, in 1987, I attended a training hosted by Prof. Dasgupta and PIDT in New Delhi for several volunteers, of which I was one from the US universities placed with the Indian NGOs. The training was an eye-opener for me to issues and approaches to participatory development and new visions of possible and right livelihoods. While I have lost contact with PIDT over the years, specific discussions and incidents from that training still inform my work in development.

'I trust this finds all well with Prof. Dasgupta and PIDT staff during this anniversary season. Please accept my warm regards and remembrances as you celebrate your accomplishments and I would enjoy learning more about your future plans'.

Kar Nicobar IAF Base Commander, V.V. Ban ZWIA

From maid to sarpanch

From scrubbing dishes for a living to running the affairs of an entire village, it is a giant leap for Rahi Meher. The domestic has become Sarpanch of Kodia village in Bhilai, Chattisgarh without even contesting an election. Villagers were unanimous in their choice of who will head their Panchayat. The post of Sarpanch in the village had recently been reserved for scheduled caste candidate and Meher's is the only scheduled caste family in the village.

Privation had forced Rahi to work as a child laborer. Later, she worked as a cleaner for two years before someone introduced her to a few families in Bhilai who were looking for domestic help. Of late, she has been spending a lot of time understanding the problems of her village. Initially, I thought the people were just making fun. I have been working in the houses in Bhilai for the last 16 years. So, it was not easy to believe. Later, I came to know that none was eligible for the post, except me. I have to learn the functioning of the Panchayat and its duties, but I will be more successful than those with years of experience.'

She says, 'I do not know much about development work, but I know the deteriorating politics everywhere. My villagers know that I will not play politics at any cost. They told me that roads are most important and I can tell those watching me to come again to my village after six months and see the quality of roads here', she adds.

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Turning the tide of Tabel property and standard standards and standards

Tsunami on December 26 last year brought huge destruction in terms of men and material in Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, some States of India and other Asian countries, yet amid the relentless flow of heart-rending, tragic stories, there were heart-warming, heroic tales of human spirit shining through. For exaple:

- Five fishermen from Ulavapdu in Andhra Pradesh's Prakasam district narrowly missed huge tidal waves, but jumped back into the foaming waters to save a drowning couple. Offered a reward, they refused to accept money.
- A woman from Nellore picked up her two children and raced against certain death. Sanjivamma hit a tree root, fell and nearly collapsed from fear and exhaustion, but carried on and reached high ground where the waves touched their feet before ebbing.

- Kar Nicobar IAF Base Commander, V.V. Bandopadhyay drove some women and children to the highest point in the island. Knocked out by a huge wave, he later received Ms. Sonia Gandhi in a vest and pyjamas – all he had left.
- Police and locals in Machillipatnam rescued hundreds of tourists. The first rescue team was lead by junior constable, Masthan Khan. Local groups pitched into convert nearby buildings into relief camps which were home to 1,500 fisher folk.
- British firefighter Roy Philips, bloodied and bruised after being smashed against a wall by the tidal wave, repeatedly drove back into the towering waves off the coast of Fhuket, Thailand, five-six times to save fellow tourists.

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Hidden talent

Separated from Andhra Pradesh by a parched river bed, Sagroli, a tiny town in Maharashtra, seems like a typical rural pocket. What is not apparent is that, tucked away on 150 acres, is one of the country's biggest rural schools. Ever since the lone sugar factory shut down, agriculture has been the sole source of income for the arid town of 10,000 people, but with the school, run by a charitable trust, Sanskriti Samvardhan Mandal (SSM), Sagroli remains an attraction for neighboring villages. The school currently has a strength of nearly 4,000 – 2,000 resident and 1,900 day scholars.

It all began in 1959, with philanthropist Keshav Deshmukh and the charitable trust he founded. The only school within a 50-km radius, it comprised a few huts and only 36 students. Now the sprawling campus has a high school, military school, computer training center, special courses for the deaf and the mute, 10 hostels, an exhaustive library, an orphanage and a 24-bed hospital. It provides education from preliminary to under-graduate level and offers vocational courses for its senior students in carpentry, moulding and electronics technology. Rainwater harvesting and crop science are also taught. While the education of girls suffers across rural India, this school's population is 40 per cent female. School fees are highly subsidized, but resident students pay Rs. 7,500 for board and lodging.

The results are encouraging. Students are focused, bright and unafraid to ask questions. They speak fluent English and are on a par with their city counterparts in academic and co-curricular activities. Focused on excelling

academically, the students worry about the lack of jobs in and around Sagroli. Most of the school's 170 teachers are former students. 'Being self-reliant is the only way', says G.A. Deshmukh, SSM Chairman and son of Keshav Deshmukh.

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Eyeing the future

Steering one's way through the maze that is Kolkata requires an unblinking knack for navigation. Of course, it helps if you can see. Ajay Sau cannot, but that has not stopped him from tracking down addresses with the verve of a bloodhound. The visually-impaired 21-year-old works for a courier company and in his three years of service has not committed a single faux pas while delivering packages. 'I just read out the addresses in the morning' and he delivers 25-30 letters a day – 'so far without mistake', says Sandeep Parekh, Sau's employer and proprietor of Indo Express Couriers.

It was a chance that brought Sau to the courier firm. When Parekh found out that one of his clients, an NGO, called the Voice of the World, worked for the welfare of the blind, he began to provide them free services. Struck by the gesture, the NGO's Secretary, Gargi Gupta, met Parekh and impressed upon him the need to employ visually-impaired staff. Sau has been with the firm ever since.

Residing near Gariahat in South Kolkata with his parents and younger brother, Sau can read Braille and has studied upto class VIII. It is, however, his sharp mind and spongelike memory that have stood him in good stead. The addresses of the places he visits are stored in his memory for good. In fact, Kolkata is so well imprinted in his mind that it is he who often helps his colleagues locate addresses. Sau has delivered letters to celebrities, including Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr. Som Nath Chatterjee and can recite addresses with the glib fluency of a man who knows his job well. The only time he faces a problem is monsoons when it becomes difficult to look for new addresses or find someone to crosscheck them.

It is small deterrence for a man who clings to his dignity with a determined fervor. 'Once a lawyer helped me cross the street and when I told him that I worked for a courier company, he became furious and asked me to sue my employer. He even offered me his services for free', says Sau. 'He could not believe I was happy to earn my living. Instead of legal advice, he should offer jobs to people like me', Sau said completing his sentence.

Central Silk Board holds silkworm rearing workshop in association with PIDT, Ghazipur

Ghazipur: 'Silkworm rearing has great potential of providing employment to the farming community and giving avenues of additional income during the lean months of the year. The farmers can improve their standard of living tremendously by taking up this subsidiary occupation'.

This was the opinion of experts from Research Extension Center, Central Silk Board, Bhadrasi, Varanasi (U.P.) and officials of the State Silk Department who came to address a workshop on March 10, 2005 organized in association with People's Institute for Development and Training (PIDT), Karimuddinpur, Ghazipur, U.P. More than 50 progressive farmers of the area participated in the day-long workshop.

The workshop was addressed by Dr. A.K. Bajpai, Joint Director, Central Silk Board, Lucknow, Dr. M.L. Chaturvedi, Deputy Director, Silk Development Department, U.P. Government, Varanasi, Dr. P.N. Mishra, Deputy Director, Regional Silk Production Research Center, Sahaspur, Dehradun, Uttranchal, Dr. V.K. Awasthi and Mr. R.P. Singh, Senior Research Officers, Research Extension Center, Central Silk Board, Bhadrasi, Varanasi, U.P., Mr. Sadanand Tiwari, Officer Incharge, PIDT, Ghazipur and Mr. Latif Sheikh, Incharge, Silkworm Rearing Project, PIDT, Ghazipur.

Dr. V.K. Awasthi informed the gathering about the ways of raising mulberry plantation. He said, for mulberry plantation, pits should be dug upto a depth of 10 inches (25 cm). Plants of good varieties should be raised. Mainly plants of two types of varieties – shrub and tree-type are available. When the plants are young, pulse crops like urad, moong, lentil etc. can be grown in the fields without any ill effect on the growth of mulberry plants. On the contrary, pulses leave rhizobium bacteria in the ground which increase soil fertility and enhance growth of mulberry trees. When the trees reach a height of 5 feet, they should be pruned for speedy growth.

Dr. P.N. Mishra discussed the method of preparing vermi compost for increasing farm productivity at a very low cost. In order to prepare vermi compost, the farmer should dig two pits measuring $5 \times 3 \times 3$ feet. In one of the pits, he should put a mixture of dung, grass and vegetable residues and let it ferment for 15 days. After 15 days, the mixture should be transferred to the second pit and 1 kg. earth worms should be left to feed on the mixture. Within two months, the whole mixture will be converted into high quality vermi-compost. If more compost is needed, the process should be repeated.

Dr. M.L. Chaturvedi said that the State Silk Department was providing subsidy for training purposes @ Rs. 200 per person and 50 per cent of the cost of construction of silkworm houses. For constructing a standard silkworm house of 10×15 feet, the cost comes to Rs. 20,000 per unit and the department gives a subsidy of Rs. 10,000. For construction of bigger-sized houses, more subsidy is available.

Dr. V.K. Awasthi and Mr. R.P. Singh discussed various steps needed to be taken and precautions to be observed for silkworm rearing. 'Cleanliness has to be maintained at every step', they said. Women can be found employment in reeling and allied activities after the silkworms have shed raw silk. Thus, silk worm rearing can be converted into a family subsidiary occupation.

Mr. Sadanand Tiwari informed the gathering that so far 18 persons sponsored by PIDT have received subsidy ranging from Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 6,000 each and collectively they have raised more than 41,000 mulberry trees. One of the farmers has already started commercial silk production and his produce has been purchased by the Silk Department. Others will shortly go into production. He called on the farmers present to follow the lead taken by the 18 farmers and open the way for their own socio-economic development.

Mr. Latif Sheikh proposed a vote of thanks.

Motia shows the way

By 1988, forests around Motia (Narmada district, Gujarat) were almost depleted due to complicity between villagers, saw mill owners and wood traders. There was no grass left for grazing the cattle or wood for cooking. The same year, Vadgiyabhai Virjibhai Vasava set up Motia Forest Range Cooperative Society with the help of villagers and together they afforested 666 hectares of land. An year later, the forest department also joined the initiative and 320 hectares of land was afforested.

The Society has been awarded the Indira Gandhi Priyadarshini Vruksh Mitra Award for its contribution towards restoration of forests through a unique approach. With the forest cover in India depleting to one-third of its original expanse in the last few years due to demands made on it by growing population and continuous industrial expansion, quite efforts like these have made significant difference. Most of the 675-strong population of Motia village have been involved in afforestation.

Says Vasava, 'Our approach was that of agro-forestry which attempts at a compromise between the need to produce a cash crop each year and the need to grow trees for the future. We motivated villagers to plant saplings in their farms and at the entrance of their houses so that in the long run they would provide wood for cooking. Between 1991 and 2000, the Motia Society produced 2,615,000 kg of green grass with a market value of Rs. 24.40 lakh and distributed it free of cost to the villagers. This increased the productivity of cattle and in the past nine years, the village has witnessed production of 927,321 liters of milk which has helped raise their standard of living and set an example for other villages'.

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SHGs snub bank, fight liquor

Ahalya Patel, a rustic tribal woman in her mid-40s, has become a celebrity in Khariar district, Orissa. After uniting disparate SHGs, she is now leading a vigorous campaign against liquor. Ahalya is the President of Narishakti Mahasangha, a federation of SHGs in Khariar and Naupada blocks. Recently, the Pragati Youth Club of Duajhar invited her to speak on women's empowerment and prohibition.

Business for the women has picked up. Most of them cultivate vegetables on their small farms and trade them in Bhawnipatna, the district headquarter of Kalahandi. When the SHGs started, the concept of saving money was strange

to the local women. A local NGO, Srusti, explained the benefits of pooling resources. So, the women began saving every month to meet emergency needs since getting a loan from Kalahandi Aanchlika Gramya Bank meant running back and forth several times.

The group, called the Tulsawadi SHG, grew and grew. They got a loan of Rs. 2.2 lakh under the Government's Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana, a program aimed at self-employment for the rural poor. The women then realized that savings can make families self-sufficient. They designed strategies to increase their income and limit wasteful expenditure.

Some 15 months ago, the Tulsawadi SHG invited 20 other SHGs to a meeting at Khasbahal village and they formed a federation of SHGs, called the Narishakti Mahasangha. Ahalya was chosen the President. In late 2003, OXFAM, an international donor agency, added to their corpus with Rs. 1.2 lakh and topped it with Rs. One lakh this year. The Mahasangha now has 37 SHGs, covering 400 families in three blocks.

The Mahasangha lends money to member SHGs at an interest rate of 15 per cent. The SHGs lend to individuals at an interest rate of 24 to 36 per cent. The rate may seem high, but the local moneylender demands 120 per cent and expects security. He takes gold, utensils, bicycles or land till the entire loan is repaid. The Mahasangha plans to reduce interest rates once they start lending more money.

This leaves Kalahandi Aanchlika Gramya Bank out in the cold. Although the bank charges only 11 per cent, it has few takers. The NABARD is breathing down its neck to meet targets. The officials are running door to door offering loans to women. When they refuse, the officials offer to sanction 50 per cent of the loan as subsidy under the Swarna Jayanti Swarozgar Yojana, but the women find it more convenient to borrow from the Mahasangha's friendly office bearers who are just around the corner. Yet there was a time when the bank had snubbed Ahalya's SHG when it approached it for loan.

Once the SHG federation expanded, members began to think, 'We should not only do financial transactions, but also work for the benefit of the community. Thus, we clean the village drains, we have taken on corruption in the public distribution system and have organized a rally to close all liquor vends (kothis)', said Ahalya, but the kothis blithely ignored them and continued with business as usual. So, the women entered the shops and broke the bottles. Some men fled to jungles and started brewing liquor there. The women chased them and got them to stop. As a result, the area has become liquor-free now.

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Replicable example

It took just a kulhar (small earthen pot) for the life of an Etah child to transform. From a tea hawker, the eight-year-old child was catapulted into the home of a compassionate IAS officer. When the Etah (Uttar Pradesh) District Magistrate, Mr. R.P. Shukla, saw Bholu cry over some broken kulhars, he was moved enough to ask him why he was crying for a 10-paise kulhar?

The heart-rending story that the boy told him moved him enough to adopt him. The child who hailed from Nai Basti, told him that he was toiling day and night at barely Rs. 20 a day to pay off his father's debt. However, he never received any money from his employers. The child was wailing because he had dropped his bag of kulhars and his employer would deduct Re 1 for each kulhar from his salary.

Mr. Shukla said, the child was also suffering from a bad bout of cold, but his parents did not have money to get him checked by a doctor. Bholu finally received medical attention when he reached the DM's residence. Asked if his family had approved of his decision, Mr. Shukla said that his wife and two children were in Lucknow and did not know that they had a new member in the family, but he was sure that they would be delighted when they arrive in Etah.

Both Mr. Shukla's children are MBAs and he is keen that Utkarsh (new name given to Bholu) becomes an IAS officer. By taking this step, he hopes to set an example for the Etah millionaires, who he feels could easily change the lives of hundreds of 'Bholus'. Bholu has already been admitted to a local school. Reacting to a sudden twist to her son's fate, Bholu's mother said, 'The pain of separation from my son will be bearable because it will be good for his future'.

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Ideal Trust - small organization, big deeds

Mr. N. Soundarapandian, the promoter of Ideal Trust, an NGO from Madurai, Tamil Nadu has written, 'Ours is basically a small organization working for the upliftment of the poor and downtrodden. I started my career with small social work activities through volunteers at the age of 18. The suffering of the poor motivated me to start Ideal Trust in 2002. Since the service provided by the Government, politicians and

AAKANKSHA: Striving for the cause of the less privileged

- Sudha Subramaniam

Mumbai: When we seek the alluring beauty in the distance, we often fail to behold the lovely flowers blooming at our feet. It took a disaster like the Tsunami to bring to notice the great work being done by the NGO, Aakanksha, for the mankind at large, especially children, the budding flowers of tomorrow.

Aakanksha played a pivotal role in assisting the Tsunami victims. They established collection centers at a number of points in Mumbai where people could contribute in kind. Contributions in the form of finance, pulses, edible oils, utensils, clothes, water purifying tablets, medicines and medication came pouring in from all over the world. This really boosted the relief effort. The tempos which came to collect the material in the evenings would return overflowing to the brim.

Aakanksha is basically a non-profit organization with a mission to impact the lives of the less privileged children, enabling them to maximize their potential and change their lives. To achieve this mission, Aakanksha provides such children with centers at innumerable locations where for specified duration of time the children come together to learn, play, create and experience the thrills and joys of that sweet time of all, the childhood.

The organization believes that in order to get a meaningful education the children need to get a different type of learning experience than what the formal school system provides. This they achieve through able volunteers who are trained to tap the potential in such children through specified activities which give them a different type of learning experience and prepares them for the life ahead. The scarce resources of space too are most effectively utilized.

Today, there are 37 Aakanksha centers which are located in schools, colleges, offices and other properties in Mumbai and Pune. Most spaces are provided to Aakanksha free of charge. Each center is staffed by a head teacher and an assistant teacher. The helpers are usually mothers from the community. Everyone teams up for the effort and the children are even picked up personally as well as by bus. The community is linked together through the mothers and even the children from the slums come within the purview of Aakanksha's all-encompassing network.

A social service team has been set up through effective networking. Interaction of the children with their families too is taken care of. The uniquely-designed curriculum has 10 levels that uses innovative teaching methodology to teach English, Mathematics and values. The first seven levels focus on goals of strong educational foundation, good time and self-esteem. The last three focus on the goal of preparing for a job. Field trips and special events, sports, dance, fun and frolic are the order of the day and indeed the children may have discovered that the heaven is indeed on earth and they do not have to look skywards for a savior.

Aakanksha Foundation can be reached at — Voltas House C, T.B. Kadam Road, Chinchpokli, Mumbai — 400033. Phone: 022-23700253/23729880 (9 AM to 6 PM), Mobile: 9870052522.

officials has not reached the people, Ideal Trust is trying to contribute its mite to mitigate the suffering of the marginalized. The objectives of the Trust are:

- To provide temporary shelter and support to women and girls who have no social support system to rely on,
- To rehabilitate women and girls socially and economically by provision of skill training and counseling,
- To raise their level of understanding of issues involving human rights,
- · To keep tract of openings for them,
- · To maximize legal and civil society's support for them,
- To increase facilities for the care of AIDS orphans and minimize the chances of their becoming street children and
- To minimize stigma and marginalization of child labor through various modes.

Ideal Trust's volunteers went to affected districts of Tsunami and provided emergency relief services like removal of the dead bodies, removing waste materials, providing clothes and food to the needy etc. The volunteers were divided into four – collection, allocation, field and coordination – teams. The collection team collected people, coordinated with those who wanted to help collect relief material and donations and inform people what was going on and what was needed, send out e-mails and news releases and establish contacts etc.

The allocation team was there to find out what material needed to go where, divided the materials, sorted them out, packed them and put them into trucks. It distributed volunteers in the trucks and sent them to Nagapatinam district and its surroundings. The field team volunteers worked in selected areas. The volunteers and work coordination team contacted people experienced in emergency relief work, local college and school students, red cross members, alumini associations etc. to help in construction and road-laying work.

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Women rejuvenate a dead pond

In just four months, a dead pond was brought back to life by the women of Dabia and Dagadkot villages in Khandwa district of Madhya Pradesh popularly called 'Poorvi Nimad'. Rippling water, six feet deep, ended a four-year drought. Hundreds of hands generously came forward to rejuvenate the pond with no assistance from the Government. The water is not just quenching the thirst of people and their cattle, it is irrigating nearly seven acres of farm land. Hard working women of these two villages are planning to turn part of the pond into a fish farm to earn an income.

'With the coming of phalgun, we had to traverse long distances to fetch water and the blazing heat made our task immensely difficult', recalls local resident Rampyaru. 'We were falling prey to diseases because of exhaustion and weakness. Our land lay unattended. The education and health of our children was at stake. We had to seek wage labor. It was then that we put our heads together'.

The women were members of savings groups. They realized that money could only be saved when one earned. Since lack of water was the cause of their distress, they approached the Gram Sabha to deepen the dry pond, but the Sarpanch was disinterested. So, the women decided to tackle the problem on their own. They realized that deepening the pond was an arduous task. They did not have any money either. They decided to take some money from, Prasoon, an organization working in the area for the last eight years. The remainder was collected from the community.

The women put in place the rules to be followed while deepening the pond. They decided the number of working hours and constituted a monitoring committee. It was agreed that one member from each family would receive wages for this work and the rest would donate their labor. Those providing their labor would be given drinking water on site. In case someone got injured or fell sick, the services of local nurse would be employed.

Initially, only 40 laborers worked at the site. The women began by digging and constructing an embankment. As the work progressed, the attitude of the villagers changed. The Sarpanch offered help and provided a tractor to dispose the earth dug out of the pond. The women worked indefatigably from March 2004 through the hot summer and got the pond ready for the monsoon. The rain gods arrived and generously filled the pond. The pond is now 290 feet long, 130 feet wide and nine feet deep. It has become a shining example which the neighboring villages want to emulate.

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AAA gets going

For a man without roof, home is where the imagination finds one. Every fourth Sunday, Delhi's homeless gather at a panchayat in the walled city, the outline of a house is etched

XIX IAVE World Volunteer Conference

NEW DELHI: Indian Association for Volunteer Effort (Iave) and People's Institute for Development and Training (PIDT) are organizing the XIX World Volunteer Conference of the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) in early November 2006. United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and industrial bodies like Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) are actively involved in organizing this Conference. The Conference is expected to host about 800 participants from at least 80 countries around the globe. The participants would include volunteers, volunteer managers, volunteer leaders, professionals, academics, corporate and Government representatives among others.

The theme of the Conference is **'Volunteering for Peace in Multicultural Societies'**. Besides, the main theme, a number of sub-themes have been chosen for the Conference. They are:

- 1. Environment, ecology and development for peace
- 2. Education and governance in multi-cultural societies
- 3. Human rights and fundamental freedoms
- 4. Spirituality, morality and attitudes
- 5. Media, advertising and peace

For registering and sending papers, please contact for Conference brochure and other information at the following address:

Ms. C. Indira Dasgupta, Coordinator or
Prof. K.K. Sen, Executive Secretary
Conference Secretariat
XIX IAVE World Volunteer Conference
People's House, A-12,Paryavaran Complex
Saket-Maidangarhi Road, New Delhi – 110030
Phone: 91-011-29532408/29531282/29531296

E-mail: pidt@del6.vsnl.net.in

Website: www.volunteerindia.org, www.iave.org

on the wall. Fragrant flowers lie scattered. Five panches, jury members elected by them, listen to their problems. These are placed before the community. The solutions are arrived at by consensus. The idea of a panchayat came from the first Mahapanchayat of the homeless held on February 23, 2003 by Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan (AAA), a project of Action Aid. More than 623 homeless drew a memorandum demanding 100 permanent shelters, permission for street vending, facilities for banking, identity cards, ration cards, separate shelters for women, the mentally ill and the handicapped. It was decided that a panchayat should be convened every month so that the homeless could discuss their problems. The venue of the panchayat is a night shelter run by AAA.

In December 2002, AAA started taking over night shelters in Delhi to protect the homeless from freezing to death. Since then the program has expanded to include health, education, livelihood and a postal service for the homeless. It has gone national and found the condition of homeless in Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Secunderabad, Kolkata and Lucknow appalling, but found that Delhi has the largest number of homelsss. However, in the South there are more women with their families living on the streets. In Delhi, the homeless comprise migrants from many regions. Most belong to Dalit, scheduled castes and tribe communities.

Police brutality is constant in every city. The antiquated Vagrancy Act gives the police the power to arrest people for 'wandering about'. Shabbily dressed people crossing the road or destitute women outside temples are picked up and thrown into begger's homes which are worse than jails. It takes half a minute for the magistrate to sentence them. AAA is planning to file a PIL in the Supreme Court to get the Vagrancy Act repealed. Identity cards to prevent police harassment are being issued. Health problems, mostly malnutrition and anemia are widespread. Of equal concern is mental health. While schizophrenia and depression are frequent among women, alcoholism and substance abuse are common among men.

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How to live a happy and rewarding life

One of the readers of Civil Participation, Ms. Samita Chaturvedi, has suggested a 12-point formula for living a happy and rewarding life. Her formulation:

Compliment three people everyday.

Become a 'Civil Participation' volunteer correspondent

'Civil Participation' invites social workers, volunteers, activists, concerned individuals and collectives, young and the old, men and women from India and abroad to become its correspondents.

We would like to publish short pieces on people's endeavors to make the world a better place to live devoid of misery, wars, poverty and want.

You may find numerous efforts in this direction by individuals and members of the civil society in all parts of the world. If you have done or come across such a recent effort, write and e-mail it to us through at pidt@del6.vsnl.net.in in English.

You may send newspaper clippings, but the source of publication from which the clipping has been taken should be clearly mentioned. All the material for publication should have an inscription on the left hand side 'FOR PUBLICATION IN CIVIL PARTICIPATION'.

We also solicit your opinion regarding this publication and your suggestions for improvement of its content. These too can be sent on the above e-mail address.

-Editor

- · Say 'please' and 'thank you' a lot,
- Plant flowers every spring,
- Be the first to say 'hello',
- Be forgiving to yourself and others,
- Return all things you borrowed,
- Treat everyone like you want to be treated,
- Make new friends, but cherish the old ones.
- Keep secrets,
- Do not postpone your work,
- Write 'thank you' note promptly and
- Never give up on anything, miracles do happen everyday.