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

# Civil Participation

Volume 2, No.3

New Delhi

July-September 2005

# **EDITORIAL**

## Dear Reader,

India is a melting pot of cultures. Throughout its history, the process of cultural assimilation and dissemination has been going on. While India has taken much from other cultures and regions, it has also given a lot to them. This cultural give and take has been a continuous process. When people visit countries of South-East Asia and even China and Mongolia, they feel effects of Indian cultural forms in arts and dances in these countries. Scripture paintings are rooted in Buddhist styles. Brahmi is the source of many scripts of South and South-East Asia. Most of the languages in these areas have also been derived out of Brahmi, including some scripts as far away as Japan. The original script in which Philippine language, Tagalog, was written, is based on Brahmi. In an outlying far away island of Philippines, a cave-dwelling community used a number of words of Sanskrit.

In the changed scenario of today, the propelling force of India abroad is in the directions of science, business and faith. While the first two are aimed at materialistic enhancement, the last one is the perfect extension of faith of Indic religions and culture aimed to meet a vacuum in the minds of the people in a fast changing world. Read more about the process of cultural exchange in an essay by Prof. Subhachari Dasgupta entitled Indic cultural spread then and now – Assimilation and dissemination.

The problem of indigenous minorities is not singular to India. In Pakistan too, it is calling for solution. Damaan Development Organization (DDO), an NGO is engaged in addressing issues related to gender equality, conservation of biodiversity, advocacy for the marginalized and development-affected people and peace. A write-up by Wasim Wagha highlights the efforts of the NGO in the area of protection of livelihood, cultural and political rights of indigenous minorities of Indus in Pakistan.

Meet A.R. Palanisamy, the founder of Society for the Educational and Economic Development (SEED) who is working among the children of life convicts, leprosy and cancer patients with the magic wand of love, helping them dream a future for themselves and becoming useful members of the society.

What are the things good friends do to assure a wide network of friends? Is it possible to expand your circle of friends by changing your behavior and attitude towards them? Some useful tips on making friends who stand by you through thick and thin.

And many uplifting news stories.

Happy reading.

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#### **FRONT PIECE**

#### Miller and his son

A miller and his son were taking their ass to sell in the market, when they passed a group of girls who laughed at how foolish the miller was to have an ass and yet be walking. So, the miller put his son on the ass. Further down the road they passed some old people who scolded the miller for allowing his young son to ride when he should be riding himself. So, the miller removed his son and mounted the ass hirhself. Further along the road, they passed some travelers who said if he wanted to sell the ass, the two of them should carry him or he would be exhausted and worthless. So, the miller and his son bound the ass's legs to a poll and carried him. When they approached the town the people laughed at the sight of them so loud that the noise frightened the ass who kicked out and fell off a bridge into the river and drowned. The embarrassed miller and son went home with nothing, save the lesson that you will achieve nothing by trying to please everyone.

Moral of the story - You cannot please everyone.



# **ENROL AS A MEMBER of International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE)**

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2: JULY-SEPTEMBER 2005: CIVIL PARTICIPATION

# Indic¹ cultural spread then and now: Assimilation and dissemination

**Prof. Subhachari Dasgupta** 

India had remained an elusive dream to the Western Europe till the sailing ships with ocean-going capacity developed in Europe. Europe was an area closed up and isolated from the rest of the world. Hence India remained in the realm of myth and dream in European psyche. Tales of India reached Europe from time to time, little authentic information hardly ever reached Western Europe. There was no way of finding out the reality. India was something like a fantasy and like that of the Atlantis, the quest for India was also similar to the quest for Atlantis at the present time. This dream lead many adventurers to sail out in all directions East and West across mighty oceans and for the first time the Europeans discovered that there were countries and cultures beyond the seas that enclosed them.

The lonesome traveler's stories generated new myths and fantasies in the minds of the Europeans who lived in principalities and small kingdoms. For them, the dream of an extensive world was akin to a fantasy. In the quest for India, they discovered the surface of the earth peopled with cultures strange to them, but we know that Saint Thomas came to India soon after the resurrection of Jesus and lived and died here. Many scholars believe that lost years of Jesus were spent in Kashmir where he learnt scriptures. Similarly, many other researchers believe that after the resurrection Jesus went to live in India.

Thus the knowledge of India as a place of physical and spiritual refuge was well known in Jerusalem. Many researchers believe that after the resurrection, Jesus went back to Kashmir where he lived the remaining years of his life as a holy man and that St. Thomas would come to India was expected from the exiled idealists. India was not unknown to Middle-East and perhaps also to the Eastern Europe and Egypt. Sufficient knowledge of India had reached Rome, but perhaps not beyond. Till late 15<sup>th</sup> century and till Vasco Da Gama came to India, knowledge of India was limited in Europe. However, contact between India and Middle East was many millenniums old.

The great search for India by the West Europeans, as we have learnt, was for searching out spices of the East for banquet tables, can only be a limited dream and of enormous greed that may account for their acrimonious behavior in their colonies. There is enough evidence to suggest that trade with India and Egypt going on for millenniums. Exchange

I am reluctantly using this term with serious reservations. The name of the country must not be changed. The name is a distortion of 'Hind', a name by which it was generally known apart from the word Bharat. The deliberate distortion of names of cities, zones and of the country is a matter of subjugation. How and with what motive the names such as Mumbai or Chennai had been coined can be easily surmised from the fact of these names belonged to two Devis. By changing the names, the British rulers wanted to disregard the names that were cherished. Bharat was a great king. His name was obliterated.

through trade and ideas travel together. Many of the ideas and knowledge had already traveled to Europe from India and occupied central position.

The concept of zero or monotheism is said to have originated in India. Indian trade with Egypt was commonplace. Thus, the great search for India cannot be attributed only to the spices as the Western historians made it out. Lack of knowledge of India in the West was perhaps due to the fact that the expansion of Roman Empire and later Ottoman Empire had pushed West European societies into a shell.

In a Christianized Europe, a search for 'three wise men' of the East, who blessed the Jesus, would have lead them to the heart of Indic area. The concept was plausible because of the presence of Buddhism in Jerusalem at the time of the birth of Jesus. If these men were from the Jewish community, they would have been easily identified. In any case, there seems to be historical evidence of influence of Buddhism on Jesus. Both land and sea coastal travel were regular affairs. Thus, Indian trade and scholarship were very much present in Middle East. The West European venture started with some gusto with the establishment of the East India Company (1600-1708).

Till this day, the heart of India remains elusive to many in India and abroad. Wherever the sailing ships from Europe went to the east, they encountered remnants of Indian influence. Sometimes, they were recognized as of Indian origin, sometimes not. Indians are not conscious of history and foreign rulers and intruders came here. With destruction and plunder, they caused immense damage to the religious edifice and racial memory. India has been described as a recipient rather than a contributing and inventive culture. We shall see to what extent this is true. This view is totally untenable and based on poor scholarship or political objective. Indianization (Hinduization) of South-East Asia was complete by first century AD. There also existed considerable give and take between various kingdoms of the Indianized area of South-East Asia. The area by sea route, as one can see, was very large indeed. We can use the term Indianization as political power in most cases was not with the Indians.

India was a central point in a cultural continuum of civilization that covered Persia to South-East Asia with infinite variation of central theme acceptance and assimilation. This we can see from the undeniable fact of Kharosthi script that was the script of Gandhara and was in use probably in times of Mahabharata. Later, the Brahmi became the script as far away as Philippines. Iraq had close relationship with Persia and Mesopotamia. From there Bhakti cult traveled to and from India in various versions of the cult. There is little sense to discover racial origin of a value system that has remained

deeply imbedded in human values. Thus, India cannot be defined in terms of its boundaries, but by lack of them. All the Avataras such as Rama or Krishna were dark in complexion described as Blue. The basis of Bhakti cult is from Vishnu who was often described as dark-complexioned. He was probably a tribal god.

#### Hindu-Muslim dilemma

In recent times, Tagore leaned heavily on Sufi and folk poets as the Baul. Practices of seers of Hindu/Muslim background have unified the cultural divisionism in India. Poets from Rumi of Tajikistan (1207), a Muslim, and his many followers are known as Sufis to Kabir (1398-1448), Guru Nanak (1469), Purandaradasa (1540), Krsna Chaitanya (1486-1533), Shankardeva. During the 16th century, Saint Mirabai (1547-1614), Samarth Ramdas (1608), Ramakrishna (1836-1886) and a galaxy of other seers merged their values into a oneness that should be the cherished goal of humanity. The influence of the ideology of love merged the identity of religious differences and promoted unity rather than contradiction that reduced many struggles to peaceful lives of people from Tajikistan to Eastern and Southern-most parts of India.

I have named only a few of the peace promoters leaving aside hundreds of others that did not find place in history books. Crossing over to the Eastern side of the border, even beyond Burma (Mynamar), South Indian Brahmins carried 'Thiru Pavai' to Cambodia and Thailand and thus propagated Bhakti cult in that part of the world. We can see continuity that ran from Egypt and Tajikistan, Iran and all parts of India. The movement has covered a long distance through rugged terrain and across span of almost a thousand years. Even when Muslim rule was well established in India and later during the period of British rule, Indic civilization was spreading well across the Eastern borders of India.

It must also be mentioned that even the Muslim religion in India went through modifications and as Indianization expanded, Sufis gave back to Islam of Middle-east very valuable gems of teaching. Amir Khusru, who came from abroad, developed some of most important Ragas and Talas which are still used in India and are staple of Indian classical music. He gave India the Sitar. He was a Sufi and a disciple of Sadhak Nizamuddin Aulia. Khusru became culturally Indian. He spoke in Hindi and adopted Hindu imageries for his compositions. He is highly respected in Persia till this day and there are poets who follow his tradition.

Khusru was of foreign parentage and a Muslim. On the other hand, the great singer Tansen was a Pande and Gaur. He and his descendants have also contributed to Indian music. Whether the music today in India is Hindu or Muslim is immaterial. It does not have a caste or religion. It is simply devotional. We can see that the ideas from India sent abroad were not restricted to Hindu or Buddhist philosophies, but Islamic faith was also going abroad. The Indic composite culture had conquered the world much larger than the British Empire. This happened very peacefully without launching a single war in 10,000 years of Indian history. This is how in

the culture of many a nations, Indic culture still plays a key role.

## What is Hindu?

In recent times, in Indian politics, Hindu has been identified with 'Brahmin', orthodoxy and Vedas, but this presentation is untrue. People have lived in this land for eons before Mohanjodaro, Harappa and Vedas. We have found evidence of such people in Hill caves near Bhopal. People from the earliest times developed their own culture. From the description adopted by those who are for or against the Hindutva culture are barking up the wrong tree. Kathak dance forms danced and sang their way into the hearts of both the Hindus and the Muslims. They had adopted and adopt Radha-Krishna theme or Dhrupada. Do we know who is a Hindu or who is a Musalman? Both art forms are part of devotion to God.

Many of these cultures developed for a time independently before and after the Vedas and have been referred to as source of knowledge of Vedas. Hindu was more a culture than being a religion. The culture had adopted many customs and concepts from very many folk cultures that enriched it. The Hindu that we see today is an admixture of ideas, customs and values of many people that we do not even know today. The influences from the Middle-East have been obvious and recognized. However, the Vedic literature abounds with reference to Meru that suggests the Himalayas which have provided us with the most powerful God Shiva. The cold region of Himalayas has often been speculated as being 'Meru'.

For instance, according to K.M. Sen, in some 'Tantra' manuscripts Puja of Shiva is conducted in the manner of Chinese – en. He also speculates that this would have been possible if the tribe Kirata that gave rise to Shiva lived on both sides of Himalayas as their God. In ancient India, Shiva flourished in the South of Himalayas, but not in the North.

It is the people that create cultures and not the territory. The border was of less consequence than ethnicity and culture in the ancient world. We know one of the most important woman of Mahabharata was Gandhari from Gandhar (Kandahar). Gandhar was also the place from where the Buddhist art flowed into India. Our concern for finding out what is India cannot be confined to India as defined by the British India or the post-British Indian Sub-continent. The precise bordering of India is not the issue in our quest to understand the spread of Indic culture.

One must consider that the population of India could not have been much and was spread over the large land mass of India. Thus, its concentration must have been very thin. The great cities of the past were but only a few kilometers in circumference. The population in India was well spread over the country by the time the Vedas were formulated and survive even today as folk cultures. These folk cultures form the basis of Indic civilization as much as the ancient literature. Most of the languages of India contain words and idioms that are neither of Sanskrit or Vedic origin. These words came from languages of different ethnic groups that were/

are living in all different corners of the country. The contributions of these varied people make-up Indian culture. Those who seek glory in exclusivity are creating division in the name of live and let live. They are not looking into the living harmony of India, but into the fire in their own hearts.

We also see that people of many parts of India moving from one part of the country to another and in the process introducing their cultural forms to their new homeland. Islamic people that moved into India from time to time have also had reciprocated to India the Indian contributions centuries ago. In many parts of India, the difference between the Hindu and Muslim practices and culture is imperceptible.

As we have seen, the Bhakti cult was not a movement of the Hindus alone, but it was also strong within Islamic people in India, each in its own way expressing pathos of the poor and denied. In a way, the concept of and feeling for Bhakti transcends the God's love and becomes the emotional human attribute. Most of the mendicants, sanyasins and poets of the Bhakti cult came from the deprived sections of the society, yet they showed no anger, but only love and right to love and make life bearable by their teachings. This close quest for God from a fearsome entity to God as lover has lead us from Tajakistan and Egypt and from the Indian area to good part of the Middle-East to as far away as Cambodia. We can see that this tradition of evangelism has continued from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to this day and still the tradition continues unabated till this day with reduced travel difficulties.

The success of Islam in India is probably because of pre-existence of Bhakti religious groups and Sufis that shared ideologies that were already wooing the poor and lower castes in India and thus touched the hearts of the poor and the oppressed. Many of the saints that we have mentioned were born Hindu and later their identity got so merged with that of Sufi cult that their identity was lost and there emerged a new individual identity. There are mendicants who are so involved with the Bhakti or Sufi cults that they have merged their identity. The new identity not only affected their ideology, but their deep involvement with it affected their sexual identity. Due to the changes in their behavior identity, they have been often looked upon as effeminate.

Upto 1890s, the Hindus were a majority in what is now Bangladesh. 1890s onwards, however, the balance began to shift in favor of Muslims. There were several reasons for the increase in the proportion of Muslim population. Perhaps the most significant was the activity of ascetic divines and Sufis (Arabic – 'Mystics') who won converts among lower caste Hindus. Sri Chaitnya was born in 1485 at Navadvipa, Bengal, India and was spreading Bhakti movement in Bengal that essentially resembled Sufi ideas. Followers of these saints are from both the religions.

Sufism and Bhakti are not identical, nor even similar, but in practice they have assumed some similarities which have touched great number of people in India. Sufism is best described by the words of this mysterious teacher. Though the two concepts are different in many ways, yet because of the commonality of certain features, they had touched the hearts of the oppressed. Both these religious movements have love and peace as their central theme.

Poor Muslims were as oppressed as the poor Hindus were. Under the Muslim rule their solace lay in the love of God. Often the Muslim rulers were very un-Islamic in their ways. Class consciousness is not a modern-day phenomenon. Rulers and the ruled professed different philosophies, social customs as well as art forms. Folk dances and music has always been different from classical ones since the early historical period. The distinction was set aside by secularism thereby avoiding all that was needed to be done to promote the beautiful element of the cultural harmony, which is still a fact of India.

Disharmony between the Hindus and Muslims that we have seen from time to time has been engineered and was first introduced as a political instrument of control by the British in India after the first armed revolt. The policy of Divide and Rule has been adopted in India along with many other British systems of control over the populace. We see even now that the coalitions of rulers are not divided by their faith, but as an easy way to hold power.

The true nature of Hinduism is difficult to fathom. It embraces many different ideas and is not based on Vedas alone. The two main Gods –Shiva and Vishnu – have little to do with Vedas. Both seem to be part of ancient culture of Bharatvarsha and pre-dating Vedas or area-specific concepts adopted into Hinduism. The bull and Shiva are distinctly portrayed in seals found in Harappa. The latter day folk cultures also contributed to the development of religions in India. The combination of religious practices of the folk culture on both Hinduism and Islam in India is noteworthy. Unknown to the religious leaders and politicians, who cry for or against Hinduism and create differences, people are still defining and building Hinduism in their own way.

# Spread of Bhakti movement

In discussions on Bhakti we have seen the spread of ideas across nations covering great land masses and oceans was possible. We may also see that the same or similar ideas arise and become acceptable simultaneously in many places. How ideas generate in human mind has not been said definitely, but we have seen that ideas build on each other and progress is an essential component of human ingenuity.

However, earliest of faiths in gods generated amongst the primitive people from their own environment. Some of these religions have in recent years inspired people who feel emotionally or intellectually deprived in the West, especially the Europe. These pre-Christian faiths/religions have always tempered inroads of official religions by contributing their own practices into the more aggressive Christianity. Most other religions such as Buddhism in Tibet and Burma (Mynamar) are very different from each other. Somerset Maughm has observed about a Catholic poster in Goa, 'I got the feeling that even though there were more than 400 years of Catholicism behind him, still at heart he was a Vedantist'. In India, practitioners of Islam have integrated many ancient beliefs and customs of the folk culture and philosophy.

The Bhakti and Sufi movements are no exception. Thus, they built up a large mass of customs and traditions based mainly on local folk cultures. Bhakti and Sufi are not synonymous,

but both have touched a cord in the minds of the poor people throughout the world. Bhakti movement was not much concerned with God or with various deities, but with people. Our quest for a secular culture lies beneath this wonderful tapestry of human culture. The caste system is practiced as a matter of course in all religions in the country as a way of live and let live approach that has avoided many bloodsheds. It is an observable factor that different communities tend to live in some seclusion whether in Europe or in India. There is no word for what we call caste. In Indian languages, the word means 'Jati' that is equivalent to race. The cultural construct had maintained the divide, while the law disproves it.

In the form of worship of both the Bhakti and Sufi movements, immense importance is given to dancing, especially by men, thus making God as the only Man. Dancing by men for worship has been known by the warriors as war dances in Bhakti and Sufi movements, the objective difference makes it a new concept where men transform themselves into Radha. Thus, in both the cases, such as the Sufi and Bhakti, as in Bengal, are expressions of the dancers as lovers of the God.

Even in earlier parts of the Rigveda, the religion had already acquired specifically numerous Indian features. 'Some of the chief gods, for example, have no clear Indo-European or Indo-Iranian counterparts. Although some of the new features may have evolved entirely within the Hindu framework, it is generally presumed that many of them stem from the influence of the indigenous inhabitants. The Vedic Aryans<sup>(ii)</sup> may never have been in direct contact with the civilization of the Indus Valley in its prime, but the religion of the valley's culture undoubtedly influenced them' – Encyclopedia Britannica.

#### Consequence of beliefs

There are several beliefs that have come to be implanted on to the image of the country without looking at the ground realities of India, but stories of Kings and conquerors have been dominating the pages of history. The advent of Aryans into India is one such issue of contention. Current day historians have many-a-times asserted that though there was an Aryan language, there is no evidence of an Aryan race. Yet they believe that Aryans came and destroyed the Harappan culture. History has often been the handmaiden of the powers that be. That only two races lived in India . the Harappans and the Aryans, is not correct. Vedas mention several other races and later findings of various cave dwellings and evidences show that people have been living even what was not mentioned in Vedas that were formulated in around current Pakistan and Punjab. The people of various regions have contributed to religious belief and tempered not only the Hindu concepts, but also the core factors of Islam.

There are many of the assumptions of the historians that have not proved to be correct. For instance, the destruction of Harappan culture was not accepted to be because of the

internal causes such as decline of agricultural produce, trade and commerce. There is no evidence of violence as the cause of the decline of the culture. Shifting of the Harappan culture in adjoining areas suggests continuity. There are many great edifices from Cambodia to Indonesia of monuments that have declined rather than having been destroyed. In India, many of the Buddhist monuments were not destroyed, but declined because of lack of patronage. One of the assumptions that India was a moribund culture was due to a myopic vision of politicized historians.

However, it has been clearly imprinted in the Indian psyche that Islamic monarchs have only been destroyers. They were also great builders is indisputable. This misconception came out of history as written prior to independence and taught to denigrate Islamic rule and promote divisionism after the armed rebellion, which was then of prime importance to the British.

# India abroad - past and present

When visitors visit any of the countries in South-East Asia and even China and Mongolia they can feel effects of Indian cultural forms in arts and dances in those countries. The dance forms and themes are deeply rooted in the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Sculpture paintings are rooted in Buddhist styles. On the other hand, Brahmi is the source of many scripts of South and South-East Asia. Most of the languages in these areas also have been derived scripts out of Brahmi, including some scripts as far as in Japan. The original script in which Philippine language, Tagalog, was written, is a script based on Brahmi. In an outlying far away island of Philippines, a cave-dwelling community uses a number of words of Sanskrit. We will examine some of these assertions later in this essay.

Two main vehicles of spread of Indian culture were Buddhism and Hinduism<sup>(iii)</sup>. The spread of Buddhism and Hinduism in South-East Asia was accomplished by the priests and Brahmins from pre-Christian times until the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. The great trade routes crossed from the Middle-East through Central Asia into China. Hinduism, Buddhism, some knowledge of ancient Greek and much knowledge of Indian arts entered into China – Encyclopedia Britannica.

Most ethnic Khmer are Buddhists (i.e., belonging to the older and more traditional of the two great schools of Buddhism, the later school being called 'Mahayana'). Until 1975, Buddhism was officially recognized as the State religion of Cambodia. Although the social and psychological characteristics often ascribed to the Khmer – individualism, conservatism, patience, gentleness and lack of concern for material wealth – were often in the eyes of the beholder, they represented Buddhist ideals towards which a large number of Cambodians, especially in the rural areas, have continued to aspire – Encyclopedia Britannica.

'In the final analysis, therefore, India should be regarded as an arsenal of religious skills, the use of which was

<sup>(</sup>ii) Aryan -The concept of Aryan as a race is now contested. It is the favored view of many historians that their language is what is now known as Indo-European. The concept propagation as an invader race becomes disputable. Both invention and discarding of Aryans may be political in nature. The concept of Hitler and his doings may be the root of the discussion – Author.

<sup>(</sup>iii) Hinduism is not a correct presentation of what I mean, but for a better description I have used this term, equating with a religion. Hindu is essentially a framework of faith and culture without professing a particular God or Messiah.

subordinated<sup>(iv)</sup> to the end of Indonesia. Expanding communication meant that increasing number of Indonesians became interested in Indian thought. The first reasonable well-documented period or maritime Malay history provides further evidence of the Indonesian adaptation of Indian religious conceptions' – Encyclopedia Britannica.

# **Globalizing Indic culture**

In the changed scenario of today, the propelling force of India abroad is in the directions of science, business and faith. While the first two are aimed at materialistic enhancement, the last one is perfect extension of faith of Indic religions and culture. They are meant to meet a vacuum in the minds of the people in the fast changing world.

The early introduction of Indian philosophy reached the attention of West Europeans though Max Muller, essentially a German. This introduction came when India was a poor subjugated country. It gave new color to India, especially the Hindu philosophy. Gradually, as the British Empire expanded, they found India everywhere in the East, even in China, Mongolia and Japan. Today, Japan is a major exporter of Indian concepts and practices to the world and even to the elitist Indians, who like to buy re-exported products such as Zen, instead of Dhyan, Yin and Yang instead of Purusha and Prakriti.

In the West, however, there is a new consciousness about India, first, by philosophical and religious teachings. Even before Max Muller's devoted work, there was sufficient interest in Indian philosophies. Fredric Max Muller (December 6, 1823 – October 20, 1900) collected great number of manuscripts of Indian philosophical literature and created much interest in the orientalists, historians, archeologists and academicians. Since then many monks and mendicants traveled to the West and preached there. The sudden arrival of a young unknown monk, Swami Vivekananda, from India and unexpected leap into fame at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 impressed general public considerably.

Since then a galaxy of men and women and Sadhus have traveled throughout the world and have made their contributions felt. Those who are now preaching in various countries are not Indians, but people from different countries and those that have embraced Hinduism. Millions of people in the West have benefited from their teachings and have adopted Indic practices and even have adopted vegetarianism. Some have even adopted clothes, music and dances.

The subjects of teachings of these Gurus are now being written and interpreted by the followers in all conceivable languages of the world. Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa all have the sources to imbibe Hindu philosophies and practices. Even as far away as Alaska and Newfoundland have large number of disciples and number of institutions and Gurus to sustain them. The great upsurge in the introduction of Hindu ideologies, the world over is being seen with suspense in India. The misconception about the Sadhus

and mendicants and their ways amongst the city-bread abound.

# Mendicants of the past and present

Who are the people that become mendicants? Around us are great many people who are seeking different things all their lives. This holds good from pioneering industrialist to a starving painter. It is often assumed that everyone's goals are the same, seeking the material, which is not really true. Most of the people are outside this search for a better living. The creative people, be they artists, painters or singers and musicians are always trying to improve themselves. Only a small number of creative people are a success in their lifetime or even afterwords, but they seek their goal and live for it.

The Sadhus or the mendicants are seekers of a realization to which they arrive through contemplation and inspiration and also logical deduction for a goal that is essentially different from assumed human goals by the social sciences. One of the major goals is finding human happiness or leading people towards it. Thus, their goals seem obscured by the conditioning by the science-educated persons who may not see the strange way of arriving at solutions without any basis sometimes promoting inaction and dedication to unfathomable void.

However, the beginning of the sciences may not be for obtaining material, but things of little material value. Curiosity and speculation about the sky and beyond and the question of where we have come from are the basis of all knowledge. Even before the invention of agriculture people were inventing methods of measuring time and movement of the Sun. Phases of moon were also recorded in caves 25 thousand years ago.

The question of morality such as respect for human life may have infiltrated from the Neanderthals who used to put flowers and fragrant pollens on the dead at the time of burial. Thus, we know from our own lives that even most scientists are ever over powering influence on common persons. The sadhus and mendicants fill this void that is created by the process of life itself. Thus, there is a developing following in the lands of plenty and of starvation.

However, there is some criticism that is aired from the point of view of the generally accepted principle of giving and taking, has a profit built in. It is the same with philosophical and religious teaching, but the profit is not measurable in tangible form. The four elements of Hindu culture have been truly globalized. These are -Yoga, Vaishnavism, Meditation and Vedanta. They are being spread vigorously by non-Indians, but Indic cultural people.

# Yoga

Yoga (Sanskrit: 'Yoking' or 'Union') is one of the six orthodox systems (darshan) of Indian philosophy. Its influence has been widespread among many other schools of Indian thought. Its basic text is Yoga sutra by Patanjali (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC). Hatha Yoga has grown in popularity in the West as a form of exercise and relaxation. Western physiologists and psychologists have also become interested in it and in related forms of Yoga that focus on the control of bodily processes. Adept Yoga practitioners have shown remarkable abilities to

<sup>(</sup>iv) The use of the word subordinated is not in my view proper as the Indian Kings were very few in South-East Asia.

lower their own blood pressure and regulate body temperature and respiration rate. Patanjali as the theoretical basis of Yoga is also being studied by increasing number of people throughout the world.

#### **Vaishnavism**

Vaishnavism introduced by Swami Prabhupada to the West has gained a great deal. Swami Prabhupada spread the movement throughout the world with hundreds of active centers and is developing a counter culture to materialistic development of secular psyche and preaching love in contrast to violence. The movement born out of Swami Prabhupada has followed the mode of Sri Chaitanya bringing into focus the essence of teachings of Sri Krishna. The organization of Krishna Consciousness has been spread in many countries of the world drawing large numbers of people into it.

There is no political agenda ascribed to it. It is a peace-loving movement spreading age-old tradition of message of Krishna love. However, it has faced opposition in many lands. New ideas always develop antagonism. Sri Chaitanya movement also generated opposition from orthodox Brahmins so much so that he was denied entry into the Jagannatha temple in Puri and was according to some speculation he was ultimately drowned in the sea. By the end of 1990s, there were about 225 Hare Krishna centers in 60 countries, including 50 centers in the United States. While the number of formally-initiated members is only a few thousand, several hundred thousand regularly worship at the Hare Krishna temples, including many expatriate Indians.

# Meditation

Many Sanyasis have introduced Dhyan as an essential component of personal life. They include Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi introduced Transcendental Meditation to the West where it has gained popularity in a big way and is providing relief to the stressed society. From managers to industrial workers, students and housewives all are taking to meditation to bring peace of mind to countless persons, especially in the US. The mode of knowing the self has inspired many people, many of them may not even be aware of the root of Dhyan, but practice it.

# Vedanta

The most important Vedantic propounder is Swami Vivekananda who inherited the tradition of modern-day Vedantics such as the pioneer of reform, Ram Mohun Roy. Many Gurus are teaching various parts of Vedas and Upnishads through countless centers and universities.

The significance of these movements is that they are not patronized by any Government and are entirely civil society-generated to meet the needs of the people. They are also in a way anarchist in nature and as peace is their bomb that explodes happiness. ISCON has only about 25,000 members, but every day their temple is used by lakhs of people for their most cherished devotion.

# Indigenous minorities of Pakistan: DDO shows the way Wasim Wagha

Damaan Development Organization (DDO) is an NGO registered in 1996 under the Societies registration Act XXI of 1860. It is mainly addressing issues related to gender equality, conservation of bio-diversity, advocacy for the marginalized and development-affected people and peace. This write-up highlights its efforts in the area of protection of livelihood, cultural and political rights of indigenous minorities of Indus.

Whether it was the British exploitation of local resources and/or the politics of 'poverty claims' after the partition of Indian sub-continent, the commons in the form of land and forests were the ultimate target. These commons, land and forests, were, in fact, the livelihood base of indigenous people who were scattered in formation. The same happened with the indigenous minorities of Indus of which Kihals is one such group. They are riverine people who live on the sides of river Indus and depend on fishing and the forests on Indus delta. They introduce themselves as Sheikhs (the converts) and Khokhar, Daphel, Sahoontra (s) etc. (the sub castes in neighboring settled communities). Musalis, on the other hand, used to live in the Thal desert on the east of river Indus and made their living from toys and household items made of sar, telian and kaney (straw-like buses). Due to TDA canal, Musalis had to shift to urban slums.

The third focus of this action research project is the *Ode* people who introduce themselves as *Ode Rajputs* and live in Thal desert. While the first two communities are the natives, the *Ode* communities migrated from India. They used to keep livestock and lived a pastoral life. After partition, in 1947, this pastoral group shifted to Pakistan. However, unlike other immigrants, they had no claims on the property here in Pakistan. Compared to *Kihals* and *Musalis*, the majority of *Odes* are well established. They have bought lands and learned cultivation.

The vulnerability of indigenous people increased further through the development activities undertaken by the State. Allotment of lands to immigrants, development of irrigation systems, i.e., canals and dams, clearing of forests and shift to inorganic farming deprived these indigenous minorities of their rights over riverine lands and forests. The water conflict between India and Pakistan, soon after partition, was a direct blow to the livelihood of these indigenous communities. This conflict was resolved through the Indus Basin treaty in 1960 which was followed by a series of canals:

- I The Mangla Dam Project, completed in 1968.
- I Construction of Chasma Barrage around the same period.
- III Chasma-Jehlum Link Canal from Chasma Barrage, in 1971.

- IV Construction of Tarbela Dam in 1974.
- V Chasma Right Bank Canal from the Chasma Barrage.
- VI Greater Thal Canal from Chasma-Jehlum Link Canal, February 2002 and
- VII Kachhi Canal from Taunsa Barrage started in October 2002.

Development of these dams, canals, barrages and felling of forests for cultivation have, so far, deprived these indigenous minority groups of Indus of almost 60-70 per cent of their livelihood in terms of river food (varieties of fish, wild duck etc.) and forests.

# Shift in livelihood, belief system and its impact on women

'We are confirmed Muslims, just like you, and recite the same Qalma. If you (Sarkar, the Government) provide us education, we will recite and understand Quran. Please provide our women and children with education and also please do not pollute the river with the city effluent and shift the effluent drains to somewhere else', said Sona Kihal in an emotional and confident tone during the first ever meeting of Kihals with the concerned councilor on 30-4-2005, Rose Hotel, D.I. Khan.

Instead of following one single religion in strict, the *Kihals* kept to a flexible system of beliefs. For example, they believe in Hazrat Imam Shaafi, Founder of Shaafi sect which in case of prolonged hunger, consents their believers to eat that sea food which is prohibited in routine. *Kihal* women, compared to women in the neighboring Muslim community, enjoy equal status with their men. Due to their increasing dependence on neighboring Muslim population, however, *Kihals* are fast converting into Muslims and adopting to Muslim lifestyles and traditions. They now call themselves as *Sheikhs* (new Muslims) and want their women to put scarf and be at home. Similarly the cut on Indus and hence decrease in *Kihal's* livelihood has turned *Kihal* women into street beggars and thus exposed them to discrimination and violence in markets and streets.

#### Registration as citizens

'We used to shift along/across the river Indus and Thal desert, but the dams, barrages and canals have locked us in little pockets (areas). Now, we cannot shift a great deal, instead we usually remain in union councils, tehsil council boundaries. Thus, we need National Identity Cards to participate in elections', said Ghulam Haider Kihal, Thala Baloo Ram, D.I. Khan.

While the Government of Pakistan claims success towards women's political empowerment (17 per cent representation in assemblies and 33 per cent representation in district Governments), the *Kihal* women and men too are still deprived of their right to vote and opinion. Although this community lives there for centuries, they were never registered as

citizens and never counted during the elections.

Registration of National Identity Cards of the indigenous minorities is a bit tricky. National Database Regulatory Authority (NADRA) usually asks for some documentary proof of residence or some certificate, e.g., school leaving certificate, birth certificate etc. – the indigenous minorities have none of such documents. Some of NADRA staff even claimed that because the indigenous minorities have been living a pastoral life, therefore, they can not get NICs.

# Issues raised by indigenous minorities

During a recent cultural and livelihood festival, indigenous minority groups of Indus raised the following issues:

- Construction of dams and canals is continuously looting Kihals of their livelihood sources, mainly fish and forests. Therefore, there should be no further cut on Indus.
- The Government should abolish the contract system on fishing and acknowledge *Kihal's* rights over fish.
- The local landlords encroach the riverine lands and do not allow the community to set *kulis* (huts) and harvest *kaanb* to make *tokery* (baskets).
- The Government should allot the riverine and desert land to Kihals who live on river or at least declare 3-4 km. of lands on each side of the river as commons mainly for indigenous minorities.
- The indigenous minorities should have their own members/councilors/representatives in assemblies.
- 'The sanitation waste from the cities is contaminating our river and our drinking water. Now we cannot drink the same river water flowing in front of us. We have to go far away to fetch water from hand pumps', they say.
- The indigenous minorities need schools for their children.

## **DAMAAN's initiatives**

DAMAAN initiated its programs way back in 1995-96 by inviting a few philanthropist doctors from London who during their three days in village Paritevala (DAMAAN's area office) held intensive health check-up of about 300 rural women.

It established five primary schools for girls, funded by the communities and Trust for Voluntary Organizations (TVO) in 2001-2004. Through this project, the organization actually sowed the seeds of gender equality in the communities.

It has run a three-year program of conservation of bio-diversity, a UNDP-funded program between 2001-2004. Women remained an equal focus of this project.

It has actively initiated the advocacy campaign of affectees of Chasma Right Bank Canal.

In 2002, it held a series of public discussions on 'active peace' in D.I. Khan and D.G. Khan and the area between. The significant feature of these discussions was a huge participation of women. The women participants argued that peace starts from homes.

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# A.R.Palanisamy: Reaching out with love

To the uncaring world, they are the children of life convicts, leprosy and cancer patients, not to be touched with a barge pole, but A.R. Palanisamy touches these tender, fragmented lives with the magic wand of love. Helping them dream a future again is his preoccuption.

Unlike him, some of his batchmates have now become senior managers in the Canara Bank in Chennai, but making it to the top echelons of the banking hierarchy is far from A.R. Palanisamy's mind because of an unusual calling that frequently takes him to prisons in Tamil Nadu. He believes he has to help poor children, especially those of life term convicts, lead good lives.

A special assistant at the bank, 55-year-old Palanisamy is so committed to social work that he even refused a promotion to the officer grade as he would then have been left with little time to pursue his goals. He knows the plight of these children only too well, having himself grown up in an impoverished family. Neither of his parents was a convict, but he empathizes with the youngsters who have to contend with social ostracism in addition to poverty. 'It is a traumatic experience to be children of convicts serving life terms,' he says, 'and my humble effort is to make them useful citizens.'

#### **SEED** established

The efforts in this direction began in 1982 when Palanisamy established the Society for the Educational and Economic Development (SEED), which currently caters to the needs of 260 children at its three centers at Sriperumbudur, near Chennai. SEED provides food, shelter, educational and vocational training to the children. The criteria for selection: one of the child's parents should have been sentenced to life imprisonment and the child should have no property or immediate relative to look after him. 'We need a minimum of 15 years of education and moral and emotional support to make the children grow up into responsible citizens,' says Palanisamy who runs the centers with a dedicated staff. The rules are sometimes relaxed to accommodate orphans and children of poor people suffering from diseases like tuberculosis and leprosy.

Life, of course, need not have been this way for Planisamy. Along with his wife who is working in an insurance company and his two children, he could have led a comfortable middle class life, but his conscience would not let him. 'I have come up in life with the help of many good people and I wish to repay my debt in a small way,' he says. Fortunately, his efforts have received recognition from the State Government which is extending financial help to SEED besides permitting the organization to set up an Industrial Training Institute (ITI) in 1997 to impart vocational skills.

By a special order, the Government also authorized Palanisamy to visit the central jails in the State to meet convicts serving life terms and inquire if their children needed help. 'My aim is to keep the children and their parents in the

social mainstream', explains Palanisamy who has postgraduate degrees in sociology, political science, public administration and education besides a degree in law. 'If these children are left at the mercy of a hostile society, they might grow up to be vengeful people out to settle scores with a system that treated them shabbily', he warns, but with him around to shower affection on them that is not likely.

As would be expected, the gratitude of those who grow up here is touching. Take the case of 21-year-old Gopalakrishnan, son of a life-term convict, who joined the administrative wing of the army as a clerk. He promptly sent his first month's salary to SEED as a token of his love for the institution that groomed him. Says Selvam, who is undergoing training in mechanical engineering (motor vehicles) at  $\Pi\Pi$ , 'I still cannot believe a rustic like me could ever get an opportunity to dismantle and assemble a car and test drive it'.

The good work notwithstanding, SEED has its share of problems. Though it gets aid from the Government and a few NGOs, clearly this is not enough. 'I keep running from pillar to post', says Palanisamy, adding 'with more funds and sponsors for children we can do wonders'. Impressed by his contributions, the Governments of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh have requested him to start similar ventures in their States. Palanisamy is only too willing to share his expertise with others. There is only one hitch. He cannot think of leaving behind his beloved children and travelling to other States even for short durations.

# NEWS

#### The officer's counsel

In the Andamans on duty, U.N.B. Rao, an IPS officer, heard the heart breaking news of the death of his 20-year-old son, Urivi Vikram in a road accident in Delhi on December 13, 1990. Rao and his wife, Chhaya, were expecting their only son to visit them a few days later. The shattered Rao did not lose faith in life and its mission. To keep alive their beloved son's memories, they started the Urivi Vikram Charitable Trust (UVCT) in 1991 to provide counseling and career guidance to disadvantaged youth in the age-group of 13 to 21.

14 years on, the UVCT supports itself with funds provided by friends of Rao, who is now Joint Commissioner of Police, Delhi and grants from the Government and agencies such as UNFPA. Under-achievers and school dropouts who seek help from the Trust which has nine centers across India, find it a sanctuary to get rid of the feeling of being losers. Rao, whose doctoral thesis at the IIT, Delhi was on Policing and Adolescents says, 'The number of young adults who gain confidence at our centers runs into several thousands. Most parents do not understand the trauma that a young adult goes through because of social, health and financial reasons'.

Rao's efforts contributed to the formation of a sub-group by the Planning Commission on adolescents in which UVCT is a member besides another sub-group set up by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports to chart out programs for adolescents. Apart from holding youth awareness seminars and career melas, the UVCT also runs career-oriented programs called Project Prerana, Project Shakti and Project Sahara. It is setting up the Urivi Vikram National Center for adolescents to broaden the scope of its activities.

Rao observes strict silence on the question of how he finds time to do all the work he does, but his wife will tell you that he sleeps less than four hours a day, managing his busy life as police officer and a social worker. However, he hopes that more people, including corporate heads, will take note of his work and offer positions to those young adults who return from the depths of utter despair and failure with a winning smile.

# Organic triumph

A recent study has concluded that organic approaches may be preferable for crops such as corn, soybeans and many grains. A review of the 22-year Rodale Institute Farming Systems Trial in the US has found that these crops offer more stable long-term yields that roughly equal those from conventional techniques. The organic processes also use 30 per cent less energy, less water and no pesticides.

Researchers compared three farms — one conventional operation using fertilizers and pesticides and two organic operations — one using manure-based fertilizer and another using legume-based three-year (changed in 1991 to five year) crop rotations. The study found that although yields on organic farm lagged by up to a third in the first four years, subsequent yields topped the conventional farm. This was true particularly for drought years when the yield from rotation-based system was 22 per cent greater than that from conventional fields. Nitrogen levels in the organic system's soil also went up by 15 per cent. The conclusion was that organic farming approaches 'conserve more water, induce less erosion, maintain soil quality and conserve more biological resources than conventional farming'.

# Two good men

'The only resource in which poor are rich is their knowledge', says Rahmat Khan Solanki. Picking his way through the undergrowth in the darkness, Solanki locates herbs for an emergency. In the meanwhile, his friend Karimbhai Musabhai Sumara prepares a remedy for skin conditions using mustard oil and seeds of local herbs, refusing payment for the cure. Rahmat and Karimbhai are members of a dying breed of village healers in Gujarat. They highlight the community spirit that lies at the heart of rural medicine. Both men feel a natural responsibility to disseminate their knowledge freely amongst the needy in the community. The healers, in turn, are trusted and respected figures in their village irrespective of their Muslim religion in a predominantly Hindu region.

Vijay S. Jodha, who has made a documentary on traditional healers entitled 'Healers for All Reasons' says 'Around 60 per cent of the Indian population rely on rural medicine for both their and their livestock's health. All of us have a stake in the system. The hereditary knowledge of herbs is over a 1,000 years old and is dying at an unprecedented rate because of the younger generation's lure of the city, changing soil conditions and encroaching companies intent on patenting and selling herbal cures, thus wiping the non-profit rural practitioners out of the market. Traditional and modern healing systems can be integrated if rural knowledge is valued. Without respect, such knowledge will only remain in museums'.

## Solar train

Phulrani, the toy train at the erstwhile Peshwe Park in Pune used to guzzle diesel and emit black smoke, but that is history now. After the animals were relocated to the newlyconstructed Rajiv Gandhi zoo in another part of the city, the toy train has undergone a facelift. Phulrani is now fitted with a battery powered by solar energy. The train now chugs along merrily at the recently-inaugurated Peshwe Energy Park constructed jointly by the Maharashtra Energy Development Agency (MEDA) and the Pune Municipal Corporation.

The park officials claim their objective is to impart awareness to children about the uses of renewable energy. A field of solar panels capable of producing 21.6 kw of power greets you as soon as you enter the park. Another attraction is the energy slip which has a rubber surface. The moment children sit on the slide, their downward movement activates a pulley. This generates electrical energy which lights up the screen.

## **National Anthem in sign language**

It is 8-30 AM and the school assembly begins in right earnest. The students who have gathered have pride writ large on their faces as they make synchronized gestures with their hands. Unusual as it may seem, it is the National Anthem that is being rendered. Indeed as the 100-odd students of the Anand School for the Deaf in Indore recreate the magic of *Jana-Gana-Mana* in sign language, the gusto with which they do it in 52 seconds flat – the same time as it takes otherwise – is unmistakable.

Standing in front of them is Gyanendra Purohit, the man who has made it possible. He is perhaps the first to have translated the National Anthem into the universal sign language and his unique rendition, the result of a three-year research, is now being circulated in institutions for the hearing impaired across the country. For Gyanendra and his wife Monica, this is just another small way of reaching out to the disadvantaged. For years, the couple has been working for

their uplift through an NGO, Anand Service Society, covering aspects like education, employment and rehabilitation.

Much of the inspiration for Purohit's work has come from personal experience. 'My brother was hearing-impaired and I had not learnt sign language formally till his death in 1997', recalls Purohit who gave up a career in chartered accountancy for a new calling that year. Armed with a degree in social work and having set up an NGO, he visited various countries to study how life for the disadvantaged could be improved. It was then that he realized that National Anthems elsewhere were being translated into signs.

The rendition of Jana-Gana-Mana in sign language is only the latest in a series of innovations that Purohit has attempted. Earlier, he launched the Mook-Badhir Police Sahayta Kendra, a facility for the deaf to file complaints. He has also designed jackets that help prevent accidents while the disadvantaged move on streets. Thanks to him, 20 hearing impaired children study in normal schools with an interpreter. Also in the offing is a plan to get the hearing disadvantaged recruited as teachers in mainstream schools.

# Bringing water to desert villages

In a unique initiative of its kind, the Jal Bhagirathi Foundation, working on the water conservation front in the Marwar region of Western Rajasthan, has taken up the task of distribution of drinking water to a few problem villages in the desert terrain. The Foundation has sought community participation in water distribution at the time of acute scarcity. The program, christened Shiv Ganga Peyjal Pariyojana (Shiv Ganga Drinking Water Project), initiated with the support of institutions and local donors seeks to supply water to development blocks of Agolai, Balotra, Luni and Rohet.

The project is designed to support the Government's water distribution program while keeping with the highest traditions of Marwar to provide water in distress. The project was launched in the backdrop of traditional festivities like gher dance and desert music. It would help the villagers tide over summer months with the support of village committees, an array of trucks and tankers and is targeted at a population of 70,000. 'Shiv Ganga is a direct extension of Jal Bhagirathi's own vision of mitigating the effects of devastating droughts in the region through revival of traditional resource management systems', said Mr. Prithviraj Singh, the Managing Trustee of JBS.

# **Eco-friendly detergent**

Liner alkyl benzene sulphonate (LABS) is the most widely used active agent in Indian detergents. It is toxic and only moderately biodegradable. A group of scientists from Laxminarayan Institute of Technology, Nagpur have found an equally effective, but eco-friendly alternative to LABS. Called alkyd resin polymer, it was developed using soybean oil, rosin – the residue of pine tree resin and sodium lauryl sulphate which was extracted from coconut oil. The scientists,

# Be a friend, not a fiend

There are things good friends do that assure a wide network of friends. What are these things? Is it possible to expand your circle of friends by changing your behavior and attitude towards people? Here are some useful tips on making friends who stand by you through thick and thin. Some things good friends do instinctively are:

- Good friends keep things to themselves that were told to them in confidence.
- They are reliable about things such as prearranged dates, times or contributions to a dinner party.
- They are not jealous of your other friends. On the contrary, real friends are happy for you.
- Good friends phone or visit when you are sick or in trouble.
- They know when to listen and when to talk.
- They are one of those few people to whom you can say that you are not well and they don't feel uncomfortable.
- They know when to back off sometimes you just need space and they do not interpret that as a personal rejection, because they do not see everything from their own point of view.
- They will tolerate your lively children or your grumpy mother-in-law or your boisterous fox terrier.
- They will be honest with you if you ask their opinion, but once they have given it, will not hold it against you if you don't follow their advice.

Here are some more things that a good friend will always do:

- Good friends never say, 'I told you so', even if they are right.
- They will laugh and cry and be silly and get drunk with you, but will not tell others about it.
- They do not make you feel that you have to spring-clean your house before they visit.
- Good friends are not jealous of your success or your nice new boy friend.
- They will not allow other people to say nasty things about you in their presence without defending you.
- They will encourage you to do adventurous new things, such as sky driving or dyeing your hair or taking up diving.
- Good friends will laugh at your joke even if they have heard it six times before.
- They will take you out on your birthday, if you have nothing planned.

lead by S.K. Kharkate, replaced LABS with the new resin polymer in a common detergent and then studied its action.

They found that the experimental detergent removed dirt more efficiently, was easier to wash off clothes and worked well with both soft and hard water. It also contained less active matter (only eight per cent) - the main pollutant - as compared to 10-15 per cent in other detergents. In a country that annually consumes 25 million tons of detergents, this translates into significant environmental gain. The manufacturing cost of detergents using the new polymer is estimated at Rs. 30 per kg.

# Igbal — differently-abled

Iqbal – a small-budget movie starring an unknown theatre actor, has overturned accepted Bollywood film industry logic to create a buzz among critics and public. Iqbal has no dancing, little glamor, no top stars and horror of horrors, no romance! It is a pleasant and well-etched story about a village boy who dreams of becoming a national-level cricket star and overcomes great odds to achieve it. The key twist in Iqbal is the handling of the hero as an ambitious teenager who just happens to be deaf and mute.

Iqbal Director, Nagesh Kukunoor said, his aim was to make the audience forget within five minutes that the hero is handicapped. And he succeeds. The fact that the lead character, played by Shreyas Talpade, cannot hear or speak fades into irrelevance as the young dreamer faces his father's objections, lack of money, rivalry and mockery, his own uncontrolled anger, politicking in the selection process and a drunken and initially unreliable coach. This sensitivity negates stereotyped roles of the handicapped as one incapable of contributing to mainstream life. His father's occasional comments on Iqbal's restrictions are contrasted with his mother's pride and faith in him as well as his kid sister's practical support and her services as a sign language translator.

After a setback when he is thrown out of the cricket academy, Igbal learns the importance of perseverance for survival and on road to achieving his dreams, he teaches a few practical lessons to his coach, played by Naseeruddin Shah, who despite his five senses and considerable talent had been handicapped by his inability to deal with the politics and hard knocks of the game. There are plans to dub the film into regional languages. Clearly, the mix of simplicity and success for Iqbal marks a new and positive trend in larger than life Bollywood.

# **Blood relation**

In the musty city of Allahabad you may not notice anything about 45-year-old Mohammad Shahid Askari that would tell him apart from the ordinary citizen going about his everyday chores, but don't be mistaken, he is capable of making a difference between life and death - literally. For hundreds who have turned to him for blood donations in times of medical emergencies, he has proved to be a messiah.

# **United Nations Days**

# July-September

International Day of Cooperatives (first Saturday of July)

11 July

World Population Day

9 August

International Day of the World's Indigenous People (through 9 August, 2014)

12 August

International Youth Day

23 August

International Day for the Remembrance Of the Slave Trade and its Abolition

8 September

International Literacy Day

16 September

International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer

21 September

International Day of Peace

September Last Week

World Maritine Day

# **United Nations Decades**

1997-2006

United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty

2001-2010

Decade to Roll Back Malaria in Developing Countries, particularly in Africa

2001-2010

Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism

2001-2010

International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World

2003-2012

United Nations Literacy Decade: Education for All

2005-2014

Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People

2005-2014

United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

2005-2015

International Decade for Action, Water for Life (from 22 March, 2005)

# **International Year**

2006

International Year of Desert and Desertification

The same is true of his team of 1,500 blood donors, who are eager to help the needy – wherever, whenever. Yet, Askari did not always have the huge army of donors to fulfil what he feels is his 'moral duty'. When he established Inqalabi Blood Donation Association (IBDA) in July 1995, at times unused blood had to be thrown away for lack of adequate facility in the city to store and test blood. So, every time a request was made, Askari would launch a frantic search for donors and arrange for blood donation on the spot and at a moment's notice.

He remembers an incident when an A+ patient urgently needed blood and suitable donor was away, attending a wedding. Without wasting any time, Askari reached the donor's home with an expert and equipment. Today, if there is no shortage of blood in the city's blood banks, the credit goes to the perseverance of Askari and his team and a growing number of voluntary donors. The Association even counsels the donors who are suffering from some disease. As Secretary of IBDA, Askari has organized more than 40 blood donation camps. And he leads by example, himself donating blood from time to time.

IDBA may not be getting any Government grant, but its efforts have not gone unnoticed. At a function on May 12, former Uttar Pradesh Assembly Speaker, Mr. Kesri Nath Tripathi honored Askari for the social work done by him. Awards encourage, but they are not the motivation for him to work. Askari has an uncommon lack of yearning for gratitude when he says, 'We do not oblige anybody by donating blood, it is our duty'.

# All in a play's work

In a dingy room in Shahjahanabad – the walled city of Delhi – a group is children is at their afternoon lessons. Close by, another group is animatedly discussing a play they are about to stage. These children are part of Team and Association in Learning Education and Natural Theatre (TALENT), an organization founded by social workers Irshad Alam and late Deepak Bhardwaj, to provide underprivileged children a platform to develop their talents.

Launched in 1998, TALENT works with children from the walled city area, whose parents are *paan* vendors, mechanics, waste dealers and the like. The organization provides education through the performing arts. The aim is to channelize the energies of these children who are extremely restless and hyperactive. Says Alam, 'Young children are easily influenced by destructive and communal ideas. Through TALENT, I want to equip them to deal with these challenges'.

Alam, himself from a family of *kabadiwalas*, was famous as a troublemaker in school. More than books, it was theatre that enchanted him. His first tryst with the stage was when, in class VI, he enrolled in a school play to get away from the boring curriculum. Later, with proper training, he learnt to use mime and dramatics to communicate effectively with people and change their rigid mindsets. 'Theatre is a medium which easily reaches out to the people', says Alam. 'It has helped me distinguish between the right and wrong and

develop my personality. I hope, it will help these children too'.

Children from TALENT theatre workshop regularly stage plays and some have also performed on POGO channel. Vijay, 12, a talented actor in Alam's group says, 'Through acting we develop confidence and feel more sure about expressing ourselves in public'. With his efforts, Alam has succeeded in reforming many a juvenile pickpocket and miscreant. However, with plans of starting special classes for differently-abled children, Alam's to do list, is nowhere near its end.

# A service provider

After losing his father to AIDS and his mother to another man, four-year-old Shubam could have ended up as just another begger on the ghats of Hardwar, but thanks to the Divya Prem Seva Mission, Shubam is now studying in a residential school and does not have to worry about his future, like 300 other children, most of whom were born to leprosy patients. Serving the most afflicted of mankind, who exist in a haze of suffering and rejection, the mission was founded by Ashish Gautam in 1997. An ardent follower of Swami Vivekananda, Gautam's spiritual pursuit lead him to the holy city in 1996. Here he sought to serve the most needy and chose the leprosy-afflicted of Chandighat.

Gautam had no experience or resources, only self-belief. So, when the leprosy patients, who considered him an intruder, welcomed him with filthiest of invectives, Gautam stood his ground. It did not take him long to win them over as he began nursing their wounds and set up a dispensary for them from donations from well-wishers. They have taught me what compassion really means', says the 40-year-old law graduate from Hamirpur, Uttar Pradesh.

After ensuring regular treatment for the leprosy patients, he turned his attention to educating their children and others who had no one to turn to. The school, which began with 26 students in a hut eight years ago, is now a full-fledged institution with two campuses, including a residential school with 120 children from 13 States. Gautam, also runs five single-teacher schools for the children of Muslim *vangujars* living in the nearby Rajaji National Park.

'It is a genuine effort in nation-building', says Dr. K.S. Dikshit, who has not only adopted a child from the mission, but also treats its wards free at his hospital in Hardwar. Run by a team of 20 young volunteers, the mission aims to raise the children to be good citizens. The mission spends about Rs. 30 lakh annually on medicines, clothes, groceries and salaries of its staff. Run through contributions of well-wishers, it often faces financial crises, but for Gautam such difficulties are part of the job for he is trying to 'live upto his own high ideals' as his idol Vivekananda exhorted.

## Do it yourself

The English class is in full swing and the attention that Amandeep Kaur commands as she addresses class XI students is admirable. Equally striking is the fact that she is

# Coca Cola's role in suspicious death to be investigated

San Francisco (US): The India Resource Center (IRC) is deeply alarmed to learn that the Coca Cola company is now the subject of a police inquiry into the suspicious death of community leader, Mr. V. Kamsan, who had publically opposed Coca Cola's proposed operations. On January 30, 2006, Justice P. Murugesan of the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court directed the Superintendent of Police to register a case into the suspicious death of Mr. Kamsan and directed the crime branch of the Criminal Investigation Department to conduct an investigation. The court action came as a result of a petition field by Mr. Kamsan's wife, Mrs. Santhanamary. Mr. Kamsan was the chairman of Gangaikondan panchayat. He died under suspicious circumstances on August 30, 2005. He had opposed the proposed Coca Cola bottling plant by the South India Bottling Company Private Limited – a Coca Cola franchisee – which was setting up a soft drinks unit in Gangaikondan village in southern Tamil Nadu.

On August 23, 2005, Mr. Kamsan convened a meeting of the Gangaikondan panchayat which passed a resolution against the proposed Coca Cola plant, stating, "As the unit will cause environmental and health hazards besides triggering acute drinking water scarcity, the Government should immediately cancel the permission given to the company which is planning to prepare a range of soft drinks here." However, within 12 hours, Mr. Kamsan issued a prepared statement to the 'Hindu', completely contradicting the resolution passed earlier in the day. When asked by the 'Hindu' about issuing the conflicting statement, Mr. Kamsan said, "I am under immense pressure from the public, the police and some other quarters. So, I have issued this statement."

On the same evening, according to Mrs. Santhanamary's petition, Coca Cola officials 'coerced' her husband into accompanying them, detained him and forced him to drink alcohol, even though Mr. Kamsan was suffering from jaundice. Mr. Kamsan was brought back home by Coca Cola officials on August 28 in very serious condition and according to the petition, he admitted that the Coca Cola company authorities had forced him to drink liquor and drop the panchayat resolution. He died from jaundice on August 30, 2005. There is strong community opposition to the proposed Coca Cola bottling plant in Gangaikondan and foul play was suspected by many community members in Mr. Kamsan's sudden disappearance and death as well as the timing between his public opposition to the plant and his death.

On January 27. 2006, the Gangaikondan panchayat once again passed a resolution asking the State Government to cancel the license of the proposed facility "as the effluents discharged from the plant will pollute the environment, groundwater and soil." "The Coca Cola company in India talks a lot about having good community relations, rainwater harvesting, transparency and accountability, but the ground reality is that the company is engaged in all sorts of dubious activities in an attempt to intimidate local communities, particularly where there is significant local opposition to its operations," said T.Fatimson of the Campaign for Right to Livelihood and Food Security, one of the active groups working in Gangaikondan to oppose the bottling plant.

"No company, however large, is above the law and we expect a thorough police investigation into the suspicious circumstances surrounding Mr. Kamsan's death," said Anil Srivastava of the India Resource Center, an international campaigning organization. "The investigation must ensure that there is no interference from Coca Cola company's authorities," he concluded.

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one among them. She is playing the additional role of a teacher by virtue of being a topper. The picture is the same everywhere at the Baba Aya Singh Riarki College for Women. Named after the public-spirited local who launched it in 1925, this unique institution comprising two schools and a college at Tughalwal of Gurdaspur district in Punjab, is driven by the self-help credo. As Principal, Swaran Singh Virk says, 'It is the students themselves who run the affairs of the college'.

The largely do-it-yourself system is highly organized. Catering to the 4,000 students of the institution is the 16-member all student committee that delegates duties to sub-committees in a defined division of labor. 'We learn the lessons of responsibility in a natural way' says Sukhmeet Kaur, Secretary of the committee, adding that the chores include teaching, managing finances, admissions, maintenance of the campus, library, hostel kitchen and the conduct of examinations. These jobs are taken up by the students on rotation so that they are not burdensome.

The spin-offs of such a system are many: it is cost-effective too. The college which accepts neither Government grants, nor private donations, has made higher education cheap. Two-thirds of its students come from modest backgrounds, but can afford the nominal annual fee of Rs. 800 (for day scholars) and Rs. 5,000 (for boarders). There is a complete waiver for 150 orphans here. The institution has done well for itself, recording a cent per cent pass with roughly 50 per cent of the students securing a first division in class X last year. Having launched a crusade against nakal (copying), nasha (drugs) and nangej (obscenity), the college conducts examinations without invigilators. Inspired, Guru Nanak Dev University set up an examination center at the college, despite it not being an affiliated institution. The purpose is to hold it up as an example for others', says R.S. Baba, Registrar and Controller of Examinations.

# Amateur radio operators help Ganapati visarjan

For fifth year, amateur radio operators helped traffic police, paramedics monitor crowds during Ganapati visarjan on September 17, 2005. As thousands of devotees thronged Girgaum Chowpatty for the final Ganesh visarjan, a team of 30 ham (amateur radio operators) were hard at work ensuring that Mumbai safely bid farewell to the Elephant God. They were stationed at strategic locations across South Mumbai, including Opera House, C.P. Tank, Prarthana Samaj and Chowpatty from 12 noon on Saturday to Sunday (18<sup>th</sup> September) morning, till Lalbaghcha (traditional last idol) took the plunge.

Besides helping in the regulation of traffic, the amateur radio operators coordinated with the lifeguards, first aid camps and paramedics. 'A very essential aspect is the help rendered by us in lost-and-found cases and emergencies like drowning', said MARS Chairperson, Huzefa Merchant. 'Generally, the police have too much to do on such days to really tend to these cases'.

Incidentally, hams from MARS have been instrumental in saving lives during calamities like the Gujarat and Latur

# Become a 'Civil Participation' volunteer correspondent

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-Editor

earthquakes and last year's tsunami when almost all other communication networks had collapsed. 'Considering how unpredictable the weather has been this year, we were geared up for any unforeseen circumstance on the 17<sup>th</sup> September. We were prepared in case the networks failed again', said Merchant.

-Lion Ajay

# **Tension**

The moment you are in tension You will lose your attention Then you will be in total confusion And you will find yourself in irritation You will spoil personal relations You will not get cooperation You will bring things to complication Then your BP may also rise And you may be under medication Instead, understand the situation And try to think about the solution Problems can be solved by discussion Which will work out better in your profession Don't think it is my free suggestion It is only for your protection If you understand my intention You will never come again to tension

— Hariharan