

# PEOPLE LIKE US

PAVAN VARMA

## Preface

This book, which brings together the column *People Like Us*, which I wrote for several months for *The Hindustan Times*, will give you the examples of people and institutions who have somehow broken through the haze of cynicism, and have contributed in personally satisfying ways to society over and above the normal preoccupations of a metropolis. The examples are largely from in and around New Delhi, but I have not the slightest doubt that they are a representative sample of what a few — alas just a few — are doing elsewhere in India too. These individuals and organizations need your help and involvement. In helping them you will only, in the long run, be helping yourself.

The purpose of this book is to try and revive the project of social sensitivity —pivotal for the survival of any civil society. It is a book that can change your life and with it the destiny of India too.

I am grateful to Har-Anand Publications who so readily collaborated in the publication of the book. I owe a special note of thanks to Narendra Kumar with whom I first discussed the project, and to his son, Ashish Gosain, who so efficiently brought it to fruition. My gratitude is also due to Rohit Babbar, my colleague, who helped in the making of the columns. I need hardly add that this book would not have been possible but for the fullest cooperation of those who are featured in them. I remain indebted to them.

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## Introduction

There is a new challenge before India today. Most people from the middle class will think that it has nothing to do with them. They will continue to believe that their lives need no changing. They will continue to be convinced that nothing really significant matters apart from the familiar grapple with want and fulfilment. They will have the right excuses: what can I do about it; who am I to do anything about it; what have I to do with this state of affairs: my problems are big enough; let me get on with my life et. al.

But look around you, and you will see that such excuses, this refusal to see beyond anything except one's interest, has created a real crisis and has made most of urban India—in big or small towns—a soulless and barren collection of wants. There is a frightening ethical vacuum. No one knows anymore what is right and wrong. There is a sense of weariness with empty slogans: people are tired of promises that never materialise, of principles that are always betrayed, of 'gods' who have feet of clay, of the complete absence of shame, of small minds and petty agendas living only at the level of intrigue and scheming.

Look at what this has done all around you. You may not notice, or you may refuse to see, or even if you do you may choose to ignore. But the facts will not go away. One-third of Delhi, the capital of India, is officially acknowledged to be a slum. More than one-third of the city has no access to latrines. The country houses the largest numbers of illiterates in the world—an appallingly 290 million, more than the combined population of USA and Canada. Every three minutes a child dies in our country of diarrhoea, 250 million people still go hungry to bed every night. And all around us there is the., stench of corruption.

What should be done? Should we continue to lead our lives as if nothing is wrong? More importantly, can we lead our lives *as* if nothing is wrong? We are taking of our own country, which has rightly an aspiration to be counted among the great powers of the world. Do we have reason to believe that governments and leaders alone will solve these problems? I think not.

The people are tired, tired of greed, tired of living solely at the level of wants irrespective of the means, of accepting the immoral, of living with compromise, of adjusting to the betrayal of faith. The time has come, therefore, for the middle and elite classes to pause, to introspect, and to think. Not on the grounds of idealism. Not because this is what they are supposed to do. Not because somebody has asked them to. But because they must do so in their own long term self-interest.

No one class in a country can achieve the cherished goals of prosperity and security if all around everything wrong continues to flourish. This is the central point. Educated India needs to awaken in its own interest, and seek to change things by reviving the tradition of a constructive interface with society and the community. Even in small ways. It is not necessary for everybody to try and become Mahatma Gandhi. There is no need for unacceptable sacrifices. There is no need for absolute or dramatic gestures. There is no need to suddenly renounce all your pleasures and pursuits. The country is crying out for a pragmatic revolution, for a middle space between the high idealism of Gandhiji, and, the complete absence of any sense of social sensitivity in most of us fifty years after independence. The only plea—and again on the basis of self-interest— is that, even as you live in your own little worlds of aspirations and desires, spare just in little time to notice

what is wrong and what needs to be done, so that each of us can begin to make the transition from an uncaring and selfish resident to a caring and concerned citizen.

I believe that, in spite of the truly unacceptable levels of selfishness around us, there are still some people and institutions

who can be role models, beacons of light. In this vital endeavour. There are some who in their spare time are making adults literate. There are others—who without any major personal sacrifices—have adopted the children of victims of terrorism and are ensuring their education. There are examples of those who have mobilised thousands of children in the fight against pollution. Or have raised money for a borewell to be dug to provide potable water to the residents of the nearest jhuggi-jhompri colony. A few are involved in making Delhi a cleaner city and there are those who are working to preserve its architectural heritage. There are people, like you and me, with the same desires and pursuits, who are happier because of their involvement in the rehabilitation of the handicapped.

Many more examples can be cited, but I believe that there are many among us who are tired of only living at the plane of hypocrisy and deception. They would like to contribute in a more meaningful and fulfilling way to society and community. I believe that the powerful legacy of *sewa* in all Indian religions may be heavily camouflaged but is not entirely dead. The examples cited in this book provide proof that this is true.

### **HelpAge India: Because We too Will be Old**

One of the less noticeable but festering problem of urban India is the increasing number of the old, and the diminishing number of those interested in looking after them. In the shadows of the frenetic pace of our small towns and big cities, which leave the young with little time or inclination to be concerned about anything but their own interests, there is the reality of an aging India. According to reliable statistics, there are 70 million senior citizens in India today, and the number is expected to go up to 177 million by the year 2025.

With the breakdown of the 'joint family', elderly people have become more and more vulnerable and lonely. There is a shortage of space in cramped urban homes. There is a greater demand on incomes by the television watching young. And, there is a breakdown of values. The problem assumes a crisis proportion because 90% of the elderly are from the unorganised sector, which means no pension, provident fund or medical insurance when they turn 60.

HelpAge India was born in 1978 to come to grips with this problem. Its essential aim is to raise funds in order to support voluntary organisations across the country which seek to help the elderly and the aged. In its first year, HelpAge India raised a meagre 22 lakhs, which helped fund 13 projects. This year, its budget is close to 13 crores, and it is involved in the funding of 500 voluntary organisations.

HelpAge India takes no money from the Government. Significantly, the single largest segment of its budget - Rs. 4 crores - comes from donations made by school children. It is equally significant that most of these children are not from public or private schools, but from their humbler cousins -government schools. An important source of funding is through its Direct Mail Appeal Scheme, where it writes for donations directly to people.

Such appeals yielded close to 2 crores last year. Corporate houses also contribute, but their share is fairly insignificant, at less than 20 lakhs per year. About 1% of the total funds come from HelpAge Greeting Cards.

HelpAge uses these funds to provide financial support to 800 homes and 123 Day Care Centres run for the aged. These homes are mostly in the nature of dormitories where food, shelter and health care are provided. Anybody over 60, who needs these facilities is eligible to join a home. Patients can also fund their own stay in a home, but mostly, the inmates are those who have been left as excess baggage by their kith and kin on the fast track of upward urban mobility.

There are two activities in which HelpAge is involved directly. The first is arranging cataract operations for the aged. Last year, it arranged for 57,000 cataract operations. HelpAge also runs Mobile Medicare Units catering exclusively to the destitute aged. There are 8 such Units in Delhi, and 95 all over India. It also runs an "Adopt A Granny - Scheme". Under this scheme, elderly people can be sponsored by families and individuals. Their daily needs are met through a small monthly contribution of Rs.400 from donors. If you adopt a grandmother or a grandfather, HelpAge will send you a picture of your beneficiary; you can meet the person and be directly involved in their rehabilitation. It is a pity that there are only 28,000 people in the whole of India who have responded to this scheme.

It is a recognised fact that in our materialistic world, the elderly are often relegated to oblivion because they are no longer capable of income generation. It is for this reason that HelpAge also has several income generating schemes by which the aged are, to the extent feasible, provided training and opportunities to be economically independent.

In all its activities, the primary aim of HelpAge is to try and raise the consciousness in ordinary people about the problems and travails of the elderly. This is not an easy task, specially because, increasingly, the Great Indian Civilisation has reduced itself to judging any and every thing only by the touchstone of its monetary value. But, once again, if we want to be a civil society, we cannot ignore such matters, particularly because respect for the old is an inherent part of our civilisational inheritance.

Random examples can bring tears to one's eyes. Satyawati, a 70 year old and unwell lady, has lived for the last 13 years in a Manila Ashram. She has a television in her room, but her eyes are fixed on the door with the hope that one day her son will return from abroad and enquire about her well being. Another lady, Daya Rani, signed off her property to her children and gave her money to her daughter who then needed it. Now penniless, none of her children are willing to look after her. Ram Prabhu, 76, has cataract in both eyes. His wife died last year and his children have left the village to live in the city, leaving him alone.

If we cannot look after our elderly, we are forfeiting the happiness and solace of our own sunset years. Our President K.R. Narayanan is a Patron to HelpAge India, as is former President R. Venkatraman. You can be involved with HelpAge by helping spread awareness, being a regular donor and helping to enrol donors. (*HelpAge India can be contacted at C-14, Qutab Institutional Area, New Delhi-16.*)

## **Sai Kripa at NOIDA**

*Anjina Rajagopal*

I have often wondered why is it that a given situation affects two persons differently. Everyday, in this vast and sprawling metropolis, each of us, in some way or the other, is exposed to what is unacceptable by any standard for any civilised society. And yet, for most people, this appalling state of affairs makes little or no dent to the amazingly insular life that they have become accustomed to live. But, there is always the possibility, and the great hope that an unacceptable situation may react differently on that one individual who is willing to take the trouble to change things around him or her.

Anjina Rajagopal, 46, is a living symbol that such a hope still exists. In 1988, she was going to her office in the Times of India where she worked as a steno-typist. Near her office, she saw a very young boy being beaten mercilessly by a tea-stall owner. Unlike many others who passed the screaming child, she stopped. On enquiry, she found that the boy could neither speak nor hear. He survived by begging for food in exchange for which he was given a few morsels of putrefying food by the tea vendor and made to work for this largesse. If he did not work well, he was beaten. Anjina enquired about the boy's parents. They were unknown. She sought the help of the local police station. The parents or any other relative could not be traced. She advertised but got no response. Finally, she took the boy to her home in NOIDA.

This boy, whom she later named Rajat, became the foundation of Anjina's organisation - Sai Kripa. This handicapped and homeless orphan boy crying for help as he was being thrashed on a street where thousands of middle class Delhiites go about their business everyday, became the living foundation stone for Sai Kripa

Anjina hails from Bellary in Karnataka. As a child, she still remembers that children in her village would beat drums and carry notebooks down the streets of the village, knocking at every door for donations for the orphanage in which they lived. Later in life, she remained deeply disturbed by the sight of children being exploited around her. There was an urge to do something about it. The opportunity came with Rajat, the child whom she took home.

Sai Kripa was formally registered on February 27, 1990 at F-44, Sector 20, NOIDA. Its basic aim is to provide a home for children who are homeless for reasons beyond their control. Its goal is not only to provide food and shelter but also to give such children love and affection. Sai Kripa does not like itself to be called an orphanage. It considers itself to be a home with Anjina as the universal 'Mummy'. Today, Anjina's home, 'Bal Kutir', consists of a family of 25 children, 11 girls and 13 boys, the youngest one just 14 months old and the eldest 17 years.

As often happens in such ventures, Sai Kripa's next activity was focused on education. With the aim of serving the needy, the organisation set up a school in 1991 in Wazirpur village, about 16 kms from Noida. Initially, the school had classes only up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Std. but now has expanded to have classes up to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Today, the school has as many as 300 children, but the beginnings were tough. It took a fair degree of sustained effort to motivate parents to send their children to school, especially in the case of daughters. In time, hostility gave way to curiosity, and curiosity, finally, to support.

Sai Kripa also runs vocational training centres, specially for those children who come for assistance at the age of 13 and above. Since these children are overage to attend formal schools, they are taught informally and helped to acquire vocational skills. The tailoring unit of Sai Kripa commenced in November 1992. It makes dresses for sale. Besides teaching tailoring to the girls at the school, another area of activity is the decoration of artifacts. Terracotta items are brought from the market, decorated and exhibited for sale. Children art' also helped to make candles in *their* spare time. Carpentry is another skill taught to the children.

Sai Kripa has grown but is still fledgling 'Bal Kutir' is housed in as many as six rented rooms- The organisation is also short of staff and is badly in need of help from volunteers. Above all, Anjina's project needs financial support.

It is worthwhile to mention that several organisations have come forward to help. CRY, supports Sai Kripa financially. The Concern India Foundation also lends a helping hand. The Lioness Club and Rotary Club in Noida have provided valuable support. Even the Noida Administration has tried to help by providing accommodation at subsidised rents.

But there appears to be a woeful shortage of private corporate sponsorship. The only corporate entity which has come forward to help the school by contributing lab equipment and computers is a foreign organisation - American Express -something to ponder about indeed for the many affluent Indian businessmen in Delhi and NOIDA.

Rajat is today 17 years old. He still cannot hear or speak, but is able to express himself very well through his actions. He is a happy child and an excellent carpenter. It is he who makes the boxes, cots and stools for Sai Kripa. A long journey indeed from the homeless child crying in agony at a tea-stall at Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg. (*Sai Kripa can be contacted at Z-133 6r 134, Sector 12, Noida-201301.*)

### **Child Relief and You**

*Praveen Sharma & Radha Roy Sarkar*

For those of us who live in the somewhat insulated middle class enclaves of urban India, it is instructive to occasionally recall certain facts about the country we live in. 11,000 children die everyday of easily preventable diseases; 1.5 million children die every year of diarrhoea; there are 13 million homeless children in India; 4 out of 5 children in India will never enter a school; 70% of children drop out of school before they enter class IV. There are 111 million child labourers and 11 lakh street children in India. Ten million children work as bonded labourers. One out of six girls will not see her 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. The mortality rate of children under 5 in India is one of the highest in the world.

To many readers, these would be just statistics, dissociated from their real lives. However, the truth is that their own security and prosperity is directly linked to a dramatic improvement in the situation that these statistics outline. Otherwise, we will continue to live in a fool's paradise, rapidly-eroding the very security and prosperity we desire.

Child Relief and You (CRY) began in 1979 to help deprived children. In 1979, seven friends got together and with a contribution of Rs. 7 each, and a combined pool of Rs, 50,

registered CRY as a Charitable Trust. The leader among them was Rippan Kapur. He was born in 1954 and died prematurely, when just 40, in 1994. Rippan grew up in a privileged middle class family. He attended St. Columbus and Elphinstone College in Bombay, and worked later with Oberoi hotels and Air India. From the beginning, he had shown an inclination towards social activism which found fulfilment when, at the age of 25, he set up CRY. The reasons for starting CRY were clearly stated by him: "I felt a sense of disgust at the way some children were growing up in India. I realised I could not just stand back and do nothing about it."

In the early years of CRY, Rippan's dining table at home served as an office. For quite some time, CRY shifted from one make-shift office to another - from the bedroom in Rippan's house to garages without electricity and godowns without toilets.

Gradually, the organisation began to grow. In 1980, the famous Cards Division of CRY was born; in 1981, CRY hired its first employee. In 1987, CRY began a corpus (Child Development Fund) as an investment for its future. In the same year, it opened branches in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta.

The essential aim of CRY was, and is, to raise funds for helping deprived children in the fields of education, income generation, vocational training and health care. CRY understood that many people who wish to work for social causes and have the resources to do so, do not know where to begin. It thus became a link organisation to help such people, and give reality to their urge for social activism. It also became a major funding organisation for effective non-governmental organisations working for children at the grassroots level across India.

The modus operandi of CRY is simple. It identifies honest and effective NGOs and evaluates their profiles and budgets. Then, professionals from its Programme Support Unit examine the concerned NGO, and if, after scrutiny, it comes up to par, funds are sanctioned to it. The utilisation of these funds is carefully monitored. CRY disburses funds only on a quarterly basis, after receiving and scrutinising quarterly returns. It also organises training for social activists, especially teachers. Through this process, CRY today supports 200 NGOs on a pan-India basis in addition to several socially concerned individuals. In Delhi alone, it supports 14 organisations working with slum and street children.

CRY cards are a significant success story. The year 1988 was the year of Art for CRY, and the event created a national impact marking CRY's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. 144 artists donated 180 pieces of work. Companies, both big and small, sponsored projects and publications. The Tata Group of companies underwrote the expenses. It was a major fund-raising drive, which brought the objectives for which CRY was created into national focus.

In addition to selling the cards, CRY consciously seeks donations, specially from the corporate sector. CRY rightfully believes that the corporate sector needs to be aware of its social responsibilities. It thus seeks contributions from it under its scheme called Direct Project Funding. Several socially conscious corporate houses have responded. Tatas was one of the pioneers. The Jindals Group and Titan are important donors. Ironically, among the other big donors are foreign companies such as the American Express, British Airways and ANZ Grindlays Bank.



As part of its fund-raising drive, CRY also brings out corporate gifts such as desk calendars and travel and address books which every concerned Indian should buy.

Under the Adopt A Project Scheme, a company or individuals can identify a project/fellow supported by CRY whose work interests them and choose to support the entire project or part of it. This scheme is tailor-made for socially sensitive corporates and individuals. For instance, only recently, Motorola in Bangalore supported SNEAHA, a project working for the upliftment of tribal and rural communities in Bellary, one of the most backward districts in Karnataka. Not just children but women and the community are direct beneficiaries of Motorola's support. Motorola's team regularly visits SNEAHA to assess first hand the effect of their support.

Starting with a mere Rs.50, today CRY reaches out to over 700,000 children through 228 Child Development Projects disbursing Rs.14 crores. The basis of its work is that it can motivate people like YOU to help in a cause without whose success your own security and prosperity will be jeopardised. As Rippan Kapur said: "One cannot be satisfied as long as there are children who need help. One just has to keep going at it."

Whatever the success of CRY, only the tip of the problem has been dealt with. Organisations like CRY need your help. (CRY can be contacted at DDA Slum Wing (Barat Ghar), Bapu Park, Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi-110003

### **A Home for Our Children**

*Meera Mahadevan*

I have been profiling, from time to time people like us who, at an individual level, or through an organisation, are doing that little extra for society. Such people do not pretend to be full time social workers. They have not opted out of society. They do not claim to be Mahatma Gandhi. They are ordinary people, sometimes more efficiently pursuing the very material things that obsess us. What makes them different is the realisation that unless they contribute to society, their own welfare and well being cannot be sustained.

The need to profile such people is important because most of urban India has become a vast aggregation of wants with little thought or time for anything else. Very few people seem to understand, specially from India's burgeoning middle class, that the very security and prosperity which they desire, is being built on very tenuous foundations so long as 300 million people or more go hungry to bed every night and India has the single largest concentration of illiterates in the world - more than the combined population of the USA and Canada. Even in Delhi, 46% of the population is illiterate and one-fourth do not have access to even such basics as latrines.

For too long have people like us depended only on the Government to resolve this unacceptable situation; for too long have people like us believed that this ignorance and destitution will go away merely by our not noticing them. The greatest challenge in the years ahead is for people who are relatively privileged to take an initiative in directly attacking these problems, even in small ways, which do not require any dramatic sacrifices of lifestyle. Then, hopefully, we will have concerned citizens rather than merely acquisitive residents in urban India.

My writing about then is a small contribution in trying to show that there are people who care. The response has been most gratifying. Scores of people have written to me to say that they would like to contribute; many others have conveyed the good work being done by people they know. We will seek to project as many as we can.

These profiles have brought out forcefully three important things. Firstly, most initiatives —however big they may have grown over the years —began by the effort or vision or concern of one individual who was moved to do something to improve the situation around him or her. Secondly, every such effort revealed the inter-related aspect of basic problems: not only shelter, but literacy; not only literacy but employment; not only employment but health care; not only health care but self-esteem and empowerment. Thirdly, and this is especially important, every individual involved in such an enterprise spoke of the great sense of happiness and fulfilment involved in the process.

The organisation, Mobile Crèches, also began through concern of one individual. In 1969, the year of the Gandhi Centenary, Meera Mahadevan, a housewife and a writer, was appointed to a Women and Children's Sub-Committee for observing the Centenary Year. She noticed that while the workers were toiling to build the Centenary Pavilion, their children lay on rubble in the dust and heat. Meera's simple response was to try and provide shelter for these young ones. So, the first Mobile Crèche was set up in a tent. Many readers would be familiar with the temporary shelters that house labourers on the edge of large construction sites. These are make-shift huts, dark and depressing with no sanitation facilities, and are a common site in any big city, including Delhi. The vast majority of construction workers are unskilled labourers who have migrated to cities in search of work. More often than not they are landless labourers or marginal farmers. A whole generation is being raised in these temporary huts. Even though schools, hospitals and other amenities exist in the city, the migrant workers cannot take advantage of them due to illiteracy, lack of confidence and their constant mobility. The young child of this community suffers the most. Being brought up on a series of construction sites, with minimal nutrition and no medical facilities, he is malnourished, diseased and lonely.

From a simple concern of providing day care to such children. Mobile Crèches has grown over the years, responding to new challenges, needs and opportunities. The Crèche for infants (0-3 years) has extended itself to a play-school, Balwadis, for toddlers (3-6 years) and to non-formal education (NFE) for 6-12 year olds, till they can be absorbed in regular schools. Mothers start lining up at the Crèche from 8.30 a.m. to 9.00 a.m. to leave their children for the day. The babies are taken through a well planned routine in which they get nutritious meals, health check-ups, vitamins and time to play and sleep. The children in the adjoining Balwadis are also kept busy through a regimen of physical exercise and learning. The children in the NFE Section are taught basic Maths, Science and Hindi. At 4.00 p.m., mothers can fetch their children to take them home. It is a sight that can bring tears of joy to any sensitive person.

Today, Mobile Crèches has 23 centres in Delhi, Mumbai and Pune, and 10 in Delhi alone. It touches the life of approximately 5 lakh children. To sustain this good work, Mobile Crèches is in dire need of funds. (*Mobile Crèches can be contacted at DIZ Area, Raja Bazaar, Sector IV, Near Gole Market, New Delhi-110001.*)

**A People's Movement Against Pollution**

### *Satya Sheel & Saurabh Khosla*

A young school girl in Delhi was suffering from asthma. This is not unusual in this city. Indeed, this is the fate of every eighth child in Delhi. The difference in this case was that she forgot to take her inhaler to school one day. On the way back home, as she disembarked from the bus, she collapsed and died. This is a true story.

About 7,500 people in Delhi die every year due to respiratory diseases caused by vehicle pollution. It is a cliché that Delhi is perhaps one of the most polluted cities in the world. There are about 2.7 million vehicles in Delhi. As many as 2 million are owned by individuals, of these, 1.6 million are two-wheelers. Delhi has more vehicles than Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai put together.

The simple truth is that pollution knows no class distinctions. It affects everyone. And it is lethal, it was this realisation which proved a turning point in the life of two brothers - Satya Sheel (45) and Saurabh (40). Both Satya Sheel and Saurabh are in business. Satya Sheel, or SS as he is better known, is a product of St. Stephen's College. Saurabh is a product of IIM, Ahmedabad.

It was in 1996 that SS and Saurabh felt that as citizens in this city, they should get involved in the battle against pollution, rather than only wait for the Government to do something. When SS first mooted the notion of mobilising people in this cause, he was accused of being a dreamer. However, he thought it better to dream and fight than to die dreamless. As part of their strategy, SS and Saurabh decided to target, as their chief soldiers, the children of Delhi. They felt that while adults are cynical, children are easier to motivate. Moreover, they have a vested interest in the future.

In early 1997, the two brothers approached 15 schools in Delhi. They were stunned by the response. By the end of the year, they had enrolled 220 schools and 300,000 children in the cause. During the summer holidays of 1997, around one lakh children were given forms to monitor the pollution level of at least five vehicles at home and in the neighbourhood. Three lakh vehicles were thus monitored during the vacation. The students who monitored the maximum number of vehicles in every section of every class were given a certificate. These certificates were signed by celebrities of the city as also the Transport Department, which had, by now, decided to support the movement. In a further unique gesture, they decided to give to the two most active students in every school a free holiday to 'Back to Nature' camps in the hills.

Many school-going students participated in road shows where they would go on the roads to check pollution certificates of vehicles. Those with valid PUCs would get a 'Thank You' slip from the student. Those who did not, were directed to the mobile pollution checking unit standing by. Often school Principals would lead the students on the road. Over 35,000 vehicles in Delhi were checked in this manner.

A key aim for SS and Saurabh was to enrol the child in the fight against pollution in imaginative ways so as to leave a lasting impression on his mind. In late 1997, the duo organised "Art Against Pollution", the biggest ever on-the-spot painting competition in Delhi. While 17,000 students donated their paintings, many concerned corporates joined hands to donate paper (Ballarpur), drawing boards, Crayons (Maruti), free snacks along with tents and other arrangements (Maurya Sheraton), free Milo (Nestle), free biscuits (Bakemans) and free hampers (Minto).

Future activities being planned by the two brothers include the operationalisation of three mobile pollution checking centres. The vans will be contributed by Maruti, two pollution checking machines will be donated by Maurya Sheraton and one machine has already been donated by Tribhuvandas Bhimji Zaveri.

SS & Saurabh are successful businessmen. They have a large circle of friends in Delhi, and are popular on the social circuit. SS's wife Kamia is a popular television actress. They have thrown themselves into a cause in the larger interests of the city in which they live, only because they felt that there is a need for people to be directly involved in such a cause. Their experience brings out that if the resolve is there, anything can be achieved. They have also demonstrated one very important element, viz. that there are leaders within the corporate world who are willing to be involved in civic causes. Their example needs to be emulated.

The task that SS and Saurabh have taken upon themselves is still unfinished; a lot more needs to be done.

### **Why Can't Delhi be Another Kottayam?**

*T. K. Mathew*

In 1962, a young Christian Keralite, T.K. Mathew, came to Delhi, like so many other young aspirants from other parts of India, to find a job. He found a job and occupied a middle class berth, but unlike most around him, he wanted to change things and do something about the visible urban poverty and slums around him. As a child, in the village of Venmony in Alleppey District of Kerala, he had himself been educated because a few public spirited citizens had put up a shed and started a school through voluntary contributions. It was an inspiring foundational memory. Mathew wanted to give back to society what he had received from it.

It may come as a surprise to many that as many as 46% of the citizens of Delhi are illiterate. This means that only a little over half of those who live in the capital of India, can read and write.

Mathew was not only moved by this appalling state of affairs, but, along with six other friends and colleagues from different vocations of life, who attended the Church in Delhi to which he belonged, he decided to act. He started in 1979 an organisation called Deepalaya - "the abode of light", whose primary purpose was to provide education to children from the deprived and vulnerable sections of Delhi.

The first school by Deepalaya began on July 16, 1979 with 5 children, two teachers and an investment of Rs. 17,500 -Rs.2,500 each paid by the 7 founding members. By 1985, the number of children had increased to 133, there were 7 teachers and the school's budget had grown to Rs. 1 lakh. In 1992, the organisation was educating 13,000 children with over 400 teachers and an annual budget of around Rs. 2.5 crores. Today, Deepalaya caters to over 20,000 children from slums and lower income areas of Delhi. Its budget is in the vicinity of Rs. 3 crores.

In 1979, the first child in the first 'free' school set up by Deepalaya, was the son of a dhobi who worked under the tree opposite the school. The dhobi's son was followed by the children of the area watchman, and that of the locality sweeper. The lower middle

class colony in which the school operated was not amused at this obliviousness to class distinctions. They protested. Deepalaya persisted, nevertheless.

What is striking is that in its initial years, Deepayalya grew not so much through the support or concern of well-to-do Indians, but through the grants of foreign charitable organisations.

I asked Mathew: “Where were the Indian sponsors?” After all, Deepalaya was not a religious movement, and children of all religions were being benefited by it. Mathew’s reply was revealing. He said that somehow Indians preferred to give money for the construction of churches, temples, mosques and gurudwaras, but not for the education of a poor child.

There can be no more damning indictment of Delhi’s privileged intelligentsia than the fact that even today, Deepalaya has only 1,600 sponsors for a poor child’s education. Deepalaya aims to have 5000 sponsors by the year 2000. Only 5000 sponsors in a city of over 12 million people?

What, after all, does a sponsorship for the education of a poor child require? A sponsor is only required to pay Rs. 2000 per child for one year. He will then receive a photograph of the child which he has sponsored. The child will write to him or her twice a year; an Annual Report of how the money has been utilised will also be provided, including 4 newsletters.

Deepalaya now focuses not only on the education of the deprived child, but on community development, income enhancement, skill development and health care. The aim is to seek the transformation of the environment itself. One of the slogans of Deepalaya is “Nothing Is For Free”. It charges a very nominal sum as school fees. This enables the child, the beneficiary, to acquire a stake in society. The child’s involvement with Deepalaya then becomes a partnership.

There are some well known people who have sponsored children with Deepalaya. These include Khushwant Singh, Shovana Narayan, Raja and Radha Reddy, Raghu Rai, Sonal Mansingh and even former President Zail Singh.

Today, Deepalaya is present in 40 slums and two railway stations in Delhi. Ultimately, the relatively more privileged must understand that their own security and prosperity will be enhanced only if those around them have education and income earning skills and access to basic health care. By-helping organisations like Deepalaya, people like us help ourselves. This is the central message. If Kottayam in Kerala can be fully literate, why not your city? (*Deepalaya can be contacted at 46, Institutional Area, D-Block, Janakpuri, New Delhi -110058.*)

### **A Police Officer’s Prayas**

*Amod Kanth*

In 1987, a young police officer, Amod Kanth, and the then Lieutenant Governor H.L. Kapur, were visiting a low-income group area of Jahangirpuri for some work. By some estimates, there are as many as 25,000 street children in Jahangirpuri alone. These were noticed by Amod and, on an impulse, he asked the Lieutenant Governor if the Delhi Government would agree to give him two small flats so that he could do something for

such children, Amod even offered to pay rent. The LG agreed, and Prayas, perhaps India's most successful NGO working for neglected children, was born.

Today, Prayas is involved in the care of as many as 2500 neglected and street children in Delhi. It has 27 centres of non-formal educational learning. It runs 15 centres of vocational training. It is involved in as many as 14 public libraries for children. It has started a Prayas Health Service and runs a hospital and a Nursing Home for street children. It employs more than 150 people and has an annual budget of Rs. 1 crore. It owns property worth several crores.

The success of Prayas is inextricably linked to the efforts of Amod. Amod joined the Indian Police Service in 1974. He is currently Joint Commissioner of Police (South) of Delhi Police.

What has made Amod different? Amod grew up and was educated in the small towns of Bihar. He did not study in a public school. His father was a scrupulously honest official in Bihar and suffered for it. He was known in his times as Bihar's "Gandhian Magistrate". This was an important influencing factor in Amod's life.

As a student, Amod did not think he would end up as a Police Officer. In 1971, when he finished his education, he left home to teach in Jamshedpur. Within a year, he had left a fairly well established educational institution to start a college for tribals and factory workers in the Jamshedpur-Chaibasa belt. But soon he was faced with major problems in the management of the college he had set up. It was then that he gave the Civil Services exams and qualified to join the IPS.

The one thing that distinguishes Prayas from many other well-intentioned efforts appears to be that it has a holistic philosophy underpinning its sense of compassion. Initially, it began as a Contact Programme for street children. Amod helped Prayas to investigate the very concept of street children. He was helped in this endeavour by volunteers from the Delhi School of Social Work. Very early Amod and Prayas realised that 'contact' was not enough. What was important was an emphasis on education. The next phase was to move from education to the imparting of vocational skills and programmes for rehabilitation.

The fundamental approach of Prayas is to ensure that the children are given required care and protection in their own milieu. All the institutions of Prayas have been set up in the slums and low-income group areas where neglected children live. The aim is to make the child a focus of change in the very environment which has rendered him deprived and inadequate.

Prayas has not restricted itself merely to providing education or vocational skills. Its aim has been to provide shelter where necessary, food where required and health care where needed. It is for this reason that Prayas began a pioneering effort, as far back as 1992, to provide mid-day meals for the children under its care. The 15-bed nursing home it runs provides genuine succour to the children on the streets. Children are also provided at least two sets of clothes for summer, one woollen article for winter and a pair of shoes.

It is estimated that there are as many as half a million neglected children on the streets of Delhi. Of these, as many as 70,000 are deprived even of shelter. Their plight moved a police officer, someone like us, 10 years ago. By now, 10,000 children have gone through Prayas. Of this, 6,000 earn a living today. It has been a difficult but rewarding process.

People and institutions have helped. A private shoe company, Action Shoes, has donated in the past as many as 1,000 pair of shoes. This is but one example. What Amod has done, and what Prayas is doing, can be replicated. (*Prayas can be contacted at 59, Tughlakab Bagh, Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110062.*)

### **A Different Teacher**

*Arun Kapur*

Every day, from Monday to Friday, from 4.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m., the inmates of Jail No. 5 at Tihar have a somewhat improbable companion. He is Arun Kapur, the 43-year old Principal of the prestigious Vasant Valley School in Delhi.

Arun is in Tihar 5 days a week, after he finishes school, not because he is preparing himself to reside in the premises, but because he voluntarily gives a few hours of his day for the welfare of those for whom Tihar has indeed become a temporary home.

Jail No. 5 has as many as 1600 prisoners between the age of 16-21. In May, last year, Arun was asked by a friend whether he could organise some old textbooks for the young prisoners in Tihar Jail to read. Arun collected the books and took them himself to Tihar. The Warden of Jail No. 5, Dr. A.K. Shringla, showed him around the premises and casually asked if he would like to help in setting up a library in his unit. A room, he said, was available. Arun readily took up the challenge. Today, Jail No. 5 has a library having 5,000 books, and as many as a hundred of these are issued everyday. Hind Pocket Books has contributed free of cost many of the books. More importantly, the inmates have been taught library skills. An essay competition is held every month. Those who do not know how to read and write are voluntarily taught by those who do.

A significant offshoot of this activity is that it has acted as an “ice-breaker” with the younger prisoners and prepared the ground for vital counselling. As Arun puts it, this kind of interaction helps provide a “non-judgmental ear” to the inmates, many of whom want to talk, but have nobody to unburden themselves to.

Arun is a person like us. He lives well in a beautiful new home not far away from his school. He drives a good car; he is an asset at social gatherings; he has his occasional drink; he is involved with his family and children and has in no way renounced the normal pleasures of life.

What is it, then, that makes Arun different from many of us? Arun graduated from St. Stephens College in 1977. He was preparing to sit for the IAS exams when, quite unexpectedly, he was selected to teach History at Doon School. Arun thought he would do this for a year or so, until he took the exams, but he stayed on for 13 years at Dehradun and became the youngest House Master of that School. In 1989, he shifted to Delhi to become the Principal of British School, and very soon after he took over the challenge of the Vasant Valley School.

From the very beginning, Arun felt that in spite of his many satisfying professional preoccupations, he needed to do something more in terms of giving back to society what it had given to him. In Dehradun, he had actively worked with Cheshire Homes and the Blind School. Three years ago, he helped begin a Trust called ‘Ritinjali’, which means ‘helping hands’. The core of Ritinjali are the teachers of Vasant Valley School, their

spouses and their friends. With an eclectic agenda, its members contribute on the basis of their skills. An architect, for instance, helps in devising better sewage and sanitation in villages; a vet helps in improving animal welfare; others seek to give village women income-enhancing vocational skills. An important aim is to send village and slum children to schools. The Trust provides for scholarships for poor children which cover fees, books and uniform. It has set up Study Centres in villages with a special focus on educating the girl child. In Vasant Valley, after school hours, Ritinjali gives coaching for competitive examinations to candidates from deprived sections,

Arun feels that the best way he can teach his own students to become better citizens is to be able to set an example which they can observe and then, hopefully, emulate.

Arun Kapur has a ready laugh. He runs a successful school and is happy to be a citizen rather than just a resident. There is a self-interest involved. His social work, Arun says, is a great 'stress-booster'. (*Ritinjali can be contacted at Vasant Valley School, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi.*)

### **Service Through Sacrifice**

*Jaspal Singh*

Dr CS.Anand is a leading ENT specialist. Sardar Jaspal Singh is a well established name in the refrigeration business. Mr S.S.Hitkari is a retired Commissioner of Income Tax. Sardar Hardev Singh is a successful stocks and shares broker. Dr. Daljit Singh lives in Friends Colony where he has a flourishing private clinic.

These are people who have made a success of their lives. They inhabit the same world as ours. They do not claim to have renounced the pleasures of life. On the contrary, they have been able to pursue many of the material goals so many of us desire with greater efficiency.

But there is something which makes them different. Even in the midst of their great absorption in the daily preoccupations of business and work, they have set time aside to help in reaching free medical care to those who cannot afford to pay, and in providing clean and potable water to those who do not have this basic necessity in the capital city of India.

These men, and others like them, many of them from the leading Sikh families of Delhi, belong to the Delhi chapter of an organisation called the Chief Khalsa Diwan. The Chief Khalsa Diwan is a hundred year old organisation with its headquarters in Amritsar. In Delhi the Diwan has set up the Guru Nanak Medical Centre in the premises of the Gurudwara at Nehru Nagar, off the Ring Road near Srinivaspuri,

The Medical Centre commenced operations in 1995. Its core financing was provided by a donation of several lakhs given by Dr. Manmohan Singh, a renowned pathologist, originally from Lahore, and who was later Honorary Secretary of the Khalsa College in Amritsar. The donation was invested wisely, and the returns help in defraying part of the cost of the daily running of the Centre.

The Centre provides free medical care to the needy from the neighbouring slum and low income housing colonies, irrespective of caste and community. A patient has merely to pay a one-time sum of Rs. five as registration fee. The doctors who attend are leaders



in their fields who voluntarily donate their time for this charitable work. The medicines are provided free.

Over the years the Centre has expanded, albeit in a modest manner. It now has the services of an ophthalmologist, an ENT section, a gynaecologist, consultations with an orthopaedist, and more recently, a basic Surgery Unit. There are now plans to add an X-Ray machine. The expansion has been financed by donations. The interesting thing is that while donations do have to be sought, they are generally forthcoming. “Money is not a big problem”, says Dr. Daljeet Singh, Honorary Treasurer of the Diwan, and the Medical Director of the Centre. “When people hear about what we are doing, they want to give. Nobody says no.” A similar sentiment is voiced by Sardar Jaspal Singh. “Some people give money, and some give medicines. Charity cannot be defined only as giving money for putting marble in Gurudwaras.”

Nevertheless, the need for sustained support and effort is quite obvious. There is a monthly short fall in operating costs which is again met by voluntary contributions of the leading and well-to-do members of the Diwan. There is also the need for continuous and compassionate attention to detail. For instance it was soon evident that the presence of an Ophthalmologist was useful, but the patients were hard put to find the money for spectacles. Now spectacles are made available through a special arrangement at considerably subsidised rates.

The Diwan has also dug a bore well which provides clean water to the nearby jhuggi-jhonpri settlement free of cost twenty-four hours a day. It is an act of concern which makes a visible and verifiable difference to the quality of life of the neighbourhood. In addition, it has adopted a village in Khichripur, near Ghaziabad, where it specially focuses on enabling women to acquire a vocational asset, through the gift of a sewing machine and professional training in tailoring. A thirty-two-room home for the old and infirm in Rajendra Nagar is another example of the kind of work it is doing.

The scale of work is not spectacular, but it is significant that it is all for the good. The need of the hour is not always for some grandiose scheme that promises to transform all that is wrong over-night and then trips over its own unfulfilled promises, but small efforts that are genuine examples of social concern and sensitivity and are workable and sustainable. Last year the Medical Centre treated close to fourteen thousand patients. Many more were prevented from falling sick by the availability of clean water.

The Medical Centre was inaugurated by then Chief Minister Madan Lal Khurana in July, 1995. Such efforts should have the support of the government. They are good examples of a constructive interface with society inspired by the best in all religions. It is wrong to mechanically co-relate all aspects of religious activity as against the tenets of secularism. I understand the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare had promised some modest financial assistance. The promise was made two years ago, but is yet to be implemented.

Meanwhile the refined and elderly Honorary Secretary of the Local Committee of the Khalsa Diwan, Sardar Shamsheer Singh, speaks to me of the validity of *Apna Tapta Paropkar*— service through sacrifice. And equally motivated Jaspal Singh, who is a management expert and runs his family business with vigour, says more pragmatically: “The important thing is to enlarge the circle of influence of like-minded people. The rest

will follow.” (*The Chief Khalsa Diwan can be contacted at Guru Nanak Medical Centre, Nehru Nagar, Near Srinivas Puri, New Delhi.*)

## **Two Ladies and a School**

*Mridula Jain*

The upmarket Gulmohar Park in South Delhi is an improbable place for a grassroots attempt to educate the children of jhuggi-jhonpris. And yet, over the last decade, unknown to many of its residents, such a movement has indeed happened. The heroes of this effort are two ladies: the late Mrs. Kanta Bhatia, who sadly passed away in April this year; and Mrs. Mirdula Jain, who is valiantly carrying on the noble work begun by Mrs. Bhatia.

Mrs. Kanta Bhatia’s husband, Krishan Bhatia, edited the Hindustan Times and was its correspondent from 1969 to 1974 in Washington. He died early, while still in Washington. Mrs. Kanta Bhatia returned to her house in Gulmohar Park in 1974 as a young widow in her mid-forties. (Gautam Bhatia, the noted writer and architect, is her son.)

Some time in the early 80s, Mrs. Bhatia took up the project of educating children in the nearby slums. She began by rounding up eight children. The classes were held under a tree, and the classes were mobile, depending on which tree provided the maximum shade. The effort was not restricted to merely teaching the young children. Mrs. Bhatia’s main effort was to motivate the parents to send children to her make-shift school. Children were regarded by parents as earning members; they were also required to take care of younger siblings. Mrs. Bhatia would sit on a charpai next to an open drain and talk to parents about the importance of education. She even went to the homes of those who employed children as domestic help. Her plea to them was to spare the children for at least four hours in a day so that they could become literate.

Gradually, the number of children attending the Bhatia Trust School grew. The problem was still of finding premises. No one in Gulmohar Park was prepared even to spare a room for the classes. When classes were held in the colony park, some residents complained. Ultimately, Mrs. Bhatia approached the missionary Father Agnell School in Gulmohar Park for assistance. The kind Father agreed to give the school the use of five rooms (after school hours) in the shed near the school playground.

By 1984, the school had grown to 25 children. By now Mrs. Bhatia had devised a uniform for the children. There were no school fees charged but she encouraged parents to pay at least 25 percent of the cost of a uniform, so that they had a stake in maintaining them. Kantaji’s commitment was total. It is said that she kept a pail of water with her when the children gathered for classes under the designated tree. If a child was dirty she would give him a bath and comb his hair. In time, the children began to appreciate on their own the importance of a neat demeanour. Another need was to provide a mid-day meal to her students. The meals were cooked in her kitchen. It would be kheer one day or kichri on another, or hot snacks or fruits. Financing was aided by the Trust (after which the school was named) to which she had contributed Rs. one lakh.

As the number of children grew, the school had classes up to Grade V. Mrs. Bhatia’s concern was to place the children in an established school after that. For this, she made an

arrangement with the DAV school in the vicinity. The children of the Bhatia Trust School give an admission test for entry into the DAV school. Thus far no child has ever failed to clear the test.

A good cause needs a good keeper. And, once a beginning is made, continuity is often providential. In the very early stages of Mrs. Bhatia's efforts, Mrs. Mirdula Jain, a young housewife from an established business family, happened, by chance, one day to see Mrs. Bhatia teaching her first eight children under the shade of a tree. She stopped to observe this rather strange sight and was transformed. In time, she became Mrs. Bhatia's chief assistant. Today, when Mrs. Bhatia is no more, the Bhatia Trust School has been happily adopted by Mrs. Mirdula Jain. The school has now as many as 170 children. It employs five teachers and two supervisors. Mrs. Jain pays for their services. The school has given her a new purpose in life. Not at the cost of her home or her family, but as something additional to these, which gives her solace and satisfaction. Mrs. Jain is greatly helped by the fact that her family is very supportive. Her businessman-husband appreciates her commitment; her three daughters understand their mother's sense of involvement.

When I visited the school recently, I was taken aback by the glow of fulfilment on the face of Mrs. Jain. She is full of plans. She wants to give the children some vocational skills such as making diyas or even Diwali cards, so that they can earn while they learn. The day I was at the school a group of students from Bihar were teaching the children yoga. It was a moving sight. Some others have also come forward to help. An Indian now residing in Moscow sends Rs. 5000 every month to defray the expenses of midday meals. But funds are scarce. Mrs. Mirdula Jain needs help. After Mrs. Kanta Bhatia's death, the trust set up in the name of her husband has wound up. Mrs. Jain needs to set up a new trust. She needs legal advice, money and volunteers.

Mrs. Kanta Bhatia is no more, but wherever she is, she will be content to know that the lonely furrow that she chose to plough has yielded fruit and is now being nurtured by Mrs. Jain. We need more Mrs. Bhatias and Mrs. Jains in the interest of our own welfare. (Ms. Mirdula Jain can be contacted at N-142, 1st Floor, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi-110 017.)

### **A Katha for You and Me**

*Geeta Dharamrajan*

In the 80s, Geeta Dharamrajan, a lady in her 40s, and the wife of an IAS officer, used to work as Editor for the children's magazine 'Target'. 'Target' caters largely to middle and upper class children. In the case of Geeta, this involvement with children led her to expand the ambit of her concerns beyond her social class. She began to visit the Govind Puri slum (one of the largest in Delhi) near Kalkaji Extension to teach children. She began with six children only because of familiar reasons; children in the slums need to work to earn money, or, they are unable to come to school because they have to care for younger siblings while the parents go out to work.

Geeta had both patience and tenacity and, above all, commitment. In 1988, she had founded a different kind of children's magazine - 'Tamasha'. This was published not only in English but, keeping her changed readership in mind, in Hindi as well. The focus of this magazine was to engage slum children in social issues through the printed word.

The aim also was to unobtrusively focus on the importance of the girl child. In 1989, Geeta registered her voluntary organisation, Katha. Soon, she persuaded the MCD to give her their Slum Wing Building in Govind Puri. She also succeeded in getting a small grant for this organisation.

With this as a basis, her first effort was to start a crèche for children between the age group of 0-3 years, so as to free the slightly older siblings to attend school. The next step was to start a pre-school. The attempt was to enroll children between the age group of 3-6 years so as to prepare them for admission into nearby formal schools.

A sensitive voluntary organisation evolves in response to actual needs on the ground. Katha realised that however great the motivation, economic compulsions would force children in poor families to work. Preaching alone could not help. The need was to adapt to the situation and devise an innovative response. Hence, Katha also set up a non-formal Education Centre to provide education to working children and school dropouts. This Centre prepares students to take the secondary school examination from the National Open School.

Katha also began to focus on giving additional help to children already in formal schools. The organisation realised that these are children - the first generation educated - whose parents are not equipped to help them in studies at home. They need help in order to cope with studies, especially in government-run schools. Thus, the organisation began to also run tutorial classes, as a support programme for the children admitted into formal schools.

Another aspect of Katha's work was to start the Katha School of Entrepreneurship (KSE). Once again, it was a response to the felt need of slum children, whose essential aim remained, beyond education, employment. If the latter did not happen, the very purpose of education and literacy would be devalued. KSE seeks to provide training to slum children in such varied fields as computers, bakery, food processing, house wiring, tailoring, and catering. It runs on a very open system with colourful charts and models so as to evoke the interest of the newly educated slum child in a vocational area.

Perhaps Katha's most innovative programme is for the women of Govind Puri, entitled 'Shakti Khazana'. This project focuses on the overall empowerment of women and includes an Income Generating Programme which has four units: bakery, catering, food processing and tailoring.

There is an interesting aspect with regard to Shakti Khazana's bakery classes. Katha, with the assistance of 'Action-Aid', a major funding agency for voluntary organisations, succeeded in having the women of Govind Puri trained in baking by the Chefs of the Taj Group. Given this training, and their natural talent, the bakery unit of the organisation in Govind Puri brings out excellent biscuits, pastries, patties and cakes, made with utmost hygiene. In February this year, when the American Women's Organisation had its meeting at Roosevelt House, the residence of the US Ambassador in New Delhi, the snacks were ordered from Shakti Khazana's Govind Puri bakery. There was unanimity about their excellent quality. The guests enjoyed the products so much that all the plates were empty. However, it is a matter of enduring regret that many Indians have reservations about buying products of the bakery, because it is located in a slum.

Shakti Khazana runs as a cooperative. What the women of Govind Puri produce, they divide among themselves. To earn more, they need to sell more. The bakery products are excellent but the organisation is hamstrung for lack of a packaging unit. At present, for instance, the biscuits are only manually sealed in plastic bags. Proper packing and more distribution outlets is a genuine need. Even so, the women all earn between Rs.1000-2500 per month from their work in the cooperative. Katha also runs a voluntary community group of women in the slum called 'Maa Mandal'. The purpose of this congregation is to involve women in the slums in discussing issues of social and personal concerns, such as hygiene, safe motherhood, family planning, AIDS etc. Maa Mandal meets everyday with an attendance of at least 30-40 women.

Today, as many as 1100 children in Govind Puri are participants in the several units set up by Katha. Through the efforts of this organisation, as many as 5000 working children have been made self-reliant in the last 7 years. The organisation has also grown and has up to 60 employees, of which the greatest number are teachers. In order to run its expanded services, Katha requires an annual budget of

almost 30 lakhs. However, it has a deficit of almost half that amount. There is, thus, an urgent need for financial help. So far, the activities have been sustained because of partial funding by the Dorabjee Tata Trust. But this funding is likely to stop. Voluntary donations by concerned citizens will, therefore, become critical to sustain this laudable effort. There are enough rich people who can effortlessly sustain this organisation through their contributions. (*Katha can be contacted at A-3, Sarvodaya Enclave, Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi-110017.*)

### **Jan Madhyam**

*Ranjana Pandey*

*I often wonder that when most of us are so unconcerned about the needs of the able around us, how much more insensitive we must be to more vulnerable segments such as the disabled in our society. In Delhi alone, there are as many as 4.5 lakh 'handicapped' persons. Most of them can be easily integrated into society by the care and concern we show to them. But, this requires that we change our traditional attitude and mindset towards them.*

Jan Madhyam is an organisation whose slogan is "Helping the Disabled to Help Themselves". In 1982, two young ladies, Ranjana Pandey, an English Honours product of IP College, and Jolly Rohtagi, a product of the College of Art, created puppet songs and stories, and started an outreach programme for children in nursery schools. The success of this venture convinced them of the effectiveness of such tools as a means of communications. They discovered that the power of such methods —puppets, games, music and dance, painting and plays—could open the doors to learning for children with a range of problems. This led to Jan Madhyam's increasing involvement with disability.

Jan Madhyam believes that mentally challenged children have special needs, which can be taken care of. On this premise, its most significant contribution has been the creation of an Equal Opportunity Technical Training Centre at Aya Nagar near Mehrauli. This centre provides courses for as many as 50 disabled girl students above the age of 13 years in cooking and baking, tailoring and embroidery. Similarly, at Zamrudpur, for

mentally challenged boys above the age of 15 years, Jan Madhyam runs a centre for providing Office Assistant Skills. The curriculum at both centres encourages integration and self-reliance. It gives to the disabled a new sense of self-confidence and equips them to become financially self-reliant. Above all, it recognizes that those whom we consider disabled have actually capabilities which nobody thought they did. The philosophy behind this is that just as insulin and pacemakers restore an active life, socio-psychological and educational methods can enable young people with handicaps to develop into productive and well-adjusted members of society.

Jan Madhyam also seeks to spread awareness about the disabled. It compiles and distributes fact-sheets, booklets and directory of services for the disabled in Hindi and English. It conducts workshops and participates in Teacher Training Courses to inform educators about disabilities. It provides support and motivates Balwadis, schools and NGOs to integrate the disabled into their existing programmes.

Significantly, it also seeks to tackle a new set of problems that confront the disabled young, such as the need for companionship, the issue of marriage and that of social acceptance.

It is laudable, but I think ironical, that the biggest source of financial support in the work of Jan Madhyam have been foreign organisations: the British and Australian High Commissions, German donor agencies and Western multi-national organisations. The government makes no financial contribution to the working of Jan Madhyam. There are contributions by individual donors also, but only few.

At present, Jan Madhyam has only one vehicle to pick up the disabled children for its school. It needs more vehicles. It needs land, and it needs a bigger building. It has several schemes by which an individual or a corporate entity can help. These include sponsoring a trainee's education, sponsoring the visit of doctors, and assisting in the printing of a directory of services which is valuable reference tool for parents and voluntary organisations, (*Jan Madhyam can be contacted at 148, Zamrudpur, New Delhi-110 048.*)

### **Concern India Foundation**

*A. B. K. Dubhash*

The Concern India Foundation (CIF), established in 1989, is a non-profit, public charitable trust that supports development-oriented organisations working with the most vulnerable sections of society —children, women, youth, under-trial prisoners, the disabled and the aged. At least two organisations working for the less fortunate members of society —Mobile Crèches and Sai Kripa have been aided financially by this organisation.

CIF was set up initially in Mumbai by Mr. A.B.K. Dubhash, who, while working with a voluntary organisation dealing with the mentally handicapped, MIND, realised that often NGOs dedicated to laudable causes do not have the time, resources or the infrastructure needed to raise funds and resources vital to their task. Along with two other socially aware individuals, Mrs. Lopa Fradhan and Mrs. Naheed H. Sorabjee, Mr. Dubhash set up in 1985 the CIF to fulfil this void.

In Delhi, CIF is involved in several significant projects. Shakti Shalini is a short-stay home for women in distress and reaches out to those, who have been subjected to domestic violence, dowry harassment and abandonment and neglect. CIF is supporting three of their counselling centres at Jahangir Puri, Nangloi and Shakur ki Dandi, where significantly, legal aid is also made available. Ekta Mahila Kendra is an income generation programme for slum women belonging to the labour communities of Ber Sarai in South Delhi. This group of 100 women is given support in skilled training and production of household items and garment manufacture. So far, about 400 women have benefited under this project and are now successfully self-employed, or working in export houses. This Kendra too is aided financially by CIF.

CIF aid is also available to Kalakutir, a programme run in the slum, Narendra Niketan, near ITO. Kalakutir aims at rehabilitating the rag-picking children of the community by giving them non-formal education and vocational training. CIF also helps Navjyoti, a voluntary organisation founded in 1987 by Kiran Bedi which works for the most marginalised sections of ex-criminals and drug peddlers in the slums of the Yamuna Pushta. Another organisation which CIF supports is Ethic —an innovative programme involving the creation of a nursery of nutritious fruit trees in Ghamroj village of Haryana. Ethic seeks to enable villagers to have the combined benefits of more nutritional diets and a source of livelihood. Finally, CIF is involved in supporting a project called Nav Abhiyan which seeks to provide vocational training —beautician's courses —to about 30 adolescents from neighbouring villages in Delhi. The course has been affiliated to Shrameek Vidyapeeth which grants a certificate at the end of the course.

Before CIF decides to fund an NGO it carefully screens its functioning and aims. Its staffers make a field visit and prepare an evaluation report and a panel of advisors vet the project thoroughly. CIF assesses and evaluates the performance of the organisations it supports on a continuous basis.

To support voluntary organisations, CIF must raise funds itself. A team of dedicated fund-raisers meet Corporations, Trusts, and individuals to raise money. Besides general donations, money is raised through project - donor matches, donation schemes and special fund-raising events. Some funds are raised through the sale of cards and stationery items such as greetings cards, card boxes, telephone diaries etc. The team coordinates with various artists and printers to ensure quality and individuality. CIF also has an in-house creative team which designs exclusive cards for corporate companies.

CIF has learnt the hard way that raising funds in India is not easy, however laudable the project may be. It is the experience of many financial supporting agencies that Indians do not wish to donate. A major problem CIF faces while asking for funds is donor scepticism: people are not ready to trust an organisation which apparently has no other ulterior motive than to raise funds for the poor and the deprived. Even when people give, their demands for accountability are far in excess of the amount they have donated. The haggling is often painful. A person, who will buy 10 cards in aid of the poorest of the poor, will seek a maximum discount. Corporate philanthropy —with a few honourable exceptions — is largely a myth in India.

It will surprise many to know that the single largest donor of CIF projects in Delhi is a foreigner, a US citizen. The gentleman does not want his name to be revealed, but it is learnt that his interest in CIF began when he came across CIF's appeal to people to buy

its greeting cards in order to support its voluntary activities. On reading this appeal, this benefactor from the US came across to CIF's small office in Delhi. Today, he contributes as much as Rs. 10 lakhs per annum—one-third of the total budget of CIF for Delhi.

Many of us want to help but do not have time to do little more than give a donation. For such people, organisations like CIF are an ideal destination. You can make a donation; buy their greeting cards and stationery products; sponsor a fund-raising event; provide non-financial assistance such as furniture, office equipment, food items, medicines, clothes, toys, etc. Monetary donations are covered by Section 80-G of the Income Tax Act and the Foreign Contributions Regulations Act, 1976. (*Concern India Foundation can be contacted at 14, Birbal Road, 2nd Floor, Jangpura Extension, New Delhi-110 014.*)

### **Crusader for a Common Cause**

*H.D. Shourie*

In 1980, H.D. Shourie was 68 years old. He had led an averagely successful life as a bureaucrat. In 1947, at the time of partition, he was the city magistrate at Lucknow. In independent India his various assignments included that of being the first Director General of the Institute of Foreign Trade. Later, he also did UN assignments in Turkey and Germany.

On retirement, Shourie could have faded away into oblivion like many of his other contemporaries. But he did not do so because he believed that there was still the need for people like him to be actively involved in causes which troubled him as a citizen.

It was thus, that at a time when many of his age prepare to opt out of things, Shourie took the plunge of being actively involved in the area of voluntary public action. In 1980, at the age of 68, he helped found Common Cause.

The initial effort required not so much the flamboyance of inspiration, as diligence and sustained effort. A society had to be registered; this required a study of the constitutions of similar societies and the drafting of its forms of reference. A search was also required to be made for those who could be motivated to join the initial organisational hierarchy. Among the founding members of Common Cause were the noted writer Khushwant Singh, the late S. Ranganathan former Auditor General of India and Member of the Rajya Sabha, former Finance Secretary—now no more—K.P. Mathani, leading Advocate Fali Nariman, and Major General U.C. Dubey, a former Area Commander of Delhi.

Shourie was very clear about the character and aims of Common Cause. It would be a non-political, non-profit and voluntary organisation, its membership would be open to everybody, without any restrictions of caste, community or creed, and its aim would be to seek redress for problems of the people. It would pursue this through the dedication of persons to the aims of Common Cause; such people would not draw any remuneration. Routine costs would be financed by a nominal subscription charge.

Among the first issues which Common Cause successfully took up related to pensioners getting their due. Many people of Shourie's age had restricted themselves to individual lamentation; they were unwilling to do anything more in the matter. Shourie wrote a letter to the Editor of a leading daily, asking aggrieved pensioners to send letters



to him addressed to the Prime Minister, then Mrs Indira Gandhi. He got 9000 letters in response. Shourie wrote to the Prime Minister requesting an appointment to deliver these letters. He was informed that he could hand them over to a designated officer in the Prime Minister's Office. So, one fine day Shourie put 9,000 letters in the dicky of his car and drove to South Block to hand the letters. When this did not lead to results, Shourie filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court.

One concern, of course, was that legal proceedings could be both time-consuming and expensive; but —as often happens when you show courage and conviction — help comes unexpectedly. A public spirited lawyer offered to do the case free of cost. A year or so later, the Apex Court decided in favour of the petitioners. The landmark decision benefited 4 million pensioners.

This first case established the *bona fides* of Common Cause. To the sceptics it showed that activism could be efficacious. To those who doubted, it proved that there is a horizon beyond merely cribbing. In the years that followed, Common Cause has contributed in several matters which directly affect the lives of people like you and me. It has helped in establishing Consumer Courts in all Districts of the country; it has secured the re-constitution of the entire machinery for improving the functioning of Blood Banks in the country; it has intervened in the levy of tax by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi; it has been involved in property rectifying various areas of inefficiency of public sector functioning, such as electricity supply, telephone lines, airlines, banks, etc.

In some instances it has shown the boldness to challenge entrenched vested interests. It was in response to a writ petition by Common Cause that the Supreme Court directed that the expenditure incurred by a political party in a constituency will be clubbed with the expenditure incurred by the candidate; it was Common Cause again which petitioned the Court to ensure that political parties filed returns of annual income-tax; and, It was Common Cause which filed a petition challenging the pensions being given to Members of Parliament.

Today, Common Cause has a membership of over 5,000. It still functions from the house of H.D. Shourie. He receives about 30 letters every day and at least as many phone calls. He replies to every letter, aided only by a steno and a messenger. His dining room is piled high with files and papers which sometimes, in sheer desperation, and much to Shourie's annoyance, his wife summarily removes.

H.D. Shourie does not look his 86 years. He has an infectious sense of humour. His passion is painting; he enjoys his daily walk. And, today there is, perhaps succour even for the travails of his charming wife; Common Cause is soon to shift out of the Shourie home to a brand new premises in Vasant Kunj, an achievement greatly facilitated by the generosity of Vikram Lal, Chairman and MD of Eicher Good Earth and a member of Common Causes' Governing Council.

H. D. Shourie has a twinkle in his eye for he is involved in a cause larger than merely the sum of his own wants and pursuits; he still has a spring in his steps because he has proved, to himself, and to people like us, that when you resolve to do something, it can be done. (*Common Cause can be contacted at A-31, West End, New Delhi - 110021.*)

**Commitment to Slum Kids**

*Mamta & Sumeet Kachwaha*

On May 29, 1983, a young Indian couple —computer engineer Rajiv and his wife Neelu Kachwaha —were travelling in the US on a holiday just after their wedding. While on holiday, they met with a car accident which was fatal. Their lives were insured and their grieving father in India received a little over Rs. 20 lakhs in compensation. He decided to use this money for a charitable cause.

The money was deposited as a corpus. Initially, the senior Kachwaha's intentions were implemented through random donations to various projects in Rajasthan, the State from which the family hailed. However, in due course, and specially after Mamta entered the Kachwaha family by marrying Rajiv's younger brother Sumeet, the family decided to take up specific projects on their own.

Thus, in 1986 was born 'Swati', a unit of the Rajiv-Neelu Kachwaha Charitable Trust.

Swati has two projects in Delhi, one at Tigri near Khanpur, which is one of the largest slums in Delhi, and other at Kanak Durga Basti in R.K. Puram, Delhi. Over one lakh people live in Tigri and the population comprises mostly skilled and unskilled labourers who have migrated from neighbouring areas of Delhi. The literacy rate here is 28 per cent for males and as low as 12 per cent for females. Kanak Durga Basti is smaller in size. It has over 1,000 shacks and a population of about 6,000 in the very bastion of bureaucratic Delhi and in the heart of the upwardly mobile southern fringe of the city. This *basti* has a literacy rate of only 44 per cent for males and 36 per cent for females.

I asked Mamta Kachwaha as to how she chose those two locations for Swati's work. She said that she used to, in her spare time, visit different slums to see what she- could do to help with the obvious squalor all around. The thing that struck her most dramatically was the number of children not going to school. Hence, when Swati was founded, its primary focus was to impart literacy to drop-out children through non-formal educational methods.

To begin with, in 1988, Swati was allotted 2 large halls at Tigri by Manjit Singh, Commissioner (Slums), Delhi Government. The Non-formal Educational Centre of Swati began to function from these halls. When the project started there were only 40 children but within six months there were as many as 400 —a pointer to the magnitude of the uneducated young in the Capital of our country.

Working with the children, Swati came in contact with their parents. Many of the mothers living in the slums wanted Swati to assist them in income generation programmes. Hence, Swati started a Women's Educational and Vocational Centre. Again, the beginnings were small. A teacher was hired to teach the women tailoring. Gradually, the vocational centre diversified into other areas such as book binding, tie and dye work, and cooking. Interestingly, the vocational centre was initially housed in the two rooms of an unused toilet. The toilet was unusable because it had been wrongly built below ground level; the rooms were lying vacant and the Slums Division of the Delhi Government was kind enough to allow Swati their use. Today, the situation has further deteriorated and the toilets are submerged in stinking, stagnant water. The vocational centre has moved to hired rooms in another part of the slum.

The reason why Swati has focused on non-formal education is because much of the population in the slums remains migrational. Children stay there for a while, while their

parents work in Delhi, and then move back to their villages for indefinite periods. Every year, a new batch of children arrive at the slums. In such a situation, formal education is a waste of time and of little value. Swati's aim, therefore, is to provide a meaningful educational capsule which can help in imparting numerical and language literacy to a child during the short period of access that the organisation has to that child.

Today, Swati reaches out to as many as 800 slum children between the ages of 4 and 14 in Tigri and Kanak Durga Basti. It also helps to impart vocational training to about a 100 women living in these slums. Swati operates on an annual budget of about Rs. 6 lakhs. Rs. 3.5 lakhs comes from the interest on the initial corpus. For the balance Rs. 2,5 lakhs or so, Swati goes about with a begging bowl. Much of its costs are fixed on the salaries of the 28 people it employs. CRY has come forward to help and this in itself is a tribute to the good work that Swati is doing, because CRY helps only those organisations whose effectiveness it has carefully vetted. Other donors include UNICEF, the British, New Zealand and Australian High Commissions, and the American Women's Association. It is quite extraordinary —and shameful —that our Government has very little to contribute and, even more amazingly, there is such little coming in the form of corporate charity, or donations from the many affluent Indians in the country.

Many of those living in South Delhi would hardly believe that right under their noses there are slums, as large as cities unto themselves, and that there are organisations such as Swati which are genuinely attempting to upgrade the quality of life of those who live there. Swati needs your help and contributions to it are eligible for relief under Sections 12(a) and 8Q(g) of the Income Tax Act. (*Swati can be contacted at 1/6, Shanti Niketan, New Delhi-110 021.*)

### **The Woman Behind Medical Alert**

*Nirmala Bhushan*

Mrs. Nirmala Bhushan is an average middle class person. She lived in a middle class housing colony. For many years, she worked as a Deputy Manager in the Delhi State Industrial Development Corporation — a fairly middle class avocation. Her husband too was an employee of this corporation. She has a son -who is a computer consultant in the US. In 1990, she took voluntary retirement from DSIDC and could have faded into a retired life with its regular canvas of middle class achievements. But something happened in 1997 to change Mrs. Bhushan's life. On a visit to her son in the USA, she read an article in the Readers' Digest Issue of March 1997 about the Medical Alert Foundation's tagging system in the USA and Australia, and how it could play a key role in saving precious lives, particularly of those vulnerable to certain specific diseases, or unable to communicate on their own.

On reading the article, Mrs. Bhushan was convinced that there was a need for a Medical Alert in India. This thought grew with her to a point where, she says, she began to work on implementing the project almost immediately as soon as she landed on her return at Delhi airport.

The essential idea behind Medical Alert (India) is to create an informatics centre which can be of help to a person in case of an accident, or a medical emergency, while travelling alone or out of home. Those who enrol with this scheme are provided a metal

bracelet or necklace and an I-card, which gives identity to an anonymous victim, a senior citizen or a sick person. The bracelet or tag has vital information engraved on it, such as whether a person suffers from diabetes or asthma, or is the recipient of a heart valve plant, etc. It also provides such essential details as blood group, allergies to medication or any other disability. Above all, it gives a phone number—that of Medical Alert (India) which is monitored 24 hrs and can immediately provide complete details of the victim to the hospital or the police. Medical Alert (India) keeps a full record of its members certified by doctors which can be immediately retrieved in case of an emergency.

Obviously, the services of Medical Alert (India) are especially helpful to people who are deaf and dumb, or suffering from memory lapses or Alzheimer or any other similar disability. Obviously, the need for such a service is self-evident in a city like Delhi with over 3 million vehicles on the roads everyday and over 1,000 fatal accidents every six months.

It has been an uphill task for Mrs. Bhushan to set up Medical Alert (India). Her organisation is registered as a non-profit organisation, but she is yet to make a real headway in enrolling members. The lack of response is in no way due to any lack of effort on her part. She has pursued her inspiration with single-minded dedication. On course, her lack of knowledge about running such an organisation was initially an obstacle. To begin with, she had to do a lot of running around to even find out as to what is the best metal for tags in a climatic situation like India (stainless steel because it is the best non-reactive metal). Then she had to look for the right firm to engrave on the metal. Nothing in her life had equipped her for such an assignment. She had been a housewife, or an employee in a Government organisation. At best, she had served the housing association of the middle class residential complex in which she lives. But her perseverance and her sense of conviction was transparent. Her efforts included making endless rounds of hospitals and clinics and Government departments, such as the Delhi Administration, from which she tried unsuccessfully for some funds for publicity. To create awareness about the scheme, she spent Rs. 30,000 from her own pocket for advertisements in publications, and the printing of posters and pamphlets. She was helped by her son, who, she says, sends her money in support of the venture.

Thus far, only 20 members have enrolled with Medical Alert (India). Yet Mrs. Bhushan does not seem dejected. She has a ready smile and absolutely no bitterness.

Mrs. Bhushan is often chided by her friends and relatives who cannot understand as to why she spends so much of her time and money for Medical Alert (India). They simply cannot understand her obsession, specially the simple answer for her detractors: “I have received a lot from society. The time has come for me to give something back to it.” More than the cause, this is the most important message we can derive from Mrs. Bhushan’s example. (*Medical Alert can be contacted at 14, Kallol Apartment, 35, IP Extension, Patparganj, Delhi-110092.*)

## **Rashmi’s Vidya**

*Rashmi*

Ashok Mishra, a young scientist had happily been working for the last 10 years in the USA until 1977 when his wife, Rashmi Mishra brought him back home. Rashmi did so

because she felt at home in India. She was a lady with considerable talents herself: a trained dancer and a teacher of German in Modern School in New Delhi.

However, these talents did not build walls around Rashmi's ability to be aware of what was going on around her. Living on the IIT Campus where her husband was a Professor, she saw, one day, right next to her house, slum children playing in a dirty *nullah*, and she stopped to ask: "Why didn't you go to school?" The girls replied there was no need for them to go to school because they were girls. Also, they said, if they went to school, who would look after the younger siblings?

Rashmi soon realised that there were three major slums right next to an Institute of Excellence such as the IIT. These slums were created when the IIT Campus was built 35 years ago. The Campus displaced three villages. The villagers left the Campus but congregated around it to create urban slums.

The year was 1985. Rashmi spent considerable time in cajoling and persuading the girl children on the importance of education. She succeeded in persuading five of them to visit her home for at least two hours between 10 and 12 everyday. At this stage her aim was merely to create awareness about the need for education, through innovative and imaginative methods which would sustain the interest of these children. And thus was the idea of Vidya born.

Predictably, the numbers of children began to grow. Rashmi was greatly in need of space. The authorities in IIT were kind enough to give her the largely unused dressing room of the campus amphitheatre. The room was put to use and the pigeons who had made it their home were displaced.

Rashmi had a one-point agenda: educational empowerment for social change. She realised that many of her children were first generation school goers. Many of them had dropped out from government schools, thanks to unmotivated teachers and an excessively structured school curricula. She realised, therefore, the need for innovative methods. Her goal was to create, not only an interest in literary awareness, and numerical literacy, but also to instil a value system, especially for these children whose parents, for entirely economic reasons, had no time for their children. She believed in a "total child concept" where the school programme included emphasis on such vital matters as hygiene and health. She and her volunteers would happily give the children a bath or de-lice them themselves.

By 1999, Rashmi's fledgling effort had grown significantly. She now had to hire trained teachers in addition to existing volunteers. Today, Vidya educates a total number of 1,000 deprived children. It has regular classes from Nursery to Std. V. It also runs classes for Grades X and XII as part of the National Open School system. In addition, Vidya runs a community programme for women. In 1991, it sent 10 volunteers with basic training in adult education to the neighbouring slums with the express purpose of motivating learners. Soon, as many as 100 women were clamouring to become literate. Vidya now has five centres for women where, inter-alia, income generation skills in such areas as sewing, embroidery, stationery, candle making, book binding etc. are taught. It also runs several mobile crèches and health centres.

The various activities of Vidya are housed in as many as 7 areas, spread over from Pappan Kalan to Sainik Farms Obviously, the need is to have an integrated centre. Vidya

was granted land by Delhi Government at the upmarket Shanti Niketan. Amazingly, the Shanti Niketan Cooperative Society of well educated residents resented the intrusion of an organization children were already in government schools, but were provided additional coaching needed but not available at home; others were introduced to education through non-formal methods. A vocational aspect to the programme was introduced right from the beginning. Girls —and their mothers—were provided an opportunity to join stitching classes.

Most importantly, the children were provided one nutritional meal consisting of a glass of milk and a fruit. (The milk is fresh and pure, courtesy the cows on the Rai farm in Chhattarpur.) The mid-day meal acted as an incentive, especially in the first phase, when children, and their parents, had to be persuaded to take advantage of the facilities being offered by Malavika and her teachers. A special effort was made to ensure that the girls did not drop out of the programme. Malavika ensured that her colleagues and teachers visited the slums on a regular basis to maintain contact with the parents.

About a year ago, Malavika Rai decided to give her efforts an even more predictable, direct and concrete basis. She inducted 70 children from the slums to receive formal education within the Rai School complex. These children were provided uniforms, shoes, socks and pullovers, in addition to the mid-day meal and healthcare. The idea is to impart to them formal education up to Std. VIII. They will then be provided a certificate by the Rai School and assisted in joining regular government schools so that they are duly mainstreamed. Each of the 70 children are provided basic education kits, including books in Hindi and English, alphabetical knowledge, a book on forming words and sentences in Hindi, notebooks and pencils, erasers, sharpeners and crayons.

Special care is taken to ensure that the teachers for these students are not only trained but also come from such a background which enables them to establish the right degree of rapport with them.

Malavika's face glows when she talks about her "70 children". She now wishes to recruit as many every year and give them education free of cost inclusive of uniforms, mid-day meals and health care. When I asked her as to how much it cost her, she said: "Not much, I think we can do even more."

Her truly significant reply, however, was when I asked her whether the nearby slum would have as many as seventy uneducated children to send to her school year after year. Malavika said, "The slum has grown by as much as 10 times over the last ten years. There are certainly many more than 70 children out there who need to be educated." It is an answer which should make us think, and ask ourselves what we need to do about it.

### **Commitment to a Cause**

*Dr. Y.P. Anand*

Dr. Y.P. Anand, retired in December 1992 as the Chairman of the Railway Board, one of the highest positions in the civilian bureaucracy of this country. He had a fulfilling career, but he was, at another level, deeply discontented. When he met me, in his *khadi* shirt and greying temples, the sheer intensity of his anguish at the non-implementation of Article 45 of the Constitution, which had exhorted the State in 1950 to endeavour to

provide free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 to all the children of India within a decade, was transparent.

Dr. Anand may have become the Railway's first officer, but his canvas was much wider: his doctorate was on a sanitation system for India and his primary grouse related to our failures in the field of primary education! Retirement gave Dr. Anand the freedom to act upon his discontentment. He resolved, as he says himself, "to make a small start". The beginning was made with a core group of friends. In this core there were some retired bureaucrats like Budhiraja, Chief Civil Engineer of Northern Railways, R.N. Sethi, Director of the DCS & D, and also some others, like Dr. V.J. Anand, Head of Surgery of the Maulana Azad Medical College. Thus was 'Godhuli' born and registered as a society in 1994. Its aim was to provide basic education to the poorest category of children. In 1995, it started a school, *Bapu-Ba Godhuli Shiksha Grih* with 40 of the poorest children in the slums of Patparganj, in cooperation with a sister NGO, *Jan Utthan*. *Godhuli* is against non-formal education. Dr. Anand says that if we are not willing to provide such an education to our own children, how we can recommend it for others? The first 40 children were chosen carefully; all came from the poorest category and all were severely anaemic; 90 per cent of the first group were girls. The organisation made it a deliberate policy not to ask about the religion of the child. It committed itself to provide, in addition to schooling, nourishment; not merely a meal, but nourishing food, a Uniform which would give the child a sense of formal participation, books, stationery, etc. It also decided that the timings of the school would have to be such so as to suit the mothers who otherwise would need the girl-child for chores at home. *Godhuli's* school thus runs from 9.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. everyday. It has no conventional summer or winter vacations, and for a very good reason. This is the first generation of leaders. Any gap in attending school, and the drop-out rate shoots up. Since 1995, *Godhuli* has been admitting 40 more children from the slum every year. Today, there are 160 children and the school has grown from class I to Class V. Dr. Anand says with genuine pride that the attendance is as high as 90 per cent, and there has been, in these years, not a single drop-out.

The major problem of *Godhuli* has been lack of space. The school had begun in two rooms made available to it through *Jan Utthan* by the Slum Wing of the MCD. Dr. Manjeet Singh, Commissioner, Slums Division, readily agreed to help in providing *Godhuli* more space for its expanding school. Yet, it is sad that it has taken close to two years to add three rooms.

*Godhuli* runs on a shoestring budget. To educate 160 children, and to seek to provide them some nourishment, envisages a budget of about Rs. 5 lakhs a year. The only source of income is donations. Not surprisingly, the various charitable organisations in the railways network have been of some help. The *Mahila Samiti* has been a major pillar of support. However, such is the shortage of money that with the greatest reluctance *Godhuli* had to dilute its plan to provide nutritional food to these undernourished and anaemic children. Initially, they had sought to give a quarter litre of milk (Mother Dairy) per day per child, plus a fruit and a bun or a biscuit. Now they have funds only for the milk. This is indeed a great tragedy because there is nothing which comments more damningly upon a nation than the perennial hunger and malnutrition of its young. Dr. Anand speaks of how these children gulp down the milk he provides. He contrasts this with his own grand children, from a more privileged background, who have to be

persuaded to have their milk. The amazing thing is that a few months' nutrition makes a visible difference to the children at *Godhuli*. Their faces look brighter and their bones less obvious. Recently, in cooperation with the Masonic Society, all of *Godhuli*'s children have had a medical check-up. The society is having their health cards computerised.

In that vast stronghold of the urban middle class of India which is Patparganj, there is the hope of care and concern through such organisations like *Godhuli*, which deserves to be helped. Its overhead costs are next to nil. It only employs four teachers and a part-time chowkidar. Its governing body charges nothing for transport or stationery. They meet because they are inspired to do so. Dr. Anand's residence serves as the registered office of *Godhuli*. (*Godhuli can be contacted at 513, Pocket C, Sector A, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110 070.*)

### **Fighting Disability**

*Shayama Chona*

Often, people are not aware of the degree of effort and sacrifice that is hidden behind the successes of individuals. This is dramatically the case of Mrs. Shayama Chona, the renowned educationist and social worker, who is the Principal of Delhi Public School, R.K. Puram and was recently awarded the Padma Shree. Mrs. Chona is a pioneer in working for disabled children. Her organisation "Tamana" was registered in 1984. Fourteen years earlier, her daughter Tamana was born with cerebral palsy. It was an overwhelming tragedy. Mrs. Chona was shattered but not broken. Displaying rare determination that would make her what she is today, she decided to accept the reality and to fight to change it. She saw in her daughter's eyes a promise and in her smile a bewitching appeal which seemed to say to her: we will walk if you help, we will talk if you talk, and we can overcome together. She quickly overcame the normal human emotions when such tragedies take place — guilt, anger, rejection and questions as to "why me". Her motto became: the present is all I have. She began to see her daughter as a message from God to wake her up because there were things waiting to be done.

Mrs. Chona had no money. Her husband was an officer in the Army. There was little consciousness in the country then of the disabilities sector. In a real sense, the battle she began was begun alone. At that time, she was a permanent lecturer employed by the UGC. Given her husband's transferable job, she taught in Bangalore, Assam and Chandigarh, but her principal concern was the future of her daughter. For 9 years, Tamana did not have the ability to even raise her neck. She would lie in Mrs. Chona's lap while she did her reading or college corrections. It was almost as if she was still carrying her daughter within.

With the perseverance that only a mother who is determined to fight can have, Mrs. Chona overcame obstacles to consult some of the best physicians and institutes in the UK and the USA. The first prognosis in the US, when Tamana was just 4 months old, was that the possibilities of recovery were zero. Any other person would have been daunted, but not this lady. She refused to let hope die and became, in the process, a therapist herself, keeping an open mind for any possible remedy. By the age of 10, Tamana had begun to show signs of distinct improvement.



It was by learning from her own experience that Mrs. Chona decided to widen her canvas of concern. As she says: “When you become sensitive to pain, everybody’s pain is yours.” Mrs Chona knew that with all her constraints, she was still able to do for her daughter what many in similar circumstances could not possibly have hoped to do. It was this sense of concern that led to the registration of “Tamana” in March 1984 as a non-profit voluntary association created solely with the purpose of helping the cause of developmentally disabled and minimal brain damaged children. Tamana, as its brochure says, literally means a longing, an aspiration. The association could not have been more aptly named, for at its heart lies “an earnest longing, a life-long aspiration to see disabled children on their feet as happy, useful, integrated members of society.”

The task was difficult. Even before she had registered her society, she had started to run a class for the disabled in a one-room school in Greater Kailash. From this one-room school, she moved her school to Safdarjung where she literally worked from rooms little better than jhuggis with thatched roofs, under the shade of trees. Help came from unexpected quarters. An article on her appeared in a local daily around that time. The same day she got a call from one Mrs- Singh, who was visiting from the USA. Mrs. Singh said that she wanted to hand over to her money equivalent to US \$ 2000. Mrs. Singh had been looking for a genuine person/organisation to -help. Such a person, she was convinced, was Mrs. Chona & “Tamana”. The money was handed over in dramatic circumstances. Mrs. Singh was returning the same day to the US. She asked Mrs. Chona to come and collect the money by meeting her at a petrol pump near Dhaula Kuan.

There were others also who helped. Mrs. Chona recalls with special gratitude the assistance she received from Mrs. Margaret Alva, Major HPS Ahluwalia and the late Rajiv Gandhi. Finally, the Delhi Government allotted land to Tamana in Vasant Vihar. The journey had been successful but not without its traumas.

When Tamana was housed in Safdarjung, one day the MCD demolished its improvised hutments. Mrs. Chona’s pleas had then fallen on deaf ears. Apparently, some influential person wanted to buy that property, where now a large apartment complex has come up.

As of now, 200 disabled children are on Tamana’s daily rolls. Its outreach programme seeks to cover children from Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan. Tamana’s annual budget is Rs. 15 lakh. Out of this, Rs. 7-8 lakh is received as grant from Government. The rest of the money is raised through donations. In our fast-paced world, we sometimes forget that there are as many as 20 million disabled children in India. They need our help. Mrs. Chona is seeking to provide it. (*Tamana can be contacted at D-6, Vasant Vihar, New Ddhi-110 057.*)

### **Hope Within the Wall**

*Firoz Bakth Ahmed*

It is always important to remember that within the unity of Delhi, there are many types of Delhi. One of the most distinct, and perhaps under the greatest threat of extinction, is the Walled City or Shahjahanbad. For many of us who live outside it, Shahjahanbad is a curiosity, a historic relic, an overcrowded hangover of the past, a commercial slum, a decadent and declining backwater, of whose vicissitudes we are unmindful except for the

rare visit to *Karim's* or *Paranthewali Gah* or *Dariba*. But, beyond these stereotypes, Shahjahanbad consists also of people, and it was a concern about their problems that led to the creation of a society called Friends for Education (FFE). Several years ago, in May 1984, Firoz Bakht Ahmed, who was freshly out of university, accompanied by M. Atyab Siddiqui, a lawyer, and Iqbal Mohammed Malak, a businessman, met at the Ballimaran home of Railway union leader Aftab Ahmed Siddiqui. Their meeting on that day led to the creation of FFE. According to Firoz, FFE has three primary objectives. Firstly, it seeks to do something about the complete collapse of civic amenities and civic sense in the walled city. Drains are choked, there is very little potable water, sewers overflow, the sanitary system is non-existent, electrical wires hang precariously over one's head, fires are waiting to happen, inflammable chemical are stored callously, factories operate illegally, unauthorised occupation has almost swallowed up the streets, and pollution is unbearable. In other words, right under the awning of a bustling commercial hub, an entire sub-city is close to a dangerous civic collapse.

The second aim of the FFE is to take a hard look at the level of education in the walled city. Firoz speaks darkly about the dingy school rooms, without ventilation, the lackadaisical quality of teachers, and the surprising uninvolvedness of parents. He points out with particular emphasis, the complete lack of interaction between the management of the school, the principal and the parents. To counter this abysmal state of affairs, FFE started a Mass Awareness Programme - through posters. In the walled city, posters are a very effective means of communication. The posters were in Urdu and their essential message was to exhort parents to send children to school, to clearly spell out the responsibilities of teachers, parents and the management, and to help propagate a 'school culture' by stressing, for instance, the importance of a proper school uniform.

The FFE was particularly concerned about the Muslim girl child. However unbelievable it may appear, 60 per cent of male children in the walled city do not go to a formal school. According to Firoz, this percentage for the Muslim girl child is as high as 70. The reasons are predictable: age-old biases which see the girl child as only a property to be married off, and the fear that an educated girl may become a 'modern liability' to her parents. FFE prepared 5,000 questionnaires in Urdu and Hindi and sent them to parents with a view to persuading them to send the girl child to school. These questionnaires were distributed by post and by personal contacts. FFE did not receive more than 100 replies. The important thing, however, is that an attempt was made (and is being made) to change a situation which, by any standard of human dignity, is unacceptable.

Firoz has a touch of anger in his voice when he cites examples about the condition of schools in the walled city. He gives the example of a school which was earlier in *Sarai Khalil* but was demolished during the Emergency. Soon thereafter, it resurfaced at the *Idgah*, but for the past 24 years has continued to function in tents. Many visits to the management and other authorities have not succeeded in getting the school proper premises. It is not surprising, therefore, that even this year; only 15 to 20 per cent of the students in the walled city were able to pass the school-leaving exams.

A third concern of FFE is to try and salvage the historical and cultural heritage of Shahjahanbad. It was the initiative of FFE that led to the rehabilitation of Zauq's tomb on

which, until very recently, a public urinal existed. (Shame on us!) It was also FFE which field a Public Interest Litigation in 1996 for the restoration of Ghalib's *haveli*.

The Hon'ble High Court of Delhi has responded positively to the PIL. A few citizens have now joined together to form a Ghalib Memorial Movement to ensure that a proper memorial is built in the name of the poet at the place of his stay. Firoz is an example of a concerned citizen. His by-line in newspapers is familiar. He teaches at the Modern School in Barakhamba Road. He is young and has much more to contribute, (*friends for Education can be contacted at 1489, Gali Qasim Jaan, Ballimaran, Delhi-110006.*) ‘

### **Delhi's Angels**

*Ashraf Patel & Jaimala Iyer*

I have been fortunate to meet Ashraf Patel and Jaimala Iyer, two young ladies who deserve to be written about. Ashraf is a founder member of an organisation called Pravah. She is a product of XLRI, Jamshedpur. In 1993, she was working as the Head of Personnel in Escorts Financial Services. She, and a group of 7-8 young professionals, often met to discuss the need for a change in attitudes and in values, particularly in the aftermath of Ayodhya in 1992.

This concern changed to action when somebody said that powerful but very simple sentence: "Let us do something to change things." This small group of concerned individuals first decided to "change" things in the DDA colony, Siddharth Extension, where many of them lived. Working with the Residents' Association, they did a workshop with children in the colony to reinforce the simple message that each of them needs to be concerned about the environment around them and do something to improve it.

The next step was a more formal exercise. A workshop on "Environment and Violence" was conducted by them at the Ramjas School in R. K. Puram. The feedback from the principal and students was so positive that this became the turning point. In September 1993, Pravah was formally registered as a non-profit society committed to enabling youth to become the leaders for social change.

In the last few years, Pravah has conducted several very innovative programmes. In over 20 schools in Delhi, it has conducted a programme called *From Me to We*, The main focus of this awareness raising programme is to encourage children to get out of their shells and become aware of larger societal issues and the need to initiate change. A second programme implemented by Pravah is SMILE (Students Mobilisation Initiative for Learning through Exposure) for college students. The message is the same: generating awareness in the young on social issues, and equipping them with problem-solving skills to facilitate their participation in development action.

Apart from facilitator's interaction, SMILE also involves intensive exposure, wherein a group of college students are exposed for several weeks to an NGO working in the development sector so as to develop in them a sensitivity to disadvantaged communities and the issues affecting them. Jaimala Iyer is very much involved in Pravah. She is also a founder member and treasurer of the rather curiously titled organisation called KLOD-B. KLOD-B stands for Knowing-Loving-Delhi-Better. Jaimala has done a Diploma in

Advance Theatre Direction under Ebrahim Alkazi and has worked extensively in the field of drama and education.

KLOD-B was born in 1996. Its essential aim is to make those who live in Delhi more aware of this city and its heritage. Jaimala and two of her friends, Ayushman and K.K. Singh, were concerned that people live in Delhi like mercenaries. They do not know their city, its past and its history, and have no sense of belonging. The city is a whipping boy for their angst. It is an object of anger and revile, never the beneficiary of their love and compassion. The inhabitants of Delhi have thus become chronic whines. They are mere residents but not citizens of the city where they live.

KLOD-B's aim is to rectify this state of affairs, not by glossing over the travails of the city, but by creating in Delhites a sense of identification with the city. This is a sorely needed activity.

KLOD-B organises walks on every Sunday to familiarise students and citizens with the monuments and heritage of Delhi. It also has a programme called "Ibn-Batuta" for schools. School children are taken on excursions to monuments and exposed to the historicity of the city, not through a dry lecture in history, but through innovative activities involving drawing and theatre, and in a sense, by creatively reliving the past. KLOD-B also organises slide shows and street plays.

It has done some work in helping to cleanse the Yamuna River and in preserving the southern ridge. It wants to adopt monuments, an initiative that can greatly assist the Government in preserving Delhi's heritage.

Ashraf and Jaimala are examples of concerned citizens who have accommodated in their successful professional lives an agenda of social sensitivity which more people need to follow. (*Pravah can be contacted at 68-A, Gautam Nagar, New Delhi-110 049.*)

### **A Matter of Vision**

*Susy Joseph & Mary Asha Lata*

In August 1999, World Vision of India (WVI), the Indian chapter of an international organisation based in California, organised a '24 hours, to a Hungry Child'. The idea is that it was not enough for those who have a surplus to give away something in charity (although that too is something); what is more important is that the person who gives also knows what it is like to be hungry.

WVI has its Indian headquarters in Chennai, and its activities are spread across the country. It does significant work in Delhi. In South Delhi, it is working in two slums near Nehru Place, three slums in Srinivaspuri, at Garhi near East of Kailash, in Okhla and in the Barapullah slum in East Nizamuddin. In north Delhi, it is operating in the slum clusters at Rohini and those near the Balsava Dairy across the GT Karnal Road.

WVI concentrates its work in three fields: education, health and income generation. These areas have been chosen because most of the slum dwellers are migrants. What is imparted to them in these areas is something that can travel with them.

In education, WVI works to facilitate the entry of slum children into schools. This facilitation can be at such basic levels as procuring a birth certificate for a child. But more than that, it consists of conducting non-formal educational classes to equip children

to enter school. Most slum children are over-aged, or school drop-outs. WVI assists in integrating them into the mainstream. With this aim, it liaises with schools, and with parents who need to be persuaded to send their children to school. A special focus is to provide these underprivileged children coaching in the key subjects of Mathematics, Science and English.

In the field of health, WVI provides the personnel to man two mobile health clinics provided by the Delhi Government. These include doctors and nurses. It also trains volunteers from the community to assist the clinics. WVI is especially concerned about spreading awareness of TB, which, according to Susy Joseph and Mary Asha Lata, the two motivated workers of this organisation, is rampant in Delhi slums. According to them, most TB patients do not complete the prescribed course of medication. TB medicines are expensive and are extremely bitter in taste. Incomplete therapy leads to drug resistance. A very important activity performed by the volunteers trained by WVI is to first identify suspected TB cases, and then monitor and help patients to complete the prescribed course of medication. The awareness programme also covers the all-important areas of sanitation, personal hygiene, and sex education.

In the field of income generation, WVI's strategy is to organise self-help groups in slums, primarily among women. Such groups, numbering from 10-20 women, are encouraged to save money on a voluntary basis. This money is then deposited in a bank, and becomes the basis of a micro-financing enterprise for which the women themselves lay down the rules. A parallel activity is to encourage women entrepreneurship, WVI provides vocational training in tailoring, *agarbatti* (incense sticks), candle, chalk making, embroidery, crochet work, and various other activities. The main aim here is to make women self reliant on a sustained basis. The idea is also to develop skills identified from within the slums. For this purpose, the workers of WVI have conducted a systematic survey of the slums.

A very significant area of WVI's work is the legal awareness programme by which underprivileged women are made aware of their rights. Susy and Mary say, "on several occasions, women who were made aware took action on their own against unauthorised liquor shops, illegal lotteries and child prostitution."

WVI is funded both from its international affiliated organisation and also by funds raised locally. These come from its child sponsorship programme and from donations which are eligible for tax exemption under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act. The 24-hour famine campaign is also a money-raiser. Last year, those who fasted for 24 hours to feel what the hungry child goes through, cumulatively donated as much as Rs 51 lakh. (*World Vision India can be contacted at B-3, Lajpat Nagar II, New Delhi-110024.*)

### **Motorcade Mayhem**

*Dr. Shreekant Gupta*

On July 23 this year, Dr. Shreekant Gupta, 40, was on his way to Delhi School of Economics where he teaches. He was coming from Moolchand Hospital where his mother was admitted. He was driving a Zen. On the Ring Road near Yamuna Nagar, he heard a siren which was part of the Lt Governor's motorcade. Shreekant says he couldn't

give way because of traffic. He then heard his car number being announced on a loudspeaker. In a little while, the motorcade passed. But at the next red light, he was asked to pull over and produce his licence. The constable said he had not given way to a VVIP motorcade. He was also told that he had 'misbehaved'. At this point, assistant sub-inspector Kavita Rana arrived and asked for his license. Shreekant wanted to speak to a senior officer. Soon, Inspector Ojha arrived, who too asked for his license. Shreekant says he said: "I'm a citizen of a free country." However, he handed over his license. A challan was made which, among other things, said Gupta was driving "rashly and dangerously", and that he "didn't allow the Lt. Governor's car to pass". When Gupta protested, the police impounded his car. He got back his car alright, after pleading guilty, which he did to avoid delay. Outraged, Shreekant, along with Mallick, a freelance motoring correspondent, filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Delhi High Court on the generic question of VIP security. The PIL was heard on August 5, 1999, and the proceedings are continuing.

I have narrated the above sequence of events with a purpose. It is not my intention to deliberate on the merits of the case. Obviously, some security for VVIPs is required. Citizens are required to cooperate in ensuring such security. However, what is important from my point of view is Shreekant's courage in fighting against what he believed to be injustice. This is what is wanting in most of us. Even the educated among us effort-lessly compromise with injustice. We are bullies when in a group, and cowards when alone. Our approach is to speak about courage in theory, and compromise in practice. We are just not prepared to suffer for the courage of convictions. We need more people like Shreekant. So often, we are outraged at the behavior of those in authority but are unwilling to take on the system at personal cost. What we need are not heroes but alert citizens who, with quiet dignity, are willing to assert their rights. This is precisely the point that Shreekant makes. He writes: "What is amazing, however, is how submissive even the educated in the city are of such violations of their basic freedoms-... A major problem is ignorance of our rights and of the laws." This is entirely true. For instance, how many of us know that organisations such as the Delhi Vidyut Board or the MTNL or the MCD are required by law to incorporate a Citizens Charter of Rights? We need to study these charters, and need to assert our rights when they are infringed. Both our ignorance and our cowardliness must go. Shreekant's story, which is still unfolding, is important because it should help in making each of us make the resolve that the next time we are victims of injustice, or even a witness to injustice, we will assert our rights as citizens. I have often said that there is only one definition of an orphan in India — someone who has neither money nor influence. This situation must change.

### **Bagh Bhadur**

*Vinod Dua*

You know him as a popular television personality. But Vinod Dua has demonstrated that he is also capable of being a good citizen. I write because more of us need to know that it is possible to be involved in the world around us and make the crucial transition from being just residents to being concerned citizens.

This personal concern found an opportunity to be voiced when Vinod was present at Lieutenant Governor Vijai Kapoor's house-warming party at his official residence. Vinod

mentioned that something needs to be done about preserving Qudsia Bagh. The LG was in complete agreement. In fact, Kapoor himself had very happy memories of the Bagh when he was a student at St. Stephens. He promised to follow up on what Vinod had said. A few days later when Vinod ran into the LG again, it was Kapoor who mentioned Qudsia Bagh to Vinod. He wanted Vinod to be involved in the effort to save the Bagh. Vinod was initially hesitant since he was a bit suspicious about getting involved with bureaucratic solutions. However, he could not say 'no' to the LG's request.

Lieutenant Governor Vijai Kapoor constituted a committee under the Chairmanship of Vinod Dua with the specific mandate to cognize illegal, unauthorized and incongruous land use within the precincts of Qudsia Garden. Members of this Committee were largely representatives of such government departments as the MCD, Horticulture Department, the Forest Division, etc. As Chairperson, Vinod had the option of co-opting members to the committee. He co-opted two public-spirited citizens living in Civil Lines, senior citizen Mahesh Narayan and Advocate K. C Jain. For the next few months, (his committee got down to work in earnest. Vinod says that by now he has visited Qudsia Garden several times at night, during the day, and at dawn.

In the course of its investigation, the committee found, scandalously enough, that within the Garden a private contractor has set up a tourist home along with a restaurant called Cozy-O-Cozy (!); a Mughal period mosque under the jurisdiction of the Archeological Survey of India is under the illegal occupation of a self-styled Imam who *is* running a Madarsa, and has even managed to get electricity, water and telephone connections; a tennis court has been converted into a semi permanent structure of a marriage *pandaal* and leased out to a local tent house owner; and finally, an orphanage called *Palna* has been set up by the Delhi Council for Child Welfare within the Qudsia Garden.

Vinod has now submitted an interim report of the committee to the LG. He is confident that on the basis of this report the rape of Qudsia Bagh will cease. He is conscious that there are strong vested interests involved, and those who are being sought to be removed have powerful patrons. But he is committed to seeing that the illegality ceases and Qudsia Bagh is allowed to remain the beautiful historical garden that it was.

The desecration of Qudsia Bagh is not an isolated event. If we look around, we will find that there are other monuments and heritage sites which are being vandalised. Beyond heritage, there are other causes such as the maintenance of parks, or the removal of garbage or the cleansing of a marketplace, where concerned citizens can be involved. The initiative of the Lieutenant Governor to involve a citizen outside government is a very welcome move. Ultimately, the Government needs to set up a partnership with concerned and public-spirited citizens to achieve desirable goals. Such a partnership 'de-bureaucratizes' government initiatives, and provides an opportunity for citizens to be involved in a constructive manner in the public realm. The essential prerequisite, of course is that we have more citizens who, like Vinod Dua, are willing to take up public causes over and above the many preoccupation of their own little worlds.

**Lead Kindly Light**

*Rita Kaul & Geeta Seshamani*

Many of us who live in this city, and indeed in other urban centres across India, are probably unaware of how cruel we appear to any foreign observer where animals are concerned. I have seen children tie a live rat to a rope and batter it to death against a wall. I have seen a pup tied to a brick and left on the middle of a road on a cold winter night to die under the wheels of a car. I have heard pigs being slaughtered by an iron rod rammed into them while they are still alive. We have all seen stray dogs, emaciated and sick, being kicked about. We have also seen cows all over the city with their bones pathetically sticking out and, what is even worse, lying dead or injured after being hit by cars and trucks.

Why do we not notice? Our religions and traditions teach us to care for life. Many of us are proud to be vegetarians. Hindus are proud to be cow worshippers.

Why then do we accept such cruelty all around us, and do nothing about it?

Rita Kaul and Geeta Seshamani decided many years ago to do something. Geeta is a Parsi Punjabi married to a South Indian. She is a Reader in English Literature at Gargi College. Her husband is an Engineering Consultant. Rita is a Bengali who has lived in UP and is married to a Kashmiri. She works in a freight moving company. For many years now, what they earn is being spent in sustaining a truly remarkable organisation called Friendicoes.

Friendicoes began in 1979 in two shops measuring 17 sq mts allotted by the late Sanjay Gandhi under the Defence Colony flyover. A personal experience proved a turning point in Geeta's life. In the '70s she was returning from a *darshan* of Satya Sai Baba who was visiting Delhi. On the road she saw a stray dog lying inert. She thought it was dead. But just then a motorcycle went over its legs and it raised its head in pain. She then realised that it was alive but paralysed. She rushed to help. The dog died in her arms even as she was trying to give it some *vibhuti*. It was a transforming experience. Similarly, Rita, from a very early age, was an animal lover. She told me that when still very young, she preferred to spend a night out with some kittens thrown into the gutter than obey her mother's instructions to come home.

It has been a battle for survival for Friendicoes. In the initial days, with almost no help and no money and only a part-time vet, Geeta and Rita kept dozens of cats and dogs at their own home. Things have improved now, but given the enormity of their jobs, only marginally. Two more shops have been allotted. An ambulance has been donated by Tata Tea and another by RSPCA of the UK. At any given time, the shelter has 150-200 dogs, cats, monkeys, cows, donkeys, horses, birds and even camels. The shelter feeds, medicates and rehabilitates these animals. The ones that cannot be rehabilitated become permanent residents at the shelter.

Over the years, over 5000 dogs and cats have found loving homes by the Association. Friendicoes is also involved in a major programme to sterilize dogs, and provide free medical treatment to over 1,200 horses and donkeys as part of its mobile Tonga Programme.

Nothing demonstrates how severely the British colonised our minds than the fact that most middle class Indians hanker only for a 'pedigreed' pet. Our own breed of dogs, whom the Brits called 'mongrels', but who are the most highly pedigreed (since there has been no dilution of their blood for centuries) roam around underfed and uncared for. The



number of animals who are on the streets is a shocking sight for any foreigner. It reflects very poorly on us. We need to do something about it. We need to adopt stray dogs on the streets and give them homes. And, we need to help organisations like Friendicoes.

Friendicoes is very short of money. It needs your help. Corporate and business houses who are in Delhi and who are so concerned about the image of their city in the eyes of their foreign partners should specially heed this call. (*Friendicos can be contacted at 277 & 173, Defence Colony Flyover, New Delhi-110024.*)

### **Lend a Helping Hand**

*Kiran Hukku*

Thirty years ago, in 1969 in Bombay, a young girl, not yet 10, working as a domestic servant in a middle class home was diagnosed with leukaemia. The Sapus who employed her took her to the Tata Memorial Cancer Hospital. The child was cured but the Sapus were greatly influenced by the misery of cancer patients, particularly the terminally ill. They founded the Cancer Patients Aid Association (CPAA).

It took 10 years for this Association to come to Delhi. In 1979, a Naval officer was transferred to Delhi. His wife, Zutshi had worked with the CPAA in Bombay. She began a branch in Delhi. The baton was taken from her by two very motivated ladies: Kiran Hukku, a teacher, and Sudha Murgai, the wife of an Army officer.

The CPAA aims to spread awareness about cancer and helps in its early detection. In the case of the underprivileged, it prepares the patient and the family to accept the disease and fight it, and seeks to provide emotional and financial support to them. Its main functions include disbursement of free medicines to needy patients and the family, holding detection camps and providing rehabilitation to the patient or a member of the family.

It is interesting to note that the Bombay branch of the CPAA is much bigger than that of Delhi. I asked Mrs. Hukku why. She says the difference is in the attitude. People in Bombay are willing to help, not only in money but also in kind. The Bombay branch of the Association has been given both land and a building by concerned citizens. In Delhi, the attitude is, 'What do I get out of this?'

The CPAA has several innovative schemes which can be supported by your donation. They *have* an 'Adopt a Child Scheme'; a 'Friends of Cancer Scheme', and a 'Special Cancer Insurance Policy'. The Association operates from three well-known hospitals; AIIMS, Safdarjung and LNJP, where its volunteers are present between 10 and 12 noon at the Radiotherapy Departments on specified days of the week (Mondays and Wednesdays at AIIMS, Tuesdays at Safdarjung and Fridays at LNJP). Future dreams include the setting up of a cancer detection centre, a rehabilitation centre, an equipped ambulance and the creation of cancer information kiosks.

I often wonder what motivates individuals to give their life to a cause. Mr and Mrs Hukku are a couple for whom the CPAA is a crusade. Mrs Hukku has been working in the organisation for the last 20 years. Hukku was a Sales Manager in a private pharmaceutical firm. On retirement, he says he has become 'a professional beggar for cancer patients'. Twice a week Hukku undergoes dialysis. And yet, there is very little

bitterness or regret in his attitude. His life has a purpose, a cause which goes beyond his own ailment.

There are others who help. One of the volunteers is 11-year-old Tarana Moitra, a student of Bal Bharti Air Force School. Her mother works with the CPAA. Tarana is an effective fund-raiser. For her, no occasion is too unimportant to raise funds.

Every year on September 22, the CPAA celebrates the national Cancer Rose Day. The aim of this event is to make cancer patients feel special and to bring a smile on their faces. This year, this event was organised at the Shanti Avedna Ashram, a cancer hospice near Safdarjung. It is heartening that several institutions in Delhi came forward to help. Nathu Sweets provided the snacks, Reckitt and Colman donated hygiene products and the Traders Association Janpath Bhavan collected gifts. The children of the Vasant Vihar branch of the DPS, the Tagore International School and Vidya Niketan put together a cultural performance. The children of the Kulwant Rai School of Lodhi Colony deserve special mention. Having read about the event in the newspapers, they come on their own to present roses to the cancer patients. Several celebrities also readily collaborate: Sushma Seth, Nafisa Aii, Manpreet Brar and Blossom Kochar.

It is time that the CPAA in Delhi grows to equal that of Bombay. This MGO survives purely on public support: from donations and funds raised by schools and colleges etc. At present, the financial position of the organisation is precarious. Your donations to such a noble cause matter. All donations are tax deductible under Section 80 (G) of the Income Tax Act. (CPAA can be contacted at C-1 / 807, Mayfair Towers, Charm wood Village, District Faridabad-121009.) Shri Hukku passed away some time ago.

### **Hope for the Millennium**

*Sanjiv Kaura*

The one thing that Sanjiv Kaura kept emphasising to me was that he was averse to personal publicity. It required effort, therefore, to ferret out details about him.

It's an interesting story. A product of St Xaviers, Ranchi, and SRCC, Delhi, Sanjiv became a CA in 1990 from Price Water House. Till 1996, he was managing director of the multinational Id's Southern African branch in Zambia.

In January 1999, he resigned and returned home. He decided to apply his business management skills on a full-time basis to the social issues plaguing India. Among these, he chose the cause of universalising elementary education, especially for the girl child. In zeroing on this issue, Sanjiv was systematic, if also unconventional. He wrote to 100 eminent Indians, asking them to elucidate their vision of India. The list included those in the bureaucracy, in the Cabinets, in public life, in the corporate world, and the social sectors. On the basis of these responses and his own inclination, Sanjiv chose universal elementary education.

In pursuit of this cause, Sanjiv became the founder of the Hope 2000 movement. The movement has certain interesting aspects. Firstly and not surprisingly, its focus is on the underprivileged children. Secondly, it doesn't seek to set up new institutions. The aim is to upgrade and reinforce the existing infrastructure, especially in government-run schools. Thirdly, it seeks to improve the quality of life of the child.

Sanjiv's first project was to take eight underprivileged children to witness the two semi-finals and finals of the 1999 World Cup Cricket at Lords, UK. The Children — Divakar, Kavita, Maikleene,

Birju, Sarthak, Kapila, Chinamal and Mayank — were taken from the lower section of society, especially from institutes like Deepalaya and Prayas, working for the rehabilitation of slum and street kids. The trip was partly financed by a finance company in Manchester willing to assist Sanjiv in his work here, and partly by Sanjiv himself and his family. For the children, it was a dream come true. Avid cricketers, they could never have thought they'd witness the finals. They returned inspired to fulfil their dreams. Initially, Hope 2000 has identified four Delhi-based schools for the underprivileged. These will become laboratories for implementing various ideas like outdoor training, opening a library bank, taking children to adventure trails, and other activities that can improve the kids' quality of life.

Sports will be an important element in this effort. It is significant that among those who are working with Sanjiv is Bishen Singh Bedi, founder of the Bishen Bedi Cricket Coaching Trust that organises summer camps for kids, and is almost 70 percent free of cost for talented underprivileged children. Hope 2000 has a group of committed and well-known citizens to assist it: Nafisa Ali, H K Dua, Gurcharan Das, Jatin Das, M F Husain, S K Mishra, Shri Paul, Pankaj Udhas and J J Valaya. Sanjiv told me that the first thing he told his wife after marriage was, "Please, don't pressurise me to go to the USA." This is so because Sanjiv's parents and his sister are already US citizens.

Sanjiv has returned to India and has taken a break from his professional practice as he believes that his contribution may be one drop in the ocean but it will cause a ripple effect.

"My micro-level effort, "Sanjiv Says, "should contribute to the macro good." (Since then Sanjiv has become the National Coordinator of the National Alliance for the Fundamental Right of Education NAFRE. *NAFRE can be contacted at 249, Tribhuvan Complex, 10th Milestone, Mathitra Road, New Delhi-110065.*

## **Preserving Childhood**

*Sanjoy Roy*

Mira Nair deserves the limelight for her film *Salaam Bombay*. But the lady who deserves much more recognition is her mother, who runs the Salaam Baalak Trust with the talented young theatre personality and film maker Sanjoy Roy.

Salaam Baalak Trust started in 1998 primarily to rehabilitate the kids Mira-had cast in *Salaam Bombay*. The primary focus of the Trust is to take care of kids who have run away from home.

UNICEF estimates that there are three million such children on Delhi's streets. Sanjoy thinks it is below a million. These are staggering figures. These children run away from home largely to escape unbearable poverty. They come to the streets of our city from the poorest parts of the country: Bihar and Eastern UP, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. Sanjoy says that he has rarely met a homeless kid in Delhi from Punjab or

Haryana, Their ages range from 6 months to 18 years. The very young are usually brought along by an elder sibling. Else, they're found abandoned.

The Salaam Baalak Trust has a centre at the New Delhi Railway Station — the entry point for most runaway kids. Homeless children are often brought to its centre by the police. Word of mouth also helps —kids who have benefited from the centre tell the new arrivals. Now, there is even a telephone helpline. You can dial 1098 and the Trust will come and collect a homeless child.

Once a homeless, runaway child comes to the Trust, it seeks to rehabilitate him or her. The very young are often given to Paalna — the efficient organisation run by the Delhi Council of Child Welfare. Children between 2-14 years are sent to the three homes run by the Trust in Pahar Ganj. It also runs a home exclusively for the girl child in Uttam Nagar. Often, children need immediate help. They have been abused or beaten. The Trust, therefore, has nine contact centres in Pahar Ganj alone. It is assisted in its medical requirements by Lady Hardinge and Kalawati Saran Hospital.

Salaam Baalak Trust does more than offering a homeless child warmth at night, toilet facilities or a hot meal. It seeks to provide recreation and counselling. Its aim is to give to such children basic, primary and non-formal education. Such training is provided to 1,800 children in seven centres. Of these, over 500 are admitted in local government schools. TB screening and camps are a regular feature. An AIDS awareness programme is also in place.

In an environment of care and opportunity, many of the children show amazing talent. Harish was a young homeless kid at the Trust when he expressed the desire to be an actor. Today, he teaches at the National School of Drama. Kapil showed talent in puppetry. He was professionally trained and now earns independently. Murari saw a computer in Sanjoy's room when he could not even read. It fascinated him. Today, he has won a scholarship to specialise in computers.

The Trust needs more space. Its plans to acquire a new home had the fullest support of the Lieutenant Governor. But a local clerk demanded a washing machine before processing the papers. Naturally, Sanjoy refused,

Sanjoy was only 22 when he began helping run Salaam Baalak Trust. Today, at 32, he is still very young. Nair is young, too at 67. Both believe that you need to give back to society what it has given to you. You can help Salaam Baalak Trust by sponsoring a child or through individual donation of money. You' can also donate to it sweaters, blankets, toys, stationery and medicine.

If you have the time, you can volunteer your services as a counsellor, a friend, a teacher or a doctor. You can help, too, by providing employment. (*Salaam Baalak Trust can be contacted at Karat Ghar, Chandiwali Gali, Paharganj, New Delhi.*)

### **Changing the Picture**

*Samar & Vijay Jodha*

Brothers Samar and Vijay Jodha were born in the '60s. Samar was a trainee at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. Subsequently, he took a degree in photography from Boston. After graduation in 1989, he stayed in the US doing commercial

photography, with focus on hot cars and fashion models. He returned to India in 1991. Once in India, he published a stunning book called *Jaipur: The last Destination*. Even today, he remains a successful commercial photographer.

Vijay did his Masters from the New York University and studied film making at New York University's School of Education. He has done projects for several clients in India and overseas, including films for the Smithsonian and PBS. Successful in their own careers, Vijay and Samar are important to us for their interest in causes. Samar made a beginning in 1994 by working with Mobile Crèche, providing shelter and care to children of migrant labour. Samar gave Mobile Crèche visual exposure and helped design their fund-raising material. Next, he was involved with Janani, working in rural Bihar on issue of women's reproductive rights. The Spastic Society also benefited by his assistance in preparing its annual report. Samar's over-riding preoccupation for the last 3 years has been with the aging and the aged. The UN has declared the year 2000 as the national year of the Aged, an important declaration. The needs of the aging do deserve a special focus. Many of them are physically in need and emotionally neglected.

Samar and Vijay began their involvement by listing 400 elderly people in different fields who they wanted to photograph. Thus far they have photographed over a hundred of their 400 identified subjects. From these has been culled the material for a truly moving exhibition entitled "Ageing in India". This exhibition has travelled to Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai. Wherever it has gone it has helped to forge an emotional link between ordinary people, and specially the young, with the elderly. The brothers want the exhibition to travel to 24 cities across the country. However, there is an acute shortage of money. The exhibition weighs 800 kilos. Samar and Vijay pay for their own travelling expenses; they have also borne the expenses of the photography, their stay in hotels and the printing of cards and posters. Thus far they have found only one creditable sponsor, the HDFC bank. The cost of organising the exhibition is Rs 50,000 or so. Given the importance of the subject, it is surprising that corporate houses have not had the acumen to come forward as sponsors. Considering the exhibition's success and its impact on the masses, they are obviously missing an opportunity.

### **The City Slickers**

*Dr. Iqbal Mallick*

One of the most noticeable features of India after Independence has been the increasing acceptance of filth in our lives. I speak of actual filth, as in garbage and trash. I am told that Delhites produce some 15,00 tonnes of garbage that goes uncollected everyday. Our parks and markets, our roads (barring those on which VIPs live or travel on) are filthy. The tragedy is that we have almost stopped noticing this.

We may be obsessed with personal cleanliness, but we are quite comfortable with collective filth. We try and keep our own houses clean but ignore the garbage just outside. We have a bath everyday but ignore the refuse lying unpicked in our back lanes. We may be stepping into the 21st century, but we lead our lives in terms of our response to garbage as if we are still in the past. The situation is fast reaching crisis proportions. That is why what Dr. Iqbal Mallick is doing is so important. Iqbal moved to the Asian Games Village in 1991. It was a quiet and green area, but dirty. Everyday, with her eight-

year old son in tow, she would go to throw garbage at the collection depot. She wanted to put her garbage into the bin, but the place was so dirty and slimy, and emitted such a foul smell, that she would, like the other residents, just throw it somewhere near the dump.

Like other citizens, Iqbal too could have continued to live with this outrage. But she was different. She decided to tackle this problem. To begin with, she motivated the other residents of the Asian Games village to contribute a paltry sum of Rs 15 per family. With this money, she contacted the local rag pickers — 18 years and older. Initially, there were eight. She then paid them to segregate (he garbage at the dump. The biodegradable garbage was taken to an adjoining wasteland for composting. This was done scientifically, by composting the garbage below the soil, so that it did not give out any odours. The non-biodegradable garbage, such as glass, metal or plastic, was sent to the recycling industries. Within a few weeks, the biodegradable garbage had become manure and could be sold at Rs 2 a kilo. The scheme had become financially self-sufficient, and Asian Games Village had become a cleaner locality. Iqbal's concern as a citizen had led her to create a truly successful project. Its greatest strength was that it was a decentralised system. It did not need huge landfill sites, or expensive loaders or trucks. It needed merely tricycle rickshaws, a *Phawara*, a *geti* and a *jhadoo*. It generated employment, but was inexpensive.

The success of this experiment led to it being replicated in other areas. Today, Iqbal's Cleaning Brigades (as she calls them) are working in 27 colonies, schools and colleges in Delhi. Her approach is to set up the system, and when it is functional, hand it over to the resident's welfare associations or concerned organisations. She has two mottos: Firstly, a simple solution to complex problems, and secondly, garbage dumps to flower beds.

Dr. Mallick is a person like us. She did her Masters in Zoology from the University of Meerut. Her doctorate was on the behaviour of monkeys. What she has done for this species deserves another article. However, her efforts in making Delhi a cleaner Capiial deserve our, fullest support. (Dr. *Mallik's organisation VATAVARAN can be contacted at 540, Hawa Singh Block, Khel Goon, New Delhi-110049.*)

### **In Aid of Awareness**

*Nafisa Ali*

Nafisa Ali is normally associated only with Delhi's glamour circuit. This is an inaccurate label. She is on the glamour circuit, but unlike many who are on this circuit, or many more who aspire to be on it, she is doing much more with her life than what her image may convey.

Nafisa comes from a middle class background. Her asset, of course, was that she was (and is!) very good looking. But there's more to her than that. She was India's national swimming champion. She was Miss India in 1976. She was the runner up at the Miss International. She has acted in films, including the critically-acclaimed *Junoon*.

Nafisa opted out of films and embraced the fairly predictable world of wife and motherhood when she married polo player Pickles Sodhi in 1979. In the next decade and a half, she devoted herself to her family and the world of the army of which she speaks of very highly. When Pickles took voluntary retirement, Nafisa moved with him to Delhi.

This was six years ago. It would have been easy for her to settle down into the social circuit of the capital without doing much else.

But Nafisa wanted to do something more. To a great extent, this was motivated by personal experience. Pickles had come close to death on as many as three occasions as a result of undiagnosed internal bleeding. On each occasion, he needed a blood transfusion. In an emergency, Nafisa had never asked whether the transfusion was HIV-free. Each time God had been kind. She felt that she needed to do something to repay this kindness.

Nafisa's over-riding obsession with the AIDS problem has this personal origin. I asked her why AIDS, when there are health problems of much greater magnitude in a country where every three minutes a child dies of diarrhoea, and more people die of malaria than probably anywhere in the world? Nafisa's answer was simple. She said that it is not her case that AIDS is the only problem in India. There are other problems which need to be tackled, but her mission is to work in the field of AIDS awareness.

What has Nafisa done so far? She has made an excellent documentary in Hindi to explain in simple terms, and in a story format, how AIDS can be contracted. It is a 24-minute film which was released by CII on World AIDS Day on 1st December last year. Nafisa hopes that corporate employers will show this film across the country to their workers. She also hopes that the film will reach other vulnerable target audiences, such as truck drivers, drug users, etc. A good beginning was made when the film was shown on Doordarshan. Nafisa has also motivated our top cricketers to appear on television with AIDS awareness messages.

These have been shown on almost every important television channel. Nafisa's main aim is to disseminate information on AIDS. She believes that there is a considerable degree of ignorance about how the disease is contracted, even in elite institutions. As proof of this, she showed me the anonymous questions sent to her by students of St. Stephen's College. They certainly showed that ignorance about the disease and how it is caused is fairly widespread, and needs to be tackled on a war footing. A documentary in English is also in the pipeline.

The importance of preventing AIDS is all the more greater because treatment for those who are diagnosed as HIV positive is very expensive, amounting to over Rs 20,000 per month per patient. There are already 3.5 million HIV infected people in India. In many developed countries, and in developing countries such as Thailand, the incidence of such cases has dropped as a result of an aggressive information campaign.

Nafisa is equally concerned about the spread of Hepatitis B which is as lethal as AIDS, and is transmitted through identical ways. There are 15 times the number of people infected by Hepatitis B than by AIDS in India. It is an epidemic waiting to happen. More recently, Nafisa has registered a new society called 'Action India' to play the role of a watchdog that exerts pressure to ensure that the promises made to Indians are fulfilled. This is, of course, an ambitious goal. But the organisation did some worthwhile work recently in following up on the implementation of promises made by the Government for the benefit of the families of the martyrs of Kargil. It has also done some good work following the Orissa cyclone.

There are those who dismiss what Nafisa does as elite 'do-goodism'. Often such criticism is motivated by envy. The essential principle is to do what you can, where you

can, when you can and how you can. I have found that those who only carp about others often do very little, that is constructive, themselves. (*Action India can be contacted at D-237, Defence Colony, New Delhi.*)

### **Where Each One Teaches Many**

*Father George Tharayil*

For all its visible callousness, Delhi never ceases to surprise me. In the up-market South Delhi colony of Alaknanda, is the prestigious Don Bosco School. Don Bosco has 2,300 privileged children. But few know that after school hours, Don Bosco is the venue for a special project for unprivileged children, called ANKUR.

ANKUR began in late 1998 as an effort not only to universalise education, but also to have meaningful interaction between the haves and have-nots (between the *jhuggi* children and the school's pupils). ANKUR was the brain child of Father George Tharayil, Don Bosco's Principal. Father Tharayil hails from Kerala but has lived in West Bengal. Before coming to Delhi, he was the Principal of the famous Calcutta Don Bosco School.

When he came to Delhi, Father Tharayil wanted to do something that went beyond merely being the principal of an elite school. To do so he didn't have to look far. There is a big slum in the area. Ankur began with 40 children from this slum.

These children, most of whom weren't going to school, were taught at the Don Bosco premises from 3 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. Classes were in Maths, English and Hindi. Basic knowledge of health and hygiene was provided. Emphasis was also placed on physical activities and art. The classes were provided free of cost. The children were also given books and copies and pencils and erasers, and provided a uniform and a snack.

Within a few months. Father Tharayil widened his 'catchment area'. He approached the children at the- Dakshin Puri slum. This was 3 kms away and the problem was of transport. However, the school bus contractor (Mohan Brothers) agreed to provide a bus free of cost to transport the children to the school and back. Now, some 70 children from Dakshin Puri have also become part of ANKUR's classes. The total number of children is 200 and Don Bosco has hired three full-time teachers for ANKUR.

This entire project is an eye-opener for the number of people willing to help to get a good cause off the ground. I have already spoken of the bus contractor providing free transport to the slum children. The books for the children are provided free by Frank Brothers of Darya Ganj. The snacks given to the children were paid for several months by a parent — of not very substantial means — of a child who studies at Don Bosco. Now, the snacks are financed from contributions made by teachers of Don Bosco School.

The most amazing consequence has been the impact on the privileged students of Don Bosco. Father Tharayil says many of them volunteered to teach their less-privileged brothers and sisters. Several of them have mentioned in their school essays that interacting with the children of ANKUR has provided them some of the best moments of their lives!

The ANKUR experiment of Don Bosco School is a fine example of a voluntary sense of social responsibility shown by the relatively privileged in our society. Students don't learn by platitudes or theorising. They learn by real examples, and from people who are



willing to practice what they preach. It is more than likely that the students of Don Bosco will grow up into more concerned citizens, because many of them will have had the opportunity to be exposed to the needy, and, even more importantly, to be involved in a constructive social project which is able to bring about a visible difference in the quality of life of the less privileged around them. One can ask why such an involvement is important or necessary. The answer is devastating in its simplicity: one third of Delhi is a slum as per official statistics and close to 40 per cent of the *rajdhani* can't read or write.

Therefore, the problem is huge, and we need to understand that we cannot hope to better our own security and prosperity until this underprivileged reality around us also begins to change as a result of our own efforts as concerned and caring citizens. The example of Don Bosco School and Father Tharayil can be replicated by many other privileged schools in Delhi. I know that some schools, like Delhi Public School, are doing something. Others can easily make a beginning. (*Ankur can be contacted at Don Bosco School, Alaknanda, New Delhi.*)

### **An End to all Parking Woes**

*Sudershan Aggarwal*

Nothing in his training as a judge, or as the Secretary General of the Rajya Sabha from 1981-1983, or in his present assignment as a Member of the National Human Rights Commission, trained Sudarshan Agarwal to take care of parks.

However, what he did to one park in C Block, Defence Colony, could be an eye-opener for us all. On retirement from the Rajya Sabha, Sudarshan Agarwal moved to his apartment in C Block of Defence Colony. He was fond of his morning walks but discovered that the park behind his house had become a veritable garbage bin.

Every other day it was the venue for a wedding. Each wedding left behind a residue of rotten food and a pile of dirty disposable plates and spoons. The smell of urine pervaded the park. Liquor bottles could also be found strewn around.

One morning Agarwal found five empty bottles of liquor. He put them on the concrete walkway of the park and watched from afar. To his amazement, he found people sidestepping the bottles and continuing on their walk as if the empty bottles did not exist. This vivid demonstration of lack of social concern convinced Agarwal on the need for action.

One day, he collected some of the children in the Block. With them, he cleansed the park of its disposable plates and spoons. He then signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the MCD by which the MCD agreed to allow him and a few of his neighbours to maintain the park. The next step was to collect money. Over a dozen residents agreed to pay Rs 5,000 each to build a corpus for the park. Gradually, this open space, which was the monopoly of tent house owners, began to blossom. It's now a green oasis with an aesthetically designed concrete pavement and attractive lighting around the periphery. It is also conspicuously clean. A corner of the park has a basketball court for children. There is also a badminton court. Residents happily pay an annual amount of Rs 1,800 per household to maintain it. A dumping ground has become a source of joy!

Having succeeded so well in one park, Agarwal devoted his time to the smaller park right next to his house. The *modus operandi* was the same. Here too, the transformation was dramatic.

The key to Agarwal's success was his determination to be involved as an individual in a civic matter. Most of us live with the unacceptable because we are unwilling to be involved in anything outside our narrow world. Before he shifted to Defence Colony, Agarwal lived briefly in a trans-Yamuna colony.

Here too was a park which had long given up the pretence to be one. One day Agarwal took two huge garbage containers in his car and drove several kilometres to the Horticulture Office which was supposed to look after this park. He then emptied the garbage cans at the gate of the Horticulture Office. It was an act of an angry citizen. But it had the desired impact.

What is responsible for Agarwal's civic consciousness? He says that when he was young, his parents used to celebrate his birthday by feeding the poor. His mother, he says, stitched clothes for the servants in the house. Later, his involvement with the Rotary Movement sustained his interests in public causes.

Today, he is the Chairman of the Rotary Foundation (India) and is deeply involved in building a state of the art voluntary blood bank in the Tuglakabad institutional area.

His slogan is: 'No one shall die in Delhi for want of blood'. At the age of 67, Agarwal is full of energy and enthusiasm. He is ever ready to support a cause and is unflagging in his optimism. What he has done in Defence Colony can be done by so many of us. But to do so we have to reach out and show the concern of a good citizen, as always, in our own interest!

### **Concern for Drug Addicts**

*R. M. Kalra*

I have been presenting to my readers profiles of such people who, without the compulsion of having to do so, are involved, over and above their professional occupation, with a cause that is of benefit to the society. Such an involvement, in big or small measure, indicates a certain openness to concerns outside one's immediate world. It is this concern which provides the foundation for the construction of a civil society.

Prof. R.M. Kalra was till recently Professor & Head, Department of Educational Measurements and Evaluation in the National Institute of Educational Research & Training (NCERT). He acquired his doctorate in Education, and his Masters in Chemistry (Organic) from the USA and Canada. He had been associated with the American and Canadian pharmaceutical industry.

But over and above these professional achievements. Dr. Kalra is also an Honorary Educational Adviser of the non-governmental organisation —RADA —Research and Awareness Drug Addiction and AIDS.

Dr. Kalra's overwhelming concern is the increasing number of drug addicts in India, especially among the young in urban areas. He is also greatly worried about the increasing menace of the spread of AIDS.

Some years ago Dr. Kalra was on a UNESCO assignment at Dhaka. He was there as an Education Adviser for primary schools with the Bangladesh authorities. On completion of his assignment, he was returning to India. It was December 1992. On the flight with him was Mother Teresa, whom he met. He says that meeting her strengthened his resolve to engage himself with work for society. Soon thereafter, Dr. Kalra began to research the subject of drug addiction and AIDS seriously. The research took him to those areas where drug addicts can be found. In Delhi, these include the space below the fly-over of the ISBT Bridge, the Ghats along the river Yamuna, including Raj Ghat and Vijay Ghat, certain slums such as the ones at Madangir and Dakshin Puri, etc.

Building on his field experience, Dr. Kalra began to focus on drug addiction among the young in Delhi. His special attempt was to identify the symptoms of possible drug addiction among students in schools, and to sensitise teachers to identify them. In this endeavour, throughout 1997 and 1998, he has carried out a systematic programme in all the 32 DAV schools in Delhi. He has also conducted workshops at the Air Force Bal Bharti and Bluebell Schools.

Some of Dr. Kalra's observations are strikingly simple and practical. One of the symptoms of a possible drug addict, he says, is his insistence on wearing long sleeve shirts. This will hide the telltale marks of intravenous shots. There are other signs which need to be monitored, such as any student with chronically puffy eyes who, when asked, repeatedly says he has only a cold.

Dr. Kalra has written a very useful book based on his experience in dealing with schools. It is called 'Drug Addiction in Schools'. The book has a foreword by Mother Teresa. There is also a very moving introductory note by Brig. Gyan Singh, Director (Emeritus) and Vice-President, National Adventure Foundation, whose son Ravinder Singh died of drug addiction. Ravi fought a long battle against addiction. In his moments of recovery, he penned down a tragic biography of over 180 pages entitled: "I was A Drug Addict". Brig. Singh had sent to Dr. Kalra, who was then working as the Deputy Adviser in the Ministry of Education, a copy of the book. Dr. Kalra was greatly moved by the book and Brig. Gyan Singh recalls in his introductory note that even then he had taken a vow to help fight drug addiction among the young. This was in the late 70s. In the early 90s, Brig. Singh was surprised to receive Dr. Kalra's important book on drug addiction in schools. The book is dedicated to Ravinder Singh.

The book has been useful for the educational community. Several editions are in print, including in Indian languages. It has also been used by UNESCO as a manual to assist teachers in some other countries. Dr. Kalra has written another book: "Adolescents and AIDS: A New Generation at Risk".

Every weekend, Dr. Kalra is busy working to fulfil his mission. He is worried that one of the great handicaps is the absence of an accurate survey or database on the number of drug addicts in India. He anticipates that Delhi alone has as many as 300,000 addicts, which is, incidentally, more than three times the population of a country like Seychelles! A similar lack of accurate data plagues the fight against AIDS. According to him, 700 cases have been reported in Delhi.

A very useful role performed by Dr. Kalra is to try and map the changing profile of drug addiction. According to him, one of the greatest menaces is the available "designer drugs", which are legal. In Paharganj, what is also popular is to have snakebite, literally.

The snake used is small —2-3 inches —mainly found in Thailand. When an addict needs a kick, he takes out his tongue, the snake is taken out of the bottle, and is made to bite the tongue. The effect of this dangerous reptilian high is for 14 hours and costs between Rs. 200-500 (Dr. Kalra can be contacted at NCERT, Sri Aurbindo Marg, New Delhi.)

## **An Emissary of Hope**

*Harmala Gupta*

Harmala was my contemporary in University. We first met in debate competitions. Her father is the well known soldier, the late General Harbaksh Singh, and her mother is a Canadian-born Sikhni. Harmala married Deepankar Gupta, a JNU professor. In 1985, she was in McGill University in Canada finishing her PhD on China's political economy. In 1986, she was diagnosed as having Hodgkin's lymphoma, a cancer. Fortunately for Harmala, Hodgkin's lymphoma is known to respond to treatment, but only through severe doses of chemotherapy. Harmala went through six cycles of chemotherapy and one month of radioactivity.

Nothing in her life —her education or heritage —had prepared her for this. Her first question was, "Do people survive cancer?" She wanted information on her treatment. She needed hope. And it was in pursuit of such supports that she discovered the "self-help" groups in Canada for cancer patients.

Though nine months of intensive treatment killed Harmala's cancer, the possibility of recurrence could not be ruled out until at least five years were over. She was now left to face life on her own. She told me that once the basic treatment is over, it is the most terrifying moment of one's life. You are on your own. As her doctor put it, "it is like having your umbilical cord cut for the second time." Harmala was determined to use her own experience as a window to reach out to other cancer patients. Her aim now was to see how she could impart courage and hope to cancer patients in India. She noticed that there was an enormously negative feeling about the disease in her own country. Patients were bereft of the possibility of recovery. Once a patient was diagnosed as having cancer, he or she was almost condemned to a living death, surrounded by a conspiracy of silence between doctors and relatives. Harmala wanted to fight such an emotional cul de sac.

Her basic problem was getting together a bunch of cancer survivors who could, through their efforts, convey this sense of hope and courage to other cancer patients. The first person to come to her aid was TV newsreader Jitendra Tuli, a cancer survivor himself. Harmala and Jitendra were able to build up a group of six. This group first began work at the Breast clinic at AIIMS. Their impact was dramatic.

When they went and said "We are survivors," the simple statement had an electrifying effect on the patients in this clinic, who all looked as if they have already been condemned to death. The group's attempt was to provide emotional support and to help patients overcome the sense of anger, anguish, self-pity and denial, which a life-threatening disease engenders. They did not seek to give gratuitous advice; their goal was to help patients regain control of their life, and to give them a forum to ventilate their feelings. Harmala's group of volunteers was christened *Cancer Sahyog*, working under the Indian Cancer Society. Its activities soon spread to the Rotary Cancer Hospital in AIIMS, the Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Hospital and the Army Research & Referral Clinic.

However, Harmala soon realised, that, unfortunately, in India, 80 per cent of the patients diagnosed with cancer are at the terminal stage. Their chances of survival are very limited. Their need, therefore, is not only courage to fight the disease, but palliative support which can help them to live the last moments of their life with dignity and comfort. With this aim, Harmala registered a new non-profit society called *Cansupport*, which specialises in palliative care. It seeks to relieve suffering and increase the meaning and quality of life in the face of death. Its concrete activities are to provide information to patients and relatives who are faced with the diagnosis of cancer, and to provide a professional team offering medical, nursing and emotional support to patients and relatives dealing with terminal cancer in their own homes. They also try and provide cancer care for needy children.

Interestingly, Harmala is being helped in her work by Ruth Woodridge, the wife of the BBC Chief in India. Ruth is a palliative care nurse, who, like Harmala, works free for *Cansupport*. *Cansupport* now has a mobile team consisting of a doctor, a nurse and a counsellor who visit cancer patients. However, money is a great constraint. They need to replicate their mobile teams and have at least four such teams for a city as large as Delhi. She also wants to open a Poor Patients Fund.

She need volunteers. Cancer is likely to be the number one killer in India. There is a great deal of ignorance about the disease. Even educated people sometimes believe the disease is contagious. Many wives are abandoned because treatment is expensive. Harmala's crusade could be relevant to any of us. You can help her by becoming a member of *Cansupport*. The annual membership is Rs. 500 and life membership is Rs. 2,500. If you make a donation, it is eligible for exemption under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act. (*Cansupport can be contacted at 1, Palam Marg, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi.*)

### **Sanjivini — The Art of Listening**

*Kavita Gupta & Raj Dagar*

Twenty three years ago, a group of six students of the Delhi School of Social Work of Delhi University were inspired by a visiting priest from the UK, Reverend Chand Varah, who had worked in the field of counselling through the organisation Samaritans. Apparently, in the 1950s, the good Reverend was once asked to preside over the funeral of a 13-year-old girl. The girl had died because when she began to menstruate, she had nobody to talk to, not even her parents. In the tomb of her silence, she thought the very normal bodily changes she was undergoing were a sign that she was possessed by the devil. In desperation, she committed suicide. If only she had somebody to speak to, this suicide would not have happened, and this incident profoundly influenced Reverend Chand.

In Delhi, the six students inspired by him called their organisation *Sanjivini*. To begin with, all they had was a room at the Gandhi Peace Foundation. Later, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan gave them a table and a chair and some space, after school hours. In due course, the original volunteers recruited more people and *Sanjivini* acquired its own premises in the Qutab Institutional Area.

The basic premise on which *Sanjivini* is based is that people who are under emotional stress need to talk to other people. Often, this in itself is both therapy and cure. To enable such an interaction, *Sanjivini* has a Crisis Intervention unit. This is a walk-in centre for any person wanting to talk about a problem. There are two walk-in centres functioning in new Delhi — one under the Defence Colony flyover and the other in the Qutab Institutional Area. In addition, the volunteers at *Sanjivini* respond to letters of help from the mentally stressed. They visit hospitals to meet, support and counsel suicide survivors. At the Qutab Institutional Centre, they have a Day Care Centre to rehabilitate patients who have had severe mental breakdowns. The unique aspect of *Sanjivini* is that it is run almost entirely with the help of volunteers - about 40 of them. A volunteer heads the organisation. These volunteers, who give their time free to give solace to those who are emotionally troubled, come from a variety of middle class backgrounds: housewives, the retired, management executives, lawyers, students, bureaucrats and the like. These are ordinary people, but selected with care. They have to be people-oriented, sensitive to the trauma and stress of others, concerned individuals, good listeners, and they have to be emotionally balanced themselves. Once selected, they are put through a training for a period of 5-6 months. Their minimum age should not be less than 26. And they should preferably be willing to make a commitment to be a volunteer for at least two years.

Emotional trauma, due to the breakdown of personal relationships, is behind the majority of those who need to come to *Sanjivini*. The most vulnerable age group is of those between 26-35. Interestingly, more men than women need help. In recent years, extra-marital relationships are a new cause for emotional stress. Also discernible is the larger number of adolescents who need help. For all the people who live here, Delhi can be a very lonely city. The breakdown of the joint family system, the excessive pace of urbanisation, the demolition of an ethical framework, and the unending obsession with material gains, are all contributory causes to emotional problems like loneliness, depression, suicidal feelings, alcoholism and mental breakdown. In this desert of stress, *Sanjivini* is an oasis of succour.

I met with two of *Sanjivini*'s volunteers. Kavita Gupta, whose husband is a chartered accountant, joined in 1989 when her two children were a little older. She did so because she felt she had the talent of listening. She said something significant: "When I joined, I thought I would be giving, but did not realize how much I would gain." Raj Dagar, whose husband is in the Army, joined as far back as 1985. She said that to see some one Walk in with shoulders hunched in defeat, and then walk out with a will to live again, is a genuinely satisfying experience. Ironically, in its early years, *Sanjivini* was able to run because of funds provided by a Dutch funding agency, and the Ford Foundation — not Indian organisations. Today, the Government gives some aid, but not much. *Sanjivini* is grateful for the land allotted to it by the Delhi Government. It is short of voluntary time and money. If you help somebody to regain a smile, it may be the best insurance for you to ensure that you do not lose your own. (*Sanjivini can be contacted at A-6, Satsang Vihar Marg, Institutional Area, New Delhi.*)

**INTACH**

*O. P. Jain*

O. P. Jain (or OP as he is known) is a well known person on Delhi's artistic circuit. Slim, immaculately dressed, with a hairstyle that could be that of a film star, he has, even at 70, very much the look of a dapper man about town. A well-to-do businessman, he has a passion to contribute to the preservation of Delhi's heritage.

OP was born in a family of paper merchants. His family home was in Bazar Sitaram. He did not go to college, and claims with transparent justification that he is self-taught. "I think from my heart not my head," he says. OP joined the family business early, but his horizons always remained beyond merely making money. As a young man, he recalls having seen the most beautiful sarees being burnt for their silver. It was this continuous carnage which first whetted his desire to do something to preserve the city which was his home.

OP joined and left politics. He was elected a Municipal Councillor and did not contest again. The turning point came in 1975, when he met Mulk Raj Anand who said to him, "It would be a pity if you die only as a shopkeeper." This comment was like a spark that ignited his quest to do something concrete for culture and heritage. In 1979, OP established the foundation — Sanskriti — which is by now well known for its work in conserving and preserving architectural heritage, and providing recognition to young talents in the artistic field. Sanskriti was primarily funded by OP. He sold some of his property to set it up. In recent years he has sold his interest in Neemrana Fort (he was among the three original buyers) in order to expand the financial corpus of Sanskriti. Today, Sanskriti is located in a beautiful complex in Mehrauli," where it provides a retreat for artists, and houses two museums, one of 'everyday art', and the other of terracotta. It also has a mini botanical garden with over a thousand trees depicting 200 varieties of India's flora.

The difference between OP and the ordinary person concerned about Delhi's heritage is that OP not only talks but 'does'. In 1995, he persuaded Delhi Lotteries to allocate 15 lakh for the restoration of St James Church. In the same year, he became the Convener of the Delhi Chapter of INTACH. Under him, INTACH, until now a pretty somnolent organisation, seems to be waking up. A fine example of the work it has done is the renovation of the monuments at Jamali Kamali near the Qutub. OP worked to have INTACH take over the renovation and restoration of 20 unprotected monuments in this area which were under the Delhi Administration. The first priority was to raise funds. Delhi Tourism was persuaded to give 20 lakhs. Experts then prepared a proposal for renovation. The then LG was cooperative. The restoration has now been painstakingly completed. Anyone who wishes to see what a motivated individual with a passion can do (with organisational and government help) should visit the Jamali Kamali complex.

OP's most significant work has been the painstaking identification and listing of Delhi's heritage. Such a listing is very important in order to know what we need to preserve. The last listing was done as far back as 1910 by Zafar Hasan. He had listed 1,300 monuments of which 500 have now ceased to exist. OP and INTACH have now completed the most detailed and complete listing of Delhi's built heritage from the historical, archaeological and architectural point of view. Corporate money was raised for this project, Eicher, being a major donor. DDA provided money for printing the book. Young people were motivated to do field work, and architects with the conservation background worked for months together to complete the project. The two volumes listing

1,200 monuments, have been officially released by Prime Minister Vajpayee be published. The listing gives photos, location, ownership, function, status, special features, the building material, state of preservation, date of construction, archaeological grading. It is a labour of love, and OP is the midwife, proudly showing me even the special paper he has selected for the printing of he books. Delhi needs more such citizens, for as OP says: “The greatest fear is that Delhi’s citizens are consuming Delhi but not giving anything back to it.” (*INTACH can be contacted at 71 Lodi Estate, New Delhi.*)

### **Giving a New Direction to Delhi’s Lesser Citizens**

*Ravi Chopra & Shobhana Radhakrishna*

Ravi Chopra is a photographer. Shobhana Radhakrishna is a dancer. Ravi’s father, R. L. Chopra, was a photographer in the *Indian Express*. Shobhana’s father was well known for his work at the Gandhi Peace Foundation. Today, Ravi and Shobhana are partners in a truly innovative community development organisation: DISHA.

In 1990, Ravi did an exhibition of his photographs in one of the slums in Delhi. MCD’s Slum Commissioner, Manjit Singh was invited. Singh advised Ravi to combine his passion for photography with his transparent interest in community development. At that time, Shobhana was pursuing research in puppetry at the Indira Gandhi national Centre for the Arts. Ravi and Shobhana knew each other. They also had a common interest in community development. And that is how their partnership began, and DISHA was born.

Essentially, Ravi and Shobhana sought to use their specialisation in photography and puppetry to devise innovative means of communicating with the underprivileged sections of society on such issues as sanitation, health care, environment, community development and education.

In 1992, DISHA was registered and the Delhi Government gave it two rooms in Ekta Vihar, an upgraded slum area in R.K. Puram. It may come as a surprise to many who live in South Delhi, and especially the government babus who live in and around R.K. Puram, that there are as many as 32 registered slum clusters in the area. Of these, DISHA works in 10.

DISHA’s most important achievement is the creation of self-help groups among women in these 10 slums. Each group or sangathan consists of 30-40 women. Shobhana readily admits that organising them was truly an uphill task. Unlike in villages, slums consist of economically uniform but socially disparate groups with a considerable degree of inner conflicts.

To bring together women across various groups within a slum on a single platform was not easy. It took as many as three years since 1995, when she first began to work on this project, for Shobhana to create the first group or sangathan. Each sangathan elects its own pradhan, sachiv and koshadhyaksh (treasurer). To begin with, the sangathans were created to tackle one basic issue — savings. Like anybody else, women in the slums occasionally need to borrow money. The local *mahajans* were charging as much as 10 per cent interest per month on the loan. This amounted to a whopping 120 per cent interest on an annual basis. DISHA made slum women aware of this exploitation and encouraged them to deposit their collective savings in banks. Contributions varied but



could start with as little Rs. 10 per month. The basic idea was to raise awareness among such women on the exploitation by small time loan sharks, and to develop in them, in their own interests, a sentiment of solidarity and strength based on financial self-reliance.

The bank deposits are made in the name of Mahila Vikas Kosh. To begin with even the banks were reluctant to accept such deposits. However, Shobhana's persuasive power prevailed. Today, the different Mahila Vikas Koshas for the 10 slums in the R.K. Puram have a cumulative amount of Rs 1.5 lakh. From this financial base, DISHA has set up a network of micro credit for slum women. Most requests to borrow money revolve still around weddings or illnesses.

However, and this is significant, today there are also-requests for loans for setting up micro enterprises. This is women's empowerment at the grassroots, far more relevant than the rhetoric of our chatterati in seminar rooms.

Beyond the question of monetary savings, the sangathans have become powerful units for the dissemination of all socially relevant messages, be it income enhancement, skill up gradation, vocational training, health, AIDS awareness or sanitation. DISHA's vocational activities include tailoring, the grinding of ophthalmic lenses, winding of transformers and speakers, and the making of low-cost sanitary napkins. An interesting addition is a beautician's training course. There is now a beauty parlour in at least two slums. These are financially viable. There has been a personality change, exuding confidence and greater self-worth, in many slum women, after a visit to the beauty parlours. DISHA also conducts non-formal educational classes in the slums for the children of the women in the sanghathan. Nearly 600 children attend these classes.

Ravi still loves his photography; and Shobhana, the dancer, still regards puppetry as an amalgam of all the arts. But over and above, their commitment to their artistic skills, these two individuals have used their love for photography and puppetry to create and organisation which has made a mark on the quality of life of the poor and the needy. Delhi needs this kind of commitment from all of us. Otherwise, it is likely that our collective future will be jeopardised. *(DISHA can be contacted at 23/68, Block C-4/B, Flat No. 88, Janak Puri, New Delhi.)*

### **Tree of Creative Freedom**

*Arajit Sen & Gurpreet*

It is a widely-held belief that idealism can only make a late entry in one's life, once material achievements have been mostly fulfilled, or one has retired and gone beyond the need to compromise any more. But I realised that there can be exceptions to this rule when I met Arajit Sen.

Arajit, his wife Gurpreet, and a few friends run the very successful People Tree, near Regal Cinema in Connaught Place. Arajit, son of a government servant, is a product of the prestigious National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad. He passed out in 1987. His wife Gurpreet is also an NID product. Both were successful professionals, quite comfortably perched on the upwardly mobile trajectory of the Indian middle class. In 1989, they were contracted to design a pavilion at the Indian Festival in Moscow. The theme of the pavilion was: "Gandhi and the Indian Revolution".

Somehow, while designing the pavilion, Arajit and Gurpreet got more-than normally involved with Gandhi's ideals, setting them on an introspective path. They soon discovered that they were not really fulfilling the purpose for which NID was set up — to produce designers who could contribute to the process of social change in India, in a context firmly rooted to its needs. They also found that they had climbed the design ladder but were working less and less with their hands, a process that was stifling their own creativity and demeaning the creative instincts of the artisan and craftsman.

In 1990, Arajit and Gurpreet met an old friend, Ajmal, who had studied in NID but had left half way to study art in Paris.

Ajmal used to paint T-shirts and sell them on the streets of Paris. He was quite willing to sell such T-shirts in New Delhi provided they could carry a social message, and break the groove of hierarchy and conventional categories. A beginning was facilitated by Gurpreet's patrimony. Her grandfather had a pathological laboratory near Regal Cinema. He had died some years ago and the laboratory was closed. Gurpreet's father agreed to open the rooms. And so, *People Tree* was born. The name is inspired from the sheltering *peepal*, which provides shade for people to gather. The logo is derived from a Dhokra metal sculpture fashioned by a tribal artist in Bastar. The flyer brought out by People Tree reads: "We began in 1990 as a small group of designers and friends working together in this shop space. Stifled by conventional jobs, each of us was looking for an alternative work space that would allow us to play, give us freedom to experiment and create, express social and political concerns through art and, of course, also sell. This idea was the seed that grew to be People Tree."

What precisely are the social and political concerns of *People Tree*? The first concern is to try and preserve, on a commercially viable basis, certain ancient ecologically-friendly traditions. Thus, for instance, *People Tree* is a major outlet for hand blocked natural dye garments made in Kaladera in Rajasthan. Arajit explains that under the onslaught of synthetic dyes, the original science of natural dyes was in danger of dying.

Ironically, a foreign organisation, Oxfam, first came to *People Tree* to seek help in promoting natural dyes. In pursuit of this project, Arajit and his colleagues "discovered Kaladera near Jaipur in Rajasthan. The Oxfam project was quickly completed, but People Tree became a fixture at Kaladera. As a result, a trade which was dying out has revived. Raghunath, the Sarpanch of the village has recalled his son from a tailoring apprenticeship in Ahmedabad to once again take up the family profession. An important element of artistic excellence in our arts and crafts heritage has been preserved. Today, People Tree is a commercially successful outlet for important aspects of our artistic heritage which are in danger of being snuffed out.

Apart from tribal and regional artefacts, it also sells other products which are eco-and employment-friendly. Of these are cards and notebooks made from recycled paper and cloths, and organic apricot oil from the *Beej Bachao Andolan*. In addition, People Tree houses, what it calls the only "alternative book store in Delhi." Books, journals, music and video-tapes on cultural and environmental politics, human rights, gender and gay rights, organic farming and literature from people's movement can be found there.

The most significant fact is that *People Tree* is successful economically. It makes enough of a profit, as Arajit says, to continue to grow. It is, therefore, a self supporting nurturing space. This financial independence allows Arajit and the other people, who now

form the artistic commune - Nikki, Simran, Suman, Neeta, Sutam - to be able to provide design services to activists or NGOs. This creative fulfilment, combining successful business with social and ecological responsibility, is the miracle of *People Tree*.

## **Conserving Our Heritage**

*Priya Paul*

Many of you may have seen in the newspaper the smiling picture of Komal Anand, Director General of the Archeological Survey of India, and Priya Paul of the Park Hotels, signing an Agreement for the maintenance of the 2000-year-old observatory Jantar Mantar. Jantar Mantar is situated opposite the Park Hotel. According to the Agreement the Park Hotel will be responsible for the conservation, preservation, maintenance, upgradation and beautification of the monument. The money spent on this will be eligible for 100 per cent tax relief.

I consider this a landmark agreement. There are few countries in the world which are richer in terms of architectural heritage than India. There also must be very few countries in the world where architectural heritage is so widely neglected.

I know this from personal experience. In my book on the *Havelis of Old Delhi*, there is a chapter on the *Namak Haram ki Haveli*. This *Haveli* is off Chandni Chowk. Apparently, it acquired its name as its original owner was rather agile in shifting his loyalties from his Mughal master to the British in the last years of Mughal rule. Much of the *Haveli* had ceased to exist even when I was researching the book in 1990. But at its entrance, there was then a beautifully carved stone gateway. Recently when I visited it again, the central piece of the stone gateway had been removed. In its place there was a marble plaque, which read —Goel Bhawan.

Once architecture of historical value disappears, it is difficult to recreate it. It is quite clear that given the resources available and the sheer size of our heritage, the Government cannot on its own fulfil its responsibility of preservation and maintenance. Even a cursory look will reveal that many of our prominent monuments need greater care and maintenance. On a recent visit to the Red Fort, I was struck by the shoddy environs and vandalism that has occurred within its precincts. If this is the condition of monuments in Delhi, one can easily imagine what the situation must be in other parts of the country.

The need of the hour is to have a constructive partnership between the Government and the citizen. Such a partnership would serve several purposes. It would enable citizens who have the means, to be involved in a project of larger social concern. It would give to other citizens a visible example of such concern. And, of course, it would make more effective the Government's own policy of architectural conservation.

The key to such a partnership is to give full credit to the individual or corporate entity, which has joined hands with the Government. They should be entitled to derive not only pride but also maximum publicity from their involvement in a public cause. In fact, such examples of partnership between the Government and citizens should be extended to other fields. Why can't our leading business houses adopt, with the blessings of the Government, public schools, primary health care centres, parks and even villages? Government policies, with even greater tax and other incentives should be devised to

encourage such participation. The crying need of the hour is for the task of nation building to go beyond merely the efforts of the Government.

Priya Paul has broken fresh ground in pursuing a partnership with government for the preservation of our heritage. Her example needs to be emulated by other successful members of the corporate and industrial world.

(This column was published in *The Pioneer*)

## **Epilogue**

### A Moment of Introspection

I have now been writing this column trying to project, every fortnight, peoples and organisations who are seeking to make a difference, to change things around them. These are real people, they are parts of our world. They inhabit the same space where most of us continue to live our own narrow, insulated, terribly predictable lives.

I have sought to project these people because we need role models today. Not unachievable role models. Not people whom we cannot even hope to emulate. But ordinary people, people who bear a resemblance to us, who have pursuits and ambitions that we have, but who have, in addition, that terribly significant quality which seems to have become extinct for most of us: social concern and sensitivity.

If I have to make a survey of what I have learnt by interacting with such people and organisations, it is this: much is happening, but in relation to how much needs to be done, it is too little. We have a multiplicity of organisations in the voluntary sector dealing with issues such as literacy, slum children, empowerment of women, environment, plight of the elderly, etc. We have a handful of concerned individuals supported by a fistful of volunteers who are making these organisations run. But the base is too small and most of those living in this city just do not care.

Nothing brings this out more dramatically than the financial support base of these voluntary organisations. Most of them run on shoestring budgets which affects their planning and effectiveness. However, there is little option but to depend on donations, and Indians just seem to have lost their ability to give. It is a truly amazing and revealing factor that so many

NGOs working in India for India's poorest of the poor are being funded by foreign charity organisation or by Associations of foreigners living in India, not by Indians themselves. A Western Bank will give money. An organisation like the American Women's Association will give money. Some Western embassies like those of Britain, Australia and New Zealand will channelise money. Some western charitable organisations will be moved by the plight of our deprived. But very few Indians.

In comparison to the generosity of these foreign entities Indians seem to have completely lost access to their wallets. This is particularly striking because it is not as if there is a dearth of money available for such causes in India. In fact, there is enough money floating around in Delhi which can easily assist twice the number of voluntary organisations as exist today without in any way reducing the quality of lifestyle of those who have this money.

The question therefore, is: Why don't Indians donate? Don't they have a conscience? Do they not see the squalor and misery around? I think the truth is - and this is borne out of my experience of observing urban India — that middle class Indians in urban India, in fact, do not any more see what is wrong around them. They do not see the poor; they do not see filth; they do not see slums; they do not see the garbage in their back lanes. And because they do not see they are not aware that one-fourth of Delhi lives in slums, a little less than half of its population is illiterate and over 30% of its population defecates in the open and has no access to such a basic amenity as a latrine. And further, they actually believe that even if the situation is as bad as this it is not likely to affect their world, and their lives. It appears to me that it is this last sentiment which is really the basis for the amazing degree of unconcern of the educated middle class residents of Delhi, and indeed of all of urban India.

Voluntary organisations can recount horrific tales of the problems they face in trying to make Indians donate for a good cause. The donor will firstly be suspicious. Secondly, he will ask so many questions and seek such an unrealistic degree of accountability for the small amount that he may be persuaded to give, that it is not worth the effort. Thirdly, he will try to negotiate *a* hard bargain. Even if he is buying a greeting card whose proceeds go to charity, he would like to receive the maximum discount while being the first to speak of his own charitable largesse.

Some organisations are lucky to get some Government support. But very often, even such support is obtained after much too great an effort, as if the Government is doing the voluntary organisation a great favour. In trying to assist the Government in realising goals which are at the very core of its own *raison d'être*, the Government should be happy to receive help from private individuals and organisations. But this does not appear to be the case. Often Government babus have to be coaxed to accept a scheme whereby a little bit of assistance from the Government would further in a great way the very cause for which the Government is constituted.

And not all voluntary organisations are able to get Government support. One of the voluntary organisations which has been featured in this book is Deepalaya. Deepalaya is doing excellent work for educating the slum children in Delhi. Deepalaya has a scheme by which a child can be adopted for as little as Rs. 2000/- a year; a donor can adopt a slum child for one year for educating the child; the donor can meet the child, the child writes to him/her, and for this donation you also get benefit under Section 80(G) of the Income-Tax Act. The scheme has been running for several years. I asked Mr. Mathew of Deepalaya, how many have subscribed to it. He said only 1600 thus far.

Such a small figure in a city of over 10 million people where the relatively affluent themselves can be numbered in lakhs! It is such a shameful record that it should make us ponder and think: What is wrong with us? Mr. Mathew observed that people are willing to donate for the construction of temples, mosques and churches but not for a good cause. How can we look at ourselves in the mirror when even for a funding agency for voluntary organisations like the Concern India Foundation, the single largest donor for its projects in Delhi, is a foreigner.

And yet, given the responses to this column, and through the mood I have sensed in the many public forums where I have spoken, I have also sensed that there is an identifiable desire in many people like us to try and do something which takes them a

little beyond their own little worlds of only material aspirations. It is on the basis of this fledgling sentiment that we need to strive to build a coalition of the concerned. Many people want to do something but they do not know where to begin. They need guidance. They need the right example. They need information. This book, and the columns on which it is based, sought to provide these, and may its efforts bear even greater fruit in the New Millennium.

**End**