

ENROL AS A MEMBER

International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE)

Indian Association for Volunteer Effort (Iave)

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

Civil Participation

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EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

We bring you the third issue of Civil Participation. In this issue, you will read of reflections on action and participation of large populations in changing their future. In the process of changing their future, they have generated ideals and values that have changed the world as it was known. Revolutions may happen in concentrated areas and in particular periods of time. However, they create ripples that change future of many others who may be far removed in time and space.

Of the revolutions that have inspired the social activists, French Revolution stands out as a dream that has given clue and inspiration to poor and deprived masses the world over. Values and modes of governance have also changed since the revolution. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity became the clarion call of the budding revolutionaries. Liberty was meant to provide freedom from religious beliefs and dictates and base decisions on rationality, and fraternity meant freedom of expression with restrictions on Government for decisions on matters of public opinion... Read about the French and the Nicaraguan revolutions and what message they carry for the present-day world in the Feature section of this issue.

This issue of 'Civil Participation' brings a write-up on another quiet revolution initiated by Gandhiji through his concept of Nai Talim (New Education) being carried forward by two comrades of peace -- Chitta Bhushan and Malati Dasgupta. The constant struggle of individuals who dare to dream and are volunteering to change their circumstances and enlarging the space for civil liberty, for themselves and their societies, is brought out in the various news articles selected for you in this issue.

We value your response to the articles and the news selections in 'Civil Participation'. So, do write back to us. The issue also contains the first announcement of the forthcoming XIXth IAVE World Volunteer Conference where we look forward to your active participation and volunteering to steer the world towards a sustained peace process.

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FRONT PIECE

Formula for Success

I am going to write a small piece to make our life a 100 per cent success.

If A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z are equal to 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 and 26

Then H+A+R+D+W+O+R+K = 8+1+18+4+23+15+18+11 = 98 per cent,

K+N+O+W+L+E+D+G+E = 11+14+15+23+12+5+4+7+5 = 98 per cent,

L+O+ V+E = 12+15+22+5 = 54 per cent and

L+U+C+K = 12+21+3+11 = 47 per cent.

None of them makes 100 per cent.

Then what makes 100 per cent?

Is it money?

No.

Is it leadership?

No.

Every problem has a solution if we change our ATTITUDE. It is our ATTITUDE towards life and work that makes our life a 100 per cent success.

A+T+T+I+T+U+D+E = 1+20+20+9+20+21+4+5 = 100 per cent.

Don't you think so?

— A download from **Lion Ajoy**



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AND

Indian Association for Volunteer Effort (Iave)

- * Make friends and network with volunteers from all over the world.
- * Participate in national, regional and state-level events organized by National, Regional and State Volunteer Centers of Iave.
- * Participate in capacity-building and management training programs organized by Iave.
- * Call on Iave specialist speakers and resource persons to attend programs organized by your organization.
- * Use library and resource center of the National Volunteer Center for reference purposes.
- * Get information on volunteer opportunities in NGOs.
- * Receive 'Civil Participation' Quarterly. Network with like-minded people and organizations.
- * Share information and receive national and international volunteers.

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FEATURE ARTICLES

Revolution and transformation

* Subhachari Dasgupta

Revolutions have always been based on dreams of utopia. The conceptual utopias arise from dissatisfaction with the present and dream of the future. In effect, the utopias are often very similar to the concept of heaven. The necessity of change is felt in cycles and has a semblance of daily solar renewals. The Sun's life-giving forces rise in the morning and gradually wane during the day followed by the night, as does hope of a different future.

Revolution is an ancient concept. Dream of a livable and better environment is also the driving force in modern concept of revolution. In a way, it is related psychologically to seasonal renewal every year which brings in energy in different forms though the year ending in distancing of the least productive periods of the year, the cold winter. In most modest and non-violent manner, it lives productively in the housewives, throughout the world, in annual cleaning through spring-cleaning exercise to renew the household.

In Hinduism, the concept of time renewal is important in which renewal for achieving a better world is rooted. Various ages that Hindu philosophical and cosmological concepts incorporate, are also achieved through revolution. Revolution ends an age and gives rise to another. We are currently into the 'Kaliyug' which is associated with darkness and corruption. It is supposed to be changed through a Messiah who would clean the world off ever and a new brighter age will be born. Social and political revolutions also have a very comparable goal, that of cleansing exting mindsets. The social disaffection with the deteriorating conditions gradually develops into a sudden change of the socio-political, and all other scenarios that govern people's lives.

The social movements turn occasionally into a revolution. It is not only the anger of the people that burst out into violence, but a social movement when it wants political and social reformation. Somehow social changes where they confront the power and violence erupts that comes to be known as revolution.

All religious movements such as Buddhism, Christianity or Islam started as social movements and then spread. These religions have changed the moral philosophies, power

structures and thus have achieved the same end that of a revolution. It is a fact of history that most of the changes that occurred due to religion lost on grounds of morality of the power centers. The morality of the center of power is gradually eroded as all centers lose the original purpose, ideas and become ideologues.

The changes are like seeds that lead on to develop into a plant that is ever so imperceptibly different from the shape of the seed. This flow of life is as omnipresent in the physical world as it is in the *psychological and intellectual plain*. Thus, new generations with new problems and aspirations emerge to take control of the situation creating cleavage in the society, giving rise to new social order.

We would like to examine nature of revolutions and fallouts from them by examining two revolutions. We also, in the small space, will examine the situations that lead up to them.

'In the European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries the ideas concerning God, reason, nature and man were synthesized into a worldview that gained wide assent and instigated revolutionary developments in art, philosophy and politics. Central to Enlightenment thought were the use and the celebration of reason, the power by which man understands the universe and improves his own condition. The goals of rational man were considered to be knowledge, freedom and happiness'

– *Encyclopedia Britannica.*

The French revolution

Of the revolutions that have inspired the social activists, French Revolution stands out as a dream of a revolution that has given clue and inspiration. The world has not been the same as before. Values and modes of governance have also changed since. Prior to revolution, France had a population 20% of the total of Europe. A leading cause of social stress in France during the revolution was its large population. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, knowledge, freedom and happiness were unknown factors to the French public, while the landed gentry lived in high style and comfort.

Over the course of the century, the population increased by another 8 to 10 million, as epidemic, disease and acute food shortages became part of rural reality. Most of the population lived in rural areas with nothing more than the food that they consumed. The peasants and the laboring classes lived in abysmal poverty and oppression.

* *Chairman, P.I.D.T.*

Capitalism entered France in the eighteenth century and was affecting life in rural areas into everyday life. There was considerable effect of money economy from foreign trade. However, benefit of this did not reach the populace. In the rural areas, barter system or exchange economy ruled.

1. Even though economic expansion had taken place, life in the rural areas remained miserable for the small family farmers. Conditions were much the same as now in India. Most people were day laborers always looking for job for a pittance. They needed food and a place to stay and clothes to wear earning only enough to feed their families. Others inhabited the countryside except for a few small numbers of noble and rich and middling owners of manors, distinct by their houses. The gap between the rich and the poor started becoming larger. This resembles the country scenario in India.

The large land-owning classes were known as 'noblemen' somewhat like 'nawabs' or 'zamindars'. Their rights over the land could be sold only within their own class. Thus, a piece of land was sold along with the farmer who moved on to from one 'nobleman' to another as tiller and had no right over the land. They could not move over in the class. The conditions in cities were worse than rural areas. Poor sanitation and lack of water prevailed. All services were meager.

However, there was also an awareness amongst some writers, poets and social philosophers. They preferred economic and political change. The class of intellectuals developed, may be as a result of economic expansion. Their ideas often sent the intellectuals running to Britain for shelter.

While there was much bickering about the number of seats in French Parliament, the King relented increasing the number of representatives that were chosen by him. In these circumstances, the revolution erupted. In 1789, the storming of the Bastille took place. Hearing of the fall of Bastille, the peasants decided that they too could fight for social change through drastic action. In the summer of 1789, hundreds of thousands mobilized to attack lords' manors and destroy the bitter symbols of seigneurialism: weather vanes, protective walls and especially property deeds setting forth feudal dues.

Gains from the revolution

Under the French Monarch, human rights were absent for most of the population, while in England, basic rights had been secured under the Magna Carta as early 1215. Since then, people had advanced step by step towards freedom. In 1628, a petition was submitted to the King by the English Parliament for securing rights of the citizens.

The lasting importance of the Declaration of Rights is immediately evident: just compare the first article from August 1789 which was quite an important revolutionary gain. However, it was not clear that the word 'men' used in the Charter also meant to include women. This became clear to humanity through a declaration of the United Nations as late as in 1948 where they used the word 'human beings' instead of 'men'.

During and after the revolution, women came into focus by their participation in the crowd, but also in decision-making committees. On many grounds, equality was granted with men, but much of this remained on paper as deeper social transformation was still wanting which remains the case even today.

The French revolution had deep impact not only in France, but also throughout the world. In French colonies, such as Haiti, great upsurge took place. Ultimately, Haiti became a republic, yet the Haitians were not guided by the liberal ideas such as those which made social transformation in France possible.

We have seen before that the French revolution strengthened the already existing liberal ideas current in Europe at the time the Haitian revolution affected the American slave trade and slave labor. The main contribution of French revolution was shifting away from religious beliefs and dictates and base decisions on rationality. Liberty was meant to provide freedom of religion, press and restricting Government on matter affecting expression of public opinion.

Nicaragua revolution

A member of Sandinista National Liberation Front, Spanish Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), one of the Nicaraguan groups that overthrew President Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979, ending 46 years of dictatorship by the Somoza family. The Sandinistas governed Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990.

Named for César Augusto Sandino, a hero of Nicaraguan resistance to U.S. military occupation (1927-33), the FSLN was founded in 1962 by Carlos Fonseca Amador, Silvio Mayorga and Tomás Borge Martínez as a revolutionary group committed to socialism and to the overthrow of the Somoza family. Over the next 10 years, the FSLN organized political support among students, workers and peasants. By the mid-1970s, its attacks on the Nicaraguan National Guard from sanctuaries in Honduras and Costa Rica were serious enough for Somoza to unleash bloody reprisals against the Sandinistas.

Fonseca and Mayorga were killed and the FSLN split into three *tendencias*, or factions, that differed over whether the group should organize revolutionary cells only in the cities, continue to gradually accumulate support throughout the country or coalesce with other political groups in the growing rebellion. The Nicaraguan revolution of 1978-79 reunited the Sandinistas under the third *tendencia*, headed by Daniel and Humberto Ortega Saavedra and the FSLN, now numbering about 5,000 fighters, defeated the National Guard and overthrew Somoza in July 1979.

A nine-member National Directorate, composed of three commandants from each faction, was then set up to lead the FSLN and set policy for a governing junta that was headed by Daniel Ortega. Once in power in Nicaragua, the FSLN organized itself into local and regional committees and built up support through mass organizations of workers, young people and other groups.

To fight off the attacks of the counter-revolutionary forces known as the 'contras', who were based in Honduras and were, in part, armed and financed by the United States, Humberto Ortega created the 50,000-strong Sandinista Popular Army and Tomás Borge organized a secret police force to guard against espionage and dissent. The resignations of various non-Marxist members of the Sandinista leadership, chiefly over issues of political rights, pushed the party and Nicaragua progressively to the left and both became dependent on the support of the Soviet Union and Cuba.

The Sandinista government confiscated the Somoza family's vast land holdings and nationalized the country's major

industries, but the central planning typical of Soviet-style socialist economies was never adopted and small and medium-sized private farms and businesses were tolerated. Having committed itself to political pluralism, the FSLN grudgingly tolerated moderate opposition groups and agreed to elections only after considerable pressure at home and abroad.

In 1984, the FSLN won more than 60 of 96 seats in a new National Assembly and sent Daniel Ortega to the presidency in an election that was widely criticized for its lack of safeguards for opposition parties. In 1990, however, the Nicaraguan populace, weary of war and economic depression, voted for the 14 parties of the United Nicaraguan Opposition, which formed a Government while the Sandinistas relinquished power. Though reduced to an opposition party, the FSLN retained a considerable power base in the country's army and police forces.

We see a fulfillment of the people's aspirations and dignity that was maintained from 1984-90. Later, in the same tune, when the opposition won for the first time, the transfer of power was done without any bloodshed. Throughout the Sandinista rule was challenged by an armed group known as 'contras' under direct support of the US military and intelligence services. Thus, Sandinistas had to spend both time and money to fight US military that retarded the economic development of the country.

Role of social transformation

Roots are to be found well embedded deep in the ground. Lasting changes in human societies also have to be deeply rooted in people's experience. Rapid changes through external pressure do not make changes lasting. When the pressure is taken off, the old ways revert back. There are many examples in History to show this. Yet the changes by legal and illegal means continue. We know that some changes have come to stay because they were generated by that could take deep roots in the minds of humans. These ideas were generated from deeper recesses of men for non-material gains. The long lasting changes are products of deep-rooted longing in the people.

Chitta Bhushan and Malati Dasgupta: A tale of two comrades in peace

Gandhiji's basic education or 'Nai Talim' inspired Sri Chitta Bhushan Dasgupta whose Majhihira National Basic Education Institute (MNBEI) has been working relentlessly since 1940 for imparting relevant education to poor children in the remote village of Purulia district in West Bengal despite several hurdles.

'I have given many things to India, but this system of education together with its technique is, I feel, the best of them. I do not think I will have anything better to offer the country' – with these words Mahatma Gandhi launched the Wardha Scheme in 1937, a National program in basic education which culminated many years of experimentation in education. It related to education to be given to a child from his 7th to 14th year. To this was to be added, in course of time, 'pre-basic' and 'post-basic' education relating to education before the 7th and after the 14th year respectively. The education covering all these three stages was what comprised 'new education' or 'Nai Talim'.¹

What urged him to place his theory on a National scale was an abhorrence of the British system of education imposed upon India. Considering the British system as impractical and destructive of Indian imagination, Gandhiji called it an 'unmitigated evil'. He thought it ignored everything India had discovered in its educational experience such as children integrated with environment, strong pupil-teacher relationship, identity with people and appreciation of Indian culture. The most devastating effect was the creation of a new caste, an English-speaking class. Hence, Gandhiji's plan for the Nation was an attempt to restore the national and social continuum disrupted by European imposition.

The purpose of Gandhian education was to raise a man to higher moral and spiritual order through the full development of the individual and the evolution of a new man, a 'satyagrahi', a non-violent personality. Everything in Gandhian thought was related to the universal value of truth and 'ahimsa' (non-violence) and directed towards realization of God and a new humanity. Thus, his educational scheme can be best understood and appreciated within the framework of the rest of his philosophy. There was an identity of ideals between truth and ahimsa and the Wardha Scheme for basic education. Truth, non-violence, service to the humanity and fearlessness were Gandhiji's goals and education became the means to attain these goals.

Emphasis on manual work and crafts

Gandhian education has been characterized as encompassing the head, the heart and the hands. He said, 'Man is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is required for the making of the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education'.

He wanted education to deal more with the concrete and so made manual work and crafts an integral part of school system. He believed that a child upto 14 or 15 has a natural capacity to grasp the concrete. Mind and heart can only be refined if the hand is brought into activity, drawing the educative process more into life.

He thought that the students can be self-supporting to some degree and this could be accomplished if the child worked manually as he learned. He placed emphasis on the child's experiences in daily life and work, experiences which foster cooperative activity and not competitive individualism. An educational program, moreover, must be attractive enough for the student to enthusiastically approve it himself. If education has to be true to life, it requires continual testing. Gandhiji handed over the Wardha Scheme to Dr. Zakir Hussain for experimentation because he believed that education required bold experiments.

We call it a bold experiment when we compare with many other countries that became independent in the region that put the destiny of the country in the hands of expatriates most of whom came from the countries that had destroyed the cultures of their country as rulers. A program in basic education, Gandhiji maintained, must assuage poverty of India. He urged students to organize social services in cities and villages in order to help the poor and weaker members of the society.

Education was a special tool in the reform of Indian village life. With 80 per cent of Indians living in villages, Gandhiji realized that education could spearhead a silent, but forceful social revolution. One major reason he advocated education through teaching of crafts was to check the decay of villages. Education through a craft, he believed, would place the destiny of masses in their own hands and give them a sense of dignity and identity.

Written into the Wardha Scheme of education were means of reviving village industries, crafts and the spirit of village life. Education through craft could possibly render it self-supporting. It would certainly render the individual self-

supporting in future, Gandhiji wrote. The scheme was focused around three inter-related centers – physical environment, social environment and a craft. The plan envisaged primary education, compulsory and universal, for seven years, covering all subjects, except English, plus a vocational skill. Primary education was to take the place of the classical primary, middle and high school plan initiated by the British.

Progress in the schools was to be pragmatic based on rigorous habits of experimentation through scientific thinking. In advancing the principle of self-sufficiency, Gandhiji insisted that the schools be self-supporting to the degree that the teachers were paid for their services. Condemning bookishness and excessive verbalizing in teaching, he advanced realistic education in his effort to move schools into the affairs of the society. He wanted to close the gap between education and life by drawing upon the cultural, social and vocational potentialities of the students.

In the plan of basic education designed for the first seven years of school, Gandhiji recommended that the craft predominant in the locality, for example, spinning, carpentry, gardening and agriculture. After basic education, that is, beyond the 14th year, the craft should become more sophisticated such as mechanics, electricity, medicine, commerce, printing and the domestic arts. Each school should have five or six crafts in order to give a variety of opportunities to the students.

In Wardha Scheme all education was around a craft and the product of the craft was to be economically remunerative in order to defray the cost of education, at least the salaries of the teachers. The connection between craft as a medium of education and education as economically self-sufficient was important to Gandhiji. He maintained that only remunerative craftwork would be done with care and be a scientific improvement in the educative process. Thus, the Gandhian curriculum consisted of the craft, the mother tongue of the student, mathematics, social studies, natural science, music, drawing and Hindustani. There was to be no instruction in either English or religion. He considered Hindustani to be the most opportune language because it would be familiar to both the Hindu and Muslim communities.

Primary education, according to Gandhiji, should employ as few books as possible and most teaching should be oral. Hence, he suggested that the first year at school be completely without books. The time table in basic education was carefully worked out by Gandhiji himself – crafts three

hours and twenty minutes a day, music, drawing and mathematics forty minutes, social study and natural science thirty minutes and physical training ten minutes. The schedule indicated the centrality of craft education.

Gandhiji saw this as a viable plan not only for the education of the young, but also for higher education as well. University education should be a continuation of basic education and it should be coordinated and brought into line with primary education. The Wardha Scheme left out religion as a separate academic subject, because 'religions as they are taught and practiced today lead to conflict rather than unity'. On the other hand, he thought that truths common to all religions could and should be taught to all children. He advocated teaching classical principles of ethics which are found in all religions.

Inspired by Gandhian concept of education

Inspired by the Gandhian concept of basic education, Mr. Chitta Bhushan Dasgupta and Malati Dasgupta came to a remote, poverty-stricken village, Majhihira, in Manbhum district of Bihar in 1940 at the age of 25. This was the beginning of more than six decades long experiment in implementation of Mahatma Gandhi's perception of education for villagers of India. The Institution founded by Mr. Dasgupta in 1940, Majhihira National Basic Educational Institution (MNBEI), now in Purulia district of West Bengal, is one of the earliest in the country implementing and propagating Gandhian way of life and education. It is still functional.

Mr. Dasgupta had opportunity to have formal education only upto primary level at Millers' School, Patna. Thereafter his entire education was Ashramic in nature – Shilpashram, Purulia, Vidyashram, Sandurup (now in Bangladesh), Abhoy Ashram, Bikrampur (Dhaka, Bangladesh). He had education also at Sonarang (Dhaka) and Kagaji Para (Chittagong).

In 1936, Gandhiji first expressed his views on education, particularly education of poor, illiterate villagers of India. His idea inspired a large number of educationists. To give it a practical shape, basic training camps were organized and at some places basic training colleges were established. Bihar took the lead in this. One such basic training camp was organized at Champaran – the place where Gandhiji had his debut in the freedom struggle for India. Here, Mr. Dasgupta had the first training in the theory and practice of basic education. Later, he joined basic training college, Patna and basic training under All India Nai Talim Sangh, Sevagram.

When the young couple came to Majhihira, a village about 8 km. away from the nearest railhead and connected to it only by a fair weather pathway, they were adequately trained in the art of basic education. Inspired by Gandhiji's life and work, he had a dream that education could not be divorced from freedom. Under British rule, independence was the foremost objective. Besides being an educationist, he was a committed and devoted freedom fighter.

As early as 1930, at the age of 15, he was imprisoned for three months. Many more stints in prison were to follow. After release, he took up underground work in Dhaka and Nawabgunj (now in Bangladesh). Later, he shifted his activities to Manbhum in Bihar and could elude police till 1940 when he was arrested and put behind bars for being the first among the volunteers in Manbhum to be arrested for his individual 'Satyagraha'.

In 1942, came the electrifying call of Mahatma Gandhi 'Karo ya Maro' (Do or Die). It saw Mr. Dasgupta at the forefront of agitationists at Manbhum. While attacking Manbhum police station, his close associate Chuna Ram Mahato fell to police bullets. The Institution founded by him at Majhihira was seized and sealed by the police. The inmates were either arrested or driven away. He himself was arrested and put into jail. He was released only in 1944 when the British Government took the decision to release political prisoners on the eve of the end of the Second World War.

After release, Mr. Dasgupta returned to Majhihira, re-opened the Institute and organized it anew remaining true to Gandhian principles. Propagation of basic education remains the principal moving force of his life, but politics continued to be another commitment of his. For him politics is a conscious education of the citizens to actively participate in the affairs of the civil society and the State. He participated in the political activities and conferences of the Indian National Congress. This brought him into contact with Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Jayaprakash Narain, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Dr. Zakir Hussain and others.

After independence, on the advise of Mahatma Gandhi, Congress workers of Manbhum under his guidance formed Lok Sevak Sangh under the leadership of Atul Chandra Ghosh

1 *Nai Talim literally means new education. The concept was developed in Sriniketan by Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore by combining vocational education with formal education and the concept was later expanded by Mahatma Gandhi as part of the Gandhian movement. Later, after independence, the concept was adopted by the Government of India and became for some years important mode of imparting education to the poor, especially in rural areas of the country.*

2 *Spinning wheel.*

and Bibhuti Bhushan Dasgupta.. Mr. Chitta Bhushan Dasgupta devoted himself completely to constructive work and basic education, the only break being the language movement in 1956 before the reorganization of States and participation in the peace mission during Assam disturbances in 1960. He is now 91-year-old, spends at least one hour daily spinning his bamboo charkha², resides in a remote village, Majhihira where MNBEI is located and is still active.

NEWS

Volunteering for satisfaction

An increasingly large number of Indians are saying goodbye to fat salaries and fancy designations to pursue their dreams. For them, satisfaction and freedom are incentive enough to opt out of the daily grind for volunteering. Some of the more prominent reasons for doing this are:

- Hobby bug – A passion for pursuing a hobby unshackled by the demands of a job,
- Outgrowing money – The realization that big money is not everything,
- Seeking fulfillment – Quest for satisfaction over designations and promotions,
- Self belief – Belief in personal abilities to challenge monotony at work,
- Being alive – Persistent need for growth, development and change,
- Taking charge – Desire to live life by design, not default,
- Lending a hand – Strong obligation to give back to the society,
- When love beckons – Answering a love call in life – theatre, music, social work, philanthropy,
- Overcoming age – Challenging rigidity and apathy in old age and
- N-hazard – Loneliness in isolated nuclear families.

*

Small steps, big dreams

A group of retired lawyers, forest officers, tea garden executives and army officers teamed with younger people from diverse fields under the Darjeeling Earth Group (DEG) have transformed the life of 32 poor families of Rampuria village near Takdah, 25 km. from Darjeeling by providing seed money and know-how to cultivate flowers, ginger, pepper and medicinal plants without using chemical fertilizers. A percentage of profits accruing to the people is

rolled back into other projects of DEG. Says D.S. Rasaily, 75, retired lawyer and Secretary, DEG, 'Our main aim is to maintain the bio-diversity balance, but we also keep social development in mind. In most of our projects, the involvement of women is as high as 40 per cent'.

Earlier, the villagers used to make a miserable living by growing vegetables in tiny plots supplementing their income through stealing wood from adjoining Kurseong reserve forest illegally chopping down trees to sell as firewood.

*

A mela for destitutes

To highlight the economic independence of destitute children and slum women through a display of vocational products and creative items made by them, an unusual bazar called 'Swablambi Mela 2004' was organized at Dilli Haat in the capital. The products on display at this NGO bazar were the outcome of intense economic activity – both in terms of vocational training and self-help groups – undertaken by the disadvantaged sections of society in order to stand on their feet and gain economic independence. Through the Mela, an effort was made to reach out to people and spread awareness about the issues concerning children in need, women's empowerment and promoting vocational and creative items made by NGOs, social activists as well as children who also presented theme-based programs.

*

Young professionals take to volunteering

A number of young professionals from India will be working as volunteers abroad under the iVolunteer Overseas Program, a result of cooperation between MITRA, an Indian charity started by the alumni of the Institute of Rural Management (IRMA), Anand and Voluntary Services Overseas. The first batch of eight young professionals has already left and 20 more will leave in February, 2005.

Harjeet Singh Bagga, a 25-year-old, who worked for CAPART has gone to Nigeria as micro-enterprise development advisor. 'I look forward to working in a marginalized society and learning a new language and culture,' he said. When asked about the job he would be losing, he quipped, 'Life is risky. With my qualifications, I can always get another job. I have no liabilities now. Later on, it might not be possible. Money is not an issue. Volunteers are given a modest package:



XIXth IAVE World Volunteer Conference

We invite you to celebrate the spirit of volunteering with friends from around the world at the XIXth IAVE World Volunteer Conference at New Delhi from September 22 to 26, 2006. The theme of the Conference is : 'Volunteering for Peace in Multi-cultural Societies'. The National Volunteer Center of IAVE India registered as the Indian Association for Volunteer Effort will spearhead the effort. The event is being organized by People's Institute for Development and Training (PIDT).

Our next announcements will provide the themes of the Plenary and Workshop sessions for you to send us proposals for papers. Look for further details at www.iave.org and www.volunteerindia.org or write to People's Institute for Development and Training, People's House, A-12, Paryavaran Complex, Saket-Maidangarhi Road, New Delhi-110030. Telefax : 91-11-29531282, 29531296, 29532086, e-mail: pidt@del6.vsnl.net.in

monthly stipend, quarterly grant, free accommodation and resettlement fund on return to India,' he said.

31-year-old Poonam Sharma is going abroad for the first time. She has worked with CRY, OXFAM and Amnesty International and is headed for Mozambique. She will be an advisor in a network of organizations in the field of HIV/AIDS. 'I shall help put in place a system to raise funds for HIV/AIDS'. Why not do it in India? She is asked. 'Even doing development work here I felt the need to reach out to those from other countries, learn from their experiences and implement it in my own country. My going abroad is a quest for something new. I am doing this to prove myself that nothing is impossible once you put your mind to it,' said Poonam.

Rohini Jog, 32, a Mumbaikar, is going to Guinea Bissau. This MBA in marketing quit as Head, Business Development of Kidstuff, a promotional marketing company, last year. 'Earning money by selling toothpaste, shampoo etc. had lost its charm. I wanted to do something worthwhile. I am going to learn about development and will be technical advisor, project planning, monitoring and evaluation for NGOs'. Sounds heavy?

No. Rohini is going with a light heart and is looking forward to working with various NGOs and helping in their funding. Ask her the language of Guinea Bissau and she comes with the reply 'Criolu'. She is obviously prepared.

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A winner in the battle of life

The men fight valiantly for their country, but the battle their widows wage after their martyrdom is even more challenging. Archana Kalia, the better half of Major Kamal Kalia, who sacrificed his life for the nation in Operation Rhino in Assam persevered and symbolized the human spirit against all odds. This war widow fought cancer of the lymph for 12 years and brought up her daughter, Ghazal, who was all of five when her father passed away, single-handedly.

Today, Ghazal has blossomed into a fine young woman, who has secured herself a seat in prestigious Delhi College of Engineering (DCE) and is a trained ballet dancer as well as a brown belt in karate. Mrs. Kalia assumed the role of a single parent rather well. 'I did not want Ghazal to feel the loss of her father. There were times when she would take my word to heart. So, I had to watch each word I uttered to her, think of everyday stuff like getting chocolates for her in the evening as her father would have done. I also enrolled her into several extra-curricular activities. Looking back, I feel this has really paid off.'

Mental, physical, financial agony dogged Mrs. Kalia at each step. 'I realized that almost overnight, I fell into different bracket for even close relatives.' To top it all, for a long time, she did not receive the compensation she was entitled to as an officer's widow. 'Serving officers were not aware of a lot of details. This delayed my case, as they had to consult others and then get back to me. The process needs to be streamlined,' she reflects.

'Then, during the Kargil war, there was hullabaloo about land allotments by Lucknow Development Authority to war widows. 22 war widows were supposed to receive one bigha land each from Zila Sainik Board. Of these, only 2-3 Kargil widows did receive the land. Others, like Mrs. Kalia, got nothing and finally gave up. 'I do not even have the strength to follow it up now,' she says.

Life looks a whole lot different for Mrs. Kalia today. The elated mother says, 'My daughter is settled and I can start thinking about myself. I am sure I will come out of the vacuum I still

feel and fulfil my dream of running a school some day.' Her struggle has been worthwhile. She has emerged triumphant from the battle of life.

*

Dhari men learn to sober up

Men addicted to bottle are advised to stay clear of Dhari village in Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand. 'No one in this village dares to drink,' says Meena, the leader of a hugely successful anti-liquor campaign. 'We have made the men leave it. Let them drink just once. They will be brought to their senses by our Mahila Mangal Dal.' If anyone is caught drunk, a whistle is blown. The Dal hurries to the spot and pounces on him. The drunkard is soundly thrashed with bichupani, a plant which stings.

Just eight months ago, liquor had made life hell for the women. All you would hear were drunken brawls, abuses, women weeping and children wailing. A home might not have food, but liquor it certainly had. The tiny village had 13 illegal distilleries (bhatties). The women would work as daily wagers and their entire earnings would be devoured by the bhatties. In desperation, Meena, accompanied by three women, went to the District Magistrate's office and lodged a complaint with the customs and excise department. The bhatties were raided. They caught canisters of liquor and arrested bhatti owners.

Five days later, bhatti owners were released, but the things were not the same. Meena's group had increased to 32 from four and a number of young boys joined it. In one go, seven canisters were destroyed. Bhatti owners and drunks were hunted down day and night. When men ran off to neighboring villages to drink, they were chased and beaten. The neighboring villages were also informed about the anti-liquor movement in Dhari village and they also joined them. Bhatti owners are angry with the Dal for rendering them unemployed.

Meena and her associates in the Dal are determined to continue their movement, but its focus has now shifted to village development.

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Changing landscape through organic farming

Darshan Singh, an erstwhile French national and a convert from Christianity to Sikhism is changing the rural landscape in Punjab's Nuper Beri village near Anandpur Sahib, one of

the five highest seats of Sikh religion. His 12-acre farm, equipped with gobar gas, revives memories of the homespun farmer lost in the frenetic days of green revolution. 'If you run after quick results, you are sure to suffer side-effects. The fertile soil of Punjab is withering away because high yielding varieties of seeds are being over-used. The soil does not get rest. These seeds need lots of fertilizer and water. When we started, the initial yield used to be hardly 25 quintals. Now, it is 45 quintals and our wheat is over-booked. Organic farming is like homeopathy, giving you results slowly, but with everlasting effect.'

When Darshan started out, he had an advantage in that he had light soil. Heavy soil retains fertilizers and pesticides for long, but the light soil washes them out. Darshan used farmyard manure and green leaf manure to enrich the soil. Household waste was directed into the fields through underground pipes. There were no flies. His explanation, 'When you do it in layers, flies do not breed and hence there is no threat of diseases.' Pink earthworms are hard at work in the manure shed. The manure they churn out is very smooth.

In Punjab, people burn the waste from the wheat harvest, destroying all the natural nutrients. No wonder, all the earthworms have disappeared. Here, I put the waste at the foot of the plants. After the rains, the waste becomes manure. An important problem is weeds. They are very deep-rooted and suck all nutrients. Crop rotation is the only way to keep all these irritants out. Peanuts, rice, potato, moong dal and sugarcane are some of the crops cultivated. Sugarcane leaves a lot of organic matter into the soil. He raises his saplings from traditional varieties. 'Where we get desi varieties of seeds now-a-days? It is high time we started protecting our traditional varieties,' he says.

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Villagers lead in handling fragile ecology

A dense vegetation of 6,000 trees in a village of 3,000? The residents of Navagaon, in Kalawad taluka of Jamnagar district (Gujarat) have done exactly that. Not only did they pioneer tree plantation in a big way, but also took a lead in the State in constructing check dams. According to gram panchayat's sarpanch, Ashok Akbari, a man named Kurji Bapa is responsible for this green revolution. A migrant, Kurji in his life span of 50 years planted and nurtured at least 4,000 banyan trees. Although he passed away eight to ten years ago, the villagers decided to take his mission ahead.

'In those days, water was scarce and if anyone requested him to plant a tree in his farm, field, compound etc., he would fetch water from distant wells, walking at least two to three km. and nurture the saplings. The villagers worship Kurji as 'Vriuksh Rishi' and have constructed a temple in his honor at the river bank where they have installed his idol. A myth abounds. If any plant does not grow well, is replanted taking the name of Kurji Bapa, it sprawls into a huge tree.

The villagers have planted 2,000 neem trees in the last five years. Apart from nurturing them, the villagers have erected iron guards at the cost of Rs. 4.5 lakh. Money for it was generated from Bhagwat Saptah celebrated in the village. A committee of 70 youngsters has been formed which collects Rs. 5 per month from every villager. This money is used in nurturing saplings. Keshubhai Patel, during his tenure as Chief Minister, had adopted the village's scheme as a role model for managing water crisis across dry Saurashtra.

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10 steps to happiness

Saints and prophets have promised happiness, charlatans have peddled it, psychologists have examined it, all of us want it, but happiness of enduring stable variety, not the momentary high that comes from popping pills or seeking instant gratification – remains elusive. Yet philosophers keep speculating, psychologists keep researching, findings keep getting compiled and are circulated worldwide over the Web. Some generate a little buzz. Some become cult e-mail forwards. Devoid of all the jargons, here are 10 steps to happiness:

- Do not equate happiness with money, people adapt to income shifts,
- Exercise regularly,
- Devote time and effort to close relationships. They require work and effort, but are immensely rewarding,
- Pause for reflection, meditate on good things in life,
- Seek work that engages your skills,
- Look to enjoy your job,
- Give your body the sleep it needs,

- Enjoy the moment,
- Take control of your life, set yourself achievable goals and
- Remember to follow all the rules.

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Kar seva for reviving a river

It is not for nothing that Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal, 42, is called 'ecological saint'. He has taken on a unique mission of cleaning up 176 km. long Kali Bein rivulet and shore up its embankment – a task the State Government could not afford to undertake due to sheer scale of effort and resources required. Seechewal, who heads a little-known religious sect, single-handedly mobilized the residents of villages close to the lost rivulet for kar seva by invoking its religious sanctity.

Seechewal started the project at Sultanpur Lodhi where Guru Nanak spent time and is believed to have attained enlightenment while bathing in the Bein. With the religious and historical significance of the rivulet forgotten, it turned into weed-choked garbage dump. Seechewal began by cleaning the 3-km-long stinking stretch of the Bein between two historic Gurdwaras at Sultanpur Lodhi. In less than two years, the ugly site was turned into a beautiful landscape: clean Bein, stone-lined leafy embankment, walkways with flowerbeds and fountains, but the fresh water still eluded the Bein because its source had long dried up.

Besides being a source of water for agriculture, the Bein had been at the heart of a key ecosystem that formed a natural flood drain and recharged ground water in the region, but this changed three decades ago when a bund along the bank blocked the source of the Bein. Encroachment by the farmers, silt deposition and wild growth virtually obliterated the Bein's course at many places. In the absence of fresh water, even the Kanjli wetland – abode of migratory fowls from Siberia – faced serious threat. The Mukerian Hydrel Channel, close to Bein's origin was identified as a possible source of water, but the bigger challenge of clearing the blockage remained.

The Government was wary of removing the encroachments on the rivulet bed and angering the farmers who suspected that the Bein water would flood their fields. It was then that the authorities, impressed with Seechewal's work in Sultanpur Lodhi roped him in. While the Government provided initial

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—Editor

logistical support, Seechewal mobilized his followers and locals. Soon villagers, particularly in Bein's periphery, pitched in with workers and machinery. Beginning with 50, the number of volunteers rose to 5,000 on some days. Wading through sewage-polluted and snake-infested waters, the volunteers manually removed hundreds of tons of water hyacinth, while the farmers used their tractors to dredge out silt from the bottom to widen and deepen the Bein's course.

For the first time in living memory, the Bein gurgled with water. 'Having cleaned the Bein themselves, the people will not let it become polluted or become dry again,' says Seechewal.