

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 first issue of 'Civil Participation' to provide you, and active participators of civil process, news of people's action and involvement in development, their struggles, their joys and sorrows.

In current dismal scenario of Peace worldwide, civil participation is looked at with great deference, disdain and suspicion. However, it is the civil society that makes its many-sided objectives and actions explicit to the United Nations, National Governments as well as uninvolved public. 'Civil Participation' will bring to you the joys of sorrows of life from different parts of India and different parts of the globe.

To be able to meet our goal, we need your participation. We are looking for correspondents from all over the globe to send us material for publication. We welcome one and all and from all ages and sexes to provide from every nation material to give the readers glimpses of points of view about multifaceted quality of humanity and culture. We would also like to hear your comments on the contents of this journal so that we can improve our presentation. Please see on the last page of this Newsletter Advertisement for correspondents.

No doubt, there are overwhelming and urgent problems that need attention. Poverty, diseases, calamities, disasters and the like occupy our attention, yet solving these problems has to be inspired and controlled by morality, dedication and other human values. Even in oppressive regimes or times of calamity, we see hope and light emanating out of human endeavor. Even after the fire has been extinguished we often find small cinders holding on to the fire by burning themselves. We look for these glimmers of hope. Eventually, these hopes claim the world. Therefore, please send us reports, stories of hope and courage from this disturbed world.

'Civil Participation' will encourage social volunteers and activists, individuals or collectives of any form to get some of the concerns of the modern day world. India is wide and the world is wider. People with varying shades of color, spiritual and material vocations are enriching the earth. We will try to bring this panorama to you through this modest endeavor so that we do not forget the forest in taking care of a plant.

Please help us bring your news to others by contributing to this Newsletter.

We would like to hear from you and accommodate stories of human endeavor and struggles. Please become a correspondent through E-mail in English, since we have facilities only in that language.

Please see the advertisement on the last page and Involve!

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Front Piece

The frog and his family comes out of the well — A frog lived inside an abandoned well with his family. He used to eat insects living in the well and played with other members of the family throughout the day as they did not need to spend much time searching for food. No other animal superior to frog lived in the well. The frog would tell the story of his bravery and would call himself the Monarch of Earth. He considered the well to be the whole world. One day, a strong cyclone occurred and broke down the nearby embankment. Suddenly water from the river rushed into the well. The water level of the well rose quickly. The frog and his family came out of the well and saw the wonderful world and were astonished to see that the world was so vast. The frog was ashamed that he had given a wrong notion to his children.

Moral of the story – One needs to come out of his cocoon to see the real wonderful world



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I, Prof. Subhachari Dasgupta, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

(Prof. Subhachari Dasgupta)
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Contemporary myths and realities

We live in the present, imbedded in the past. We live protected by shells made of bedrock that are strong and protective. The shells that contain us are like solid rocks that wrap our minds within our small spheres. The elements of the shell are ever increasing making the shell ever harder. At the beginning of twenty-first century, these shells are being covered ever faster by our technological interventions and innovations. Increase in communications is making the prejudices that we carry within ourselves ever stronger. Isolated by our protective shell, we want to see and hear what we want to and assimilate only all that conforms to our schema. Thus our protective shells isolate us from the messages that could be ours.

Without a metamorphosis of bigotry and prejudices, the information highway and ever-stronger media presence, the elements that contain many divides in which we survive are strengthened. Thus we are losing the great cultural wealth of human creations that remain encased in separate shells. The universality of mankind thus remains the dream of poets.

Bedrock of our contentions

Religion is one of the factors that has fashioned our shell. The religion was humanities' first quest for knowledge beyond the material and the immediate. The original questions of the mankind have not yet been answered and have baffled communities spread over the surface of the earth, often isolated from each other.

Religions rose out of the quest for knowledge of creation of mankind that grew out of speculations eons earlier, and are here and have remained steadfast with the insufficiencies of information on which their philosophy have been based. Veered away from their original roots religions became modes of control or subjugation. Thus more often than naught they have been the cause of violence and wars. Some wars came to be known as holy. The use of sword in the name of religion has been a continuous process of enslaving people and reducing their faculties of reasoning through attribution of their misery to an external and unknown cause. Thus the social causes of misery were justified as the will of God, the Almighty.

From the spiritual and scientific quest, religion became the central point of public affairs, so much so that the priestly classes became the most powerful people. Roman Catholic church or the Hindu priests or even the Egyptian priests all wielded great power. On the other hand, in Islam, religion is the guiding force of public affairs.

Secularism in politics today is a myth and escapists' apology for practicing religious bigotry. The word means seclusion of religion from public affairs while in fact the Indian democracy today is based on caste and religious politics. There is no interest of public men in the reform of religions or growing above them.

In Indian history, only one man had the courage to face it that was Akbar the Great who tried to propagate a new ideology of 'Din-I Illahi' that was essentially an ethical system, prohibiting such sins as lust, sensuality, slander and pride and enjoining the virtues of piety, prudence, abstinence and kindness.

The blunting the faculty of reasoning through religious belief is the most powerful weapon on which the centralization of political and economic power is based. Maoste Tung had called religion the opium of the people for very good reasons. The modern day reality is no better. To blunt the reasoning power, in India, we have coined a word Sarvadharmasamanya (unity of religions) that licenses not one, but many untruths and is basically escapist to avoid the most important obstacle to human progress.

The political objectives determine make up and perpetuate the myth of religion, hence 'secularism', which is a buzz word today, is escapist, sedative and harmful to actualization of people's consciousness. In most countries today religious divide is used to manipulate people, power and wealth. The ancient tradition of linking power with wealth has continued till now and we have very little to hope for redeeming people from their irrational tranquility.

Language

Language, the most important means of communication, influences the concepts and thus becomes barometer of prejudices. Communication is becoming a tool for political manipulation. The powerful print and electronic media has made it out to be. However, humans who are physically weaklings in comparison to most other life forms, have expanded their domain through communication of ideas across generations through language and speech.

The world is becoming poorer everyday. It is dying out gradually. Languages are dying everyday throughout the world in competition to English language. Disappearance of a language is also the death of a culture. The supremacy of English is the cause of it, yet languages are created by the people to express their feelings and knowledge. The tribes in India, as elsewhere, have been known to speak different languages. Speakers of each language represent certain not only mundane expressions of daily use, but with all of these they also express values that determine

their lives and relationships. These values and cultures are destroyed along with the languages.

Culture

Superiority of ethnic affiliations, color and ways of living, are some of the other divide on the basis of which hierarchical concepts of classification developed. It was only a few years ago, the peoples of dark skin were referred to as savages in scientific literature emanating from European countries. Words such as native, ethnic, heathen, aborigine are all derogatory terms of which ethnic has slightly gained status by encompassing meaning of all these words into one. However, these terms are never used to denote any European.

Savage is another word which needs no explanation. Use of these words in scientific as well as in general usage makes bias explicit. In case of scientific documents, in anthropology or sociology, it certainly takes away credibility of these documents as they show the bias of scientists. While such divide between the peoples exist, communication is littered with prejudices. Such prejudices affect communication. Within every country, such prejudices prevail. In India, such prejudices are of menacing proportion.

These prejudices create myths about other people and cultures that strengthen existing narrow-mindedness and intolerance. When we confront any difficult situation, these prejudices release their fangs and determine our action. Much of these factors have been responsible for it, including the war in Iraq.

Modern myths

Modern myths are created through business, political and democratic promises most of which remain unfulfilled and insatiable. These promises are no different from the promise of a heaven where you can escape from realities of the world. Most people overburdened with the task of survival, are managing to survive economically. They are also under great pressure of actualizing social relationships that they aspire to have and the desire to escape from misery into the lap of the God is a form of death wish. Rationality, logical deduction and learning through trial that are bedrock for truthful survival get past the life itself. It is a pity that the core of the matter is that political leadership perpetuates untruths on the suffering people by what they know to be false.

Subhachari Dasgupta

Founder & Governing Board member of
People's Institute for Development and Training
and Indian Association for Volunteer Effort

Volunteering to inspire

Result is not the most important, but resilience is. We present below a life wholly dedicated to conviction. A frail woman who would have been 100-year-old, dedicated her life to Gandhian principles. Read about the most important teaching of her life was — do not get defeated, keep to your principles.

Toofani

Malati Choudhury — a life of dedication

Gandhiji used to call her 'Toofani'. She was Tagore's favourite 'Minu'. As a young student at Santiniketan, she was quite famous for her outgoing personality, taking active part in Gurudev's dance dramas and music sessions, as well as initiating innocent mischiefs in the community.

Proverbial courage, sheer dynamism and a strong zeal to fight for the rights of the oppressed and have-nots were the dominant features of her character. She was frank and outspoken and was never afraid of calling a spade a spade. In 1934, she had accompanied Gandhiji in his padayatra¹ in Orissa. After a daylong walk, he was obviously too tired to visit a Harijan village which was in his itinerary. The villagers, who had waited long, were disappointed, but were prepared to forgive Gandhiji for the minor lapse. Malati Choudhury did not spare Gandhiji, and told him point blank, "Bapu, you have not done the right thing". Gandhiji apologized and cooled her down with his disarming smile.

In 1988, she refused to receive the prestigious Jannalal Bajaj Award from the hands of the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, because, according to her, Rajiv Gandhi had not done anything to promote Gandhian values.

Malati Sen was born in 1904 in an aristocratic Brahmo family. She had lost her father, Barrister Kumud Nath Sen, when she was only two and a half years old, and was brought up by her mother Snehalata Sen. Malati's family originally belonged to Kamarakhanda in Bikrampur, Dhaka (now in Bangladesh), but her family members had settled in Simultala, Bihar. Snehalata Sen's father was Beharilal Gupta. She came from a distinguished family of bureaucrats. Her mother, Snehalata, was a writer in her own right, and had translated some works of Tagore, as is seen from her book 'Jugalanjali'.

It is hard to believe that coming from a highly westernized and aristocratic family, Malati Choudhury could adopt a completely different life style. In an article entitled 'Reminiscences of Santiniketan', her mother had written, 'Malati was very happy and benefited much from her residence at Viswa-Bharati as a student. The personal influence of Gurudev and his teachings, his patriotism and

idealism, have influenced and guided Malati throughout her life'.

She had been fortunate enough to have been deeply influenced by both Tagore and Gandhi. It was the former at whose feet she learnt and acquired some rare values and principles of education, development, art and culture, which had been the guiding principles in her life and it was the latter who had a magic spell on her and at whose instance she plunged herself in the freedom struggle.

Malati came to Santiniketan in 1921, when she was sixteen and lived there for a little more than six years. In those days, Santiniketan was small and beautiful. There were nine girls of her age living in the hostel called Notun Bari (new house) – Manjushree, Surekha (who later on became her sister-in-law), Eva, Satyabati, Latika, Saraju, Tapasi, Amita (mother of Professor Amartya Sen) and herself. They were attending classes in the open under the trees, learning embroidery, handicrafts, music, dancing, painting and gardening. Mr. Elmherst, an Englishman, was in charge of the Agricultural Institute at Surul in Sriniketan and he used to encourage them in gardening. Mr. Pearson, another Englishman, was also teaching them. It was from him that Malati got the inspiration to work for the tribals. Gurudev used to take classes on Balaka, when he was reading his poems from his book 'Balaka', and was explaining the same to them. Miss Stella Kramisch, who came to India at Gurudev's invitation, taught them the principles of Indian art and dancing.

During her stay at Santiniketan as a student, a young man from a well known family of Orissa, Nabakrushna Choudhuri, came there as a student. He came from Sabarmati Ashram at the instance of Gandhiji, to study at Santiniketan. There was also G. Ramachandran, B. Gopala Reddy, and Syed Mujtaba Ali. They are no more. She got engaged to be married to Nabakrushna Choudhuri, and left Santiniketan in 1927. This was a turning point in her life.

After her marriage, Orissa became her home and her area of activities. They settled in a small village named Anakhia, now in the Jagatsinghpur District of Orissa, where her husband started improved sugarcane cultivation. Apart from agriculture, establishing rapport with the surrounding villages was their main concern. In their concept and scheme of rural reconstruction, it is the people who were at the center of activities. Their development depended on their empowerment, which was again the result of education. They had started adult education work in the neighboring villages. Soon came the Salt Satyagraha and they jumped at that. It was the greatest movement of mobilization and motivation, which were the dynamic components of adult education. During the freedom

struggle, they were activists using the principles of education and communication in creating a conducive environment for Satyagraha. Even as prisoners in respective jails, they continued educational activities like teaching fellow prisoners, organizing choral singing and disseminating Gandhiji's teachings.

Malati Choudhury and Nabakrushna Choudhuri, in February 1933, organized the Utkal Congress Samajvadi Karmi Sangh, which later became the Orissa Provincial Branch of the All India Congress Socialist Party. After independence, Malati Choudhury got opportunities of translating her ideas into practice. As a member of the Constituent Assembly of India, and as the President of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee, she tried her best to emphasize the role of education and adult education in rural reconstruction. When Nabakrushna Choudhuri became the Chief Minister of Orissa in 1951, she was assertive enough to focus the plight of the have-nots, particularly those belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Eventually, she decided not to join politics, because Gandhiji had advised that all Congress activists need not join politics, but should work for and with the people with service as their goal.

Even before Independence, she had established the Bajiraut Chhatravas at Angul in Orissa in 1946, and the Utkal Navajeevan Mandal, also at Angul, in 1948. The Bajiraut Chhatravas had its genesis in the Prajamandal Movement and its initial activities were geared towards providing residential facilities and educational opportunities to the children of freedom fighters. Over the passage of time, there was a societal demand on the Bajiraut Chhatravas to provide educational facilities to the children belonging to scheduled castes and under-privileged sections of society coming from all over Orissa. Established in the memory of the twelve-year old boy Bajiraut, who sacrificed his life by disallowing the British forces to cross the river Brahmani by boat, Bajiraut Chhatravas has become an institution of national importance.

The Utkal Navajeevan Mandal is a voluntary organization of repute, engaged in rural development and tribal welfare in the rural and tribal areas of Orissa. The State Resource Center for Adult Education, which was established by the Government of India, under the auspices of the Utkal Navajeevan Mandal, at Angul in 1978, had done pioneering work in Adult Education. Honors and Awards came to Malati Choudhury in quick succession: National Award for Child Welfare (1987), Jamnalal Bajaj Award (1988), Utkal Seva Sammaan (1994), Tagore Literacy Award (1995), Honor by the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the first sitting of the Constituent Assembly (1997), Honor by the State Social

Welfare Advisory Board (1997), Honor by the Rajya Mahila Commission (1997), and last but not the least, the 'Deshikottama (D.Litt. Honoris Causa) from her Alma Mater, Viswa-Bharati. On receiving the Tagore Literacy Award given by the Indian Adult Education Association, she had said, 'I feel doubly honored to receive the Award, which is named after Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore, to commemorate his memorable achievements in bringing a synthesis among culture, music and aesthetics in evolving and practising his unique philosophy and principles of education.

Like Rousseau, Gurudev did not want purposefulness, belonging to the adult mind, to be forced upon the children in school. He believed that once purposefulness was introduced, it brought torture to the child, as it went against the purpose of nature. According to Tagore, nature was the greatest of all teachers for the child. He had tremendous faith in the educational value of natural objects. Natural events like the beautiful sunrise and sunset, blossoming of flowers and singing of birds are the learning resources for children possessing the natural gift of learning things very easily. He had a great faith in the children's natural way of learning. He did not insist on forced mental feeding as a result of which lessons become a form of torture.

Gurudev considered artificial feeding of the mind to be of man's most cruel and wasteful mistakes. According to him, the greatest possible gift for children was their own freedom to grow. Tagore also wanted the children to have another kind of freedom – the freedom of sympathy with all humanity, a freedom from all national and racial prejudices. Thus, his philosophy of education is based on the ideal of the spiritual unity of all races'.

Malati Choudhury had organized the 'Krusaka Andolana' (Farmer's Movement) as a part of the freedom struggle against the zamindars, landowners and moneylenders, who were exploiting the poor. She had seen and experienced the untold sufferings of the people while walking through many villages in Orissa. She had also realized that women were victims of many superstitious beliefs and they alone were to fight against the same for their own empowerment. As a member of the Constituent Assembly of India, she used to feel restless, because she was not in tune with the wavelength of other members and when Gandhiji's famous Noakhali yatra began, she joined the same at the instance of Thakkarbappa.

A dynamic person like her did not slow down her efforts after the Bajiraut Chhatravas, Utkal Navajeevan Mandal and the Postbasic School at Champatimunda, near Angul, were established. She joined the Bhoodan Movement of Acharya Vinoba Bhave. During the Emergency, she raised

her voice against the anti-people policy and oppressive measures adopted by the Government and was imprisoned.

Prof. B.B. Mohanty
Bajraut Chhatravas, Angul

Making possible the impossible

Magazine for the disabled — Turning challenges into opportunities is not often easy and there are very few who have managed to do it. Rajender Johar is one such individual. A former occupational therapist at King George Medical College, Lucknow, 56-year-old Johar was rendered permanently paralyzed waist down. He shifted to Delhi where his parents lived and are now running a very successful NGO, 'Family of the Disabled'. It works for the poor, illiterate, disabled people, giving them an opportunity to pick up occupational skills and lead a good life with dignity. Now he has come up with a biannual magazine, 'Voice'. It covers issues that are relevant to the disabled, their problems, challenges and information about various services.

A House of Peace

Aang Serian (the name means 'House of Peace' in Maasai language) is an independent, non-profit organization founded in March 1999 by young people in Arusha in Northern Tanzania. It is officially registered with the National Arts Council of Tanzania (BASATA) as an organization for promotion of arts and culture. It is now establishing as an NGO dedicated to preserving indigenous traditions and knowledge and promoting inter-cultural dialogue across the world.

Aang Serian is not funded by donor agencies or linked to any specific religious or political group. It is a diverse group of people working with schools, colleges and community associations in Tanzania and elsewhere daring to believe that by refusing to be labelled 'underdeveloped' we can build our self-esteem, by rediscovering our traditions, we can build our identity, by using the skills and knowledge of our ancestors, we can build our economy, by promoting dialogues between ethnic groups, we can build a peaceful society.

Do you want to play your part in translating these dreams into a reality? Are you studying anthropology, health sciences, environment, botany or planning to start a course in one of these subjects in 2004? Would you like to spend a few days experiencing the realities of African rural life, staying in a family home and eating traditional foods? Do you have 6-12 weeks to spare and want to spend some time teaching and learning in Tanzania, then contact Box 2113, Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, Africa or fax 255-744-318548.

Myths and realities of politics

Who killed the cold war? – There is something strange about the way the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe have been interpreted in the West. It is said there were no new ideas, that the people who gathered in the streets of East European cities simply wanted to live like their Western counterparts. The revolutions have been treated as spontaneous outbursts, as though they had no history. The fact remains that 1989 revolutions had a history and were responsible for new ideas.

One of the most important, was the idea of transnational civil society that emerged from the intensive dialogue between West European peace movements and the developing peace and human rights groups in Eastern Europe. In the early 1980s, the peace movement in the West was considerably larger than the movements that toppled East European regimes. Five million people demonstrated in the capitals of Western Europe in 1981 and 1983. The immediate stimulus to it was NATO's decision to deploy a new generation of nuclear missiles in Europe and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

What made the peace movement of the 1980s different from earlier movements was the explicit link between peace, democracy and human rights. The European Nuclear Disarmament (END) appeal of 1980, signed by millions of people from all over Europe, called on its signatories not to be loyal to East or West, but to each other. From the beginning, this new movement sought links with individual dissidents and groups in Eastern Europe. Something parallel was happening in East Europe. The most important new movement was Solidarity in Poland, but other groups, like Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia and the Democratic opposition in Hungary were also significant.

The initial dialogue between Eastern and Western movements was characterized by deep suspicion. Gradually, these suspicions were dispelled. Those engaged in the peace movement in the West found that East European intellectuals were articulating ideas. What the East Europeans meant by civil society was not just the eighteenth century concept of the rule of law, but the notion that self-organized groups, movements and institutions can limit the power of the State by constructing a democratic space independent of the State. The emergence of these groups was historic.

On the night of November 9, 1989, Berlin wall fell. The rest is history as reformers assumed power and ended over 40 years of Communist rule in East and Central Europe.

Give the dog a bad name and kill him

No proof Saddam gassed Kurds – President George Bush of the United States used his State of the Union address to re-emphasize the moral case for an invasion that Iraq used chemical weapons against its citizens, Kurds, in Halabja, in March 1988 near the end of an eight-year war with Iran. The truth is that the Kurds were bombarded with poison gas at Halabja, but it cannot be said with any certainty that Iraqi chemical weapons killed Kurds.

Stephen C. Pelletiere, Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA's) senior political analyst during the Iran-Iraq war and a Professor at the Army War College from 1988 to 2000 who was privy to much of the classified material said immediately after the battle, the United States Defense Intelligence Agency (USDIA) investigated and produced a classified report which asserted that it was Iranian gas that killed the Kurds, not Iraqi gas.

The agency found that each side used gas against the other in the battle around Halabja. The condition of the dead Kurd's bodies, however, indicated they had been killed with a blood agent – that is, cyanide-based gas – which Iran was known to use. The Iraqis, who are thought to have used mustard gas in the battle, are not known to have possessed blood agents at the time

Tagore's message to Iraqi Air Force

From the beginning of our days has imagined the seat of divinity in the upper air from which comes the light and blows the breath of life for all creatures on this earth. They peace of it's dawn, the splendour of its sunset the voice of eternity in its starry silence have inspired countless generations of men with an ineffable presence of infinite urging their minds away from sordid interests of daily life. Man has accepted this dust-laden earth, man has accepted for this earth his dwelling for the enacting of the drama of tangled life. Ever waiting for a call for perfection from boundless purity surrounding him in a translucent atmosphere. If in an evil moment man's cruel history should spread its black wings to invade that realm of divine dreams with cannibalistic greed and fratricidal ferocity, then God's curse will certainly bring desecration and last curtain will be rung down upon the world of man for whom God feels ashamed

Rabindranath Tagore, April 1932

Be a nobody

Liberation without a face is total revolution — In ten years of teaching the miracle of liberation, I have learned a lot about the human condition. The most challenging matter for the seeker of enlightenment is learning what it means

to be a nobody. Many think they want to be enlightened, but actually without realizing it, they aspire to be better people. Better means powerful, wise, compassionate, fearless. To be enlightened means that the very center falls away and we find ourselves standing nowhere in the middle of everything with nothing to hold on to including power, wisdom, compassion and courage.

How many women have I seen who claimed that they wanted to be free while at the same time tenaciously holding on to the idea of being a saint or a good person deeply terrified of being a nobody? How many men have I seen who thought they wanted to be enlightened, but who so obviously had infinitely more interest in power and knowledge than in emptiness?

It is not possible to be a nobody as long as we insist on being somebody.

Andrew Cohen

Religion – a strange mixture

JP on decline of religion — At the root of all pervasive problem of the crisis of character is the decline of religion. I wish to voice my serious concern over the state of Hinduism as it is found in practice. For the educated class and more so for the young, it has no meaning except for certain ceremonies which are performed without faith to conform to social customs. For some important sections of the Hindu community, piety or religiosity is only a means to obtain divine sanction for unethical behavior, such as black marketing, tax evasion, profiteering etc. For the mass of Hindus, religion means nothing more than a few mythological tales, crass superstitions, some taboos and empty observances.

Religion as a formative, humanizing, ennobling force hardly seems to have survived. Between word and deed there are contradictions that balk the imagination. The Hindu religion is a strange mixture of good and bad, sublime and low, the most emancipated thought and bigoted obscurantism. What happens to the future of Hindu society depends upon which of these strains are to be selected, nourished and propagated.

Jayprakash Narayan

Education

Home schooling

An alternative to regular schooling - Imagine going to school in your pyjamas. Or staying up late to finish that exciting book you started reading just after supper because you do not have to get up early the next morning. These are just two of the options available to children who learn at home.

Many parents home school because they want their children to learn in an atmosphere that is responsive to their individual learning styles. Parents choose home school

for a variety of reasons – pedagogy, philosophy, religion and/or safety. Some parents decide to home school their children after the school experience did not work for a child. Others make the decision before their children are even born. Many home school parents have noted how much learning takes place while the children are playing. It certainly builds strong family relationships. Home schooling parents are aware of the social skills their children develop in family relationships with the larger world, outside the institution of school.

One of the benefits of home schooling is that it develops inquiring minds. When children get interested, they consult books, ask their dad or someone else, go to the library and access Internet. Thus the possibilities are exponential. And there is time for doing a variety of things which is a bonus.

Clips on education

United Nations - The General Assembly of United Nations on the 10th day of December, 1948 adopted and proclaimed Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It may be worthwhile to recall article 26 of this declaration :

1. Everyone has the right of education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Gandhian education — Equally significant would be a reference to the pre-independence thinking on education as perceived by the fathers of freedom struggle in India.

Nothing turns out right so long as there is no harmony between body, mind, and soul.—M.K. Gandhi.

The ideas of Gandhi had become 'Gandhian Thoughts' during the very lifetime of Gandhi.

Education in Indonesia – 'In Indonesia, even private schools have to follow the syllabus set by the Government, with some concessions so long as there is no clash with the country's philosophy, *Panchashila*. In practice, thus, there

is some leeway for teaching to depart from the Government's dictates. In fact, a good deal depends on the creativity and inventiveness of the teacher, who should know how to interpret the spirit of directives creatively. The teachers should be resourceful in integrating and weaving their own outlook and approach towards education into the government guidelines.

The ultimate objective of our educational approach being the attainment of true freedom of the individual, the immediate goal is how to foster those qualities and potential in the child that would help to bring about a peaceful, non-violent human community where relationships are conducive to harmony and creativity.' Gandhian Experiment in Primary Education, The Story of Taman Kanak-kanak 'Gandhi'.

Gedong Bagoes Oka

Tagore on education -The highest education is that which does not merely give us information, but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed. From our very childhood habits are formed and knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature and our mind and the world are set in opposition from the beginning of our days. Thus the greatest of educations for which we came prepared is neglected, and we are made to lose our world to find a bagful of information instead. We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the Epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates...Child-nature protests against such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment'.

Arts and Culture

China to reprint Buddhist literature - China has launched a massive project to reprint a 270-year-old gigantic edition of the Buddhist canon, which if piled, could make a 40-storey high-rise building. It is a collection of all Buddhist literature translations over a history of 1,700 years after Buddhism was introduced into China from India.

Sharing the delights - For over 30 years, Rathna Kumar, veteran Bharatnatyam and Kuchipudi danseuse has breathed American air with her art form, but passion for it has grown over the years. She is the Director of Anjali Dance Center, Houston, Texas and Artistic Director of Samskriti Society for Indian performing arts, a non-profit organization. 'Rathnadi', as she is affectionately called, muses Tagore's 'in thy dance, divine dancer, freedom finds its magic and dreams their forms'.

There is something mystical about Indian dance, she says, that has captivated the hearts of audiences all over the world. Today, the Indian dance has reached such popular heights that schools have mushroomed in cities all over USA and Europe, catering to the artistic inclinations of ever-increasing Indian community. 'It all began with Uday Shankar and Ram Gopal, two innovative exponents of Indian dance who took the Western world by storm. With their combination of good looks and artistic talents, Indian dance got a permanent place in the western hemisphere', She said. Anjali is every artist's delight. The school has an elaborate dance floor, a library facilitating the students with all kinds of cultural information, well-equipped kitchen, a theatre room and also a boutique with different kinds of dance costumes. The fervor of 'guru-shishya' relationship can be felt here. Students of all colors and races come here silently, remove their shoes at the door, rush forward and touch their guru's feet. Rathna feels children are a reflection of their parents. And as a teacher, one has a moral responsibility to instill the values of self-respect, tolerance and respect for elders among them.

Women Empowerment

Women changing the face of rural Bihar - Since the establishment of three-tier panchayatiraj system, the rural face of Bihar has undergone a transformation. Apart from the provision of 33 per cent reservation in panchayats, the crucial fact is that women have been able to stand up for themselves. They are putting down gender discrimination with boldness and are having a say in all crucial matters.

Tetri Devi is a ward member of Tilauthu panchayat in Rohtas district. According to her own account, her husband and she manhandled the Mukhiya, Arjun Chaudhary, for not accepting her suggestion for issuing 'red cards' for below the poverty line families. Angered by her action, the Mukhiya filed a FIR against her. 'I am not one to be frightened by such actions and shall continue my crusade for the development of my panchayat'.

Sindhu Kumari, a ward member of Karnpura South panchayat in Muzaffarpur, forced a gramsevak to return the money he had taken as bribe from 35 women and forced the local bank manager to open their account. Shanti Devi, another women ward member, gathered the women of her village and raised the issue of Mukhiya having taken a bribe from two women for allocating Indira Awas Yojana funds and compelled him to return the money. She also challenged the irregularities being committed in flood relief program and ensured that the allocated funds went to the affected families.

Satya Devi, a ward member of Marwan panchayat held a dharna before the police station and got arrested an alleged rapist in Kodria village. Shahidan Bibi, a ward member of Karnpura panchayat, along with other women, gheraoed the local police and got released a member of the Self-help Group (SHG) arrested without a reason. Jyoti Rajni in Chittona panchayat of Rohtas district takes up development schemes only after the approval of the gram panchayat. She also seeks to resolve local disputes at the panchayat level.

Conferences and Seminars

Volunteering in People's Interest, An Engine for Changing; 18th IAVE World Volunteer Conference & Youth Forum, 17th – 21st August, Barcelona –

The forum is organized by IAVE Youth and the Federacio Catalana de Voluntariat Social (Catalan Federation of Social Volunteering as part of the International Association for Volunteer Effort's (IAVE) Biannual World Volunteer Conference. The Virtual Youth Forum served as an electronic preparatory event in April and a participant selection tool for the actual Youth Forum, which will present on August 17, 2004 as part of the official activities of the World Volunteer Conference. Apply on-line at www.iave2004barcelona.org/

The aims of the Conference are to use this occasion to make the world aware of what volunteer work represents. To carry out an in-depth discussion of the ethical framework under which the IAVE will move forward and the nature of volunteer commitments in defense of values such as justice and human rights. It will likewise aim to formulate proposals to make this task easier, turning it into a real opportunity to make an impact, a true engine for change toward a better world. In short, this Conference aspires to give meaning to the words of Ken Allen, the volunteer is the fundamental building block for constructing a civil society. Without people who wish to commit themselves to their community, neither NGOs nor philanthropy, nor responsible Governments, nor democracy are possible.

10th Researching the Voluntary Sector Conference Sheffield, United Kingdom – 01-Sep –04 – National Council for Voluntary Organizations' (NCVO) Researching the Voluntary Sector Conference is a unique meeting place for both researchers and users of research to discuss current research in the voluntary and community sector.

National Council for Voluntary Organizations.

Circuit Riders Conference – 13 Sep-04 – The Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network (N-TEN) is co-hosting a Circuit Riders Conference in London, with the theme A New Approach to Voluntary Sector ICT Support and Development. The Conference will address issues faced by Circuit Riders and other ICT staff working in small to medium-sized voluntary organisations.

Nonprofit Technology enterprise Network (N-TEN)

<http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/getevents/>

Humanizing the World

We should try to make the world a better place for living – New-age Guru, Deepak Chopra said, we have seven needs – survival, materialism, love, self-esteem, creativity, God, and self-actualization. We are living in a superficial life trapped in fear and greed. Yet, we are aching for a loving environment. We have to connect to create a new humanity to join hands to make the world a better place. We should seek humane, creative solutions in this hard-hearted mechanized world for ecological problems, destruction of weapons and all violent conflicts.

Environment

Water-fuelled car round the corner – The world's first mass-produced water-fuelled car could be just round the corner. This startling claim by an environment group in London (UK) comes with a price tag – one million pound sterling – by public donation to fund the technology, after which it could be handed over patent free to car manufacturers like Tata India or Ford. The car, which would be tanked up with the garden hose, is an improved model of BMW's sleek hydrogen-powered road monster, the 745h. By converting water into hydrogen and oxygen which is burned in a normal internal combustion engine, it recycles its main by-product, water.

A suggested book reading

The Sixties by Richard Avedon, Doon Arbus - The sixties was an expression of the youth of the period. It was exciting and was full of many experiments of life and of protest. The book review quoted below is of images of sixties with deep concern of the world. It is a product of a 30-year collaboration between photographer Richard Avedon and author Doon Arbus, whose images and words combine in this volume to create a compelling portrait of one of the 20th century's most tumultuous decades. This large book is filled with a cacophony of Yuppies, Black Panthers, Weathermen, Hare Krishnas, Andy Warhol Factory Superstars, pop artists, rock musicians, astronauts, pacifists, politicians, electroshock

therapists, media correspondents, civil rights lawyers, anti-war activists and much more. Arbus conducted interviews with many of the subjects. Snippets of those conversations provide an intimate and unforgettable document of the tension, vulnerability, anger, recklessness, hope and empowerment many people experienced in that era. Brief biographies of the portrait sitters as well as a chronology that spans the first signs of the war in Vietnam in 1960s to its final conclusion in 1973 provide an excellent context for the images.

Volunteers bring about transformation in the lives of Chhatisgarh tribes

Creation of grain and cash banks

In order to save themselves from the clutches of moneylenders, tribal volunteers, women and men, of Shankargarh and Kushmi Blocks of Surguja District in Chattisgarh, have organised themselves into small groups called 'Samities'. Grain and cash banks have been created by these village Samities who were able to collect 71.70 quintal grain and Rs. 77,286 in cash, which is a large amount in this remote cash-strapped region. Samities have proved to be of immense help to its members as far as their additional grain and cash requirements are concerned during lean months when in the absence of Rabi crop they are short of grain. They have to pay back only one and a quarter times the grain they take on loan within a period of six months. Similarly, service charges on their cash loans are very low and affordable. This has saved them from mortgaging their land for small amounts of grain and cash for which previously they had to work as bonded laborers with moneylenders for decades.

The Samities of these villages in the hilly terrain have through an elaborate and democratic system of representative voting been able to form a federation of samities called 'Hariyari'. In fact, they have even registered it as a Society, fighting all odds of corruption and bureaucracy and truly representing the voice of the people. **Hariyari Samiti** is actively promoting independent and committed local leaders at local self governance levels encouraging women representatives. Guided by the **People's Institute for Development and Training (PIDT)** for over two decades, the volunteers of Surguja in Chhatisgarh have come a long way in actualising people's power, in an area, where the entire community was bonded.

Voter awareness campaign

Prior to 1994-95 election to panchayatiraj institutions under the 73rd Constitutional amendment act, a voter

awareness campaign was conducted in which members of Samities were asked to actively participate in the elections and get elected as many panches and sarpanches from amongst themselves as possible. The campaign had a positive impact. 18 persons associated with PIDT in different capacities, all male, were elected panch (member) of village panchayats. Seven persons, two women and five men were elected sarpanch (chairperson) and four persons, one woman and three men, were elected members of Block Development Committee (BDC). In 1999-2000 election, 33 persons, seven women and 26 men, were elected panches, five persons, one woman and four men, were elected sarpanches and a lone woman was elected member, BDC.

Women's leadership and participation

There are 39 panchayats in Shankargarh block. According to reservation criteria, there should be 13 women sarpanches. It is a measure of women empowerment that there are 15 women sarpanches in the Block. It means women have also been elected sarpanches in non-reserved areas. It has been seen that women are honest, more hard working and sincere in their work and they take their responsibilities as sarpanches most seriously.

How seriously women sarpanches take their work can be seen from the following examples:

Ms. Madhurani Bhagat a tribal woman was elected Sarpanch of Gamhardih panchayat in 1999. Since then she has been instrumental in getting a number of construction works done which include a road, a panchayat building, water sources, including five hand pumps, culverts and getting villages, Charaidih and Bagiapara, electrified.

Ms. Chami Bai is sarpanch since 1994. During her two tenures, each running into five years, she has been able to get a school building constructed in village Laduapara Laldera and electrifying Ladua Ambadipa which will help in increasing agricultural production through the development of irrigation facilities.

Ms. Sukalo Paikra is sarpanch of Dohna since 1999. She helped in the construction of an additional room in the primary school running for the last 20 years at Patra Toli thus saving the children from the vagaries of elements like rain, sun and winter winds. She also helped in the mutation of land records in favor of 35 persons.

Samities take up development work

10 Samities, which are part of the Hariyari Samiti, took up development activities in the last year comprising of installation of eight hand pumps, deepening of a village tank and construction of two tanks, land leveling work on community basis and a tubewell boring with the help of village panchayat. This has led to availability of potable

drinking water, improvement in health status of tribals. This has also been a boon for the local economy since better availability of irrigation facilities has improved farm productivity and tribals are now growing fruit and green vegetables for their home consumption along with cereals like rice.

Sakhu Ram – a meteor from the mud

Sakhu Ram, a lean slightly built man of the 'Orau' community, 36 years of age, who has studied upto Vth standard through PIDT non-formal education classes has made history through his exemplary leadership. A farmer and labourer with three acres of land, Sakhu Ram, with humble antecedance, was elected as sarpanch for five years. He says that a PIDT Samiti leadership and volunteer training, changed his behavior and mindset. He being a community-oriented person helps his villagers in marriages, conflicts, deaths etc.

Sakhu Ram has been practicing true participatory action. His method is to involve all the villagers by calling a large 'gram sabha' meeting and then developing a priority list of needs relating to the poor. He then would request the Government for programs according to this needs list. He involved all the other members of the village governing body (panches) in supervision and implementation. He had also involved the funds of the elected state and central representatives (MLA and MP).

He was selected as the best sarpanch of the development Block and given Rs. 25000 as prize money, however instead of using it personally, he spent it on the repair of an existing school building. Though this show of community mindedness caused an infighting within the elected representatives, he remains steadfast in his commitment to the marginalized. During his five years' tenure he

- built a community hall
- built four culverts
- repaired and cemented five natural springs
- built two bath spaces next to two hand pumps
- firmed and raised two road stretches

- made a school for Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS)
- deepened and renovated a village tank
- repaired a middle school building and a students' hostel
- repaired a primary school building
- brought electric connection to a hamlet

Leaders like Sakhu Ram will always be remembered. His volunteering advanced the social and economic capital of his community manifold.

Dr. Ratna Prakash

Become a 'Civil Participation' volunteer correspondent

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

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

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

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

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

—Editor