



2011

Annual Magazine of Association for India's Development
Penn State Chapter

For further information

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Cover

A drawing by XXX,
a child from our project YYY

From the Editor's Desk

Over the past years, Sankalp has slowly transitioned from a handout of a few pages to a full-fledged magazine. It began by being a compendium of our activities and projects. It still accounts for our projects and activities throughout the year, but now we try to broaden our horizons by exploring various topics related to development of India. The transition required additional efforts on our part in coordinating with different authors from Penn State and India so that we maintain a rich diversity in our articles. This time, especially, we invited our project leaders back in India to write their vision of the project. It was heart-warming to read their stories; we witnessed the essence of what we do as we went through their experiences in writing. We thank saathi Mahendra Yadav from Bihar and Dr. Sreelekha Ray from Tripura for their valuable contributions.

Besides our regular events, we also organized a 'Bollywood Night' as another fundraising event. Instead of writing it out, we have presented to you a comic strip of 'how-where-when'. The recent conviction of Dr. Binayak Sen has not gone unnoticed and we invited two of our volunteers to put forward their views on the issue. We have also included an article based on the experiences of an American teacher in Gujrat. We are grateful to our friends at Penn State and back in India who wrote to us about their views on different aspects of our development. We hope that you enjoy reading Sankalp as much as we did in bringing it together!

The views expressed in the articles solely represent the autor's point of views.

Sankalp Team,

16 April, 2011

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From the President's Desk

Somesh Prasad Roy

Time flies. Another year has passed since the last food festival. We have had a wonderful food festival last year. We raised more than \$10,000. But more importantly, it started a new tradition — a completely green food festival. All the disposable items used, from spoons and forks to trash bags, were bio-degradable. At the end of the event, entire waste was given to the Borough for composting. Keeping with this new tradition, this year's food festival will also be green. As a token of appreciation to the wonderful community of State College, we donated part of the proceeds of our last food festival to the State College Area Food Bank. This year we have decided to donate a similar amount to Global Connections.

We had another big event last year — Bollywood Night, an evening dedicated to the Hindi Film Industry. The evening was marked with dazzling performances by local performers and guest artists, Jaishree and Suresh. At the end of the evening the audience couldn't resist swaying their bodies to the wonderful music being performed on stage.

Then there was the usual flurry of activities, like the freshers' picnic and the ever-busy concession stand during the home games in the Beaver Stadium. The Tudek Park seems to have become the de-facto picnic ground for AID. Everyone had a blast on the picnic day with lots of food and frisbee. The concession stand last year broke all the records! We raised more money than ever from the football games.

Last year we expanded our list of projects in India. One of the new projects is located in remote northeast India. Despite being one of the least developed regions, our reach to this part of India has been very limited. So we are glad to start a collaboration with Unmesh - a child rehabilitation center in Tripura. We hope that this connection will mark the beginning of a series of projects in northeast India. We also started supporting activist Mahendra Yadav in Bihar. We have worked with him earlier in the Right to Information campaigns. This support gives us another opportunity to help him fight the corruption in arguably the most corrupt part of India.

With every new project, we learn new things — new ideas, new problems and new solutions. With every new NGO we work, we make new friends, new partners. We look for new and fledgling organizations that need support and we collaborate with them until they become self-sustainable. We hope to build a network of like-minded people with ideas that are scalable, practical and aim at a better India. We also believe that no

single person or organization alone can make the country developed; but with help from everyone, the government can. We do not believe in blaming the government, instead we want to help the government find and implement better policies for a better India.

Our stated aim is to promote sustainable, equitable, and just development in India. Development includes, but is not limited to, socio-economic development. There is a certain aspect of moral and ethical development involved. A society is developed only when every member in it is happy, can eat and live leisurely and respectfully; still feels an urge for the betterment of the lives of people around himself and contributes something positive towards the society. Socio-economic development can be achieved by developmental projects taken up by the government or an NGO, but the moral and ethical development needs efforts from within. This internal push comes from individuals like us, when we stick to the good moral and ethical values in our daily lives. If we leave the task of development to others, be it the government or an NGO, we actually make their work hard by underestimating our own potential.

Another point we often forget is that in this age of information, development of India or any other country for that matter is not an independent phenomena. Any social change in one country has a global effect. Even though our focus is on developing India, we should not forget that India cannot sustain her development status if her neighbors remain under-developed. We need a focused, yet global perspective on the general issue of development.

The past year was an eventful year. We have been busy fighting volcanic ashes in European sky, oil spill in Gulf of Mexico, heat wave in Russia, cold wave in Argentina, floods in Pakistan, earthquake and cholera epidemic in Haiti and many more. On the brighter side, events like the miraculous rescue of the trapped miners in Chile, the official conclusion of Iraq war, release of Aung San Suu Kyi, official end of H1N1 pandemic, etc. have given us days of joy and promise. The measure of good and bad may not seem balanced, but there is always hope. And when hope combines with everyone's willingness to make things better, the distant dream of a developed world becomes a distant reality.

Here's to that hoping!

सूचना अधिकार कानून से मलिा बुढापे में सहारा महेंद्र यादव (पटना)

वैसे तो सूचना अधिकार कानून से रोज़ भ्रष्टाचार उजागर हो रहे हैं परन्तु इसके आलोचकों का कहना है की इस कानून के पहले भी भ्रष्टाचार उजागर होते रहे हैं और सक्षम व्यक्ति कोई भी जानकारी पा लेता था. इससे इतर इस कानून से वधिवा जानकी देवी को सहारा मलिा है और उनके बुढापे की लाठी के समान वर्षो से रुकी पेंशन मलिी है.

गोपालगंज और देवरयिा जलिो की सीमा पर बसे गाँव फ़ोइरपिति में ७० वर्षीय अनपढ वधिवा जानकी देवी रहती है. इनके पतिस्व. होरकिा राजभर की मृत्यु १०-०४-२००५ को हो गयी. वे कोलकाता स्थति एक जूट कारखाने के मजदूर थे. उनकी कमाई से परिवार चलता था. बचत के कुछ रूपये तीन बेटयिों की शादी में चला गया, छोटा बच्चा श्रीभगवान भी मुश्कलि से प्राथमकि शिक्षा ही प्राप्त कर पाया और दहिाड़ी (दैनकि) मजदूरी करने लगा. पतकि अवकाश ग्रहण करते समय एक छोटी पेंशन की रकम मलिती थी. उनके मृत्यु के उपरान्त उनको भी यह पेंशन मृतक आश्रति के तौर पर मलिना था.

इस पेंशन को करने के लिए दौड़ भाग शुरू की, परन्तु कौन सुनता. थक हार के पड़ोस के गाँव से ५% ब्याज मासकि की दर पर कर्ज रुपया लार्यी एवं उसे पेंशन पास करने हेतू नजराना ग्राम प्रधान कौशकि राजभर को दी. वर्षो बीतने पर पेंशन नहीं चालु हुआ उलटे ब्याज के पैसे बढ़ने लगे. १४-०९-२००७ को सूचना अधिकार प्रयोग कर इनकी पेंशन की जानकारी मांगी गयी. बाद में २००८ में पेंशन चालू हुआ और मृत्यु की तथिसिे बकाये राशकिा भुगतान हुआ.

अनपढ़ जानकी देवी को क्या पता था की बैंक में प्रत्येक नवम्बर माह में जीवति होने का प्रमाण पत्र जमा किया जाता है. उनका पेंशन २००९ में पुनः बंद हो गया. बाद में जीवति होने का प्रमाण पत्र जमा करती रही और दौड़ती रही परन्तु कोई नहीं सुनता. इस बीच घर की आर्थिक हालत और खराब हो गयी एवं बेटा भी सहयोग कम करने लगा. लगातार बीमार रहने लगी. बेटियों के सहयोग से पुनः इलाज हुआ. भवषिय नधिकार्यालय गोरखपुर जाने के पश्चात पता चला कि पेंशन इनकी जा रही है परन्तु पंजाब नेशनल बैंक पथरदेवा के अधिकारी बताते थे कि आपके खाते में कोई पैसा नहीं आया है. दो वर्ष दौड़ते दौड़ते थक गयी तो अंत में ११-१२-२०१० को सूचना के अधिकार कानून के तहत जानकारी मांगी गयी. जनवरी २०११ में जवाब मिला कि पेंशन नयिमति जाता है परन्तु खाता संख्या गलत था. इस सूचना के आधार पर शाखा प्रबंधक से शिकायत कि गयी. अंत में १५ फरवरी २०११ को दो वर्षो से रुका पैसा मिला.

जानकी देवी के लिए सूचना अधिकार कानून ही उनकी बेबसी और गरीबी का सहारा बना एवं उनकी बुढ़ापे की लाठी रूपी पेंशन मली.

RTI Act Provides Support in Old Age

Mahendra Yadav, AID Penn State Saathi, Patna
(Translated)

Even though the Right to Information (RTI) Act is exposing corruption every day, its critics claim that even before this act, corruption has been exposed and an able person could extract any information. Nevertheless, this act has provided support to widow Janaki devi and she has received her pension which had been stalled for years.

The 70 year old widow Janaki devi lives in Foiripati village located on the borders of Gopalganj and Devaria districts. Her husband Horika Rajbhar died on 10 April, 2005. He was a laborer in a jute factory in Kolkata. The family relied on his income for sustenance. Whatever little savings he had were exhausted in the marriages of his three daughters. His son Sribhagvan could barely complete his elementary education and started working as a daily wage laborer. After his retirement, he was supposed to receive a small pension. Following his demise, she was to get this pension as a dependent of the deceased.

But her efforts in claiming the pension went unheard. Tired and defeated, she took a loan from the neighboring village and gave it to the village head Kaushik Rajbhar in order to approve the pension. Years went by but she did not get the pension. Instead, her interest amount increased. On 14 September, 2007, using the RTI Act, information about her pension was sought. Later in 2008, she started receiving the pension and the arrears since the date of her husband's death were paid.

Illiterate Janaki devi did not know that every November she had to submit a certificate to the bank declaring that she is alive. Her pension again stopped in 2009. Later she repeatedly submitted the certificate to no avail. During this period, the financial situation at her home worsened and also her son stopped helping. She fell sick frequently. She was eventually treated with the help of her daughters. After visiting the pension office, she realized that her pension was being sent regularly. But the officials at the bank used to tell her that no money was credited to her account. After two years of repeated attempts, finally, on 11 December, 2010, she again resorted to the RTI Act. In January, 2011, she was informed that the pension was being sent regularly but her account number on file was wrong. Based on this information, branch manager was nagged. In the end, on 15 February, 2011 she received the money due for the past two years.

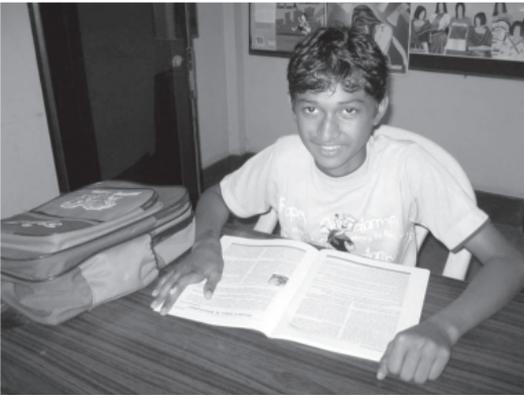
For Janaki Devi, the RTI Act came to her rescue in her old age.

Unmesh – Blooming

Dr. Sreelekha Ray, Tripura

“Don’t limit a child to your own learning, for he was born in another time.” — Rabindranath Tagore

Unmesh Child Protection Centre was initiated in 2009 as an extension of Anwasha, a project of Voluntary Health Association of Tripura (VHAT) with support from Association for India’s Development (AID). VHAT is a network of civil society organizations in Tripura, a state of northeast India. While working for children in need of care and protection, we strongly felt that the facilities for the marginalized children are very limited. A good number of them are working as domestic help and child laborers in hotels, tea stands, and motor workshops. This is particularly prevalent in the poverty struck areas, where families force children to start earning. This exposes the children to violent situations. Many of these children do not have a stable childhood. Since its inception, Unmesh has given shelter to more than 50 children. The stories of five such children are told below.



Name: Keshab Das, 14 yrs, Male, West Tripura

CHILDLINE received a call in April, 2005 from a concerned individual that a child, Keshab, is seriously wounded by a bomb blast and his mother was dead. The child was admitted to the hospital by the neighbors. CHILDLINE rushed there and

brought the case to our attention. A local extremist group was responsible for the blast. VHAT arranged for two major surgical treatments for Keshab because his father had abandoned him and his mother for another woman. Keshab lost the vision in one of his eyes. He had no one to look after him. At that time we also had some other children, who were in need of shelter

and we could not arrange a place for them in the government orphanage. Then we decided to start Anwasha, now Unmesh, which would be a shelter for such children. Since 2005, Keshab is staying in Unmesh. He is studying in class VII. He is very much interested to learn driving and electrical work.

Name: Bulti Majumder, 13 yrs, Female,
South Tripura

Bulti's father committed suicide. Now her mother is working as a daily wage laborer. Bulti has a sister, who is staying with her mother. The child has been staying in Unmesh since April, 2007. In December, 2010, she was promoted to class VIII.



Name: Paramita Sutradhar, 7 yrs,
Female, West Tripura

Bishnupriya, mother of Paramita, is a severe victim of domestic violence. She is the second wife of Nripendra Sutradhar. Nripendra's first wife died leaving two girls. After one year of marriage Bishnupriya gave birth to Paramita, another girl child. Since then Nripendra started torturing Bishnupriya. Bishnupriya was burnt by her husband and survived with severe burn scars on her left hand and lower body. She left her husband's home due to severe physical and mental torture. She went to the

police station and also filed a case in Women's Commission. VHAT and CHILDLINE supported her in seeking legal action and put Paramita in Unmesh's care in August, 2010. Paramita is studying in class II.

Name: Sampili Debbarma, 11 yrs,
Female, West Tripura

Sampili is a child with single parent from a tribal community. Her father is in jail with the charge of raping and killing his stepmother. Sampili's mother, Lalita, is earning her livelihood by working as a daily wage labourer. Sampili is staying in Unmesh since February, 2009. She is studying in the local government school. Now she is in class III. Before coming to Unmesh, Sampili never attended school.



Name: Priyanka Sarkar, 13 yrs, Female,
West Tripura

Both parents rejected Priyanka and went to Bangladesh leaving Priyanka with her stepsister in Narayanbari village. Priyanka came to Unmesh through CHILDLINE and is staying there since January, 2009. Before coming to Unmesh, she never went to school and was working as a domestic help in other people's house. Now she is studying in class III.

Though VHAT started its activities in 1988 for promotion of the health status of the people of Tripura, but at present child related activities are its major focus. We cannot think of our existence without working for

the children. But as we don't have the assurance of long term support, each year we are sending few of our children from Unmesh to other shelters such as Ramakrishna Mission. This year in February – March we admitted three of our boys to Ramakrishna Mission. We have regular contact with them. Three of the girls were sent back to their mothers for various reasons; for instance mother wants help from the child in household work. One of them was admitted to a government orphanage.

Our View

There shall be peace on earth, but not until
All children daily eat their fill,
Go warmly clad against the winter wind
And learn their lessons with a tranquil mind.
And then, released from hunger, fear and need
Regardless of their color, race or creed
Look upward smiling to their skies,
Their faith in life reflected in their eyes.
— Dorothy Roigt

Parivartan in 2010

Newsletters by Rushab Mehta

Compiled by Riddhi Singh

Parivartan was started in the slums of Wadala, Mumbai with the vision to provide free non-formal school to children belonging to extremely poor families. AID Penn State has funded Parivartan from 2007-2010. Every year, the team at Parivartan makes efforts to improve all facets of the lives of the children. Some of their key contributions this year are mentioned below.

Survey, August, 2010

Kanupriya from Parivartan and volunteers from Tata Institute of Social Sciences conducted a survey of around 700 households in the community and some of the results were surprising. Key facts that came out the survey are:

No of children per household	2.5
School going age children not going to school	4.00%
Percentage of illiterate mothers	45.00%
Percentage of illiterate fathers	18.00%
Percentage of muslims	80.00%
Percentage of hindus	20.00%

The key occupation of fathers included driving, tailoring, working at construction sites and vending small items. It was also found that there is a greater demand for balwadis, which are classes for very young children. It was, therefore, decided that this year three classes would be conducted for younger children and only one class for elder children (7-10).

Computer Center, October, 2010

With the objective of giving affordable computer education to youngsters, Parivartan started a computer class at the J. B. Dsouza Center on 2nd October 2010, on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti. There are six computers and enrollments for basic computer education have already begun. Over time, Parivartan also wants to provide job assistance to

students.

Special Education, December, 2010

In Parivartan, there are children who need special attention due to physical or psychological reasons. A session was arranged with trustee Medha Loltlikar, who is an educationalist and trustee of a special school. She gave informal training to teachers and now Parivartan is in the process to give admission to these children to schools. She recommended normal schools for two children and special school for one child.

Nutrition Survey, December, 2010

A nutrition survey was conducted by Mrs. Anuradha from the National Service Scheme unit of nearby B.M.N. College of Home Science along with Parivartan team on 25th and 26th December, 2010. The motivating cause for conducting the survey was the recent death of 18 children in Rafique Nagar, Govandi, Mumbai due to malnutrition.



A class in Parivartan

Vellore Hill Restoration Project — A Site Visit Report

Ganesh Vijayakumar

Vellore is a city located in between Chennai and Bengaluru and is famous for its medical college, golden temple and an old fort. The once lush green hillocks surrounding it are experiencing a slow death due to deforestation. There are three main reason for this — illicit liquor makers setting fire to the forest, uncontrolled grazing on the hills, and reckless plundering of the forest for firewood. The Vellore Hill Restoration Project is a joint initiative of Srinivasan of India Green Service, the Tamil Nadu Forest Dept, and AID Chennai. This project was started in February, 2010 with the main aim of increasing the forest cover over seven hill ranges surrounding Vellore.

This was my first site visit and I was excited about meeting the people I had seen only through photos over the past year. I expected to see hills that had been turned green due to the sustained efforts of the volunteers. Bharath, another AID Penn State volunteer, and I landed in Vellore and met Srinivasan in the morning. We hired an auto rickshaw for the day and planned to visit the hills that had not been visited by AID Penn State volunteers earlier. As we neared the hills, a sense of reality — a sense of the size of these hills dawned on me. The seven hill ranges of the project were but a small fraction of the 22 hill ranges surrounding Vellore. Many of the hillocks looked barren with no top soil leaving the underlying rock exposed. I immediately realized that it is going to take a sustained effort over a very long time to see real changes in these hills.

However, this sense of gloom quickly disappeared when we started interacting with the local people. Mr. Swami, a local village forest officer, was very enthusiastic about how the project had made a difference in the attitude of the local people towards unrestricted grazing on the hills. We saw numerous ponds dug by the volunteers. The ponds aim to prevent runoff from the hills and allow the hill to absorb more water. The farmers were happy about how they could grow two to three crop cycles per year instead of one due to the increased ground water levels. It was a very pleasant experience to hear this directly from the farmers when they were working in the fields. Never before had I walked through fields of so many different vegetHans J. Eysenckables, flowers and lentils.

“Manjampull” is a particular variety of grass that is found on these

hills. During the summer, the grass dries up and helps spread forest fires very quickly. Many sections of these hills are not easily accessible and certainly not close to sources of water to help put out any fires. Srinivasan aims to cut as much of the grass as possible and isolate it to pockets smaller than the critical size required for the forest fires to spread. The grass which is cut is used to cover the exposed rocks. We saw many volunteers busily cutting the grass and stacking them into piles. It was interesting to see Srinivasan's "management tactics" in action, trying to motivate them to work harder.

The volunteers and their families were happy about the fact that this project gives them a sustained source of income throughout the year. Srinivasan has used his contacts to find permanent jobs for a few volunteers in allied areas such as estate management. Srinivasan plans to sustain this project through development of fisheries in the ponds, apiculture, cowshed and nurseries. It was hard not to get carried away by Srinivasan's enthusiasm. I look forward to continuing collaboration with Srinivasan through AID Penn State to implement some of his plans to sustain the project.



AID volunteers with people from India Green Service

BOLLYWOOD NIGHT - BY BHARATH RENGARAJAN

HOW IT ALL BEGAN... THE IDEA MOMENT

Duh! Is it only me or this show & food is BORING!

Umm... maybe we could have our own show with food...

THE INVERSE-IDEA RULE
THE BEST IDEAS OCCUR DURING THE MOST BORING TIMES

NEXT DAY...

370 Willard AID CSH

You should call the event - **BOLLYWOOD NITE**

NO NO. Not me. He'll do it!

??@\$!^?

AND LIKE THAT, A NEW SHOW WAS BORN

SO WE LISTENED TO WISE MEN

To Begin, Begin!

Impossible itself says I'm possible

Rock n Roll!

Convert your Dreams into Thoughts, Thoughts into Action

Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.

AND GOT INSPIRED TO ORGANIZE THIS EVENT

THE COUNTDOWN

DAY 1 RECRUITMENT DAY

With great power comes great responsibility. I want you two to be the hosts for the event

Over-awed first-timers

DAY 2 SOUND CHECK

&& Smelly cat, && Smelly cat...

Look at me - I'm a star & I have an awesome echo. They should call me **The Doppler Effect**

CONTROL ROOM:
Umm... can we stick to the mike testing alone please?

DAY 3 TEAM PRACTICE (LAGAAN)

Captain G, why are we playing cricket on stage again?

Silence! A true team player doesn't question his captain's orders

Err... what are these people with the wierd costumes trying to do?

They are just Grad students wanting to dance, Honey.

THE RUN UP...

DAY 4 ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KIDS PRACTICE

Why am I paired with little kids always?

HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM

Mom, I'm sacrificing play-time for THIS?

Why do I have to be in school AFTER school?

Hey! Looks like another High School Musical!

DAY 5 FOOD COMMITTEE MEETING

The question is, Do we need compostable plates?

##\$! To eat or not eat dessert is the only question!

FOOD is the question. YES is the answer.

Nights at the round table - Session 1: Menu Meeting

DAY 6 PUBLICITY

Pictures speak more than words. Being there speaks more than words. Where will you be this Sep 10th?

We came, We saw, We got conquered. The Daily Collegian after the trial run.

YouTube

If Music be the food of love, play it on! =>>>

BOLLYWOOD NITE: Captain G is attending. Are you?

AND FINALLY...

D-DAY: 7:00 PM **A FALSE START**

She is doing it in the wrong order.

AGAIN!

CONTROL ROOM: ACTION, CAMERA, LIGHTS - GO!

D-DAY: 7:30 PM **FASHION PARADE**

Is it only me or do all the young kids here seem older & the older people seem so young?

Actual

Expected

GRAND TIME

D-DAY: 8:00 PM **INTERVAL**

FREE PALMISTRY FOR \$10 (??)

FOOD \$5 -->

TRUST PEOPLE TO GET THEIR PRIORITIES RIGHT

THE END

8.30 PM **THE GRAND FINALE**

38 DUM MAARO DUM...

NO SMOKING
Smokers pay a fine donation of \$300.

Like a glowing cigarette's end curtains closed on our show. Burnt out, but a smirk of satisfaction in its afterglow.

Money Raised

Total : \$ 4548

1852	245	1411	1040
in Sing For India	in Food	in Tobacco	in Smoking

WE WERE OVERWHELMED BY OUR PERFORMANCE

WISE WORDS WERE SPOKEN. AGAIN.

All is well, that ends well.

But this is not the end. It isn't even the beginning of the end. It is perhaps, the end of the beginning.

So, do the very best you can, and keep meaning to do it until the true end.

AND WE GOT INSPIRED AGAIN. RESULT - COMING SOON, BOLLYWOOD NITE 2011

Run for India!

Tanushree Dutta

I call it – run for passion – and I love the way the poet Kahlil Gibran puts it in words in The Prophet:

“Your reason and your passion are the rudder and the sails of your seafaring soul...

For reason, ruling alone is a force confining; and passion, unattended, is a flame that burns to its own destruction.”

Running, to me, is a retreat from commonplace; it cheers me up and relieves me into the realm of nature. It has so far been and will always be a time when I find myself. What could be better than having to follow your passion with a few like-minded souls, my running buddies? I call them like-minded because one thing that I have found common in all of them is an urge to follow one’s heart, a determination to achieve a goal and reach the destination.

All of it was triggered when a group of AID volunteers embraced this idea of running Philadelphia Marathon to raise money through support from friends and relatives. The money is utilized to run and assist developmental projects in India, something that AID as a group is meant for. Run for India became an annual fundraiser for AID Penn State in 2009, an event that I think was the best way I could connect to AID. I still remember the day when we, a group of ten to twelve students, started our training for Marathon. We were all venturing into the unknown with those parallel thoughts running in our minds: “Is this doable?” and then, “Yes, it is doable and we will see the end of it.” Energy and enthusiasm was all we had and that was



what, I think, finally saw us through this project. And now it's been two years since its inception and I hope that in the forthcoming years also this endeavor will flare the same love and passion in future AID volunteers and we will continue to cheer for India.

My wishes to all runners and a big thanks to AID for bringing running into our lives and for everything that it has been doing for India.

2010 AID Conference, Seattle

Neeraj Kumbhakarna

“What was your most enriching experience at the conference?”

“What was your biggest gain from the conference?”

These are questions that a lot of people have asked me since it was my first time at such an event. Since then I have done some serious thinking on the advice given by Lord Krishna to Arjuna in the Bhagwad Geeta:

बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते।
तस्माद् योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम्॥

Translation in the present context: “One who is un-ambivalent does not care what good or bad comes his way. Master this art of engaging in all your undertakings with equal mindedness, for the art itself is superlative genius.”

I had my share of doubts on the matter discussed in this verse. Un-ambivalence? Superlative genius? Do people who are close to such a state of mind really exist? All my concerns were put to rest when I saw Mr. Nikhil Dey and Mrs. Revathy presenting their work in the AID 2010 conference in Seattle. It was a pleasure and a privilege talking to these simple, down to earth people who pour their heart and soul into their undertakings for the betterment of our dear nation. Mrs. Revathy is an AID Saathi and a dynamic leader of the organic farming movement in Tamil Nadu. Mr. Dey is a social activist who has rallied thousands of people in Rajasthan to fight the blatant siphoning of government welfare funds meant for ordinary people. We, as Indians, can imagine the terrible hardships they must have faced when they started off with the aim of bringing about a positive change in the system. Listening to the stories that they told with their modest demeanor and smiling faces made me realize that there are individuals who are on their way of mastering the art of superlative genius which Lord Krishna talked about. I consider this realization as my most enriching experience at the conference.

The 2010 AID conference was not all just about philosophy but did have its share of fun and adventure. We had been told that conveyance from Seattle airport to the conference venue would be provided. When we came out of the airport in the midst of pouring rain at 1:00 am, we found a 15-seater van parked in the lot. The van had its keys, some food, a map to the venue and a GPS. We were supposed to drive it to the venue ourselves.

The scene was right out of a movie! It was as if we were on a dangerous mission. The two and a half hour drive in the dark through forest-like areas in pouring rain was indeed an adventure. The AID Seattle chapter had an innovative idea of selecting the Deception Pass Environmental Learning Center as the venue. It is a resort far away from the city on the coast of the Cornett Bay with wooden cabins and beautiful natural surroundings. We would have enjoyed more of it had the weather Gods been more merciful. It rained almost all the time throughout our three day stay there. But we did have fun roasting marshmallows and mushrooms on an open campfire, strolling along in the forest and the sea coast and sleeping in the wooden cabins. We also got to test our so called “cooking skills” as food for all the attendees was cooked at the location by taking turns.

Throughout the conference, the main hall was full of activity without any break. We were introduced to the new executive committee members who took over the reins. We learnt a lot about the grassroot situation in India through practical workshops and similar activities. The issues that were discussed were malpractices in farming, corruption in government run welfare schemes, poverty, malnutrition and income disparity in India. This was very enlightening for me even though I already knew what things are like back in India. What I knew was just by reading newspapers and watching TV. Having people with firsthand experience talking about it made a lot of difference. We were also given opportunities to sign up for different groups and to actually start working for AID on one of its projects. To top it all, the Sunday night dinner was the most memorable one. The coordinators of that event recreated the Indian scenario of food disparity by serving different foods to different conference attendees with very few being served gourmet food on decorated tables and the majority being served just rice and water. We saw people protesting, shouting slogans and demanding action against this injustice. Although this was just an informative and enlightening exercise, it did scare a lot of people. Some of the children present there even started to cry. After a while all the misunderstandings were cleared up and all of us enjoyed a scrumptious dinner.

Overall for me, the conference was an attitude changing experience. It aroused my latent awareness of the serious issues we are facing in various sectors in India. It made me realize that we need to focus our attention and work together to relieve our beloved motherland from the clutches of the problems she is facing.

The Football Experience

Sneha Kadetotad

“So which university are you from?”

“Penn State”

“Oh! That’s great! Joe Pa is awesome! Been following the games lately?”

That was my conversation with a cab driver in New York. I think this would be the case when any Penn Stater visits another state in the US. One of the first things spoken about would be football. I was well aware of the game being a big deal with the university campus buzzing with people on game weekends. I had also heard about people from AID volunteering at these games. Realization soon dawned that — another year and I would be leaving the university not having been to a single game. Having used the excuse of having too much work to go volunteering way too many times, I finally decided it was time to go.

I volunteered for the next game. It happened to be Penn State vs. Michigan, supposedly a big game, and also a White Out. It was early on a Saturday morning when I left home wearing my Penn State jersey to get a feel of belonging to the university, if nothing else. Reaching the stadium, I was given a pass and I entered the stadium to find hoards of people everywhere. That was my first experience of how big the whole event actually was. I went into the stand, one of the many all around the stadium, where the volunteers from AID prepared the drinks and eats for the game and sold them to the fans. Since the game was about to begin, many people were waiting at the stand to get their drinks and eats so as not to miss a single second of the game once it started. There was a group of about 30 Indian students in the stand managing different stages of the supply chain. Most of them were regular volunteers and knew exactly what to do and how to do it. This being my first time, I was given instructions on how exactly the stand is managed and what I was to do. I was given the responsibility of filling out the drinks. I started the work with not much emotion.

About half an hour later, Penn State made its first touchdown. I still hadn’t gone out into the stadium. The huge roar from the stadium and the numerous televisions in the corridors gave us the news. The cheer of the crowd could be heard far and beyond. I started cheering with the rest of the

people at the stand, soon realizing that I was feeling like a part of Penn State for the first time.

Just before halftime, as the crowd at the stand was relatively less, I had the opportunity to go out and actually enter the stadium. My first glance of the whole stadium, with the unbelievably huge crowd all in white, completely took my breath away. The people, the game, the cheerleaders everywhere and the whole stadium in general gives one a sense of awe that is inexplicable. Being someone who did not even follow the rules of the game didn't stop me from feeling the excitement. The happiness and thrill of the atmosphere seeped in immediately. I had my first experience of being a part of a wave. I took a few photographs so as to remember these feeling years after.

Returning to the stand, I helped out for the rest of the game as Penn State beat Michigan scoring touchdown after touchdown, cheering for the team throughout. Towards the end of the game, a couple of students went out with drinks, walking around the stadium through the crowd to make some last minute sales. I joined this group. Walking through the fans I could feel the energy in the stadium. We decided to go right till the top. Just when we reached the upper levels, Penn State scored the final goal to win the game. The crowd went ballistic. There was loud cheering all around. People started jumping in the stands, causing the stands to shake. It was a moment of adrenaline rush. We cheered along with the crowd and the joy was inexplicable. The view from the top of the stadium was so breathtaking that one could not help but smile. It was a moment of sheer pride of being a Penn Stater. Something I think every student here should experience.

After the game, we came back to the stand to help clean up. While doing this, the coordinators from AID were doing the accounts to calculate the money made through the game. They announced to us the final amount. That is when it actually struck me that through the whole experience I was actually able to contribute towards some good for my country. Every time I heard about the organization I would mentally make a note of trying to be a helping hand for it. I had heard only good things about the organization but never went about actually putting the plan into action. Through this motive, of experiencing a football game and getting a sense of school pride, I was able to get the feel of being a part of the organization too. Knowing that you helped contribute towards your country's good, no matter in how small a manner, gives you a feeling that, I think, comes close to true happiness.

I hope the batches of students to come do not make the mistake I did, waiting for a time close to you leaving the university, to experience

something as splendid as what I did on that Saturday.

Vegetable Garden — The Follow-Up

We decided to follow up on the progress of the vegetable garden about which our fellow volunteer Ganesh Vijaykumar wrote last year. For those of you who did not read last year's Sankalp, the garden belongs to the Das', State College residents, and AID patrons. Mrs. Das, fondly called Rama Mashi or Mashi, had proposed last year that if AID volunteers help her out in the garden, she would donate commensurately to AID. And so "a bunch of city grown kids" took to the task of gardening. But then some of them got hooked into that, and this year they started farming there on their own with help from Mashi. Here are snippets of a conversation with one such farmer under the condition of anonymity!

Q. How much veggies did you grow, did you use any chemicals?

A. We grew lots of veggies, both in variety and quantity. It is easier to list what we didn't grow! So lets not go there. It was more than enough for four-five people's entire supply of vegetables during the whole summer and fall. In fact, I still have frozen vegetables in my freezer and am still consuming them!

Yes, we used chemicals. It is not an organic farm. However, chemical use was restricted to only one fertilizer - MiracleGro. We didn't use any chemical pesticide, fungicide, etc.

Q. Where did you get seeds/ manure from, how many of you participated?

A. Most of the seeds were collected by Mashi. She buys seeds wherever she finds good seeds! Some common seeds are available in places such as Walmart, Lowes, Ace's. For other seeds and saplings, sometimes we went to an Amish farm in Center Hall. Mashi ordered some seeds via horticulture catalogs at the beginning of the season too. Manure was collected from a local farm, a Mashi connection again.

We started with five. But at the end of the season it was only two of us! Mashi was there all along.



Q. Was it fun?

A. Definitely! There is nothing more relaxing than venting all your frustrations and anger on pieces of soil and mud at the end of a long day in the lab!

Q. How much time it took from your grad life?

A. We used to go every other day in the evening for couple of hours. But then after a point, we went there whenever we had time ... it's like an addiction, but a positive one.

Q. Is gardening something you plan to always do?

A. I do not quite get your question. Before I started, I never “planned” to garden seriously. But now it seems very hard not to do gardening! Or should I call it farming?

Q. Did you sell some stuff?

A. Yes. Lots. Will sell this year too. Are you interested to buy?

Q. Sure! Did any snowstorm cause havoc?

A. Not really. But frost caused some problems. Some plants are sensitive to frost, so we had to cover them up according to weather forecasts. We never followed weather forecast so closely before!

Q. Any incidents or anecdotes?

A. One good/ bad part of working there is the fact that people passing by the bike path will most definitely stop and ask about gardening. It looks so beautiful with flowers and vegetables and two Indian graduate students working among them. Some times these people include our advisers too!

The most powerful enemies were groundhogs, raccoons, and rabbits. They'll dig up holes and eat up all the new leaves and vegetables. If we put a trap in the evening, we will surely catch one by the morning. And the most innovative remedy we found was powdered fox urine. And it seems to work! But it is a never-ending battle between us and them! Do you know if there's a market for groundhog meat?

And then there are blackberrys ... well let that be a secret!

Binayak Sen's Conviction: Is Justice Playing Politics?

Anirban Hazra

In a democracy, the judiciary is expected to transcend politics, which is to say that even if the laws of the land reflect certain politics (for example, different laws may apply to people depending on their age, nationality, gender or economic status), their interpretation by the judiciary should not depend on the popular or prevalent political atmosphere. The judiciary's primary job is to interpret the law and uphold the tenet that a person is innocent until proved guilty. Moreover, it is the judiciary's duty to maintain neutrality and objectivity in cases where the government is involved — a tough call, given the reality that the judiciary is after all a part of the government and judicial appointments are made by government officers.

A recent case in India — the conviction of Binayak Sen on charges of sedition (meaning incitement of discontent or rebellion against a government) — may represent a situation where the judiciary has not maintained its independence. This article provides some background about Sen and discusses why his sentence of life imprisonment may be unfair.

Binayak Sen is a doctor, who has worked with the poor for a large part of his professional career spanning more than 30 years. He has also been a human rights activist and since 2005, he has been particularly critical of the government alleging that it is promoting a civil war-like situation in the state of Chhattisgarh.

The two groups involved in the conflict in Chhattisgarh are the Maoist party and Salwa Judum. Both these groups believe in violence as a strategy to achieve their goal. Their fight is primarily over land, which is becoming precious by the day with fast paced industrialization. The Maoist party is regarded as a terrorist outfit and the government has lent support to its foe Salwa Judum with a belief that it is a strategy to quell the Maoists.

Like in any conflict, here too, the greatest suffering is being borne by innocent people in Chhattisgarh. Sen has opposed this strategy and has been extremely vocal in his criticism of the government. The government alleges that Sen has links with the Maoists and that is the reason for his opposition of Salwa Judum and criticism of the government. His supporters deem the evidence to convict Sen as insufficient and the life sentence as extreme.

The question to grapple with is posed in the title of the article. An unwillingness of the government to take criticism from its citizens and the judiciary's inability to keep the rulers honest are signs of weakness in a democracy. Fortunately, there are checks in place; Sen has recently appealed to the Supreme Court. From a broader perspective, such high profile cases spark conversation about issues of justice, politics, freedom of speech and democracy that can lead to a more just society for all of us.

The views expressed in this article are solely author's and do not represent
AID's stand on this issue.

Binayak Sen: Are We Playing Politics with Justice?

Vikas Argod

“Who is Binayak Sen?”

“An award winning doctor and human rights activist. He was serving poor people marginalized by the state, and he is now under arrest by the Chattisgarh police and has been wrongly charged with sedition by the Raipur court.”

“That’s bad. But, what do you think of Communist Party of India (Maoist) or CPI (Maoist)*?”

“Forget them. Salwa Judum* is bad. It is aimed at destroying poor tribal people and sponsored by the state backed by industries. It should immediately stop.”

This is a snippet of a typical conversation between majority of the human rights activists in India, now busy campaigning for the release of Binayak Sen. It is also a summary of many of their campaign videos floating on the internet. But there is more to this case. The manufactured outrage from Sen’s release campaign has crossed the line of displaying public dissent. More than 40 Nobel laureates led by Amartya Sen have asked for the immediate release of Binayak Sen. Amartya Sen even went as far as to announce that “if the high court has its thinking straight and unbiased it will overturn the decision.” To borrow a quote from Hans J. Eysenck, a famous psychologist, “Scientists, especially when they leave the particular field in which they are specialized, are just as unreasonable as everybody else, and their unusually high intelligence only makes their prejudices all the more dangerous.”

What is not being told is that Binayak Sen is a long time sympathizer of CPI (Maoist), a terror outfit. Police have found their publications and clear evidence of him working actively in legal defense of them. As the General Secretary of People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), he had issued press releases in favor of CPI (Maoists) leaders. Contrary to his supporters’ claim that he is a Gandhian, PUCL documents generated during his tenure have not condemned violent movement led by CPI (Maoist) in strong words even once. He visited Narayan Sanyal, a CPI (Maoist) leader, in jail and supposedly acted like an ‘agent’ as per the police. Leaders of CPI (Maoist) have called for protests condemning Sen’s arrests. They frequently do such protests when their leaders get arrested.

As per Chattisgarh Special Public Security Act (CSPSA), any kind of facilitation for members of unlawful organizations is a crime and by that token the case against Binayak Sen is strong. Based on the evidence, the Raipur court convicted Sen and charged him with sedition, which caused outrage among his supporters. The case was, I think, weak for sedition charge. Disagreement with this verdict is completely acceptable. That is why there are higher courts. But to assume that the verdict has been ‘fixed’ is outright arrogance and shows their disbelief in judiciary. Though the supporters are nothing but vocal minority, with backing from left-leaning media, they sound like majority. Endorsement from scholars like Amartya Sen reinforces their views in the minds of the public. Unfortunately, these intellectuals are (un)knowingly giving unintended legitimacy to CPI (Maoist) insurgency.

Sadly, in this ideological battle, people of Chhattisgarh are suffering from denied economic freedom. Ideologies apart, should Binayak Sen be charged with sedition or two years of jail term or get released immediately — is something for the courts to decide.

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*Salwa Judum is an anti-Naxalite movement in Chhattisgarh, India,. Naxalite movement is a far-left movement in some states in rural India that is designated by India as a terrorist movement on account of their violent Maoist activities in the states. (Source: Wikipedia)

CPI (Maoist) is a Naxalit organization.

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AID’s stand on this issue.

Philanthropy by Indian Corporate for Underprivileged

Prabha Mangalgi, Delhi

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is part of business in India today. Till date if we compare India with other countries, very little of its GDP goes towards CSR, although India is identified as a country where philanthropy known as 'dhan' is age-old tradition. The situation is heading towards a change, that is, in the new business model connecting with society is a need for good business. Corporate houses are realizing that 'what is good for workers – their community, health, and environment – is also good for the business.' Corporates are devoting time, resources and money towards CSR through various schemes and programs. It is understood that giving back to society is very important for any business house. We have quite a good number of examples in the Indian corporate sector that are striving to make some changes in the lives of the underprivileged. The Government of India has directed the Public Sector Undertakings (PSU) to devote 0.5% to 5% towards philanthropy.

Of the top 40 Indian business groups, around 70% are owned or controlled by families. For many, the CSR initiatives of these family-owned companies are generally seen and treated as their own giving, with wives, daughters, or relatives at the helm. But times are a-changing. "We have to create platforms. The challenges are huge. One group cannot accomplish the task," is the feeling of many business groups. The Times of India group is conducting a national survey on CSR activities, so that collective development can be initiated by corporates which can speed up the CSR process and avoid duplicity.

There is a subtle change; a clear shift in the mindset of India's rich and wealthy. Earlier, most of India's business groups, tradition-bound and conservative, were happy doing their own thing, in their backyards — building a school, a clinic, writing out checks, or working with communities around their areas. The major sectors that are now attracting the attention of donors are: combating HIV - AIDS, education, health, child welfare, rehabilitation of child laborers, etc.

The inclination to forge partnerships, pool resources, create and foster alliances, scale-up giving for better reach and impact can be seen. It's slow, slightly hesitant, but it's happening. It is still in its early days. India's wealthy families are beginning to step out of their cocoons, their

comfort zones in giving, which is indeed a good sign for Indian philanthropy.

I am able to see the future, the welcome change in Indian corporates will certainly help India to come out of its weakness and fight poverty and will finally build a stronger India.

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AID's stand on this issue.

Experiences of an American Teacher in Gujrat

Cat Biddle

My first day of teaching in India, I walked into a classroom to find sixty pairs of eyes looking back at me. The fans had slowed to a halt and though my 11th science students looked bright and fresh sitting four or five to a bench, I could feel the sweat dripping down my face already. I was unused to the climate, unused to the sari that I had awkwardly pinned and pleated that morning, unused to having so many students looking up at me expectantly. My class in America had only fifteen students.

The blackboard was full of Gujarati writings from their previous class. I looked around desperately for chalk and a duster, but I was also unused to the government school convention of keeping these items in the staff room and thus found nothing. Disoriented without the tools of my trade, I turned back to the class. This was not the promising start that I had hoped.

I was a teacher transplanted from Boston to Kadod, Gujarat, a small village roughly two hours outside of Surat. I had come to teach 9th and 11th standard English at the Gujarati-medium Kadod High School through a series of unlikely events that led me to apply for a job with the small educational non-profit, the Nanubhai Education Foundation. Nanubhai's mission is to improve the quality of government school education in rural India through ensuring that students receive quality instruction in English and technology — the skills they would need to reap the benefits of the growth of India's newly booming economy. Finding English speakers in this part of Gujarat was difficult, and qualified English teachers even harder — English classes at Kadod High School had, until then, been taught almost exclusively in Gujarati.

A fit of giggling erupted on the girl's side of the classroom. The sight of this strange foreigner teacher fumbling to start her class proved too much for my students' composure. I smiled and shrugged: Why pretend? I introduced myself and started my lesson as best I could. When the class ended 25 minutes later, I was left overwhelmed by my students' composure and enthusiasm, the way their hands shot up into the air, the way that they listened and thoughtfully responded, the way they cared about the subject and their education. It was unlike anything I had ever seen in the US.

It was an impression that only grew throughout the two years that I

stayed there. However, the longer I lived in Kadod, the more aware I became of the barriers that stood in my students' and my co-workers' way to improving the quality of education on offer.

"Teacher," one of my students asked me one day while I was copying an essay entitled "My Computer" out of a cheap exam-guide onto the board for my students, in turn, to copy into their notebooks and then memorize for the final exam, "Can I copy my essay in a blue pen?" I started to say that it certainly didn't matter to me when my co-teacher cut in. "No," she said sternly to the student, "you must copy it using a black pen."

Later, when I asked her why the stringent rules regarding pen color, she explained that the School Inspector checks a few student notebooks each year and they must adhere to strict standards. I wondered inwardly how essays copied in a particular pen color could possibly serve as an indication of student learning.

The culture of bureaucracy, copying and memorization which reigned the school infiltrated every aspect of my instruction. The homework I assigned was merely copied from student to student. The projects my students turned in were made up of a text laboriously copied from an old book or, if the student was lucky, the Internet. The few library books that my students did have access to were locked in glass-doored cases to which only the government paid librarian, who rarely bothered to show up at the school, had the key. The skills and resources my students needed to create language, to put together new sentences and combine words in different ways, were underdeveloped in a school culture that focused on perfection rather than skill-building.

There was, however, hope in the form of the younger set of staff teachers. These teachers were not reconciled to the problems that the students faced in getting quality instruction that they could use in the real world after graduation. They were interested in exploring and generating new ways of addressing these problems.

In this way, a partnership was born, a program called the Teacher Leadership Program was started in my second year in Kadod. Young teachers, straight from their B.Ed, partnered with a foreign teacher for a year in an English classroom, sharing all the responsibilities of teaching and using their classrooms as laboratories for developing strategies that will serve the students to navigate the exigencies of the exam as well as develop real-world English skills. The foreign teachers bring their experience as a teacher in a different environment and their fluency in

English while the local teachers bring their knowledge of the examinations, Indian school conventions and the cultural context of the students. Together, they generate solutions that will work to help bridge the gap between government education in rural India and private education in urban India.

After one year in the program, these enthusiastic younger teachers have then partnered with other enthusiastic young local teachers, spreading the generated solutions and teaching methods beyond their own school. The changes are still small — only a few teachers have participated in the program, but thus far, the results have been encouraging. My 11th science students from my first year write me enthusiastically in English through e-mail to tell me that they are surviving their English-medium college programs. When I get these e-mails, I think back to my first day, fumbling for chalk and duster, and think that maybe things haven't gone so badly after all.



In the school in Kadod

Villages as a source of self-sustenance for the Indian Society

Soumya Pisupati

A recent survey undertaken by National Geographic in June, 2010, on the occasion of the World Environment Day reported that Indian consumers have the most sustainable and environmentally friendly behavior amongst the 17 nations surveyed. The survey was undertaken in tandem with the polling firm Globe Scan to study consumer behavior that can have an impact on the environment. Some of these were transportation patterns/ choices, use of resources, and sources of food. Around 17,000 people in each of these countries were surveyed which measured the impact of the average consumer to each of these nations. The important thing to note here is that the result of this study exhibited the environmental impact of the consumers in a country, not the environmental impact of the country. So the fact that India is ranked No. 1 with the likes of US, China, UK, France and Japan take part, is commendable.

To start with, what is it that makes the Indian consumers environmentally more sustainable than their global counterparts? India, as a nation, can boast of having one of the world's earliest complete-in-itself civilizations. The average Indian's lifestyle today is an amalgamation of various different lifestyles and practices – some ancient, some modern, some so old and deep rooted that if abandoned on the grounds of being obsolete, will probably be impossible to trace back. For instance, the 'rangoli' custom is a means not only to decorate the homes, but also to keep insects away. India has always followed the route of absorbing practices of other cultures and civilizations while retaining its own. Indian culture has always focused on quality of life — not on how much we have, but how happy we are with what we have. The civilization which developed on the banks of the great Indus river was an inherently eco friendly civilization. A good illustration of this is the fact that the festivals we celebrate today, all have their roots in our ancestors' eco friendly civilizations, be it the gular made of powdered flowers, the Ganesh idols made of natural clay, or the emphasis on vegetarianism.

Now coming back to the survey, how we managed to be environmentally sustainable. Was it due to the fact that the average Indian's carbon footprint was low because of the lack of basic amenities? Or was it because in a country of a billion, a sample set of 17,000 was not

representative. The answer lies in the development of villages in India. Statistics reveal that villages continue to be India's backbone due to the inherently agrarian nature of the society, in spite of the globalization and information technology revolution that have set the country in motion. Whatever may be the reason, most people, if not all, wish to reach the highest possible standard of living – whether green or non-green.

The great Indian leader and visionary MK Gandhi envisaged free India as a confederation of self-governing, self-reliant, and self-employed people living in village communities rather than a nation state. The British believed in a centralized, industrialized, and mechanized modes of production. Gandhi revolutionized the statement “Not mass production, but production by the masses.” Mass production is only concerned with the product, whereas production by the masses is concerned with the product, the producers, and the process. A local economy enhances community spirit, community relationships, and community well-being which in turn encourage mutual aid. On the other hand, mass production leads people to leave their villages, their land, their crafts, and go to work in the factories. Gandhi knew that with the globalization of the economy, every nation would wish to have a trade surplus. Beyond a certain limit, economic growth becomes detrimental to human well-being as demonstrated by the recent global meltdown. The western society, too, is slowly but surely realizing this.

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