



# Prakash

Asha - Princeton Newsletter

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*The year 2002 has been eventful for Asha. Asha co-founder Sandeep Pandey won the Ramon Magsaysay Award. In Princeton, we had many interesting speakers from grassroots projects in India. We continue to support different projects, discuss and debate ways of making meaningful contributions to our mission.*

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## 2002 Ramon Magsaysay Award



**Dr. Sandeep Pandey**, one of the co-founders and early volunteers of Asha for Education has recently been awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award for 2002 in the *Emergent Leadership* category for his work towards the upliftment

of the poor and the underprivileged in India. The entire Asha community around the world is proud his work has found the recognition it deserves.

Sandeep is currently the coordinator of Asha-India and devotes time to the Asha Ashram at Lalpur in Uttar Pradesh. Sandeep is also involved in many other social activities in India.

After receiving the award, Sandeep gave several interviews. However, some of his statements have been quoted out of context, resulting in many inquiries to Asha for Education for clarification. Melliyal Annamalai, the President of Asha for Education, issued the following clarification:

1. Asha for Education has benefited greatly from Dr. Pandey's views on education and is delighted for the honor he has received.

2. Asha is a non-hierarchical organization, with its mission and activities are decided by its volunteers collectively, instead of by any single volunteer. Individual volunteer opinions do not necessarily reflect the views of Asha for Education, our supporters, donors or project-partners.

For more details please see the following webpages: [www.ashanet.org/sandeep/](http://www.ashanet.org/sandeep/) and [www.ashanet.org/sandeep/clarification.html/](http://www.ashanet.org/sandeep/clarification.html/)

## **Visitors and Speakers**

### **Rashmi Misra, VIDYA**

Rashmi Misra visited us on 10th June to share with us her work in the area of education and empowerment. She works with Vidya, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Campus in New Delhi and Mumbai. Rashmi along with a group of faculty wives started the organization called Vidya about 18 years ago at the IIT campus in New Delhi. It was their response to their observation that girls from the slums nearby were being deprived of an education and being forced to assume the maternal domestic responsibilities of housekeeping and caring for their siblings whilst their parents worked. From this humble beginning - 15 girls learning Hindi and English and maths on Rashmi's lawn - VIDYA has grown, continuing to support those members of society traditionally neglected.

Rashmi's talk was well attended and she received many questions about the future of Vidya, its sustainability, her work in Mumbai etc. Her responses were very pragmatic and filled with anecdotes. It was clear that her experience in both on the education and training could be very useful for Asha.

An Asha Princeton volunteer has since visited the Delhi site of Vidya and has provided a site visit report. Please see a later section in this newsletter for details of the site-visit.

For more details on Vidya, please visit <http://www.indiasites.com/vidya>

### **Elango Ramaswamy, Panchayat President, Kuthambakkam, Tamil Nadu**

Asha Princeton had the pleasure of hosting Elango Ramaswamy on 17th August. Elango is the Village Government (Panchayat) President of the 5000 strong village of Kuthambakkam in Tamil Nadu (India). A few years ago, the village was fraught with poverty and lacked basic infra-structure. Violence against lower castes (dalit) and women was rampant, had 35% of its population was involved in illicit liquor brewing.

Today, the village has been transformed and has good basic infrastructure in place. The villagers are now busy building an environment-friendly local economy based on a cooperative model, producing their basic necessities (like food and clothing) within their own village.

Elango's earthy and practical approach to sensible problem solving struck a chord with the audience. He pointed to the glaring lack of even basic information within the village communities and the fact that the engagement with the government was absolutely mandatory to bring about any meaningful social changes. Based on his experience and ongoing work, he is starting a Panchayat Academy to help other villages use this model for development. He was clear that each village would have to make their own choices towards self-sufficiency and that there is no single answer.

Please visit [www.samanvaya.com/swaraj.htm](http://www.samanvaya.com/swaraj.htm) for more details on the speaker and his work.

**Prof. R. Rajagopalan, Director, International Ocean Institute, IIT Chennai**

Prof. R. Rajagopalan visited Princeton on 25th September to speak on his work relating to rural development projects in 40 Dalit villages in coastal Tamil Nadu in South India. The project focuses on disadvantaged women and children and attempts to integrate livelihood issues, coastal ecology and appropriate eco-technologies. The project activities include: formation of women's self-help groups, extension of microcredit, setting up of supplementary education centers for children, tree planting, spirulina production, organic bio-intensive gardening, promotion of herbal gardens and rainwater harvesting.

Prof. Rajagopalan showed two short films relating to the project and followed up with a discussion on the projects and their future. Six supplementary education centers are supported by several Asha chapters. It was indeed heartening to see the effect it has had on the children. Prof. Rajagopalan paid glowing tributes to the enthusiasm, seriousness and sincerity of Asha's efforts. The long term goal of the project is to support the centers with a part of the money generated in the microcredit scheme. It was a very positive experience to have a speaker who is not only very aware of the ground realities but is also very articulate in stating them. Prof. Rajagopalan's goal is to create 25 self-funded supplementary education and microcredit centers within the next few years. For a detailed status update please visit: [www.ashanet.org/mit/Public/www/Projects/loi/loi.html](http://www.ashanet.org/mit/Public/www/Projects/loi/loi.html)

**Arup Ghosh, Tomorrow's Foundation, Street-to-School Project, Kalighat, Calcutta**

Arup Ghosh and his twin brother Swarup have worked with the children of sex workers, slum and pavement dwellers in the Kalighat area in

Calcutta for almost eight years. Working with the local government and using their facilities, they have been helping these children by providing them with supplemental tutoring and other vocational skills. Tomorrow's Foundation has received support from Asha since 1996.

Arup visited Princeton on 12th October as part of visit to Asha chapters in the US. Arup's infectious enthusiasm and positive energy was palpable in his talk. It was clear that he was willing to work with the local government and be part of the solution. Given the long term successful relationship of the organization with Asha, it was clear that Arup was anxious to take it to the next level. This included constructing a building to support the ongoing activities. The group seems to have also given considerable thought to the idea of vocational education as a tool for future growth of the children. For more details on the project, please visit: [www.ashanet.org/la/Projects/Calcutta](http://www.ashanet.org/la/Projects/Calcutta).

**D.P.Prakash, Asha Volunteer, Project Pride & Universal Quality Education (UQE)**

DP Prakash (or DP as he is known) spoke very eloquently a variety of subjects including Project Pride which is an attempt to improve the quality of education for children from Urur Kuppam, a small village in South Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Starting with the status of the village, its historic roots, its current status and how Asha got involved, DP weaved his way through several complex issues including community development, education and eventually what needs to be done for the future.

DP also spoke on his concept of Universal Quality Education, and shared ideas on how Asha's engagement needs to get directed for the future. He simply stated his goal to achieve UQE for all Indians by 2047 with clearly defined milestones along the way.

For more details on Project Pride, please visit [www.ashanet.org/berkeley/projects/pride](http://www.ashanet.org/berkeley/projects/pride)

## **Project Updates**

### **Nalamdana: Youth Leadership**

Nalamdana's Youth Leadership Program is based on the conviction that community leaders from within the community would be the most effective agents of positive change. To this end, Nalamdana provides scholarships to bright students from financially challenged communities in the 8th to 12th grades. The students are screened for (i) academic ability (ii) leadership (iii) motivation and (iv) a commitment to social change.



The scholarship covers their tuition, books and uniforms, and also provides exposure to a variety of unconventional career options through 1 - 5 day workshops. In 2001-'02 they ranged from carpentry and pottery to script-writing, English language classes, talks on personality development.

The students maintain an impressive track record in their formal education, and gain an appreciation of a broad range of life's options. Of the students that have completed their term at Nalamdana, one has achieved a bachelors in Dental Surgery, two have applied for engineering and medicine and a fourth has applied for teachers training. The fifth has elected to continue through distance learning.

Ms. Selvarani who is doing her residency in Dental Surgery is volunteering at health camps organized by Nalamdana, and is also able to rally support from her professor. In short, Nalamdana's investment in these bright young people is starting to bear fruit.

Asha Princeton will continue to support the project for the year 2003 for \$3200.

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### **Vasundhara's Science on Wheels**

This is the third successful year of the Science on Wheels (SOW) program and all the schools in the Konkan region (southern Maharashtra) know it.



SOW has decided to include upper-primary schools (5th to 7th standard) in their visits to boost student's level of understanding as they surge towards secondary school. They also have mathematics tricks and simple geography experiments in order to understand planetary motions and their effects. The SOW teachers spend one whole day in one school and the program goes on for more than 8 hours a day. The schools are notified about their arrival long time ago. They visit each school 2 times in a year, i.e. once each semester.

SOW has increased their outreach to 150 schools (90 upper-primary schools and 60 secondary schools). They plan to intensify teacher's training program by forming study groups and doing individual projects e.g. studying about a well-known scientist like Newton and how he came up with his theory. Asha-Silicon Valley's efforts resulted in Oracle Foundation approving \$10, 000 towards equipment for the Eureka Hall in Science Center.

**Project Coordinator:** Rohini Gupta

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### **Aaj Pottery & Ceramic Art Center**

The traditional potters in the Aajgaon village (Maharashtra) village are hesitant to send their kids to learn pottery. Their knowledge of pottery is limited to making earthen pots, diyas, etc. which has very limited buyers. Nowadays entire potter families, including their kids, go to brick factories to make bricks.

The Asha Center has 3 instructors. All the instructors are from the local villages and are trained from Govt. institutions. Two instructors have advanced training in pottery making and the third instructor has trained in glazing techniques. The instructors teach the children for an hour or more and also make glazed pottery items for sale.

A total of 32 students attend the training program. During the month of September there has been average attendance of 25 students. Many of them are now in a position to prepare candle stands, ashtrays and small idols of Ganapati. Some of these items have been sold in the local village.

Our goal is to make this project self-sustainable by helping them market their products and to involve the traditional potters. Ideas on how to get there are welcome.

**Project Coordinator:** Vikas Sawant

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A detailed report on our other important project - Khajurdaha in the 24 Parganas of West Bengal will be forthcoming in our next issue of the newsletter.

### **Site Visit Reports**

#### **SUPPORT**

Sumathi Iyengar visited Society Undertaking Poor People's Onus For Rehabilitation (SUPPORT), a rehabilitation center for drug-addicted street kids. Centers are located in and around Bombay. They have 3 centers for boys (aged 5-20) in Santacruz, Dadar, and VT, and one center for girls in Lonavla. Asha-Seattle is supporting vocational training in these centers (for children 15 or older) for over 3 years now. She felt that this project was among the best in Asha and had dedicated volunteers. There was transparency in accounting, the volunteers were filled with optimism and had practical programs for rehabilitation and have a plan in place for turning over the organization completely to the street kids themselves in the next 6-7 years. It was very inspiring to see the lively children and they seemed very happy and positive-minded despite all what they have been through so early in life. It was motivating to see the dedicated work of the Centers' Coordinators and the Director.

The main office of SUPPORT is located at the following address: Old BMC Office, 2nd Floor, Vakola Market, Nehru Road, Santacruz(East), Mumbai - 400 055; Phone: (022) 616 2965

#### **VIDYA**

In June, Asha Princeton hosted a talk by Rashmi Misra, the chair-person of an NGO called VIDYA. VIDYA runs many projects in

Delhi for women and children. In July one of our volunteers, Manoj visited VIDYA's school- Bal Vihar. It is a primary school, located in the IIT Delhi campus, for the under-privileged children. Manoj has returned with a very favourable impression of the functioning of the organization and its volunteers' efforts. The site-visit report recommends that project be given "immediate and serious consideration by Asha," and calls for follow-up evaluation of the project details.

Currently Asha Princeton is not in a position to take up the large funding request from Bal Vihar, and we are looking for individual sponsors (Asha Stars) who may be interested in the project.

A detailed report of the site-visit is available at our website: [www.ashanet.org/princeton/files/vidya\\_sitereport02.pdf](http://www.ashanet.org/princeton/files/vidya_sitereport02.pdf)

### **2002 Fundraiser: Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani**

Our latest fundraiser "Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani" took place on May 18th 2002.

Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani was a unique journey presented by SaReGa, "the orchestra that strikes a chord," with talented singers and musicians from the film industry. The program also included young dancers presenting a fusion of Indian and western cultures. The choreographers for the dance program included Nanda Badgi, Madhavi Devasthale and Kilpatric Mitchell, and the performers included students from the dance schools *Indianica* and *The Anointed Ezekiel Dancers*.

### **Financial Report for 2002**

The following table summarizes our fundraiser proceeds and the project expenses for the year 2002. Asha is a zero-overhead organization: volunteers bear all the administrative costs.

<b><i>Income/Expense of Asha, Princeton-2002</i></b>		
<b><i>Category</i></b>	<b><i>Revenue</i></b>	<b><i>Expense</i></b>
<b><i>Fund Raiser 2002 Revenues</i></b>		
Tickets Revenue	\$11,215.00	
Individual Sponsorships	8,204.00	
Corporate Sponsorships	2,701.00	
Brochure Sponsorships	2,400.00	
Merchandise Revenue	123.00	
Food Sales Revenue	1,807.95	
<b><i>Total Fund Raiser Revenues</i></b>	\$26,450.95	
<b><i>Fund Raiser Expenses</i></b>		\$8,149.07
<b><i>Net Fund Raiser Proceeds</i></b>	<b>\$18,301.88</b>	
<b><i>Project Expenses</i></b>		
Nalamdana		<b>2,800.00</b>
FODRA		<b>4,000.00</b>
Vasundhara		<b>10,000.00</b>
Khajurdaha		<b>15,000.00</b>

A more detailed financial report will be available at our website by April 2003.

### **Plans for 2003**

We plan to continue support of current projects in 2003. The strategic increased engagement with Khajurdaha will be further developed in 2003 and will be reported in our next issue. We continue to evaluate new projects and pay close attention to the evolution of Asha's role in primary education. Our goal is to bring in several speakers during the year who can help enhance our understanding on the issues confronting primary education in India. As always, we solicit your continued and increased support for the projects.