

The Association for India's Development (AID) Monthly Newsletter

Health Clinic in Sunderbans.

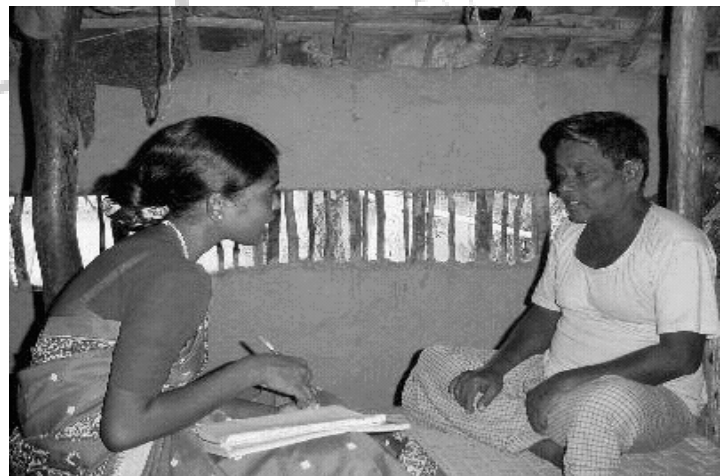
Subodh Midde heard rustling sounds coming from where his wife was sleeping. Half awake, she anxiously asked him to see what had bit her. Holding up the lantern, he pulled aside the mosquito net, and saw the snake, extricating itself from his wife's sari.

The agonizing tale of the next 6 hours (narrated to me by Subodh and others) often repeats itself in Baikunthapur. After the incident occurred at 10:00 pm, the usual avenues were traversed in futile succession. The nearest medical facility is in Raidighi, 3 hours journey by boat. A neighbor, braving an hour's trek through a downpour, set out to arrange a boat, prepared to part with over Rs 300. (For the cash-strapped, money-lenders are more than willing to bail you out, and bleed you to death later on). Meanwhile, desperate rituals conducted to save the woman helped nobody, except the "ojha", who made off with Rs 200. Finally, when word got back that the boat was ready, Subodh set out with his two pre-teenage sons and semi-conscious wife, battling sheets of rain, and marsh-like terrain. She died well before they could reach the boat. To add to the nightmare, the boatman demanded Rs 500 to cleanse his boat of its brush with death.

Baikunthapur, located on a remote island in the Sunderbans, is plagued by snakes and water-borne illnesses. Baikunthapur Tarun Sangha is working with AID Austin towards establishing an island health clinic. BTS plans to initiate monthly contributions to sustain the clinic. Loans will be given when treatment demands

travel to the mainland. Work is underway - 6 village women have been recruited, and they have conducted a survey to assess the people's needs. A doctor has been identified to man the clinic. However, significant problems exist, including lack of space, sanitation, clean drinking water, and electricity. To help BTS succeed, we need to take our level of involvement several steps further. Coming together, we can truly make a difference to these people, currently besieged by heaven and earth, and cursed by remoteness, and superstition. For more information on the project, please contact Chandrika (cramanau@cisco.com) at AID Austin, or Kanishka (klahiri@ece.ucsd.edu) at AID San Diego.

— *Kanishka Labiri (San Diego).*



Health survey and awareness campaign in the Sunderbans.

Rain water harvesting: Participatory Development at work

As India goes through yet another year of drought due to lack of rainfall, Ashok, a native from the village of Surodi in Ahmednagar and the villagers in Surodi got organized to harvest rainwater as efficiently as possible by constructing small earthen or cement bunds to limit the flow of water and use this stored water mainly for agricultural use. Ashok, having been associated with AID through the mobile science laboratory program, approached AID-Pittsburgh last year for funding the project. The funds were used primarily to purchase the construction materials and to hire skilled masons for the construction work. Most of the construction labor was donated by the villagers as "Shramadan". AID-Pittsburgh has been supporting this project since early 2001. An elaborate and extensive report written in Marathi was sent by Ashok after a year into the project. Within the first year, the villagers have completed the construction of six new bunds and repaired three other existing ones. This encompasses 40% of the watershed development work planned for the village. These projects range from small repairs to construction of new cement bunds almost 2 feet high. The villagers themselves have also raised about Rs 14,000 towards the project from their personal funds. In addition, the villagers have also started planting trees in the village with the help of forest department. This project exemplifies alternate eco-friendly development models and participatory development at their best.

— *Shoba Subramanian (Pittsburgh).*

A Girl Is Born

I first heard the Telugu song "A Girl Is Born" in November 2000 at Rajghat (Gandhi's memorial) in New Delhi. A group from Karnataka was sitting in a circle after the Supreme Court Judgement on the Narmada Dam singing songs of solidarity and justice. Among the songs they sang was this song by Gaddar. It tells the story of a mother, worried that her daughter is unwanted by her husband and mother-in-law. She tries get rid of the baby, through various means. The girl survives every attempt, finally giving her mother the strength to commit herself to raising a sister, a revolutionary who will challenge the system. I took down the lyrics and carried the song which had traveled from Andhra to Karnataka to Delhi to choreographer Aparna Sindhoor in Boston. Aparna took two of the ten verses in the song, and created a folk dance that brought this mother, her questions and her determination to the Indian-American stage. I performed it for the first time at India Beckons, a cultural program in Maryland in May. A video of "India Beckons" may be ordered from arvind_rag@yahoo.com

-- L.S. Aravinda (AID-Mumbai)

AID Bay Area co-sponsors fund-raiser for Gujarat riot relief survivors.

EKTA and Coalition Against Communalism (CAC) organized a fund-raiser in the Bay Area for the survivors of the recent communal violence in Gujarat. The two-day event was held at the Mission Cultural Center in San Francisco (July 13) and the Jain Center of Northern California in Milpitas (July 14), and was in remembrance of the late M.P. and peace activist, Ahsan Jafri who was burnt alive by mobs, along with over 150 other people who had taken shelter at his home in Ahmedabad, on February 28th, 2002. In addition to moving presentations by the late Jafri's daughter and son-in-law, Nishrin and Najid Hussain, a recent documentary by Gopal Menon, Hey Ram: Genocide in the land of Gandhi, was screened. The program included spoken word, dance and bhajans performed by number of local artists. The two fund-raising events raised over \$25,000 for relief efforts in Gujarat. SAATH, a member of Citizen's Initiative, was identified as the recipient of the funds raised. The AID Bay Area chapter co-sponsored the fund-raiser and several members from the chapter actively volunteered and publicized the event to make the fund-raiser a success. — Ani Vaidya (Bay Area)



Aravinda performs "A Girl Is Born" at "India Beckons" in Maryland.

Mark Your Calendar.

AID-Boston presents

"Global Rhythms: Sounds of Peace and Progress"

A Fall 2002 World Music concert, on Sunday, October 20, 2002 at 5:00pm at Kresge Auditorium, MIT, Cambridge, MA. Global Rhythms is a World Music Ensemble consisting of over 40 members, based in Miami University, Ohio. The group blends south-Asian, African and Latin music with a heavy emphasis on rhythm. For more information on the program and to purchase tickets, please contact: info@aidboston.org. Purchase tickets online for this program at <http://www.aidboston.org/globalrhythms>

AID-Cincinnati presents

"Harmony 2002",

an Indian American cultural extravaganza of dance, drama, magic, animation and lasers by the renowned Manick Sorcar group at P&G Hall (Aronoff Center) on September 28, 2002 at 7 PM. Tickets may be purchased from Aronoff box office, Music Hall box office, by calling 241-SHOW or from any Ticketmaster outlet (<http://www.ticketmaster.com>). For more information on the program, please call (513) 556-7509 or visit <http://www.aidcinti.org>, or send email to aid2@email.uc.edu.

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Phone: 1-888-TALK2AID

Web: <http://www.aidindia.org>

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