

The Adivasis are speaking. Do you hear them?

Adivasis in India number close to 100 million, a tenth of the population of the country. Yet, the "educated" citizens of India are often stymied by the question "Who are the tribals?" Why are we not taught in school history lectures about the original inhabitants of the land, or how and why they are "denotified" by their own government?

These are the questions being asked today by Bhasha, an NGO based in Baroda. Bhasha was started by Dr. G.N. Devy, a former professor of English. Bhasha works towards documentation of linguistic, literary and artistic heritage of tribal communities.

Bhasha has set up a tribal training institute in Tejgadh, Gujarat, with the goal of educating tribals in setting up water banks, grain banks, plant and gene banks, micro-credit groups, literacy and health care, and awarding them a diploma in Tribal studies. They adopt a holistic approach to tackling the problems facing adivasis today, through non-formal schools, micro-credit groups, organizing migrant laborers to demand a minimum wage, forming artists' co-operatives, and increasing awareness amongst tribals through the Denotified tribes Rights Action Group (DNT-RAG).

Bhasha publishes *Dhol*, a magazine entirely devoted to tribals, printed exclusively in tribal dialects and distributed in tribal villages for reading out to groups of tribal villagers. *Dhol* is published in 11 languages, most of which are spoken only by the tribals. Many eminent persons are associated closely with Bhasha, including noted Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi, dancer Mallika Sarabhai, and academic Gayatri Spivak.



Adivasi dance workshop conducted by Bhasha.

The DNT-RAG held its fourth annual conference in New Delhi on 10th and 11th September 2001. Delegates from Rajasthan, West Bengal, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, working in the area of upliftment of tribals in India, attended the conference. Adivasis, through the efforts of the DNT-RAG, are getting increasingly more aware of their rights as guaranteed under the constitution. They now have a voice through *Dhol*, are getting an education that counts through *Vidya* (non-formal schools run by Bhasha), and most importantly, are willing to stand up and be heard. Is the government of India ready to listen?

AID-Pittsburgh and AID-Boston jointly support the Tribal Training institute in Tejgadh, Gujarat.

-- *Supriya Kumar (AID-Pittsburgh)*

Childhood...?

AID-Boston volunteer Mora Oommen profiles two NGOs, where children play a crucial role in increasing access, quality and enrollment of elementary education.

The M.Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF), established about ten years ago by Dr. Shanta Sinha, in the Ranga Reddy district of Andhra Pradesh prescribes to the philosophy of achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) by working with the government to get every child access to school. Their volunteers have worked in over 500 villages, achieving UPE in 168 villages. They get the children out of the work force and equip them with a basic education, by working with every child to pass tenth grade. The largest forces behind the activities are unemployed youth and children who are currently enrolled in the programs. MVF has set up mechanisms to address issues related to child dropout from schools. The bridge camp system brings older children from numerous villages into an intensive learning environment,

and coaches them to take the grade seven exams. This will allow them to then start regular school from class eight. These camps have teachers who live with their assigned group of students and spend all the time with the children.

The other organization, Alternative for India's Development (A.I.D), which evolved out of the JP movement in Bihar, works with children employed by the carpet industry in the Jharkhand district. Apart from various types of formal and non-formal schools, they have opened a Community College for children over 14 years to receive vocational skills. They have recently begun to create a union for the children who were in the carpet industry so that they can educate the rest of the community and lobby the government for their rights: safe working environment, fair wages, opportunity to go to school. These children are organized and nominated to posts at the village, Panchayat, block, district and state level, with titles like, President, Vice President, Secretary, and members. Most of these children have lost the opportunity to get a timely education. Many had attended or are currently

attending the non-formal education (NFE) centers run by A.I.D., but have very basic reading, writing and math skills. From their point of view, they have already lost their childhood and it is their responsibility to protect younger ones from the lives they were subject to. Talking to children in both programs I thought of myself when I was their age, how little I had been exposed to and how harsh the realities of life are for these children. Yet, they have hope for the future and a real, tangible plan!

-- *Mora Oommen (AID Boston)*



Girls Bridge camp, set up by the MV Foundation, that coaches girls to take the seventh grade exam before joining regular schools.

Workshop on Science and Global Security

A workshop on 'Science and Global Security' was held on 18-19 August, 2001 at Princeton University. Experts and volunteers of AID, Asha discussed a wide range of socio-economic issues including the nuclearisation of South Asia, communalisation of the education process in India and Pakistan, Tribal and Dalit Rights, WTO and Globalisation, and the concept of local currency. At the end of the conference, a forum called 'Activists Together' was formed as a support group for people's movements in India. Links to articles on these topics and the workshop proceedings are available at web-site <http://www.princeton.edu/~hazra/meeting/>

-- *Manju Krishnan (AID-Columbus)*

From the AID Video desk:

- **AID - USA 2001**, edited proceedings of the AID-USA conference held recently in College Park, Maryland.
- **"What is really happening in Gujarat today?"** A talk by Martin Macwan (Navsarjan Trust) and Gagan Sethi (Janvikas). Navsarjan and Janvikas (along with Kutch Navnirman Abhiyan and other NGOs) spearheaded the relief operations under the banner Janpath Citizen's Initiative, and are now playing a pivotal role in reconstruction and rehabilitation of affected peoples in Saurashtra.

To obtain copies of either of these videos, please send an email to Savita Kini at savitakini@yahoo.com.

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News and Notes

AID-Bay Area hosts Amjad Ali Khan

AID-Bay Area organized a fundraiser concert by Sarod maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan on 18th Aug. at Palo Alto. The concert was a sold out event with 950 people witnessing the performance. It featured a silent slide show during the intermission, a presentation about AID and a pledge drive. The fundraiser and the pledge drive witnessed on the spot donations totaling over \$3000. -- *Aarshi Rishi (AID-Bay Area)*

"River Rites" in RTP

The three AID chapters in the Research triangle park area (Raleigh, Chapel Hill, and Durham, NC) organized "River Rites", a dance concert performed by Navarasa Dance Theater Company of Boston. "River Rites" presented in Raleigh on August 25, depicts the mass displacement of Adivasi societies by dam projects in the Narmada river valley in Western India. The performance was followed by a question and answer session with the artiste Aparna Sindoor. The event featured posters and information booths on AID, the Hundred Block Plan, and Gujarat EQ relief and a video presentation about AID. AID kurtas made by earthquake victims were sold at the venue. The event was primarily aimed at creating awareness about the Narmada river valley issues and informing people about AID. The day following the concert, Aparna conducted a dance workshop.

-- *Uday Mudoi (AID-Raleigh)*

Festival of India in Atlanta

The Indian-American Cultural Association in Atlanta, GA organized its 5th annual Festival of India on August 25th 2001. The AID-Atlanta chapter co-sponsored a seminar, "India's Development and You", by Prof. Mohan Bhagat of AID-MD. Dr. Bhagat held a small audience engaged completely for an hour, after which Atlanta volunteers led in the singing of '*hum honge kaamiyab*'. We displayed a "Narmada displacement" banner, along with a poster explaining the human costs of the project. Many people expressed solidarity with the struggle, and about 35 people signed our letter to the President of India, requesting him to visit the Narmada valley and support the displaced people.

-- *Radhika (AID-Atlanta)*

• • AID - Ann Arbor • •

presents

An "Evening of Percussion" with

**Ustad Zakir Hussain L. Shankar
"Vikku" Vinayakram**

Venue: Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor

Date: 18 October 2001, Thursday, 8:00 PM

For tickets, please call Rachna at (734) 717-9064 or visit

Ticketmaster at <http://www.ticketmaster.com>

AID relies solely on your contributions to fund community development projects in India. AID volunteers work hard to put funds to optimal use in project and awareness work. Every project is visited and monitored. All donors receive monthly updates of our projects and activities. To obtain a copy of the current financial statement please write to AID. Documents and information pertaining to AID can be obtained from the Secretary of State for the cost of copies and postage.