



# Sankalpa Newsletter

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 1

OCTOBER, 2011

*“Sankalpa can be an individual or a group commitment to social development in India. As more and more resolve to make a difference, Sankalpa as a concept takes root. And through their untiring actions it continues to grow.”*

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Give me 2  
some sun-  
shine...

Sankalpa- an 3  
Enolution

School chale 3  
hum...

Our Collabo- 4  
rators

How can you 4  
contribute?

Sankalpa and 4  
I

## Far and out in the Eastern Ghats

By Nihita Yatri

In 1994, the small-scale NGO ‘Mahila Vikas’ began reaching out to the remotest tribal villages in southern Orissa, tackling widespread illiteracy, poverty and lack of healthcare. They started the ‘Sanjukta’ (joining together) bridge-course centers in the mountainous Gajapati district in 2006, to provide easy access to primary school education. Sankalpa has been funding 2 of their 21 centers since 2009. I visited the project site this summer during my trip to India, and



The villages had huts with granite walls.

what a remarkable experience it was! The villages, hidden in the nooks of the Eastern Ghat ranges, were the very definition of remoteness. The roads leading to the foothills were so narrow and weather-beaten that jeeps or motorcycles were the only vehicles that could get you anywhere. Even the jeep had to be abandoned at a point near our first destination – Mentiamba. Thus began an hour-long journey on foot through the rocky terrain with the harsh May sun beaming overhead. The directions to the next village, Bariamara, were easy – climb the westward hill, walk some more, stumble down, climb another hill and there! Now I realized why the government schools in the region were dysfunctional - teachers from nearby towns would have to spend over six hours on their daily commute. In a characteristically grassroots solution, Mahila Vikas employs local youths as teachers. These girls and lads barely out of

their teens are trusted figures in their own villages. They are in



At the Bariamara center

charge of about two dozen children from classes I to III who come to the centers daily for combined lessons, individual study and play. I was impressed to learn that the teacher from Bariamara started a night-school for elder people of his own accord. The teacher at Karanjsahi is a matriculated girl, a rare role model for young girls in the village. With initiatives like Sanjukta centers,

Please turn to page 2

## Pay it forward

By Izquierdo D.C.

Woody Hayes once famously misquoted Ralph Waldo Emerson a 19<sup>th</sup> century American poet when he said *you can pay back only seldom. You can always pay forward, and you must pay line for line, deed for deed, and cent for cent (sic)*. Trying to make sense of the phrase I set out to understand what it meant to me and

society in general. Woody Hayes was a fiery and uncompromising coach of the OSU football team during the late 60's. Pilloried for his brashness and indignant attitude the man had a side unknown to many. From helping wounded war veterans to serving the local community, Woody was involved in a variety of charity acts throughout his life. Most people beyond OSU do not

know Woody Hayes; however it is not the man but his actions that warrant focus. His idea of giving back or what he called “paying it forward” has a very universal appeal. The act of giving is not a privilege the rich hold, neither is a luxury the poor can't afford.

Please turn to page 3



**Studying at a make-shift school in their slum in Jhansi (the Pragathi Path project).**

*“Being Indian students in the US, we all want to feel connected to our roots and always have a strong desire to help the betterment of our own country.”*



**The youngest pupil at the Mentiaba center (the Mahila Vikas project, Orissa)**

## *“Give me some sunshine give me some rain, Give me a chance I wanna grow up through the pain!”*

By Gayatri Natu

Thirty five percent of India's current population is under the age of 15. These youngsters will be shaping our nation in the coming years, and a positive difference in their lives will have a huge impact on its fu-

ing a safe-haven for 32 children living at an old, run-down orphanage in Bangalore, Karnataka. The projects were selected after careful scrutiny of the proposals that we received, and we disbursed 2,000 USD to each project through 2010-2011.

The discussions at Sankalpa meetings about project backgrounds, gauging the measures for a positive impact and thinking about the root causes of problems and their solutions, have educated me tremendously about the ground conditions in an India that I erstwhile knew only through newspapers. But for these projects, I wouldn't have been thinking about the future of a 9<sup>th</sup>-grade passed tribal youth in Odisha after the education center that he teaches at is closed down. I

few lakh rupees, a mission that started with taking donations of just 5 rupees from individuals. The far and wide reach of the projects, the tenacity and the



**Challenging ignorance, illiteracy and drug abuse in children (the Pragathi Path project)**

ture. Sankalpa has funded three projects with very different profiles and locations within the last year, but all three are directed towards making the lives of some of India's children a little happier, their futures a little brighter. The Mahila Vikas project strives at providing primary school education to ~300 tribal children in the southern mountains of Odisha, the Pragati Path project aims to nurture and educate 22 children working at the Jhansi railway station in Uttar Pradesh, and the Mission-5 project is build-



**Growing up against the odds in India's Silicon Valley (the Mission 5 Project, Bangalore)**

college-going kids who are building an orphanage costing a



**Rebuilding the home of 34 orphans (the Mission 5 project)**

expertise of our partner organizations in India and the smiling faces of their beneficiaries are the things that have been making 'Sankalpa' a most rewarding and motivating experience for me.

### **Far and out in the Eastern Ghats**

*Contd. from page 1*

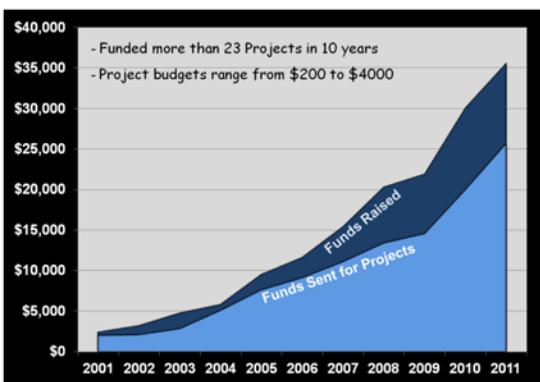
Mahila Vikas is slowly building trust within the native Saura tribe, educating them about NREGA and RTI and helping them create local, sustainable solutions to their problems. This project is a great example of social integration through education. The site visit showed me a slice of India hitherto unknown – I am glad that I am closer to it, supporting it through Sankalpa and getting enriched in turn.

# Sankalpa— an Evolution

By Vinayak Shedekar

After spending four years in and with *Sankalpa*, I learnt a great deal – about its mission, its objectives, the issues in India, and our small-but-important effort to make a difference. During this time, I also realized that *Sankalpa*, besides being just another ‘registered student organization’ like thousand others at the OSU; is growing. On one hand it’s growing in terms of Dollars raised per year, Rupees sent per year, number of people helped per year; on the other hand it’s also evolving as a concept. While

keeping the same philosophy, we recently revived the constitution of *Sankalpa*, brought consistency by introducing the proposal review criteria and brought visibility through several collaborations, newsletters and lecture events. But, it’s not just about the growth and



change in an organization and its constitution. You start off as an amateur member, and transform into a resolute ‘*Sankalpee*’ who is a responsible citizen forever and has no hesitation in expressing an honest opinion or helping others. This transformation and progress is impressive, but never enough! *Sankalpa* will keep setting new targets and achieving new milestones as we march forward! Because...

*Sankalpa* is (not just) a Resolution (but also) an Evolution!

## School Chale Hum...

By Nandhu Mohan Nair

In 2001, the Government of India launched the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) to provide free elementary education to children between the ages of 6 and 14. A 2002 constitutional amendment resulted in the Right to Education Act. The objective of the SSA was to implement the “school chale hum” (Let’s go to school) campaign and bring all children into schools by 2003. The agenda also included opening new schools, strengthening existing school infrastructure through provi-

sion of additional classrooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance and school improvement grants. Furthermore, SSA aimed at providing additional teachers where scarce and training existing teachers as well as providing grants for developing teaching-learning materials and strengthening academic support structure at all levels. Ten years later, the goal to achieve universal retention remains unfulfilled. Over 25% of the Indian population is still illiterate and of the total number, only 15% students reach high school of which only 7% graduate.

Cultural boundaries and prevailing casteism are major roadblocks to the success of SSA. Girl child discrimination and child labor are other hurdles the SSA needs to cross. As educated citizens of India, we must stand up to the government and demand them to enforce quality education for each child, however our duty doesn’t end here. We must step up and contribute, either by teaching the young boy/girl who comes to clean our house or by supporting individuals who endeavour to make true the objectives of SSA.

## Pay it forward

Contd. from page 1

In my opinion communal prosperity is often a consequence of unbridled generosity and genuine concern for each other. However we are faced with cynical questions; how is giving going to make a difference or even appalling questions of expedience, a line of thinking that takes its root in

our diluted societal mores of utopian existence and lackadaisical attitude to the needs of people. This may sound a bit distressing but what soothes my troubled soul is the extraordinary work of individuals like Woody Hayes that continues to inspire us to this day. And to answer cynics I would like to quote a dialogue from the movie “Pay it

Forward”. It goes like this “The most important thing I can add from my own observations is this: Knowing it started from unremarkable circumstances should be a comfort to us all. Because it proves that you don’t need much to change the entire world for the better. You can start with the most ordinary ingredients. You can start with the world you’ve got”.

*“Volunteering with Sankalpa is a rewarding experience. It is always fun to work the stands at the horseshoe but more importantly it is gratifying to know that all the money raised is going to be used for a noble cause back home.”*

- Uttara Manohar





## Our Collaborators

By Manasi Lagare

Every now and then Sankalpa collaborates with organizations like the Indian Students Association (ISA), one of the largest student organizations on campus. These collaborations help us bring together innovative and fun events for our members. One of the recent events organized by Sankalpa, ISA and Association for India's development (AID) was the Penn Masala concert that was a great hit on campus. Not only did the crowd enjoy the band, but we also raised close to \$5000 for the Mahila Vikas Project in Orissa, India. Besides reaching out to the Indian students on campus, Sankalpa and ISA also make it a point to create programs catered to the broader Indian community in Columbus. A large numbers of Indian families and students attended Buckeye Mela 4 another charity event for local community with dance performances, food and sports. Collaborations with ISA are also common during the football fundraisers on campus. Student volunteers who are members of both Sankalpa and ISA help us staff the food -stands at the Horseshoe. Our collaboration with student organizations like ISA helps us spread our philosophy and create a broader network..

## How can YOU contribute?

*"Almost everything you do will seem insignificant, but it is important that you do it." – Mahatma Gandhi*

There are lots of ways you can contribute:

**Volunteer:** We always need volunteers for our fundraising events. It is also a good way to socialize and have fun with like-minded people and most importantly, a nice learning experience.

We hereby request you to join us in our **upcoming fundraiser** on **29th October** at the Horseshoe and make a difference not just in someone else's life but in your life too.

**Donate Money:** If you are not in or around Columbus OH, and would like to contribute, donate to our 'Friends of Sankalpa' initiative. Please make your cheques/money orders payable to "Sankalpa"

For Contributions from within India: mail your cheques to:

Sankalpa  
C/O Sandip Bapat  
B/8 Jestaram Baug,  
Dadar TT, Mumbai - 400 014

Residents of US, Canada or Mexico:  
Mail your checks to:

Sankalpa

1448 Highland St, Apt B  
Columbus, OH 43201

**Donate Online:** Sankalpa accepts online donations through "Paypal". Visit our website for making an online donation using your credit/debit card. Paypal is one of the most reliable online money transaction services.

\* You may also donate books, educational magazines, microfilms that you do not use any more.

**Share your Ideas:** If you have any ideas for fundraising, or a project or anything that could help us, please let us know. Join us on **23rd October** for our **biweekly meeting** at the Presidents Room, CSLS Area, Ohio Union at 5:30pm. You may also send articles for our newsletter.

### Contact Information:

The best way to contact us is through email.

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**Phone:** 614-886-2640

*Visit us online at  
[www.sankalpaindia.org](http://www.sankalpaindia.org)*

## People:

Sankalpa has a diverse member-base including OSU students, alumni, professionals within Columbus and around. We also have some members who contribute from India and several other countries.



### Current Office Bearers:

President: Keerthi Thirtamara-Rajamani

Vice President: Pooja Joshi

Treasurer: Manasi Lagare

Secretary: Nandhu Mohan Nair

Project Co-ordinator: Gayatri Natu

**Advisor:** Dr. Prasun Sinha

### Outgoing Office Bearers:

President: Vinayak Shedekar

Secretary: Ajay Mulay

Project Co-ordinator: Gayatri Natu

Webmaster: Rohit Belapurkar

**Newsletter Editor:** Pooja Joshi

## Sankalpa and I

By Pooja Joshi

*Tis not to wake up in the morn,*

*Tis not to sleep when the sun goes down,*

*Tis to take a small step at dawn,*

*That goes to make a difference in the long run.*

*Tis not to shore up tons of printed paper,*

*Tis not to please and earn purposeless favor,*

*Tis to bring a ray of hope that'd shine forever,*

*That I am Sankalpa and I resolve to better.*

*Dare to reach out your hand into the darkness, to pull another hand into the light – Norman B. Rice*