



Resolutions

Issue 1 Vol. 1

Sankalpa
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A quarterly newsletter of Sankalpa

From the Editor's desk ...

Hello All!

What started out as a small group of five motivated graduate students at The Ohio State University a couple of years ago, has now grown into an organization of 30 students supporting five full fledged developmental projects in India. It gives us immense pleasure to present Sankalpa's first newsletter to all of you.

So why this idea of a newsletter? We realize that Sankalpa needs to reach out to many of you who desire to help the underprivileged in India, but are just looking for the right medium. We hope that Resolutions will help you learn about Sankalpa and also act as a bridge between Sankalpa and its friends. In addition, it will provide quarterly updates on our current projects, activities, and fundraisers.

The first issue of Resolutions consists of two feature articles. "Sankalpa's Beginning" describes the history of Sankalpa. It takes us through the early phases of Sankalpa and shows how a motivated and dedicated group can come together to make a difference in their own humble ways. "Making a Difference" describes projects that we have supported and speaks about our achievements. We will have a regular column, "NGO of the Quarter", featuring an NGO that Sankalpa has supported. We hope this column will educate and inspire us with a desire to contribute towards our common vision of building a glorious India.

Hope you enjoy reading our newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you. Any comments or questions are more than welcome!

Jai Hind!

Prashant and Savitha

This year we planned a fun camping trip to South Bass Island, Put-in-Bay, Ohio



Front (Left to right): Mrs Sulbha Nikam, Mukta, Sandip, Puneet, Swapna, Savitha, Anurag
Back (Left to right) : Vinayak, Saurabh, Ameya, Prashant

Inside

Editorial.....	Page 1
- Prashant and Savitha	
Sankalpa's Beginning.....	Page 2
- Prashant	
Activities.....	Page 2
- Savitha	
Making a Difference	Page 3
- Ameya	
NGO of the Quarter.....	Page 5
- Savitha	
Sankalpa Team.....	Page 6

Sankalpa's Beginning...

By Prashant Nikam

Sankalpa evolved from this desire...a desire deep down in our hearts to give back to our homeland to help the lesser privileged in some way.

The concept of Sankalpa was born at an informal gathering during the Ganesh Utsav Celebration in September 2000 at The Ohio State University. The idea sparked off here while we were discussing avenues to give back to our home country. One common feeling was that we are all considered to be the crème de la crème of India (at least the popular opinion says so...) and it is our moral responsibility to give back to our society...we needed to break out of this mundane circle of assignments, mid-term exams, and projects and to some extent dedicate ourselves to the betterment of the lesser privileged in India. I suggested that, we begin our own special group, dedicated to the cause of helping the society where we all came from. This idea got everyone excited; we decided to name it Sankalpa - Our Resolution. We had 40 interested members on roll the very same day. We planned to meet over the weekend to discuss the idea- the beginning of the organization was marked!

We planned to meet every fortnight and discuss social and developmental issues in India. We would brainstorm on ideas for developmental projects. Everybody was charged up and was full of ideas. However, the next few meetings saw a steady decline in attendance. Mukta, Sandip, Ajay, Neeraj, and myself kept at it. We were still optimistic about our mission and had a strong conviction to make a difference. Few months after the first meeting, we had solidified our vision for the organization; we decided to concentrate on micro-developmental and sustainable projects in areas of sanitation, health, education, and agriculture. We believed that these areas are highly integrated and key to India's development.

Our first fund raising activity was what we fondly called "Chaat for Charity". We sold Bhelpuri at a campus festival and made a good profit. This activity gave us the much needed momentum and a feeling of accomplishment through teamwork.

Unfortunately, the lukewarm response at the meetings still continued. We got busy with the usual graduate student life and almost for a year Sankalpa took a back seat in our lives.

continued on page 3

Sankalpa organized a fund raiser food stall at the "Taste of OSU" food festival organized on the 7th of February. A grand menu consisting of Bhel Puri, Pani Puri, Pav Bhaji, Sweet Trilogy and Chai was planned for the event. While Puneet took charge of the coordination, the rest of us split into one of the food groups or decoration teams. The effort was a grand success and a complete display of motivation and dedication. Not only were the chaat varieties of the stall in great demand but we also came fifth in the festival for our food. The decoration team unleashed amazing skill on improving our display. A commendable wall paper with the India's map with appropriate pictures of famous monuments was deservingly the star of our decorative pieces! The curious Rajasthani dolls, the Indian flag and Sayantan's bold efforts in the artistic front, won us the second place in stall display.

Of course, fun is only the by product of self-motivated hard work. Mukta, quite admirably, managed two of the Chaats while Ameya, Swapna took over the dessert section, Suhanashep was the leader of the Chai pack and Bhavya and Prashant undertook the Pav Bhaji project, all with their own little teams. The entire team felt a great sense of satisfaction after the fruitful effort. Those hours of shopping and cooking the previous night and hours of advertising and selling are quite unforgettable. At the end of the day, we had managed to make a profit of \$311. With this money we plan to sponsor few more projects in India and look forward to working with newer motivated NGOs!

By Savitha Krishnamoorthy



Sankalpa's food stall at the Taste of OSU

continued from page 2

Personally, I was very disappointed that our enthusiasm had dried up. I wondered if it was hard to motivate individuals because it was a not-for-profit cause. But, little did I know then that the flame hadn't died away completely. In March 2002, Mukta, Ameya, Swapna, and myself were driving back from Pittsburgh and Sankalpa popped up in our conversation. Ameya and Swapna's infectious enthusiasm put us back on track and in a way rejuvenated Sankalpa. On coming back to Columbus, I called up Sandip and he was overjoyed to initiate our resolution again.

The next step was to look for intelligent and motivated individuals on campus who felt the same way about giving back to the society. Our hunt brought in Nandan, Michael, Puneet, Reshma, Savitha, Saurabh, Sayantan, Shunahashep, Sucheta, Suja, and Vinayak. These fresh minds renewed our vigor and Sankalpa has seen a steady stream of activities since then. In a short span of eight months Sankalpa has successfully completed four projects in areas of health and education. Apart from this, we also conducted two fundraisers. Sankalpa members have made a unique resolution that they will make a voluntary donation of \$10 each month for Sankalpa's development fund. Money from this fund is utilized to support our current projects in India.

The New Year began with a new step. So far Sankalpa had always worked with individual social workers or Non Government Organizations (NGOs) where we had personal contact. But the year 2003 saw a broadening of our relationship with other organizations as well. Currently, we are looking forward to working with Prabuddha Bharat (www.youhelpindia.org) towards their goal of 'Holistic Education' by supporting village libraries and youth development projects in India.

Sankalpa is not just about a group...all it needs is the motivation and commitment from everyone of us to burgeon many such Sankalpas in every corner of the world. Many thoughts put into action with a "resolution" to make a difference can be instrumental in bringing about developmental revolution in India. Our "Sankalpa" is a humble step toward this destination. We hope this step will motivate many others with similar vision to come forward and contribute in any way to this common cause.

Making a Difference

By Ameya Pitale

It is my pleasure to write about the projects we, at Sankalpa, have been involved in. Let me start from the very beginning.

As Prashant mentions in his article, the main focus of Sankalpa is in areas of sanitation, health, education, and agriculture. But our first contribution as a group was not in any of these areas. It was January 2001 and a massive earthquake hit Gujarat. It was as if the whole nation was shaken by the enormity of the disaster. Every Indian and many international organizations promptly came forward to support relief operations for the people in Gujarat. All members of Sankalpa unanimously decided to contribute toward this cause and donated \$250 in aid of the affected people. We raised this money from selling Chat at a food festival at The Ohio State University campus.

There was a lull in the activities of Sankalpa for quite some time until it again rejuvenated. At this time, our main aim was to find some developmental projects, take them to fruition, and thus have a sense of achievement, which would further fuel our motivation. Every member contacted people they knew back home to explore possible projects that could be undertaken. The first person to come up with a project was Swapna.

Swapna's grandmother, Mrs. Nalini Deshpande, has been volunteering at Vardaan, Nagpur, for the past 10 years. Vardaan is an organization, which helps unmarried girls who are pregnant. They help girls deliver the baby. In case, the mother does not want the baby they take care of it until adoption. We decided to donate \$30 to Vardaan, which was used to buy food supplies for the infants. Even though the amount donated was small, all of us had a feeling of accomplishment when we received the letter from Vardaan thanking us for the contribution.

continued
on page 4

NEWS NOOK

Sucheta and Reshma visited Akanksha foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to help less privileged children in improving their lives. Based on Akanksha's project proposal, Sankalpa has decided to support Art for Akanksha project.

continued from page 3

The next project idea was brought forth by Sucheta's mother, Mrs. Pradnya Bhatawadekar. She is very active in supporting social work organizations in India and one of them is *Melghat Mitra*. This organization plans to reach out to about 1500 children in 12 villages in *Hatru* region of *Melghat*. These villages have very little or no facilities for schools and health clinics. The aim of *Melghat Mitra* is to provide primary education, healthcare and improve quality of life in the region of *Melghat*. One of the ways to support *Melghat Mitra* is through their scheme of adopting a child. This entails paying for a child's education for a year, which comes to about \$15. Sankalpa has adopted two kids and will be getting annual progress report on them. We plan to make this project a regular activity by continuing to pay for the education of the two kids and, if possible, adopting more in the future.

We have been fortunate to associate with the charitable NGO *Cancer Patients Aid Association* (CPAA) working towards the total management of cancer as a disease, which includes: (i) spreading awareness on the dangers of chewing tobacco, early marriages, multiple pregnancies, (ii) initiating steps for the early detection of cancer, and (iii) providing complete assistance to underprivileged cancer patients in addition to that given by the medical profession. We have donated \$50 to CPAA, which will contribute towards supplying medicines to cancer patients.

After these small but highly encouraging successes, we took up our first big project. It was associated with the *Opportunity School* at IIT Kanpur. I am a graduate of this institute and for five years I have seen many people trying to help and contribute to *Opportunity School*. The school was started 15 years ago for the education of the children of class IV employees of IIT. These kids do not get automatic admission to the campus central school and

in most cases their parents do not have sufficient money to send them to a school elsewhere. The school has students from Grade I to Grade VIII. I contacted Prof. Prabha Sharma, who is actively involved with the school, and conveyed our willingness to contribute to a project. She told us that majority of the students of the school, after completing Grade VIII, are not able to continue their higher education due to inadequate financial support. Hence they are not able to finish Grade X, which is usually the minimum educational requirement for many jobs. She suggested that we could sponsor the higher education of a few deserving children. We at Sankalpa decided to donate \$200 to sponsor 4 children (2 girls and 2 boys) for their education in Grade IX and further. Our plan is to establish a long-term association with *Opportunity School* and continue helping the children complete their high school education.

Prashant contacted a NGO called *Prabuddha Bharat*, which has been active in IIT Kharagpur for the past two years. *Prabuddha Bharat* believes in bringing everlasting changes at a national level through spread of holistic education especially among the less privileged class. The project suggested by *Prabuddha Bharat* was to buy children's books and other educational material

for a library cum activity center for less privileged children at *Rabindrapally, Kharagpur*. The library cum activity center has been promoting reading culture among the children ranging from ages 5 to 11 years, conducting personality development exercises, and providing non-formal education. Also, *Prabuddha Bharat* has adopted 25 young, bright but disadvantaged school going adolescents in a remote village, *Lakhnaur, Madhubani District* - in the state of *Bihar*. *Prabuddha Bharat* has started supporting these children by sending thinking-oriented curriculum based quizzes and books. *Prabuddha Bharat* wishes to send books like inspiring biographies, practical science, classical literature, at least once every three months. Over a period of time these books would form a mini library, which could later be used by many others in their village. Sankalpa has decided to donate \$100 *Prabuddha Bharat* toward the village library project.

Apart from these projects that we have successfully completed, we are currently involved in few other possible projects for the future. I am very proud to be a part of Sankalpa and be able to contribute to people in India. All of us have the desire to give back to our country, and I feel that for my friends and me here, Sankalpa has become a medium to put this desire into action.

NEWS NOOK

Friends of Sankalpa: We plan to spread awareness about the organization and raise funds through this activity. It mainly targets friends of members who wish to contribute to our mission. To enlist as a Friend of Sankalpa, please contact Sandip Bapat at bapat.2@osu.edu.



Three librarians with Dr. Bhargav

NGO of The Quarter

Time for the NGO of the quarter! Sankalpa has associated with and supported a number of NGOs since it was born. Our latest venture has been to work with Prabuddha Bharat <http://www.youhelpindia.org>, which we chose as the NGO of this quarter!

Prabuddha Bharat is an organization founded by Dr. Parag Bhargava, Assistant Professor of the Materials Science at the renowned Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur. The vision of this group is to build a united India, enlightened through holistic education. They believe that a literate and educated India will gradually overcome the challenges of poverty, population growth, malnutrition, child labor and corruption.

Truly the very existence of Non Government Organizations revolves around this ultimate vision. Prabuddha Bharat is well justified in holding education as the key to achieving this goal. Education can bring about a desire in people to have better quality of life. It can make people think rationally not only for themselves but for the society in which they live.

Quoting then, they describe the components of holistic education to be:

- * Self-confidence, self-motivation and self-dependence
- * Awareness of the responsibility for self, family, society and the country
- * Maintenance of mental and physical health
- * Sensitivity towards all life forms especially fellow human beings
- * A sense of wonder and curiosity
- * Spirit to create and innovate
- * Thinking as the most important and dependable tool in all situations of life
- * Freedom from all superstitions and close-mindedness
- * Value for time over money and other material acquisitions
- * Love and respect for nature
- * Realization of the impermanence of everything

Now something more about its activities. The group has been running a library cum activity center for underprivileged children at Rabindrapally, Kharagpur. Formerly running in a rickshaw driver's house, the library has recently moved in a rented community premises. The library cum activity center has been promoting reading culture among the children ranging from age 5 to 11 years, conducting personality development exercises and providing non-formal education.



Inauguration Day of Children's Library

NEWS NOOK

Sankalpa recently supported a proposal from Dr Vivek Wagh, a social worker in Nagpur district who focuses on strengthening of basic education and development of simple technologies for sustainable livelihoods of tribal people. Swapna and Ameya recently visited him in association to his proposal concerning science and math education to tribal people in 16 villages of the Korchi and Kurkheda block of Gadchiroli.



Prabuddha Bharat Group busy in Mending Books at the library

Prabuddha Bharat has adopted 25 young, bright but disadvantaged school going adolescent children in a remote village Lakhnaur, Madhubani District - in the state of Bihar. We at Sankalpa are involved in supporting their library project. Sankalpa believes in establishing relationships with many such NGOs and supporting sustainable projects. It is an integral part of our mission to continuously work with such dedicated groups in their vision for a better tomorrow.

By Savitha Krishnamoorthy



(Left to right) Front : Puneet, Naga, Savitha, Mukta, Sucheta
Middle : Bhavya, Prashant, Satish
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Aknowledgement : www.uhelpindia.org for images

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Join Us to Make a Difference!

Please complete the information below and return it to the following address:
Sankalpa, 1458 Highland Street, Apt. B, Columbus, Ohio 43201.

Name:

Mailing Address:

Telephone Number: (Home) (Work)

Email Address:

Profession:

1. How did you hear about Sankalpa?

2. Please enlist two friends/relatives who might be interested in hearing about Sankalpa.

a. Name1: Email:

b. Name2: Email:

3. How would you like to contribute to Sankalpa?

- a. ☐ Donations
- b. ☐ Sharing project ideas
- c. ☐ Volunteer
- d. ☐ Sponsorship to Sankalpa events
- e. ☐ Providing potential contacts in India for projects
- f. ☐ Starting a local Sankalpa Chapter in your area
- g. ☐ Other

4. I would like to participate in the "Friends of Sankalpa" fundraising initiative by pledging
\$ yearly.

Please make checks payable to "Sankalpa" and mail it to above mentioned address. Thank you for your pledge. You will receive our newsletter once every three months. In addition, periodic updates and project progress will also be communicated. We look forward to hearing from you.

Together WE Will Make a Difference!

Fold here

From _____

PLACE
POSTAGE
STAMP
HERE

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