

# **DIALOGUES**

**ON**

## **DEMOCRATISING NORTH-SOUTH RELATIONS**

**Report of a dialogic self-appraisal of the cooperation between  
Lokayan/CSDS and Kapa 1998-2001**

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**PART I**  
**ACCOUNTS**  
**FROM FINLAND**

## **Vasanthi Raman**

### **Some Reflections**

I was in Helsinki, Finland in November, 1998 for a week as part of the Lokayan-Kepa Exchange Programme. I was in Berlin prior to that giving lectures and seminars at the South Asia Department of the Free University of Berlin.

That was my first trip to Finland and also my first exposure to Kepa, as a network of voluntary organisations in Finland. It would be a just a formality on my part, a mere act of courtesy if one were to just note that every aspect of my sojourn in Finland was extremely well-organised, right from being received at the airport, being escorted to the hotel and fixing my programmes for the week-long stay. But what was distinctive was the note of genuine friendliness, cordiality and informality that was combined with efficiency and organisation. For a person from a Third World country this was indeed reassuring. Generally extreme efficiency and organisation go along with a certain detachment bordering almost on a certain aloofness and coolness of manner that can be very intimidating for Third Worlders. The style that characterised KEPA's functioning and the 'persona' (if one can use that word for an organisation) that was projected was indeed quite remarkable and worth emulating.

Friends from Kepa had taken care to arrange a lectures, seminars and meetings with a wide cross-section of people in Helsinki. There was a lecture

at the University for students on Women's Situation In India. About a hundred students attended and there was keen interest in the subject. There were also some very intelligent questions. There was a presentation on Radicalisation of Democracy in India, to the India Group. Though the group was small (about 8-10 people), it was very obvious that most of them followed India quite closely and the discussion that followed was lively. I was particularly struck by Thomas Walgren's knowledge and vision. I had a meeting with the representative of the trade unions who are also part of the Kepa network. We had a discussion on issues of child labour (which was also an area I was interested in). The discussion was very useful for me since the standpoint on the question of child labour was different from the one that I had. Subsequently in 1999 when I was in Finland, Kepa was kind enough to invite me to be part of a campaign on child labour where in a press conference I was invited to put across my position. The attempt to try and understand another viewpoint on the question of child labour impressed me given that the general position on this particularly in Europe has been (to my mind) considerably influenced by WTO.

Apart from the formal discussions and meetings, there were many informal meetings and get-togethers where many Kepa activists and organisers were present. Here, too, the discussions veered on India and the experiences of other third world countries. Some of the leading Kepa people had already lived and worked in other countries. I learnt quite a bit about the history and society of Finland through these informal meetings.

It was quite obvious that Kepa had a wide network in Finland and was quite well-known

Following my first trip to Finland as part of the exchange programme, I was invited to participate in a consultation on Experiences and Voluntarism, which also dealt with problems of funding and its impact on the programmes of the recipient organisations. This consultation was organised by CSDS, Lokayan and KEPA.

Once again what struck one was the frankness in the discussions and an ability to take seriously opposing viewpoints.

It is my opinion that such exchanges are not only extremely useful but also necessary to further dialogue between the North and the South. Moreover, what is notable about these exchanges is that it helps to foster the dialogue process within India as well.

## Atal Behari Sharma

I am a political-social activist from India visiting Finland under KEPA-Lokayan Exchange programme. I became social activist at the age of 13. It was the social, political and, economic conditions around me which drew me to an activist movement at an early age, while I was studying and working to supplement my family income. Injustice, inequality and exploitation around me made me feel agitated. My father worked for more than 18(+)hours per day, more often all the seven days in a week. He had no expensive or any bad habit. He never saw even a movie as entertainment or drank a cup of tea outside home, during the day. Yet he was unable to provide basic minimum needs for the family. I had to work as "child labour" along with my schooling. To tell the truth, not any particular ideology but the conditions prevailing around me that made me an activist. This was the time when student movement was taking shape in the states of Gujarat and Bihar, against corruption. Our great freedom fighter and a socialist leader Jai Prakash Narain led the movement, which spread nation wide. Perceiving threat from this movement the then prime minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi imposed the state of Emergency on the country. It suspended fundamental human rights of Indian citizens and greatly weakened democratic institutions. Political leaders were put behind bars. I became active in the underground movement for restoration of democracy. Since then I am actively involved with the issues related to

women, children, unemployed youth, unorganised labour, and human rights. Apart from working in the field of Development co-operation, strengthening the democracy at the grass roots has remained my main arena of activity.

My association with Lokayan began way back in 1979, when idea of Lokayan was taking shape in the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. That time I was working in a project of CSDS "Caste Tension in Village Kanjhawala" as an assistant researcher.

My visit to Finland under Kepa-Lokayan Exchange programme has provided me with an opportunity to learn and understand about the Finnish society, its culture and politics closely. During my stay in Finland I had several opportunities to interact with a number of civic activists, NGOs, and families. I could also attend a number of national and international seminars. My stay in Finland has enhanced my understanding of the social and political debates in the Finnish Society and generally in Europe.

My association/participation in KEPA's and its member organisations' activities has broadened my understanding of the issues of Development co-operation in the new context of globalisation. I came to know about some intricate issues pertaining to WTO which will help me a great deal in my activities in this regard in India.

At the same time I had a great fascination for Finland's political system, its egalitarian social practices and youth and peace movements - about which I read in India. So it was natural for me to follow the Finnish political system and its functioning. Kepa-Lokayan Exchange Programme has provided me opportunity to follow Finnish Parliamentary Election with keen interest. I was able to attend the press conference of the Prime Minister in Parliament building. I had opportunity to meet a number of politicians from different political parties and discussed with them about their ideology. I had an interview with Mr. Jari Luoto, special adviser to the Prime Minister of Finland and discussed with him the issues concerning the global security, global economy and about development co-operation and India-Finland relations.

Through, my interviews in Finnish Media-YLE-Radio, The Kaleva newspaper and other Radios and newspapers I have been able to share my experiences and ideas with Finnish people.

I have also learnt the other side of global economy, which in some respects is affecting Finnish society in a similar way as it has the countries in the

Global South. During my visit to Finnish countryside and homes for senior citizens now compromised. There is lesser number of nursing staff because of the govt policy of downsizing. Primary schools are being also closed down in countryside, and the postal service is privatised. The economically weaker sections are suffering not only economically but also socially and culturally as well. I was told some people are visiting Tallinn mainly for their grocery purchases on cheaper price. A sizeable number of people are currently unemployed. Agriculture sector is also suffering. It is sad to see that the high economic, social and cultural denominator of the European Union.

I enjoyed the Films of Aki Kauris Makki with strong social message and portrayal of the challenge faced by Finnish Society. I also enjoyed the Ultra Bra band on Vappu-and the workers and students day-festival of spring. It is a festival like as we have the festival of Holi in India and Nepal. On that day people go crazy and apply colour to each other. On the whole I have learnt a great deal from my stay in Finland. It has changed my perspective on my own work in India. I would want some aspects of political culture of social movements here to be adopted by movements in India, particularly building federal networks of groups and movements on different issues. Interlinking of issues for a wide movement is the problem on which the Finnish group should also ponder seriously.

I was hesitant to come to Finland. I was afraid of snow and the temperature in minus degrees. Born in a tropical country like India. I thought I would physically freeze in Finland. When my plane was about to land at Vantaa Airport, the captain announced temperature (-) minus 6 degree! I got prepared to face the cold. I put on three set of woollen hand gloves and socks, a couple of sweaters, a thick over coat and a woollen cap. As soon as I came out of airport building and sat in taxi my fears started melting away. I realised that I have the same kind of human body as the people here, of course different in colour and habits. I began to get acclimatise to Finnish weather and began to shed some of my clothes and prejudices. Spring in Finland is colder than the winter of Delhi, but it is much pleasanter. Moreover the houses, offices, transport, market places and public places are kept warm from insides which is a luxury in India, available to a selected few.

Another big fear I had was my strict vegetarianism. I thought how will I survive in a predominantly meat eating country. To my surprise I found

stricter vegetarians- vegans, Finovegan etc. They even do not touch the milk and milk products which is considered vegetarian in Asia. Some will only eat food naturally/organically produced in Finland. But my vegetarian habits were in some ways quite unique. Brought up in a traditional Brahmin family where, till recently eating out of house itself was considered a defiant behaviour, eating on the same table where meat, fish and eggs are served was a sacrilege. Moreover, I was always worried about the cooking medium, what if they use animal fats and other products in preparing the 'so called' vegetarian food items! It was impossible to know whether a particular vegetarian preparation was a right kind of food item for me. Especially when instructions and ingredients were written in Finnish, Swedish or Russian languages. I could very soon develop my own survival kit of eating. I have developed a great respect for Finnish people verging on envy! They use their own mother tongue, in their entire social, political life and administrations. For an Indian suffering from the aftermath of English colonialism this was a matter of great importance. Before coming here, I thought that Finland being a member country of European Union I can manage with English, but I soon realised that in this and many other respects my understanding about Finnish Society, before leaving India, was miserably poor. I was aware of women movements in Finland and other Scandinavian countries. Despite that it was a pleasant surprise to find out that a large number of women is taking part in civic life, 74 women have got elected to Finnish Parliament with strength of 200 seats. That too without any kind of quota or reservation system. I became particularly appreciative of Finland's egalitarian political culture. It will remain an unerasable memory in my mind- Finnish Foreign Minister Ms Arja Halonen collecting money at the City centre in front of Students House near three smiths statue for Kosovo war victims to help Red Cross Finland's refugees fund. And, near by a couple of hundred people protesting against the Nato's bombing of Yugoslavia, demanding an end of war immediately left a lasting impression on me.

I also had opportunity to visit the national museum of Finnish Art-Ateneum. It presents the history of Finnish art, from late 18th century portraits. In addition to the 19th century classics, the section based on the great Finnish national epic-Kalevala was a real treat. The artists had used different mediums-oil colour, watercolour, Indian ink and sculptures to depict stories from Kalevala. Some of the paintings depicted stories-similar to the stories in



India. Particularly the painting entitled 'Field of Adders'; Where a man ploughed the field full of snakes. We have a similar story in India where Janmejaya had cleared the land from snakes.

I am also impressed by the way, in which democracy is practised in Finland. Elections are conducted peacefully. And NGOs freely canvass their agendas, which may differ from government policies. And this does not affect funding to them in a proper perspective I will have to overcome some of my own cultural conditioning.

The other thing amazed me was the teenagers with their hei-hei, moi-moi, jo ni jo, noni on mobile phone in trams, in buses, in metro, in trains, in restaurants, in market place and even in elevators etc. and the wide use of email. Teenagers have also been taken over by the culture of Pepsi, McDonald and spice girls. Having their hair coloured and having pierced their lips, tongue, eyebrows on belly button each. Is this new folk culture or cultural imperialism? We also have such a class of youth, even if a very tiny one, in India. Emotions, personal relationship, family occasions are all turned into commodities in a market. This is evident both in India and in Finland. The Valentine's Day is a case in point. This culture of consumerism and market seem to have come to South Asia and Finland simultaneously in last few years. Greeting cards and gift industries with the support of Junk Food producing American Companies are pushing this new kind of events in social life of countries. In India Valentine's day is promoted as lover's day, in Finland it is promoted as Friendship day. St. Valentine must be feeling sad about his being commercialised and of commodification of his high ideals of love for fellow beings and of peaceful coexistence.

It is good to know that the Finnish NGOs' and politicians are getting aware of the undemocratic and unjust regime of WTO and globalisation and about the havoc they can create for the economies world over, particularly to the already marginalised communities and nation.

307/2, Old Post office St. Shahdra, Delhi -110032  
Tel: 91 -11-2443943, Email: atalsharma@hotmail.com

## Amar Singh Amar

Mr. Vijay Pratap informed me that I am being sent to Finland under the KEPA-LOKAYAN Activists Exchange Programme for about one and half month (September 17, 1999 to November 2, 1999). I gave my consent.

There were little problems encountered at Indira Gandhi International Airport otherwise everything was all right. Prior to take-off, I gave a ring to Vijay Bhai from the airport itself at 1.30 a.m. I realized it later that I should not have called him so late. However after a long time Vijay Bhai picked up the receiver. I informed him that I am calling from airport and the flight is about to take-off. Vijay Bhai asked if there is any problem. I told him that except for a little problem faced at the Immigration Counter, everything is ok. Then Vijay Bhai told me to go and enjoy the work.

I was a little scared in the beginning after reaching Finland as I am neither a good orator nor I have a good command over English. I felt as if Vijay Bhai has made a wrong choice in sending me to Finland. But Rita ji helped me a lot throughout the stay.

But as I began to intermingle with the people of Finnish society I didn't even realize when I became an integral part of them, washing away all my apprehension. One thing, which impressed me most, was that there is no discrimination between people belonging to different strata of the society

and everyone was given the same treatment. Talking to the Chairman/Director of KEPA, I felt as if I am talking to a close friend. The one aspect of KEPA office, which impressed me most, was that turn by turn, every person was responsible for various works of kitchen, right from preparing tea to washing the dishes. It implies that both physical and mental labour were treated equally and there was no discrimination. Here in the offices there are no peons or servants for taking files from table to table or providing water and tea but everyone does one's work oneself. The intimacy and equal treatment of the people, replaced my apprehension and inferiority complex by the newborn self-confidence. People mostly talked about the Indian society. When they asked about the family structure, caste, caste-struggle and other akin issues, I tried to solve their curiosity, to the best of my ability.

Before going to Finland, there were a lot of questions in my mind regarding 'activism' and 'activist'. Perhaps a study of the worldwide problems or successes, is activism. Or perhaps the persons engaged in these studies are called activists. From my own angle, I see two types of activists. From the Indian point of view, in one category there are educationally, socially, economically and politically better placed person like us which are engaged in the activism with the help of indigenous or foreign many. Many of these self-proclaimed revolutionaries believe that the persons or activists receiving foreign money are foreign agents and foreigners provide them money to blunt out the sharpness of their revolution.

The second type of activist lack any resource, live within the problems and during the course of their struggle with these problems, activism is inculcated in them. Even today there are million of persons which are engaged in their struggle without any kind of financial support, be it indigenous or foreign. Among the second type of activist, a significant section is comprised by those, which have come out of movements like Ambedkarites, Socialists, Leftists, Naxalites etc. These activists are born in these movements.

When I compare the second type of Indian activists with the Finnish society then I find that our activists are way behind the Finnish. Because the struggles for the betterment of our society in which the Indian activists are engaged today, the Finnish society has already fought and won most of these struggles. Owing to this, not only Finnish activists but the whole of the Finnish society is getting benefits of these facilities.

For example, if a Finnish citizen does not have any employment then the Finnish Government provides that person unemployment allowance in the name of social security. This is not the case in our Indian society. In the private sector, workers are not paid even the minimum wages fixed by the Government. There is hardly any law, which is implemented, in the private sector. Workers often have to work for 12 or even 14 hours rather than the eight. There is no weekly off-day or national holiday for them. No attention is paid towards the pollution from the factory. This adversely affects the health and wellbeing of the workers but also affects the whole society. Thus there is hardly any meaning of the law. In the government or Public sector though there is no gross violation of the law, but still the employees many a times have to face physical and mental torture, on the grounds of caste or bureaucracy. The Indian activists have to work in these sub-human conditions.

Overall, from the point of view of the humane values present in any civilized society, our Indian society lags much behind the Finnish society as despite all the struggles is still not getting the basic minimum needs of common man in India are not being fulfilled. His entire energy is consumed in fulfilling the basic needs and in such circumstances it is not easy for him to think beyond, on the issues related with society and activism

The meaning of NGOs in the Indian society is that they are non-government organizations registered in the Registrar Office, which take or intend to take indigenous or foreign funds. Most of the NGOs do not have any democratic structure. In this sector too there is a monopoly of Government, indigenous or foreign funded NGOs on the basis of social, economic, political and caste considerations. And this arrangement has an understanding and lobbying with the existing bureaucracy.

There may be such a possibility existing in the Finnish society but I can not conclusively say about this as I could not make my observation on this point due to shortage of time. But I did realize that NGOs in the Finnish society mean citizens organizations or civil society groups, like we have in our wards and bastis, and they have their distinct identity as a force to reckon with.

### **Education System**

I had a chance to visit a Primary School in Finland. There are about 650 children studying in the Primary School of City Oulu, Finland. In Finland

Primary School covers class I to class VI, High School covers from class VII to class IX and Senior School covers from class X to class XII. In whole of the nation there is more or less uniform education system. Most of the schools are the Government schools. Children of both, the rich and poor, study in these schools. Thus there is no discrimination on the basis of education which provides the equal environ, society and education for their growth and evolution. But in India we have different kind of schools for the children coming from poor and rich families. In India there is no uniformity in the education system. Schools located in the slums and far-flung villages are even worse than the ordinary government schools. Many of the schools located in the far-flung areas exists only on paper and in many such places there is discrimination on the basis of caste, religion etc.

Finland is largely covered with forests and hence the wood is in plenty in the county. Normally the common men themselves build the houses with wood because of the extreme cold climates. Hence carpentry is taught from the Primary level itself and almost everyone knows carpentry work. The standard of the school was many times beyond my imagination. The building, the library, the computer room, the hall - everything was beautiful. Here the meal is also provided in the school itself. We also ate with the children.

Rita ji told children about India. I sang a Hindi song and the children repeated it. In addition to this I also narrated some of the activities of the Sewa Dal. Children really enjoyed this interaction.

### **Old Age Home**

Before coming to Finland, I had somewhat wrong ideas about the old age homes of west or Europe but after the visit to an old age home in Oulu my ideas changed. Earlier I used to think that persons in the western society are extremely insensitive as they drop the elderly members of their family in the old age homes. When I personally visited the old age home, interacted with the elders over there and understood the society in Finland then my perception changed. I understood that in order to maintain the standards of the life over there, both the husband and the wife have to work. In such a situation it is not an easy task to look after and take care of the physically and mentally retired and elderly persons. Keeping all these factors in mind the old age homes have been made. The old age home we visited, we found the elderly persons too excited to meet us and interact with us. Among them

there was a 93-year old lady which was busy in the hair saloon with her hairstyle. My happiness knew no bounds on seeing that a 93-year old lady is absolutely independent to lead her life in whatever way she wants to live. In the old age home all the facilities exist - doctors, nurses, Prayer hall, music, handicraft etc. Special facilities are provided in old age homes for the physically and mentally challenged people. During the interaction, I talked to 94, 95, 97, 85, 87 years old ladies and gentlemen. I found them to be very happy.

The admission in this old age home is given on the basis of one criterion - whether there is no one to take care of them. Mostly the sons, daughters, grandchildren of the elderly members, visit old age home on weekly, monthly or irregular basis to meet them. Collective outings are also organized by the old age homes.

When we compare this situation with the Indian society then we find that in an average family structure, male members go for the service/job and female members do the household work and look after the elders. In this structure elders have the support of females and children and the females and children have the support of elders, a kind of symbiotic relationship. But today this system is breaking up in cities and towns. Today's women want their own identity and more freedom and they see elders an obstacle in this. Second reason for break up of this system is economic. In maintaining the high standards of living and being a part of the consumerist culture, both the male and female members of the family are working and this affects the elder members of the family. In these circumstances, it is not possible for a son to take care of his parents satisfactorily, even if he genuinely wants to do so, as the old age home does in the west. Today there is a significant increase in the numbers of the elderly members, which are victimized by their own kids.

But one thing which I deeply felt after meeting the elders in the old age home of the Oulu City that their heart felt wish was to live a life with their family members. In front of this desire, all the facilities, comforts, advanced technology all this pales.

### **Family Structure**

Compared to structure of the Indian family, the Finnish family-structure is fast disintegrating. Joint families are still commonly seen in our society, though more in villages and in cities they are breaking up or weakening. This has both negative and positive repercussions and aspects.

The western and Finnish society too has undergone the phase of the joint family. There may be a number of reasons for the extinction of this but in my little understanding I find few major reasons like, self-identity, freedom of choice, equality and self-freedom.

Right from the teen age, youth want their independence and freedom and hence want to live separately. If they live with the family then they are totally dependent on their parents, socially and economically. And this dependence, in one way or the other, curbs their individual identity, freedom of choice, equality and self-freedom.

In Turku, we saw two-three dramas/plays of the Estonia ethnic community. In one of the play, based on homosexuality, lesbianism was encouraged. In another play, one teen-age boy falls in love with a poor more-aged girl and faces opposition from his mother. There was a drama on drugs and it showed how the drugs affect youth. Yet another drama demonstrated the neglect of a child by his parents, as they are too engrossed in themselves. Consequently, the child reaching school late becomes the norm and scolded by the teacher. The other classmates also make fun of him and sometimes even beat him in the absence of the teacher. The other classmates make false complaints to the teacher and the child gets punished. Finally, the child himself becomes violent and beats classmates.

The impression I got, from these plays and on the basis of talks with the elderly members whatever understanding I developed about the family structure and society over there, I will like to present a picture of that here.

First, on the basis of the play on lesbianism, I will like to say a few words on sex. The sex is a truth of life given to living beings by the nature. Attraction towards the opposite sex is maximum in the teen-age and owing to immaturity or inadequate knowledge of the body system, sometimes unfortunate circumstances are reached. At that time they are neither mentally prepared for the child nor they are in a position to decide what to do and because of the different body structure it is the girls who have to suffer. In many cases boys in such situations leave the girl or the girls get disillusioned with the boys and they separate. The monopoly of the male domination, socially, economically and politically, in the society also plays a role in it. Here the main issue is freedom of selection. If a girl and boy understand the feelings of each other and want to live together, then it is an issue of individual freedom or choice and no one should interfere in this.

In this drama, a girl falls in the love of her girlfriend but the girlfriend loves some other boy. This boy betrays the girlfriend a number of times but the girlfriend loves the boy too much. Finally the girlfriend gets disillusioned with the boy and starts living with the girl who loves her. But the parents of the girl oppose this lesbian relationship and put pressure on the girl for marriage. It implies that the society does not fully accept the lesbian relationship and hence it was being promoted by the play. Gender is a very big issue and I am not an expert or scholar to say that such a relationship is natural or not. Or that the man-woman is complimentary to each other and only that relationship is legal. But a broad principle comes in my little mind that both, man and woman, must have the freedom of choice, i.e., if one wants to live this way or that way, it is one's personal freedom. This also might be a reason for the breaking up of the family. Another aspect of the society is that if a young boy or girl live with their parents than they become an object of ridicule among their friend circle that they are still dependent on their parents and are unable to take their own decisions. And as far as I have understood the people here have a lot of self-esteem. To maintain this freedom of choice or freedom of taking decision they have to make this sacrifice that they have to start life afresh, i.e., they leave the comforts of their parental home begin living independently. Whereas in our society, we get everything readymade from our parents and in-laws.

In Finland I had a chance to visit the home of a lady who had delivered a child just 5 days back and was living on her own. She was getting help and support from her friends and relatives. Perhaps her boyfriend did not want child and hence has left her. I wanted to ask her a whole range of questions on many issues but did not as I thought she might feel bad. One thing which inspired me most was the fact that despite the unwillingness of her boyfriend she gave birth to a child and she maintained her freedom to decide even in such adverse condition.

I also met another lady, mother of two kids who also lived on her own. She was fulfilling her responsibility towards the kids and was also doing his research work in the university. Both these ladies are a symbol of courage and inspiration for us as they are breaking up the monopoly of the male dominated society which consider women weak and helpless. They are fighting against these inequalities and other challenges in a magnificent way.

I talked to a number of middle-aged man and woman on the issue of marriage and yet another reason of break up of the family came to my knowledge. I asked them if they are married, then many of them informed me that they are not married. When I asked the next question if they want to marry then with the exception of one or two, all of them replied in yes. When I asked if you want to marry then why you have not done so, they told that though they want to marry but first they have to study, then find a decent job and then build a house. I asked them that they must be losing their prime youth in all this. And they said yes it n all this we cross our marriageable age.

I said in a lighter vein that we Indians are in a better position in this matter. There is no education, no job, no house and yet despite all this they marry, produce kids, continue their struggle and remain happy. We have no choice for good education, no choice for good job, no choice for good house, no choice choosing girl/boy, no choice for marriage and yet everything goes on.

### **Taste of Sauna or Taste of Equality**

Alongwith Marco and his girlfriend Marna, I had a chance to visit the house of Marna, i.e., the in-laws of Marco. Marco's father in law Erkki-Pasanen and his mother in law live a far off village Naadanmaa. This village is located on a small island. Because of her studies Marna lives in the Jansu town. Her younger sister lives in Helsinki and brother lives in some other town. I asked Marna how many houses are there in her village and she replied about 30-35. When I reached the village I could see only her house. When I asked her where are other houses, she told that their nearest neighbour lives 5 kms away. It was quite strange for me.

We reached there on Saturday night. After meals, Marco's father in law Erkki invited us for taking a sauna bath. Erkki informed us that there is a practice/ custom of taking sauna bath on Saturday night alongwith family and friends. Most of the houses are along the lake and so on the banks hut-like bathroom is built with the wooden planks.

Marco and Erkki took me to a Sauna bath built along the lake out of their house. Marco and Erkki took out all their clothes and entered in the bath totally naked and called me to get in. When I went inside the Sauna bath in the underwear, Erkki said all are equal Sauna and there is no discrimination in Sauna. Though I was feeling shy in taking off my underwear but on Erkki's

perusal I took it out. In the Sauna, stones are heated on a Kluas, then with a coulu water is taken from a bucket and thrown on the stone. Immediately after falling on the heated stone, water is converted into steam thereby increasing temperature in the bathroom. Due to this, one starts perspiring and all the pores of the body are opened. Erkki gave a lot of information about the Sauna and I told Erkki that you are my teacher in Sauna, which made him very happy.

Erkki told me that when Parliament, meeting or conferences fail in reaching a political decision, the these decisions are taken in Sauna, as over there everyone is in a very relaxed mood. In Finland there is tradition of taking Sauna bath with the family members, children and close friends.

There are four kinds of Sauna:

1. Smoke Sauna
2. Single heated Sauna
3. Continuous heating Sauna
4. Electric Sauna

With the help of Marco I enjoyed taking three kinds of Sauna baths. Marko informed me that four Finnish words are not translated in any other language.

1. Sauna
2. Kius - Sauna stove with stone
3. Avanto - Hole in ice upon the lake for swimming
4. Loyly - To throw water on hot stone for steam

For sitting in a Sauna, there is a stair-like layer of wooden planks. First of all the person sitting on the top of the stair feels the steam and then it comes down gradually. When using Loyly, water should be thrown in a manner that steam heat could be tolerated. Whenever one feels very heated in the steam, one comes out and drinks a beer. Many even take a dip in the lake where the temperature is in minus, swim for some time and then come back to Sauna. Erkki also took a dip in the lake, swam for some time. All of us also drank beer.

### **Toilet Cleaner**

In the Helsinki city I met Passci Clenne. In Yuvascula, I met a friend of Hannu Virtenam named Laari, who runs a one-man cleaning company. Laari takes the contracts for toilets, Sauna etc. Then he himself goes for cleaning these places, driving his own Esteem-like car. He earns a good sum from by this work and hence he maintains a good living standard.

Paasci works in a company in the Helsinki. Under a contract he has to clean the 21 general toilets of the city. On the basis of my conversation with him I learnt that these persons do not have the respect and honour in the society which persons engaged in other works have.

In the fair trade shop of Yuvascula city, alongwith other young friends of the University I did the kitchen work, like preparation of raw vegetables, and helped in cooking. These people collect the vegetables, money etc. from the common people and provide free meals to the poor people. After the meals were prepared we took the meal to City Square Market and there fed all the poor people. In the end all of us also ate the same food. In such a developed high tech nation like Finland there are still poor people in the society, which need to be fed freely.

In the Helsinki City I also had a chance to visit an organization working with homeless people. Here I learnt that as per the 1998 data there are 10,000 homeless persons in Finland, out of which 4,300 were in Helsinki City. The city governments have also built night shelters in the cities here but they are too crowded and there are many drug addicts and alcoholics in these shelters and hence many of the homeless persons do not go there.

This organization also manages a whole night cafe () in which there is arrangement for of providing tea, coffee etc. to the homeless persons in the night. Here turn by turn, homeless persons spent the night by drinking tea, coffee and playing cards. Since the capacity of accommodating persons in this cafe is small, hence the persons left once the cafe is full, stand outside the cafe and wait. After some time these persons come inside and persons sitting in the cafe go outside. Thus persons spent their whole night in staying inside in the cafe and waiting outside the cafe.

I asked the people of the organization that this does not allow these homeless persons any sleep as you have only made sitting arrangements. If you wanted you could have made the sleeping arrangements also for these persons as if one does not sleep for a long period then s/he may go mad. But I could not get any satisfactory response. Over there I also told some homeless persons that you people have such a big organization in the Helsinki city why you do not take possession of the land lying vacant in the Helsinki city. They replied - "No, no, we can't do this as it will be against the government and the government is our friend". I felt quite strange on this answer.

One and half months are not long enough to understand any society. I am neither a scholar nor an expert and if I have hurt anybody's feelings, I offer my sincere apologies. I received love and affection of my friends in Finland and I am really grateful to all of them - Sirpa, Marko, Thomas, Risto, Outi, Enna, Pairi, Elena, Sussana, Siru, Hannu Vartenek (who was also Hindi speaking), Sisco, Olli and many others.

Forests and the conservation was predominantly the issue of the week. The informal and formal exchanges led to the reaffirmation that if man did not learn to respect the nature all over again the survival of the whole human race is at stake. One thing that I would like to mention here is the use of native Wisdom and native Religion by the Indigenous people that we met to discourage their younger generation from "modernisation". Also important to mention here is the fact that the Indigenous people of Nicaragua had to face the treachery of their own Indian leaders. I need not elaborate these issues as our friends already understand these issues very well.

### **CALENDAR OF EVENTS 17 September 1999**

We arrive at the Helsinki Airport in time. As told to me on phone earlier I was expecting Paivi and few others to come and receive us at the airport but it so happened that there was no body at the airport. We had to call Paivi and she came to receive us. It seems that there was a confusion about arrival timings. We drove straight to our residence in Hauhtontie. There is a dinner to welcome us in our house. Paivi and Amar went shopping and I cooked. It was attended by Paivi, Outi and her 2 children, and Tove.

Paivi is coming back in the morning to take us to the Seminar venue. 18.9.99 & 19.9.99 The seminar co organised by KEPA, DODO and CNS. DODO- Living Nature for the Future, NGO, is a politically and religiously uncommitted environmental organisation. DODO aims to approach environmental issues in a fresh and open-minded way. Promoting comprehensive and rational discussion about the planet is their goal.

CNS- The national council of rubber tappers from Brazil. It was very informative the first day to share with all these people how they are struggling to survive and retain the rain forest for the people and save them from over exploitation. There are also participants from Indonesia and Nicaragua as well. The Indian reserve in Nicaragua and Honduras are facing threats because of concessions given to multinationals without consulting the Indians contrary to the constitution which gives them partial autonomy They are protesting and recently have resolved to violence as well. They are also demanding an independent state for themselves and . They wish to retain their land and resources and save them from over exploitation. The discussion about the rain forest in Amazon as well as Kaalimanta continued on 19.9.99. The stress was more on the roles of transnationals or multinationals. The participating

## **Rita Nahata**

Vijay Pratap Ji had kind of briefed me in detail about the basic objectives of the exchange programme and also my personal commitment to Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam helped. "Democratising North South Relations" is such a wide term that it can virtually cover every thing and anything on bilateral terms. But I was very clear in my mind as to what I had to observe, learn and compare. Personally I was very interested in WTO issues. Also to understand the politics of coalition governments was high on my agenda. And then of course I was prepared to travel with an open mind and make full use of the opportunity provided by Lokayan and Kepa. I had already met Marko Ulvila and Piia Saari, the two Finnish activists in India, and was highly impressed with their commitment and devotion. I was already curious to understand the civil society that was producing many more such activists and also to find out the causes of our failures as activists in Finland. In some ways I was already traveling to Finland with very black and white ideas of that society and was certain that in many ways Finnish Society had a lot to teach me. On the other hand I knew that Gandhian thought and action was also unique to the world and we Indians are the lucky inheritors of Gandhian legacy. I was certain that some of our methods and techniques for reforms and social change are also unique and was prepared to make full utilisation of this opportunity to propagate the same.

activists elaborated in details how specific multinationals could or could not get concessions on land occupied by indigenous people. The Swedes as well as Timo from KEPA's Thailand office gave presentations about their experiences of destructions as well as success stories from Thailand, Vietnam and neighbouring countries. Marko gave a case study on behalf of the friends of the earth of a big paper factory funded with Finnish money in Thailand and the destruction it is going to cause. Towards the end of the seminar I made a short intervention at the request of the chair (Mika from Kepa).

I put forward the Indian position on (My kind of Indians) multinationals and why we oppose multinationals. My main issues were unscrupulous exploitation of natural resources, the environmental costs of destruction for raw material and also the centralisation of wealth. 20.9.99 It was our first day in KEPA office. Paivi came in the morning to pick us up and take us to Kepa. it was a day of formal meetings. first the participants from the south for the seminar met each other formally and discussed how to continue the dialogues and how the north can help us do so. it was also the day for Kepa board meeting which we attended and that consumed the whole day. 21.9.99

The day started with a 9.00 am Kepa programme committee meeting where I made a detailed presentation of my proposed plans in Finland. it was well received by everybody. The afternoon was spent on practical problems like travel arrangements etc. Also was able to spend some time with Risto and exchange some valuable information. He has promised to continue this discussion after our travels are over. 22.9.99

We went sight seeing to Nuksio reserve forest just outside Helsinki along with the Nicaraguan and the Dayak friend.

Afternoon was the India Group meeting where once again I made the formal presentation of my plans and it was followed by dinner at our place. The Dinner was quite well attended and a success. 23.9.99 The morning was spent in informal discussions with Humberto our Nicaraguan friend and also Risto. Afternoon was spent in the office and evening I gave my Talk on Vegetarianism in Indian Context and also The Jain Philosophy of vegetarianism. It was well attended by Finnish standards.

#### **WHAT DID NOT IMPRESS ME OR SAY WHAT I DID NOT APPRECIATE MUCH IN THE FINNISH SOCIETY**

The fast disappearance of small enterprise and almost every trade and

manufacturing activity being controlled by a much bigger may be a transnational company. The most shocking example of this is a jumbo k market near the Helsinki Vantaa airport. Every day news papers are advertising the cheapest prices at this store. It is about 25 km away from the centre and is so huge that for a first timer it is very difficult to locate the merchandise that he wants to buy without the help of a map. The question is do we need to travel such distances to shop for our grocery. These huge markets did not make any sense to me nevertheless the Finns are patronising such stores.

Well here I want to narrate an incident before I come to the point. Me and Amar were traveling back to Hauhontie in a Tram from Risto's place. We found a man sprawled on the floor of the tram. He looked like either he was very drunk or very sick. Either way he needed help. The tram was fairly crowded but no body even bothered to inquire not even the driver. I put forward the question to many WHY? Well I do not have a single satisfactory answer. I found the reasons too flimsy. Like the man would not have appreciated it or if he was an alcoholic and such reasons. I still do not understand why there was not a single individual to volunteer help.

Another thing that I could not understand and appreciate is the depoliticisation of the Finnish society. We in India have been of the opinion that education will lead to a more aware and active society. Finland is already a 100% literate and a high level of education. What Happened? Why is the society getting depoliticised then? So far I do not have satisfactory answers to share. May be some of the readers may fill in. This question is very important for me as In India also the youth and the upper middle class is getting depoliticised at a pace which is alarming.

This report would be more than incomplete without the mention of KEPA fraternity. It was their guidance and patience without which probably nothing could have been achieved. I jokingly called Paivi our temporary mother, but let me tell you there is a great deal to that statement. The care with which she looked after us was more than what a mother does. Sirpa's sensitivity to various social issues specially to Dalit issues and her tears in response to Amars presentation of dalits was moving. The list is endless. The exchanges in the corridors, at the coffee table and at the pub .Elona at one end and Kirsi and Olli at the other end of the 2 sides of the corridor, Each and every one helped us so patiently with our sometimes very stupid questions. I would always cherish the times that I spent in the Kepa Office.



I would like to end this note with this incident that happened to me outside the Helsinki railway station. I was waiting for the tram to go back home. A lady tall and handsome but a little tipsy was also there not very near me. Very hesitatingly she walked up to me and offered 5 marks for a cigarette in excellent English. As I had carried my cigarettes with me from India I told her that may be she can actually buy a whole packet for that much and she was most welcome to. In fact take 2. She took the cigarettes and walked away even without saying Kiitos. Well the whole incident is weird for me. Why did she offer me money? Why was she not interested in a further conversation? If she was not interested in a conversation than why did she approach me in the first place?

In next few pages I try and describe few issues and events in detail as they come to me: Selki and Pauli Rantanen When Risto Isomäki mentioned about an inventor called Pauli Rantanen based at village Selki about one hour drive from Helsinki I was very excited and looking forward to this trip. As Amar had already left for India it was decided that Risto, Jaana and myself will spend a day at Selki. Jaana agreed to drive us there and back. Pauli Rantanen had spent his early life in Australia looking for gold and precious stones and was successful in that. He is also very influenced with Gandhi and Schumacher and is a devout Christian.

At present for last about 20 years he is busy designing and inventing various things for conservation of energy. His centre at Selki has a permanent exhibition of his inventions. They arranged for a live demonstration of his charcoal furnace for heating. He had various types of heaters burners and ovens that were charcoal operated. Besides a few combination cookers that combine charcoal and solar energy. He has also designed this stand with pots that in a small area can produce enough for a family.

The 2 products that impressed me most and which are very relevant for us here in India are his charcoal making furnace and the new wind mill. The charcoal furnace that he has designed is on wheels and can be easily transported from one place to another. The design is such that all the discharges from the wood can be collected and put to commercial use specially the tar. Any kind of wood including the waste from furniture factories can be converted to charcoal. The discharged gases are non polluting. The charcoal produced is also of better quality and gives almost smoke free fire and has full utilisation capacity in the sense that nothing is left except ashes.

At the moment the trials of the same are going on. The cost of production of this furnace is very high in Finland. I had suggested that it was possible for us to involve groups like PPSt or some IIT graduates to work out a much cheaper production in India for our domestic use as well as for the Finnish use.

In our country production of charcoal is limited by government as it is very polluting and also not very energy efficient as a lot of energy is wasted in producing the charcoal. A furnace of the Selki kind can also revolutionise the charcoal making in our country also and all the existing illegal charcoal making in various parts of the country can be checked.

The second product is the wind mill. The basic difference between this wind mill and the conventional one is that it has a circular rotor instead of the normal fan like construction of the windmills. The other most important factor is that the voltage fluctuation due to the speed of the wind is checked and controlled by a device attached to the bottom of this windmill. Unfortunately Pauli has already given the patent to some company and we will have to negotiate with them for this matter.

Risto had suggested that if some organisation was interested in visiting Selki and working there or get more information we should let him know. I think the best would be for us to circulate this note with the literature that I have brought with me to all the interested groups and wait for their reactions.

### **THE ISSUES THAT IMPRESSED AND INFLUENCED ME MOST**

Activism : Where ever we went and whichever organisation we visited there were always a group of activists involved in voluntary activity. The level of understanding and commitment to the cause was also much more than I had expected. This situation was so different from our country where we do not have this proportion of activists. Moreover whatever number of grass root activists we have they are generally not so well informed. Of course our activism is fighting the injustices within where as activism in Finland was concerned with global issues. In spite of a high rate of unemployment our youth is so far not getting attracted to activism in a big way. In Finland we noticed that most of the students were involved in one issue or the another.

The social security system from Cradle to Grave: It was an experience to see first hand the social security system in Finland. Visits to schools, universities, Old peoples Homes and other such institutions and the sense of security they provide. On the other hand it has also made people over dependent on state.

Also people are disciplined to the extent of slavery. The younger unemployed generation also is not reacting at all.

Lack of 'Made in Finland' goods in the shops: I was also pained to see many deserted factory buildings and the information that many Finnish industries have either died or are dying. The impact of globalisation on the Finnish economy and also the fact that Finland is now a member of the EU are very similar to the impact of liberalisation in my country and this was a newfound solidarity.

Over consumption in terms of packaging and throw away items at first hand look very anti environment but some research and statistics given to me by some friends tried to reason that the water used for cleaning and washing is also equally anti environment and that water is a scarce resource in Finland.

Last but not the least, The Finnish character. The people by and large are hard working, committed and diligent. I discovered that absenteeism was or is minimum in the world in Finland. The responsibility towards state is well understood. Amar asked a question to some of the people we interacted with. He asked why people were not reacting to the high rates of public transportation. More or less standard reply from all was that we have to keep the system running smoothly and in order to do that we have no alternative but to pay more. Same is the case with taxation. We in India have one of the lowest rates of taxation and still we complain where as Finland probably has one of the highest tax rates in the world and the civil society understands and justifies. It is very important to tell my Indian comrades at this stage is that every single person we met was not rich and these are the opinions of Finnish poor or Finnish not so poor people. Their existence is hand to mouth and very little is left after paying for rent and food and transportation. Some people use bicycles just to save bus money. This kind of existence does not bother them as they need not save for a rainy day. Rainy days are taken care of by the state.

#### **EVENTS WHERE I GAVE A PRESENTATION**

- Gave a talk on Vegetarianism in Indian context at Kepa (Most of the people present were animal rights activists)
- Fair Trade and what we understand about it at Jyväskylä
- In three different schools about India in general
- Indian women At Home, At Work and In Politics at Kepa
- Four press interviews and one Radio interview

#### **EVENTS THAT WE ATTENDED AND THE PLACES WE VISITED**

The Seminar on Amazons  
 Kepa Board meeting  
 Kepa programme committee meeting  
 India group meetings  
 The community theatre festival at Turku  
 Visit on board Estelle  
 Fair trade shop, Sun Factory and Emmaus at Turku  
 The meeting held at the Finnish Parliament to hand over the representation regarding WTO  
 Juuttiputiikki at Oulu  
 An Ala Aste (Elementary School) at Oulu  
 An old peoples home at Oulu  
 A village in Leppaverta county  
 Joensuu  
 Fair trade shop at Jyväskylä  
 The University at Jyväskylä  
 Keuruu Eco Village  
 Seminar on EU at Tampere  
 No Borders event and demonstration at Tampere  
 Visit to the Blonde club at Tampere  
 Visit to YLE radio and television  
 Visit to village Selki to meet and see the inventions of Pauli Rantanen  
 The seminar at Finnish Parliament about Women as Peacemakers

## Deepa Sharma

(17th August to 3rd September 2000)

I spent about two weeks in Finland in the summer of 2000. What I saw and experienced during this short visit left a deep impression on me both mentally and emotionally. The presence of the forest so close even to Helsinki was an exhilarating surprise. I found much in the way life is lived in Finland fascinating. In my report on my visit, however, I would like to focus mainly on my impressions of what I saw and understood of the Finnish craft tradition and its aesthetics.

I am grateful to KEPA and Lokayan for making it possible to know and see Finland in a way that would never have been possible without their support and sponsorship. During my first few days in Helsinki, when I was feeling a little lost and not clearly oriented as to how to begin, Aija Tashkinen with great patience and understanding helped me to find my bearings. KEPA's support gave me an access to Finnish craft traditions and the sensibility from which these traditions originate. The people I met were warm and exceedingly helpful and patient in explaining things to me. And perhaps what was most significant and touching was that they seemed to derive great joy in sharing their thoughts and experiences.

Before visiting Finland I used to think of Finland as a technologically advanced and affluent society; European in every sense. My clear sense was that

the feel for colour was missing in European fabrics and clothing. My very first encounter with traditional hand-weaves in Finland came to me as an exciting surprise. My impression deepened further by what I saw in the museums and some of the craft shops. I was particularly struck by the sense of colour in Soami artefacts: stunning and vibrant, somewhat like the colours from our desert areas in Rajasthan and Gujarat. However, this traditional sense of colour seems to have been overtaken almost completely by what we think of as the modern West: factory produced goods and assembly line designs.

I work with handloom weavers and hand-block printers. These are people who are preserving a craft tradition, which goes back several thousand years. Weaving and printing are their means of livelihood and survival. Most of them are very poor and do not get enough work. I am acutely conscious of the fact that the survival and future of this tradition is uncertain. The skills and the aesthetics that sustain this tradition are widely diffused. The best examples of traditional craftsmanship are still to be found in the remote rural areas. The work the craftsmen do is still a part of the natural rhythm of their everyday life. It is not a product of a dominant centre either as a school or as a market. The things they make, the colours they choose are what pleases their eye. I see my function as essentially that of finding new uses for their products and the right projection and platform to market them. I do not see my function in terms of making changes in the traditional sense of colour and aesthetics. But while remaining within the tradition, craftspersons and people like me who work with them, can and do make choices. But what may seem like a new design is really nothing more than a play with colour, forms and symbols within the matrix of traditional sensibility and craft practice. I also feel I have an obligation to support craft skills of good quality. I do not like to compromise on the quality of craft skills, or the purity of the traditional sense of colour and motifs. It is with this background and understanding that I look at craft traditions in Finland.

For us as Indians the idea of associating craft and Europe together, comes with difficulty. We have grown up thinking of Europe in the images of industry, machines and, generally things large scale. What I saw in Finland of craft tradition, made me realise that both in terms of skills and sense of colour and aesthetics, the Finnish craft tradition is as good as the best we have. Finland is unique among European countries in that the craft skills are still a part of recent memory and practice. But craft production no longer

offers a viable means of livelihood. The State has played an imaginative role in keeping these skills alive. It has introduced the teaching of various craft skills at the school level. The State also maintains looms for public use on a nominal payment. People weave on these looms for pleasure and to make things for personal use.

People of all age groups visit these centres which also run hobby centres where clay modelling, ceramics, durri-weaving, knitting and woodcarving is taught. It was an exhilarating experience to visit these centres. But despite this heroic effort, handicraft does not and perhaps cannot have a place in the everyday life of people. Craft in Finland can perhaps only survive as a treasured personal skill. It can no longer be a source of livelihood. Given this state of things, I wonder as to how long the craft skills would remain a part of living heritage in Finland. This thought made me sad because the disappearance of craft sensibility and practice would mean the loss of spontaneous joy which comes through the use of things which are at the same time useful and beautiful.

In Tampere I visited a centre which weaves floor rugs and knits. They also run a hobby centre for people of all age groups. Crafts like pottery design, dyeing and weaving are taught at this centre. The products made in this centre are commercially marketed at one of the most exotic shops in Tampere. The stupendous display of Finnish craft and skills at this shop was a treat to behold. But one look at the price tags upset and depressed me. In this shop as everywhere else, handcrafted things are so steeply priced that it does not and perhaps cannot have a place in the everyday life of people. Craft tradition is no longer for mainstream use and it has no place or very little place in the rhythm of life in Finland. Hand-made clothing is expensive and out of reach for most people. It can no longer be the source of livelihood. Craft in Finland survives as something exotic and ornamental. Given this state of things it made me wonder as to how long would craft skills and sensibility remain a part of lived experience in Finland. This thought makes me profoundly sad because it would mean the loss of a perennial source of beauty and comfort.

I visited several places in Tampere where they make floor rugs, wool and cotton fabrics. I went to Pirkanmaan Kotityo Oy which produces woollen and cotton yarn on a very large scale and supplies it to various units. The work produced in this unit is sold at an exclusive shop in Tampere at exorbitant

prices. This kind of pricing makes the craft beyond the reach of most people. Hence craft products are not seen as things for everyday use in mainstream life. The designs which are woven into the knits are absolutely stunning but beyond the purchasing power of perhaps 95 per cent people. Floor coverings and wooden utensils are priced beyond any possible notion of use. I felt deeply depressed by the thought that making craft unaffordable is a step towards making the craft slowly extinct. That may not happen immediately. But very soon it should become something to be displayed and seen only in museums.

In Tampere I also went to a craft shop called 'Jakotai' which sells ceramics, hand-painted dresses and scarves, jewellery and accessories. It is run by four enterprising women. I had a long talk with Marie who paints dresses. She made me feel welcome at the shop and spent time explaining her craft. She felt that there were not enough people to appreciate her craft in Tampere. I wondered if the problem was one of appreciation or the lack of it only. Could it be that given the exorbitant prices of this kind of everyday clothing, most people had lost the desire to even look at it?

In Helsinki and Tampere, I visited the fair trade shops which are unique in the sense that they are a reflection of the larger humanist engagement and sensitivity of the Finnish NGOs. However, I was distressed by what is displayed as Asian handicraft in these shops. The selection was, if anything, very poor. Perhaps this was also the reason for the poor sales they seem to have. The fair trade shop in Tampere was especially disappointing. As someone who has some familiarity and experience of skills and craft produce in India, I felt sad at the poor quality and display in these shops. I would have thought that since vibrant colours are such an intrinsic part of Finnish craft skills, the Indian or Asian craft would find a better projection. I also felt that with the kind of institutional support that these shops get, it should be possible to put together a better selection which would give a more effective platform for the display of skills and aesthetics from India and other Asian countries. The Third World shop in Helsinki seems to put a lot of emphasis on selling tea. I don't see the point of it since tea sells well even in the mainstream outlets.

The Finnish cherish an intimate relationship with the wilderness. That is something extraordinary and striking. Every Finn has this great desire to spend part of the year living close to nature, more or less untamed. Fiskars seems an attempt to institutionalise this impulse. Fiskars is an old town which

housed the massive iron works. The houses in Fiskars are mostly old wooden houses. Most of them have been restored with great care and imagination. But much to the dismay and distress of artists and intellectuals who have made Fiskars their home, the State has started cementing the dust roads in the village. In the last twenty years the village has blossomed as a village for artists, intellectuals and activists who seek to live life close to nature. I was fortunate in being able to visit Oli and Ulla in Fiskars. They live in a wooden house. I felt completely at ease and very welcome. Ulla fascinated me. Her walking bare foot made me feel the warmth of nature. I met her for the first time. Yet, we could share and cherish much that was familiar to both of us. She took me to the museum of old iron implements. I also visited the glasswork workshop. At this workshop they use modern precision instruments and electric furnaces. But each piece is handcrafted. Even as the old crafts have shrunk and shrivelled, this new craft has flourished. It creates sparkling magnificent forms in glass. They are sold in the best stores all over Europe. Maybe in this craft there are at work some silent connections with the old craft sensibility. But unlike the older traditional crafts, the things made are ornamental and not for everyday use.

My short stay in Finland gave me an opportunity to listen and speak with people of another culture. But the seemingly unfamiliar had a deeper affinity with my own culture. I particularly cherish my stay in Tampere. The warmth and hospitality of Yarna and Marco is unforgettable. The old wooden house in which they live has a courtyard-kind of open space in the middle where the neighbourhood comes together, much like the extended family in India. To step into that courtyard was to be in a world I thought I had known, even though it was under the shade of trees I had never seen before. To Thomas Wallgren, Oli, Aija and the entire KEPA group, I owe huge gratitude for making it possible to get to know their country in a way that I would long cherish.

**PART-II**  
**LETTERS FROM**  
**INDIA**

representative of Indian movements, Dr. Vasanthi Raman, went to Finland. The first Finnish activist, Mr. Marko Ulvila, arrived in India in the beginning of January this year.

The 'Letters from India' is divided into three sections. A theme discussion covers an issue arising usually out of Lokayan's activities. Some of the potential themes are listed in my work plan, which is the theme section of this first 'Letter'. Secondly there are short highlights from events during the two week period. Lastly personal reflections on issues of importance and human interest. In this first 'Letter' also a note of personal introduction is provided.

Next issue in the beginning of February will discuss the land struggles in the state of Bihar where I will spend next week.

### **Personal presentation**

The question that has occupied my mind for several years now is how can we find ways to challenge collectively the overwhelming forces driving humanity towards greater inequality and further environmental degradation. Although during the post-war period there has been remarkable improvements in the well being of the people in most parts of the world, these achievements are overshadowed by the fact that the number of people living in absolute poverty has increased, the gap between the rich and the poor has widened and vast and irreversible damage has been done to the environment. If these trend are let to continue humanity will face serious crises in the future.

This joint question of poverty and environment has been a continuing theme in the whole of my adult life. I have been addressing it primarily as an activist in several citizens' organisations such as Coalition for Environment and Development and Friends of the Earth Finland. Also in my studies at the University of Tampere I have selected disciplines and themes that have enabled me to learn more about the questions. They include sociology, environmental policy, peace research and development studies.

During the past years my main engagement in the activist side has circled around the theme of globalisation and corporate power. As a case in point I have highlighted the negative impacts of the Finland's largest forest company UPM-Kymmene's investment in paper production in Indonesia based on clear-cutting rainforests in areas traditionally owned by local communities.

## **No1. 18.01.1999 MARKO ULVILA**

*'Letters from India' is a fortnightly brief written by Finnish exchange activists participating in the Lokayan - Kepa co-operation programme. The 'Letters' are circulated primarily among the staff of the organisations and members of the groups responsible for the joint activities, ie. Lokayan's Global Responsibility Forum - Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam and Kepa's India Group.*

### **Introduction**

DELHI -- This is the first communication in the series of 'Letters from India', a fortnightly brief written by the Finnish activists staying in India as part of the Lokayan - Kepa exchange programme. In the first phase they will run regularly until the end of April for the benefit of people interested in the activity in both countries.

Lokayan is a think tank and network node with the office in Delhi and Kepa is the umbrella organisation of two hundred Finnish NGOs involved in development and solidarity activities. Having exchanged ideas since 1989, the two organisations formalised a relation and decided on a three year co-operation programme in September 1998 when the convenor of the Global Responsibility Forum - Lokayan . The main theme of the cooperation is democratising the North-South relations. This issue is approached by the programme to exchange some four senior activists every year. In 1998 one

In the academic side I am pursuing post-graduate studies in a collaborative project studying non-governmental organisations in Nepal and Bangladesh. My work is based at the University of Tampere and I work closely with fellow researchers at the Tribhuvan University in Nepal and Dhaka University in Bangladesh.

My interest in participating in the Lokayan - Kepa cooperation as an exchange activists rose from the deep impact interaction with Lokayan activists has had on my friends and senior colleagues at the Finnish movements. This interest was further strengthened by the research engagement in the South-Asian region. My objective is to gain insights into the issues and methods of Lokayan and to establish contacts and relations that will bring forward the common struggle for a more just World.

An important part of my life is sharing it with my beloved companion Jarna who is with me also here in India.

### **Theme: My work plan**

As agreed with Lokayan and Kepa, I will be working with Lokayan in January and February and during the first two weeks of April. Based on the discussions and documentation the following work plan has been approved by the Lokayan convenor.

### **Learning about Lokayan**

What & Why One of the main reasons for the Lokayan - Kepa co-operation is the unique nature of Lokayan as a think tank and a node of movement networks in India. The inputs from Lokayan have been important to the Finnish solidarity movement during the past decade, and one of the central ideas of the co-operation is to expand this knowledge to wider circles in Finland.

How I will get acquainted with the work of Lokayan by talking with the staff, activists and members and by taking part in the activities. As the main output I will write bi-weekly 'Letters from India' in English to be circulated among the members of the Kepa's India Group and staff and among Lokayan circles in India. The letters will consist of one main theme and short presentations of interesting events and issues. The themes would include: - Dalit struggles - Transport issues - Globalisation (Global Responsibility Forum) - (Anti-) Communalism - Natural resources - Health - Et c.

### **Democratising the North-South Relations**

What and Why Besides the exchange programme, the North-South project implemented with the Centre for the study of Developing Societies (CSDS) is a major undertaking in Kepa's India programme. For a smooth progress some more man-power is needed especially to bring in the Northern perspectives.

### **How**

The seminar held in Delhi on 10 - 12 December produced a good number of material which needs to be processed. Also a number of articles has arrived that are to be reviewed and edited. I will lend a hand in both operations as requested by the project co-ordinator and staff. Moreover, I will help preparing a session on the theme in Nepal to be held in March 1999.

### **Lokayan - Kepa Co-operation**

What and Why The Lokayan - Kepa Co-operation was for years 1998-2000 was formalised in September 1998 and the exchange programme has begun. For the successful implementation of the agreed activities and for the planning of new ones constant communication between the organisations is needed. As a member of the India Group and with several year of Kepa experience I can provide some necessary insights of the Finnish end.

How On substantial issues and practical arrangements I will help by communicating with Kepa's office and the India Group. If new people from India will leave for Finland during my stay I will play a role in the preparatory work. As the first Finnish exchange activist to India I am naturally involved in arranging the logistics in Delhi. Identifying new European contacts for Lokayan is also on my agenda. If needed, I can also help in preparing decisions regarding job descriptions of the new activists, establishing e-mail connection etc.

### **Corporate power, WTO and globalisation**

What and why Both Lokayan and Kepa have a long tradition of critical examination of the activities of multinational corporations. This is an integral part of the co-operation programme.

How The next meeting of the Peoples Global Action against Free Trade and WTO (PGA) is to be held in Bangalore in the beginning of April. I will



participate in the gathering and report from the event to Lokayan and Kepa, and to other interested groups.

### **Highlights from the fortnight**

On the day of my arrival to Delhi I visited a sit-in demonstration (dharna) supporting the struggle of a group of vegetable vendors. During the week I made a half day visit to a studio of a new Internet radio station. Later I had the opportunity to discuss with Mr. Arun Kumar his proposal for political reform which he later on presented at a CSDS-Lokniti forum. Lastly I participated in a meeting called by Lokayan's working group on transport. Summary presentations of the events are below.

### **DHARNA ON VEGETABLE VENDORS' PLIGHT**

On my first day in Delhi I attended briefly a sit-in demonstration (dharna) in front of the office of the Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi. Some 30 people had been demonstrating for ten days on the street-side throughout day and night against the coercive closing down of an informal vegetable market at Pachim Vihar, West Delhi. The vendors together with a number of activists from peoples' organisations led by Ms. Nirmala Sharma of Jagriti Mahila Samiti were demanding a reversal of the eviction decision. Also member organisations of the National Alliance of People's Movements, including Lokayan, took part in the action. The issue was successfully settled on 8 January after an intervention by the union Minister for Urban Affairs. He promised a recognised market place for the vendors and allowed them meanwhile to continue the trade at the old site. At the dharna a number of meetings and other events took place. Among them, Lokayan activist Ratti and the convenor of NAPM/North India Vimal Bhai announced their engagement.

### **A WEB RADIO IN MAKING**

A veteran BBC journalist and a friend of Lokayan, Mr. Raman Nanda, has started a radio station in the Internet to provide an Indian perspective to local and World events. The site will be launched on January 26 with Hindi and English news broadcasts every day. Already now there are daily news at 20.00 hours. In the future the site will also have a thirty minute programme on issues emerging from people's organisations and movements. Lokayan

might play a role in identifying events and issues and even organising barefoot journalists to produce material for web-casting. Visit the site at [www.media-arc.com](http://www.media-arc.com).

### **ARUN KUMAR'S REFORM PROPOSAL**

A senior social and political activist Mr. Arun Kumar, founder convenor of Lokayan's Rajasthan Chapter, gave a presentation at Lokniti - a forum of research and dialogue on democracy - on a political and administrative reform. The point of departure of the proposal is the observation that there is a lack of dialogue between the elite and the people, and this as such causes injustice (anyay). The key element of the reform would be to make the heads of local and regional administration elected rather than appointed by the central government. Secondly there would be integration of vernacular wisdom and Indian tradition into the elected bodies at all administrative levels from village to Union.

### **TRANSPORT POLICY STATEMENT**

On January 11 Lokayan's working group on People's Transport Policy (Jan Parivahan Panchayat) issued a statement regarding national transport policy. The prime minister A.B. Vajpayee had announced that the government would make an integrated transport policy and that the Planning Commission would be responsible for drafting it. As a response Lokayan issued a memorandum highlighting the fact that 90 per cent of India's population move by non-motorised transport and this should be considered seriously by the government. Facilities for pedestrians, cyclists, rickshaws, animal driven carts and boats should be a high priority. These pollution-free modes of transport save also foreign currency and scarce oil resources.

### **Reflections**

#### **LOW-KEY STYLE OF LOKAYAN**

The first observations about Lokayan I like to share is the working method which does not push the Lokayan banner to the front but creates separate groups for each of the major issues the organisation is working on. This way new people can be conveniently gathered to exchange ideas and to work together. By giving each group an identity of its own nobody needs to give up organisational identities or to identify with a reputed institution like Lokayan.

An inevitable outcome of the approach is that there is not so much visibility for Lokayan but this goes well with the objectives and style of the organisation.

### **POSITIVELY CALCUTTA**

When planning my trip to Delhi from Bangladesh where I had spent December for my research work I decided to travel via Calcutta to see the world-famous city and to spend less time in a fuel hoarding aeroplane. The prospects were not overwhelming. The Lonely Planet travel guide describes Calcutta as "an ugly and desperate place that to many people sums up the worst of India" and the leading Finnish authors on India, Tuominen and Zenger, write that "the many run-down houses add to the chaotic and end-of-the-World image". To my surprise, the 26 hour visit to the city gave just an opposite impression. I found the standard sized buildings and the huge Ambassador car fleet pleasing to the eye, and moving around by foot, boat, metro and taxi proved most convenient. Of course there were traffic jams and the air was thick of smoke, but that is the case in all Asian mega-cities I have visited. Perhaps my impressions have something to do with spending time in the other capital of Bengal, Dhaka. From that perspective Calcutta appears affluent, modern and well organised. Also my route in Calcutta from Airport to BBD Bagh to Howrah railway station had left some of the more destitute places out of my sight. However, I do wonder what is it that reproduces all those negative accounts of a remarkable city like Calcutta.

## **No 2. 04.02.1999 MARKO ULVILA**

### **Introduction**

DELHI -- The theme of the second letter is the broad and forceful social movement lead by Jai Prakash Naryan, known as J.P., that strived for democratic state where class and caste differences would be minimal and communal relations would be harmonious. Began in 1974, the JP Movement played a vital role in the events leading to the emergency and the rise of the Janata Dal government. Having mobilised a whole generation of social activists it has had a lasting impact in the voluntary sector and political organising especially in the northern part of India. The discussion of the movement below is based on a one week visit to the cradle region of the JP Movement, Bihar, where I talked with a dozen of key activists with background in the Movement.

During the past two weeks I also made presentations in Bihar on globalisation and peoples movements, attended a demonstration for communal harmony in Delhi and received the second exchange activist from Finland, Ms. Piia Saari. These items are discussed under the 'Highlights from the Fortnight'. Ending of the month of Ramadan on the 19 January provides scope for reflection.

## Theme: The JP Movement

In discussions with the people from Lokayan reference is made time to time to the JP movement. For many activists in Lokayan and other organisations and networks it has played a determining role in personal development. The energetic spirit of the movement and shared experiences in the prison during the emergency has left a lasting impact to a generation of activists that are today leading numerous voluntary popular movements and organisations. Also many present day politicians attribute the beginning of their careers to the Movement.

Below is a historical account of the movement from 1974 to present. However, first a brief presentation of its leader Jai Prakash Narayan is made. The passage is mainly based on discussions with Anil Prakash, Arvind Kumar, Ghanshyam, Tri Purari Sharan, Rajendra Ravi and Vijay Pratap.

**Jai Prakash Narayan: peaceful revolutionary** The leader of the JP movement, Mr. Jai Prakash Narayan, was born in 1902. Higher education he received at the United States. In the freedom struggle he was leading a group of radical socialists inspired by the Russian revolution. In 1934 he established a socialist group within the Congress party to radicalise its positions. There were some disagreements with Mahatma Gandhi whose indigenous categories of social analysis appeared conservative to him and others whose thinking were more influenced by western ideas and urban environment.

After independence and the death of Mahatma Gandhi Congress banned all the diverse forums within the party. Then JP and others formed a separate socialist party that contested the first elections of independent India with a decentralised democratic socialist platform. They received some 10 per cent of the vote but little representation in the parliaments. The party was thinking whether to oppose the Congress or to work along it for nation building, but JP had difficulty in deciding on the direction.

After several years of thinking and introspection JP declared in mid 1950s that he would dedicate his life to the Gandhian Sarvodaya movement lead by Vinoba Bhave. JP played an active role in the bohoodan campaign appealing to land holding families and institutions to donate land for the landless. Nearly million followers were participating in the movements yielding important results in comparison to other land reform efforts. JP also addressed the issues of human rights regarding the activists in Kashmir and North-East

and supported actively the struggle of Bangladeshi freedom fighters against the Pakistan regime.

After 1969 Indira Gandhi started to impair the democratic structures of the Congress party by taking more and more decisions by herself. The government declared an external emergency due to the war in Bangladesh in 1971 and this created a concern for the integrity of a democratic system. JP started mobilising public opinion demanding that Indira Gandhi should lift the emergency proclamation. JP got tremendous public support especially from youth and student resulting in a mass movement in Gujarat 1973 (Nav Nirman Andalan) and Bihar (Sampurna Kranti 1974)

Rise of the movement 1974-75 The dawn of the JP movement is traced to the violent oppression of a student protest in Patna, the capital of Bihar, on 18 March 1974. Students from number of universities had become increasingly frustrated about the corruption and mismanagement in the educational system. When it came to known that the Congress Party minister for education had favoured his son, the students decided to stage a protest in Patna by encircling and blocking the Legislative Assembly. The demonstration was met with a heavy police force which eventually attacked the students leaving more than one hundred dead.

The students turned to JP for leadership in struggle against the oppressive state, and he accepted the request. As a first reaction he staged a silent march on 7 April in Patna in mist of a curfew and heavy police presence. A group very disciplined activist of whom many had also participated in famine relief efforts in 1966/67 walked through the town.

In the coming months the movement gained structure and direction. JP pulled together nation-wide people from two groups where he had been involved before: Sarvodaya and socialists movements. He also established a new organisation for young students, Chitra Yuva Sangarsha Vahini.

On June 5 JP gave a call in Patna for Total Revolution in an event attended by some 500,000 people. The key objectives were justice, equity and personal change. To achieve this the systems of capitalism, casteism, communalism and other forms of social injustice had to be overcome. All in all, this would require a transformation of the whole society. An immediate objective was to restore democracy and control the authoritarian tendencies of the Indira Gandhi Government.

Emergency, elections and the Janata Party government After a more than a year of active organising and agitation the Government responded to the popular protests by declaring a state of emergency and by arresting more than two hundred thousand movement leaders and activists. Those who ended up in the prison continued clarifying the objectives of the movement and worked on personal development. Others went underground, changed names and organised people secretly.

When imprisoned activists were let free little by little from November 1976 and elections were declared in January 1977, many members of the JP Movement became active in election campaign to oust the Congress government. A forum of diverse forces united under Janata Party and contested successfully the elections. A government lead by Moraji Desai was formed, the emergency lifted and a number of social and economic reforms to benefit the poor majority were launched. However, only after two years the differences in the coalition grew stronger, the government fell and the Congress Party lead by Indira Gandhi won the early polls. JP died in October 1979.

Struggle movements and voluntary organisations After the emergency those who did not choose to engage in electorate politics started to organise disadvantaged groups to create changes that would sustain under different political regimes. In the Bihar Vahini circles two main approaches were chosen. On the one hand agricultural workers and other land-less dalits would be organised to carry out land reforms, and on the other hand tribal groups would be supported in their struggle to control the natural resources, especially forests. Some of the efforts were organised as popular movements while others took the form of a voluntary organisation. Below three examples from Bihar are presented.

One of the first efforts were done in Bodhgaya area, place famous for the site where Lord Buddha became enlightened under a Bhodi tree more than 2500 years ago. There a Hindu religious trust (Math) was holding 9.000 acres of land that was worked under very unfavourable conditions by some 100.000 landless labourers. A land reform legislation was at place that had set a ceiling of 40 acres per adult male member of a family and a provision of distribution of the excess land. The trust had evaded the law by registering the land holdings under bogus names and by other means. The Bodhgaya Mhumi Mukti Andolan (land liberation movement) organised by Vahini started to work relentlessly with the communities using non-violent means. After 7

years 8.000 acres were eventually distributed to some 20.000 families and for the first time registered in the names of both husband and wife. The successful struggle has inspired many other communities and organisation around Bihar and other parts of India where justified struggles for land are often marked by prolonged violent conflicts and extensive suffering.

Another set of issues has been addressed by Ganga Mukti Andolan (Ganges liberation movement) started by Vahini activists in Bhagalpur district. A key question had been the adverse impacts on fisher folks and farmers of inundated areas caused the Farakka Barrage that blocks the Ganges river near the Bangladesh border. The huge dam was finalised in 1975 affecting tremendously the fish population (75 % decline) and farming conditions in the areas upstream of the barrages (prolonged water logging and alkalisation of soils). The Ganga Mukti Andolan has been organising the people and demanded justice to the adversely affected people. It has also demonstrated that the intended benefits of the dam has been limited but it has created immense suffering to the rural poor.

Meanwhile in a tribal are of Bihar in Santal Pargana local Vahini activists started working with the Adivasis. District administration had given excessive concessions to contractors to log forests that provided livelihood for the local communities. The tribal groups had no way to influence to operations or even to protect their legal rights. Vahini activists started an voluntary organisation Lok Jagriti Kendra (people's awareness centre) to support the struggles of the tribal communities for control over the resources. In couple of years the efforts yielded results and the contractors were driven from the area. The process very similar to the famous Chipko movement has been sustained, an expression being the annual Bir Mela (forest fair) organised at the reclaimed deforested site now growing 15 year old Sal trees. The area is also marked for the lack of violent conflicts common in other tribal areas.

Total revolution today This year marks the 25th anniversary of the beginning of the JP Movement and a number of events will be organised to celebrate the achievements and to reflect on the aspirations. Also Lokayan is planning to convene a meeting to discuss the meaning of the JP Movement to Indian democracy.

During the past two and half decades India and the World has changed quite a bit, but most of the problems addressed by the JP movement in the Total Revolution agenda remain unresolved. The oppression of the tribals,

dalits and religious minorities persists and the economic policy of India is closer to capitalism than ever before since independence. Therefore it can be predicted that new wave of broad people's movements will emerge, but it is difficult to estimate if it will be in the same line with the JP Movement or if it will take different forms and directions.

One expression of continuity is the National Alliance of People's Movement where the activists that were young during the JP Movement are playing a leading role. The NAPM is strengthening local struggles by bringing together communities, activists and organisations to make a stronger and more lasting impact on the society. It is more decentralised in organisation and less programmatic in objectives than the JP Movement. However, the overall goals and the drive to organise disadvantaged groups are similar.

### **Highlights from the fortnight PRESENTATIONS IN BIHAR**

During my visit to Bihar I made presentations in Muzzafadpur and Patna for groups of activists from various voluntary organisations and political parties on cooperation of people's movements of India and Nordic countries. In my presentation I outlined the success story of the two grand movements of the Nordic countries of the current century - the labour movement and the agrarian movement - and their shortcomings in extending global solidarity. Of the current issues I highlighted the new challenges created by globalisation and the emergence of scope for international action. The discussions concluded that the people in the South are suffering most from the adverse impacts of globalisation. This has created a base for broad movements that are taking a lead also in international organising. It was also highlighted that it is difficult to believe that the European people would readily change their consumeristic lifestyles for solidarity. The Times of India (Patna) reported from the presentation that "People in Finland are seriously against globalisation, corporate power and WTO. There is large scale unemployment in the country in the post-cold war days after the fall of Soviet Union, said Marko Ulvila."

### **DEMONSTRATION FOR COMMUNAL HARMONY**

On the 51st anniversary of the death of Mahatma Gandhi a citizens march was organised in Delhi for communal harmony and against attacks

on minorities. The demonstration was initiated by a group of eminent citizens lead by Dr. Rajni Kothari, a social scientist known world-wide and a founding member of Lokayan. The march was organised due to the intensification in the attacks on religious minorities, Kabir Panghis, Dalits and Tribals during the past year. The organisers attribute the increase of violence to the ruling 'Hindutva' brigade that "has been emboldened to launch a systematic attack on the secular and democratic foundations" of India. Several hundred people joined the march.

### **ARRIVE PIIA SAARI**

On the 31 January the second exchange activist from Finland, Ms. Piia Saari, arrived in Delhi. She is trained as a geographer and works at the World Trade Shop of Swallows in Oulu, the oldest alternative/fair trade organisation in Finland. Piia will stay with Lokayan until end of April. Personal presentation will be in the next 'Letter'.

### **Reflections ID-UL-FITR**

On the 19 January the Islamic month of Ramadan ended in Id-ul-Fitr celebration as the moon was sighted by religious leaders, one day before envisaged by calendar makers and government planners. During Ramadan devoted Muslims fast. For most that means that no food or drinks are taken between the sun rise and sun set. To maintain strength during the day, those who observe fast (roza) wake up before sun rise to eat a full meal. When the sun sets and a call is made for maghreb prayers, it is time for an Iftar meal with special delicacies. In the spirit of Ramadan political leaders organise Iftar parties where government and opposition rivals meet in friendly atmosphere. At night a dinner is eaten as usual. In terms of food, roza does not therefore mean eating less but eating at different times. Those who do not observe roza end up eating more than usual because of the lavish Iftar parties. I fasted for one day when in Bangladesh and found the experience elevating. However, after eating an Iftar meal with delicious snacks and sweets a nausea took over.

South Asians living in Finland to explore possibilities to organise solidarity activities with them.

### **Highlights from the fortnight TRADITIONAL CRAFT FAIRS(By Piia)**

During February there have been quite a few handicrafts fairs in Delhi and at the neighbourhood promoting the crafts production and export. "The Hindu" newspaper comments that during a 10 month period in 1998-99, export of handicrafts had shown an increase of Rs. 620 crores (6.2 billion) rising from Rs. 3740 to Rs. 4360 crores, an increase of almost 17 per cent. The Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts, the Textile Ministry and individual handicrafts exporters have organised training programmes, workshops and seminars on exports all around the country to develop the products and to meet the rising demand for Indian handicrafts abroad.

I went to two, quite different type of fairs in February. The first one was arranged by "Arankri", a venture of two ladies who have contacts to a wide network of artisans in different states of India. The fair was located at the Blind Relief Association at Delhi and provided a variety of Indian dresses, mainly salwar kameez and sari. The other of the organisers, Mrs. Deepa Sharma told that all the styles in dresses are traditional and colours used are natural vegetable dyes, but the cloth is bought ready and it can also be made by powerloom.

"Indian Handicrafts and Gifts Fair - Spring '99" was oriented to western handicrafts purchasers and the producers trying to promote their export sales. It was arranged at the huge Pragati Maidan Exhibition Grounds in Delhi and presented everything from jewellery, wooden photo frames and glassware to textiles and furniture. Ironically, while showing Indian crafts styles, the atmosphere was extremely western with the separate showrooms, spotless facilities and the product range designed exactly according to European tastes.

The visits to the fairs at least raised more questions about the nature of a craft and an artisan. The concept of a handicraft can be defined in many ways and all definitions do not necessarily demand the product to be 100% handmade or of traditional culture. A discussion with a handicrafts specialist, Rita Nahata on the development of Indian crafts, both the so called fine arts and village arts during the past few centuries gave me more insights into the

## **No 3. 04.03.1999 PIIA SAARI & MARKO ULVILA**

### **Introduction**

DELHI -- Both Piia and Marko were unwell during the fortnight, so there is no theme discussions and only three highlights are covered. They stem from visits and discussions of Piia on handicrafts and Marko's trip to Jaipur where he met with a voluntary organisation that has been attacked heavily by the state BJP government and a meet on nuclear weapons free world. As the bed-ridden activists had a chance to read more than usually a new section 'Book Notes' in included where thoughts from readings are shared.

On 4 March Marko will travel to Nepal for a month to resume his research work there and to organise a dialogue seminar on democratising North-South relations. He will be back in India in early April. Since the People's Global Action conference in Bangalore has been postponed to August he will be working in Delhi to consolidate the processes put in place.

Next Indian exchange activist, Mr. Atal Behari Sharma, will leave for Finland on 8 March for a one-month visit. He will take part in the dialogue seminars on democratising North-South relations organised by Kepa's India Group on 12-13 March in Helsinki. Moreover he will get in touch with

vast world of the crafts. She was especially concerned on the ways British influenced on Indian weaving industry and the ways the present global culture and mass production destroys the real handicrafts of the area. These questions in mind, I will concentrate on the weaving and garments production of Rajasthan, one of the famous crafts states of the country, and am planning a trip there in the beginning of March.

### **A VO UNDER FIRE (By Marko)**

A Rajasthani voluntary organisation Bal Rashmi Society, was attacked heavily by the BJP lead government of Rajasthan in mid July 1998. The organisation runs several social welfare programmes to orphans and tribals, and it has also been a vocal critic of violence against women. For example it had mobilised a movement on a rape case which involved BJP politicians who were getting away from police investigation and trials. After losing heavily in the parliamentary elections in February 1998 the Rajasthan BJP became distressed about the forthcoming state legislative assembly elections in November same year. They had identified the women's movement as one of the reasons for declining popularity and an attack was launched against one of its leaders Alice Garg and her organisation BRS. Nine charges, mainly sexual abuse and fraud, were levied against Mrs. Garg and her employees of whom four were arrested and allegedly tortured. The Alice Garg was forced to go underground while the harassment intensified towards the elections which BJP eventually lost to Congress Party. After the new government was put in place the attacks discontinued, but it takes time to clear the fabricated charges and restore the damage done. The case draw a lot of national and international attention involving dharna in Delhi, Amnesty International Urgent Appeal and many other reactions. Also the Save the Children Association in Finland mobilised support to the organisation they have been funding for a decade. However, the Gargs are most disappointed with the silence of the Rajasthani NGOs of which very few came to defend them in the time of the trouble. This is attributed to their dependence on state and international funding which the government can use to pressure them.

### **NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

On 22-23 February Lokayan arranged together with Indian Doctors for Peace and Development dialogue seminars that were attended also by a nine-

member delegation of the International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War - recipient of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize. The two day dialogue seminar covered ways to abolish nuclear weapons and improving peoples security through initiatives. Speakers from opposing camps regarding India joining the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty presented their views and sparked an debate. The IPPNW delegation continued from Delhi to Pakistan to similar visit, several members of Lokayan also went to the main seminar in Karachi.

### **BOOK NOTES BY MARKO**

#### **Bapu Kuti**

In 1998 a one time co-editor of Lokayan bulletin, Ms. Rajni Bankshi, published a book that presents twelve contemporary efforts to promote justice and equality in India. The Bapu Kuti: Journey in Rediscovery of Gandhi draws its title from the residence of Mahatma Gandhi - popularly known as Bapu among Indians - where many of the people covered in the book come to meet time to time. Anyone who wants to know about some of the most interesting new initiatives in India that are inspired by Gandhi should take time to read the book. Many of the people who feature in it are associated with Lokayan to various degrees, and therefore the Bapu Kuti gives also a good introduction to the network. (Copies will be sent to Keba soon.)

#### **Nobel Laureate**

After receiving the Nobel Prize for Economics in October 1998 Prof. Amartya Sen has featured weekly in the Indian press. His works focussing on economics of poverty have had a major impact, i.e. in conceptualising the UNDP human development report. I took a quick look the book by Sen and his recurrent co-author on India, Prof. Jean Dreze, 'India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity'. One of the most interesting chapters in the book that was published in 1995 compares India with China and puts some of the contested issues such as economic liberalisation and population policies in a perspective. According to the authors, Indian economic reforms of the 1990s will hardly yield as positive development results as in China because social advances are too few, and the coercive population control methods of China seem unnecessary in the light of the Kerala experience where a quick transition has taken place by thrust in social services to women and girls.

### **Socialism for Survival**

One of the leading Socialist ideologues from Bihar, Mr. Sachidanand Sinha has recently come out with a new pamphlet titled 'Socialism: A Manifesto for Survival'. In it he draws attention to the threats caused by the advancing globalisation and reflects on the shortcomings of the socialist states of Eastern Europe. For a way out of the dead-lock Mr. Sinha proposes a system that would take the environment fully into account and devolve power to the communities. One expression of this would be a shift from centralised mass production of unnecessary and harmful consumer products to localised manufacture of essential goods. Despite the limited scope of the pamphlet it gives food for thought for restructuring the society.

### **Naxalite Dialogue**

During the 1990s new wave of leftists violent uprisings have bursted out in India and Nepal. These are commonly termed as Naxalites after the Naxalbar town in northern West Bengal where a famous revolutionary force was formed in the early 1970s. In Andhra Pradesh where the Communist Party of India - Marxist-Leninist - Peoples War group has waged war against the local feudalist leaders and the collaborating government officials a Committee of Concerned Citizens has conducted a number of dialogues with both the Naxalites and the government representatives to find remedies to the escalating violence. The reports of the Committee and the responses that were published as a booklet 'In Search of Democratic Space' provides a well informed and balanced perspective to the difficult issues. The responses by the Peoples War group provide a good overview of revolutionary leftist position on number of issues such as land reform, elections and NGOs.

### **Famous Tree Planter**

The short story 'The Man who Planted Trees' by the French author Jean Giono has become renowned around the world, and according to the Indian publisher Friends of Elzeard Bouffier 'has long since inspired reforestation efforts, world wide'. The story written in 1954 tells about a solitary man who single handedly regenerates vast area of the Pyrenes mountains. Although on a surface level the narrative is heartening, comparison with real-world situation causes shivers. Namely, the hero of the story, Elezeard Bouffier, proceeds in his work in a way that would ultimately lead to failures and even

disasters. Because he plants his trees in isolation from the local community, in real life his seedlings would have been eaten up by the sheep and goat. Moreover, his limited choice of trees would have lead to another monoculture. In fact the booklet describes the arch type of a hero-forester who comes from outside and fixes problem caused by local folks. As long as such character serves as a source of inspiration we can expect more miserable failures in reforestation projects.

### **BY PIIA**

#### **Indian Culture Guede for Travellers**

A concise packet of Indian (mainly hindu) culture, "Culture Shock. A Guide to Customs and Etiquette. India"(1994) is an amusing and informative introduction to the subcontinent's different aspects of life. The book (written by Gitanjali Kolanad) discusses for example the religious festivals, communication by body language, the eating habits in an Indian home, traffic systems of the cities, the marriage and social customs. The explanations to the strange habits of Indians are explained in a way every first-comer to India would understand. The author is well aware of the danger of generalisation, as the country in question is not that simple to describe in single terms. However, she has succeeded in hitting the nail on the head, as in many cases a traveller will find a clarification to basic questions from here, yet many of the further questions will still remain unanswered.

### **4. Reflections**

#### **Holi-The Festival of Colour and Joy**

This hindu festival is celebrated for the end of winter especially in the northern India and is a festival of goddess Holika. On 1st March people set up bonfires and dance around them, on 2nd the better known activity, throwing colourful water and powder on people, took place. We were warned not to move out of the room on the two days unless we want to get pink all over, or at least wet. Following this advice, we took part in the festivities from our safe balcony at Maitri Apartments and observed the play with the colours that the neighbours of all ages exercised. We had not been left totally outsiders, however, as we got a couple of good splashes from the water balloons the previous days.



## No 4. 13.03.1999 PIIA SAARI

### Introduction

DELHI -- I have been busy travelling in Rajasthan in 6.-10.3. and the main theme stems from my several visits to family artisans, crafts companies and exporters. Besides this the concept of fair trade and the shops selling fair products is discussed as a background to the theme. There was a meeting at Lokayan about tribal self-rule and a discussion with the Finnish delegation from the Department of International Development Cooperation. These will be discussed in the highlights section. Reflections describe the efforts of Marko, Jarna, Piia and Lokayan staff to purchase a refrigerator and to get a telephone connection to the activists.

The first Indian activist, Mr. Atal Behari Sharma has happily arrived Finland, and Lokayan decided to postpone the next activist's, Mr. Rajendra Ravi's, visit by one year (to April-June 2000) to have more time for the preparations. Vijay Pratap will travel to Finland around 17 April together with Marko and make a presentation in the Finnida NGO seminar to be held in Helsinki on 21-22 April. Also Smitu Kothari will be in Finland that time. I will continue to Bihar for 13.-21.3. and continue the study of the artisans' situation there, and attend a book-release in Patna about Bodhgaya land struggles.

**Can trade be fair?**

The power of transnational corporations and the way they have abused the people and the environment in the South are a concern for many. The question of child labour has become very acute in many countries. The low labour costs and loose standards to protect the environment as well as minimal rights for workers in South appeal to companies searching for maximal profit. The consumers' information on the products they consume is usually very limited for the simple reason that they cannot get the information from the places where they buy the products or they are not interested. The product passes through so many hands in its way from the producer to consumer that it loses some information on each step. Besides people are usually happy if the price-quality rate of the product is ok, they may not even happen to think about the workers rights in a distant country.

As the consumers have become more aware of the exploitative trade relations between North and South, new alternatives have also appeared. Some groups have established special shops, where you can buy products that are made in fair conditions and where you can get information on them. Usually the products are made in some cooperatives, organisations of producers, in NGOs or the like. In different countries the shops selling these products have different names (Fair Trade Shops, World Shops, etc.), but the basic principles are common. These include:

- fair prices to the producers
- environmentally friendly production
- no child labour used in production
- no middlemen used in trade relation; direct contacts between producer and purchaser
- trade of finalised products, not mere raw materials
- information about products provided for customers

There has also been an attempt to get the fair products available to all shops by introducing a symbol that can be identified with fair trade, the so called fair trade label. The idea is same than in the environmental labels that tell the product is environmental friendly. These kinds of fair trade labels are already used in many European countries but a common system is under preparation.

**Theme: Rajasthani family crafts to export?**

The traditional craftspeople in Rajasthan belong to certain castes, practise their profession at home with the whole family involved in the different

tasks, buy the raw materials from and sell the final products at the local market. What the cheaper, factory-made cloth and garments industry and the increasing demand of standard-sized products to the export sales have meant to these craftspeople is a threatening burden of unemployment and the loss of the skills the generations and generations earlier used to have. The middlemen have now the main role in the chain as purchasers, wholesalers and exporters, and they are the people who can dictate to artisans what to produce and at which rates to sell.

My journey with Rita Nahata covered two cities (Jaipur and Jodhpur) and a smaller town, Barmer, near to Pakistani border. Journey through the arid plains and deserts was a thrilling experience, as the colourless nature was so sharply contrasted in the colours of people's dresses and the decorations in their houses. As a native Rajasthani and once an exporter herself Rita could show me some parts of this fascinating area that I could not have reached otherwise. She took me to artisans' homes, owners of bigger production units and an exporter enterprise, all of which were good examples of the different stages in the production chain. Observing the living conditions and style at each stage and the discussions with these people were an interesting lesson not only about crafts but also about the people's views on their profession. Here I share my experiences from four of such places.

Rana Mal Khatri's family practising traditional block-printing in Barmer. Mr. Rana Mal Khatri has inherited the profession of block-printing from his father. A Rajasthani would trace from his name that he is a block-printer, as the printers traditionally belong to khatri (or chinppa) -caste. The whole family is involved in the printing, dying, washing and selling work, altogether 11 members. They design the patterns for the wooden stamps themselves, guaranteeing that the products are unique. Mr. Khatri has recently opened a showroom in Barmer and has also participated in exhibitions in different cities. His business seems to run well, he has some regular customers and has been able to provide secured livelihood for the big family.

Roopraj Durray Udhyog, a carpet-maker in Jodhpur. An ordinary house at the end of a street in Salawas, a village near to Jodhpur, belongs to a family of durry-carpet-makers. Mr. Nemichand Prajapati sits under a shelter in his yard, explaining the operation of handloom to a couple of western people. A lot of carpets lie on the ground, goats lie a bit further away in the shadow. Mr. Prajapati tells that his company collects carpets from about 50 people working in their homes in the village and sells them to a person in Mumbai.

He also sells carpets at his home, as in the tourist season his home gets regular visitors and the packets in his stock room, addressed to Europe, prove that the tourism is beneficial to him. He is a carpet-maker by his caste, prajapati. His father sits at the door opening with a little grandson in his lap, who is most probably going to continue the business in future, especially if tourism brings more customers.

Sonava Printers in Jaipur. A small printing factory is situated at the outskirts of Jaipur, in Sanganer handicrafts area. Mr. Kund Bihari shows us his production unit and a stockroom full of home furnishing cloth. The same house is also his home. His grandfather started the enterprise producing block-printed cloth for specific castes at the locality. However, nowadays caste does not play an important role in the production anymore, and Mr. Bihari's printers can be of any caste. He employs 28 printers, 2 colour specialists, 4 washers and 3 stitchers, many of whom are migrant workers. During the monsoon there is no work for the printers, so they return to their home villages to take part in farming. Mr. Bihari tells that a worker can print about 10 metres of cloth in a day and earn on average 80-100 rupees. There are no holidays except the full moon day, so the 29 working days in a month would bring worker about 2300-2900 rupees.

The cotton cloth is bought from the wholesale market in Jaipur. The cloth comes there from cotton mills in Maharashtra and South India, as the quality of the cotton cloth woven in moist areas is better than that of dry areas. Printing, however, is ideal in Rajasthan's dry climate, as the colours printed one by one dry quickly in the sunshine. This company sells the products to 3 agents, who export them or sell in India. Mr. Bihari does not himself know to which countries the export products finally go. He tells that he must adjust to the market demand and produce such products that will sell. If there are no orders for the export products, he hopes to get at least orders for cheaper, low-quality products sold locally.

Bandari Exports in Jodhpur. The busy and elitist atmosphere of an export enterprise in Jodhpur was a world itself. The rooms of the big building were full of all kinds of crafts, arranged neatly to the customers' eyes. The owner of the enterprise collects crafts from about 40 producers or families all around Rajasthan. He himself employs labour in finishing the products, packing and exporting. 100% of the products go abroad, mainly to Europe, America and Japan. The lunch at the upstairs of the enterprise, in the owner's house was a good chance to observe the life of one of the richest families in Jodhpur. The airy rooms, expensive furniture and many servants gave an

impression of a very privileged lifestyle.

What conclusions can one draw from this short expedition to the artisans world? Everywhere the amount of the shops selling mass-produced garments and other utility items compared to the locally made crafts is large and increasing. The family artisans tend to give up their traditional professions in the pressures of cheaper products flowing to villages from cities. The craftspeople that still stick to their ancestors' way of life must increasingly orient to export markets and have good relation to their agents. And as far as money is concerned, a lot of it seems to accumulate at the hands of the middlemen.

### Highlights from the fortnight

A meeting at Lokayan about tribal self-rule. On February 5th Smitu Kothari from Lokayan and Harsh Mander arranged a meeting on "The implementation of the Panchayats (extension to scheduled areas) Act. This Act lays down that in all schedule V-areas, consultation with the Gram Sabha, a local decision making body, is mandatory before any land acquisition proceedings can be undertaken. The whole day discussion covered several aspects of tribal self-rule, such as the question of land and resource ownership and the role of Gram Sabha in the local democracy. Smitu Kothari comments in the Right to Information -campaign's newsletter "Transparency" that the recent amendments to the Constitution recognising the rights of Panchayats and the right to self-rule in tribal areas have created the historic opportunity to rethink and rebuild the institutions and processes of democracy. On the other hand this new autonomy is given provided it does not threaten the prevailing liberalisation and the dominant export-oriented market. The traditional communities have been driven more by market demand than by cultural practice and ecological sustainability. This among other issues will be discussed in more detail in a meeting near Mumbai in 19.-21.3., where I am unfortunately unable to attend because of my journey to Bihar. The conclusions of the meeting will anyway be presented in one of the next "Letters from India".

Finnish Development Cooperation bureaucrats in Delhi Two people from the Finnish Department for International Development Cooperation, the director Ms. Marjatta Viitanen and the counsellor Ms. Ann-Christine Karna had come to India for two weeks to take part in many happenings in different cities. On 11th March several people from Lokayan attended a dinner party at Satu Santala's home at Finnish Embassy in Chanakyapuri with a bulk of

embassy people. The next day we had a discussion at Lokayan about NGOs' and civil society's role in Finland and India. Ms. Viitanen was concerned on the elitism and bureaucracy of many Finnish NGOs, and the similar trends in Indian NGOs were discussed. Other issues like the impact of foreign funding, the demand to listen to the grassroots initiatives and the ways globalization has affected in people's way of life in cities were also raised.

### Reflections

Buying a refrigerator and connecting a telephone in Delhi How could one guess that buying a refrigerator would require so many visits and phone calls to electric shops? Or that connecting a telephone would make us so familiar with nice Mr. Krishna Kumar at the telephone department? After giving up the idea or buying a 165-litre Kelvinator (as the shop always told us they could supply it "day after tomorrow" and that day never came), we decided to discuss the possibility of buying an old one from one of the Lokayan people. Smitu told that his family needs a bigger refrigerator and he could sell the old 165-litre to us. OK, we agreed, as Delhi got warmer every day. But now Smitu understood that his old refrigerator actually was the same size, 300-litre, as the just bought new one. The new one was returned and the Finnish activists returned to the electric shops again. The result of bargaining and a cruise between a couple of shops now stands in a corner of our kitchen - a new 165 Godrej and serves its purpose perfectly.

Getting a telephone line was an experience, too. The people at the telephone department got totally confused on whether Mr. Lokayan, in whose name the phone was applied, existed or not. Anyway, after a couple of visits to our home, a few letters and phone calls we succeeded to assure them that Mr. Lokayan and these 3 Finnish people mean the same thing. One day two men came to us with a phone and line and the happy news: "The line will work in a couple of days, maybe three or four or seven days. Somebody will tell you your number, too." So days were passed, but the phone was still dead until Mr. Krishna Kumar called us to Lokayan, told our number and assured the phone is working. "If any problem, just call me!" So did we, as the phone was still dead. Mr. Kumar was very sorry, as the foreign visitors had to suffer so much. After a few days the line was working, thanks to Rajendra Ravi's constant claims to telephone department and to Mr. Kumar's friendliness.

## No 5. 01.04.1999 PIIA SAARI

### Introduction

DELHI -- This time "Letter" discusses the middlemen's role in trade as its main theme, as the question of "whether middlemen are necessary or not and harmful or not to the artisans", became very vital in my journey to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. NGOs and individual producers may have very different opinions in this question, yet it should be remembered that neither of them is a homogenous group. The highlight of the fortnight was the seminar in Patna about the Bodhgaya land struggles. The reflections describe feelings about my exchange period until now: some suggestions are provided. I find this kind of "interim report" important both for the Kepa-Lokayan program and for myself, to be able to convey the ideas to the others and to develop this program in future. The reflections also include a story of my wanderings at the ghats in Varanasi.

### Theme: the role of the middlemen in handicrafts trade?

Craftspeople form the second largest employment sector in India after agriculture. According to the statistics from craft NGOs there are about 23 million crafts persons in India today. Earlier craft was the only industry known to mankind, and products were made based on the market requirements and designed according to utilitarian as well as aesthetic values. Traditions were handed over from father to son.

With foreign dominance Indian craft and the handloom industry have been severely exploited. Some of the urban, western-minded classes saw craft as being a part of the impractical aesthetics milieu. The need to redefine and rediscover the status for craft was felt only after the independence, and an awareness for protecting artisans' skills was accentuated by craft activists. Later agencies for craft development were established both by NGOs and by the Indian Government. Artisans had to find their own niche in a growing industrial environment, as the highly competitive market put them in a poor position. The different agencies had to bear in mind that protecting craft alone was not enough, but that the communities of craftspeople had to be taken care of, too.

A "middleman" has become almost like a swear word to the people involved in NGOs promoting small scale employment of artisans or in the fair trade movement, at least in the western countries. The middlemen are often seen as greedy exploiters, who unnecessarily increase the price of the product. Trading straightly with the producer was the NGOs' response to this situation. The higher prices of the products in these NGOs' shops were explained in terms of salaries to the producers: "By purchasing a craft from us you ensure that a woman gets employment and fair wages!" What about the money left over from not using any middlemen? Where has it gone?

It has also been suggested that the NGOs are the biggest middlemen themselves. Their western-style offices and equipment are easily much more expensive than the expenses of the middlemen. It is not always guaranteed that the producers really get fair wages after all. Usually NGOs' work, however, is appreciated, as they alongside implement welfare activities and education programmes, which can further assist the artisans to stand on their own feet.

The question of the middlemen is very complex in Indian context. Traditionally artisans did not need to use any middlemen: they sold their products locally in the same village, were recognised as a specific group and were known by other people. The increasing pressure to orient outwards to cities or even abroad has made it necessary to rely on the expertise of other people, e.g. sales agents, wholesalers, exporters etc.

Indian society has the characteristics of hierarchy and precise division of labour. Although the boundaries of castes in the crafts making are not so significant anymore, the way of thinking in terms of "one man, one work" still persists. Thus, there is a work for spinner, work for weaver, sewer, cutter,

packer etc. In the same way, the effort the artisan made to sell the products at the local market, is now replaced by the effort he makes to sell it to an agent. The case is, of course, far more complicated if you see the linkages and structures of a whole village: there may be families involved in production as well as acting as agents for the other handicraft producers, or wholesalers themselves, and some still succeed in selling the products locally.

What do the craftspeople say themselves? Here are some of the reflections from my discussions with the artisans in eastern part of India.

### **Experiences from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh**

In my trip to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh I met some NGO groups selling the products of individual artisans or artisans' organisations. Interesting examples were Adithi, a shop selling Bihari handicrafts in Patna, Mahila Vikas Sahyog Samiti marketing traditional "sujuni"-embroidery of local women from Muzaffarpur, and Sewa Mithila, a shelter home for divorced and widowed women in Madhubani running also a small shop there. I also visited in a Khadi-shop in Madhubani and followed the private wholesale marketing of saris in Varanasi.

Adithi - empowerment of women Adithi is an organisation started in 1988 by Viji Srinivasan and it aims to struggle for the greater economic and social development of women of poor families in India and to eliminate the hunger in a few demonstration projects. Adithi runs dairy projects, fisheries, handicrafts production and village industries, saving schemes for women and afforestation programs. It has about 50 partner organisations in Bihar. The organisation is funded by Indian Government as well as foreign agencies and some Indian banks, including Sidbi, "Small Investment Development Bank of India". Adithi's shop selling the handicrafts from partner groups is located in Patna, and I met two persons working there, Medha and Aseta. According to them Adithi always checks the background of the producers to be sure that they produce the crafts themselves and the organisation also insists the craftspeople to come to the meetings about marketing, pricing, quality control etc. Some of the producer groups have already become independent, but most remain very dependent on Adithi's marketing skills.

Mahila Vikas Sahyog Samiti - marketing difficulties A partner organisation of Adithi in a little village Bhushura in Muzaffarpur struggles with the marketing difficulties. Kailash Prasad Singh and his wife Ram Sati came up with the idea

of reviving the domestic art of sujuni craft to assist the women who were living in poverty, and established Mahila Vikas Sahyog Samiti (MVSS) to market the handicrafts of the local women. Sujuni, the indigenous embroidered bed sheet, was usually made just before the birth of a child. Women of the family would collect old saris and connect them together with tiny running stitches. The embroidery tells the stories of villages, and with the encouragement of MVSS the women began to embroider also their social and political concerns into the fabric, such as the female infanticide, dowry system, ecological degradation, election violence etc. I also saw a sheet expressing the concerns of the nuclear weapon competition between India and Pakistan.

At the moment about 300 women work at their homes for MVSS and get the salary from the embroidery by square inch. Depending on their time used for work, women earn from 300 Rs. up to 5000 Rs. a month. A favourable circumstance in sujuni work is that a high proportion of expenses (about 60%) goes to the wages of the workers, and not to the raw materials and administration. The ready products are marketed to foreign NGOs through Adithi, and to art shops in Delhi. According to Kailash Prasad Singh the marketing is the biggest headache. For example Oxfam had refused to pay the advance, and now there is no money for the raw materials. The case with an Indian wholesaler or an agent would most probably be different, as they would either provide the organisation with the raw materials or with the advance. But selling these pieces of art is difficult anyhow: they become so expensive that only the elites can afford them. Somewhere in its way from the village sujuni bed cover's price is multiplied. The workers tell they can earn about 750 Rs. from one and in the shops these amount to several thousand rupees.

Sewa Mithila - home for abandoned women Sewa - Self Employed Women's Association - was started to create work opportunities to women in desperate situation. Sewa is an NGO working around India, and one of its group is Sewa Mithila in Madhubani. A home for the women was established here in 1983 and there live about 50 women, most of them either widows or divorcees. For some of them this is the only place they could come after the family had abandoned them for various reasons, or where they escaped the violence of their husbands. "My husband tried to burn me!" tells an elderly lady, showing a long scar in her injured leg. Similar stories are

expressed by other women. The whole community seems to be like a big family: the women have their children here with them, and Sewa provides every one a place to stay, food and work. Most women can paint the so called "Madhubani" art or stitch or make baskets from local sikki-grass; some are still practising their skills. The little salary (about 500 Rs./month) helps them to get dignity and control over their lives. It is delightful to hear that many of the women, who have once stayed here, have now become so independent that they are running some small businesses in handicrafts in the area, somebody has even established a dairy. Some families have accepted them back and they have been able to continue the craft making at home.

The general secretary of Sewa Mithila, Ms. Rane Tha, shows us the new building where the rooms for the women are about to be finished; Indian government (which is the biggest supporter of Sewa) has subsidized this construction programme. We also visit the Sewa's shop at the main street in Madhubani, a little room where the women's handicrafts are sold. But we hear that the sales have been bad.

At wholesale market of saris Varanasi is world famous for its wedding saris and the handwoven silk Saris can be seen all around the city in the bazaars. Where do they come from and how? I had a chance to see a sari's journey from the hands of the spinner and weaver to the hands of a customer, as I myself bought a sari in one of the shops in Old Varanasi.

One example: The mother spins the yarn for the male weavers of the family in the neighbourhood of Varanasi. The whole family is involved in the production, and besides some outsiders are employed in extra looms. The eldest son of the family proudly shows his new designs, they have been purchased from a local designer recently, and he can be sure that he is the only one making this kind of saris. He is a busy man: many times a week he goes to the nearby wholesale market and negotiates prices for his saris with the purchasers who further sell the saris to the shops in Varanasi and in other Indian cities.

Following the business at the market was interesting. At times it looked like using your elbows was much more effective than negotiation, as the market was so full of people. (Slowly, however, I understood that all the hustle was not daily, as the attention was paid to us: I and Rita weaving through the narrow lines of a wholesale market, where people buy ten saris or hundred saris but not ONE, were something extraordinary!) Comparing the prices

of saris in the wholesale market and the shops in Varanasi gave some ideas of the role of the middlemen. It is difficult to draw some conclusions, however. One should know the quantities of saris sold, the expenditures of running a shop etc. The role of the middlemen was taken quite for granted by the artisans: "How can we sell anything without them?" was a common comment.

The experiences in the trip made my questions of middlemen's role much more complicated. At least it was obvious that there are no simple answers to whether these people are seen as exploiters or helpers by the artisans. Each visit revealed a different scene and a generalisation would distort this complex picture.

### **A highlight from the fortnight**

A book on Bodhgaya land struggles In the Letter 2 Marko has described the background of the Bodhgaya's land dispute and the achievements of The Bodhgaya Bhumi Mukti Andolan -movement in claiming the lands to the people who cultivate them. Prabhat Kumar's Hindi book "Jameen Kiski Jote Uski" (The land belongs to the one who cultivates it) describes day-to-day events of the land struggle. The seminar on 14th March in A.N.Sinha Institute of Social Sciences in Patna collected the activists of the movement and people with different viewpoints to take part in the release function of this book and in the whole-day discussion about the land issue and about other movements struggling for social change.

The land in Bodhgaya previously owned by the Hindu religious trust had been distributed among the landless after the movement's successful pressure on the government to implement the land reform. After this most landless people became small farmers. The seminar raised the questions of the movements achievements to the communities in the area, as recently after the movement's discontinuance many disputes have arisen again. The seminar also discussed the need to have a strong social movement of the people in the area. There are many kind of rifts between people and caste conflicts are also noticed among the new land owners. As Bodhgaya is very famous for its religious background (Lord Buddha got enlightenment here), and a popular tourist site, the outsiders purchasing the land have also caused many troubles. Alcoholism and illegal alcohol production, which had been general problems in the area and caused violence in the families, are again returning, too. Also the irrigation causes headache to the farmers: the irrigation canals that were

earlier taken care of by the religious trust, are not in function anymore because of the government's carelessness.

The visit to the holy sites in Bodhgaya, most importantly the vicinity of Bodhi tree, proved that tourism has a huge influence here, and it has succeeded in commercializing the holiness and the beliefs connected to the place. The city itself, full of Buddhist monasteries built by different countries, was somehow artificial in its appearance.

## Reflections

### Ideas about the Exchange Program

I think now it is time to express some of my ideas about the program, of which I have been a part for two months now. First of all, time has gone really fast in getting acquainted with the people at Lokayan and the issues they are working with, in settling to Delhi and in keeping contact with Kepa. This has been a very good way of learning inter-organisational relations, as one rarely gets a chance to be a part of two organisations simultaneously.

What has been puzzling me right from the beginning is the feeling that no one really knows what I am supposed to do here, in practise. The aims of this program as expressed in the contract (democratizing the North-South relations etc.) are of course rather abstract, and perhaps the tasks needed to meet these aims cannot be very practical, either. For a person who knows Lokayan and Kepa well, it may be easier to adjust to the situation and see the goals in the right context. A person like me, coming from an organisation that is engaged in very practical activity, found this a bit frustrating, at least in the beginning.

The tasks for the activists, both for Finnish and Indian, should be clearly defined and there should be a person in either organisations to help the activists to create their work plan, to contact the people and organisations relevant to their work. Many times the permanent staff is so busy in the daily work that there is no time to be spent with the activists, especially if their role in the organisation is somehow unclear. Employing such a "helper person" could be discussed with the activist well in advance before the post starts, because everyone may not need that kind of help. At least for me Rita Nahata's help has been very valuable.

The fact that there is nobody coming to Lokayan after I leave, also worries me. The next activists will again have to set up the apartment for themselves

and somehow start from the beginning and that will take time. But of course this is just the beginning of the program and hopefully these problems will be solved in the future. I think it is very important for Kepa and Lokayan to discuss what kind of activists they want to send/receive and if it is realistic to find such people in these countries. I have got the idea that finding senior, experienced people from Finland ready for a short stay in India has been difficult. However, to be able to have innovative and profound dialogue, this kind of people are also needed.

These are just my personal opinions, and all in all, I find the work very interesting and I am very happy to be able to concentrate on the issues which are important to me (trade etc.). It has been very rewarding to discuss with Indian people about these issues and I am sure this experience will help me a lot in my work in Finland in future. People in Lokayan have really kindly helped me in all kinds of matters (from providing spare gas cylinders to my kitchen, to helping me to modify my work plan). The contacts to Kepa have been helpful and regular, because of the good e-mail connection. Hopefully there will soon be an e-mail connection straightly to Vijay Pratap too.

### Three Times at the Ghats

"One should go to the ghats early in the morning, when the sun rises and the place is full of pilgrims, sadhus, colours, life..." This was the guidance given to me by the "ghat experts". Notwithstanding, the first time I stepped at the famous stairs to river Ganges was early evening. I took a boat to the river and was able to see the fires from the cremation ghat. The river was amazingly silent, as if I were not in India at all.

The morning visit at the ghats was as described, plus a crowd of western tourists following the advice of the experts. Anyway, it was an experience. I was just wandering there all senses overloaded by India. This was the real India I had long ago been taught at school!

What about ghats at the middle of the day? Sleeping dogs, sleeping people under the umbrellas, the hot sun over my head and the boatmen shouting again and again "boat madam, very cheap!" The flowers of the salesmen at the ghats were dying and nobody needed them now, as there were no pujas going on. Well, the experts were right: we must go to a lot of trouble of waking up early, if we want to discover "real" India, the one that we want to see. Otherwise we will just see something we did not expect from India!

## No 6. 15.04.1999

### MARKO ULVILA & PIIA SAARI

#### Introduction

DELHI -- Theme of this issue of the 'Letter' is the meeting on voluntarism that was held in Nepal 4-5 April. As part of the joint project of CSDS and Kepa on Democratising the North-South Partnership the project convener Vijay Pratap, Marko Ulvila and Gopal Siwakoti Chintan organised the dialogue in Kathmandu with the title 'Voluntarism: Experiences and Reflections'. The event draw together some 30 activists and scholars from Nepal and five from India.

"Highlights" describe the discussions in a seminar on "Empowerment of women in their households", arranged by Lokayan's Women Panchayat in Delhi on 18-19 March. The traditional Indian wedding will be attended at the "Reflections".

Marko Ulvila's activist visit to India ended on 14 April and he returned to Finland. There he will resume his work as a research fellow at the University of Tampere. He will continue to be an active member of the India Group of Kepa and other organisations and movements. A report on the experiences in India will come in due time, possible titled as 'A Letter from Finland'.

#### Theme: Seminar on voluntarism in Nepal (by Marko)

The meeting 'Voluntarism: Experiences and Reflections' took place in Kathmandu 4-5 April and discussed the work of NGOs, people's organisations and popular movements in Nepal. Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi and Coalition for Environment and Development, Finland were the joint organisers of the event. Local seminar convener was Mr. Gopal Siwakoti 'Chintan', one of the most dynamic and reputed Nepali activist in the fields of human rights, environment and development. The meeting was held at the hall of National Concerns Society, which is well known for its weekly 'Sunday Forums' that draw attention to topical issues of Nepal.

The dialogue was divided in two parts. On the first day the general picture of the voluntary/NGO sector of Nepal was drawn. There were one overall presentation and specific papers on ethnicity, education, forests and water. On the second day the impacts of foreign funding and democratising North-South partnerships were discussed. At the end of the day a follow-up plan was made.

The participants came from variety of backgrounds including researchers, NGO practitioners, activists and government officials. Besides the speakers mentioned below from Nepal presentations were made by Tika Bhattarai, Rishi Shah, Ajit Dixit, Tika Pokharel, Dr. Ontha and Vikash Panday. From India there were Prof. D.L.Sheth, Prof. V.B.Singh, Dr. Vasanti Raman, Dr. Rajendra Ravi and Rita Nahata.

Main presentations Dr. Diwakar Chand gave an overview of voluntary action in Nepal. He is a former member- secretary of the governmental body coordinating and regulating the work of NGOs during the Panchayat regime (SSNCC) and currently president of a coalition of some 20 NGOs (ADAN). Dr. Chand presented some traditional voluntary formations and moved on to the modern institutionalised ones which date back to some 50 years. Currently there are some 25.000 NGOs with up to 1 million volunteers, of which half are associated with the Red Cross society. He highlighted the high dependence of the Nepali NGOs on foreign funding (around 85 %) as a problem and the need for local resource mobilisation.

Dr. Krishna Bhattachan presented a paper on Ethnicity and voluntarism. He is a lecturer of sociology at the Tribhuvan University and a prolific writer.



Dr. Bhattachan's presentation focused on the 'South of the South' - the marginalised nationalities of Nepal. According to him, the modern NGOs are killing the traditional voluntary activities, and they are part of the dominating structures of the upper casts (Bahun&Chetri) over the indigenous nationalities. According to the studies of voluntary actions, it seems that the traditional organisations have much more of the characteristics attributed to success than the modern NGOs. One indicator to the failure of the state and NGOs is the Maoist People's War which has started in the areas of indigenous peoples and driven away also the international and local NGOs. There could be a positive role for NGOs in promoting advocacy, self-determination and autonomy for the nationalities.

Dr. Kaji Shrestha spoke on the community forestry movement in Nepal. The presentation discussed the struggle over the control of the forests from the beginning of the Shah dynasty to present and highlighted that forests have always been an important resource for the dominating rulers. However, local communities have been protecting the forests that provide them an important means for survival. Finally, in the mid 1980s a paradigm shift developed in the Government, which recognised this and an provision for handing over forests and degraded lands to Community Forestry User Groups was created. So far some 5,5 million hectares are under 8000 user groups of which one third are organised into the Federation of Community Forest User Groups in Nepal (FECOFUN). This is perhaps the largest membership-based organisations in the country.

Summarising and commenting the discussions of the first day Prof. D.L.Sheth noted that NGOs have to be situated in the today's World where sovereignty of many nations has diminished while the power of the big economic and military governments has increased. The international agenda of rights does not match with the local realities, and therefore many NGOs speak a different language than the people. Foreign funding has turned the attention from struggle movements to advocacy where the issues has shifted from protest to awareness and education. Furthermore he noted that in the development aid there is an element of morality but it is tied with the power structures of dominance.

Mr. Keshav P. Acharya presented a paper on the development aid to Nepal in general. He is a senior economist at the Nepal Rasthra Bank. He

highlighted the problem of Nepal's dependency on foreign aid and increasing debt burden. As a remedy he suggested tapping domestic resources and reallocating spending to priority areas. He also called for a time-bound plan for ending receiving foreign and a debate on cancellation of the Panchayat era debts.

Dipak Gyawali gave an example of a heavy donor influence over an NGO. He is a member of the Royal Academy of Science and Technology and former chairman of an NGO Rural Self-Reliance Development Centre. It started already in 1985 with an aim to promote income generating group formation among the poorest. The saving and credit groups have in many places become very successful. The organisation was split in 1995 when the main donor German GTZ wanted the group become also a major service delivery agent in their project areas. When the founding members declined to follow the demand, the GTZ eventually facilitated a birth of a new organisation that hired many of the RSDC's employees.

Gopal Siwakoti Chintan presented a strong critique of the NGOs in Nepal. He is the director of an human rights group Inhured International and general-secretary of National Concerns Society. He pointed out the important role of the local authorities (Village Development Committees) and how their improved capacity should receive maximum attention. The foreign funding has paralysed the popular movements that contributed to the 1990 democratisation and created NGOs without basis and often very close links to political parties.

Follow-up activities At the end of the seminar a follow up plan was made. A group of people from both India and Nepal will conduct civil society dialogues on the themes that came out of the seminar. They include expectations of NGOs, expectations of development, NGOs and power structures and NGOs and funding.

The people who made presentations or notable comments were requested to write down an article for the book process of CSDS and Kepa. All in all some 10 contributions are expected by the end of April. The seminar secretariat lead by Gopal Siwakoti 'Chintan' will also produce a seminar report by the same time.

Some more meetings will be held in Kathmandu on the seminar theme. The next one will most likely be at the venue of Martin Chautari, a weekly forum covering important issues. In that event the language will be Nepali

and Hindi and more of the local activists and critical voices will be sought after. Ms. Usha Tiwari will coordinate the process in Kathmandu.

### **A highlight from the fortnight**

#### **SEMINAR ON EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN (by Piia)**

18th to 19th March Lokayan arranged a seminar at Rajendra Bhavan in Delhi about "The empowerment of women in household space". Mrs. Uma Nandy and Deepti Priya had invited many working women to attend the seminar and discuss the complex issues of how to find space and time in the home where traditionally women have to adjust to the needs of the men and the children.

The seminar had many presentations, but the 20-30 women participating the seminar at both days also socialised in a way women traditionally do in Indian culture: by singing songs and having informal discussion. The notes have been made according to an interview with Mrs. Uma Nandy at Lokayayn, as neither of us had a chance to take part in the seminar because of the journeys.

Madhulika Banerjee, a lecturer on Political Science stressed that women should have the courage to take their own time at home to develop their interests and carrier; this is something that has not been thought as a right of the women in India. Renu Kishor, a lecturer of Psychology in Delhi University, mentioned that among all classes in society women have difficulties to express themselves at home. The traditional concept of women's work and responsibility at home causes a lot of pressure to working women, because there is a confusion of what is supposed to be the women's work in the new situation. Earlier everybody knew their responsibilities, so in a way the things were easier.

Sanskrit teacher Surabhi Sheth expressed her fear that women will lose their peace and enjoyment at household work, when they take work outside the home. Women will not be able to fulfill the both responsibilities. Their husbands' work outside home is often stressing, too, and the men may be eager to take women's place at home. This may cause a whole new situation, which the women are not prepared to face. However, Karen Kothari, stressed that men should also make effort in the household responsibilities, and women should demand that from them and not to think that it will be a danger to women.

Gauri Chaudhury from an NGO called The Action India, says that for some women the space and time needed for themselves will come from participating in some NGO activities, outside the house. She encourages women to take responsibilities outside home, because it will give women courage to meet the society and other women.

Mrs. Uma Nandy told about her experiences of the traditional customs she has been taught at home. When she had got married, she sometimes used to go to her parents' home after finishing her housework, but her mother could not understand that. "You could have made one more sobji, a vegetable dish, to your husband instead of coming here" she commented. The concept of free time was non-existent at that time, and all the women's time was expected to be spent for making her husband happy. At the moment the customs are changing and the women are demanding more time for themselves, but it still does not mean that their husbands would not be happy. "Having my own time is very important to me, and it will reflect my work at home. I will do it happily", Uma Nandy tells and laughs: "One sobji should be enough!"

It was concluded that women should find different ways of empowering themselves. The seminar was like a therapy for the women as they had a chance to speak about their common problems and search for the solutions to them. All felt that there is a huge demand for this kind of open discussion in the society.

### **Reflections**

#### **INDIAN WEDDING (by Marko and Piia)**

During the past months the main street leading to our residence was almost a constant wedding venue. Night after night large decorated areas came up at the lawns of the apartments, brass bands played energetically almost in tune, processions lead by horses brought the key persons to the settings and people in big numbers walked through the gates to celebrate and to eat well. Sometimes firecrackers could be heard until late in the evening. We were curious to know what was going inside, but remained in ignorance.

Finally in April an opportunity to attend a wedding became real as the sister of Vijay Pratap got married and we were invited the occasion. The first ceremony was on the 11 April at the lawn of the bride's home where rings were exchanged and the family of the bridegroom entertained with good food and music.

The actual wedding took place on 13 April on the last day of the Vikram Samvat year - an auspicious occasion to get married. The preparations had been going on for months and the last few weeks had been very hectic for the families involved. Many friends from Lokayan and CSDC had also helped with the preparations.

The big hall was beautifully decorated with thousands of flowers giving the place a pleasant scent. More than 500 people attended the celebration and followed the lively dance of the bridegroom's party while approaching the gate and enjoyed the great varieties of food served. The jaymala, the moment when the bride and the groom met and gave the flower garlands to each others' necks was memorable and will certainly remain one because of the presence of so many photographers. The most intimate ceremony, puja and saptapadi, the seven rounds around the fire happened early in the morning, when only the closest relatives remained present. That time we had already left, Marko ready for his morning flight to Finland and Piia a bit tired from wearing a sari for the first time in her life. The occasion will certainly remain in our minds as one of the peak moments in India, and we wish all the best to the newly married!

## **No 7. 29.04.1999 PIIA SAARI**

### **Introduction**

DELHI -- The theme of this time is the non-motorised transport, which is one of the main issues Lokayan is working with in Delhi. I visited some rickshaw shops in Delhi and had a chance to speak with Mr.G. Shayam And Ms.Priti Priyadarshni, who work in a Cycle Rickshaw Improvement Project in Agra. I also discussed the issues with Lokayan's convenor Mr. Rajendra Ravi, who concentrates in this topic. The highlights describe a meeting in Orcha, near Jhansi organised by PPST (People's Patriotic Science and Technology), which focuses on reviving traditional, people-oriented technologies in India. Also visit to a textile factory in Tukhlagabad, Delhi will be mentioned. The political situation after the fall of BJP government and the geographical realities of Delhi are the topics of the last section.

I will complete my stay in Delhi on 30th April and return to my work in the Fair Trade Shop of The Swallows in Northern Finland, Oulu and keep in touch with Lokayan and Kepa's India group as much as possible. A concluding report describing the experiences and thoughts about the program will be prepared soon and sent to both organisations.

I want to tell my special thanks to all the people at Lokayan and the relatives of Vijay Pratap for their kindness and hospitality at all occasions, which made the three month stay in Delhi a very memorable and pleasant

experience. Also special thanks to Rita Nahata and Rajendra Ravi's family for their nice company and the help in my work.

### **Theme: non-motorised vehicles as a means of transport**

Pollution, congestion and traffic fatality are alarming in Indian cities, for example Delhi is one of the 10 most polluted cities in the world and the traffic fatality in Delhi is more than double that of all other major Indian cities combined. Delhi has about 1% population of India, but as much as 10% of country's motor vehicles. It is estimated that about 70% of the pollution in Delhi comes from the traffic. However, the non-motorised transport still remains very important in most Indian cities (and even more in the countryside), especially for the poorer sector of society. This constitutes pedestrians, bicycles, rickshaws and animal drawn vehicles. The road planners, engineers and politicians have neglected, and even looked down upon the development of this mode of transportation, though it is non-polluting, occupies much less road space and needs less infrastructure than motorised vehicles. Non-motorised vehicles have been labelled backward, merely because these are not common in the west and are patronized more by the poorer majority of the people. The environment-friendly road users have not been given recognition and their life and profession remains unsafe and inconvenient in the middle of motorised vehicles.

One aspect of the transport is energy consumption. In non-motorised mode human energy is used, whereas the motorised transport uses imported petroleum, which largely contributes to the financial-strategic independence on petroleum. Over 35% of India's petroleum consumption is in transport sector. The increase of motorised transport has also risen the amount of imported petroleum and set the Indian economy under a stress and dependence on crude oil prices. Besides environmental problems, the motorised vehicles also contribute to congestion, noise and insecurity in the roads.

Cycle rickshaws, bicycles, pedestrians The cycle rickshaw was first invented and used in Japan in the end of 19th century, and the word rickshaw comes from a Japanese word *Jinn Rake Shaw*, meaning literally a hand-powered vehicle. The cycle rickshaw spread rapidly in the Indian cities in 1930s and 1940s, first in Calcutta. Nowadays, in Delhi over 50% of the journeys are estimated to be shorter than 5 km, which means that bicycles and rickshaws have a great importance in transportation, both for persons and for goods. It

has been estimated that the proportion of cycle traffic is more than 30% of the total traffic in the peak hours on many arterial roads and even on highways. A large number of people have no other choices than cycling or walking, because approximately 28% of the households in Delhi have a monthly income of less than 2000 rupees and not many households can spend more than 10% of the income on transport.

New rickshaw models As rickshaw puller's occupation does not require training, the immigrants from rural areas take the occupation to pedal cycle-rickshaws in urban or semi-urban areas. The most immigrant rickshaw pullers come from Bihar, Assam, Bengal, Orissa, Tripura, Tamil Nadu and even Bangladesh.

Traditionally the rickshaw designs vary considerably from one part of India to the other. Bicycles, being an industrial product, have been improving in design and technology, but the design of cycle rickshaws has remained stagnant, inefficient and wasteful in the use of human energy. The main deficiencies include inefficient brakes, single gear, poor suspension, high weight of the rickshaw and uncomfortable seats for passengers and the puller.

However, at the moment industrial designers are modelling new cycle rickshaws as a part of the Agra City Rickshaw Improvement Project. This is a joint effort of AITD (Asian Institute of Transport Development), ITDP (the New York based Institute for Transportation and Development Policy) and IITD (Indian Institute of Technology Delhi). The idea was to remove all kinds of motorised traffic and find an ecologically sustainable mode of transport. Agra is said to be one of the most polluted cities in India and the concern for the historical monuments, especially Taj Mahal, has made some headway in the pollution control.

I met Mr.G. Shayam And Ms.Priti Priyadarshni from the Cycle Rickshaw Improvement Project in Delhi on 21st April and we went to some rickshaw shops to show pictures of the new rickshaw models to the rickshaw shopkeepers and pullers. It was interesting to observe the reactions: the curiosity and prejudices about the new models, their shape, price, availability of spare parts etc. Some shopkeepers were interested, and maybe after seeing and testing one new rickshaw model, also the pullers might get interested; at least Mr. G. Shayam tells that "The new model is half of the weight of the traditional one, sturdier, has gear and a comfortable seat for the passengers, and besides, the price is about 4000 rupees, equal to the classical model".

Lokayan and People's Transport Policy Lokayan has been addressing social and political issues, which concern the marginalised and discriminated populations of India, rickshaw pullers being one of them. There is a working group called "Jan Parivahan Panchayat" (An organisation of Rickshaws, Cyclists and Pedestrians) in Lokayan. Mr. Rajendra Ravi tells that the work with rickshaw pullers started about 3-4 years ago. In the beginning Lokayan organised meetings with the rickshaw people and tried to understand their problems. There were many problems, because some people thought these meetings were against rickshaw owners and they did not want to attend. Slowly Lokayan succeeded widening the network of different rickshaw related people (pullers, owners, technicians) to policy makers and city planners. A very successful meeting was organised for all these groups and the issue of rickshaws got a lot of publicity in media in October 1998. After that people got more interested. The cooperation with "Indian Institute of Technology New Delhi" has also been very valuable, because it has made research on transport issues and also prepared a "Bicycle Master Plan for Delhi", which Lokayan wants to support. Lokayan is actively trying to handle the issue on many levels, also in policy making. Lokayan has made a "People's Transport Policy for Delhi", where a lot of practical points concerning the recognition of non-motorised transport, separate lanes for pedestrians and cycles/cycle rickshaws, safe crossovers, parking and rickshaw stand facilities, licensing of rickshaws etc. are raised. "In the future we want to deal with these issues also, as well as other social issues of rickshaw pullers, maybe form a cooperative and later spread to other places around Delhi. But not too fast, with little steps so that we can be sustainable", explains Rajendra Ravi and welcomes anyone interested in these issues to contact him in Lokayan (address is mentioned below).

### **Highlights from the fortnight**

#### **THE MEETING NEAR JHANSI**

It happened that I got an ameba in my stomach just before the seminar day, so my experiences of the whole thing are near to zero. I lied and slept while the others spoke in Hindi and after recovering from the disease, I have been so busy with the last day preparations before leaving for Finland that I have had no time to ask anyone what was discussed in the seminar...

#### **A visit at the Textile Factory**

It was very interesting to visit a factory, because till now I had only seen

artisans working at their homes or in smaller companies or NGOs. I had not actually seen a place where the textiles are produced in bulk and then exported to foreign countries. I visited a place called Vimal Exim Inc. in Tughlagabad, Delhi where they make mostly women's garments to department stores in USA. The different phases of work were clearly separated and every worker was specialising in one thing. For example there were several stages (and people) in finishing the garments, several in ironing etc. The salaries were calculated according to the amount of work the people do and they were approximately 3000 Rupees/month. This is more than in many NGOs that I know. The workers told what kind of benefits they get from the owner: some snacks every day and gifts on special occasions. The director Vimal Rathi said that the owner is at the mercy of the workers, not the opposite way. She says that the workers are professional and skilled, many of them Bihari Muslims and if they do not earn enough, they will go somewhere else. "If I have an order to make and the people go, what shall I do? It is not easy to find skilled people and also training takes time. We want to keep our workers here", he says.

### **Reflections**

#### **THE FALL OF BJP GOVERNMENT**

The political turmoil in Indian government has been the central topic of discussion for Indians the last few weeks. The government that was formed in December 1997, led by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party, the party for Hindu nationalists) has come to its end, as the other government party, the AIADMK (Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, tamil nationalist party) withdrew support to the coalition government. There were about 15 parties forming the coalition government. On 14th April the AIADMK leader, Ms. Jayalalitha submitted a letter to the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan stating the withdrawal of support by her party to the government led by Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee. The second biggest party in India, after BJP is Congress Party, led by Mrs. Sonia Gandhi. On 17th April Vajpayee government lost the confidence vote in the Lok Sabha by one vote and resigned - and now the new government is under preparation. There will be midterm poll in the summer.

#### **The Heat Waves and Earthquakes!**

The natural geographical conditions have been rather interesting in Delhi for a Geographer like me for the last one month: the warming up of the

temperatures has been abrupt and the tremors have rocked the earth all around North India for weeks. These conditions have caused trouble and even fear among the inhabitants of the capital, not to mention the districts of Chamoli in Northern Uttar Pradesh that has suffered from the most serious quakes, or Rajasthan where the heat has gone amazingly high at this time of the year.

I knew that I am a sound sleeper, but did not have an idea that I would be so sound a sleeper that I would almost not wake up to an earthquake of 6.8 on Richter scale and would read about it from the newspaper the next morning. In the night of 28th March I did wake up to the tremors, but still drowsy I thought the neighbour's car must undergo exceptionally bad problems this time or perhaps I had something wrong with my head! Immediately falling back asleep again I remained happily innocent of the panicking neighbours rushing away from their apartments and staying at the lawn outside the house. The nearby houses had developed some cracks in the walls - our "Maitri Apartments" stood totally intact as if nothing had happened. Only in the morning I had my shock, as Vijay Pratap from Lokayan explained me the night happenings in the phone.

The heat, on the other hand, cannot be escaped even by a sound sleep. The thermometer going up to +43 in the day assures good sales to the fan, air cooler, refrigerator, cool drink and air condition companies. The drought has affected the life of millions of people in Delhi itself, as the capital struggles under the insufficient water supply from the rivers. "Water crisis" meaning no water from the tap is a common phenomenon in the residential areas and can last for weeks. To my continuous perspiration and drinking only slight comfort is expressed: "This is not so bad yet, wait for May-June, then it is really hot!" I sigh of relief, as in May-June I will be again in Finland. 24 hours in sauna a day loses its charm quite quickly!

## **No 8. 31.01.2000 ORAS TYNKKYNEN**

### **Introduction**

DELHI -- I, that is Oras Tynkkynen - a 22-year old student of journalism and the third Finnish exchangee - arrived in India on 14th of January. I have been active in different NGOs and movements since the early 90s, but have lately concentrated on working in Friends of the Earth Finland - an organisation I helped to found and co-chaired for two years. My special expertise is climate change and related policies and politics. Back at home I am also busy taking part in politics in the Green Party and as a deputy member of the Tampere city council. For Finnish readers, more information on me is available at [www.oras.net](http://www.oras.net).

I will be staying in India for three months from mid-January to mid-April. Using Delhi as my headquarters I will visit Rajasthan, Orissa, Himachal Pradesh and probably Bangladesh and the Maldives. I will study how different levels of Indian society view climate change and what kind of changes have taken place in local climates. I will write a report on equity in climate politics for an international workshop by the Centre for Science and Environment and present case studies on the effects of the cyclone in Orissa and the threat a rise in sea levels poses to the Maldives. This work will be utilised in many ways back in Finland

On more general Lokayan issues, I will work on a booklet describing the exchange programme in close cooperation with both Finnish and Indian people who have in one way or another contributed to the programme. I will also select articles from the Lokayan bulletin and translate them for the Finnish audience. Articles may range from the overall analyses provided in the editorials to descriptions of local struggles for justice and ecological sustainability. I will naturally also continue writing the fortnightly bulletin I enjoyed reading so much before coming to India.

As before, an essential part of the programme is learning about Lokayan, social movements and the Indian society in general. Travelling quite extensively and meeting a lot of different people as well as reading insightful books will hopefully contribute to my understanding.

Before continuing to the actual topics of this letter I have to apologise to the reader that this letter is a bit light on substance. This is mainly because a large portion of my first two weeks in India was spent on settling, organising logistics and even feeling slightly unwell for a couple of days. I hope the next issues will be more interesting.

### **Conservation efforts in Vrindavan**

Vrindavan is a town about 100 km south of Delhi in Uttar Pradesh. It is known as the setting for many of young Krishna's famous pranks. Today it hosts numerous temples - many accounts speak of thousands.

Rita and I visited Vrindavan on January 21.-22. to attend the inauguration of a computer training centre for poor students. The centre is a project of Swami Avsheshanand, a Hindu priest considered particularly progressive and radical. We had a discussion with Swamiji and stayed overnight at his Geeta Ashram.

In the not so distant past, Vrindavan used to be covered with lush forests. The mighty river Yamuna washed the many ghats - steps that people use to get closer to the water for ritual bathing - on its river banks. Now little is left of the forests and even Yamuna, polluted and reduced greatly in size, has meandered away from the ghats.

Vrindavan Conservation Project by the Indian branch of World Wide Fund for Nature tries to restore some of Vrindavan's lost beauty. Devendra Sharma, the person in charge of the project, told us about the many activities with which environmental conservation is promoted in the area. The project

has planted more than 10 000 trees, given lectures and organised rallies just to give a few examples.

What was particularly interesting was how the project merged the ancient with the modern to promote environmental awareness. Arguments based on science that are commonly used in northern countries might fall on deaf ears as many of the local people are illiterate and uneducated. However, all of them know the myths surrounding the life of Krishna. For instance, it might be difficult to argue for the common people why untreated waste should not be let to flow to Yamuna. Instead of telling about how waste pollutes the water, Mr. Sharma often reminds people of how Krishna killed a water demon residing in the river; preventing Yamuna from getting polluted is thus like killing the demon.

### **Highlights from the fortnight**

#### **DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE**

Two days after I arrived Rita and I attended a conference on development and governance organised by Rashtriya Vikas Morcha (RVM). The gathering attracted around 60-70 people, most of them men. Much of the discussion was in Hindi, but the speeches given in English were quite informative. Presentations and discussions revolved around the state of democracy and politics in India. Dr. D.L. Seth suggested that fear of the full consequences of democracy had prevailed for the past 50 years and that India was undergoing its third revolution. Arun Kumar, one of the two people Kapa funded to attend the WTO ministerial in Seattle, talked about the poverty of mind: people believe that they cannot do anything without finances from abroad. For a student of journalism like myself, the discussion about the media becoming more commercial and superficial (a journalist from The Times of India stated that generally the media is interested only in the three F's: food, fuck and fashion) sounded very familiar. Many calls for political reform were made, including a practical suggestion that the parliament - instead of the cabinet as is currently the case - should ratify international agreements.

#### **Right to Information**

A remarkably more gender-balanced crowd gathered for a meeting of the campaign for a right to information. The government is working on a draft bill that was generally considered to be hardly worth the paper that it is

written on. Apart from analysing the many defects of the draft and proposing changes, during the first part of the meeting two key questions were raised for discussion. Firstly, would a lousy bill be better than no bill at all? It was argued that getting a bill accepted is difficult, but amending it later on is even more so, thus a weak bill should not be supported. Secondly, should the campaign concentrate only on the right to information? On one hand it was pointed out that influencing the bill was the most urgent task and achieving even that would be an uphill battle. On the other hand many people argued that the issue should be linked to the wider context, including demands made for good governance and secure livelihood for ordinary people. A gentleman from the audience claimed that promoting decentralised governance - the ultimate goal - and lobbying politicians would be contradictory. Lokayan is in the process of bringing out three issues of its Bulletin on the theme: the first is on the history of the campaign, the second is based on analytical and reflective pieces and the last on the policy-making process and more recent developments.

### **Reflections**

Two weeks is a very short time to make any conclusions about the exchange programme or Lokayan - not to mention a vast and diverse country like India. I have also found that either due to cultural differences or my personal shortcomings in communication skills the chances of being misunderstood are very high. I am afraid I have managed to offend many people unintentionally while trying to express my feelings and views on different issues.

I have so far not been explicit enough in thanking for the time and energy Lokayan people have invested in making the exchange programme a success and making me feel at home. All the Lokayan people I have met have been very warm in welcoming me to the country, but I believe Rita who is helping me almost 24 hours a day deserves special thanks for her tireless work. Our views on activism and social issues are often surprisingly similar taking into consideration our different backgrounds. It also helps that Rita has experienced the peculiar Finnish society and culture; in many - not particularly good, I would add - ways I am a very typical Finn.

One of the most interesting experiences I had during my first two weeks was visiting a Hindu temple in Vrindavan. A black statue representing Krishna

was located in the inner section of the temple behind curtains. The curtains were closed when the god was eating, bathing, sleeping or engaged in any other activity. When the statue was revealed again, the room was astir with excitement. I was right in the middle of a crowd of devotees so I could really feel the atmosphere. It was clear that religion and rituals were very much an integral part of these people's everyday lives unlike in protestant Finland. This may also have interesting political implications I am likely to get back to in the following bulletins.



write about meeting with Rita's parents and seeing the work of an organisations called SURE. Finally I share my reflections on visiting a remote village near Barmer.

### **Human rights situation in Rajasthan**

Rajasthan is often considered to be a relatively peaceful state with a good human rights record and gender equality. Kavita Srivastava, the general secretary of the Rajasthan chapter of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), disagrees with this view. According to her, Rajasthan is very much crime-prone and tops the list on atrocities against scheduled castes. Especially crimes against women are very common. Between 1990 and 1996, rape incidents increased by 56% and molestation cases by 83% respectively. Bearing in mind that many cases go unreported due to the social stigma attached to rape, the real numbers are likely to be significantly higher. Even the incidents that are reported may not go anywhere as the victim is pressurised to withdraw the case or the police dismisses it as insignificant. Officials claim that as much as a quarter of rape cases in Rajasthan are baseless.

Kavita attributes the plight of women both to social and cultural traditions and the recent rise in the saffron - or Hindu chauvinist - rule. In the past, men belonging to upper castes and classes could get away with abusing women at lower levels of the social ladder. Even today male groups can gang-rape women and continue abusing them indefinitely through blackmailing the victim with photographs. Saffron rule advocated by the local leaders of the Hindu populist right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) portrays women only as mothers and sisters. If a woman is raped, either the case may be silenced to death or the victim is ostracised as a prostitute or a nymphomaniac that deserves to be hanged. Offenders, often men of high social and political standing, are protected and the victim suddenly becomes the accused.

When we met Kavita in Jaipur, she had her hands full with a recent and telling case which highlights the role of caste and class in human rights abuses. Manoj Kumar Tak and Anuradha Sharma got married in May 1998. What would have otherwise been a happy occasion outraged the father of the bride because Manoj belonged to a tailor caste and had a humble economic background whereas Anuradha was a Brahmin.

Anuradha's father, a lawyer himself, persuaded a dacoit (a criminal) to lodge a false case against Manoj who was subsequently arrested and tortured

## **No 9. 16.02.2000 ORAS TYNKKYNEN**

### **Introduction**

DELHI -- The work plan of my stay in India includes a number of trips to different parts of the subcontinent. This, I believe, is necessary if I am to get any kind of a balanced view on the vast country. First of the longer trips was made in early February to Rajasthan, a state in western India. For one week I travelled in different parts of the state with Rita Nahata, my mother who was visiting the country briefly and Johanna Sarjas, a Finnish journalist-cum-activist with whom most of our readers are probably already familiar.

The itinerary in Rajasthan was as follows:

- 2.2. Delhi-Jaipur (330 km)
- 3.2. Jaipur-Jodhpur (300 km)
- 4.2. Jodhpur
- 5.2. Jodhpur
- 6.2. Jodhpur-Barmer-Bijrar (280 km)
- 7.2. Bijrar-Barmer-Jaisalmer- (180 km)
- 8.2. (Jaisalmer)-Jodhpur- (290 km)
- 9.2. (Jodhpur)-Delhi (540 km)

This Letter concentrates on the experiences from that trip. The first article deals with the human rights situation in Rajasthan and the second gives a short overview of the climatic conditions in the Thar desert. In highlights I

by the Madhya Pradesh police. To create an atmosphere of terror and to persuade the newly-wed to give up their plans, Manoj's brother Narendra was also arrested and beaten up. So far the appeals and protests by PUCL have fallen on deaf ears as the Brahmin father has, in the words of Kavita, "the police in his pocket".

Although being occupied with the struggle for civil liberties, Kavita somehow manages to have time to campaign also for the right to information, against rape and on anti-nuclear issues. There are not many people sharing the burden and those who are do not get paid, but the work continues thanks to the contributions of generous individuals.

### **Changes in local climate: arid regions in the West**

The hot arid zone in India covers an area the size of Finland. Most of it is located in the western parts of the country and Thar desert in Rajasthan alone constitutes nearly two thirds. Climate in these areas is quite extreme and variations between consecutive years can be drastic. Temperatures may reach almost 50°C in the summer while during winter they can be close to freezing. Rainfall varies from more than 600 mm to less than 150 mm per year. Droughts are frequent phenomena: western Rajasthan has experienced some kind of drought on an average every second year.

According to some studies, rainfall has increased and temperatures have decreased slightly during the 20th century in the north-western parts of the country. One reason might be the extending scope of irrigation: irrigated areas have shown a more marked change compared with non-irrigated regions. The most notable irrigation project in the area has been the building of Indira Gandhi Canal in 1961. Dust storms, previously prevalent in the Jodhpur area, have all but disappeared - perhaps partly due to soil conservation measures.

Extreme weather conditions and frequent droughts make arid zones highly vulnerable to desertification. Growing numbers of both people and animals are adding to the pressure: population in Jodhpur district has grown more than 400% during 1901-91 and the number of livestock has increased by almost 130% in a little more than four decades. Dr. A.S. Rao from the Central Arid Zone Research Institute (CAZRI) in Jodhpur suggests that growing populations are to blame for desertification as the climate has at the same time actually become less extreme.

### **Highlights from the fortnight MEETING RITA'S PARENTS**

Like I expected on the basis of what I had heard, Rita's father Amrit Nahata - a three-time member of the parliament - is an intelligent and very experienced gentleman who participated in the Indian freedom struggle as a youth and has been involved in social issues ever since. He was worried about the derooting of the youth in India and the spread of western monocultures and consumerism. Despite vast and ever-growing problems, he had retained a healthy sense of optimism: although things were likely to get worse before getting better, the good would eventually prevail.

Gandhiji's thoughts are now as relevant as or even more relevant than they were some 50 years ago. Coupled with modern information technology - he himself used e-mail even at a honourable age of 74 - they would be able to pave the way for decentralised economies and truly sustainable development.

However, what I found personally even more impressive than Amrit Nahata's thinking was the lifestyle of Rita's mother Raj Nahata, a practising Jain, who holds deep respect for all life. She did not eat the Finnish rye bread we offered her because she was afraid it might contain eggs - a truly relevant concern also for many Finnish vegans who have to master the list of additives that contain animal products. Earlier she had grown eggplants that were invariably eaten away by monkeys. When asked whether this made any sense, she just replied that also the monkeys have to be fed. Organic waste was left on a small stone table outside the gate to the house so that cows and other animals could easily eat it. She would not allow cutting old trees even if they did not produce anything. Despite the family being relatively well-off, the Nahatas used very little electricity and water.

I believe that these two combined - the political and economic views of Rita's father ("Gandhi with satellite") and the practical frugal and life-respecting lifestyle of her mother - would be the key elements in any future survival strategy both in the North and, although I am not the right person to judge this, in the South

### **SURE**

After getting clearance from the relevant authorities, we visited the area close to the Pakistani border in western Rajasthan where Society to Uplift Rural Economy (SURE) was working. With the assistance of foreign donors

SURE had formed women's groups or Mahila Mandals in which the women were taught traditional craft skills. One woman would take the task of overseeing the work and the others would make products ranging from bags to pillow cases and bed covers. SURE had acquired professional help in designing products that used traditional techniques but were still appealing to the modern consumers.

The bottleneck seemed to be marketing and distribution of the products which started a heated debate. A young gentleman from SURE defended the policy of providing sufficient income to the villagers and protecting them from the exploitation of middlemen. Rita argued that his ideals reeked of socialism and were not suited to current market economy. She advocated that SURE should act only as an initiator, find suitable commercial partners for the villagers and get out of the project as soon as possible. In her opinion there was no exploitation if both the buyer and seller agreed on a suitable price.

### Reflections

The most profound and moving experience so far during my month-long stay in India has been visiting a small village called Navtala in a remote corner of the Thar desert. Materially the people lived in humble conditions, but we were greeted with genuine smiles and friendly curiosity. This was in stark contrast to the predatory attitudes of many three-wheeler drivers and hawkers we had encountered and would encounter later in cities and tourist-infested areas like Jaisalmer. (To avoid misunderstanding I must add that I quite understand the behaviour of these people who are just trying to make a living.)

Johanna - remarkably better than I at talking, socialising and expressing her views in a foreign language - put the experience quite beautifully (presented here in a paraphrased form): we in the North may have high material standards of living, but these villagers had a sense of community; we have a lot of plastic, but when the villagers look at the sky in the night, they can see the stars.

The trip provided many other memorable moments: sitting at the back of a pickup fast making its way through the beautiful landscapes of the Thar desert or staying overnight in a hut made of cow dung and straws. Although I have had my fair share of reading, talking and watching documentaries about India, experiencing the country firsthand is always totally different. That is why I consider travelling to be of utmost importance.

## No 10. 28.02.2000 ORAS TYNKKYNEN

### Introduction

DELHI -- This Letter covers the period between two longer trips to Rajasthan in early February and Orissa and the Maldives in early March respectively. Apart from the short piece on the rickshaw workshop in Agra, all articles are based on either material I have read or people I have met in Delhi.

First I give a brief account of the situation of sexual minorities in India. The question I tried to look answers to was what it is to grow up and live as a gay or lesbian in the Indian society and culture. The second article dwells on the enigmatic and elusive phenomenon that is called the caste system. As my source of information I rely on P. Sainath's powerful essay on dalits. The short pieces in this Letter cover work with rickshaws in Agra, a metro system in Delhi and some notes from my meeting with Arun Kumar better known as Pani Baba (pani means water in Hindi). Finally in reflections I share my encounter with information technology in India.

### Sexual minorities in India

In late 1998, Mamta (24) and Monalisa (19), two Oriya women, attempted suicide. They drunk insecticide Matadex mixed with fruit juice and slit their wrists open. Mamta's mother found the two girls lying on the floor bleeding

profusely; Monalisa died soon thereafter. Mamta who was lucky enough to survive was, ironically, charged with Monalisa's murder.

Mamta and Monalisa were a lesbian couple. They were driven to their desperate attempt by the fear of being separated - Monalisa's father was transferred to work in another city.

Unfortunately this is not an isolated case but a story that can be heard many times over in varying forms. Sexual minorities in India are faced with a multitude of problems. They are outlawed by the state, harassed by the police and discriminated by people. Gays and bisexuals have to live under the pressure of mainstream heterosexist culture that does not recognise or tolerate, let alone accept, their lifestyle. It is not therefore surprising that denial, self-discrimination, guilt, shame and suicidal tendencies are prevalent among sexual minorities.

The most obvious sign of discrimination is the section 377 of the Indian penal code that dates back to 1860. It in effect criminalises homosexuality by forbidding "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" - a suitably vague formulation to provide ample opportunities for misuse. The police repeatedly use the section as a tool with which to intimidate and blackmail gays.

Indian movement for sexual minorities is still more or less in its infancy, but several groups already exist in bigger cities and it is fast gaining momentum. There has been a lot of media coverage recently, many more gay people find their way to support groups and even the first gay pride march has been held in Mumbai. Some gay activists argue that satellite TV channels and the Internet are among the best tools for empowerment and gay community does seem to be well established in the net.

Gay liberation groups would seem to suffer from an urban, educated middle-class bias that easily excludes people of lower classes, more humble economic background and a limited command of English. However, this bias is acknowledged within the groups and efforts are being made to counter the problem - organising separate Hindi groups for instance. The basic demands of the movement are repealing section 377 and decriminalising consensual homosexuality, the inclusion of homosexual rape in the criminal code, forbidding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the constitution and allowing same-sex marriages under the special marriage act.

While the struggle for equal rights has just started and has a long way to go, many gay activists acknowledge that living as a gay in India is not all

gloomy and depressing. In fact Indian culture has many strengths vis-à-vis gays. Showing affection publicly and casual caressing between male friends is culturally acceptable whereas in the West even holding hands is considered a telltale sign of homosexuality.

Another positive feature is Indian parents. In their infinite love and caring for their "darling children" they will eventually come to accept their gay offspring even if they may not understand why precisely their son or daughter has to be "different".

The experience of one Indian gay man is worth sharing. His mother told him that if he was not going to marry a nice girl, it would be better to marry a nice boy than be left alone. She even went on to look for a possible suitor. The son, however, thought he would be able to find a suitable partner on his own.

### **Breaking the glasses: improving the situation of Dalits**

For many foreigners the caste system in India is strange, complicated, confusing and oftentimes outrageously unjust. Whatever people may think about it, caste is omnipresent in India. It affects every level of society and is manifest in all religious denominations. It is both very mundane and spiritual, at the same time personal and political. Despite 50 years of efforts to eradicate caste from the face of the earth, it is very much alive. It can be argued that it would be impossible to understand India without understanding caste.

Dalits ("oppressed") are the untouchables left outside the caste system. Dubbed harijans or children of God by Gandhiji, they number more than 160 million and constitute a sixth of the population in India - more than there are people in Pakistan. The contribution of dalits to the nation is vast, but they still suffer from blatant prejudices, discrimination and, at times, also violence.

P. Sainath, a renowned journalist and author who I had a chance to meet in Finland many years ago, has written a lucid and powerful paper titled "Dalits & Human Rights: The Battles Ahead". In the paper Sainath analyses the situation of dalits, shares some telling examples of how they are treated even in the 21st century and suggests action that needs to be taken to improve their lot.

In many schools dalit children are made to sit separately - provided, of course, that they get the education in the first place. They may not drink from the same pitcher with other kids and may have to bring their own pattis (carpets) from home to sit on.

If dalit students against all odds fare well with their studies, they may suffer from a backlash. In one case a girl who was the first of her community to complete her education had acid thrown on her face in cold blood. In many villages barbers refuse to cut the hair of dalits and dalit grooms are not allowed to ride a horse - a customary part of the wedding ceremony. Dalits may be required to stand up when upper-caste people pass by. Sometimes tea-shops use separate glasses to serve dalits and non-dalits. In eastern Uttar Pradesh the police may use dalits as a convenient and free labour force. In one case a jail had held eight times its capacity of people for three days and was understandably filthy. The police climbed on their jeep and arrested a group of Musahars (a subcaste of dalits) on false charges. The people were forced to clean up the jail and were only released after it was done. Incidentally this has made Sainath sceptical about moves to bar people with criminal records from contesting elections - no-one knows the number of cases in which the accused is framed by the police.

Sainath calls for a renewed effort against untouchability in all its forms. He argues that the only way to end untouchability is to simply destroy it at every level and in every form that it exists. "You have to act and act radically on issues like the separate glass system. Go out there and break those glasses if you must. But don't allow this system to continue."

### **Highlights from the fortnight**

#### **IMPROVED RICKSHAWS IN AGRA**

Tri-Chakra ("three wheels"), a joint effort between Asian Institute of Transport Development (New Delhi), Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (New York) and the development aid agency of the US government (USAID) has been working on improved rickshaws. The rationale behind is that rickshaws are a non-polluting and cheap mode of transport that should be revived as one solution to the burgeoning environmental problems in big Asian cities. Lokayan has also been actively working with rickshaw-wallahs (rickshaw pullers) as reported earlier, e.g. in the Kumppani magazine.

I visited the Tri-Chakra assembly workshop in Agra in mid-February and had a chance to see the new improved rickshaws. The standard model has two gears and is significantly lighter than the older models thus reducing the strain on the rickshaw-wallah. Passengers will appreciate a comfortable seat, a

permanent top protecting from both sun and rain, and seat sides that increase safety. There are also separate models for transporting school children and cargo. There are some 50 improved rickshaws currently in action in Agra.

The difference between old and new rickshaws was easy to notice as a passenger. The old models were very shaky and insecure in heavy traffic and on potholed roads. The rickshaw-wallah had a hard time taking two people around and oftentimes had to resort to pulling. There was no top on the seat and sitting was not particularly comfortable. The new model provided an enjoyable ride - hopefully both for the passengers and the rickshaw-wallah.

#### **Mass Rapid Transit System**

Whenever I engage in conversations with Delhiites travelling on buses, a popular topic is air pollution. Delhi is considered to be the second most polluted city in the world. City's 12 or so million people have more than three million vehicles, most of them two-wheelers. The number of vehicles tripled between 1981 and 1991 and is expected to nearly double between 1991 and 2001 reaching four million. On an average five people are killed and 13 injured in traffic every day in Delhi.

I visited the Delhi railway museum with my mother who works at the Finnish railways. The museum had a fancy and informative multimedia exhibit of the new Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS) that is planned to provide at least some relief to the congested and polluted roads of Delhi. MRTS, an urban transport system based on rails and large traffic volumes, is capital-intensive and has a long gestation period. However, it is more or less vital in a metropolis. There are urban rail systems already operating in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), Chennai (Madras) and Kolkata (Calcutta) with Bangalore, Poona, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad soon to follow.

The construction of a wide network of metro lines in Delhi started in 1998. The first section will be opened for traffic in 2002. When the first phase is completed in 2005 with an estimated cost of 50 billion (thousand million) rupees, there will be a total of 55.3 kilometres of metro lines most of which are above the ground. The number of stations will total 45 and the lines are expected to carry 3.2 million passengers every day. Frequency of service should be one metro every three minutes during peak hours and the scheduled speed is 30 km/h. Eventually the network should span nearly 200 kilometres and cover most of the city.

While the exhibit paid scant attention to issues such as relocating people living in 6 500 jhuggis (huts) on construction lands and the suitability of selected technology, it is obvious that something has to be done to the burgeoning traffic in Delhi. If MRTS can deliver what it promises - a remarkable cut in pollution levels, fast and safe transport, reduction in congestion, more efficient use of energy - it is probably well worth the money invested.

### Meeting Pani Baba

Arun Kumar - not to be confused with the Arun Kumar who participated in the WTO ministerial in Seattle - or Pani Baba as he is more often known is an experienced activist, former journalist and, I was told, a fervent critic of the ways of the West. While waiting to meet a die-hard radical denouncing everything even remotely related to the West, he proved to be a very reasonable and knowledgeable person with sound opinions about Indian society and culture.

First Arun Kumar made it clear that he is not critical of the West per se, but how its values and systems are imposed on countries like India - the process he calls cultural transplantation. The western paradigm is destroying  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the world. Although Indian civilisation is age-old, westerners with a past of merely 3 000-4 000 years come here to teach what Indian people should do. Westernisation of India is not going to work: in the past 200 years it has benefited only 5% of the population. The media behind cultural transplantation include among others the use of English, western notion of liberal values, technology and modern science.

Arun Kumar is not just satisfied with criticising the way things are going, but also proposes alternatives. Instead of trying to get rid of all western influences at once he envisages a solution that combines in a fruitful mix all the three strands of Indian history: pre-colonial, British and post-independence. Instead of yet another disruption he sees the virtues of continuity; societies cannot change dramatically overnight. The Indian government is not only responsible for its own people but also for fighting for other countries for instance in Africa and East Europe.

### Reflections

What has struck me in India is how enthusiastically people are adopting the fruits of what is sometimes dubbed the information revolution. India is the world leader in software exports and suddenly everyone in the urban

middle class seems to have an e-mail account. Ranging from Vijayji's young daughter Manu to Ritaji's septuagenarian father, many of the people I have encountered are eagerly exploring new possibilities opened by information technology.

Internet has been a vital tool for me for the past three to four years, so I have been happy to find out that the connections in India are usually good. Internet provides access to a wealth of information on just about every imaginable issue - and some more thrown in for a good measure. For instance if I am interested in the devastation caused by the recent cyclone in Orissa, the effect of rising sea levels for the Maldives or the proposal Brazil has made in the UN climate negotiations, a number of reports and articles can be retrieved from the net without ever leaving the room or sacrificing trees for paper. Of course this has to be complemented with information from meeting people, travelling, observing and other methods, but it is of great help nevertheless.

E-mail is an even stronger case in point. It provides a cheap, fast and reliable way of communicating with those people who have Internet access all over the world. Although I am thousands of kilometres away from Finland, I can effortlessly discuss important matters with my activist friends back at home. Whenever in doubt about a certain aspect of international climate politics, I can turn to my colleagues in Norway, the UK or Bangladesh for example.

Information technology can be criticised for good ideological reasons and it is still a far-fetched dream for a majority of the world's people. However, there is one additional reason for my acceptance: it gives me a chance to stay in touch with my loved ones. All academic doubts aside, this is more than enough for me to make full use of the possibilities provided by this new technology. And as our friends in social movements know and was argued by the activists in the gay community, Internet can also be a tool for liberation.

I wanted to finish the longer report on Orissa cyclones before writing the short piece for this Letter. Secondly, anti-Clinton demonstrations of the last two weeks took quite some time. Thirdly, I have been busy working on a report on equity in international climate politics. (More on anti-Clinton activities and the equity report in the next Letter.) And last but not least I have realised I am rather slow at writing these Letters. My apologies.

### **Super cyclone in Orissa: reaping the grim harvest**

The two cyclones that hit Orissa in late October 1999 had a devastating impact. With wind speeds reaching 300 km/h and storm surges of several metres, they damaged three million homes and key infrastructure, killed around 10,000 people, made 7.5 million people homeless and affected another 15 million people. Most of the tree cover on the coast and closer to half a million livestock were lost. Economic costs may run into hundreds of billions of rupees (billions of US dollars). Rebuilding the area will take years if not decades.

However, statistics are dumb when it comes to human suffering. No figure can express what it feels like to see your loved ones die. The survivors are left with innumerable sad stories to tell, constantly haunted by ghoulis images.

We met some of the survivors in a temporary shelter in Ersama - the worst hit block in Orissa. We could see from their faces that these women had been through a lot. As they sat on the mud floor of a temporary shelter in Ersama, they recounted calmly what happened on that fateful Black Friday.

Sita Beura (60) told that it was drizzling when it all started. There had been a cyclone warning, but people were only expecting strong winds as with earlier cyclones - not the devastating flood several metres in height. Beura survived by clinging to a tree. She says that she would have been dead if it were not for the help of relief organisations.

A woman of 65 with sad eyes and beautifully black hair - the secret is the ghee (clarified butter) she applies regularly, she confided - told that she lost most of her family in the cyclone. They used to keep as many as 80 cattle, but now all the animals were gone. However, that was insignificant compared with the human tragedy: "What is there to mourn about lost cattle when so many people have lost their lives?"

Cyclones are nothing new in the Indian subcontinent. However, the extent of devastation caused by the October cyclones was unprecedented. Probably

## **No 11. 01.04.2000 ORAS TYNKKYNEN**

### **Introduction**

DELHI -- This Letter presents the findings of the two-week trip Ritaji and I made to Orissa. We met people in Bhubaneshwar, visited cyclone-devastated areas on the coast, learned about the struggle of the fishermen on Chilika Lake, visited ancient temples, talked about climate change in Sambalpur and got a chance to see some adivasi villages around Bisra. The itinerary was as follows:

- 27.2. Delhi-
- 28.2. -Bhubaneshwar (1 900 km)
- 1.3. Bhubaneshwar-Jagatsinghpur (70 km)
- 3.3. Jagatsinghpur-Bhubaneshwar (70 km)
- 4.3. Bhubaneshwar-Palada (~100 km)
- 5.3. Palada-Puri-Konark (~130 km)
- 6.3. Konark-Bhubaneshwar- (~100 km)
- 7.3. Sambalpur (~290 km)
- 8.3. Sambalpur-Raurkela-Bisra (190 km)
- 9.3. Bisra-Raurkela (20 km)
- 10.3. Raurkela-
- 11.3. -Delhi (1 650 km)

This Letter has been delayed considerably for a number of reasons. First,

never earlier had the winds and subsequent storm surge penetrated so deep inland.

Everyone we met in different parts of Orissa seemed to agree that the devastation was largely manmade. Earlier the coast was covered with a buffer zone of mangrove forests several kilometres wide. In addition to providing an important breeding ground for fish and a secure livelihood for both people and animals, the forests slowed down wind speeds and prevented large-scale flooding. Especially since 1960s deforestation has progressed at an alarming rate and now most of the forest cover is a thing of the past.

While uncertainties abound, there are fairly good reasons to believe that also global warming affected the cyclones. According to statistics, warming has increased the frequency of pre- and post-monsoon cyclones in the North Indian Ocean. Many studies have suggested a link between climate change and an increase in the frequency and force of extreme weather events such as cyclones - climate change warms sea surface temperatures and cyclones require warm waters to thrive. Furthermore, it can be asked whether any weather event can be saved from a human influence in today's changing climate.

Someone could argue that people in Orissa are now reaping the grim harvest of misplaced development priorities and indifference to protecting the nature. However, if a Bengali refugee cuts down a patch of forest to settle down or a poor peasant resorts to selling fuel wood, they can hardly be blamed for trying to survive. Many people point the finger at local authorities and the state government for failing to do their duties.

But even government officials in Orissa are helpless in front of global warming. People in most southern countries are producing only miniscule amounts of greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change; industrialised countries are responsible for most of the global emissions. How can industrialised countries justify their unsustainable consumption patterns that cause death and misery to millions and millions of people in the South? This is the question at the heart of international climate politics and equity and forms the backbone of my work on climate issues. And after visiting Orissa, this is the question that I continue to ask with an increased sense of urgency.

### **The struggle for Chilika lake**

On the coast of Orissa not very far from the areas worst hit by the cyclones lies Chilika Lake. Comprising about 1,000 square kilometres of shallow brackish water, it is considered the biggest brackish-water lake in

India - some even say the biggest in Asia. Designated as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, it is a breeding ground for migratory birds that travel there every winter all the way from Siberia. For many people in Orissa Chilika is a unique treasure and a cause for pride.

But now Chilika's environment is threatened. The lake depends on the fragile interaction of rivers that bring fresh water and tides mixing in salty seawater. Deforestation on riverbanks and areas adjacent to the lake cause soil erosion releasing large quantities of silt, which is then carried to the lake. Due to siltation, the lake area is diminishing by two square kilometres a year. Similarly, the average depth of water in the summer has reduced from three metres in 1922 to 1.6 metres in the 90s. Siltation also clogs the connection between the lake and the ocean making the water less saline.

An even bigger threat for Chilika is prawn cultivation. Started in the 80s, it proliferated in the next decade as it seemed to be a lucrative source of export revenue. Unfortunately prawn farms contribute further to siltation, destroy natural vegetation and pollute the water with extra nutrients. Many claim that the money and power involved in prawn farming has corrupted local officials and politicians, creating the rule of "prawn Mafia" in the region.

For the around 20,000 fishermen and their families living near the lake, preservation of the environment is not only a question of bird habitats and natural beauty; it is a question of livelihood and even survival. There has been a decline in the fish catch largely due to the deterioration of the environment. As the population continues to grow, there are more people sharing a diminishing number of fish.

To save their livelihood, fishermen have been actively involved in Chilika Bachao Andolan (Save the Chilika Movement). The movement has raised awareness of environmental threats, organised public meetings and seminars, lobbied decision-makers and organised dharnas to highlight threats to the future of the lake. The movement has been able to convince the industrial giant Tata to withdraw from a prawn cultivation project. One of its greatest achievements so far is the Orissa High Court judgment banning intensive prawn culture in Chilika.

The struggle for the preservation of Chilika and the livelihood of fishermen is not yet over. Deforestation, erosion and siltation continue and prawn culture is yet to be eradicated totally from Chilika. But thanks to fishermen, the future of Chilika looks much brighter.



In Palada, a village of 2,000, we stayed overnight in a school building. The villagers went out of their way to provide us with food and shelter and wherever we went, there was always a group of young boys following us with great curiosity. When asked about their future profession, one little kid wanted to become a doctor and another said he was going to be a teacher - good plans indeed. But, I was glad to notice, most of the boys planned to continue like their fathers, grandfathers and forefathers had done for centuries - as fishermen living off the riches of Chilika Lake.

### **Highlights from the fortnight**

#### **ALCOHOL AND JESUS - THE PLIGHT OF ADIVASIS**

For many, the word adivasi (tribal) evokes pictures of people leading simple and traditional lives in close contact with the nature. Before going to Orissa, I was told that the adivasis there are the poorest and the most backward in India - semi-naked and untouched by civilization. Visiting two tribal villages around Bisra on the border of Orissa and Bihar was an experience that pretty much shattered my beliefs on how adivasis live in the 21st century India.

The area around Kapranda is barren and there are few trees left. We meet an old man between 60 and 70 who tells about the vast forests that used to surround the villages. Bears, deer and even tigers roamed in the forests. Trees provided fodder for the livestock and vegetables for the villagers.

Now the forests are only a distant memory. Villagers are engaged in brewing handia, a local alcohol made out of rice that sells at a couple of rupees per jug. Our guide from the development organisation DISHA does not want to take us to the local market as there would be many drunken people that might cause trouble. Especially for many male villagers handia seems to provide a wanted escape from the dire reality.

This is even clearer in the second village, Jharbeda, which we find at the end of a dusty road. Villagers gather around us and sit on a straw mat. All men including the village priest are drunk, some hopelessly so. They tell that they travel regularly 30 to 40 kilometres on foot to the neighbouring Bihar that still has some forests left. There they cut trees illegally, carry them all the way back and sell them at a pittance. Most of the money goes to buying alcohol; some is used to purchase rice. When I ask what they will do when also Bihar has lost all its forests, the answer is very simple: "We will die."

For the people in Jharbeda, the only other source of consolation apart from handia is the religion. We are taken to a Catholic church that stands on the adjoining hill. The drunken priest takes the podium in front of a statue of bleeding Christ and starts reading from the Bible with foggy and unfocused eyes. Men sitting on one straw mat and women on the other sing a strange and beautiful hymn. When our guide takes a picture, the priest is distracted by the flashlight and loses the line, but he comes back with a vengeance singing even louder than earlier.

What is most striking is the apathy and lethargy that has taken hold of the villagers. They do not seem to have much hope for the future and do not even try to improve their lot. They do not bother to plant trees, as they are afraid that another cyclone would uproot them or government officials would come and cut them. This is in stark contrast with the efforts of the fishermen in Palada.

The current rates of deforestation, climate change, population growth, corruption, alcoholism, crime and poverty already constitute enough problems. Knowing that these people have all but lost the desire to improve their lives, I really do not dare to think what their future will be like.

### **Reflections**

A hot day is almost over and the sun is about to set just to emerge after a while to shed its light on some other corner of the world. After driving first for an hour on roads that turn narrower and more riddled with potholes we reach a village a stone's throw away from the sea shore. We leave the jeep and continue on foot. We can see the sea on the horizon.

Having walked through a field we come across a small stream. Luckily the water is shallow and we can cross the stream by wading. Tiny seashells by the path reveal that once sea had come several kilometres inland.

The beach is stunningly beautiful. A forceful but still gentle wind keeps the sand in perpetual motion. The beach is devoid of garbage and the water is clear. There is not a single soul to be seen apart from ourselves. I wrap my pantlegs and rush to wade in the strong waves that carry crowns of white foam.

Watching this idyllic view it is difficult to imagine that only four months earlier probably the strongest cyclone in the history of Orissa had hit the very same beach. Even when we visit the worst affected area around Ersama the

destruction is still very much visible. Massive banyan trees have been uprooted and only a few coconut palms managed to resist the winds. The ActionAid workers accompanying us show a place where they had found human bodies. Animal skeletons blotch the roadsides and next to the beach five cow carcasses are huddled up together - as if the poor animals tried to find comfort from each other when the cyclone ravaged the area. White skeletons and empty shells are all that remains of two beautiful and big sea turtles.

Observing the extent of devastation is naturally sad. What makes it upsetting is that much of this could have been avoided had the forests that once protected the area remained. By destroying the mangroves, humans have not only caused vast damage to nature; they have been piling their own funeral pyre.

What is most disturbing, however, is that even worse is likely to come. Scientists predict that climate change is going to increase and aggravate extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, heat waves - and cyclones. Last time I got a chance to see the Indian Ocean was five years ago in Mozambique. Fate or coincidence: immediately prior to leaving for Orissa international news reports told about floods ravaging the coast of Mozambique. Many experts raised the possible connection to global warming.

I am afraid I have seen to the future. And I do not like what I saw.

## No 12. 24.04.2000 ORAS TYNKKYNNEN

### Introduction

DELHI -- My last Letter from India starts with an article on the encouraging work of villagers in Garhwal hills to revitalise their environment. Rita and I spent four days in a remote village called Ufrainkhal observing efforts to reforest the barren hills and revive traditional water harvesting methods. Our itinerary was as follows:

- 9.4. Delhi- (230 km)
- 10.4. -Ramnagar-Bajro-Ufrainkhal
- 11.4. Ufrainkhal
- 12.4. Ufrainkhal
- 13.4. Ufrainkhal-Bajro-Ramnagar-
- 14.4. -Delhi (230 km)

Climate change and international climate politics are issues I have been working on for some time now. They were also the main topic for my exchange stay in India so it is about time to write something about them in these Letters as well. The second article tries to outline why I consider climate change to be of utmost importance to the South.

The third article narrates the story of Bill Clinton's visit to India - what it was and why progressive activists opposed it. There is not much new to the

Finnish readers who have come across my piece on the same subject in Kupa's Uutiskirje, though.

Highlights include short pieces on the alternative women's reservation bill and Dalai Lama's speech. Finally, in reflections I write about - well, my reflections on the three and a half month stay in India.

### **Closer to heaven: the regeneration of Garhwal Hills**

A breathtaking view spreads out from the bus window. Age-old pine trees reach for the sky. Majestic hills are covered with bright green forests. At the bottom of the valley, one can see a beautiful meandering stream; it has a long way to go before it reaches the sea. Hill slopes - probably the steepest I have ever seen - have been ingeniously put to use by digging terraces that sometimes number more than one hundred on a single slope. It looks as if they were built for the gods: a stairway to heaven.

Only 20 years ago many of these hills in Pauri Garhwal, northern Uttar Pradesh were barren and desolate. Lack of water was a constant problem and women had to walk long distances to fetch enough firewood to cook food. As there was no protective forest cover, soils were prone to erosion and landslides were frequent.

At that time, Sachchidanand Bharati was a young man who had just graduated from the university. He heard that the government was busy cutting a rare fir variety in the Doodhatoli forest. Alarmed, he set out to the villages near the forest and tried to convince the villagers to struggle for the preservation of Doodhatoli. This was not easy, but he succeeded by promising that the benefits of the forests would go directly to them. With the villagers as his support, Bharati persuaded the officials to visit the Doodhatoli forest. After three days in the forest, the officials decided to stop the felling.

But this was only the beginning - now Bharati started organising people. He went from door to door and invited everyone to a public meeting the next day. At the meeting he would talk about the everyday problems of women and how lack of trees makes life difficult for them. This was repeated in a number of villages and gave birth to a movement to preserve forests and a large number of women's groups. Tree nurseries were set up and training workshops held. It was decided that no one would ever get any salaries for working in the forest movement. Furthermore, no foreign money was going to be used.

The people started regenerating the forests that had been lost a long time

ago. First they dig jal talais or small basins that will retain the rainwater. Tree saplings are planted next in these basins. Saplings will grow, protect the ground from erosion and give a chance for other plants to thrive in their shade. Little by little as leaves fall and dead plants decompose, new soil is created. Newly planted areas are protected from grazing cattle by a community decision.

After some years, the forest is old enough and it may be opened for grazing. Meanwhile, the villagers are already busy setting up new jal talais and plantations. Every year new patches of forest are planted and each family plants 5-10 trees. Little by little hills regain a healthy forest cover. Villagers even take turns in protecting the forests from illegal cutting by people from other villages.

In Bharati's remote village, Ufrinkhal, we get to see all the different phases of regeneration. From a dry and erosion-prone slope the villagers develop with their hard work and expertise a lush forest with visible moisture and scores of birds. Water levels are going up and fires cannot touch these forests. And this experience has been repeated in more than 150 villages in the region.

The villagers respect the hills. When I see a snow-clad mountaintop for the first time, Bharati guides me to greet the mountain. When we eat candies in the forest, one is offered to the Himalayas. This same devotion can be heard in the hypnotic songs of puja (religious service in Hinduism) that continue for hours uninterrupted.

It is as if this spirituality comes from the hills. There is something really serene and peaceful, almost sacred about their beauty. When the sun retreats behind the hills and paints the sky with shades of orange, red and purple, I truly feel that people here - at 2,200 metres from the sea level - are closer to heaven.

### **Climate change: the case for southern participation**

Climate change is the worst environmental problem humanity has ever faced. At best, it will only disrupt ecosystems and societies to a bearable extent. At worst, it will end the human civilisation as we know it.

Based on my experiences in India, it would seem that climate change does not feature very high on the agenda of the activist community as there are so many other, often more urgent things to deal with. However, I would argue that the gravity of the issue would call for increased participation of Indian activists in the future. Let me explain why.

Climate change is going to have a deep impact on the South. The southern countries will be the first to suffer and the devastation will be markedly more than in the North. In addition, it is the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the population that will bear the brunt of the destruction; as is often the case, when it comes to devastation, the last man - or daridranaryan as Gandhiji called it - comes first.

Climate change will increase the frequency and force of extreme weather events (cyclones, droughts, floods, heat waves); introduce tropical diseases to new areas; worsen food security; flood small islands and low-lying coastal regions; aggravate the shortage of water; and further deforestation and desertification. It is likely that towards the end of this century millions of people will die due to climate change and many more will have to leave their homes and become environmental refugees.

All this is very theoretical - what has happened recently in Central America and Orissa is not. Hurricane Mitch ravaged Central American countries at the end of 1998 and killed about ten thousand people, rendered three million homeless and caused huge economic damages to the already poor Central American countries. Honduras lost 70 per cent of its crops. A cyclone in the Indian state of Orissa (see Letter from India 13) killed also about ten thousand people, made 7.5 million people homeless and affected another 15 million people. Most of the tree cover on the coast and closer to half a million livestock were lost. Economic costs may run into hundreds of billions of rupees.

If climate change is left to continue unabated, the future weather forecast is more of the same. More areas like Honduras and Orissa will be put in a time machine that takes them decades back in development, obliterating the hard work of thousands of dedicated women and men literally in a matter of days. Many southern countries simply do not have the technical and economic capacity to deal with such a heavy additional burden. The combined effect of climate change and so many existing social, political, economic and environmental problems may condemn many countries to chaos and misery.

Climate change is caused mainly by the industrialised countries. An average US citizen produces 20 times as much carbon dioxide, the most important greenhouse gas, as an average Indian. If we are to avert potentially catastrophic changes in climate, emissions have to be reduced globally by as much as 60-80%.

This looks like just another case in a chain of global inequities, but it is in fact an opportunity in disguise. The most equitable way to go about distributing the burden of emission reductions is to set a level of per capita emissions that is equal for all countries of the world. To reach this level, industrialised countries have to cut down their emissions drastically while most southern countries may continue to increase their emissions in a controlled manner. If this global system of emission quotas is complemented with international emission trading, there could be a massive flow of resources back from North to South as industrialised countries would have to buy unused emission quotas from more frugal southern nations. This would strengthen global ecological democracy significantly. This article is a very concise introduction to the state of my thinking on climate politics in the North-South context. I have made many strong statements but the space available does not allow me to substantiate my claims. I have gone through the same issues in greater detail in a paper published by Kepa titled Climate change and the South that should be available in late May. The paper may be ordered for free from Kepa ([kepa@kepa.fi](mailto:kepa@kepa.fi)). A longer report on equity in international climate politics commissioned by the Centre for Science and Environment (Delhi) is due out this summer. It will then be available also at <http://www.oras.net/writings.html>.

### **Clinton went back**

American president William Clinton visited India at the end of March with a sizeable convoy of security personnel, aides and even his daughter and mother-in-law. Allegedly the aim of the visit was to reduce tensions in the region, promote non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and further collaboration in the fields of economy, science and environment.

Indian activists saw the visit in a different light. Clinton was considered to be one of the most vocal agents of imperialism, neo-liberal globalisation and corporate rule who wanted mainly to open up India's market for American exports. Many people thought that his attitudes towards the Kashmir conflict and nuclear weapons were hypocritical and paternalistic. It is ironic that the biggest military and nuclear power in the world has refused to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and yet has the nerve to order India and Pakistan to do so. Despite all Clinton's anti-terrorist rhetoric, activists saw him as the biggest terrorist of the world.

Both from a journalistic and a political point of view it was interesting to follow the hype surrounding Clinton's visit. Journalists reported with military precision each meal Mr. President had, who he talked to and which places his mother-in-law visited. At one point almost all stories on the cover of a newspaper were somehow related to Clinton. TV news programmes became equally monotonous.

Indian political establishment went out of its way to extend hospitality to the visiting dignitary. All roads that Clinton would use were cleaned, painted and sometimes even paved anew. Traffic signs got a thorough washing and roadsides were decorated with plantations. In Bangalore stray dogs were caught, a curfew was declared for cows and beggars were transported to distant places where their sad existence would not disturb Clinton's sensitive mind.

Activists, not wanting to be left behind, organised their own events to "welcome" Clinton. Several demonstrations were held with powerful speeches, slogans, banners, political songs and street theater. Holi - one of the two major annual Hindu festivities - was creatively utilised; the tradition of burning effigies of demon Holika was converted into modern use and this effigies of Clinton and corporate imperialism perished in flames. The string of protests ended with a fast.

After a fair amount of shouting the slogan "Clinton go back!" he finally did just that - left the country as fast as he had come. Activists will probably not miss him.

### **Highlights from the fortnight**

#### **ALTERNATIVE WOMEN'S RESERVATION BILL**

Unlike in many other parts of the world, women's participation in politics has actually stagnated or in some areas even declined in India ever since the independence. While many remember the India of Indira Gandhi, women constituted less than eight per cent of Lok Sabha (the lower house of the parliament) in 1998. This is less than in 1984 and only marginally more than in 1962. In Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the parliament, women's representation is lower than ever before.

At the state level the situation is hardly better. Some states got their first female legislative assembly members only in 1990. In 1999 Delhi led the pack with 12.9% female representation in the assembly, but there were still states

without a single female representative. Interestingly enough, the situation is hardly any better in states with high female literacy or a political leadership strongly - at least in theory - in support of women's rights.

To remedy the situation, a bill for women's reservation has been proposed in the parliament. The bill would give 1/3 of all seats to women and lottery would be used to choose the constituencies. The discussions in parliament over the bill were heated even by Indian standards and no decision has yet been made.

Although the idea of a reservation for women sounds good at first, many progressive and women's groups - including Lokayan and CSDS - criticise it strongly. Forcing voters to choose women is not a good way to go about promoting women's participation. Using lottery to decide which constituencies would be reserved for women would mean that there would be no continuity and no incentive to nurture the constituency. One third of men candidates would be forcefully unseated in every election. Reservations for adivasis and dalits further complicate the picture.

The weaknesses of the original bill have led these groups to propose an alternative women's reservation bill. According to them, the real problem lies with securing party tickets to women candidates. Despite lip service to the contrary, none of the parties - including the different leftist hues - has managed to promote the participation of women even within their own ranks, let alone the wider society. When women candidates have contested, they have generally fared better than men. This would indicate that the best way to promote women's participation is to give them a fair chance to contest.

Instead of reserving seats, the alternative bill would demand each party to field women candidates in 1/3 of constituencies. To avoid parties fielding women only where they have no chance of winning, there would have to be 1/3 women candidates in a selected geographical area - say 15 constituencies put together. This would mean that women would get a chance to compete with men on a relatively equal footing. It would be up to the voters to decide whether the women candidates have enough merit to represent them in the parliament.

### **Dalai Lama Speaks**

At the end of March I got a chance to listen to the speech of Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists. A small lawn at India

International Centre was packed full with hundreds of people, surprisingly many of them foreigners.

Dalai Lama emphasised that ethics and moral values should not be restricted to religious people. Compassion and loving kindness are a natural part of being human. While one cannot be sure that our ethical action really benefits other people, the impact on oneself is always instant and positive. Ethical life and practice of compassion contribute to good health and peace of mind. Sense of caring should first encompass you and then extend to others.

Forgiveness is not weakness. The Tibetans always oppose the evils the Chinese invaders commit in Tibet, but they still try to develop caring and compassionate feelings towards the Chinese as people. A person with negative emotions becomes a slave. If you resort to violence, you will also suffer.

While most people would agree that Dalai Lama is an extraordinary person and one of the greatest living teachers, he himself stressed that each and every one of us has the same capacity to transform. He encouraged everyone to make their heads laboratories and experiment with ideas.

Dalai Lama hardly said anything really new. Like Gandhiji, what he teaches is wisdom that is as old as hills. However, it seems that humankind needs many more people like him to show us the way to compassionate and peaceful living. Actually more remarkable than what he said was how he said it: very simply, thoughtfully and with a great sense of humility. Deep thoughts about good and evil were often accompanied by his trademark laughter that is truly infectious. That laughter alone would have made attending the event worth the effort.

## Reflections

At the time of writing this, the very last days of my exchange in India are at hand. I am busy finishing outstanding work and taking care of practicalities related to my departure. Amidst this hubbub, it may nevertheless be good to look back and see what happened - and did not happen - during the past three and a half months.

I do not hesitate to say that the exchange was a very important, educative and useful experience for me. I feel deeply enriched by all I have seen and done. There was a fair amount of learning involved and I think also managed to do something useful. I will carry the experiences with me and try to put

them to use back in Finland. I feel privileged as I have had the chance to participate in this programme

As always in life, there were also some problems. Communication across two different cultures and in a foreign language seemed to create at times ample room for misunderstandings. Learning to read cultural codes took some time. As I do not speak Hindi, I did not understand many conversations and had to rely on someone else for interpretation. Some practicalities like the heat towards the fag end of my stay were also a bit trying at times.

These small problems inevitably crop up and they do not change the fact that overall the experience was very positive. What is more, oftentimes the exchange was also a lot of fun. This is largely thanks to the many people I had a chance to meet.

However, although I am personally quite content with the stay in India, I do not know whether I have managed to live up to the expectations of friends at Lokayan and Kepa. We will probably get a chance to hear their judgement quite soon.

My experiences with the exchange are summed up in my final report that will be available from Kepa.

## No 14 & 15. 12.01.2001 SUSANNE ÅDAHL

### Introduction

DELHI -- Christmas and New Year were spent with Indian friends (Rita, Vijay, Ritu, Manu). Delhi experienced a twelve hour power cut on January 2nd which affected all of northern India. A major collapse had occurred in the northern grid which supplies electricity to all of North India. Since then there has been recurring power cuts. This newsletter actually covers two fortnightly periods and deals with two formal meetings attended in January and individual discussions held with Lokayan activists, as well as discussions related to the ricksha exhibition. As the Christmas holiday period included a number of informal invitations to visit Rita's friends, some thoughts on this will be included in the reflections section of this newsletter.

Ola Poikela, the second Finnish activist to visit India this year, arrived on the 11th. On January 20th Rajendra Ravi and Susanne Adahl will leave for Calcutta and Dhaka where they will be contacting organisations working with people's traffic issues and urban poor (ricksha pullers, hawkers and vendors, domestic workers, migrant workers). They will return to Delhi on February 8th. The remaining part of the exchange period will be dedicated to preparing the exhibition material with the Jan Parivahan Panchayat (People's Transport Council) and attending the Globalisation Convention, March 22-23.

### Highlights from the fortnight

#### INDIA-NEPAL PEOPLE'S DIALOGUE TO CONSOLIDATE DEMOCRACY

A meeting convened by Vijay Pratap of CSDS was held on January 11 in Delhi's Rajendra Bhavan. A number of Nepali and Indian senior party and civil society leaders and prominent individuals, including former Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral, former speaker of the House of Representatives in Nepal, Daman Nath Dhungana and Ambassador of Nepal to India, Bhesh Bahadur Thapa attended. The purpose of the meeting was to initiate discussions on the commonality of issues affecting the two countries through an understanding of the polity of Nepal and outlining shared concerns and future strategies.

Areas of shared concerns are environmental, economic and strategic. Climatic changes (melting Himalayan glaciers) and water management schemes affect the river systems on the plains of the Indian sub-continent. Trade barriers on exports from Nepal to India and economic pressures caused by globalisation (SAPs, mass unemployment, widening gaps between rich and poor) is the reality facing Nepali society. Political unrest in the Seven Sisters region of Northeast India has caused mass migration into Nepal. There is, for example, approximately 100 000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.

Recent anti-India demonstrations in Kathmandu, sparked by the alleged anti-Nepal statements of Indian film star Hrithik Roshan, can be seen as one in a series of riots in India-Nepal history reflecting the complicated relationship between the two countries. It is a form of political marketing in which anti-Indian sentiment sells well, says Anil Bhattarai, Nepali activist with hands on involvement in the dialogue process. In the current historical context the outbreak of violence is directly linked to the political instability in the country. Maoist insurgency and the populism of political parties bolster anti-Indian sentiment as a political strategy. False explanations presented by the dominant elites and misconstrued images presented by the media can only be made transparent if structural issues are openly discussed.

In order to create equilibrium in Nepal-India relations a basic change in outlook is needed that takes into account the needs of poor people and actively opposes competitive political formations. Dialogues among various professional groups are essential to strengthen a people to people dialogue in support of the mutual dependency between the countries, built on age old historical, cultural and political ties. This people to people dialogue process will continue during 2001 to bring about more transparency in Nepal-India relations.

### **People's Science Congress on Food and Agriculture**

Convened by Vandana Shiva was held on January 1-2 at the Constitution Club in New Delhi. In response to the Indian Science Congress (ISC) on "Challenges in the areas of Food, Nutrition and Environment Security" the People's Science Congress wanted to unveil the real agenda of the ISC - an aggressive launch of the corporate takeover of Indian agriculture and agricultural research. The ISC was originally set up to challenge colonial science and the colonisation of Indian minds, but today it has betrayed its legacy. The People's Science Congress presented topics on agriculture and globalisation, the new agricultural policy, genetic engineering, and sustainable and just alternatives including testimonies of farmers from different states.

Professor Jashpal, Chairman of the University Grants Commission, in his inaugural speech mentioned that scientists should not be mere scientists, but also political and social beings. The elitism of Indian minds does not recognise that making music, repairing bicycles or doing tailoring is science. The new consumer believes everything that does not have a 'made in the USA' label does not involve science and technology, and is, thus of less quality or value.

ce has become a bad word. Mainstream economists have forgotten the people in economics and are talking only of services, capital and goods. The belief that there will be only one market that will produce for all the people is a preposterous one. What we should be striving for is production by the masses rather than mass production. That is why the world today needs Gandhi more than ever before because he had the capacity to combine science, knowledge, technology and spirituality. It is only when we combine the agenda of science and the people that we can change the world.

For 30 years there was no agricultural policy in India, so why did the government flamboyantly exclaim in 1994 that it was re-tailoring its policy? Because of the IMF and World Bank demands. The main concern at this point is that the small land-holders should be at the centre of the policy. If they are ignored, then the government leaves out 70% of the sector. India can no longer say that the Indian peasant can save India from starvation. Peasants can no longer produce enough to even sustain themselves, let alone their families.

What Indian farmers need is good, safe and reasonably priced seeds and fertilisers. A reasonable level of affluence needs to be ensured in the farming

sector. Today farmers have no say in the seed business and even if a policy is available it is one of exploitation of farmers. It comes as no surprise that Prof. Jashpal mentions Monsanto as topping the list of 'evil' corporations. He stresses that the seed business must be in Indian hands and, additionally, an organisation needs to be set up where farmers can go to test their seeds.

Even though the Agriculture Minister has stated that the import of Monsanto seeds will not be allowed, previous cases of moral and financial corruption in the government sector, makes this an empty promise until concrete action provides proof of a change in attitude.

A concluding remark of the opening session was that the next generation of wars fought globally will be over the control of agriculture and food production. I believe this war has already started and it is only by uniting the farmers of the world that we can reduce the casualties.

### **Theme: the Delhi master plan leaves no space for the poor**

Prominent environmental lawyers filed a Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court 10 years ago against the polluting industries of Delhi. These enterprises were developed either in areas designated for residential habitation or were non-confirmed areas. Now, ten years later, the case is coming up. A notice has been issued to bureaucrats of the Central Government who are avoiding the issue. They have not replied, nor appeared in court. Sheila Dixit, Chief Minister of Delhi, wants to throw the issue to the Central Government's Ministry of Urban Development, headed by Jagmohan. His stance is known to be anti-poor as witnessed, for example, by his actions during the emergency period when he, as the Governor of Delhi, demolished all slum clusters.

This 'hot potato' is linked to the planning of the new Master Plan for Delhi spanning the time period 2000-2020. The removal of polluting industries is a step in the process of cleaning up Delhi. The World Bank 'clean cities project', to be applied in all major Indian cities, also supports this development. Clean is not necessarily equated with environmentally sound, in this case. It is, rather, related to making the city fit for foreign investors and the multinational corporations that, the government hopes, will follow in their wake. This mega project of city beautification involves the building of flyovers and wide roads to facilitate the easy flow of motorised vehicles. This also means further banning of slow moving non-polluting traffic forms such as cycles, rickshaws and bullock carts. In public areas such as the railway stations the



coolie system will be replaced by the use of self-service luggage carts. These are just a few examples of how public spaces for the poor are diminished. The message that is clearly communicated is a pushing out of the poor to make way for the rich and powerful.

Massive migration from rural to urban areas will continue to take place and these people will be working in the city regardless of how many industries are forcibly moved to the satellite towns. How will these people get to their places of employment? This is not only a transport issue for the poor. Also middle class families are dependent on ricksha transportation. Children are transported daily between school and home by ricksha.

Lokayan's Jan Parivahan Panchayat (People's Transport Council) has actively followed the developments of the new Master Plan. In many areas of the city there already exists bans on ricksha pulling. Whole streets are closed off and, additionally, parking for rickshaws is non-existent. Pullers waiting for passengers along the road sides are often attacked by the police. Nor will the city provide spaces for ricksha garages for safe keeping of the vehicles during the night. This restricts ricksha pullers in owning a ricksha rather than renting one. They simply have no safe location to keep it. This is a particularly acute situation for pullers who work seasonally.

Rajendra Ravi, Coordinator of the Jan Parivahan Panchayat, explains that the root of the problem lies in the lack of an integrated perspective to traffic policy making. Traffic planning is a very neglected issue and one of central importance to poor people. Lokayan is not against motorised traffic, but feels the primary need is to have a dialogue on how to reduce the pollution problem in Delhi. If pollution levels are not restricted this will affect rich and poor alike. Equally important is the voice of the poor. Who will secure the needs of the poor in the new Master Plan considering that there is no people's representation in the planning commission? There needs to be a long-term, sustainable perspective to city planning. Rajendra Ravi stresses that this is not a sectoral issue, but a social one.

### **Theme: Ecological democracy - globalisation and indigenous rights**

Professor Rai Burman, anthropologist and specialist on adivasis in India, commented on the issue of globalisation and indigenous rights during an informal discussion in Delhi.

A starting point in the discussion of how 'the west has colonised the rest' is the eurocentrism of the ILO convention 169. According to professor Burman there is a conflict of definitions and use of the terms 'indigenous'

and 'tribal'. The Indian government refused to sign the ILO 107 convention, that later became the 169, because, in the Indian context, the term 'indigenous' is not applicable to the local historical context of ethnic migration and settlement. The definition of the word 'indigenous' is seen as eurocentric, linked to the concept of 'original' inhabitation of an area by a group of people. On the Indian sub-continent, where migration of ethnic groups has been an organic process going on for thousands of years, the use of the 169 is conflictive from a juridical point of view.

Smitu Kothari, tribal rights activist of Lokayan, explains that the question of who is really indigenous in India is a contentious one because many tribals or 'adivasis' cannot be called original inhabitants of an area. They have migrated from somewhere else in Asia and have then settled on the Indian sub-continent some 4-5000 years ago. As most groups have at that time lacked written or illustrated records of their culture they have no proof of 'indigeneity'. Many of these groups were not originally forest dwellers. successive invasion of Aryans and Mughals pushed them from the plains to forest areas.

At the heart of the matter is the fact that 80% of Indian mineral resources are in the tribal areas, as well as the major part of the country's hydroelectric and silviculture resources. Professor Burman has for many years been involved with Nagaland, a tribal area in northeastern India located in the so called Seven Sisters region. The interest shown in the area, by multinational companies, has to do with the vast oil and gas resources found there. In a public statement made during a recent visit to the area, the Counselor General of the USA said the region should be made fit for foreign investment.

The Indian government blames the indigenous/tribal groups for denuding forest areas although, in reality, forest cover in the Northeast has survived, and actually grown, as a result of indigenous natural resource management methods. Denuding will continue, but at the hands of the multinationals and any resistance that the indigenous/tribal groups will put up, will be crushed by forces far greater than the now so feared insurrection movements of the Seven Sisters region.

Smitu Kothari stresses that an important step in the move towards more democratic control over resources and decisions that affect the lives of adivasis is the issue of self-governance. This is a process that Lokayan has been actively following and supporting.

Widespread adivasi protests lead parliament to set up a commission under MP Dileep Singh Bhuria. The Bhuria Commission's report, released in 1995,

supported the strengthening of self-government and concession of adivasi control over productive land and forests. As a result of public agitations to government indifference to the report, parliament passed the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act in 1996. Many challenges remain in the process of implementation, but now, also internationally, in the UN, adivasis have a legally recognised voice.

Just like the European proletariats of the industrialisation era were seen as vanguards in attempting to preserve agricultural resources, so too the tribals of today should be viewed as vanguards in defense of natural resources. This is why Burman feels that they are pivotal in the anti-globalisation struggle.

The growth of indigenous networks across the globe is a witness to the fact that indigenous/tribal groups are feeling a pressing need to unite against the power of multinational corporations set on 'vacuuming' Mother Earth. Gross human rights abuses are conducted in this race to feed the hunger of the North (and elites in the South) to consume more than the world can afford environmentally and morally.

### **Theme: People's technology**

Arun Kumar, a founding member of the Patriotic People Oriented Science and Technology Foundation (PPST), calls for a de-colonisation of science and technology. He feels that Indians have not been able to confront colonial consciousness and to de-connect themselves from the colonial past.

The technological skills of Indian artisans go back hundreds of years and, to date, a vast repertory of local wisdom lies in 'street technology'. This is what needs to be discovered, celebrated and put to mankind's use.

The notion of universal science is destructive because in the process of standardisation that it demands, it leaves no space for local variation and adaption. Those who develop scientific and technological advances should take responsibility for the consequences of these processes. To address the issue of the societal responsibility of scientists and the need to discriminate between science that is good vs. bad for people, the PPST in 1993 organised its first National People's Science Congress. The thought process leading up to this was initiated already in 1980.

Arun Kumar states that there is no debate on traffic policy in India like there is on other areas of central concern to citizens such as education, housing or employment. The transport system and style of using the road network is chaotic and based on ad hocism. Rapid societal transformations have raised

living standards, causing serious traffic and parking problems in the cities because middle and upper class Indians can now afford to buy cars and some families even own more than one. The 10 million people living in Delhi own some 4 million cars of which 3.5 are on the roads daily.

In the large cities of Asia like Bangkok, a solution that has been sought to deal with the problem of overloaded road networks is building flyovers to create more space for motorised vehicles. These are intermediate, short-term methods, which do not take stock of the long-term needs placed on city planning and the challenges of population growth.

Transport policy has to be linked to what is happening on a broader level, beyond the city, in rural areas. Only then is it possible to plan properly. Factors that increase pressure on cities need to be clearly defined. The most central push factors are reduced economic and employment opportunities in rural areas, as well as rural violence. Many of the individuals that migrate to cities end up in ricksha pulling as it is an entry level job for unskilled labourers.

Social workers are unaware of the linkages of issues, due to what Arun Kumar terms as societal institutionalism and sector based thinking. He feels it also has to do with a lack of 'real Gandhism' in present day India. Already Nehru strayed from the path by stating that he did not want his clerks to travel by bicycle to the office.

### **Reflections: celebrating death on New Delhi - acts of responsibility**

The mother of Rita's childhood friend, Dileep, passed away around Christmas. I attended the Kria ceremony celebrated during the last day of mourning. The Havan ritual carried out on this occasion is meant to purify the soul and the house of the deceased. Family members throw Havan Samagri, a mixture of herbs and wood shavings, as well as ghee onto a fire accompanied by recitals of a Brahmin. These are offerings to the fire god. Traditionally, the Kria occasion was when the eldest son took over the control of the family. Dileep's father used the occasion to re-affirm his authority as the family's eldest member and attempted to solve a dispute between his daughter and his daughter-in-law over a matter of inheritance.

As an outsider, coming from a country where invitations to funerals are usually not extended to strangers, I initially felt a bit uncomfortable, but also very honoured. The notion of death as something as inevitable as birth is actively communicated in the Indian society. The karmic belief makes the concept of life a fluid one, not confined to only the one lived at the moment.

Participation in the Havan ritual is a way of honouring the family, of sharing together the purification of the soul so it can travel onwards to its next life.

I also celebrated my father's death anniversary on January 4th. I had decided to do it according to Indian traditions. Rita instructed me on what are the customary ways to achieve a holy connection with the soul of the deceased by offering food, so called 'Prasad'. Offerings of food prepared with ingredients of high quality are given either to family members, Brahmins or the poor. The last option, naturally, seemed the most appropriate. A widow prepared the Prasad - puris, vegetables, achar and halva - which we delivered still hot to the tomb of a Muslim saint near Rita's house where poor people gather on Thursdays. The food was served on leaf plates so also the cows would be able to participate in the celebration. Altogether 100 people received a hot meal and I felt it was a much better way to communicate with my father than to put a candle on a grave.

I feel we have a lot to learn from Indian society on how grief and a connection to generations passed, and still to come, can be used as a way to bring joy to those in need. The concept of good deeds and social responsibility through a redistribution of wealth is a tradition that teaches us how we are all connected to each other in a very concrete way. It makes us seek out others, whether they are friends or total strangers who need our support or to whom we can give support.

These organic institutions are changing also in India. The growth of individualism threatens the social fabric. The traditional Indian family gave a designated space to each individual within a structure that was inclusive. Now many Indians live in cities far away from family or within a city like Delhi where distances are enormous. Of course there are problems also encountered in the extended family model, disputes and difficult compromises. In fact, we became involuntary listeners to a family dispute on the train from Jodhpur to Delhi. Our neighbours on the train had heated discussions until midnight and resumed deliberations in the early morning (5 am). In spite of the problems, families give the support that no institution can replace. The concept of family need not be one of blood ties. In its broad and inclusive definition 'the family' becomes a group where solidarity and mutual support is the basis for common action. No matter how well organised our welfare model is, we can never institutionalise emotional support.

The elites speak of sound values, social responsibility and environmental awareness, but this is merely lip service because they do not practice what they preach. This, I want to stress, is not an Indian phenomenon. I have seen it in many places, including Finland. Here I do not want to sound like a moral barometer, because we are human and we err. We try to live well, but cannot always live up to ideals. It is different when lip service is used as a political strategy and an 'image polisher'. What we are experiencing is a global crisis of leadership. In India elites drink tea in 5 star hotels for sums that would sustain a low-income family in food for several days, instead of sitting in their local park buying a cup from the tea wallah and experiencing the reality of the society they affect with their decision making. Here we can hardly speak of good deeds and social responsibility any more. It is quite simple, really - those who have more want more, and still they want to sound like they are doing it all for the good of the citizens!

Good deeds are not a thing of the past yet and acts of charity do keep many social institutions alive in India. One such institution was the blind school in Jodhpur that I visited with Rita. We happened to come to the school when they had an all school musical function to which we were invited as the guests of honour. It was wonderful to witness the pride and enthusiasm of the students as they presented songs and dances. Most memorable was the heart wrenching gazal (love song), presented with such pathos and abandon that no one could avoid smiling, by the youngest student of the school.

The inevitable moment came when the headmaster of the school calmly stated that now our guest from Finland is requested to present a song or funny story from her country. I had dreaded this and, at some point of my travel planning, did actually remember that it would be good to learn a few basic songs. In the bustle of departure it was easily forgotten, so there I was singing the song about the little frogs, jumping around an imaginary May pole. The children liked it and said they could hear I was also dancing and not only singing.

The incident made me aware of how we live in a country where oral culture is not upheld among people unless you have a special interest in e.g. music, sing in a choir, work with music or sing with your children. It is a kind of a resource loss, an important means of communication that has lost its place in the stressful pace of modern life.

because of the day long hartal (political strike) called by Islamic fundamentalist groups.

**Theme: The story of Shawkat Ali, rickshaw puller in Calcutta**

On Dilkusha Street, right next to where we were living in Calcutta, is Shawkat Ali's rickshaw stand. Every morning he waits there for customers, seated on his hand pulled rickshaw. In the Park street sector of Calcutta rickshaw plying is still permitted, so Shawkat can still support his family, four daughters and a wife, in Samastipur village, Bihar.

Since 1979 Shawkat has been a seasonal labourer. He spends 2-3 months pulling a rickshaw and returns to his village for 1-2 months to harvest paddy and wheat cultivated on the small plot of land he owns in the village. He is a typical subsistence farmer whose labour input keeps his family in rice and wheat for some months of the year.

Shawkat first tried selling salty snacks outside a school in Calcutta, but was not permitted by the other vendors to enter their territory. He tried for long to get a good job and did, for some time, work in a hotel (local restaurant) for a salary of 2 Rs. a day and food.

Through a village contact he was introduced to a rickshaw owner. Shawkat's friend provided him with a guarantee which made it possible for him start working as a puller. He rents his rickshaw on a 24 hourly basis working from 6 am to 10 pm with a break in the afternoon to eat and rest. For this he pays the owner 20 Rs. per day. His minimum charge is 5 Rs.. About 5 years ago, when the fees were smaller he had more passengers, but due to rising costs in consumer goods, pullers have been forced to increase their rates.

In Calcutta he lives with two other pullers in the stairwell of a house on Dilkusha Street. Shawkat thinks that the owner and the residents are good people because they let them reside there in peace. The provision of free housing makes it possible for the pullers to send more money to their families in the village. They carry all their earnings while pulling and when they have collected a larger sum of money they deposit it for safe keeping with a local shop keeper until it can be sent with a relative or neighbour to the village.

When asked if he would be interested in trying out an improved model of rickshaw, Shawkat says he would not want to switch to the cycle model because it is heavier than the hand pulled one. He did try out an old model of

## No 16. 04.02.2001 SUSANNE ÅDAHL

### Introduction

DELHI -- On a cold and dark January morning Rajendra Ravi and I left for the railway station in Old Delhi to catch the early morning train to Calcutta. The streets were still deserted, stray dogs running aimlessly in search of breakfast. We had called several times to check if the train was leaving on time - fog in the winter causes delays in departures.

During the trip we spoke for hours about work, politics and future aspirations for the cooperation. Our cabin mates were travelling business men who lamented the fact that there is so much corruption in the business world in Calcutta. We also spoke about the Kumbh Mela that we passed on our way westward. A special issue of the weekly magazine Outlook featured pictures of a nude mud-covered Mexican woman taking a dip in the Ganges. A structural engineer gave his view on why it is inappropriate for westerners to imitate 'sadhuhood' and also provided advice on how he felt the improved model of rickshaw needed to be improved (we had shown him a pamphlet on the Tri Chakra Project).

We spent 4.days in Calcutta before taking a bus to the Benapole border crossing and from there we continued to Dhaka, whizzing past blazing green paddy fields. In the evening of February 3, on the same day as a mass meeting of civil society, we left Dhaka, narrowly escaping a delay in our departure

cycle rickshaw in Delhi for ten days, but when he heard that the government was going to ban all cycle rickshaws, that foreign countries were providing the government with money so they would impose the ban, he thought it best to stick to his old job and his old model of rickshaw. In Calcutta he believes the unions will influence the local government not to impose the ban. Shawkat feels that the local government should work to improve working conditions for poor people rather than robbing them of their possibility to earn a living.

Shawkat used to be a union member, but his union has been dismantled. A main issue of concern to pullers in Calcutta is the issuing of licenses. The local government has issued 6 500 licenses, but rickshaw owners are flooding the streets with illegal rickshaws. When the decision to ban all rickshaws in Calcutta was presented the union demanded that the local government should either give pullers the status of government servants or provide the union with money to rehabilitate the pullers. The government conceded to neither of the demands, but it has proceeded to remove illegal rickshaws from traffic. Pullers bear the brunt of this compromise between the local government and the unions. The government previously had facilities to renew licenses, but now they stick to the rules very strictly. When pullers do not arrive on the stipulated day to renew their license it is cancelled.

Rickshaws are an essential element in the traffic system because they can provide transport to people in emergency situations. Many doctors have pleaded that rickshaws not be banned because they provide transportation to people who do not have access to cars. During the monsoon season, when many streets are flooded in Calcutta, rickshaws are the only means of transport.

Shawkat's dream for the future is to have a job that provides him with a regular income. On a philosophical note he adds that "a man can have several dreams, but only God decides what happens in life."

### **Theme: Making poverty a business - development and foreign funding in Bangladesh**

Bangladeshi society is in a state of flux, charging ahead in the mad race to catch up with modernity. One visible sign of it is the state of the roads in the city. Dhanmondi, a middle class residential area in Dhaka, has in the course of four years turned into a mad house of traffic jams and rampant

construction. Private English medium schools are found on every street corner catering to the small, but steadily growing elite classes who have invested millions in apartments in housing complexes named Grand View, Paradise, Utopia or Delight Residence. Shopping centres and air-conditioned luxury corner shops line the streets.

Gaps between those making mega bucks and those left to eek out a deprived existence at the bottom of the societal pyramid are widening. Criminality is on the increase. The label of modernity consists of all the most destructive symbols of the western lifestyle - fancy cars, high rise buildings, fast food and trips abroad. Those who have made it in the fast lane are exporting themselves to the UK, US and Canada. Belief in life being better in the large liberal economies of the world is the driving force for most who can afford to leave. But, maybe more importantly, it is a lack of belief in a future in Bangladesh that makes people submit their immigration papers. The city swells uncontrolled and the competition for scarce resources, on all levels, hardens.

It is in this environment that we find the world's largest NGOs and an economy largely dependent on foreign aid. According to the Director of the Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP), 60-70% of the national budget consists of foreign funding. Seventy percent of this money is spent on development initiatives implemented bi-laterally with the remaining 30% going to the NGO sector. Money has always been available in development and, thus, it has been seen as a source of income. The impression we got from general discussions with NGO representatives is that in the context of Bangladesh NGO work is equated with social work, not voluntarism in the ideological sense.

During my brief stay in Bangladesh there were repeated comments about the power of NGOs in Bangladesh. Services provided by the some 20 000 NGOs, employing around 100-120 000 cover a small percentage of the total population of 150 million inhabitants, but, nonetheless, they have political clout and are viewed as political actors by the establishment. CPI leader Manzurul Ahsan Khan finds that NGOs represent another face of the free market forces, who, under the guise of political neutrality take an increasingly more political role in Bangladesh. Hopes to enter more firmly into the political limelight have been fulfilled especially under the Awami League leadership. NGO workers supported the Awami League in the last elections, many maybe remembering, or hoping the party was still truly representing the secular,

democratic and multi-cultural values that were Sheik Mujibur Rahman's trademark in his mobilisation of the Bangladeshi people against the Pakistani rule. Now the NGO sectors are gradually turning their backs on Sheik Hasina. At present, leaders of the mega NGOs are becoming business moguls and 'wanna-be-politicians'. There are even rumors that a major NGO leader is aiming for an MP's position.

Where did these mega NGO sagas begin? The first Bangladeshi NGOs were established as a result of relief work initiated after the liberation war in the early 70's. The Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Reconstruction Service (RDRS), one of the oldest NGOs in the country, was involved in relief work. Proshika, ranking second in size after BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), now employing around 30 000, was established by a Canadian CUSO worker. Also Zafrullah Chowdhary, director of Gono Shastho Kendra (GK) started out in relief work. The focus on rehabilitation and reconstruction work remained at the fore throughout the 70's.

A former Proshika worker tells me that many of these founding fathers of 'NGOism' were freedom fighters wanting a counter-revolution. Their revolutionary zeal was based on the ideals of Mujibur Rahman and they believed in the power of mobilisation. Several NGOs were initially born out of movements, but what started out with voluntarism today bears the label of professionalism, institutionalisation and a steady move into the corporate sector.

NGOs are being co-opted into the world of the liberal market forces under the guise of financial sustainability. They are now into sectors as diverse as telecommunications, real estate, transportation, and cold storage. NGOs are turning into foundations, trusts and pvt. limited organisations, clearly underscoring a corporate profile. So called poverty alleviation is a good sales trick. Also foreign donors have failed to push for a political dialogue on how market liberalisation is destroying income generating sectors supported by donor money throughout the 90's. The truth of the matters remains that neither donors nor the government can put up a stand against the market forces. One concrete example can be found in the fisheries sector. Massive amounts of money have been spent on developing small scale fisheries, but with the removal of import restrictions the market is being flooded with cheap, imported, frozen fish. Eventually, small scale entrepreneurs, originally supported by development initiatives, will be wiped out.

Can NGOs influence government policy? Nadira Malik, Programme

Coordinator of the South-Asia Partnership-Bangladesh, outlines that in the 80's and 90's development work was carried out in isolation from social and political developments in the society. Today, NGOs are building more active links to various sectors of society, including business and government sectors. They are becoming aware of the need to work on empowerment for various rights - something which cannot be carried out in isolation from the policy decisions of the government. The degree of influence NGOs have can only be evidenced if the government makes a political commitment to support truly pro-poor policies. If government does not respond, the only alternative is mobilising people to actively protest.

In light of a recent corruption scandal in the NGO world of Bangladesh, one can question the credibility of NGOs, and, by extension, their ability to mobilise the masses. One of the largest NGOs of the country has been under investigation by the NGO Affairs Bureau accused of financial fraud. Despite the sustained struggle of the 6 000 strong staff body, the organisation was closed down. Through some creative organisational maneuvers, the director managed to retain the most profitable sectors of the organisation under the control of a trust run by himself and the former executive board of the organisation. We can ask ourselves how it was possible to hide the creative accounting from the donors or did they just turn a blind eye? Maybe one answer is that 'good' NGOs are hard to come by. Donors choose to see what is comfortable rather than face the writing on the wall.

What can the example of Bangladesh tell us about the present state of development cooperation? That money alone is not the solution to poverty alleviation. If development is not rooted in local philanthropy it will remain a world apart, playing according to its own rules. Both donors and top level NGO management live worlds apart from the reality on the ground. What we are witnessing is a slow, but massive co-option into the drama of 'working for the grassroots' where the people, whose suffering projects are to alleviate, remain faceless masses. How often do we really hear their stories? How often does development by the people become a concrete reality?

There are no equal partnerships in a system based on institutions giving money and receivers channeling it down along long routes to a peasant or slum dweller in Bangladesh. Money corrupts and development without an ideological commitment becomes an empty venture. It was with a sense of strong disillusionment that I left the promised land of NGOs and an ever

stronger conviction that all the locals who claim that Bangladesh would be better off without donor money are right.

So, how should we proceed from here? There are no easy answers, but I would claim that honest dialogues are a good start. There are many committed, critically minded individuals who have a long history in the development sector who are presently being integrated into the dialogue process of Vasumbhaiva Kutumbakan.

### **Theme: Pollution in Dhaka - lead and feeble protests**

Bangladeshis themselves refer to Dhaka as a gas chamber. The city of 9 million inhabitants has been ranked as the most polluted in Asia. Exhausts from nearly 175 000 motor vehicles, including 40 000 auto rickshaws, saturate the air with 50 tonnes of lead annually. Chronic respiratory diseases are on the rise and doctors are prescribing inhalators assembly line style. An estimated 15 000 premature deaths and several million cases of sickness are thought to be caused by exposure to air pollution.

According to a report, edited by Dr. Naila Kabir of the Child Development Centre of the Childrens' hospital in Dhaka, lead concentration in the air in Dhaka is the highest in the world. It far surpasses the safe blood lead level recommended by WHO. Lead pollution causes brain damage in children manifesting itself in extremely difficult behavioural problems and learning difficulties. Treatment of lead toxicity is both very expensive and hazardous. The most visible effects are seen in poor children whose living environment puts them at risk. They do not receive an adequate diet which cushions the effect of lead in the blood.

Although Bangladesh imports unleaded petrol, lead is added to the petrol as a means of refining it. The only existing oil refinery of the country has a lead separator which is out of order and new equipment has not been installed.

The government, in the name of free market forces, continues to provide import tax reductions on cars, simultaneously welcoming a World Bank project that, in passing, mentions that pollution is a problem that needs to be dealt with. Of greater concern seems to be reducing traffic jams by banning what is considered un-necessary forms of traffic, e.g. rickshaws. Dhaka inhabitants complain about rickshaws and want them to be controlled or removed. This is coming from people in a city known to be the rickshaw capital of the world.

Everyone from the car owners to policy makers are looking for quick

fix solutions. Nowhere, in neither public, government, nor NGO discourse is a connection being made between excessive traffic, traffic jams, pollution and an integrated restriction and control of all forms of transport.

Kursi Kabir, director of Nijera Kori, has been actively involved in formulating a position paper for policy makers on the traffic situation in Dhaka. It advocates banning policies on scooters and trucks, but in the case of private cars the stance is less stringent - the position paper proposes the introduction of pollution reducing mechanisms like the use of catalysers and un-leaded petrol. As far as we were told, no pressure groups are suggesting a restriction of cars entering the road network or an improvement of the public transport system.

Finding organisations actively working with pollution issues and working in support of the use of cycle rickshaws was a difficult task. The simple truth is that no organisations are working on this issue. It is surprising that organisations have not focused their work on a group of urban poor believed to total 250-500 000 individuals. One reason may be that NGO work in Bangladesh is very sector-based and is extremely sensitive to international development trends. Veena Khaleque, Director of the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), says that the government is not encouraging NGOs to work with slum dwellers because they believe it will increase rural to urban migration. ITDG is not yet involved in transport sector work in the urban areas, but were interested in cooperation on the rickshaw issue.

Unless pollution and traffic planning become a priority issue on the global development agenda, few changes will take place on a local level in Bangladesh. The harsh reality is that children will continue to suffer the damages of lethally high levels of lead in the air.

### **Highlights from the fortnight IN SEARCH OF REAL UNIONS**

During our stay in Dhaka we visited two unions representing transport workers. The first one was located in Demra, a part of Dhaka where a number of rickshaw workshops are located. Finding a union that truly represents the interests of rickshaw pullers required us to carry out some detective work.. We got the address of the union off the membership plate

nailed onto the back of a rickshaw in the Agargaon slum area in Dhaka. A puller tells us that the Bangladesh Rickshaw and Van Sramik Oikyo Parishad represents the interests of pullers and has a wide membership base. The union is a federation representing both pullers and owners with a total of 70 000 members. The union's president, Fazlul Rahman, tells us that union is politically neutral, in contrast to the other four unions representing rickshaw pullers. They are all linked to either Awami League or BNP and are used to get votes, rather than to work for the welfare of pullers. They receive no government support, running their activities on income derived from membership fees of 1 Tk. per month. They provide training, and legal support to pullers as well as organising strikes.

A few days later we visit the Road Transport Workers Union, whose official advisor is Manzurul Ahsan Khan, Leader of the Communist Party of Bangladesh. He is present at the meeting to provide us with background information on the union established in 1956. The position of rickshaw pullers is not strong within the union. It mainly represent truck and bus drivers. The reason why little work is being done with rickshaw pullers is that organising rickshaw pullers requires arduous work because they are a floating population and they live in slum areas controlled by rickshaw owners and the mafia. He feels a proper solution to the traffic problem in Dhaka would be to improve public mass transport and to accept rickshaws as an important and necessary mode of transport.

### **Mass Meeting of Civil Society in Dhaka**

The Association of Development NGOs in Bangladesh (ADAB) was one of the main organisers of a mass meeting of civil society held in Dhaka on February 3rd. The overall theme was 'good governance' and its slogan was 'be a patriot, be a Bangladeshi, support democracy'. The objective was to send a message to all political parties on the fact that the country is not running smoothly and also to educate the next generation on the role and responsibility of the liberation war in the lives of Bangladeshis. The coalition of NGOs organising the meeting aimed to convene 700 000 people at the Dhaka parade ground. The actual number of participants never became clear - some said 100 000, others 300 000 and above.

On the day preceeding the meeting a radical Muslim coalition, Islami Oikyo Jote staged a protest march and called for a day-long hartal (political

strike) on February 3. They were protesting a court ruling to ban fatwas that could subject women to torture for alleged adultery and to prevent them from working with men outside their family. Thousands of supporters of the court ruling joined the civil society meeting. Jote members demanded a repealing of the court ruling and "punishment by death" for anyone supporting it. They denounced the mass meeting, calling NGO activities "anti-islamic".

Reflections: Images of the Liberation War - who will carry the legacy of social responsibility?

Exactly 30 years have passed since the Liberation War. In commemoration of the event, The DRIK Picture Library had organised an exhibition of press photographs titled "The War we Forgot". The material had been collected from a number of Asian, European and American press photographers whose pictures had never previously been shown to the public.

Shahidul Alam, Managing Director of DRIK, wanted the younger generation of Bangladeshis to understand who the forgotten heroes of the liberation struggle were. Through the photographs he wanted to show that these heroes were more than simply names in history books, that they had faces and families, dreams and hopes for a Shonar Bangla (Golden Bengal).

Entering into the modern gallery on the second floor of the DRIK building in Dhanmondi, Dhaka I could have been in any gallery in the world, but the pictures that met me gripped my heart, unsettled me in a way that only photographs can do. It was not only the fact that they showed the hate, blood and grief of war, but somehow, gradually I was struck by the uneasy realisation that this was suffering objectified. The material lacked any reference to the social responsibility of those who record atrocious events. We were given pictures and texts presented in a factual manner. Only one picture series of freedom fighters executing captured Razakars (supporters of Pakistan) had a text questioning the responsibility of the photographers. It asked if their presence had brought about the executions. To me the issue of social responsibility runs much deeper than that. The material produced by the DRIK Picture Library is of superb, professional quality, but it is totally beyond the reach of people on the street. Although there is no entrance fee, no rickshaw puller or domestic servant returning home from work will decide to drop in and be reminded of the forgotten war. Why hadn't the exhibition been set up in the street where it would truly reach the people of Dhaka?



DRIK produces wall calendars, postcards and provides photographic material to glossy development agency reports. Do the poor village and urban women gazing at us from the DRIK materials receive any of the profits made? Considering that the going rate for individual photographs is US\$ 100 it would seem more than justified that some of it should go back to those whose faces and bodies have been exploited. Perhaps this is a too radical view or then my suspicion is correct - also the DRIK Picture Library has been co-opted into the corporate model of development work in Bangladesh.

## **No 18. 23.10.2001 ANASTASIA LAITILA**

### **Introduction**

DELHI -- I arrived in Delhi on 15th October. Unfortunately I missed half on the seminar on Globalisation & Democracy (October 14-15, India International Center)) due to my scheduals and obligations in Finland and for the same reason was not very well prepared for the seminar. Folke can give you the urgent details you might want to know, I will report back after my return with hopefully some sense of the broader picture of WTO & globalisation debate in this country. Anyway the few days I've spent here have been interesting and I m looking forward to the next weeks in India.

I am sorry my coming here was done in such a hurry two-three weeks ago I didn't know I was going to India because I could not take the adequate time I wanted to prepare and study. So I'm hoping to prove myself useful at some point of my stay anyway.

### **Work plan & methods**

As the Indian culture is not very familiar to me I sometimes worry of my very European point of view. I belong to the cast of Europeans who carry the post-colonial cross of belonging to an over-priviledged race of conquerers who have a very narrow view of the world despite proving narrow or not.

I also hope my ways of working will not feel too strange for the activists here. I like to observe first in order to get to know the working culture, the people and the topics before actively participating in discussion. It is also my way of respecting other people and their way of working, as I don't feel comfortable taking a strong stand in issues I might not know so much about. Also as Oras wrote in his report, I also speak little by Indian standards. I shortly explained this to Vijayji and he seemed to understand and accept this. What I would like to do in general is but observe is to take part in the trivial NGO (or people's movement they call it here) work as it is what I do at home and that's the basis for a movement. The question of technology is very interesting Western NGOs are so dependent on Internet and mobile phones we seem to spend most days just staring at the monitor. When technology fails, we get dysfunctional. We do meet people, but I'm afraid we're losing ourselves in the Internet not doing so much action as writing emails. So on some days one might call a weak connection a blessing. What I admire here is especially the time Indian activists spend in real face-to-face discussion and the effort in building broad networks.

### **Post-september 11 discussion**

On Tuesday we went to a discussion on (post)September 11th. I was very pleased to observe this, for the Indian discussion seems to be more civilized and constructive than in Finland. Is it because of geographical or cultural reasons, I don't know. But I am becoming increasingly interested in the issue of globalisation & war/peace & democracy (I haven't figured out the wording yet). Coming from a so-called neutral country which is not very close to a conflict it is very eye-opening (but also sad) to observe the situation here. I'm extremely worried about the US using the attacks of September 11th and the what appears to be an oncoming global recession as an excuse to force developing countries to accept the launch of a new round of trade negotiations in the WTO, an agenda the Third World has been opposing for two years and that it has no economic nor human capacity to put into practice.

The Indian government is offering aid both to Afghani refugees and to US, as a form a million dollars worth of anthrax drugs. US patent laws and the TRIPs Agreement of the WTO however are an obstacle for selling the drugs in the States. The price of Indian anthrax drugs is 2-5% of the American drugs, but by making an exception in a national emergency the US government

would look funny by objecting to the demands of developing countries to have an annex in TRIPs stating that countries can the right to protect public health.

### **Visit to Agra with WTO-campaign & the NAPM**

Thursday I was staying in Ritu & Vijay's house and had breakfast with WTO-activists. They were going to a meeting in Agra, so we shared a taxi. So now I have learned something of the WTO-campaign and the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM). It is an 'alliance of alliances', a broad network of people with different background and different ideological background also (though mostly leftist I think). They had started building this network in 1991. The years 1992-96 were spent going to people and talking with them, getting feedback before formally establishing the alliance. NAPM's goal is getting India out of WTO. It is anti-globalisation, anti-communalism. It's also a member of People's Global Action Against Free Trade (PGA).

National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) has three main objectives: -they oppose globalisation, especially the likes of WTO, IMF and Wordbank -they re against communalism -they want alternative development (an English booklet is to be give to me later I hope, my hindi consists of four words) Members are generally organizations but also individuals can join. The basic principle of NAPM is that moderns technology has failed to fulfill its promise and there s a need for alternative development. People that subsist on land, water and forest must have the right to these natural resources.

Some time ago NAPM organized a camp which some 2000 people (I think) took part in. They decided to begin 'November agitation' this means they're travelling around agitating people to have actions before the WTO Ministerial in Doha (November 9-13). The National Federation of Fishermen will be travelling to Qatar by boats to do actions.

On 6th November there will be big rally in Delhi. Many local actions are also planned, for example landless people taking over private land or government land that has not been distributed to them.

I asked whether it was difficult to talk to people about these issues, since only three-four years ago most people in Finland (including MPs) had little idea what the World Trade Organization is. I was told it is not, because

globalisation has been an issue in India since 1977 when the country took it's first big loan from the IMF. We have a lot to learn in Finland.

What I was really taken by in Agra was in fact not the Taj Mahal (though it was very impressive) but a short visit to Rituji's parents and Danvanbagh (??). It is almost like a self-sufficient municipality. It was established in 1978, and has about 5 000 inhabitants. They have their own dairy, schools, farms and some sort of energy supply (they buy it from outside but it is distributed inside if I understood correctly). None of the inhabitants own their house, they have a low rent and their right to live there is decided year by year. Everyone has to work. There are no television sets and no unnecessary things, driving is forbidden inside the area (they walk or use bicycles or rickshaws), everyone is vegetarian and to bed by ten latest. Life is simple and peaceful. I believe there are many Finns who would find this place remarkable, so many (especially young) people want to move to the countryside and live a simple, 'natural' life.

Friday I was in NAPM press conference and meeting. Unfortunately it was 90% in Hindi, but it's not like I haven't been before to a press conference I didn't understand much about. I was dropped off to Vijayji's brother's house and had a very nice evening. His wife Prabma works in a nutrition program in the Department of women and child development, so she told me about her work and the program and gave me some government material. I also got a chance to see the news (but it seems that either nothing else than anthrax is happening in the world or then BBC and CNN are just bias).

I'm doing reading and writing at the moment and will probably go to Bombay at some point. For more details, till next week.

## **No 19 31.10.2001 ANASTASIA LAITILA**

DELHI -- Two weeks have now passed in India, and again I have gained new experiences to share with you. I am writing this with a slight fever, so please excuse any disorientation.

### **On Afghanistan**

As you all know, the situation in Afghanistan is getting more and more intense. This reflects both in the political situation of South Asia and the upcoming WTO Ministerial in Doha and the "inevitable new round", but also on other issues such as patent rights and the TRIPs agreement.

Nearly every night there seems to have been a cultural event (mostly arranged by students here in JNU campus) against the war and for peace. So far I've only participated in one, which seems to have cost me my health but was definitely worth it. This particular event was organized by a left wing students group and there were musical groups, poets, a street play, speeches and US war movies. Arun Kumar Singh (whose knowledge on WTO issues I consider him the local Ville-Veikko) was with me and translated even the songs, so I was able to get an idea of the views presented. Before the program we had an interesting conversation on non-governmental organizations and their work and influence. What we in Finland would call NGO in English

would be movement or civil society group in here. The NGOs in India are mostly big, foreign funded, and more extensions of the government than representatives of the people. But I will put no more emphasis on this now, as it will be discussed more on my paper on WTO, India & civil society groups (under construction :). There was one particular song in the cultural event that I'd like to quote; summarized it went something like this: "Muslims and Hindus, why fight/There's a McDonald's in every city/so drink Pepsi and eat burgers/--Why discuss bread and water/drink Pepsi and eat burgers". One event especially worth mentioning was the fact that JNU is near the airport, so all the time airplanes were flying above us. You could not forget what was happening in Afghanistan, and one was sort of expecting them to drop bombs, ground troops or food packages with plastic forks and paper towels. Food and bombs, what a combination.

Opposition against the attacks on Afghanistan and the US is growing steadily in Pakistan and India. In Pakistan, there have been demonstrations against the US and for Taleban. In India, there was an attack on a Coca cola plant and at least two boycotts on North/Anglo-American products, apparently mostly by Muslims and against killing of the innocent. It is increasingly clear that the US and apparently also the EU are using the current weak economical situation as means to persuade or forced to accept the new round in the WTO. After the unofficial WTO meeting of 20 countries in Singapore less than two weeks ago, all opposition towards the new round suddenly silenced. A couple of days ago the Indian government announced under the circumstances all they could do is try hard to keep all new issues such as investment, competition etc out of the round and insist on implementation issues. The LDCs and Organization of African Unity seem to be thus the only groups officially opposing the "inevitable new round", but they won't be able to stop it without help from countries the likes of India. All in all, the situation looks miserable.

### **TRIPs declaration, media expertise**

The way and expertise of many Indian journalists about WTO issues has been a happy surprise for me. In Finland, mainstream newspapers have hardly paid attention to the Doha Ministerial, not to speak of specific details and agreements such as TRIPs. So there is a clear gap between countries (and the

media of such countries) that are heavily affected by economic globalisation and countries that have most of the playing cards. The developing countries reacted immediately to the Ministerial Declaration Draft, prepared by WTO General Council Chairman Stuart Harbinson. If the Finnish media published anything on the issue, I didn't come across it. The TRIPs agreement has been under intense debate in the Third World. Such declaration would ensure governments the right to protect public health by liberally interpreting the agreement to issue compulsory licenses to third parties for production of patented medicines at low cost; arrange for parallel imports from competing suppliers; allow developing countries to go beyond 2004 and 2005 to implement the TRIPs agreement and more assertions that would give governments the right to take necessary measures to address public health concerns. The idea rose from the African group earlier this year concerning patented retro-revival therapy for AIDS/HIV patients. Medication supplied from US or European manufactures cost \$10,000, while Indian companies were willing to offer the same medication for \$350.

Naturally protecting public health would not be only in the interests of developing nations, and this has come out in an interesting manner during the anthrax scare in the US. The patent for Ciproflaxacin, drug used for anthrax, is owned by German company Bayer's. Ciproflaxacin is not the only drug that can be used to cure anthrax (penicillin and doxycycline are other options), but it is the preferred one. US Bayer's has a patent on the drug until 2003, but questions have been raised whether the company has the ability to meet the demand and the cost. German, Indian and US producers have all increased production on the drug. Canada "broke the patent" and licensed it's largest pharma producer, Apotex, to supply one million tablets at a price half Bayer's price. In the US, Cipro (brand name for the drug) sells wholesale at \$4.67 per 500 mg and US government's purchase rate is \$1.83 a tablet. Compared with Indian drugs the difference in costs is enormous. In the city of Chennai (formally Madras), companies providing anthrax drugs sell at prices as low as 2 to 5% of the US prices. Despite of this the US refuse to reconsider their position on liberal interpretation of TRIPs. Switzerland and Germany, home to the world's biggest pharmaceutical companies, is also strongly opposing any statement or political reading on TRIPs.

**WTO agitation**

I took the opportunity of using the work I have done in Finland and translated the paper on WTO I had prepared for Kepa during the summer (the WTO paper in Finnish), including some additional points and an annex on the Doha preparations. This can be used as background material in here, and seemed to fit their needs.

I've also taken part in two agitation meetings at JNU campus hostels, they have been very good but since I'm unwell, also tiring (in a good way, I think). On the second meeting I spoke of 'European struggles against WTO', today I was requested to present the second draft of the Ministerial declaration.

**WTO ministerial declaration**

The second draft came out on Friday 26th Oct, and has again gained opposition. It is not better than the first, and many feel it is in fact worse. I have not had the time to look into it very closely yet, I will do that today and see for myself. The additional paper on TRIPs and public health also seems problematic, since Western countries are not willing to do a proper declaration and many developing countries are fiercely insisting for it. I understand why the African group has brought out this initiative, but I feel it is somewhat dangerous to include a separate TRIPs declaration on public health. Health should not be discussed in TRIPs, and since TRIPs is affecting health, it is a question of abolishing or reforming the agreement rather than having a side paper on health. Also the alternatives given in the paper seem bad: for example, protecting public health and addressing public health crises are not compatible, and who will determine what is a crisis? Does there need to be a public health crisis before countries are allowed to protect public health? I'm beginning to feel very strange about the fact that this is such a big issue here and in Finland... well, you know.

I have experienced problems with trying to change my flight (In Finland I was told it is easy. It is not.), so I don't know yet shall I return next Tuesday or Tuesday after that. I also heard that I had actually gotten visa for Qatar, but since I had cancelled all my plans to go there and it would be difficult to arrange from here and it might not be very wise to go there, I probably won't. That is my short report now, wish you well.

**No 20. 02.11.2002 ANASTASIA LAITILA**

DELHI -- November, 2002

Shivalik, New Delhi 17

Dear all,

so it is that I am writing to you again from New Delhi where I have been for a week now. As most of you know, I'm officially here to help in the preparation of the upcoming Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad, Jan 2-7 2003. Unofficially "general slave" (bear with me, this is just an expression).

I am staying in the Shivalik area about 4-5 km from Vijay & Ritu's house and the Munirka office with Fitria, an activist from Indonesia. Tonight the Thai activist, Kob, will arrive. This is a big house with three families (or joint family as someone said), we live on the first floor. I hope there are no problems with Kob's flight, he was supposed to come yesterday. I myself had to be rescheduled because Amsterdam was jammed, 7000 people waiting to get out of there and Finnish KLM officials waiting for instructions from Amsterdam. The KLM international web was about to crash because people all over the world had to be redirected. After four hours they put me to a direct flight from Moscow (via Stockholm, which is ridiculous but was the only way to make it to the Delhi flight) and I actually arrived some hours before scheduled. My luggage went on a trip to Bangkok. Rakesh Bhatt, who has the delightful task of facilitating all of us exchange activists during

our stay, said that he would like to be luggage to be able to travel without visa and air ticket, but the Indian bureaucracy for claiming "mishandled luggage" is too much bother I think. Stamping, signing, passport please, another place stamping, signing, passport please madam, third place stamping, waiting, signing, fourth place sending to x-ray, back to fourth place signing, stamping, signing the signature? Thai officials had taken half of the hapankorppu packet I had brought as a gift but hadn't touched honey or coffee or anything else for that matter. I hope they at least liked it.

One euro is 45.10 rupees - a bus costs less than ten. Amazing. It seems as if the rupee is weaker than last time. In some way it feels great to go to the currency exchange and they will call you Madam though you smell bad, look tired and are uncertain about cultural behaviour. My Hindi is about ten words so I'm not really managing yet, but I'm able to pick up some words when people speak. Would Hinglish be accepted in my CV?

I have been trying to observe the cultural differences here - like for example people working nightshift will be sleeping when they're tired, which is impossible in Finland. I so glad I can take my shoes off in this country and nobody cares. People are more curious and social and will come up and talk to you, at least if they know English. Everybody wants to invite you to their home, yesterday some asked me to come and bless his children. Ritu explained to me that this is a polite way to

invite people and also a way tell young women that it's safe to come to my house and meet my family. Nevertheless it felt quite confusing. Family in a comprehensive way is more important in India, a bit like in Catholic countries such as Italy. Indians will feed you more than you have had in your life in Finland. Food is for survival but how to say that you really can't eat more or don't want to although the food is great? I couldn't figure this out the last time and I have no idea if this can be done since I am here as a guest and everybody looks after my well-being. I get told that for hindus a guest is like God, but sometimes I cant help feeling spoiled when all I have to do is sit and people will say "my wife is at your disposal".

I have had very nice discussions with people and it feels really good to have people you know or have met around you. I don't even feel being so much abroad at the moment, it's possible to call Finland, the lines are very good and I can read email. I went to NAPM meeting (National Alliance of People's Movements) although it was in Hindi (or Hinglish) because I wanted

to meet some familiar people (and of course buy books, I worry about getting too much and not having a space to put them in).

It seems that there has been a government supported (ruling party BJP, political part of the Hindufascist RSS movement) genocide of muslims in Gujarat, and this is the first time I heard about it. Do I just follow news so selectively or what is our press doing? More on Gujarat will follow, since it is a big issue here and there will be elections in December. Many voters are "missing".

That night Bhupen Singh and I attended also a climate meeting arranged by WWF India (the UN climate conference of the parties number 8 was held in Delhi 26th Oct to 1st Nov). We were quite late so I have no idea what they had discussed but the rest of it was quite interesting. They felt that the climate justice movement is really unique and has overcome barriers, brought together people that wouldn't have otherwise come together, but still there is a lack of trust between Southern and

Northern NGOs. Vijay would call this political trust and I think he is quite right. We have witnessed this between Finnish and European NGOs and movements as well and it's one of the major obstacles that prevents us from working together and in fact might have us even working against each other or our goals. Another point related to this was "corporatization of NGOs" (regarding climate issues in this case but I

feel it is the danger with all international issues at least): we start to act like corporations and are located somewhere in lobby space with corporates. The language -not in just climate issues, but regarding globalisation, biodiversity and biosafety and so on - is very technical and alienating for other NGOs and the public. The drive for consensus sometimes means forgetting the issue.

So Fitria arrived very very early on Saturday morning. This is her first visit outside Indonesia but she's doing better than I am. I would suppose Indonesia is more Asian than Finland. The food is very different, she says, and the language. But I think her English is better than mine. We're about the same age, so let's see how uncomfortable Kob feels with women in their twenties. We showed Fitria the Munirka office of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and on Sunday attended a discussion on "Islam,

muslims and democracy". Quite interesting for both of us, since Fitria herself is a muslim and I come from the part of the world where we discuss "ethnic conflicts" but have no idea what is going on and why. Especially after Sept 11th last year, the fascism against arabs and islam in Western countries is

quite astonishing. As Vijay said in the meeting, we should be able to discuss this issue without a political

perspective (but I hadn't realized before how comprehensively anti-imperialistic islam is. Some of the Coca-cola boycotts started by muslim shopkeepers after USA started bombing Afganistan a year ago are still holding). More on this follows if you are interested.

Some practical issues are still waiting to be solved, since I wanted Fitria and Kob to be a part of that discussion. Beds are here and one computer, Internet access is also working now but the other computer has to be fixed today.

About work; so far we've discussed arranging a workshop on globalisation and water in the ASF and I've agreed to produce a background paper or make a presentation on the issue, I just have to decide on whether the focus should be globalisation or global resistance. This is part of the project which Siemenpuu Foundation has granted funding for and I have promised to try to facilitate that process from here. Possibly some traveling to the Himalaya area (newly created state Uttarakand or

Uttaranchal) for networking and meeting environmental activists and so on and/or other regions, nothing fixed yet. I would like to visit also Rajasthan so I have to see if there is something interesting happening there. Rakesh was telling me what a great place it is. I'm also trying to meet a group working with the children of prostitutes and maybe visit an AIDS center. Trade unions are for Vijay to arrange so this will take some time since he is quite busy. But I have to look into all

possibilities I have. Rakesh also suggested a meeting with RSS. Let us see. Two months to ASF.

## **No 21. 10.11.2002 ANASTASIA LAITILA**

Letters from India, vol 21

November 10th, 2002

Shivalik, New Delhi

As usual, I'm taking a very liberal approach to these reports, as they've been named as 'letters'. Also because the exchange program itself is quite liberal, which is in a way good but doesn't suit everyone.

Some time has been going into trying to sort out budgetary things. Since budgets are based on expectations there are bound to be some problems and deficits, but let's see if we can work them out somehow. Despite unclarities in the budget we are leaving tomorrow morning for Uttarakhand (newly created state in the Himalaya area, official name Uttaranchal) on 11th. It is a region with lots of natural resources and quite many environmental movements that are of interest to all of us exchange activists. I am quite enthusiastically looking forward to it and it fits perfectly into the agenda of all three of us. Our guide will be Mr Rajendra Dhasmana, who is very nice man and familiar with the region. Tentative plans include meeting people from the Chipko movement and committee opposing Teheri dam, tribal people, environmental activists, see a sinking village and so on and so on. The climate would be a little closer to the one at home, so I'm also quite exited about the possibility to see snow. I spoke with my sister yesterday and she

said it's about -5 C back in Finland, so not that much. The lady who comes here to cook said that I must be from a very cold place since I am red here. Now I've actually noticed the winter is coming in here as well, temperature has gone down quite rapidly.

I feel quite privileged being a part of this pilot project of bringing together activists from four different countries, mostly from the South. But since it is a pilot project, the biggest problems if any are likely to emerge during this first time. Comrades Fitria and Kob are in India the first time so I also worry about how their experience turns out to be. I have tried to be quite diplomatic about explaining Indian schedules and so on, but when Fitria says so-and-so is late, I tell her I wasn't even expecting him to turn up until an hour or half after agreed. Being 'flexible' in schedules seems to be an Indian and African habit, not so much Asian in general. I am uncertain if Fitria and Kob are used to this way of building up your workplan yourself, I think they'd expect a little more guidance and fixed program since they do not know how things work here. I am quite unable to help them out as much as I would like to, since my last visit was quite a short one and spent mostly with the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam crew.

My Hindi is improving day by day: vocabulary is now about twenty words. These people find it very funny, though, if I say jana (to go), acha (ok) or pani (water) or whatever. But I'm still illiterate in this country. And the WSF-Delhi meeting we participated the day before was mostly over my vocabulary. Based on the English minutes, what was discussed there was the tentative program, parallel youth camp, key concerns and clarifications. What I think was a very good point was that there should be a follow-up process, but some felt it's premature to discuss about it. It was also felt that since being part of the struggle against globalisation is not new to most of us, in a sense a process already exists. Small groups are being mobilized to join the Asian Social Forum. It was also suggested in the meeting that there should be conference in Delhi for the Social Forum. More information will be found from the website at [www.wsfindia.org](http://www.wsfindia.org).

Tea. Again. It's a bit funny how much Indians have tea. A friend of Ritu's from the same faculty said 'Indian academics wouldn't survive without tea.' According to an agricultural survey by The Hindu, India is the world's largest consumer of tea. I am uncertain on would it also be the largest producer

or would that be China. In the hilly areas, I was told, you might not be charged at all for black tea. Sugar and milk give needed energy and calories for difficult conditions. In some parts they even have tealeaves with butter and sugar. Ritu was telling me yesterday how tea came to India through the British military about a hundred years ago: in army rations there would be a portion of this addictive drink, so little by little tea replaced traditional drinks from herbs and spices. Traditional drinks were usually cool drinks and varied according to season. In the same way alcohol imports have overcome traditional mild alcohols and replaced them with hard drinks and a hard drinking culture.

I was at JNU yesterday and day before. Student elections are going on, and BJP student union was marching outside and shouting their slogans. Sounds like a military rehearsal. Somehow I'm glad I can't understand what they are saying.

The Holy month of Ramzan started here on 7th. Both Fitria and Kob are muslims, so they are fasting during the day and getting up at 4 AM to have breakfast before the sunrise.

Regardless or related to the international policy (or should I say US-posed policy) the issue of Islam and Muslims in the society seem to be much more present in the everyday discussion than last year (but so are mobile phones). During my travels during the last year or two and especially now I have been thinking a lot about national identity and nationality. Now, being again here where the conflict between Hindus and Muslims is very present and discussed much more than last time due to the genocide of Muslims in the state of Gujarat, I've started realizing that what we in the West dismiss as 'ethnic conflict' is actually a question of identity and the right to an identity: regardless of religion, a person born and brought up in a culture is as much a part of that culture as the mainstream. And still minorities grown up as part of the nation are outsiders. But national identity is not necessarily being an Indian but more being from this and this village in Bihar or Sicily, it is more regional as the region, the place where you grow up, is the place you identify with rather than the nation. How many people are as familiar with the whole of their country as they are with their locality? Still, calling it regional identity might not be a solution (or would it?).



## No 22. 14.12.2002 ANASTASIA LAITILA

Letters from India, vol 22

November 20th, 2002

Shivalik, New Delhi

Back in Delhi after an educating journey to Lesser Himalaya and suffering from a vigorous food poisoning. After the mountain breeze (just like at home!) Delhi seems even more polluted than before. We met some great and important men such as C.P. Bhatt and Sundharlal Bhagouna (how do you spell that?) from the Chipko andolan (hug the tree -movement) but I am more and more interested about the women that nobody knows, who carry iron plows on their heads in 2002. Quite a lot of the people we've spoken to have stressed the important role of women, especially in the hills.

When I say that integrating these people into the global economy might actually be destructive, liberalists tell me I want to set developing countries back into primitive economy. What can I say, the "primitive" economy still exists in agrarian economies and changing it rapidly will not help the poor. In the hilly areas industrial agriculture is not even possible, manual labor and farm animals are more useful. Still, agriculture is changing, traditional rights to land and resources have been lost and traditional varieties not used as much as before. In small landholdings crops are in two-three terraces and different land races sown. These crops mature at different times, their resistance

and tolerance levels are different and thus they will give more food security. Hilly areas have traditionally always done mixed cultivation. Now export-led agriculture is introducing monocultures and races that are not local. Hybrid seeds have luckily not yet reached hill areas, possibly because the cultivated area has not got very much economic value.

I do bear in mind that in modern times societies change very quickly.

Our first stop in the newly created state of Uttarakhand (official name Uttaranchal) was in the town of Nainital, which is situated by a lake. The town was built by the British, said Rajendra Dhasmana, our guide for the week. In Nainital we had a long discussion with professor G.P. Panth from the Institute for Environmental Protection about protected forest areas, biosphere reserves and whether this kind of environmental protection is anti-people and destructive for the communities dependent on forests and forestry. It reminded me of the Natura 2000 discussion in Finland, although this was about the actual survival of tribal people and Natura more about private landowners. Many people in the hilly areas depend on the forest for their daily needs: firewood, food, cattle grazing, leaf litter for agriculture (compost) and so on.

The biosphere reserve consists of the core zone, which is unaccessible; buffer zone where there are villages and certain activities are permitted such as limited cultivation. The government is now proposing to allow other activities in order to give the people some income. In Nepal there has been an interesting experiment in trying to give local people benefit from the biosphere reserve: ecotourism is allowed in the buffers zone as well as economic activities that won't affect the biosphere.

Commercial forestry was started in UA area in 1890's by the Britishers, we were told by Mr Ajay S. Rawat. He's done excellent research on forestry. The British encouraged population and agriculture expansion but restricted access to forest (though, as said, agriculture in hills is forest-based). Movement against this started in 1916 and as a result of Gandhi's non-cooperation movement many people burned forests in 1920. As much as 123 000 hectares of forests were burned "to express discomfort". Now that the British have left India, their own government is taking away their rights and supporting tree smuggling, or surrendering the rights to the World Bank trough "Joint Forest Management" programs.

Professor Panth told us that the largest biosphere reserve in India is in Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand used to be the route to Tibet for traders, which took their material from the area that is now the reserve. Trade with medicinal plants was traditionally done with plants that are now inside the core zone. One solution to this problem is teaching people to grow these plants instead of just harvesting them from the forest. There are also nomadic tribes that change housing according to season; in the summer they go up on high areas with their cattle, winter settlements are lower. Some of the summer settlements are now inside the core zone. The tribes have been provided alternative routes to areas that are not restricted.

Prof. Panth stressed that animals living inside the reserve cannot be touched although they come sometimes out from the reserve and affect people's livelihoods. I think this is quite normal and there are hardly such big flocks inside the reserve they would permanently destroy everything. This also reminds me of the predator debate in Finland, especially concerning wolves and bears. They also need to survive, and how can you restrict an animal's life to a certain area? Don't the people's activities affect the animals and the forests just as much? Despite of restrictions, poaching and smuggling of timber is frequent.

Professor Panth noted that people are not very worried about the long-term perspective of their activities. Four out of five big forest fires occur in Uttaranchal due to dry pine needles in the ground but people are not so interested to do anything about it since forest use is restricted anyhow. As a solution to this, Forest Panchayats (village councils) have been formed: the land belongs to the state but the villagers are in control. However it has not helped, and many a times the village forests are in worst shape. The local people are aware of this though and trying to solve it.

Religious values are important in restricting forest areas. People will perform rituals to close the areas and impose their own sanctions. This has worked much better than government sanctions. They will also close one area at a time, use it for some time and move on to another one. This gives the forest time to recover and is more sustainable resource use. Holy trees near temples serve as seed banks for small areas. Sometimes when a child is given a name the priest can also bless a sapling by the same name. The sapling will be planted near the house and taken care of as a part of the family. Saplings can also be planted in memory of the dead.

One thing that forest reserves are causing is that poor people are being displaced and are chained to labor, often forced to move to cities to find work. And that's another story... However I have a problem that when elaborating these problems nature conservation and people's livelihoods are often seen as contradictory. It is true that the people should be compensated but why settle for that, why not take an alternate position and see how the people could benefit before they suffer? Mr Panth said that if a lot of consultation takes place, eventually the wisdom will come out of it. The Finnish position seems to be that the more consultation, the more problems, so let's change the land use law back to what it was.

We also visited Tehri and the dam construction site. The Tehri dam project goes back in to the 1970's but the actual construction was started only in 1991 (I think), due to fierce resistance. If it is completed the Tehri dam will be the biggest in Asia. It will form a huge lake and displace 80 000 people. It is also situated in a highly seismic area, where an earthquake of 7,1 Richter has occurred. Landslides are not uncommon, the last one happened in September very near the dam power house. If the dam breaks, results will be devastating, whole towns and villages will drown. But what the government has done in Tehri so far is also quite devastating. Nearly the whole town has been demolished and people being told to leave their homes since the area will soon be under water. The truth is it will take \_at least\_ another three years before the dam is finished, if even then. But last year there were 12 000 families living in Tehri, now only 300. The government claims that everyone has been compensated and the people should only be rehabilitated in New Tehri (a copy of Tehri!). Many people however have not received anything.

Mr Sundalal Boguna was being interviewed by a Norwegian student about the Chipko andolan when we arrived to meet him in Tehri. He is very keen on trees, and of the opinion that if every family had 2000 trees, poverty would disappear. The trees would provide food, fibre, fuel wood, leaf litter etc. (Where to take the land and how to change the system, he didn't say)

Sundalal Boguna said that the essence of culture is that life is everywhere and that pollution of our minds and hearts will destroy the world, that the East sees divinity in nature, life that should be respected and worshipped. When people accuse the Western culture, I feel they are pointing their words to me, as if I could represent the West simply because I come from Europe. I still don't know how to take it. Gifts to the next generation are poverty and

pollution. I share his view that the Western culture is materialistic and destructive but I think he was being too black & white.

In Srinagar we had breakfast with associate professor Himanshu Bourai. She has done research on the role of hill women in watershed management. She confirmed my understanding that though women do most of the work and their workload is increasing, their political participation (planning, management, evaluation...) is difficult. Women have little rights to the land they cultivate (women's share in agricultural labor is about 90 %): around the world, around one per cent of women own land and such resources. Deserted women in villages have no legal rights. Their husbands go away to find work and marry again. In cities women have a double work load of the home and paid work. Alcoholism is becoming common amongst the men, it is the women that fight against it to save their lives and their husbands but the state is not listening.

After this we met with Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam's Cultural Democracy convener, D.R. Purohit who told us quite a lot about the folklore in the hills. Since that would require several pages, I will not go into details now, though it is quite interesting.

There are quite many people in the hills spending their life in defending trees. Sundalal Boguna, C.P. Bhatt, Chanrda Singh Rana who has planted more than 16 500 trees in his life. To my happiness, seed saving seems also to be "popular". I regret we were not able to meet the Beej Bachao Andolan (seed saving group), but we met some people from an organization called HESCO (Himalayan Environmental Studies & Conservation Organization) that are cooperating with them. They promote organic farming and the farmers voluntarily give, for example, 1/4 of their crop for HESCO to save.

HESCO has a number of other interesting projects, such as Women Technology Park which employs 50 women part-time. The center aims "to serve exclusively the mountain women for their various technology needs". HESCO has also developed a technology to use invasive plants to provide energy for rural areas - such as producing carbon from pine needles.

C.P. Bhatt was also a Chipko leader. Chipko movement took place 30 years back when it was extremely difficult to talk about protecting trees. C.P. Bhatt was educating local people about the relationship of the trees with environment, landslides, erosion and floods. The Himalaya is an important biodiversity area but very fragile. Deforestation has increased floods and

landslides. After roads were built in the area, forests were cut up to the extent that there aren't any trees at all in Joshimath. Soil has become fragile.

The name ("hug the tree") came out of strategy planning. They were thinking of how to stop the cutting of the trees, and a non-violent possibility was to stand in front of the trees so the contractors would have to cut them in two first. This developed into hugging the trees.

Some say that Chipko was a women's movement, started by women, but C.P. Bhatt said women were not a part of it in the beginning. When the government held up the protesting men in the city, contractors were coming to cut the trees. When the women learned about this, they rushed to the forest and confronted the contractors for seven hours, blocked the way to the forest and stopped them from cutting the trees. After all, the women will be the first to suffer if the forests are cut, since they are directly dependent on the forest-based agriculture.

Now a lot of reclamation work has been done, landslides are less and the green belt is growing. C.P. Bhatt has been appointed to a government committee to discuss how tree coverage could be raised to the scheduled 33 %.

## No 23. 04.11.2002 FITRIA AGUSTINA

'Letters from India' is a fortnightly brief written by Finnish exchange activists participating in the Lokayan - Kepa co-operation programme. The 'Letters' are circulated primarily among the staff of the organisations and members of the groups responsible for the joint activities, i.e. Lokayan's Global Responsibility Forum - Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam and Kepa's India Group.

Letters from India, vol 23

November 4th, 2002

Regards to all,

I have no idea how to start my 'report' letter for KEPA, because there are so many interesting things that I like to share, especially with friends in INSIST. That's why I choose to translate my letter for them. I'm really sorry if my English is not good in writing, especially in vocabulary and grammar, I'm still working on it. So, here it is.

This is my first letter that I send--after an email that mentioning that I've arrived and my address here, of course.

Right on schedule, Saturday (02.11.2002) 01.40 am local time, I arrived in India. I got exhausted with the traveling, 'cause Yogyakarta-Jakarta took 1 hour, then transit. Jakarta-Hongkong for 4,5 hours and Hongkong-Delhi 5

hours. And I took this traveling as first abroad by myself. Since leaving Yogyakarta, I was confused by lot of airport bureaucracy-getting worse; my whole family drove me to the airport, chaos. But thank God, I met Anu at the airport; she's going to Jakarta, so there's someone that explains everything to me in a calm situation.

At Delhi's Airport, I worried, "Where's the facilitator?" 'Cause if he hadn't, then I should call him, while each Rupee in me is in big amount-I exchanged my USD in Hongkong and this airport. I was really glad when Rakesh Bhatt-our facilitator-show up. He guided me to our apartment, where a nice big room with warm bed waiting for me-Anastasia (Finland) had gone to bed, but she left a welcome note for me.

So, I'm having my own bed and bathroom. I think these are too much for me 'cause usually I sleep on INSIST Press carpet in Yogyakarta. The facilities that are ready: one computer and telephone. Another computer hasn't been set-up, also Internet and household equipment. Looks like things will be managed after Kob (Thailand) is here.

Anastasia has arrived earlier, 28.10.2002. And Kob will be in 04.11.2002-but postpone till 05.11.2002, late at night. Anastasia is a nice person; she's from Friends of the Earth. Her interests are in environment issues, women, and lot of other things. Last year she's been here for a month. Guess that's why she knows a lot for 'daily living' in India-she even has Indian suits, later I'll find one for myself.

First day in India (02.11.2002) I spent by visiting CSDS Project Office at Munirka. I was introduced with some activists there. Bhupen-young activist; Suresh-he was a journalist and now still writing, lot of them about his land, Uttarakhand; Surej-he's in charge with the office, who keep trying to fax my right invitation for me to get my visa; and many more. I tasted my first Indian food here. It's rather difficult for me. Not because of the hot taste, maybe because they're always in liquid form or not as 'spicy' as Indonesian food. But hope I'll get used to it.

We started by getting more information about India-Indonesia-Finland condition and trying to know more about our institutions. Guess it's a common phenomenon that NGO usually starts from middle class, in India too. I asked, "Is there any woman working here?" because at that time, those who are present are men. They said there is one young woman, Kusum, but she's

concentrating at the WSF Secretariat. This question popped-up 'cause there are lot of women working in INSIST and lot of women activists in Indonesian NGOs, even most of them are in women or children issues. So I got a-very subjective-conclusion that women working in non-domestic area are less than in Indonesia. Highly education also hasn't been a common for women.

After taking meal and got connect to the Internet, we had a discussion about India, especially on environment. One thing was about the effect of global warming and globalization (the TNCs/MNCs). Bhupen and Suresh who company Anastasia and me are from Uttarakhand, a state in Himalayan, so mostly they told us about the effects there.

Uttarakhand is known as 'Indian water land'. From this place lot of rivers bring water to Indian plain area. In the past, there was snow and some rainy days. Agriculture depends on this rain. But because of global warming effects, snow is not available anymore and rain is getting rare. Agriculture system also has changed. Organic fertilizer being replaced by chemical ones, and brings less and less harvest every year. Seed quality also decreased. This story made me remember Indonesia's condition on Green Revolution's 'success'.

About TNCs/MNCs, forrest management that was in villagers hand, been took-over by commercial corporations. Don't forget mining sector also.

Uttarakhand is based on patriarchy-can any one find any part of this world that's not? But women have a big role in society. Suresh said, "Without women, Uttarakhand has nothing."

Few things about Gujarat Dam Project, which started from 15-20 years ago, it's a mega-project that supported by lot of international funding. Not less than 40.000 peoples were displaced from their homes and lands. Compensation that been given was not enough for having a decent place to live. Lot of people suffered still 'cause of this project.

That's for my 1st day. At Sunday (03.11.2002) Anastasia and I attended a discussion held by CSDS Lokayan at Indian International Centre (IIC) about "Islam, Moslems, and Democracy". Rakesh, our facilitator, was one of the main speakers. He presented ayat-ayat of Koran that bring peace, Islam hates violence. There was a Hindu movement who propose to ban some ayats that seen as supporting violence.

Ironic, I heard that there was genocide on Moslems in Gujarat early this year. Rumors said that this incident happened by government element's contribution (BJP is the party in power, part of the Hindu-fascist RSS movement).

Discussion was interesting, even it's in English and Hindi. I got attracted to learn more about Koran. Indonesia was mentioned several times, 'cause it's one of the countries that has large amount on Moslems. Fundamentalism, terrorism, secularism, and democracy were being debated all the time. Some participants said that Rakesh only views Koran literally and forget the context of time when the ayats appear. Hindus-Moslems conflicts are still going on at some parts of India. I memorized conflict places in Indonesia based on SARA (Tribe, Religion, Race, and Political ideology. One thing that's important from this discussion: If we talk about democracy, it's not relevant anymore whether you're India or not, black or white, Hindu or Islam.

Night we spent at Suresh's place, having dinner and nice conversation about his poems in international literatures; Uttarakhand and the chance of water solution for India by having lake in hills; story about Rakesh's experience being jailed 4,5 years in Iran and how's his wife teaching-she's a teacher in Iran; and few things about madrasah-Moslem schools--in India.

Coincidentally-but I hope it won't be too often; there were terrorists at Anzal Plaza. From news we knew two was shoot, one missing. It took my attention because we pass by that place from IIC. I even could see the Plaza from window of Suresh's kitchen. I asked his son, "Do this happen often?" And yes, he said. When I wanted to know who are these peoples, he said it's never clear, government always says that they are Pakistanis. Guess the relation between these two countries isn't good.

I think I'll stop for now. Happy I could tell lot of stories for my family.

Take care. Keep in touch.

Warm regards,

fitria

Lokayan"-then I knew that there are differences between CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies) and Lokayan (Lokayan's Office is at Ajpur Road). Even though, both of them can be considered as one 'family', based on historical relation-just like INSIST family. From Rakesh we're informed that Lokayan is kind of a platform-platform-for peoples to talk about social theories. Noted by Vijay, Lokayan's main concern is having 'dialogue' on comprehensive democracy: 1) economic democracy; 2) ecological democracy; (3) social democracy; (4) cultural democracy; (5) political democracy and (6) gender democracy. I got the point that their focuses are quite many-like INSIST. This dialogue on democracy is known as 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (The World is A Family).

I wasn't sure with 'platform' term, and Vijay said that Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is rather seen as an attitude (the way of looking each other), sort of a perspective.

Later we're introduced to some excellent persons. One of them is Prof. Suresh Sharma-he's a convenor of Lokayan, who's an expert of Philosophy on History. More information we knew from him, based on the context of Indian history. In 1970s and got worse in 1975, the situation was covered by trust crisis, no human rights, 100.000 and more peoples sent to jail for democracy struggle (implementation of law, freedom of speech, etc.). At that time, there're 2 types of institutions: 1) political institutions/parties, that failed on their function as society representative; and civil institutions, that good on work but fragmented. In 1977, this accumulation brought the idea of Lokayan 'to talk to each other'. NGOs developed vast in 1980s-even Prof. Sharma didn't forget to remind us that NGO and civil society term is brought to Third World by globalization, in this context the international funding institutions.

Some miss-concepts on democracy in India are: 1) Democracy means that give people the right to participate in the elections, people make vote, than those who win the election control the state as "people's representative" for 5 years. Where as the implementation of this power neglects lot of people's needs. It should be that any constitution, which-especially-has large effects on society, must be maintained by developing discussion; 2) Democracy in Indian can be called as 'religious democracy'. Hindus are 80% from total population, 20% others. Moslems are minority; even the amount is quite a number. In politics, Hindus as the majority dominate others. Nepotism phenomenon

## No 24. 09.11.2002 FITRIA AGUSTINA

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Letters from India, vol 24

November 9th, 2002

Regards to all,

This is my second letter. After 1-2 days in India-which I've written in my 1st letter, we (Anastasia, Kob, I, and Rakesh-our facilitator) spent 3 days on arranging things (like providing foods, equipment, etc.)

Last Thursday (07.11.2002) finally we met Vijay for a meeting-actually Anastasia tries to reach him in few days, but Vijay's always busy. So we went to CSDS Main Office at Rajpur Road-in my 1st letter it's CSDS Project at Munirka. Hmm, the office is a large place, but it's in a renovation. And like other building in New Delhi, the area is covered by trees and grasses. It will be nice to have a discussion on open air, considering New Delhi's weather isn't hot for me.

After introduction part, we got a further explanation on "What is

makes it worse; family relatives-even girlfriends-join political parties and enjoy the taste of ruling.

Prof. D.L. Seth-one of the chairmen on "Islam, Moslems, and Democracy" discussion, also the initiator of Lokayan-later accompanied us. Kob asked many things about forest problems and people movements on ecology to him. He said there are many people movements, like against mining that destructs forest, or to protect some specific species, etc. Btw, Kob is from Project for Ecological Recovery (PER), Thailand.

When I mentioned how about democracy implementation in India if society based on caste, he said 'more or less'-but for Bhupen, an activist of CSDS Project, "One because of caste, India have no democracy." Well, a young activist's perspective surely different than a professor's (this is my own interpretative opinion). "Like Islam. In 'pure' Moslem countries, it would be difficult for democracy," Prof. Seth compared.

Later the discussion got over then we head to Lokayan's Office to fetch a document needed for Anastasia and Vijay's discussion on one programme. We spent just few minutes there. I was shown an output of Rajendra Ravi's research on tricycle/rickshaw drivers. Interesting, because it contents a comprehensive data, from demography till their everyday problems. Unfortunately, this output is still in statistic's form (in tables), a review hasn't been made.

Back at the CSDS Main Office, with Vijay we discussed our programme planning. Like where are the places outside New Delhi that recommended to be seen, peoples to be met. Two places were being discussed: Uttarakhand-in Himalayan-and Rajasthan. Desert condition in Rajasthan brings high mortality, health problem, etc. We're interested on both places, but which one that can we visit depends on the arrangements.

Friday (08/11), we stopped by at Bahri Sons Bookselers-Oh my, too many interesting books. I got so excited and confused, that I bought nothing and only made notes. Later I'll buy some. From that place, we went to Delhi Regional Meeting for WSF-India or ASF at Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF). About 87 peoples were there-not bad; almost 50% are women. Unfortunately, this forum was in Hindi. So except Rakesh, we couldn't understand what's going on. There were some English, likely they discussed about themes for ASF's seminars, workshops, or conferences. And I thought that that was the

main agenda of this meeting-later I'll send the list of conferences to INSIST; you can't find it in [www.wsfindia.org](http://www.wsfindia.org).

From GPF, we had a nice talk with Arun Kumar 'Pani Baba'-means Father of Water, he is 'the water man of India'. Pani Baba involved in ecology and water problems in India for some years. In the way to drive him to his place, he told us lot of things about life and ecology. Life is already 'well organized", examples on the way of living among birds. Human being shouldn't disturb and destroy, but learn from this life balances.

Last, Kob and I discussed about Involvement Programme of INSIST. He wanted to know more about this programme, 'cause some friends in Thailand willing to make this kind of learning process. He asked about the curriculum, the steps, etc. So I explained things to him, including INSIST's plan to make it regional in some parts of Indonesia. One thing, Involvement and INSIST's brochures are in Indonesian, guess this could be a recommendation for having English version?

That's it for now, my family. Hope you don't get bored reading Letters from India.

Take care. Keep in touch.

Warm regards,

fitria

-- Still feeling cold here

This marvelous view completed by knowing lot of great persons. Even it's difficult for me to tell it in a good story right now. Most people we met are professors. So I got the feeling that if we meet someone new, he/she must be a professor-later, Kob and I make funny of ourselves by calling each other with 'professor'. One thing that really impressed me, besides get in touch with the academicians, is knowing persons who did "the real job", they who directly involved in people movements.

**People we've met:**

Prof. L.M.S. Palini (mountain expert and environment development)  
Prof. Shekar Pathak (forest and geology expert in D.S.B. University, Naini Tal)  
Prof. Ajay S. Rawat (forest expert in D.S.B. University, Naini Tal)  
Sunderlal Bahaguna (one of the Chipko Movements Leader, writer)  
Dr. Himanshu Bourai (activist on women issue, General Secretary of People Union for Civil Liberty (PUCL), associate professor at Dept. Political Science, H.N.B. Garhwal University)  
Dr. Purohit, D.Phil. (folklore expert, Dept. English, Modern European and Other Foreign Languages, HNB Garhwal University)  
HESCO Institute (Himalayan Environment Studies and Conservation Organization)  
Dr. Yogesh Dhasmana and Dr. Haris Maikhuri (activist from Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, Gopeshwar)  
Chandra Singh Rana (mountaineer who dedicated his life for environment)  
Chandra Prasad Bhatt (Chipko Movement initiator)

And of course Rajendra Dhasmana himself, whose knowledge and involvement on Uttarakhand State development are admirable. He knows completely each mountain, river, forest, region, also the past and still going process of social-economy-politic situation-lot of key persons we met even ask him to tell things to us.

Now I'm little bit confused, how can I tell things I got from them to you? The information is too many and interesting. One thing, for information, we can say India is very dependant on its environment-which country that doesn't? - so every change on Himalayan land-such as deforestation, dam development, etc.- effects directly to whole India. Hence, lots of people movements are fighting for environment.

From Prof L.M.S. Palini, Prof. Shekar Pathak, and Prof. Ajay S. Rawat,

**No 25. 20.11.2002 FITRIA AGUSTINA**

'Letters from India' is a fortnightly brief written by Finnish exchange activists participating in the Lokayan - Kepa co-operation programme. The 'Letters' are circulated primarily among the staff of the organisations and members of the groups responsible for the joint activities, i.e. Lokayan's Global Responsibility Forum - Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam and Kepa's India Group.

Letters from India, vol 25  
November 20th, 2002  
Forests and Panchayat  
Regards to all,

I wrote this letter after our trip to Uttarakhand and feeling better not tired anymore. Yes, Kob, Anastasia, and I, facilitated by Rajendra Dhasmana traveled for two weeks (Monday till Sunday, 11-17 November) in Uttarakhand State, which is in Himalayan. The scenery is gorgeous. Great mountains, rivers flowing down, zigzag road (that sometime make me tired of the shocking), and don't forget beautiful nights with bright moon and sparkling stars (I even saw snow for the first time). Only one thing that I can't hold: the cold temperature (the height is before 10,000 feet). That's why I always cover myself with sweater and scarf. And thank God, I'm in a good shape till now-not for Kob and Anastasia, they got sick at the end. Maybe the food caused it; they're having stomach ache.



I got more comprehensive and chronological view-of course from scientists' perspective-about condition and problems of Uttarakhand's forests. British colonialized this region in 1815 and divided it to Kumaun and Garhwal (then divided Garhwal to British Garhwal State and Tehri Garhwal State). The thing that invited British to come is 'Sal tree', which use for railway material (since 1850). In 1878, British declared the Forest Act. Then in 1898 British managed Uttarakhand's forest using "scientific forest" term, which actually is the same as "commercial forest" 'cause it was used for colonial purpose. Here, there's a dualism: 1) as the consequences of people growth, farming sector was developed, of course it's "agriculture based on forest"-because the place is formed by forests, and 2) British restricted people to access forest, made the forest as protected area. This problem raised conflict between people! and government (in this case British).

Then in 1916 at Kumaun, a first forum for discussing forest problem was being held by elite and local politician. In 1920, Gandhi with non-cooperation movement against the British, inspired people to burn the forest. The reason is "If people can't access the forest, so shall British". In Naini Tal-one of Uttarakhand's cities, which is extremely beautiful because of the mountains and lake-123,000-hectare forests was burnt. It's bad to hear that, but seems that at that time this was the strategy preferred most to against colonial government.

After colonialism, even government of India didn't well-manage the forest either-a common phenomena in underdevelopment countries, after World War II. Lot of problems raised in managing things. The forest being categorized to nature reserve, wildlife sanctuary, biosphere reserve-forgive me for haven't found the significant differences among them. In biosphere reserve there are Core Zone (CZ) and Buffer Zone (BZ). CZ is forbidden for people, maybe because there are some rare species (plants and/ animals). Then people, who already built village in those areas, have to be moved to BZ. BZ is a protected area too, but people could access it. Several problems that followed: 1) people aren't allowed to put hands on wild animals, 2) but wild animals often go out from CZ to BZ, and make mess on crop, 3) Forest Department doesn't give good compensation for people's loss because of the animals, 4) then people ignore the rules and kill the animals, they don't care whether the animal is!

rare or not.

The restriction rules for accessing forests-while government explore it continuously-caused apathy among people. People's awareness was getting poor for solving forest burn, compared when British and Indian government haven't done this miss-management.

One thing that is interesting about people's representation and democracy in villages is Panchayat. Panchayat is a committee which is-ideally-chosen once in 4 years by people; with-ideally-the quota is 32% for women. People meet Panchayat for problems they can't solve among them. Panchayat is more like a "judge" for civil problems (such as cattle trespassing crops), "advocate" for citizen's right (demanding legal base for civil arrestment), and they can advocate and demand to the government for people's needs (like they ask budget for village development). There are about 500,000 villages in India. Gandhi declared that democracy should grow from the grassroots. And Panchayat is the right form for it. If Panchayat's mechanism is well done in every village, then democracy shall remain in India.

Too bad, that reality shows the opposite. From Rakesh I knew that from 28 states of India, only some villages in 2-3 states that still doing Panchayat's election continuously. The others haven't been doing this for-like-last 10 years. And Dhasmana said that nowadays most Panchayats are just for formality. The government can easily ignore them. For example, Panchayat from a village, they demand fund for development, but then government can give just 25%. Getting worse, corruption reduces the fund badly-(sigh) corruption is everywhere!

Well, I think this is enough for Uttarakhand Part 1. I start to feel exhausted. Wait for the Part 2 and my next letters.

Take care. Keep in touch.

Warm regards from me that's still freezing,  
fitria

Agustina is an Indonesian activist and journalist working for Wacana Magazine published by INSIST, an Indonesian partner organization of Kepa

## No 26. 14.12.2002 ANASTASIA LAITILA

Letters from India, vol 26  
December 14th, 2002  
Shivalik, New Delhi

Now I've almost become a regular customer in Delhi Press Club, where I hang around with Suresh Nautiyal and his friends. So many people want to talk to you because you're a foreigner, and often it's nice but I was fairly upset when I again realized that no matter what I do or am in reality, in the South I will first and foremost be a possible donor agency simply because I come from a prosperous part of the world. But I am trying very hard to understand the debates and the discourse and not to be socially illiterate. Sometimes it is very difficult, partly because of the language but also because I am still a guest and thus shouldn't have to worry about technicalities. But I feel that some of it is because of my gender, like in Finland also.

Some weeks ago I went to see the Delhi opening of a film called "My Mother India". The director was of Indian-Australian origin, and the film a documentary of both her mother and family as well as of the chaos in India during 1984 when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated. She said she wanted to let Australians know what it feels like to be a foreigner, and I think she wanted to stress that nationality is a part of your identity but the

piece of paper, your passport, is not the most important thing. However she was trying to make a political personal story where as her mother was tying her life quite well into the changes in the community around her, thus stating it is not just she but her life as part of the society. It fits well into the things I had been thinking and the discussions that take place; how being Indian or being Finnish is much more than being a citizen of a country. This can however also be a language problem, since the word for citizen in my language (kansalainen) has a slightly different connotation (than citizen). Or at least I think so.

During the movie I was thinking about the genocide in Gujarat and other places, it makes me sick. How can it be that the world cares so much about the worries of the United States but not about what happens every day in "democracies".

I'm a bit afraid I will not be able to speak any language properly when I return, I'm picking up Indian accent... but my vocabulary in Hindi is still around 30 words, so I can pick up only pieces from discussions, like I understand when somebody's talking about people and so on. But it always feels great to be able to understand even just a little.

Many of the meetings I have attended have been in Hindi, but nevertheless I felt it's somehow politically important that I attend, as to show support or something. One meeting that must have been very interesting but also very tiring was on 29th November, Uttarakhand and ecological democracy. I spoke briefly about climate change in the Central Himalayas and how the Himalayas are a global heritage all of us should cherish - us in the North by trying to halt climate change and cut our emissions and the hill people by trying to preserve a lifestyle that is non-pollutive and sustainable. But I don't know whether it was any input since I couldn't follow the debate. Sometimes I think India is the land for practicing patience, where even the simplest things are very difficult.

I also went to a school to talk about climate change with some of the students. It was a very nice experience, although I still somehow feel I am the student (despite I have given lectures in Finnish schools). The students were aged 16-18, participating actively and very much politically aware of things like US and EU policies against Third World countries and corruption of the UN system. This became a problem for me as well, since they were asking questions like, 'how to make industrialized countries to change their policies?'

'How to make the rich and the politicians change?' that I cannot possibly answer. That's why I nowadays try to stress that I am not here to even try to give answers to such big issues, merely to ask questions and hope that the people I am speaking with will be a part of trying to find the answers. It was very educating for me, but of course I have to bear in mind that this was an English-speaking private school.

One day Rakeshji was telling me about how when he was young, he and Vijay's brother used to go to the railway station to have tea and talk about everything. It reminded me very much of how me and my dear friend used to spend sunny spring afternoons (maybe cutting class or not, I don't remember) in a parking lot of one shop and discuss. Both are inspiring places in a way; you see a lot of people and life is passing and going on around you when you sit still, with all these things going on inside your head.

Instead of parking lots or railway stations I sit in the balcony now and watch the people. Yesterday I was feeding the cows - six white cows I saw coming down the road, so fetched all my carrots and extra rotis and threw them down. Good meal, I hope, with wheat and vegetables. I feel so bad for the animals here, the chickens and hens are not better off than in the animal factories in Finland. And the pigs and cows roaming around the city have their freedom, yes, but at the price of starving or eating plastic every day. So what actually is respecting the cow?

Agustina is an Indonesian activist and journalist working for Wacana Magazine published by INSIST, an Indonesian partner organization of Kepa

## **No. 27. 21.01.2003 ANASTASIA LAITILA**

SHIVALIK -- So, these might be my last words from India as my last week here begins. Sorry I wasn't able to write earlier, but I was on the road and after that ill. Now the last couple of days have been a mess trying to send Indians to Porto Alegre for the World Social Forum. Somehow, simple things become difficult here. And the difficult things? I am not very sure.

In December I had the opportunity to visit Nepal and join a three-day international consultation on water and the World Commission on Dams Report organized by WAFED, Water and Energy User's Federation, Nepal. I knew that dams are a major issue in Asia, but I had no idea how large processes have been taking place in even such mountainous areas as Nepal during the last 50 years. It was very educating for me.

The report of the World Commission of Dams has caused a lot of controversy since it was released two (I think) years ago, but this consultation aimed at moving beyond the report, finding out ways to utilize it. The report outlines 7 strategic priorities (such as gaining public approval for planned dam project), but the ways of implementing them are controversial. However it seems that the committee's work has been boundary breaking, since it included 12 people from very different backgrounds but great experience.

I'm finalizing this letter in between power cuts. It happens often, during

this winter almost frequently. Vijay's daughter noted that now the electricity is private (privatized in Delhi just 6 months back) nobody protests, but when it was government owned, everyone complained.

So I have unexpectedly returned to Delhi since I was denied visa to Bangladesh (recent developments in this region do not support the free movement of people - for example, only anti-India Pakistani activist were given visa to come to the Asian Social Forum) and am now trying to cure my cold and cough. The weather here is quite cold on Indian standards, in Bihar the other day it even went to -0,5 degrees Celcius.

In Delhi during the coldest night 200 people died and all schools were closed for some days. There are so many people without shelter or even any clothes to keep the cold out that I don't know what to do. Here I sit in my Finnish pullover, indoors, being very middle-class. (Another strange phenomenon is that by Indian standards I'm quite wealthy at the moment but when I go home, that's something else)

What has happened during the last month is as difficult to summarize, but I'll let you know some of the things. One interesting experience was my visit to Tamil Nadu, the Southern State. I went over there on behalf of Siemenpuu Foundation to meet two groups that had submitted proposals, and was genuinely very taken by both of them. The other one, PAD (People's Action for Development), has a field office situated in a fisher village by the name of Vembar, facing the Gulf of Mannar.

It was the first time I saw the Indian Ocean. The other was ODAM (Organization for Development and Maintenance), whose main office is in Tiruchuli, some 50 kilometres or so from Vembar. Both of these groups impressed me with their overwhelming hospitality (though they claimed it was inconvenient and minimum facilities, little did they know where all I've slept), warmth and anxiousness to communicate even when there was a language barrier.

Another thing that never ceases to impress me since I come from a country where people don't speak to each other (note that I love and miss my country very much), is the fact that since face-to-face discussion is the only way to communicate and campaign properly in rural areas, these people travel often extensive distances and sit down with the people.

And then there was me as an exotic oddity, all the children wanting to touch me because I am so white and so different. But they were very excited

and happy, so for the very short period I spent there I managed not to feel like Queen Victoria in her queendom. But I had some great discussions in both groups. With Rajendra Prasad from PAD we noticed we shared many campaign ideas, such as supporting local production.

In ODAM what really impressed me was the never-ending strength, courage and resourcefulness of these women self-help groups. Some of them were saying how I must have courage to travel such a long way as a single woman, where as most of them couldn't leave their street without a man before they joined the group. I have grown up thinking I should be able to do EVERYTHING myself, be totally independent if need be. And all the generations coming after me, will they know about all the rights they DON'T have to fight for?

I realized as well how coming here, or anywhere where visible poverty exists, makes a person want to stay here and work here, and I had to question myself again, why is it that I have not made development work my priority. But the answer is quite simple: the existing problems are partly because of Western policies and our failure to do our work at home. For national problems, it is mainly up to the local people to address that, foreign interventions can take a very very wrong course, like in Afghanistan or what seems to be happening with Iraq.

Sometimes we underestimate people's capacity to do things themselves, but more often we seem to think that the only (or the best?) way to contribute is by doing something that is visible, so we get the assurance our work has some effect and meaning. Somehow this reminds me of the globalisation debate, where on the other hand we have this abstract, natural force-like, inevitable globalisation process and on the other there's the grass-root propaganda but. What's missing most of the time are the governments/states, that still are the actors in international policy and trade.

Another event from these past days is more or less the reason of my stay in India - the Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh - but for some reason I find it the most difficult to put into words. Maybe it's partly because of the extensive discussion that is taking place afterwards on whether it was magnificent or exclusive.

What definitely was good about it was that in some form or another, it brought together different segments of Indian people's movements, civil

society organizations and others, and has stimulated a lot of discussion and many people are on board for the big test, possible World Social Forum in India. But mobilization in other Asian countries was not done properly, and Fitria indeed renamed the even Indian Social Forum.

In addition the visa problems were there, and many groups and people from South Asia were not represented for this reason also. One of my tasks was to help organizing a workshop on corporatisation and privatization of water. Attendance was good, but I had hoped we'd be able to discuss about strategies on what to do about the ongoing GATS (WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services) negotiations, which include water collection, distribution, purification, wastewater service etc. as "environmental services".

Like other happenings of the sort, the ASF was like a big activist camp in a slight chaos, but to tell you the truth I was expecting much more chaos, with 10 000 people (give or take, this is an average based on hearsay), 300 workshops and god knows how many conferences and seminars. Plus of course the unscheduled events. But as social forums are striving for providing an open space, I think this was definitely there. For me at least. And it offered an interesting insight to the Indian movements.

What really impressed me was the youth camp. I was speaking in the closing plenary, and the level of speakers was really high, I felt quite shy to speak last. But it was also the first time I came across sexuality rights movements (gay and lesbian but also others) in India, and was really taken by their abilities.

As it is my last week in India, I feel a bit puzzled on what to say and do (latter mostly due to my prolonged illness). Somehow I just want to go home and adjust in peace for a couple of days. But one never knows what will happen next in this country.

**PART III**  
**SELF-APPRAISAL**

## INTRODUCTION

The Indian network organisation Lokayan, the Indian research institution CSDS (the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies), and the Finnish umbrella organisation of NGDO's, Kepa (Service Centre for Development Cooperation) have been involved in various forms of exchange since 1989.<sup>1</sup> The first three-year cooperation agreement between them was signed in September 1998, and the activities of this agreement period will be carried out until the end of the year 2001. Currently the partners are formulating a new three-year agreement for the period of 2002 - 2004. The partners are presented in appendix 1, the agreements in appendix 2.

The Lokayan/CSDS - Kepa cooperation is analytical, experimental and politically ambitious. The overriding ambition is to contribute to the democratisation of North-South relations at all levels of society. The partners seek to realise this ambition through a critical analysis of the conceptual framework, political structures and concrete practices which define present relations between the South and the North, and through invention of practical experiments with new methodologies and tools for their democratisation.

Although this first phase of the Lokayan/CSDS - Kepa cooperation has a clear time frame it should also be seen as part of an open-ended process searching for alternative forms of North-South cooperation based on solidarity and equality. The prospect of widening the present cooperation

beyond the original partner organisations and their constituencies has been an important part of the internal discussions of the CSDS/Lokayan Kepa partnership. In this connection the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (V.K.) was introduced by the Indian partners as a means to explain, to potential new cooperation partners, what we stand for and seek to learn and achieve together. This sanskrit concept means the Earth is a Family. In our context the concept serves to highlight our shared trust that the same values of sharing and solidarity can guide action from the family level to the global level. In order for this to happen, action needs to be guided by a rich conception of democracy. Our joint ambition is to create a forum for global responsibility that focuses on five dimensions of democracy: political power, economic power, ecological decision making, cultural expression and social democracy. The aim of the forum is to create a global coalition for radical democracy building on the idea that a strengthening of local democracy and local decision making authority is essential to the democratisation of national, regional and global polities.

The dialogic method used to produce the present self appraisal report reflects the centrality of democratic ideals in this cooperation (see chapter 9 for a fuller description of this method). The report has been produced collectively by the key actors of this cooperation in both India and Finland for seven months, from April to November 2001. The partners have experienced this collective assessment effort as a very positive and constructive process. It has deepened their own understanding of this programme, and of many larger issues and concerns in communication and cooperation between the North and the South. Therefore, it has given useful tools for the planning of the Kepa CSDS/Lokayan cooperation, but also for other activities. It is difficult to say how different the results would have been if a consultant had carried out this effort, but most probably the collective learning process would have been weaker.

The political nature of the Lokayan/CSDS ? Kepa cooperation makes it difficult and challenging to evaluate its outcomes. The results will largely be seen only during the years to come. Nevertheless, the aim of this report is to analyse the outcomes of the Lokayan/CSDS ? Kepa cooperation as transparently, exactly, deeply and widely as possible.

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<sup>1</sup>About the concepts: the names of partner organisations refer in this report both to their permanent staff and board members. Their constituencies/communities refer to their member organisations and to other actors with whom the partner organisations constantly communicate with.

The political nature of the Lokayan/CSDS - Kepa cooperation makes it difficult and challenging to evaluate its outcomes. The results will largely be seen only during the years to come. Nevertheless, the aim of this report is to analyse the outcomes of the Lokayan/CSDS - Kepa cooperation as transparently, exactly, deeply and widely as possible.

This report is divided into three parts. The frames of cooperation are explained in the first part. It is followed by a presentation and analyses of the activities carried out during the first three years, and the last part deals with conclusions. Detailed information on administrative matters are presented in appendix 5. Unpublished documents mentioned in the text, but not included in the appendices, are available in Kepa.

## **I. FRAMES OF COOPERATION**

### **1. Origin and objectives**

Kepa and Lokayan/CSDS have been involved in a continuous exchange of ideas, sharing of political prospects and analysis since 1989. The exchange has been informal, but has nevertheless provided crucial, although mostly intangible, input into many social initiatives and political campaigns as well as to a large number of articles and books published in Finland and India over the past decade. A deep sense of solidarity and political fellowship has also emerged at the individual level between many activists belonging to the Kepa and Lokayan/CSDS communities.

When the informal cooperation started the political environment in both India and Finland was affected by many important changes. At a world wide level the end of the cold war, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent crisis of the left were important new developments affecting all political efforts. In India, the last hope of maintaining the socialist project vanished with the rise of BJP (Baharatiya Janata Party) to power and the politics it represented. In Finland, the Nordic welfare state model of society and the commitment to neutrality and global solidarity in Finnish foreign policy came under pressure due to the increased hegemony in Western Europe of neoliberal politics.



Another crucial background to the partnership between CSDS/Lokayan and Kepa is the fact that it emerged at a time when the ideas and practices of solidarity were in a state of crisis. During the past decades the main paradigm of morally motivated cooperation between the civil societies of the North and the South was development cooperation. This typically involved technical assistance provided by Northern to Southern agents and a transfer of Northern resources, financial and others, to projects and programme work in the South. The development cooperation model of solidarity has since its inception been subject to articulate intellectual and political criticism in South Asia, and also e.g. in Southeast Asia and Latin America. This critique was, however, for long, not very well known in Europe, including Finland. During the 1990s it became evident to many activists in the North, including Finland, that development cooperation is not a sufficient and not always a beneficial response to the gross inequities in the relations between North and South. Economic policies, foreign and security policies and globalisation policies are often more important than development cooperation in shaping North South relations. All these areas therefore require increased attention when NGOs and people's movements from the South and the North work together.

Moreover, in the late 1990's there was a general crisis of democracy in South Asia and Europe because the effects of economic globalisation, an increased growth in radical right wing groups and the continued crisis of the left had led to a marginalisation of social movements. Another visible trend at this time was the extreme fragmentation and individualistic culture in activist circles, coupled with a lack of efforts towards coherence building. The whole global scene of activism had changed radically. There was intellectual turmoil in India with the old new social movements changing. The peace movement was changing and issues such as ecology were seen through a cost benefit lense rather than as a human rights issue.

The fact that the global political scene has undergone dramatic changes was the main reason for the common urge to seek new forms of partnership among those involved in the Lokayan / CSDS Kepa cooperation.

The CSDS/Lokayan Kepa partnership is based on the view that there is an urgent need to work out new concepts, visions and practices of solidarity, which are adequate to the changing international context and which build meaningfully and creatively on the mixed experience of the development cooperation model. Moreover, the partners have agreed that the key deficit in international relations is the lack of democracy. They have therefore decided to work together on the assumption that a democratisation of the relations between the South and the North at all levels of society is a key to real mutuality, justice and solidarity.

Indian and Finnish activists wanted to understand the emerging new political situation with its new threats and possibilities by looking at it from two different watch towers; one in Europe and the other in South Asia. They also came to the view that the informal relationship leads to a lack of institutional learning and individualises the exchange. Hence, a sense that there will be no social and political benefits urged to establish a formal partnership. At the same time objective developments have made it imperative for Kepa and CSDS/Lokayan to seek new kinds of partnerships with Southern and Northern partners respectively.

During the renewal process of the Kepa's internal structure in 1996 97 it was decided that Kepa should have more contacts with peoples movements. A more policy based approach was adopted. Previously Kepa had concentrated almost entirely on sending volunteers to three Southern countries, i.e. to Zambia, Nicaragua and Mozambique. Kepa now established new contacts with popular movements in Brazil, Indonesia and Thailand. Lokayan/CSDS was at this point in time looking for new opportunities and possibilities to cooperate using a soft approach, which was not a usual advocacy initiative, but building on public dialogues and in-depth exchanges as tools for mutuality. Indian activists had high regard for Nordic activists and have a firm belief in the possibility of creating a base for global democracy. Getting into partnership was seen as an opportunity to deal with globalisation.

D.L. Sheth, director for the cooperation with Kepa in CSDS, explained the above-mentioned situation from the Indian perspective in the Delhi evaluation meeting, April 2001, as follows:

“It was at a particular juncture in 1997, which was quite different from 1980 when Lokayan was established, that I saw this relationship as becoming mutually edifying for all involved: Lokayan, CSDS and I believed also Kepa. By the beginning of 1997 the whole global scene of social movement activism according to us had radically changed. We were at a loss and were looking for a better global opportunity by 1997 to counter hegemonic forces of globalisation whose impact had begun acutely to be felt. The cold war had ended for long. Soviet Russia had not only collapsed but dispersed. It descended as a new triumphant paradigm. People declared that the age of ideology had ended. People declared that history had ended! We were all intellectually in turmoil. The social movements had changed their gears because the cold war had ended, a nuclear threat had ended. In their view the third world had also changed. The social movements in the West were now not terribly concerned about the third world, because in a way the cold war logic had dictated a certain direction to these movements.

All this we were trying to assess and understand in Lokayan, in CSDS and in our own different ways that how to re-relate with the changing world and with our old compatriots in the West. Earlier it was very easy. Alternative development or development cooperation were fairly developed concepts. Development cooperation we always saw as a kind of political relationship, where you received experts, you received money, you received ideas and implemented them for the benefit of the poor of the poorer countries. A sort of mutually exploitative relationship, this was already there but that has also changed. In this process ecology was also getting redefined. It began to be seen more as a ‘factor’ to be balanced than as a way of life. So many things had changed. We came under certain kind of stress. So our primary goal was to associate with some larger movement or to do something to counter the political discourse of hegemonic globalization in our country as well as globally. That was our primary motive, our primary interest while trying to explore possibilities in this partnership; that is why we liked the whole idea of publication, books, exchanges. So it was a softer aspect of programme. It was not like the earlier development cooperation programme that one was getting into. Neither was it like a clear advocacy programme

which is now happening today, where you have got a particular brief – your own, somebody’s or a joint one – for which you get money and you go out and say that let all of us go for a certain one-point programme. It was not like that. It was much settled, but softer kind of a thing where we thought that getting into association with people whom we knew already, we will be able to do something for making the emerging global scene somewhat just and equitable through influencing the terms of global political discourse.

Lokayan was also facing a similar situation, as an organization and a movement. Lokayan was in tremendous pressure to redefine itself as a single issue organisation or becoming a typical NGO. Because by mid 90s most organisations who easily receive foreign funding to which Vijay has already referred, had become specialized NGOs: a women group or ecological or human rights group. I am not undermining their importance. But Lokayan always had a self image of a group which differentiated itself as a support organization for grass-roots movements articulating the so called ‘local’ issues nationally and globally. It always saw itself as a social activists cooperative, engaged in changing political discourse not just on specific issues but in a more generic way. Because of the kind of financial and other pressures it experienced it would have made sense to many, if Lokayan had re-incarnated itself as a single issue group, say a human rights group or in the form of a Jan Parivahan (Public Transport) Panchayat. This has been resisted. So this initiative came at a right time where we could think of continuing Lokayan in one way or other as a loose structure, a generic organisation differentiating itself, at the same time giving rise to more specialized movement-type organizations. So that was the second important consideration.

Third important one was what I would call a certain doubt. A doubt about foreign funding. We thought an arrangement between CSDS-Lokayan, where CSDS received legally and with a moral conviction, foreign funding and carried out activities of interest to Lokayan, it would in the long run help Lokayan to overcome what it experiences as a financial and moral predicament today. In the short run, it will keep Lokayan activists politically engaged in this crucial transitional phase. Moral consideration is very important. I feel it a moral act if I get my share of responsibility and benefit from the

global commons whether they are located in Finland or anywhere else. But that's a secondary point. The important point is that we had known people and activists in the Nordic countries and we have very high regard inspiring a sense of possibility that by getting into a partnership we may recover and redefine globally some idea of social democracy that may be relevant for the globalizing world. We are still away from this goal but the hope is still alive. So that was another motivation. These were the kind of motivations and expectations which enthused me, and I am sure my colleagues, to get into this interactive process with our Finnish friends. Primarily we saw it as an opportunity to change the political discourse in a heavily loaded situation of hegemonic globalisation, which we still believe is a threat to democracy."

It was against this backdrop, then, that Kefa and its cooperation partners in India decided to engage in a cooperative search for new modes of interaction between civic actors in their respective countries and regions. The following aims have been listed, on different occasions, to concretise the main objective of the programme, i.e. the democratisation of South-North relations:

1. To generally support the activists' personal political development, and through them also strengthen the political movements of the partner countries.
2. To deepen activists' and other people's (trade unionists, politicians, civil servants, students, workers, teachers, etc.) understanding of their position in their own society and in the present global situation, and also enhance these through an understanding of the reality of a country in the South (India) and in the North (Finland).
3. To strengthen the base of the international solidarity movement and to broaden its understanding of the North-South relations,
4. To increase democratic communication between Northern and Southern civil societies, as well as in the North and in the South,
5. To create and respect democratic practices in the carrying out this cooperation,
6. To develop a method of cooperation that can be of use also in other cooperation agreements between Northern and Southern partners.

## 2. Methods

During the past five hundreds years the exchange between the modern West, here referred to as "the North" and other cultural spheres, here referred to as the "South" has been deeply shaped by the predominantly exploitative and violent practices of colonialism and imperialism. It is a compelling, but not an easy task to work out methodologies of exchange which will be deeply post-colonial. Present practices of economic and political integration as in the WTO or the World Bank, and of scientific, technological and cultural cooperation often fail to free themselves from colonial structures of dominance. Even the best practices of political solidarity, as in development aid and cooperation, or in political solidarity work within the communist and socialist internationals or the efforts of agricultural producers or popular movements such as the women's and the environment movement, have often been dismantled as repeating errors of the colonial structures they have set out to correct. Any effort to rebuild the North-South exchange on terms of solidarity and justice must therefore take the question of methodology seriously.

The Kefa - CSDS/Lokayan partnership has been built on a number of methodological assumptions. These assumptions relate to various levels of generality and their articulation has been subject to change as the programme has evolved and learning taken place. Some of them can presently be defined as follows:

(1) It is imperative for idealistic actors to study carefully and jointly the problems and possible shortcomings of those tools for solidarity which they have themselves been involved in, or closely affected by in the recent past.

(2) Relations between cultures are multifaceted. The most widely debated and most well-known forms of inter-cultural exchange need not be the most formative ones. In their shadow there may exist a wealth of positive experience of mutual respect, sharing and democracy in North-South - relations. These experiences, which can also have a very long history, need to be closely studied and understood.

(3) Despite the urgent need for action it needs to be acknowledged that the task of developing new tools for democracy and mutuality may be time-consuming.

(4) Any real democracy requires that partners of cooperation have an in-depth understanding of each other: in particular of the motivational forces which bring us together from our diverse backgrounds; of the political, economic and cultural resources and constraints which affect the cooperation.

(5) North-South cooperation has often been based on the idea that exchange between cultures has the form of a rather mechanic transfer of resources, knowledge or know-how. The methodological implication has been that North-South relations have often been undertaken as an exercise where short-term effects are sought through short-term efforts. (You teach me how to build big dams, I teach you how to dance salsa or construct computer programmes, I give you money, you give me your political support for this or that cause, etc.) The present programme departs from this idea. It takes it as an important fact of life that what people learn from the encounter with other cultures mostly has its deepest and most lasting effects and most profound significance through the life and work which people lead in their home culture.

The insight is not new, but it is still one of the most important and methodologically radical features of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme that makes it central to its daily practices. The concrete work done, to be explained shortly, has not been designed to bring development or other short-term effects. In fact, a focus on short-term achievements has been seen as a risk, rather than a possibility for the programme. Instead, the leading methodological assumption has been that an in-depth sharing of political experience and analysis, of daily work, of grief and celebration will give those involved in the programme, whether intensely or more at the fringes, insights and experiences which will give solidarity depth and serve as basis for a partnership in which democracy is not an empty shell but a substantive practice.

(6) The programme distances itself from atomistic notions of society and individuality. It has therefore been seen as essential to engage, in the programme, persons with a deep and tested commitment to collective action, especially in people's movements.

(7) The programme is also based on a respect for the various forms that best analysis and knowledge takes. Therefore it has been clear in the daily work of the programme that activists may have as much to contribute to political analysis and creativity as have established knowledge-professionals.

(8) The partnership has evolved around the notion that dialogue on social and political matters of crucial, joint interest is a key method to the creation of democratic relations between the organisations involved and their respective constituencies. A democratic partnership between CSDS/Lokayan and Kepa themselves has been considered necessary for their constructive, joint contribution to North South democracy. Complete equality of the partners in planning, decision-making and implementing has therefore been sought, although the Northern partner provides the funds for the programme. Within Kepa, the cooperation with CSDS/Lokayan has been carried by a part-time desk-officer in cooperation with an active group of committed volunteers. The large role played by volunteers has been seen as a way to strengthen Kepa's role as a popular movement at a time when Kepa, because of its heavy dependence on state-funding, runs a certain risk of bureaucratisation at the expense of broad-based participation.

There have been four main components, or methods, of concrete work done. These are (i) an activist exchange programme (ii) seminars or dialogues (iii) documentation and analysis and (iv) networking. The quality of each component has been informed by the aforementioned methodological assumptions. All working methods have also, de facto, in real day-to-day practice, been closely integrated. Therefore, the programme, as envisaged so far, could not be carried out properly without having all the four components. Nevertheless, an effort will be made here to characterise each component briefly.

Through the *activist exchange programme* activists from Kepa's constituency go to India and activists from the Lokayan-CSDS constituency come to Finland. As short-term observers (from two weeks to four months) they take part in the activities of the partner organisation. The activist exchange is one of the first models known to Kepa and Lokayan/CSDS where there is complete parity in the physical travelling (total length of the Southern and Northern partners' visits in the partner's country is equal) and general reciprocity in the entire programme.

This exchange involves experienced social and political activists in a search of a mutual understanding of each others social situation and the movements

working to change them. It involves the sharing of views on political analysis and priorities, moral ideals and deep-rooted cultural aspirations. The exchange is done in the expectation that the enhanced understanding, emerging in the course of the exchange, may provide a ground for innovation and strengthened cooperation between the people involved and their movements. The aim of the activist exchange is to bring back, to the home country, impressions, insights, experiences and analytical skills for the benefit of the relevant political efforts at home and internationally. It aims at supporting both the spiritual growth of activists, as citizens, and the strengthening of the relevant political processes in their home countries. The exchange programme forms a crucial part of a wider political programme of solidarity which aims to equalise North-South relations also in political and development oriented activism.

The Lokayan/CSDS cooperation process seeks to act as a countervailing force to the fragmentation and individualisation of the activist scene in the world. Therefore, one idea behind the activist exchange component of the cooperation is to create connections between the activists in India and Finland that have a common ideological perspective that can form a base for building a wider network of activist contacts nationally and regionally (South Asia and Europe). It has also been important to involve activists in India who would not otherwise have the opportunity to visit Finland due to economic constraints and the lack of connections with international groups that would give them access to travel to international conferences and meetings.

**Seminars** held mainly in Finland and India are forums to analyse key points of common interest among the partner organisations and their constituencies but also with the representatives from other civil society organisations, civil servants, politicians and other people interested in and/or relevant to democratising North-South relations. The aim is to organise open dialogues among different kinds of civil society groups on common concerns in order to create mutual understanding and tentative bases for future activities. The aim is to strengthen civil society capacities by uniting actors and forces, and, thus, breaking down possible disagreements among the civil society actors. Therefore, the process of verbal communication itself

is relevant and important, and not only the documentation of these experiences.

**Documentation and analyses** of the activities are crucial in sharing the processes of the partnership for a wider audience in Finland, India and elsewhere. The aim is that proper documentation and analyses are an integral part of all the activities from the outset. The experiences are presented and analysed in newsletters, reports, visual materials and books. A further aim has been to offer materials for public media in the partners' societies.

Through **networking** in their respective countries, and internationally, the partner organisations search together for new relevant partners and share experiences of the Lokayan/CSDS-Kepa partnership.

### **3. Funding, administration and decision-making**

The programme is financed entirely by the Finnish counterpart Kepa, which in turn gets almost all of its funds from the Finnish state through the Foreign Ministry. Hence Kepa has formal control over all programme expenses and a reporting responsibility towards the Finnish state. Kepa's reporting duty extends to the Indian counterparts in so far as they take on the realisation of certain parts of the programme on the basis of cooperation agreements with Kepa. Due to the trepidation Lokayan felt about the effects of foreign funding on creating truly equitable relations between Northern and Southern partners, a channel of funding was created through CSDS who became the formal fund receiving organisation. The programme is run by Kepa and CSDS/Lokayan jointly through complex procedures of consultation carried out in close conjunction with the programme activities. The decision-making structure involves the following features.

The Foreign Ministry finances Kepa on the basis of a programme agreement which is worked out in consultation with Kepa. The agreement between the Ministry and Kepa provides the framework for Kepa's own budget- and activity plan. Kepa's annual meetings, in which all Kepa member NGOs are invited to be represented, decide about Kepa's annual budget and activities within that framework. The preparatory work for Kepa's annual general meetings and the implementation of its decisions is the task of Kepa's

board and staff. Kepa's board can delegate programme implementation responsibility to working groups consisting of volunteers, which will mostly be individuals active in any of Kepa's member organisations. Mostly, however, Kepa's programmes are run by Kepa's professional staff. There are some specific working groups nominated by the Kepa-board, as the India/South Asia Group (ISAG). They are central in carrying out the activities and making proposals for the Kepa board but they do not have any budgets of their own, beyond the responsible desk officer in Kepa in charge for this activity.

According to the agreements Kepa has made with Lokayan and CSDS, the latter is in charge of certain tasks of editing, publishing, organising dialogues and taking care of related administrative costs, within the framework of the larger cooperation agreement. Funds for the realisation of this part of the programme are transferred from Kepa to CSDS, which decides about the use of these funds and reports back to Kepa in accordance with the agreement. As to all other aspects, the decision-making power concerning programme implementation rests with Kepa's responsible officer (who in turn is responsible to her/his superiors), within the formally accepted action plan. The same officer, together with the management group of Kepa's staff is also formally responsible for making propositions to Kepa's board concerning annual and longer-term budgeting and activity plans, as well as for reporting on activities undertaken and funds spent. In this work, the head of the field unit is supported by Kepa's Asia desk officer.<sup>1</sup>

The decisions about programme implementation and allocation of funds within the framework set by Kepa's annual meeting should generally be taken in meetings in which members of Lokayan/CSDS and Kepa (office and ISAG) are both present. When this is not possible Lokayan/CSDS and Kepa each has discrete decision-making authority, to which, however, there is a mutual veto-right. If a decision made by the counterpart is vetoed new decisions are taken after mutual consultation.

In practice, CSDS/Lokayan in cooperation with Kepa's ISAG and Asia desk-officer is in charge of most tasks defined above. Lokayan and CSDS, the members of ISAG and Kepa staff are engaged in a complex process of ongoing discussion and consultation. This discussion is the locus of actual

will-formation and therefore the real source from which the cooperation gets its life. In Kepa's context this cooperation is of a special nature because it is carried out by volunteers together with the Kepa staff.

In India the boards of Lokayan and CSDS are the main bodies of decision-making concerning the cooperation with Kepa. Most parts of the activities are carried out by the CSDS, and especially through its Lokniti programme, i.e. the Institute for Comparative Democracy. As was noted above, CSDS coordinates the economical resources received from Kepa, and is responsible for organising the seminars or dialogues, carry out the documenting activities and to report to Kepa. Lokayan's role is mainly to take part in the planning and carrying out in India the exchange activities, and also to cooperate with the CSDS in organising seminars and discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> Kepa's new administrative structure will be initiated in August 2001. Here is taken into account only the earlier one, as the report mainly covers the activities carried out before that date.

## II EXPERIENCES OF THE PROGRAMME IN THE FIRST THREE-YEAR PERIOD (1998-2001)

### 4. Activist exchange

#### 4.1. General notions

The activist exchange programme has been the most difficult component of the Lokayan/CSDS-Kepa cooperation. It has been the main “channel” for making the partners’ constituencies work closely together on an everyday basis. The three-year experience has taught us how demanding it is to create a proper programme for a foreign partner visiting your country for several weeks or months. The exchange has demanded us to be earnestly involved in this cooperation process and obviously this mutual earnestness has also extended into other components of the cooperation. However, besides the wide diversity of mainly practical problems, the exchange programme has mainly had promising outcomes.

#### 4.2. Analyses of experiences

##### 4.2.1. The background and selection of the activists

The selection process and criteria of activists caused lot of discussion in the ISAG. The Indian partners have made it very clear from the very beginning that they wish that activists going from Finland to India/South Asia should

be seniors in their fields. However, some younger and less experienced persons were selected, for two reasons. First, there were not many senior activists among the applicants. Second, the exchange programme was also seen, from the Finnish side, as a good learning opportunity for younger activists. This calling for activists was realised just before (announcements in Kepa's magazine and newsletters) the agreement was formally signed in 1998, in order to make it possible to carry out the selection process together with the Indian partners. Vijay Pratap and Smitu Kothari from Lokayan, and D.L. Sheth from CSDS were visiting Finland because of the IGGRI (International Group for Grass Roots Initiatives) conference. An open application procedure was decided to be used in Finland to maintain the principle of democracy, to open up the process beyond the core of the ISAG and to gauge the interest available in the exchange.

There was a total of 10 applicants of whom five were selected. The applicants all had a background in international or development issues and almost all of them (eight out of 10) were active in Finnish citizens organisations (the Nature League, International Work Camps, the Swallows, Tinku). They ranged in age from 20-46 and the gender division was six women and four men. Finally, three of these five (Piia Saari, Marko Ulvila and Oras Tynkkynen) participated, as two of them (Tiina Saaresranta and Hanna Laitinen) had to cancel their participation due to other commitments. The selection process has been criticised by some Finnish activists who have felt that it lacks openness, i.e. that it is not advertised widely enough and that the selection should be based on matching up candidates with specific tasks. The remaining three activists (Ola Poikola, Susanne dahl and Anastasia Laitila) were selected on invitation basis.

In the Indian context it was not reasonable to organise an open call for activists. Firstly, it would most probably result in an unlimited number of applications, complicating the task of processing. Secondly, in the Lokayan/CSDS networks there are plenty of activists to nominate for the exchange programme. Thus, in India the activists have been invited to participate in the programme. The selection process has been carried out collectively among organisations linked to the Indian partner through a process of informal group consultation, mutual trust and a certain degree of autonomy. Complex criteria are used in selecting the Indian activists, consisting of a positive discrimination for activists of an economically modest background, gender

bias, smaller country bias (Nepal) and caste consideration. Names of people directly associated with Lokayan are not proposed, nor is precedence given to those in leading positions.

The exchange activists from India (Nepal) have been:

1. Mr Atal Behari Sharma (3,5 months / 1999 / economical globalisation)
2. Mr Amar Singh (1,5 months / 1999 / dalit rights, rights of maintenance workers)
3. Ms Rita Nahata (1,5 months / 1999 / gender, transport policies, party politics / political system)
4. Ms Usha Tiwari (from Nepal /1,5 months in 2000 / topics: visual documenting (photography), forestry, trafficking in women, social marginalisation)
5. Mr Rajendra Ravi (1,5 months / 2000 / transport policies, civil society groups, hawking and vending, social marginalisation)
6. Mr Ashok Rao (3 weeks / 2001 / globalisation, privatisation, trade unions, energy)

The visitors (mainly funded from other sources) from India have been:

1. Ms Vasanti Raman (2 x 2 weeks / 1998-99 / child labour)
2. Mr D.L. Sheth (2 weeks / 1999 / globalisation, democratisation, civil society)
3. Ms Deepa Sharma (3 weeks / 2000 / Indigenous rights, arts, handicrafts)
4. Ms Ritu Priya (3 weeks / 2001 / public health issues, health services and globalisation)
5. Ms Nina Rao (3 weeks / 2001 /ecological tourism, Indigenous rights).

In addition to the above individuals, Also Vijay Pratap, the convenor of the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam - Lokayan and the convenor of the Kepa cooperation of the Lokniti project in CSDS, has visited Finland on four occasions during the period of formal cooperation. However, his visits to Europe have mainly been funded and organised by other institutions, as the Right Livelihood Foundation and the NIGD/the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Earlier Imtiaz Ahmad, chairman of Lokayan's governing board, had come to prepare the cooperation, and Suresh Sharma from CSDS and Lokayan joined the programme in many occasions.

The exchange activists from Finland have been:

1. Ms Pii Saari (3 months / 1999-2000 / fair trade, sustainable production)
2. Mr Marko Ulvila (3,5 months / 1999-2000 / globalisation, democracy,

civil society organisation, environmental issues, helping in South-South networking, establishing the practices and conventions for the exchange programme)

3. Mr Oras Tynkkynen (3 months / 2000 / climate change, globalisation)
4. Mr Ola Poikela (1,5 month / 2001 / rickshaws, traffic policies)
5. Ms Susanna dahl (2,5 / 2001 / rickshaws, traffic policies, health policy)
6. Mr Risto Isomäki (1 month / 2001 / partially funded by the programme/ privatisation, energy technology, globalisation, five dimensions of democracy, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam networking)
7. Ms Anastasia Laitila (3 weeks / 2001 / WTO, economical democracy, Afganistan war)

Besides, members of the ISAG have visited Lokayan with other resources, these include Thomas Wallgren, Jarna Pasanen and Hannu Virtanen. Also Kepa's responsible officers have visited India, Päivi Ahonen three times (1998, 2001), Aija Taskinen and Sirpa Mallea in Autumn 2000. ISAG member Outi Hakkarainen visited India in 2001 for the planning of the second three-year agreement.

#### 4.2.2. Remuneration

There was a long discussion in the ISAG also on the compensation policy of the Finnish exchange activists. Opinions on the appropriate salary level varied from the Finnish to the India standards. An Indian standard salary would mean complete parity in the cooperation process between Northern and Southern partners. The arguments for a higher remuneration were mainly based on two aspects. First, the Finnish activists have regular expenses to cover in Finland while they are in India (study loans, rents etc.). Second, they do not have social networks helping them in India in their everyday life routines and in sharing the costs. The compromise reached was that Kepa will offer Finnish activists a monthly salary of 6 000 FM which is clearly more than the Indian standard but still significantly less than the Finnish average (for activists with children separate additional allowances would be negotiated). The salary includes social costs, i.e. pension fees, that are the responsibility of the employer to pay. Besides, the activists will have free housing, and travelling costs, including daily allowances for travelling days (First 25 USD per day, later on 16 USD).



For the Indian activists in Finland a daily allowance, free housing, reimbursement for local travel both within Helsinki and in Finland, and the use of cell phones for local calls would be provided during the exchange period. Due to taxation regulations it is complicated and very expensive for the employer in Finland (in this case Kepa) to pay salaries to non-nationals. Therefore, the ISAG decided that the most cost-efficient way to pay remuneration to Indian activists in Finland was to pay the maximum amount of DA that can be paid locally which does not require the employer to pay taxes. This sum is at present 157 FIM. Kepa also wants to stick to the principle of paying all its foreign visitors the same amount when they are in Finland.

All the Finnish activists felt that the remuneration provided was sufficient especially since the exchange periods were short and, thus, did not affect long-term financial commitments in Finland. Two of the activists felt the salary was too high. One of them found it embarrassing to explain to Indians what the salary was and why it was so high. This activist feels that the issue of remuneration should be set according to the individual needs of each person attending the exchange programme. Another Finnish activist felt that DA provided for travel in India for Finnish activists was unnecessary because the remuneration was more than sufficient to cover costs incurred during travel. An exchangee who felt that the remuneration was sufficient said this was related to staying as a paying guest with the local exchange programme coordinator:

"..the disparity between remuneration level versus price levels for Indian activists in Finland is not the same as for Finnish activists in India. It is also a matter of spending culture. In Finland more of social life is spent outside the home with visits to bars and restaurants compared to India where Finnish activists are often invited to share meals with Indian families."

#### 4.2.3. Training of the activists

Even if some training was arranged for both Finnish and Indian activists some of them have felt it was not enough. They think there should be proper training before the activist leaves from home, because that helps a lot in the work abroad, that information, listening to others' experiences and clear plans make things much easier in a foreign country. The Indian activists would have wanted a clearer idea of what types of individuals and organisations they

could meet in Finland and, thus, plan their programme in more detail before departure. An Indian activist commented the following on the exchange period:

"When I finally arrived at the airport, I realised there was a lot of practical advice that I had not received that could have helped me cope with meeting a different culture and society. In the beginning I did feel awkward, but this unease did not last long."

#### 4.2.4. Working theme

The dilemma of a specific working theme has been a complicated question. Should a specific theme be defined for the exchange activists or should they just go with an open mind to observe and participate in the activities of the partner organisations and their constituencies?

For two reasons it was decided in Finland it would be reasonable to list some tentative themes to be presented in the announcement about the exchange programme. Firstly, to be able to take into account the specific substantial needs and hopes of the Indian partners in selecting the activists. Secondly, to avoid making the new programme seem too vague among the possible candidates interested in applying for an "exchange post". Four themes were formulated in dialogue with the Indian partners, (i) the dialogue method and the opening of markets, (ii) the dialogue method and the urban poor, (iii) public health issues in South Asia, and (iv) the impact of foreign funding in South Asia.

Many applicants asked about the status of the topics and were willing to redefine them or to work on another one. However, it was obvious that the interested activists found it more convenient to have a collectively accepted theme to work on before departure rather than just to go to "hang around" in India. Additionally, there is also the issue of the shifting nature of what you actually do during the exchange period. You may set out with initial plans, but these may change according to the needs and the opportunities that arise.

The Indian partners have brought up that it would be good for the Finnish activists just to come there and go into Indian activist life without having any predetermined specific tasks to be fulfilled, in order to be as sensitive as possible in experiencing the nature of the society that the Indian partners are acting in and how they construct their methods to act. The Indian partners felt that Finnish activists may find it uncomfortable being involved

in unstructured talking followed by writing and sharing. They feel it has been difficult to communicate this cultural code to Finnish friends.

One of the Finnish activists to attend the exchange said:

"It would have been helpful if I had prepared a work plan draft already in Finland together with someone from Kepa and got the opinions on that from Lokayan in advance. I could have collected information, formulated the questions and topics I want to look at and prepare a preliminary time table. Now, as I arrived in Delhi I started from zero. It took a lot of time for me to know what to do in the Lokayan office..I was frustrated because I did not really know how and where to start my work... in a way it (the activist period) was a perfect experience for me because of these troubles. I understood many things about myself, about India, about work, about activism, etc."

The undefined schedule of work is certainly both a weakness, as the activists feel they want a vision of what they will be doing before they arrive, and a strength because of the flexibility it offers. Here we can only note that the experiences and opinions on the issue are multiple. Therefore, the dilemma of themes has not been universally resolved during the first three years of Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation. However, maybe it is not even reasonable to resolve it! The best solution could be that the decision will be taken separately according to the specific background and aims of each exchange activist.

However, the expectations tied to this component of the cooperation process are still a problematic issue and needs to be discussed properly. Do we want to concentrate on collecting and processing material on certain political themes? Or do we want to focus on the deepening activists' general understanding on a society other than their own, on the methods used and activities carried out by the civil society actors in that society? During the first three years of the exchange the working methods chosen by the activists in realising the goals set out for their exchange period have shown that there are diverse ways of working. Because the activists have been cooperating with different individuals, depending on what they have been interested in learning about they have been exposed to a variety of ideas and working methods.

#### 4.2.5. Receiving activists

The capacity to receive activists as part of the exchange programme has not always been sufficient in either of the partner countries. There has not

been enough preparatory planning for their programme and for taking care of their basic needs. A few of the Indian and Finnish activists also expressed a need for interim evaluations during the exchange period to give them an opportunity to get feedback from the Finnish/Indian partners, to clarify unresolved issues and to, if necessary, restructure their programme. Getting a sense of whether they were 'going in the right direction' seemed an important reason for wanting an informal but still structured interim evaluation. An Indian exchangee explained in the Delhi meeting of 6th April, 2000:

"There was no formal, structured briefing when we arrived in Finland. The tour around Finland was only a learning experience, but on return to Helsinki there was no possibility to reflect on our experiences with Finnish activists which would also have made it possible for us to reflect on the Indian society. This should be included in the structure of the exchanges."

However, the activists mainly felt they had received help and support from both ISAG members and the responsible officers in Kepa/CSDS/Lokayan, that they had been well cared for, and that a friendly and caring atmosphere characterised the first meeting with India and Finland respectively, but a need for a more structured form of reception with representatives of the partners' organisation was expressed. Also former exchange activists, both in India and Finland, have lent their support and provided local guidance, and organised specific programmes for the activists. Having a 'cultural translator' and 'guide' present was seen as an important factor by all the exchange activists.

Various shortcomings have been noticed by the partner organisations and many improvements have been realised. In India, the support and input of Rita Nahata, who acted as the paid coordinator of the exchange programme in India, was seen as a crucial actor. Without her through knowledge, of both the practical and ideological issues of the Indian society, Finnish activists would have had a much less enriching and less smooth time during their exchange period. Also, local activists have been hired to help the Finnish activists during their trips outside of Delhi and sometimes also in Delhi. In Finland the ISAG members started to divide the responsibilities more exactly among themselves and to plan the programmes for the activists more properly. It would be costly to hire people to help the activists in Finland and, so far, generous voluntary effort, by members of the Kepa

staff and by some ISAG members, have been sufficient to keep the programme running.

#### 4.2.6. Programme of activists

In both Finland and in India the exchange activists have been involved in various types of meetings and encounters with local people (please see appendix 7). What is notable is the wide range of these activities and how the flexibility of the programme has allowed for innovative and unusual contacts to be tied through a network of contacts and interests of both the activists and their local hosts. These activities also entailed travelling within India and Finland and also to neighbouring countries (Nepal, Bangladesh, Holland, Germany, Russia, Sweden), both as part of the official programme and as private trips financed by the activists themselves.

Indian activists have been interested in visiting both institutions, organisations, associations, festivals, seminars, meetings and cultural programmes. Representatives of commercial companies, trade unions and political parties were also encountered and communicated with. Among these were for example visits to a trade union of cleaners, a cleaning company, a fair trade shop, a street party, a secondary school, an old pensioners home, the women's network of the Finnish parliament, a summer cottage, traffic planning engineers in various cities, and the association of the homeless people. Additionally, one activist arranged a photography exhibition.

Finnish activists have been involved in similar types of activities. The perhaps most significant difference is a greater focus on contacts with various organisations, rather than institutions. The majority of the activists also spent time on being in Lokayan and attending programmes and meetings arranged by Lokayan and its constituencies. These included meetings, seminars and dialogues on globalisation, ecology, peoples technology (also in Nepal) and meetings with various activists and organisations working with environmental, fair trade, sustainable production and traffic policy issues. Besides the official programme, Finnish activists enjoyed visiting cultural events and celebrations in private homes such as weddings and religious holiday celebrations.

#### 4.2.7. Reporting

All the activists have been required to write a report in English at the end of their exchange period or soon after it. The Finnish activists have also been

required to write an open letter every fortnight to be circulated among the Indian partners, the ISAG e-mail list and also in Kepa's web pages. Using newsletters as a means of reporting was seen by the Finnish activists as an efficient and simple method of reporting because it helped in sorting out and clarifying issues and experiences. It was also seen as a good way of documenting the learning process, planning your activities and informing people in Finland about important issues etc. A Finnish activist had the following comments on reporting during the activist period:

"It would be useful to add to the newsletter system a brief monthly summary of the main events that have taken place in the Indian society that are of particular importance for the cooperation process... The amount of information that was given to me all hours of the day was quite overwhelming, but when it then came to summarising it or selecting what to write in the newsletter it was difficult partially because of a lack of some basic facts or information on the background of a certain situation and because there was so much information. You fear that you report incorrectly on something because you come up against complicated issues that have a long history... A very positive aspect of the newsletter is the fact that most exchangees have included personal experiences and incidents from everyday life. This is what gives the whole communication process a special touch and indication of the value that is placed on intersubjective experiences."

Problems have been encountered in reporting because all activists are not used to writing, and less so in English. Therefore, discussion has been held on what would be the most appropriate way to collect information on the experiences of the activists in the exchange programme. In the Delhi evaluation meetings in April 2000 stress was placed on realising that there can and should be different ways available for activists to report their experiences, such as discussions with coordinators or some visual methods. One possible method of recording experiences of activists could be to interview them at the end of their activist period and also to have interim discussions during the exchange period to evaluate how the exchange is progressing, what additional support, contacts or information the exchangee would need. One Indian activist specifically mentioned that the post visit follow-up work should be improved.

In fact, various modes of reporting have been used. Usha Tiwari from Nepal will report on her experiences by arranging a photography exhibition in Nepal, and Marko Ulvila interviewed Amar Singh before he left Finland.

Susanne dahl also used a different reporting format as she was working on the life and rights of rickshaw pullers in the Indian society. She prepared an exhibition of photos, texts and rickshaw art which was presented in the international development and solidarity work festival (Maailma kylässä) in Helsinki in May 2001, and later on in The Faces Festival in Bilnäs (July), in the Technical centre of Oulu (September), at the Development days of the University of Turku (October) and the Helinä Rautavaara ethnological museum in Espoo (November-January), and maybe also in some other museums and centres in Finland in the spring of 2002.

An Indian activist described his feelings on reporting in the Delhi meeting of 6th April 2001 as follows:

"It is difficult to write a formal report on the exchange period. In four months it is impossible to get an understanding that is coherent enough to write it down. There is a fear of misinterpreting and writing down the wrong information. I was reflecting on sensitive issues like Indonesia, East Timor and timber exploitation in Indonesia...".

#### 4.2.8. Personal learning of the activists

All of the activists, both from India and Finland have mentioned that the exchange period has opened up windows to cultural encounters and exchange of ideas about society, politics and global values of justice and solidarity. It also opened up new perspectives on working methods and the nature of discussions in another society. Experiencing a different culture also makes you more atone to what is going on in your own society. However, one Finnish activist also underlined that it is difficult to analyse which parts of one's own inner learning process are exactly results from this exchange period. She/he also underlined that living abroad for an extended period of time can be a learning process in itself and it can show a person the he/she is capable of doing things/work independently.

The exchange activists also brought up they have gained a deeper understanding on a wide variety of issues:

- on the roots, motivation and activities of solidarity in both the Northern and the Southern context,
- on the life of activists,
- on the successes and weaknesses of the welfare state. The Indian activists' concern was expressed about issues such as loneliness and the social marginalisation caused by it, as well as the disintegration of the Finnish family,

- on the stereotypical ideas in India about solidarity between the North and the South, i.e. an extreme sense of inferiority and dependence or an extreme sense of arrogance, indifference and an attitude of rejection of any gesture of solidarity from the North,
- on the complexity of the Indian society, its history, culture and social system.
- on the role money plays in relations between the North and the South, and especially in the context of development work in the South. It takes a concrete dimension when experienced personally by interacting with activists working in organisations that do not have large budgets and fancy offices, but rather are individuals who are ideologically motivated on a deep level,
- on the fact that how much easier it is to do ideologically motivated work in the North because of a social security system which supports the citizens. Besides, the northerners do not have to bear responsibility to financially support family members such as siblings and parents, and
- on the working methods of citizens' organisations in a different kind of society.

An Indian activist in the final report mentions that:

"Once again, what struck one was the frankness in the discussions and an ability to take seriously opposing viewpoints. It is my opinion that such exchanges are not only extremely useful, but also necessary to further dialogue between the North and the South. Moreover, what is notable about these exchanges is that it helps foster the dialogue within India as well."

A Finnish activist included the following comment in the final report:

"Seeing cultural differences at work has sensitised me to different aspects of my own culture and to understanding certain difficulties a person has to face when coming into contact with a new culture...most importantly I feel I now have a better and deeper understanding of Southern perspectives on the important political and social issues I have been working and continue working on."

People who have attended from India have mainly had no sense of the Nordic context, so for most who went in was a discovery in its own way. Most have come back highly enriched. Living in a Northern society has served to dispel stereotypical ideas Indians had about Europeans and about wealth and well being in a country in the North. Indian activists have been interested

in seeing how central features of injustice and societal structure are visible in the Finnish society, but noticed the poverty and the working classes are not visible in the Finnish society. It has been a particular challenge for the Finnish partners to make visible these aspects of the Finnish society to the Indian activists. Seeing what equality is like in practice was an important experience for many of the Indian activists. An Indian activist belonging to a low cast, which is discriminated against in India, says:

"It was very helpful to know the similarities and struggles of the Finnish society and mine so that we can fight together. All in all, the visit was very educational and really gave me a taste of equality which will give me energy to fight for it in India."

Communicating these experiences to friends and colleagues at home was seen as an important part of the learning process. An Indian exchange activist said the following about preconceived notions about Finland and how the stay in Finland brought about a revision of these notions:

"The level of understanding and commitment to the cause was also much more than I had expected. This situation was so different from our country where we do not have this proportion of activists....It is very important to tell my Indian comrades at this stage that every single person we met was not rich, and these are the opinions of Finnish poor or Finnish not so rich people. Their existence is hand to mouth and very little is left after paying for rent and food and transportation."

However, one needs to be aware also here of the two categories of activists found in India. One category consists of individuals with English as their first language who are motivated and genuine. They function as translators of the needs of grassroots people. They can write on diverse issues such as ecology, human rights, etc. This is a new phenomenon in the activist world in India. The second category consists of grassroots activists who have English as their 2nd or 3rd language. They are very committed people who resist foreign funding seeing it as a restraint in having truly equal relations with the grassroots. The activist exchange component aimed to mainly give activists from the second category exposure to a different reality. These activists have seemed to have a greater sense of adaptability than activists belonging to the 1st category. In this sense the exchange component is unique.

Also another Indian activist attending the April 6th evaluation meeting in Delhi expressed how the exchange period has influenced her/his perspective on the issues worked on in India:

"When I left I had no idea of what whites were like. I received a completely new view of them and had to realise that not all whites are the same. I also learned about the discipline and working methods used in Finland. This has influenced my work and will continue to do so for a long time. I thought that (the issues I work on) are local problems, but now realise we need to work locally, but have a global agenda."

#### 4.2.9. Political influence

Although the results of the exchange programme will be mainly seen during the years to come there have already been positive political impacts both in India and Finland. In India, a better understanding and a building of a common platform has been strengthened as a result of the time spent in Finland and due to contacts with the Finnish activist community. In numerous dialogues, organised by various platforms, most of the activists have related to their Northern experiences primarily because of the participation in the exchange programme. Lokayan's legitimacy has increased in activist circles because people from all ideological streams have been involved in the cooperation and exchange process. This has benefitted Lokayan with a larger network than ever. The process has, thus, been very effective in conveying the policy of positive affirmation. The experiences, comments and concrete contributions of both Finnish and Indian exchange activists have had a significant importance for the will-formation and campaigning in Keba and among other Finnish civil society groups and organisations, concerning especially the privatisation of public companies and WTO/trade policies related issues.

## 5. Seminars (dialogues)

### 5.1. Seminars organised in India and Finland

In a series of seminars, or dialogues as they are often referred to, issues of common interest of the partners or specific issues in their societies have been discussed and analysed. An important aspect of the seminars has been the presence of Finnish activists from the Keba constituency in the South Asian seminars and of South Asian activists in the Finnish seminars. The Indian partners have been more active in organizing seminars than the Finnish ones, as there have been all together around 35 seminars organised by them, mainly in India but also in Nepal and Bangladesh. All of these have not been Keba

funded; some have been supported by the Lokniti project of CSDS or the Heinrich Boll Foundation. Vijay Pratap and other V.K. members have participated in a total of some 100 meetings.

The Indian partners have organised large seminars on the voluntarism of social action groups, to share and discuss experiences and reflections of the local activists:

- in India (Delhi, December 10-12th, 1998),
- in Nepal (Kathmandu, April 4-5th, 1999), and
- in Bangladesh (in association with the Community Development Library/Dhaka, February 7th, 2000).
- Another large scale dialogue was the North-South Dialogue: Consolidation of grassroot democracy organised in Delhi, August 29th-31st (funded directly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 2001. Minister Satu Hassi participated in this seminar, one complete day. There is a report of that dialogue.
- Another important dialogue was organised in Delhi at 14-15th of October on Globalisation and Democracy. Minister Erkki Tuomioja was supposed to participate in it but for the current critical international situation he had to cancel his participation. However, Kepa's executive director Folke Sundman was able to be present in this seminar.

The Indian partners have also organised, more than one seminar on each of following topics:

- consolidating democracy in societies,
- WTO/International trade,
- (globalisation of) culture/cultural activists,
- ecological democracy, and
- Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme planning.

Other seminar topics (one session on each) have been:

- corruption,
- empowerment of women,
- peace and nuclear disarmament,
- democracy and public health,
- challenges for resource mobilization in social action,
- survey of rickshaw pullers,
- human rights,

- exchange programme,
- privatisation/market globalisation,
- consumerism and liberalisation,
- Delhi's master plan,
- poverty,
- laws and liberty,
- democracy in the state of Uttarakhand (edited English version of the report in Hindi),
- Nepal-India-forum,
- Finnish-India forum.

There is a list of the seminars which have been taped and transcribed. Please contact Kepa office for a copy and/or materials.

In Finland the main seminars have been the four ones documented in the book *Dreams of Solidarity. Finnish experiences and reflections (Unelmia maailmasta. Suomalaisen kehitysmaliikkeen juurilla)*. The topics of the seminars, held in Riihimäki (March 12-13th, 1999), were the personal motivations for solidarity, and development cooperation as a mean of solidarity. In the seminars of Vähäkylä (May 7-8th, 1998) the topics were other means of carrying out/realising solidarity and solidarity in one's personal everyday life. An important event was also Making Sense of Development NGOs which was held in Tampere, August 28-29th, 2000. It was organised together with the University of Tampere.

Besides those mentioned above, smaller seminars and discussions have been held:

- the discussion on Dalit Theology (organised together with the Institute of Development Studies, University of Helsinki), Helsinki, autumn 1999,
- the discussion on Jainism and women, Helsinki, autumn 1999,
- a discussion on ecotourism and Indigenous people was organised in Helsinki, June 21st, 2001,
- discussion on Cultural democracy, May 29th, 2001, Helsinki, Kepa,
- discussion on Ecological democracy, September 15th, 2001, Helsinki, Kepa, organised in cooperation with the Green Cultural Association. Both the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme and text of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam received very positive and exited response in this discussion among the participants from Mexico, The Philippines, Sweden, Indonesia, China, Cameroon and Finland.

Besides, the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme had also a role in the making of the NIGD (Network Institute for Global Democratization) seminar North-South Dialogue on Democracy and Globalisation held in Helsinki 19-20th of June, 2001. Vijay Pratap was one of the main speakers in this seminar, his speech is documented in a publication of the seminar published by Department for International Development Cooperation, Ministry for Foreign Affairs. This cooperation still continues, as NIGD is cooperating with CSDS/Lokayan concerning the search or 12 persons in the South to be selected to participate in the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2002.

## 5.2. Analyses of experiences

An fair amount of seminars and discussions have been organised and participated by the partner organisations and their constituencies during these first three years of Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation. The seminars and generally the dialogue method have received very positive feedback or response in the constituencies of the partner organisations. For example, those Kepa board members and staff professionals discussed with for this self-appraisal see the seminars/dialogues among the most positive outcomes of the programme.

The key problem has been the documenting of the seminars. Many of the seminars have been taped, and even transcribed but final reports or books are still waiting for editing or publishing. However, also the processes themselves have a specific value. Therefore, it needs to be recognised here that very diverse people have come together in these dialogues and significant achievements have certainly been reached, although it is difficult to measure all the impacts of the dialogues. However, it was also underlined in the Delhi evaluation meetings that if we are too process oriented we tend to forget the product, i.e. there is a need to find a constructive balance between the dialogues (seminars and discussions) and the documenting (books, articles in newspapers, magazine etc.).

## 6. Documentation and analyses

### 6.1. General notions

The documentation of the activist exchange results has been already presented above. Therefore, we concentrate here on the other parts of the

Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme. Seminars, discussions and dialogues organised by the programme in the last three years have generated a big number of documents. They are of broadly four types:

1. Reports and proceedings of the seminars/dialogues (transcriptions)
2. Articles (contributed/commissioned)
3. Interviews/interfaces
4. Notes/experience/reflections of activists

These documents reflect a multifaceted interaction among people/activists/ academic/institutions holding diverse views on a particular theme. The intensive and dedicated effort in transcribing, translating, editing etc. has generated huge and valuable textual material. However, they require to be systematically transformed into publications in order for the material to be accessible and useful for people at large in the form of suitable products - books, reports, proceedings, booklets, articles etc.

These documents are of immense significance, not only from the activist point of view, but also from an academic perspective as they contribute to the meaning of the ideological processes and put the effort of such dialogues in perspective. To strike a proper balance between the dialogues and documentation or process and product, a detailed publication plan has been worked out.

There are four types of publication envisaged:

1. Printed books.
2. Photocopy book (thematically arranged articles, translated/edited and properly laid-out/designed).
3. Printed booklets.
4. Spiral bound collection of articles.

In some cases there can be three stages of final publication. That is to say, the contributions of articles by the participants made available as spiral bound document, from which articles are edited/translated and laid out as 'photocopy book' based on thematic union. In the cases of monographs or edited compilation this is the stage of sending it for peer-review. Since peer-review should not just take into account the academic view, but also should accommodate the activist, institutional and a cross-section of the political view, this becomes a time consuming process. Nevertheless, keeping in view the spirit of Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme of involving people/institutions holding diverse views to enrich further and build up a broad

consensus over various issues, it is the most suitable process to adopt. Contacting the publisher in parallel or separately and to eventually get them printed is the final stage.

## 6.2. Books and reports published and under process in Finland

- Unelmia Maailmasta: suomalaisen kehityskaaliikkeen juurilla (2000) eds. Outi Hakkarainen, Miia Toikka ja Thomas Wallgren. Helsinki: Like ja Suomen rauhanpuolustajat, Pystykorvakirja. A collection of articles based on the four dialogues organised in Finland in March/May in 1999 (see above, a chapter of dialogues). All together 40 persons, somehow involved in the Finnish solidarity movement since the 1950's to the end of the Millennium, have a voice in this book, which is a first attempt in Finland to figure systematically out the history of solidarity in Finland, and mainly through personal stories of those who themselves have made that history. Translated to English in 2001: Dreams of Solidarity. Finnish experiences and reflections. (final stage in India)
- Micro-finance Against Poverty: Challenges and opportunities. (In English) Eds. Farhad Hossain & Zahidur Rahman. The articles of this book (which are looking at the micro finance from different perspectives and from the experiences in different regions/societies in the South) are mainly based on the presentations in the Micro-finance workshop in the "Making Sense of Development NGOs" conference, Tampere, August 2000. The book will be published as a reduced academic print in Finland in the autumn 2001, but will later on be republished in India for a wider audience.
- Taste of Equality - Experiences of the Keba-CSDS/Lokayan activist exchange programme. A book on the experiences of the Indian and Finnish exchange activists. Final reports, newsletters and other texts written by the activists are published in this publication together with the photos taken by them and interviews/articles published about/by them in local newspapers and magazines. (in English). Ed. Hannu Virtanen. (Will be published in 2001)
- Economical democracy. There is a plan to publish in Finland a five-item-series on the five dimensions of democracy of the V.K., i.e. economical, ecological, cultural, social and political. The idea is to carry out the project as a collective effort of various organisations (Keba/the ISAG, CRASH-Coalition for Research and Action for Social Justice and Human Dignity,

Coalition for Environment and Development (CED), and other interested ones). The aim is to produce a comprehensive and clear presentation of each dimensions of democracy for a wide audience in Finland, to be published together with a Finnish publishing house. The book will be partly based on specific dialogues. The CED has already got funds for a book on economical democracy, which will focus on Finland and India, as case studies. The book will look at the economical policies and practices from last person's (Daridranarayan) perspective, from the perspective of a dignified citizenship, i.e. how production technology, labour policies and so forth should be organised in order to guarantee a dignified job for all in the society. Eds. Jaana Airaksinen, Outi Hakkarainen and Tove Selin. (will be published in 2002)

## 6.3. Books published and under process in India / South Asia

- Learning NGOs and the Dynamics of Development Partnership. (2000) Eds. Farhad Hossain, Marko Ulvila & Ware Newaz. Dhaka: Dhaka Ahsania Mission. (in cooperation with the University of Tampere). The is a collection of articles both on general aspects of the NGOs in development and on the specific cases from the South Asia, mainly Bangladesh.
- Development NGOs Facing the 21st Century: Perspectives from South Asia (2000) Eds. Juha Vartola, Marko Ulvila, Farhad Hossain & Tek Nath Dhakal. Kathmandu: Institute for Human Development. Half of the articles (both general and case studies) of this book are based on the dialogic seminar organised by the Keba-CSDS/Lokayan programme in Kathmandu in 1999. (In cooperation with the University of Tampere)
- Water: one issue, many problems. (In English) By Arun Kumar Singh. In author's words: "The situation of water on a global scale has already become so precarious to predict that the wars in this century will be fought over water. In most parts of the world, water crisis has already arrived or is lurking on the horizon. A whole range of factors can be held accountable for this: irrational faith in modern technologies and unthoughtful rejection of our pre-industrialism wisdom, ill-conceived planning, faulty implementation,



destruction of watershed, heavy pollution of flowing water bodies, emerging global perspective, to name a few. All in all, the official agencies and public at large, both, are responsible for increasingly deteriorating situation on this front. The approach of wider public towards water, especially the so-called conscious citizens (urbane, educated, middle class segment of society), needs to be urgently engaged with. What makes the matters difficult is non-availability of a comprehensive reader exploring the various dimensions of hydrological cycle and implications of use, abuse and misuse of water, reflected in generating water related calamities. It is crucial to understand 'what is being done to water' in order to come up with 'what needs to be done and how?' The need for such a reader was acutely felt in the seminar TOWARDS AN ECOLOGICAL DEMOCRACY [organized by CSDS-KEPA Programme of Comprehensive Democracy (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam) on January 23, 2001]. So, I took up the task and compiled my work of last 20 years, integrating it with the recent data in the form of a book. The book will help field-based activists engaged in campaigns and movements, on the one hand, and the concerned urban citizens which are simply denied of this kind of knowledge base, on the other." (final stage)

- Book of Trees. (In English). This is a comprehensive monograph covering various aspects of a tree, its propagation, utility and varieties. With ecological imperatives firmly in focus, this monograph succinctly argues a case for a greener world to avert the impending ecological catastrophe. Keeping the day to day utility of trees in organic societies, it illustrates the issue with historical and scientific perspective with interesting anecdotes from ancient scriptures by way of situating the importance of fruits and trees in ancient societies. Imminently a readable book after a bit of copy editing to do away with some repetition redundancy would make it a valuable contribution in this field. (final stage)
- North-South Dialogue - Series I. Political Initiative for Democratising Globalisation (In Hindi) Five significant contributions of the NIGD - Finland based International red: Network Institute of Global Democracy working papers have been translated, edited, laid out, designed and printed as a photocopy book in limited numbers. (current status: almost ready for print as a book).
- North-South Dialogue - Series II. Democratising North-South relations. (In Hindi). All articles have been received, and are now under translation. Topics and writers are: North-South policy of European Union (Arun Kumar Singh); Globalising democracy Versus Deepening of Democracy: Post Cold War discourse (D.L. Sheth); Health in the sand: A track record of EU's global responsibility (Frank Amalric), How can Southern movement support Northern movement (Risto Isomäki), Transparency in Development Aid- Devendra Raj Pandey; Equity in burden - sharing (Oras Tynkkynen); Political Semantics of 'Globalisation', a brief note (Thomas Wallgren). Photocopy book will be ready by October 2001, in a book form at the end of 2001.
- Democracy at the grassroot: meaning, challenges and implementation. (in Hindi). Almost all the articles (eight out of nine) have been received, some of them already in Hindi, others are under translation. Topics and writers are: Micro movements & redefinition of democracy (D.L. Sheth); Globalisation & Challenges of Democracy (Kishan Patnaik); Agenda for radicalising political reform (Yogendra Yadav); Lessons of Environment: learn from grassroot - wisdom (Anupam Mishra); Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: an antidote to globalisation (Mohan Hirabai Hiralal); Health & Democracy (Ritu Priya); Encountering Marx after Singrauli (Aditya Nigam); Cycle Rickshaw Revisited (Rajendra Ravi); Tales from the Soil: understanding vernacular wisdom. Photocopy book will be ready by October 2001, in a normal book form in January, 2002.
- Indian Agriculture and WTO. (In English) Some articles still to be received. Topics and writers of those articles which are ready or coming in soon: Globalisation, Biotechnology and India's food security (Devinder Sharma); Farming in Andhra Pradesh: a ringside view (Uma Shankari); Development: paradigm, practice & possibility (Gian Singh); Agricultural Scenario (Narendra Nath); People's movement in the era of globalisation (B.D. Sharma). Ready for printing as a book by end of February 2002.
- New States, Old Problems. Regional Ecological Manifesto/Concerns. (Language? In Hindi?) Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan dialogue has initiated a multifaceted interface with the people of three new states in India. If we consider those three states from which the new states have been carved out, they also stand as 'new' political entities with the nature of challenge changing fundamentally for them. To understand these problems from

this new perspective various dialogues/forums are being created. Within the next six months it is hoped that a perspective on these new states would emerge through these dialogues which will be the themes of this publication. Two articles are received. Since it involves a process, widely dispersed geographically - it will take a year or more before we can expect this process to take complete shape.

- Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. (In English and in Hindi) This being the foundation paper providing the basis of the dialogue under Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme - getting a feedback on it is very significant. In order to secure the widest possible feedback/comments the paper in English has been translated in Hindi and both the versions have been printed as booklets. The booklet has been sent in India to five important sections to get their responses which include (i) movement groups, (ii) leader/ideologues of political parties, (iii) academics of various hues, (iv) NGOs in different sectors, and (v) journalists. Since more than 300 people have been given this paper for comment, a persistent follow-up to get their written response is required to be published later. The responses have started trickling in, yet it needs a systematic follow up strategy. New versions will be published at the beginning (February-March) of 2002.

In order to reach a larger number of people and elicit a response from then, the process of getting some important papers on a theme are translated in Hindi. The process has successfully started with the "Photocopy book" of the NIGD (Network Institute of Global Democracy) working papers in Hindi. Recently, getting some important articles printed in booklet form has been warmly received (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Charter of Global Greens have been printed in Hindi and English as booklets). We may require to get many more such booklets for wider dissemination.

Apart from the thematic compilation of papers, there are a number of valuable transcriptions of seminars and dialogues, which will be published as proceedings. Publishing reports of these seminars and dialogues would also give a broad overview of the activities and issues being taken up under Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation programme. Some important articles are to be published as booklets also.

This is just a select list of books under process of publication. Additionally, a large number of articles and reports including on "Impact of Foreign

Funding" and "Volunteerism" are underway to be published as spiral bound versions.

It can be further added that both the activist exchange (appendix 6) and the dialogue programme has sparked a good number of newspaper articles in national and regional newspapers in Finland. Also in India there has been some press coverage. For example, some of the papers presented in the first Delhi seminar in 1998 were widely publicized in several leading journals of Gandhian and democratic socialist organisations apart from NGO journals like Samayaik Varta Gandhi Marg and Himalya Raibar each and also papers released by a Gandhian news and feature service which caters to small news and regional news papers like the Sarvodya Press Service.

#### 6.4. Analyses of experiences

The partner organisations have been able to publish quite a number of publications by themselves or in cooperation with other organisations, and there is a lot of more material to be published. The sheer amount of information that would be worth publishing is daunting. A clear focus or theme outlined for the publication work would provide boundaries and selection criteria for what can and cannot be published under the auspices of the Kepa-Lokayan/CSDS cooperation process. This is needed for the sake of clarity and would also bring greater coherence between the different components of the cooperation, i.e. the seminars, publications and the exchange. Here again, it is important to stress that there must be flexibility also. Finding a balance between having space for ad hoc initiatives and having a set frame work within which the publication work is to be carried needs to be further developed.

### 7. Networking

#### 7.1. General notions

From the very beginning the idea of networking with other civil society actors in India, Finland and elsewhere has been an integral part of the CSDS/Lokayan - Kepa cooperation, in order to create creative civic links in the frame of democratising North-South relations. Civic actors have been invited to the seminars, connections have been created during the activist exchange visits and also through personal activities of other actors of this cooperation.

In the three years of cooperation it has become obvious that in order to

build influential networking for the democratisation of North-South relations the volume of activities must go beyond the resource frame of the current Lokayan/CSDS - Kepa cooperation. In September 2000 it was presented to the Kepa board that the volume of this cooperation should at least be threefold in order to be able to seriously test the possibilities of this kind of method of cooperating between the North and South. The Kepa board generally found the Lokayan/CSDS - Kepa cooperation stimulating and challenging, but found it difficult to significantly widen the resource frame of this cooperation agreement from the current level. It was felt that the most relevant way to widen this initiative would be to search for other Nordic partners who could also channel resources into the process.

In South Asia formal networks have been created with Pakistanis, Sri Lankans and Bangladeshis. In Nepal the progress is at a more advanced level. The aim of the Nepal-India dialogues is to create open debates on society and people-to-people politics. The Indians would like Finnish activists to use South Asia as a strategic example in furthering the notion of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, The Earth is a Family. There is a need to set up an institute for South Asian democracy successfully involving top level intellectuals who are not affiliated with political parties.

Evaluation of Working Groups in India: In the mid-1990s Lokayan was going through a phase of reformulating its work in response to the changing situation within the world of social action and in the organisation itself. Both appeared to be at a dead-end in terms of approaches to the complexity of issues confronting our society, of relating to the 'common people', and in recruiting voluntary (i.e. non-paid) contribution of energy and time. In attempting to reformulate Lokayan's role vis- -vis social action and the written word, a number of 'Working Groups' were envisaged on specific themes. Besides engaging its existing informal network of institutions and individuals, these working groups were to expand the network and invite greater 'voluntary' inputs for Lokayan's work while working towards a shared holistic pro-poor perspective on the themes in the prevailing context of globalisation and privatisation. The experience of the last three years has shown that there is immense potential in each of the Working Groups but there are needs to be a senior person working full time for each. While that person would have to be given monetary subsistence, he/she would act as fulcrum to sustain voluntary inputs of a large and diverse network. Since Lokayan had no corpus fund it was decided that barring Rajendra Ravi in Jan Parivahan Panchayat,

no other collective will be supported by Lokayan. Each collective will be responsible for its own fund mobilisation. In keeping with Lokayan's tradition of encouraging evolution of new institutions by its network members, it was envisaged that these autonomous collectives could, at some later stage, also become independent entities as part of a larger fraternity. Experiences, activities and plans concerning the networking in India/South Asia as well through the working groups explained above as forums between actors/groups/organisations from different countries are presented in the following texts: Ped Panchayat: Evaluation (by Prabodh Raj Chandol), Swasthya Panchayat: A Forum for Dialogue on Public Health (by Ritu Priya), A Brief Report on Ecological Democracy (by Arun Kumar Singh), Towards an Indo-Finnish Forum (by Suresh Sharma), An Introduction to India-Bagladesh Forum (by Mohiuddin Ahmad). Please, take contact to Kepa to have a copy.

Various Finnish and Indian partners participated in the civic gatherings in June 2001 in Gothenburg. The main event attended was the Sustainability and Solidarity conference organised by Friends of the Earth International. The focus of the conference was on EU environmental policies and the Kyoto agreement. In a gathering consisting mostly of European participants and European speakers it was important to get the voice of the South onto the agenda. Although the environment is recognised as being a global concern, gatherings and policy level discussion often lack concrete perspectives and experiences from the South. Attendance at the gatherings served a twofold purpose; to present a Southern perspective on climate issues and EU's role in environmental policy making globally, and, to present the experiences of the Kepa-Lokayan/CSDS cooperation as well as the V.K. concept to a European audience. It also provided the Indian activists an opportunity to concretely experience mass gatherings and public demonstrations in a Nordic context.

Networking has also taken place with politicians and researchers. Important process has been the dialofued with the Finnish ministers Satu Hassi and Erkki Tuomioja on ecological and economical democracy respectively.

## 7.2. Analyses of experiences

In strengthening the base for collective activism we have not reached the desired level of activity. This, also, by extension, has resulted in a failure to expand this process into European networks. One reason for this has been the difficulty in deciding what type of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam we want in

Finland, and in the North, and what would be the role of the current Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation in this wider context. Therefore, it is urgent to figure out the wider plans, and then have a proper discussion on what could be the role of Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation, as well as the independent role of each these partners. Whatever the answer is, most probably these partners will continue their cooperation in one way or another.

## 8. Communication and decision-making

In the CSDS/Lokayan - Kepa cooperation there are three main spheres of decision-making, i.e. (i) Kepa and its constituency, (ii) CSDS/Lokayan and their constituencies, and (iii) between Kepa and CSDS/Lokayan (and their constituencies). Experiences of communication and decision-making in these three spheres will be presented here separately. However, first there will be some notions on the language issue.

### 8.1. Language issue

One of the main problems of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme has been clear from the first word of this report. How can we develop a culturally sophisticated and politically serious form of cooperation if we must communicate in English? And if we use our first languages - Finnish, Hindi, Nepali, Swedish or what not - how can we reach the partners of the exchange.

In situations of informal oral communication interpretation can often be arranged for free, or people can use their version of the English language. In more formal oral encounters - the seminars and administrative meetings are the most important cases! -we have mostly been able also to get along without paid professional help. But in written communication things are much more difficult. One difficulty is administration. This dialogic self-appraisal report should be available in Finnish. Otherwise, many in the Kepa constituency will find it difficult to go it through. But in order to process this self-appraisal together with the Indian partners it is imperative to have the report in English. Ideally it should also be available in Hindi. The programme budget, however, has no budget for translation of administrative texts.

Difficulties mount in the documentation and publication work. At least some key publications should be made accessible in Finnish, Hindi and English. So far, however, resources have been allocated for doing only some of the

publications at least partly in two languages (see the chapter on documenting and analyses).

## 8.2. Communication and decision-making in Kepa and its constituency

### 8.2.1. Frames and general notions

As already has been explained in the second chapter (the frames of cooperation) there are various spaces and persons in the Kepa constituency somehow involved in the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation, i.e. Kepa board, Kepa's South Working-group (Etelä työryhmä), executive director Folke Sundman, field unit director Sirpa Mallea and her substitutes (1998-2000), officer in-charge Päivi Ahonen and her substitute Aija Taskinen (13 month in 1999/2000), some other persons in the Kepa staff, the India/South Asia Group (ISAG) and the interested people in the open-for-all e-mail list of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation.

The central point or crossroads of communication among all these actors is Kepa's officer in-charge for this cooperation, Päivi Ahonen, and partly Aija Taskinen. They have worked or kept contact with all, while many of the others may not even know each other. Besides, they have also kept permanent contact with the Indian partners, and hosts, together with the ISAG members, the Indian exchange activists and other visitors in Finland. Päivi Ahonen has been able to have a good and open communication with all. Her importance in implementing the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme was positively mentioned also in the discussions with the Kepa board members and professional staff.

The Kepa board accepted in 1998 the proposal for a new cooperation programme with two Indian partners, after a long discussion. Some board members had critical views on the programme for two reasons. First, the proposal had been prepared by a small group of mainly academic activists, who mainly are from one member organisation of Kepa. Therefore, the legitimacy of the programme in Kepa was seen to be quite narrow. Second, Lokayan's wish not to receive directly funds during the three-year cooperation programme with Kepa, and its proposal to use CSDS as "an assistant institute" to channel funds for those activities which needed to be paid in India. Lokayan was politically hesitant to receive foreign funds straight away when opening

itself, after many years, to a formal cooperation programme with a Northern organisations. Lokayan wanted to go on slowly in order to see first how the cooperation would generally develop and what kind of influences it would have in Lokayan's political role in the Indian civil society. However, some of the board members saw Lokayan's proposal difficult to accept. Why should Kepa cooperate with an organisation which is not ready receive directly funds from its foreign partner? These board members found it difficult to trust on unknown organisations. However, the Kepa board was open enough to take an unanimous decision.

In the discussions organised for this self-appraisal process it came up that three years later the general attitude towards the programme is mainly positive among the Kepa board and staff. However, few board members still have doubts about the meaning of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme. They also think that the programme does not yet fit properly in the current frame or structure of the Kepa. Thus, a proper place or frame should be found for it. Moreover, it was quite often noted that the aims and methods of the India programme are still unclear for some of the Kepa staff and board.

### 8.2.2. The India/South Asia Group (ISAG)

#### History and current state of the ISAG

Kepa's India group was formed already in 1997 when the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan agreements were still under preparation. However, a public invitation was delivered (through means in the Kepa constituency) only after the cooperation agreement was signed. The group soon attracted considerable interest. During the first winter approximately 30 persons attended meetings all together, so that up to 20 individuals could be present in one meeting. Currently less than 10 members of the group attend meetings regularly. However, "the oldies" form a minority in the current ISAG. Sometimes other members of Kepa's staff and visitors from South Asia, who are part of the Kepa - CSDS/Lokayan exchange, take part in the meetings.

Why was the India-group so attractive in the beginning? Why did the interest decline? Only two have explained their reasons to leave the ISAG. One of them did not have time to continue and the other got frustrated with the meeting-methods, but also with the topics of the ISAG. The person told it had been difficult to participate from outside of Helsinki as the meetings were held quite

late, generally starting late and ending late. This person expressed also that the ISAG was not very democratic or its content wide, but still the agenda of the ISAG seemed to be very full; that there are good reasons for intensive "activism politics" but there are also other ways of activism; that both women and culture were in a tiny role; that discourse on understanding activism and defining different ways to carry out activities was quite absent, that this discourse naturally has been in the edge of the India programme, but anyhow ISAG's frame of activism was quite limited, although valuable; that the ISAG is carrying out a certain kind of activism, and that the other kind of India/South Asia activism can be carried out elsewhere.

We can only speculate on the reason why others chose to leave the ISAG. The large number of active members in the beginning may partly have been due to a more general excitement about Kepa's "new birth". A larger part of the explanation may be the genuine interest in the Kepa community in cooperating with India: a new thing in Kepa at the time. The general vision that informs the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan work also seemed attractive to many. Moreover, in the early meetings some who came had the impression that the programme was only being conceived and that they could deliver important contributions to defining its general direction. Lastly, some individual activists were maybe attracted by the possibility of working in India themselves within this programme and thought of active engagement in the group as a possible qualification.

If these explanations hit the mark, we can understand the decline in the number of activities in the ISAG as follows. In the activist community around Kepa interest in Kepa has receded as the natural consequence of Kepa's activities getting more firmly on track, and becoming therefore also more routinised, after the big changes in emphasis in, roughly, 1995-1998. Activists who joined the ISAG in order to be part of defining its core features, partners etc. naturally withdrew when they realised that the programme had, by September 1998, already acquired a definite shape. Other activists realised that there was little hope for them to be selected for the exchange programme because of its tiny volume and because of the emphasis on opening the exchange programme also to experienced persons outside the ISAG, whose political position and interests link up with the central concerns of Kepa and CSDS/Lokayan. Furthermore, once the programme got started the meetings of the India-group have been dominated by administrative matters. The effort

to separate programme administration from discussions of a more general interest has failed. Hence, meetings have become more boring than they were initially when the programme was only being conceived and first concrete steps taken.

These factors may perhaps explain the great interest at first and most or all of the decline in participation in the ISAG. But important questions still remain. One of them is this: the programme is the fruit of intense discussions between certain activist friends over a number of years. It is not easy to explain the essential features of this exchange to newcomers. An ISAG member, for example, confirmed this notion by explaining the huge importance of meeting first time in India people from the CSDS and Lokayan. This person emphasised the difficulty to understand properly the programme without having a possibility to visit partners in India. The greatest difficulty with the newcomers is probably related to the notion of politics. The programme is at heart a highly ambitious political effort, as the aim is to have an impact on the quality of North-South relations at all levels of our societies. Hence, for newcomers it will necessarily take some time to understand the core intentions, as in any new programme, and how they relate to its concrete details. Such understanding can only evolve over time. Naturally, any new person will eventually bring changes to the programme, but the changes must be based on a real understanding of what has happened before. Because of this concern, the "oldies" have been reluctant to jump on propositions brought to the ISAG by newcomers. These in turn have some times felt marginalised.

### **Internal communication and decision-making of the ISAG**

There has been some internal debate on the legitimacy of the ISAG and about its decision-making practices. Some members' understanding about the legitimacy of the ISAG is according to those of the Kepa board and staff who think a wider representativeness of Kepa's member organisations in the ISAG would raise its legitimacy in Kepa. Other ISAG members underline that the legitimacy of the ISAG must rely on its specific mandate (i.e. North-South democratisation by using certain methods), and not on its composition. In relation to the decision-making it has been pointed out that the ISAG should have a formal board which would act according to the legislation for associations (yhdistyslaki), e.g. the decisions are legal when half of the board

members, including the president are present. The arguments, presented by other ISAG members against this idea are based on two facts. First, the ISAG is not an independent, registered civil association but an open working group in an officially registered association. Secondly, its decision-making power on the programme implementing is equal to that of the officer in-charge. They think that decision-making power (or power to present proposals) relies on those who are active in the ISAG and take the responsibility, together with the Kepa officer in-charge, to implement the commonly accepted aims of the programme. The respect towards other members of the ISAG would be taken care of by sending the meeting agendas to them in time. Therefore, everyone who has concerns on any of the issues in the agenda has the possibility to send her or his comments for the meeting. Another "method of respect" is not taking new issues into the agenda in the meetings.

### **Role and status of the ISAG in Kepa**

There are very different understandings about the status and role of the ISAG in Kepa. However, on two things there seems to be a consensus. First, the ISAG is special among Kepa's working groups, as it is the only one formed around a partnership agreement. Second, the ISAG is a positive example of volunteer activism in Kepa, as partner programmes are usually carried out by the professional staff of Kepa.

As a negative aspect, the issue of narrowness was brought up in the discussions with the Kepa board and staff, i.e. the members of the ISAG do not widely represent Kepa's member organisations. Therefore, the legitimacy of the ISAG was partly questioned, although it was also underlined that one can neither expect that the working groups are always very representative in relation to the member organisations. Moreover, there were also some critical comments on the very existence of the ISAG, and generally on the idea to implement Kepa's programmes on the lines of the current India-programme. These few voices were worried about Kepa's dispersion if all the programmes in the South would be carried out like this one, Kepa's partnership agreements would then be apart from each others, and the understanding of the wholeness (Kepa in the South) would suffer.

Majority of those Kepa board members and staff, discussed with for this self-appraisal think the ISAG has lot of decision-making power. The

same result came up in an informal review of the current working-groups (their members, openness, methods, and so forth) realised in the Kepa office in the spring of 2001. It illustrated that the ISAG was different from other working groups, and especially in relation to its decision-making methods. The other working-groups, i.e. South, Cultural, Development policy, International education, Food programme, and ETVO, although also different among themselves, are mainly dealing with the substance of their specific topic, i.e. providing support, giving advice, reflections and recommendations to the officer in-charge in Kepa office and to the Kepa board members, not so much implementing the programme themselves. However, in practice decisions or proposals of the ISAG have sometimes been questioned by the Kepa staff, especially when they introduced new initiatives outside the current action plan. In these occasions many active members have felt that there is not enough decision-making freedom in the ISAG to carry creatively out the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme. These occasions have caused disagreements between the ISAG and the Kepa staff.

### 8.2.3. Communication with other sectors in Kepa

There has been a lot of good, creative, enthusiastic and open communication between the ISAG and other parts of the Kepa constituency. The interviewees mentioned commonly the dialogues as a very positive element of the India programme, although many of them were sorry for not being able to participate in the dialogues organised in Finland. The "dialogic book" *Dreams of Solidarity - Finnish experiences and reflections (Unelmia maailmasta - Suomalaisen kehityksmaailikkeen juurilla)* was largely seen as an excellent outcome of the programme.

However, the ISAG is still seen among some people on the Kepa board and staff as a small closed circle, which is carrying out an interesting programme but without openly inviting others to participate in the dialogue with the Indian partners. Some Kepa board and staff members also see key members of ISAG as arrogant and as showing too little interest in Kepa's other programmes. The charge made is that ISAG-members have therefore failed to appreciate the extent to which all Kepa's programmes have changed and/or have similar kinds of desirable elements, as North-South equality in the partnership like the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation.

A concrete example regarding the misunderstandings between the ISAG and some Kepa board members was the presentation of the India programme's progress in the board meeting of 12th September, 2000. The ISAG members were eager to present results for the Kepa board, after two years of concrete experience. They wanted to respect the wish presented by some board members in 1998 when the programme was accepted, i.e. that this programme will be closely followed up. They prepared background papers for the presentation. They also explained that in order to properly carry out this kind of programme it would need more economical resources, and presented a visionary budget for the board. It was suggested by the ISAG-members that it might be a better option to discontinue the programme than to try to keep it up with resources which do not allow it to flourish. The funds could come, in the future, either from Kepa and/or elsewhere. There was a half an hour discussion on the programme, concerning its history, aims, methods, progress and future visions. Many of the board members gave positive and/or constructive critical comments on the programme, but they did not think that more funds could be found in the near future in Kepa for the programme. It was also underlined that the annual maximum for any cooperation and partnership programme is 600 000 FIM.

The ISAG members thought the discussion was good and constructive, and that the future would show how Kepa wishes to develop this cooperation programme. Therefore, it was a surprise to hear one year later, in the discussions organised for this self-appraisal that some of the board members are still very annoyed because of this presentation. They thought it would have been enough to present the progress of the programme in the South Working-group, as its mandate is to follow up Kepa's programmes in the South and not to "disturb" the Kepa board. They found it arrogant to present a new big budget (they did not take it as a visionary budget) exactly when there were more cuts in the national budget for development cooperation. They were also annoyed because they had seen that ISAG members were asking for an expansion of the programme of their interest even though they had not participated in the campaign for raising the Finnish development cooperation budget to 0,7 % of the GNP.

The above-mentioned misunderstandings between the ISAG and some board members is a sad example of lack of communication. The main method of Lokayan has always been bridge-building between different sectors of the society in order to unite social groups which are affected by the very

same political and economical processes, decisions and structures, i.e. to strengthen civil society actors to constructively use their limited energies together, instead of fighting with each other. The same method of bridge building is crucial also in the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme. Therefore, the serious aim of the ISAG is to invite people to dialogue on collective key issues and concerns, among the Finnish activists as well as with the Indian exchange activists and other visitors. It looks like the ISAG has not been able to open up and communicate well enough with the rest of the Kepa constituency, however, without underestimating the positive experiences explained above.

### 8.3. Communication and decision-making in Lokayan/CSDS

There are small groups of people working as core of the various collectivities which have an overlap of personnel as well as activities. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is an open-ended process of dialogues on issues of comprehensive democracy. So far, it is not a legal entity. It has people both from Lokayan and CSDS. Lokayan started as a research project on development, democracy and decentralisation in 1980. Prof. D.L. Sheth had conceived and written the project proposal. And also Vijay Pratap was among those who joined Lokayan at its inception stage. CSDS has a tradition of allowing independence to the functioning teams. All teams have their informal and formal participatory decision making process. Lokayan enjoyed this freedom and became an autonomous organisation within three years of its existence. The project director of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam Programme is very satisfied that despite relatively low level of activity of Lokayan for about a decade the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme has not only revitalised its old dialogic platform mould but has also expanded it phenomenally in South Asia and even outside. True to CSDS tradition this process has acquired its own autonomy and momentum and is free to decide its future course of action through participatory consultations. V.K. is now acting as an organisational and conceptual bridge between Lokayan and CSDS.

Travelling within Delhi, due to its sheer size, may take several hours e.g. from the south to the north of the city. Lokayan and CSDS offices are close to each other, in northern Delhi. Thus, the communication between them has been easy to carry out. However, some of the key persons of the programme in India live in southern Delhi. In order to save time, energy and other resources,

they have started to work partly from their homes. Besides, many of the exchange activists and other Finnish visitors have stayed with them. The programme has gradually become coordinated mainly from the drawing room of one of the main actors involved in the cooperation. Taking this into consideration, it has been seen as more practical to establish a new Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme office in southern Delhi. Some individuals, both in Finland and India, involved in the programme, have been worried about how a new office, situated in southern Delhi, may cause a split in the connection between the Indian partners. However, as the CSDS (which has the responsibility to carry out the seminars and documentation of the programme) took a positive attitude on a southern office, the ISAG decided to support the Indian partners' proposal to reallocate 20 000 FIM from the budget of 2001 for the use of a new office, but it was also underlined that the decision was taken only for the year of 2001. The future situation depends on the overall frame of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation for the next three-year period.

### 8.4. Communication and decision-making between Kepa and CSDS/Lokayan

Although reciprocity is sought at all levels of the cooperation, the funding comes entirely from Kepa. Formally Kepa therefore has full control of the programme. At the same time the ideas and vision which are embodied in the particular concrete modes of the programme and carry it forward resides to a large extent in individuals who have little or no involvement in Kepa's decision-making. Thanks to Kepa's flexible attitude, and the general notion in Kepa that this programme is interesting and important this situation has actually been quite workable.

#### **However, there have been also moments of some tension:**

- A plan that Yash Tandon from Zimbabwe would participate in the activist exchange programme in order to participate in the dialogues on economical democracy in India in 2000 was first denied by the Kepa staff, as the selection of a person from outside of Finland/India was against the cooperation agreement. Later on funds were found for this plan from Kepa's general budget, but because of other practical reasons Yash Tandon could not participate in the programme. Vijay Pratap and Yash Tandon met finally in the NIGD-seminar in Helsinki, June 2001.



- In the summer of 2001 a decision/proposal of the ISAG (based on wishes of the Indian partners) to allocate 20 000 FIM for the costs of a new office in southern Delhi for the use of Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation programme was questioned by the executive director of Kepa. However, he accepted the plan in a slightly revised form after receiving a letter from the ISAG where the details and arguments of the issue were explained.
- There have also been some disagreements concerning the reports on programme visits or participation in specific events. For example, some of the Indian partners found a report on a visit in India by Kepa staff members unjust and limited. They said the report did not cover substantial discussions of the visit, on programme development, and that it only concentrated on administrative issues. Some Finnish persons, in turn, have been disappointed about not receiving reports from the Indian partners on certain visits.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

#### 9. Dialogic self-appraisal as a method

The atmosphere was very enthusiastic in the CSDS meeting room in Delhi, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2001, when around twenty representatives of the partner organisations (four of them from Finland), decided to present to the Kepa office and board that the planned estimation of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme should be carried out as a dialogic self-appraisal. They were eager to take the task seriously and had a first proper self-appraisal meeting the next day. The five-hour long meeting on April 6<sup>th</sup> in Delhi was a successful one. It formed a solid base (the discussions were taped and transcribed) for this dialogic self-appraisal which has been carried out collectively by the key actors of this cooperation in both India and Finland for seven months, from April to November 2001.

This report is based on various discussions. Another specific self-appraisal meeting was organised also in Helsinki in June 2001. There have also been many other discussions both in India and Finland, discussions and personal interviews were organised also with Kepa board members and staff. Some of the Indian and Finnish activists who have participated in the activist exchange component have been interviewed, others have sent their comments by e-mail. Kepa's India/South-Asia Group (ISAG) members and those who

are on the Finnish e-mail list of the programme were invited to send their comments by e-mail. Although a significant amount of people (appendix 6) have given their comments, the “sphere” of this self-appraisal has been limited to the partner organisations’ constituencies. Therefore, the influences of this programme beyond these limits are not completely reported. Also agreements, letters, minutes of the ISAG, informal texts, reports on dialogues and lists of organised/attended seminars have been used in this collective effort.

The partners saw this dialogic self-appraisal effort as an opportunity to test this type of an evaluation method, in the development cooperation context, which is carried out collectively by the Northern and Southern partners, and which is based on transparency and mutual sharing of experiences. Various versions of this report have been discussed properly and agreed in the partner organisations, and also partly with their constituencies. The partners have experienced this collective estimation effort as a very positive and constructive process. It has deepened their own understanding of this programme, and on the communication and cooperation between the North and the South. Therefore, it has given useful tools for the planning of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation, but also for other activities.

We are satisfied both with this dialogic self-appraisal method, and with this report. We think it describes and analyses properly and openly the history and activities of this programme, and also brings up relevant notions for the future cooperation. We hope that also others in the Kepa and CSDS/Lokayan constituencies would find this report a useful, coherent and reliable one.

## **10. Final remarks**

The final remarks are divided here in two parts. First, there will be a short presentation of the main results of the different activities in the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation programme. Secondly, there will be an analysis how the original aims of this programme have been fulfilled.

### **10.1. Main results**

#### **10.1.1. Activist exchange programme**

The overall results of the activist exchange programme have been positive and encouraging, besides the various problems and shortcomings explained earlier in this report. At the end all the activists have been satisfied that they

had participated in the programme, that they got a fruitful opportunity to deepen their political understandings as activists, through a close cooperation with activists in a Southern/Northern society. Also the political influence of the programme has been significant. An important result of this component is also the success in creating physical parity between Northern and Southern activists. All the exchange activists continue their social/political activism, although only few of them are actively involved in the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme. However, the aim has neither been to integrate all of them into this specific activity, but to support their personal growth as activists.

*Some specific concrete results are:*

- the discourses of one of the Indian visitors has significantly influenced the understanding on child labour in Finland,
- some of the Finnish exchange activists have been creating important initiatives based directly or indirectly on their experiences in India, concerning especially the climate change, other environmental issues, and the democratisation of the North-South relations,
- the exchange programme has given an opportunity for those from India to travel to Europe who usually do not have that possibility. Their visits have been deeply important for themselves and their political movements, but also for the Finnish persons who have been in touch with them. The most positive comments from the Finnish side have especially been related to these exchange activists from India,
- it has been positive to realise how the traditional Kepa kind of approach, the academic institutions and the Indian low cast movements have been able to come together for a common goal, as the visit of one of the activists to Jyväskylä, has ended up giving birth to the environmental community programme of Jyväskylä University students in a township of Delhi,
- contacts with Indian activists have significantly influenced both the anti-privatisation and WTO campaign, and also vision-formation on (at least) WTO related issues in Kepa,
- with one of the Indian exchange activists came up the idea that a specialist from the Indian Ministry for Renewable Energy, responsible for the development of cooking stoves should meet a Finnish specialist Pauli Rantanen to see which of his models could be further developed for Indian

conditions. The cooking stove issue is an extremely crucial health dilemma, as between 900 000 and 3,6 million persons, especially women, die in India annually because of the smoke caused by inappropriate cooking stoves,

- a Finnish NGO Technology for Life (Tekniikka elämään palvelemaan) has created long term contacts with some Indian exchange activists.

An important outcome is also the experiences of all those who have been interacting with the exchange activists in India and Finland. For example, in the Finnish context, the Indian activists' comments and queries about the Finnish society has taught for the Finns a lot about their own society. It has made the invisible visible to them and it has forced them to search for information on a wide range of issues and seek contacts with a diverse group of people. It shows them that sometimes outsiders are needed to make social marginalisation visible to them living in a welfare state.

#### **10.1.2. Seminars, documentation and networking**

The partner organisations have organised a significant amount of seminars/dialogues both in India and Finland. The response from the partner organisations' constituencies has been positive and supporting, as also from other participants. Through these seminars it has been possible to strengthen the dialogue and mutual understanding of different civil society groups and organisations concerning certain common concerns.

Lot of documentation work has been carried out (seminar taped and later on transcribed, presentations transformed into articles, articles written and so forth) but the partners have been able to publish only couple of books. However, many manuscripts are almost ready to be published.

A lot of networking has taken place, especially in India/South Asia, but also in Finland/Northern Europe. The Indian partners have already been able to create initial seeds for more structured South Asian networking, based on the five dimensions of democracy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (V.K.). The V.K. process is active also in Finland but is still less structured. However, the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation has opened basis for a new kind of political dialoguing and networking in Finland. One concrete result of new kind of networking was an agreement between Finland and India concerning the research on renewable energy, after Finnish Minister Satu Hassi had met three ministers from the Indian federal government (ministers for renewable energy, environment and power) in her visit to India.

#### **10.2. Original objectives in focus**

The objectives for the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation programme (listed at the beginning of this report) have significantly been fulfilled.

The first two objectives of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme, i.e. (1) to support the activists' personal political development, and (2) to deepen activists' and other people's (trade unionists, politicians, civil servants, students, workers, teachers, etc.) understanding of their position in their own society and in the present global situation, and also enhance these through an understanding of the reality of a country in the South (India) and in the North (Finland), have obviously been fulfilled in the activist exchange programme. Also those who have been implementing the programme have had significant experiences in relation to these two aims. Hence, most probably these two aims have, to some extent, been fulfilled also through other activities of the programme, i.e. seminars/dialogues, publications and networking, although it is more difficult to be measured. Moreover, the results will be seen in the future, i.e. how the personal learning of the activists will be seen in those political movements they participate in.

The next two objectives are more general, i.e. (3) to strengthen the base of international solidarity movement and to broaden it's understanding of the North-South relations (4) and to increase democratic communication between the Northern and Southern civil societies, as also in the North and in the South. Therefore, they are also more difficult to estimate. However, we can be certain that at least some steps have been taken also in relation to these objectives. It is difficult to here point out some especially successful activities in relation to these two aims, as all the activities of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme have certainly somehow contributed to the fulfilling of these objectives. However, perhaps the most important results have been the active dialoguing and networking in India and South Asia among representatives from various sectors of society. There have been in these events also many Finnish participants. Another important result has been a more face to face level of dialoguing the Indian and Finnish exchange activists have had during their visits in a Northern/Southern society.

The last two objectives are more related to the programme itself, i.e. (5) to create and respect democratic practices in carrying out this cooperation, and (6) to develop a method of cooperation to be useful also in other

cooperation agreements between Northern and Southern partners. This cooperation programme has been carried out quite democratically, although there have also been some shortcomings. This programme has been a challenging cooperation process for both partners. It has perhaps been a bigger challenge for Kepa than what was envisioned at the beginning of the process. We have experienced our share of complexities and misunderstandings that grow out of working in different contexts. Lokayan and CSDS work according to a decentralised decision-making structure, where individual groups have a fair amount of autonomy in the use of funds and in formulating how they want to work. The decision-making structure is quite different in a large institution, as Kepa is. There have been instances of communication between Kepa staff and CSDS/Lokayan that have not functioned the way they should have and important matters have not been responded to. It is difficult to communicate the context of work in India to staff members in Finland who have no experience of it. It is only when decision-making processes become clear to us, on the ground, and when we understand the effort and discussion which has gone into reaching a decision that we can understand the need for response on proposals and suggestions from the Southern partners. It becomes an issue of commitment and solidarity.

Has the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation been fruitful for meeting its objective of developing new methods, or new tools, for solidarity? It seems fair to say that the concrete experiences described above in themselves have some exemplary value. Especially the activist exchange and the dialogues have already received lot of positive attention, both in India and Finland but also elsewhere. For example, a Kepa officer has experienced that when speaking about the Kepa's activities in different international NGO meetings the activist exchange programme has been found very interesting and attractive. On the other hand, there is a strong sentiment that the methodological ambitions and experiments have not been concluded and that more effort and time is required before this aspect of the programme can be properly assessed. Whether this inconclusive and uncertain remark means that the programme has in fact failed with regard to working out new tools for democratising North-South relations is a matter of judgment. This judgment should be exercised by the partner organisations when they use this report,

and other material to draw their conclusions about future activities.

## **11. Notions for the future**

### **11.1. General notions**

This chapter is divided into three parts. Firstly, there will be notions based on the concrete experiences during the first three years of cooperation. Secondly, there will be a presentation of some visions for international cooperation and networking in the frame of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Thirdly, there will be some comments on how the future cooperation between the Kepa and CSDS/Lokayan would be reasonable to be formulated.

### **11.2. Methodological challenges**

The programme has been methodologically ambitious and some of the experience gained is promising, as noted earlier. However, it seems likely that more focused attention than before should be directed to analysis of the methods used and to their refinement. There is a serious question here of whether this important task can be completed successfully mainly through the input of volunteers or whether it will require more attention also by professional staff within the programme, e.g. by skilled people recruited especially to develop this particular aspect of the programme.

### **11.3. Ideas for the future on the base of the experiences**

These ideas for the future, which have been presented and understood during this self-appraisal process are listed below in the order of the current activities of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation programme. They are concrete suggestions for the becoming activities, in the case the same methods will still be used in the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation. However, these comments for the future may also serve others using similar kinds of methods in their work. A recommendation for the entire programme would be focusing on certain issue or issues in the general frame of the North-South democratisation, in order to make the cooperation more coherent substantially.

#### **11.3.1. Exchange programme:**

##### *General*

- the activist exchange should be slightly expanded in both countries in order to guarantee more continuity and stability of the programme,

- there are no guarantees that the voluntary energy which has been crucial to the success of the programme so far, can be sustained. Therefore, more resources should be allocated in the receiving the exchange activists,

- there is a need to circulate the experience through a larger mailing list and share views on various issues involved

#### *Background and selection of the activists*

- more involvement of seniors in the activist exchange, opportunities must be provided for people in leading roles in different sections of social and political life to take part in it. However, also committed younger activists should be included into programme in order to strengthen their political training. Hence, also both the persons who implement the programme in Finland and India and other key persons in the partner organisations could participate in the activists exchange programme, i.e. there could be three activist categories in the programme: (1) seniors, (2) younger ones, and (3) programme developers,

- activist exchange should involve both people closely associated with the core groups of Kepa and CSDS/Lokayan and others,

- if the programme wants to select senior activists for future exchange periods they would need to be invited formally also in Finland, not through an open calling process, and only for a limited period of time because of their numerous other commitments.

#### *Remuneration*

- according to the comments of the exchange activists the current level of remuneration should be sufficient also in the future,

- however, one possibility is also figure out a proper level of remuneration according the current situation of each exchange activist,

#### *Training of activists*

- training should be planned and carried out properly, both before the departure and at the beginning of the exchange period itself, a structured form of briefing should take place,

- briefing, training and feedback sessions should take place also during the exchange period.

#### *Working theme*

- the three-year experience did not give a clear answer for the dilemma of formulating a working theme for the activists while participating in the exchange programme,

- perhaps the most reasonable method would be a specific plan for each exchange activist according to her/his personality, earlier experience and momentary needs of the Kepa-Lokayan/CSDS cooperation,

- however, it is crucial to have a proper discussion on the issue between the partners

#### *Receiving of activists*

- receiving of activists should be improved, more resources than presently budgeted are required to guarantee a minimal reception capacity,

- it is important to receive well in advance exact information about the activists' background, fields of expertise and specific wishes for their exchange period in order to be able to preplan a relevant programme for them.

#### *Reporting*

- the newsletters could be improved and should be assessed in terms of who the readers are and what their objective is,

- we need to be flexible when it comes to report writing and look at diverse ways of "reporting" such as poems, personal stories, photographs or keeping a journal, because it would be a great loss to exclude people because they cannot write reports. Different ways of recording experiences also have to do with including debriefing sessions, interviewing activists, also during the exchange period itself.

### **11.3.2. Seminars**

- reasonable to continue with organising seminars/dialogues for having so good experiences during the first three years of cooperation,

- there could be more (at least in Finland) small, quite informal public meetings where some relevant issues/common concerns could be discussed among the Kepa (CSDS/Lokayan) constituency, in order to open the dialogue of the programme and find more links for example to the advocacy work done in Kepa.

### 11.3.3. Documentation and analyses

- the links between publications, the seminars and the overall programme of the activist exchange have been too weak. Thus, there is a need to find a constructive balance between the dialogues (seminars and discussions) and the documenting (books, articles in newspapers, magazine etc.),

- one suggested way of dealing with the difficulty to report the seminars is to restrict the number of dialogues held. After two held dialogues preliminary reports should be produced before the planning of following dialogues can start. The dialogue and dissemination process need to go hand-in-hand,

- the costs of documentation and reflection are necessarily large in a cross-cultural effort of this kind. More realism is needed in budgeting costs of translation of written material, but also more resources,

- the publication side of the process could also be enhanced by the introduction of a digest on democracy to appear 2-3 times a year, which could publish material cumulated during the dialogues,

- the publication process is constrained by the lack of a full time person working with the publications, thus more resources also for this activity are needed.

### 11.3.4. Networking

- strengthening the networking around the five dimensions of democracy of the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam both in India and in Finland, and also in South Asia and the Northern Europe.

### 11.3.5. Communication and decision-making

- Kepa and CSDS/Lokayan should continue - and improve - their democratic way to carry out this cooperation programme,

- the status and mandate of the ISAG needs to be clarified,

- the formal acceptance must be based in a process of mainly written communication and documentation of the programme. The result must be that key features of the programme are transparent and accessible to all in

the Kepa constituency, especially the board and central staff.

### 11.4. Visions for the future: Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

We have been explaining Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (V.K.) process through the entire report. The wide frames for the V.K. have already been formulated but many issues, dilemmas and methods are still under discussion. However, a serious and ambitious aim is to construct, step by step national, regional and international networks aiming seriously towards democratisation of North-South relationships. The conceptual core of the process is formed around the five dimensions of democracy of V.K., i.e. economical, political, social, cultural and ecological. There will be in the future many geographical and/or ideological key points. Some of them will also use, hopefully another concept than V.K. The aim of the V.K. initiative is that the core ideas of the "mother V.K." will be transformed into something relevant and natural in each economical, political, social, cultural and ecological context.

During the brainstorming session in Delhi in April 2001 on the future ideas the following was listed:

- holding dialogues on the five dimensions of democracy in South Asia and Europe,
- make V.K. an international organisation based in South Asia with open membership for individuals and organisations,
- having five processes coordinated by movements in South Asia and Europe,
- sectoral expansion into having dialogues with movements directly,
- establish a joint publishing house owned by a South Asian organisation or by both an organisation in the South and one in the North,
- supporting networking on a South-South and South-South-North axis,
- developing a web page and setting up a room/space for activists who participate in the exchange and as a physical centre of the activities.

There are also a number of challenges related to the application of the five dimensions of democracy within the work of the Lokayan panchayats (peoples councils). The Swastha Panchayat (peoples health council) does not fit clearly into any of the five dimensions of democracy. They would like to establish more concrete links to health issues in the Nordic countries and in South Asia. An example, on the ground, of how to work with the dimension of social democracy is work of the Jan Parivahan Panchayat (the peoples

transport council). The case rickshaw pullers interlinks class, dignity and identity issues, and people-to-people dialogues have been the basis of the mobilisation work. One challenge is how to translate the concept of ecological democracy to be applicable on the political level.

Much of the networking that has taken place until now has been between researchers and intellectuals. If the concept of V.K. is to be expanded into new sectors this should also include more contacts directly with grassroots organisations both in Finland/Northern Europe and in India/South Asia. At present this is a dialogue that takes place mainly between like-minded individuals working and acting at the same level of society and in similar circles. Bringing the V.K. concept to the grassroots requires a process of translation into 'local' languages, the language of diverse groups who are not communicating in academic fora, whose life is more concretely tied with issues of survival. The V.K. concept should be a framework for action that contains the seed for change and a clearly communicated flexibility that will allow it to be transformed according to the needs and requirements of diverse groups, because the earth is not only one family, but many families.

An interesting challenge for the V.K. process and concept is also the reaction of a womens' group in Mombay, which participated in the dialogues organised there in August 2001 on ecological democracy. They found the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam problematic, as they emphasized that the family is not necessarily a unit of democracy and justice, but, especially for many women, a place of humiliation and violence.

### **11.5. Future of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation programme**

We think that the planning of a continuation of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan cooperation process should be continued in a three-year framework. However, we do not have yet enough experience to formulate reliable proposals for the next three-year period. Therefore, we suggest that the first year (2002) would be dedicated to two things. Firstly, to properly complete the current activities, and especially the unfinished publications. Secondly, to work on the planning and preparatory work for both the future networks around the V.K. initiative and the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme itself. The latter one will most probably be somehow part of the wider V.K.

process, as has already been discussed with the Kepa board in September 2000.

Planning of the V.K. process would mean mainly dialoguing and planning with different civil society actors in India/South Asia and Finland/Nordic Countries. Planning of the Kepa-CSDS/Lokayan programme would naturally be closely linked with the overall V.K. process, but the aim is to define for this specific cooperation programme such a frame and content which will smoothly suit for all the partners, but being relevant also for the V.K. networking frames. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years of the programme (2003-2004) could then be dedicated in carrying out the collectively accepted plans. In the future plans it is also important to clarify the role of CSDS, Lokayan and Kepa in implementing the programme. However, the central task will be the formulation of a legitimate programme mandate which will be fully accepted by the Kepa, CSDS and Lokayan.