

# Community Health Learning Programme 2010

CHLP-2010-4/FRS3



Source: Community Health Cell

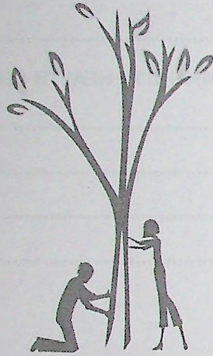
## A Report on the Community Health Learning Experience

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COMMUNITY HEALTH CELL

Sudha WR Sz6 RB-5 (120)

CHLP-2010-4/FRS3



# MEMOIR OF A JOURNEY UNFINISHED

*A Harbinger of Hope*

L A V A N Y A  
D E V D A S


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MEMOIR OF A  
JOURNEY UNFINISHED

At the height of Hope



DEDICATION

# To My Fellow Travellers'



With my friends



Manjula



Vinaya



Hannumanthappa



Dr Rohini and Shobha



Shivamma



Malikarjun and Madappa



Sejal



Ganesh



Ananad



Lakshmi

## Wonder Called Friends

*I am a summation of all that I have met. Friends have been my constant support. Family my anchor and life my inspiration.*

*This journey would not have started out, if not for the Community Health Cell allowing me to stray into its corridors, inspire me to walk into the world of the Fellowship Program.*

*Dr. Thelma listened to me with sensitivity, assuring me that my fears of the unknown will have a place to rest. It did. She has been a guide through this journey, helping me crystallise my thoughts, encouraging me to travel, explore and discover.*

*Premdas has been a sounding board to all the arguments and counterarguments that mushroom in my mind. Whenever I needed to get clarity on a topic that would be seemingly "complex", his grace in looking at it from several points of view would add to an expansion of knowledge. Knowing him as a wonderful person is a treasure.*

*Dr Ravi's classes always stirred me into deep reflection. The reflections translated into reading and that into understanding communities where I worked. The messages from a humble person are worthy of being treasured and above all brought to practice. To my newfound practice, I thank the source of light.*

*Every member in the SOCHARA Family has built a girdle of trust, companionship and community. This is where it begins. Each of them is today my friends. I take with them their goodness and generosity.*

*My friends and especially my parents accept me the way I am - for all my idiosyncrasies, my daring to ruffle an order, or just being eccentric. There have loved me for who I am. To each one of my friend who adore me, stand by me in this journey that has merely begun, I think of you and know I am richer than all the riches of the world put together.*

WHEAT, CORN, ALFALFA

and other crops are raised on the farm. The farm is a typical example of a small family farm in the Midwest.

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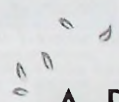
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# A BEND IN THE ROAD

# A JOURNEY IN MIND

*"The only tyrant I accept in this world is the 'still small voice' within me."*

*-M.K Gandhi*



The journey converged into areas that are seldom synonymous to India – the unmystified, poor, remote villages that I travelled in the last year, soon I quit the IT industry. It has been a journey that unravels for me a different language, new experience and renewed awakening.

It took me a long while to start the first chapter of this journal – A reflective story of the one year of my journey through the **Community Health Fellowship Program** at the Community Health Cell.

I knew I had to come to it at some point. I was unsure if I was prepared to revisit each of the raw, nervous emotions that I had battled with to decide an alternative way of life different from what I was familiar. It is not that those battles are over – they just take new forms, I realize. I had mustered the courage to take on a different course of life.

I decided to finish the other chapters that address my learning on community, health, equity, India's challenges in handling universal health and nutritional security to its people, globalization and the impact at every structure of life, livelihood issues due to urbanization, and countless complex issues that I got to see in close.

As I finished with the other chapters, the content for **A Journey in Mind** was being assimilated in my mind. I was revisiting several arguments that I was surrounded with – my consciousness, people's opinion around me, conflicts that took undue attention. Sometimes this would snowball into a larger than life ogre. I had to take a plunge. **A leap of Faith.**

I recall feverishly writing in my blog **Bohemian Interludes** (<http://bohemianinterludes.blogspot.com/>) the mappings of my mind. This was a place that chronicled the decision I was to make. A decision that



would change the course of my life in many ways- quitting the IT world that I had known for a decade now.

At this crucial time in my life, I knew only "strong" choices need to be made to carve out a new path in my life – a path that is affirmative, positive, resilient and that which will impact me and my world around me. It was a churn of emotions, no doubt.

My blog dated **October 15 2009** read:

*"The day approaches. I am about to tie-up my high heels of the corporate world, to wear my sneakers. The high heels were for an elite world. I need my walking shoes, to be sure that the soul wears out silently when I firmly step on the earth. The delicate heels renders no balance in rugged streets of life. I am about to move to a world beyond marble corridors, exquisite wall to wall carpets that are vacuum cleaned every hour by janitors who are always seen hunched at their work...*

*As I tie the laces of my "walkers", to set out, I see the gates opening to a "new" world. I approach the gate and push it open. I am drowned by a flood of light. There is nothing but the blinding light. I close my eyes almost instinctively. I draw my hand towards the beam, almost to stop it from blinding me. I stand momentarily out of my pulsating heart - out of a vision.*

*Before long, as I open my eyes, I see I am in a new world...."*

And thus I decided to take the road less travelled on. The decision was not easy. I had to sail through cascading waves or arguments that Loved ones posed and counter posed on the rich experience they had gained of life.

## *Myths to Deal With Before You Pursue Your Dreams*

*-----*  
***No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars or sailed an uncharted land, or opened a new doorway for the human spirit. - Helen Keller***  
*-----*

Not before long, after much oscillation between now, then, tomorrow, not for sometime soon, and then now again, there were greater challenges to brave, confront, and meet. Just before I could take the first step on the "journey" that I thought was the right and appropriate thing to do, I had to counter each argument. THIS was probably the right time to pursue my dreams. People around me, the ones who deeply cared for my wellbeing began to ask me a barrage of questions.

This I warn you now, can be first of the many battles you will have to wage, brave and live through. The advice comes in a torrent; even if you want to shut it out and you tell yourself, "I am not hearing this" it will be screamed into your ears.

The intentions of loving concern are not evil – it is just that you would rather want the person to say "go ahead and do what your mind and heart tells you. I am right there by your side". You don't get to hear that. It is for you to take the leap of faith. The flight from the cliff is a belief in yourself, in your journey of finding out the true meaning of life that will define your dreams, passions, and goals. You have just one life to live. **If you don't risk it now, you will never find.**

These arguments try to protect you by shielding you from the possibility of failure. This in effect also shields you from the possibility of making your dreams a reality.

**You can follow your dreams someday, but right now you need to buckle down and be responsible.**

Someday? When is 'someday?' Someday is not a day at all. Today is the only day I know is guaranteed. Today is the only day I know for sure. I do not know if tomorrow will be. I realize that pursuing your dreams is what life is all about. You cannot wait until 'someday.' Someday is no day. It is today or never. I was at that time reading the **Tibetan Book of Living and Dying**. It struck me profoundly I need to make my today the first day of the rest of my new life. What comes later is not in my hands. The NOW surely is and I needed to exercise it.

**You will be a failure, if it doesn't work out.**

What is success? What is Failure? Who defines these dichotomies? Whose definition is it anyway? I had merely contemplated an alternative way of living I knew would give me a lasting meaning in life. Failure was just a lucid word like success. I was always thought to be different – being different to people can be a "failure to some! I was not prepared to go by these measuring criteria – for me life is to live through straight and not so straight paths of life.

**It's safer to stay in your high paying job.**

Sure. Money gives me a feeling of "security". Especially for a woman, independence is got through her purse. It gave me an identity. The freedom to self-determination. But money was no more the motivation for me as much as ensuring I live a life here on where I could build memory. Security I began to see was far away from the truth. There was a need to apply the "knowing of finding a world" that could help me cultivate the practice of being present with issues that plague our country and find ways to work towards alleviating the pain, inequality and discomfort of an egalitarian world order.

Clearly, a high paying job, technology driven world gave me the skills, knowledge, and impetus to understanding the world at the micro and macro level. What I needed was a memory of experiences to make me rich. Money hardly did that.

Living the same life in an endless groove, was going home every evening locking yourself in house and never ever coming out. And one fine day you wake up to see your entire life and dreams is down the sink.

**Only a lucky few "make it."**

I'd say that is because those lucky took the leap of faith and said to themselves "today or never" they made it. They had the drive, determination, and willpower fear. May be some are not so lucky, but I am sure they go to bed saying, "at least, I tried". I'd want to say the same, then to look at the glossy magazine and feel envy, miserable and let down because I chose to take the easy way out.

**You might fail. And failing is bad.**

Failures are simply stepping-stones to success. No matter how it turns out, it always ends up just the way it is meant to be. The biggest mistake I could do is to do nothing because of the fear of failure. A new world is scary for sure. Once you start living through the new world, you realize it is not so bad, after all.

Today, I would not trade the journey that I made for anything else. Despite the trepidation, the giving up of many luxuries, choosing an alternative way of living is turning out to be a beautiful journey. The past year has allowed me to see life in the true sense. This is the life that affects our world the most – helpless children struck in the quagmire of poverty, malnourishment, bleaker opportunities; the struggles of the underprivileged who are time and again marginalized and kept outside the boundaries of society; tales of women who hold on to their lives despite the struggles of life, are merely some of the "looking into reality" that I have done in the past year.

Choosing the social development world to the IT world is by no way demeaning or undermining one from the other. The two worlds are a dichotomy. I feel proud to have worked in some of the finest technology driven companies like i2 Technologies, Infosys, EMC and then CISCO Systems. It is just that I felt I needed to touch the lives of people who probably do not have access to any of the technology that is developed in many of the research labs

**You need more money saved before you can take the first step.**

I did not need more money. I needed a plan. It was all right if I had to alter it as the days went by. I need a budget to help me wade through the choices that were offered to me. I realized that it is important to eliminate ALL the nonessential costs in my life – sometimes consumerist greed can make

one mindless. It was a challenge to have a minimum amount of money needed to be able to live realistically. I continue to be inspired by people who succeeded despite adversities. Who allowed truth to be their weapon to be the voice of the oppressed, the marginalized, and the shunned. The lives of M.K Gandhi, Martin Luther King, George Orwell, Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi continue to give me the strength to know that there were/are people who have had the tenacity to work for the suffering.

With this realization, I have taken baby steps.

**That sounds like a lot of hard work.**

Yes, it is surely going to a lot of hard work. I had to work hard at cultivating a new practice. Every minute to nurturing the practice is worth the effort. I think success in life hinges on one key point: Finding hard work, you love doing. As long as you remain true to yourself and follow your own interests, values and dreams, you can find success through passion. Perhaps most importantly, I did not want to wake up a few years from now working in a career field that I knew was not where my peace was and keep wondering, "What have I done for so many years?"

I was on a journey to find myself working hard, loving every minute of it, and not stopping. Because there is meaning in what I am doing, I believe that hard work isn't hard when you concentrate on your passions and dreams.

**I tell myself, most importantly: Be yourself, because everyone else is taken!**

## *One Year Later*

As I write this journal, it is nearly a year from the time I dealt with the tyrant who spoke to me about the need for "practical" living. The "still voice" in me, gave me the courage to break the fears of my mind and explore my inner passion to work in the area of social development, social justice and the common well-being of society.

A year hence, I have learnt immensely through each of my friends in class. My Fellows Companions who come from various parts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. I have also learnt from many men and women whom I have spent time with, in villages, street corners, several NGOs. I see them work tirelessly to create a semblance of an equal world. But mostly, my lessons have come from speaking to women walking through by-lanes in fields, or sitting with a group of people under a neem tree. The tales of everyday existence, the strength and imagination required of them to live everyday life is inspiring. This has humbled me beyond measure. I know that journey has poignantly come to a cross road and the

direction to surge forward is one of deep commitment to my dreams to work towards touching people's lives in small measured.

## *Learning From the Lives of People – Here and Elsewhere*

Life is elsewhere. The greatest lesson I have learnt so far is that despite the contradictions in life, hope and promise are yoked together. Sometimes the attitudes that defeats us, is to go to a village as an "outsider". The extreme dichotomy of "rural" villages and urban dwelling is stark through the images, smell, sound and language. When one sets into a village, one sees deprivation, injustice, poverty, struggle, disease. I was cautious of the impulse to pretend that "I" as the "outsider" had the answers to the problems. The first myth was shattered rather quickly. One is saved if one can suspend the "I-Me-Myself" when working with communities sooner than later. What lies in our periphery of knowledge is what has been taught to us – that the poor are often "non-literates" and we the educated lot have the answers.

It did not take me long to know that there was "unlearning" to be done. Fast and quickly. That the answers to tacking issues do not come from "outside" but lay within the core of people – poor, informed (though not university bread), imaginative, creative and who live through the problem day in and day out and know that they have the solutions to their problems, though some help to organize their effort may help.

Living in communities is the key – especially living with the communities that are marginalized, silenced and unseen. It is when you live with the disadvantaged, one sees how power operates – with power comes a plethora of privileges: roads, water, access to health care, food, education that normally should be equally distributed. The silenced communities often get a "hand-me-down" treatment.

I had lived in snatches for three to four months in several villages in Hampi, during the north Karnataka flood calamity of October 2009. One year later, I travelled to Raichur (August 2010) walking through villages on a *Padhyatra* for five days. Walking through the villages, one saw that people continued to living in temporary shelters. The tin-roofs that were provided soon after the flooding had not changed to permanent housing facilities for people who had lost everything. A year gone by and the rehabilitation activities initiated by the government are still far from over. IT Corporations promised to build houses for the homeless. The foundations of the houses are of poor quality. The structural plan and layout of the houses do not adhere to the minimum requirement of space for comfortable living. There has been no effort made in taking the opinion/views of people, their needs and necessities. This proves that we are often caught with the "outsider" world-view when it should be a "from-within"

approach. Through my travel to North Karnataka (Bagalkote, Raichur) and Chamrajnagar Districts (Kollegal Taluk) where the health Index is at it dismal low, one sees equitable development is far from achieved.

## *Through the World of a Child*

The fellowship program helped me narrow down an area that I want to work for the remaining decades of my life. Children are the harbingers of change. They need to be nurtured, tended and cared for. In our society, one often sees that children are considered to be the property of their parents. They do not have a "voice" or "political influence" and above all no economic power. A child is seen and seldom heard. Thus, one presumes that a child is a non-entity. Little is done to realize that the evolving capacities of a child must be respected.

It is imperative that we create a world that listens to children and learns from them. It is our duty to create a world where children have hope and opportunity to grow. The poem On Children by the Poet **Kahlil Gibran** captures the essence of a child beautifully.

### On Children

*Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.  
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.*

*You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.*

*You may strive to be like them,  
but seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.  
You are the bows from which your children  
as living arrows are sent forth.*

*The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,  
and he bends you with his might  
that his arrows may go swift and far.*

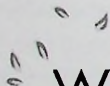
*Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;  
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,  
so He loves also the bow that is stable.*

When you visit a village, the first thing that you see is children. You see them playing, carrying pots of water-by-water tanks, or sometimes tending to even smaller siblings. Their voices are often feeble when an adult is speaking. One needs the sensitivity to pause the adult "experiences" to hear the voice of innocence.

Thus, through the fellowship, I have had the opportunity to trace, know, learn and acquire the tools to work in the area child rights, looking closely at the best interest of a child, with respect to right to education, leisure, cultural activities, right to health, Child right to food. The important areas that one needs to focus on are: *Basic health and welfare of a child, survival and development, health and health services, handicapped children and social security guarantees.*

### *Today. Now. Then.*

I can with confidence state that today through my "baby-step" journey, I have acquired tools to knowledge and action, to lead, communicate, and help build communities. I have thus reclaimed my language of the "other". Today, I realize that my journey is humbled by the experiences of men, women and children who live in difficult landscapes – through them I am now a more grounded individual. The realization that a lot more is left to un-do, learn, know and evolve, and yet dream is hope in my now and then.



WALKING INTO THE  
WORLD CALLED  
COMMUNITY HEALTH  
CELL



## UNLEARNING THE LEARNT

*"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved"*

- Helen Keller



Walking in the path where there is the most suffering.

The orientation program that began in March through the second week of April was one of many unlearning, re-learning, discovering and knowing. Personally, for me it was a chance to meet with myself again. This has allowed me room to explore the "inners" of my conscious and unconscious mappings of my mind.

The orientation program brought together wonderful people from various backgrounds, sharing their journeys through interactive sessions leading to great intellectual flights of discussions, deliberation and fruitful learning.

The class of 2010 had people of varied background, thus making the class rich. Several vivid moments capture my memory that will have a lasting impression. Some events that are etched deep in my mind are the Public consultation on Health Rights at Haveri, where one heard testimonials of people who suffered the death of a close family member due to the negligence on the part of the health personal in a Primary Health Clinic. The trip to Pothnal, to the school Chilli Pili, interacting with the children and the school administration on the impact the alternative education is having on children who belong to the disadvantaged communities was a quieting experience.

## *Chalking out the Mission Statement*

The chalking out of the mission statement was an important step in the beginning of the orientation program. This served to chalk out our short-term plan, and personal objectives that works as a follow through. This helped us gain perspective and focus on what each one of us wanted to achieve for ourselves. For example, Hanmumathappa's mission and vision is to emancipate the dalits of his community. "I want to go back and teach my people what I have learnt here." Anand, a young "Marxist" thinker has a fire of hope burning in him and the egalitarian principles fill his heart and mind, to wanting to be an instrument of change in the world".

The one common goal that binds each one of us is that each one has a common goal – that which has stirred our minds, hearts and soul, and above all have decided make "strong choices" of action towards an aspiration. I can say that is true of myself, after much thought, to have called the IT industry quits after nearly a decade of working in an "elite" industry, it is my desire to know my land, and may be find my roots at the end of the journey.

When it came to choosing my area of work that I would want to concentrate on I knew it would be in the area of Children. To do this, I needed to understand the problems of children, their rights and needs, I first needed to understand the vast expanse of the areas of health, health rights and the several factors that impact a child's right to life.

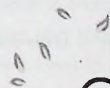
Understanding the rights of a child means that one has to understand the family, society and the players that constitute a child's world.

This led me to discover several socio-political-cultural undercurrents needed to understand the problems that our people face in this country. These are illustrated in the chapters that follow.

# UNLEARNING THE LEANT

Learning to unlearn is a process of letting go of old ways of thinking and acting in order to embrace new ways of thinking and acting.

The first step in unlearning is to become aware of the old ways of thinking and acting. This is often done through reflection and self-examination. Once aware, the next step is to let go of these old ways. This is often done through meditation and other practices that help to quiet the mind and release the old ways. Finally, the new ways of thinking and acting must be embraced. This is often done through practice and repetition. The process of unlearning is a continuous one, as the old ways often creep back in. It is a process of ongoing growth and change.



## CHILDREN

Children are born with a natural curiosity and a desire to learn. They are constantly observing and absorbing information from their environment. This is a natural and necessary part of their development. However, as they grow, they often learn to conform to the expectations of others. They learn to suppress their natural curiosity and to follow the rules. This is often done through punishment and reward. The result is a child who has learned to conform but has lost their natural curiosity and desire to learn. It is our responsibility as adults to help children unlearn these learned behaviors and to help them embrace their natural curiosity and desire to learn. This is often done through play and exploration. Play allows children to explore their world and to learn from their experiences. Exploration allows children to discover new things and to learn from their discoveries. It is through play and exploration that children learn to embrace their natural curiosity and desire to learn. It is through play and exploration that children learn to unlearn the learned and to embrace the natural.

# OUR DYING CHILDREN - WHERE IS THE RIGHT TO LIFE?



Children are heard. Not seen. When you walk into a village, the first thing you see are children. Look closer. Something stares into you – malnutrition, poverty, and a promise in their eyes.

**"No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law"**, reads Article 21 of the Indian constitution. Does "life" mean a mere mode of existence - an existence from birth to the natural decay of the body to death? Or does "life" mean living, breathing, existing through the means to subsist with the dignity of being, possessing the right to livelihood, health, to be treated equal of any physical and sexual identity, of caste and creed.

Then, what may you define "deprived"? Simply put, it means snatching, taking away, stripping, impoverished, keeping away from having the fundamental essence of life.

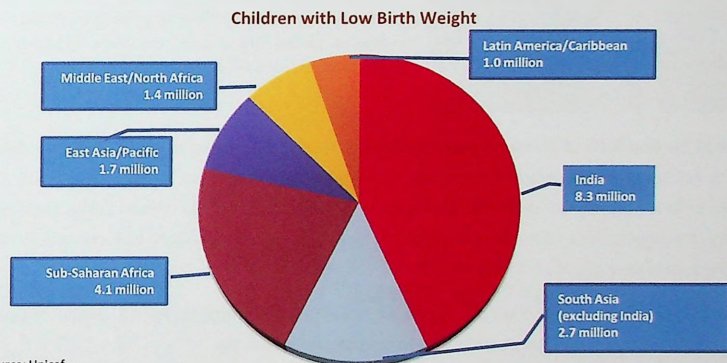
When things being equal, does this include children? Is this merely a presumption that it does, after all?

Children are the silent, the invisible, possessing no formal political voice to claim their identity to the "right to life". If we are the custodians of their lives, then, why is it that India allows two million of her children under the age of five to die every year, through a deathblow of malnutrition, when it is clearly preventable and manageable?

## *Children's Right to Food*

Undernutrition is a violation of child right and right to life. A child's right to food is an integral part of the right to life.

India has the dubious distinction of standing first in having the highest number of stunted children in the world, surpassing countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Ethiopia and several Sub-Saharan African countries. Low height for age is indicative of stunting and of chronic malnutrition. The prevalence of underweight children in India is twice as high as the average prevalence of 26 sub-Saharan African countries put together. In India, the under five-mortality death was reported to be alarmingly high at 69 for every 1,000 live births in 2008. Five north Indian states: Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh account for nearly 55 percent of child mortality and with this, 65 percent of maternal deaths.

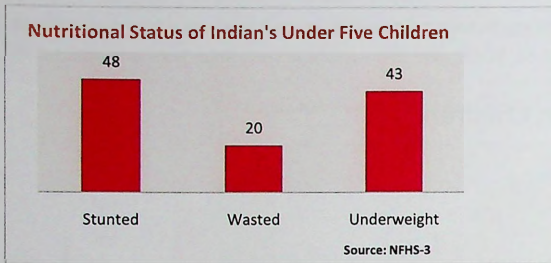


Source: Unicef

More than 19 million infants in the developing world have low birth weight. More than half are in South Asia; 8.3 million are in India

## *The Game of Survival for the Hungry Children*

The health and nutritional status of India's children has been in the danger zone for far too long. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) 2005- 06, 48 percent or half of the India's children under the age of five are chronically malnourished or stunted, with nearly 43 percent children underweight or have low weight for their age. This puts the survival of a child at grave risk, apart from having the potential to cause severe physical, intellectual and cognitive development that can cripple the child for life.



Research has proved that ensuring better childhood nutrition increases the adult productivity, thus enhancing the economic wellbeing of the individual, thereby ending the vicious cycle that poverty begets hunger.

The world loses 9 million children under the age of 5 each year, with two million children dying in India alone. Two thirds of these deaths are preventable: diarrhea, pneumonia, malaria, measles, and HIV and AIDS account for nearly half the deaths. Undernutrition contributes to more than one third of these deaths.

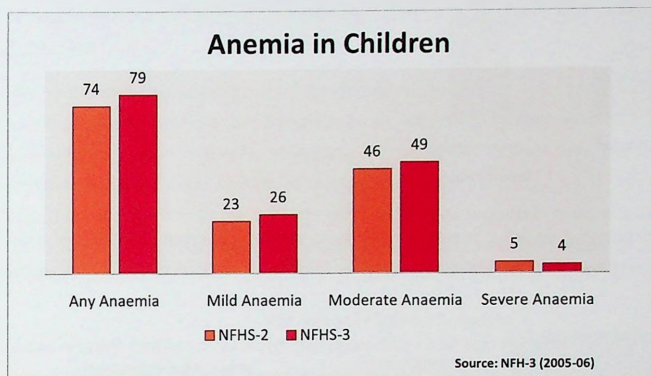
Adequate food, care and attention health go a long way in protecting the child from diseases.

The colossal waste of fragile life is compounded by poverty, poor maternal nutrition, non-literacy, prevalent social norms, sanitation, and safe water supply. Truncated government policies, rising food prices, challenges in food production, high import of pulses, inadequate budgetary allocation on health further accentuate the problem, deteriorating the health and wellbeing of the vulnerable sections of the society. The mother and child are the vulnerable most. As you read this, children continue to die silently. The nutrition security of the country is seldom addressed with the seriousness it deserves.

Take the fallout of malnourishment – Anaemia. Anaemia is a deficiency of haemoglobin or red blood cells causing far-reaching damage on an individual. In young children, it results in increased susceptibility to infectious diseases, impairment in coordination, cognitive performance, behavioural development, language development, and scholastic achievement.

Anaemia in children under three years of age has increased to a far greater level from 74 percent to 79 percent in 2005-06 of NFHS-3. A mild decrease in severe anaemia is seen from 5 percent to 4 percent. Children (under three years) with low weight for height or wasted, has increased from 20 percent to 23 percent from NFHS-2 to NFHS-3, though there has been improvement in children with Stunting or low height for age.

Today, the prevalence of anaemia among married women between 15 to 49 years has risen from 52 percent (1998-99) to 56 per cent in 2005-06. 58 per cent of pregnant women suffer from anaemia.



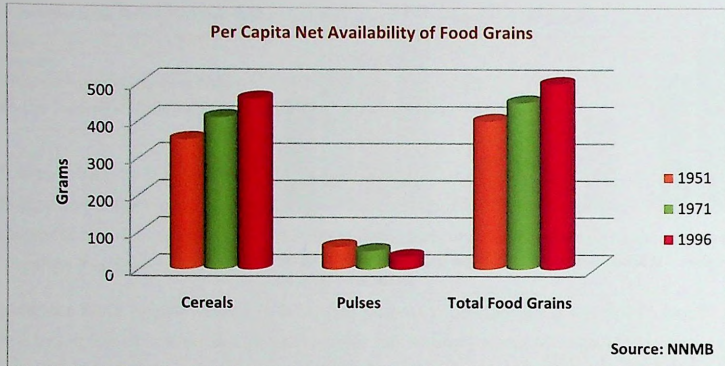
### *A Healthy Mother. A Healthy Child*

It is beyond any doubt that a healthy mother is unlikely to have a stunted, wasted or an underweight child. Anaemic and under-nourishment has a severe impact in pregnancy, the development of the fetus and the newborn child, making it impossible for the mother to support the nutrition deficit of the child. It is found that mothers who have a body mass index less than 18.5 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or underweight are likely to have undernourished children. This threatens the survival of the mother and child.

### *Hunger, Food and Nutrition Security*

It must be noted that despite the tall claims of the green revolution and the surplus of food grain production having increased from 50.82 in 1950-51 to 200.88 million tonnes in 1998-99, the production of coarse grain and pulse has not increased. The government today imports large scale of pulses, making it unaffordable for the poor. Thus, there is a dramatic decline in the per capita consumption of the essential pulses (the vital protein element) to merely 34 grams per day. The government is unable to fill the crevice of cost, availability, distribution and fiscal expenditure. The nutritionally vulnerable child, adolescent girl, expecting and lactating mothers face the brunt of the nutrition crisis and ill health the most. The public distribution system (PDS) does not distribute pulses, oil, and locally available coarse grain to the poor margins of society who access the PDS. If measures are taken to encourage the

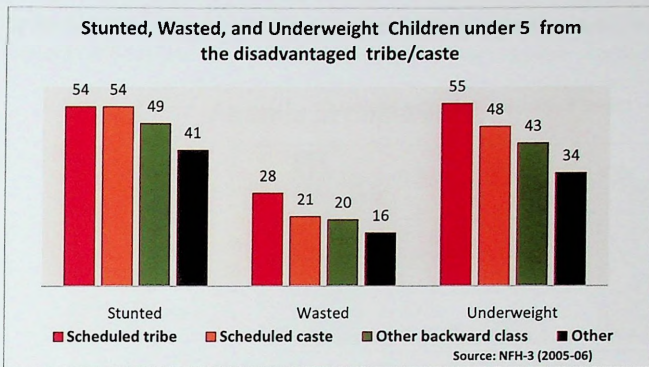
consumption, cultivation of coarse grain and pulses, then this can fill the nutritional gap of a household.



### *Who are the children that suffer the most?*

As gruesome as this may be, it is important to delve into the plight of tribal and dalith children. They are caught in the quagmire of social inequality, political alienation, discrimination and exclusion. Consider this: the neonatal mortality of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Scheduled Caste (SC) is far greater at 46.3 to 34.5 among non ST/SC/OBC. Infant mortality rate is 66.4 in ST/SC to 48.9 among others. This only proves that the nutritional deficiencies are at a heightened state among disadvantaged groups. Young children from the disadvantaged castes are more susceptible to a chronic stunted, wasted, and underweight nutritional status than children from other "upward" castes. This shows that the accessibility to health care, clean drinking water, access to education, landlessness, migration and insurmountable poverty are factors that cripple the normal development of a child that belongs to the "other" side of the caste barrier.





### *Little Done is Half Done*

Over the past few years, several attempts have been made to plug the dismal health record of mother and child in the country with the introduction of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mid Day Meal Scheme. The ICDS address the nutritional status of children under six years, lactating mothers and adolescent girls (only two adolescent girls per anganwadi). The Mid Day Meal tackles the nutritional flux and classroom hunger of children from 6 to 14 years.

Though much is done, much remains to be achieved. The out-reach of the ICDS centres or Anganwadis fall short in its coverage. Only 30 percent of children from 6 months to 6 years have access to an anganwadi. This means that over 80 percent the children of this age group have no access to any day-care centres. The universalization of the ICDS is far from being a dream. The Supreme Court had earlier ordered the opening of 14 lakh anganwadi centres with specific coverage given to SC/ST, urban slums, and other disadvantaged habitations.

### *Promise To Create a World Fit for Children*

There lies promise in the impact of the health and nutrition interventions made in the past eight to nine years. Clearly, there is a decline in infant mortality and severe malnutrition.

However, even with more than 10 lakh operational anganwadis, the functioning of the anganwadis need systemic support to ensure its true efficacy. The need to upgrade the day care to anganwadi-cum-crèches would be the lifeline to working mothers (mostly from the unorganized sectors) who can leave their children behind in the day-care centre, while they earn their bread.

Indicator	1981	1991	Current level
Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) (Per 100,000 live births)	NA	NA	254 (2004-06)
Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) (Per 1000 live births)	110	80	53 (2008)
Male			52
Female			55
Child (0-4 years) Mortality Rate per 1000 children	41.2	26.5	16.0 (2007)

Source : Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and India Economic Survey 2009-10

Taking heed to the Supreme Court intervention at the colossal rotting of food grain, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government has finally made a decision to reach PDSs in 150 districts in the neglected -rural -poverty-belt of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Assam, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) has helped in strengthening the public health systems through the induction of the grass root workers like the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) and Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA). Today they play a pivotal role in ensuring that maternal and infant mortality is checked by encouraging institutional delivery, counselling and support on breastfeeding practices, guidance on maternal and child health, information dissemination on maternity entitlements among other things.

## *Our Tomorrow*

We have a promise to keep: to save our children from the perils of hunger, starvation, malnourishment and death. We owe it to every child that we will create an environment that is equal, fair and just, where a child is nurtured to grow to his/her full potential. This world belongs to them, despite their silence. They have a right to the earth beneath, the sky above, the wind and water around them. If we cannot do everything in our power to lessen the burden on their delicate lives, we would have done disfavoured to ourselves.

## THE PURE CORRIDORS OF EDUCATION- A SORDID TALE



Children in a Government school in Cowdalli, Chamraj Nagar District, Karnataka, reconcile to the fate – the stench of human defecation in the school corridors and classroom goes unstopped. Their right to education, secure environment to grow is curbed. This is the fate of many children in the neglected government schools.

### *Right to Education*

On 1 April 2010, India joined a group of few countries in the world, with a historic law making education a fundamental right of every child coming into force. Making elementary education an entitlement for children in the 6-14 age groups, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 will directly benefit children who do not go to school at present.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced the operationalisation of the Act. Children, who had either dropped out of schools or never been to any educational institution, will get elementary education, as it will be binding on the part of the local and State governments to ensure that all children in the 6-14 age group get schooling. As per the Act, private educational institutions should reserve 25 per cent seats for children from the weaker sections of society. But the ground reality is hardly as idealistic as this that is stated. One often sees a failing education system, gross neglect of the primary school education and standards of teachers, archaic methods of teaching practice. One merely needs to step into a government school to see how dysfunctional it is!

## *Child Labor and Early Childhood Education*

There is a crisis in our education system, especially in the early childhood education in India is deficient. Undernutrition, lack of a mechanism to be ensure that the child is nurtured and cared for in the aganwadi, schools is heart rendering. The attitude of teachers towards children is one that lacks sensitivity, as this is seen with most teachers holding a cane in their hands to create disciples in overcrowded class. There is furthermore no effort to work on the cognitive development of children. This is compounded with child labour. Children are compelled to give up their schooling because they need to help earn a few rupees for their family. With this responsibility falling on a child, they have to also migrate with their families when they go in search of jobs outside their familiar environment. The prevention of child labour, especially when one sees the Kollegal district of Chamrajnagar area that has done a lot to bring children to mainstream education one sees that it is extremely difficult to enforce the abolition of child labour due to economic disparity and social conditions.

It is also a known fact that if the quality of education would be good, parents would have insisted their children to be in school. The feeling from most parents is that despite the child going to school, the child has learnt very little. This massive gap in high pupil-teacher ratios, shortage of infrastructure, poor management of schools, and poor level of teacher training, adds no value. Parents therefore feel the children are better off helping them in the daily chores. Students completing six years of primary schooling lack rudimentary reading and writing skills.

## *The Quality of Education*

Through the many months that I spent in the vast pockets of "rural" villages, I spent much time visiting schools, spending time with children. The most important time that I spent was in Hannur with the Comprehensive Rural Health Program, where, I was involved in working with the children on Children's Parliament and helping children create handwritten magazine.

Through several visits to schools, one sees that there is a seer failure to look at children as individuals who have a right to education, clean educational environment. I visited a school in Cowdalli where the stench of human waste has stuck like smog for the whole time – through the lethargic attitude of the teachers and the principle, through the people who live down the street, who play the blame game, to the panchayat members who live in and around squalor and filth. This situation has been going on for over 10 years now and teachers or the public have done nothing to alleviate the situation! One tends to get anger at the complacency of the civic administration that despite knowing of the problem, nothing has done to ensure that children's right to education means providing a safe, clean

environment. Furthermore, the NGOs working here seem to have reconciled to fate that activism brings out the wrath of people against them, and therefore it is prudent to not press charges, or take up activism to fight for the children's right to clean, pure education.

In yet another instance, I came across a school where the custodians of education were themselves failing the system. According to the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, the government has promised millions of children that it will ensure safe, and secure educational environment to its children. Thus, helping children to attend school regularly and ensuring a holistic development of every child. If this does not happen, it affects the child the most. It is therefore the obligation of the government, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and local authorities to ensure that every child in every school is taken care of, such that there is no psychological impact on the child by the reckless behaviour from the very custodians of education. This being the case, the principal of the school was seen to be violating the very essence of the Child's right to education and dignity to education.

The principal of the Government Lower Primary School often would come to school drunk, failing in her various roles and responsibilities. Her drunken, abusive, and callous behaviour was shocking, appalling, condemnable and unpardonable, as she was and is doing a disservice to the children and her country.

Teachers should be an ideal role model for their students. Teachers should be punctual and encourage curiosity. It is unfortunate that the teacher here is not only irregular to class, even if she enters the classroom; she is not in a position to take up class due to her intoxication. The children are often embarrassed, stunned and shocked. This has had a severe impact on the children, as they are hesitant to attend school. They stand in danger of discontinuing their studies. The parents, local leaders and panchayaths have over the years made several attempts to speak to the principal, but they are often sent away forcefully, pelting abusive language, sometimes in front of children.

One cannot but see that the children share the same surroundings, and by nightfall the Principals drunkenness gets severe. This leads to brawls with neighbours, often disrupting the harmony of the village.

What was shocking was that the principle being the custodian of the school would encourage students in hazardous, illegal and punishable behaviour by asking children to buy cigarettes for her. It is also common knowledge that there was a time when she would ask students to buy alcohol packets for her. She thus risks the student's lives, as minor children buying tobacco and alcohol is punishable under Indian Law.

The Principal and her influential husband often threaten the villagers, should they make attempt to escalate the issues. Being influential and politically motivated one could not risk escalating the matters.

Even when she was transferred from this school earlier, she managed to get a transfer back to her hometown. The fact that she has gone unchallenged for the many years is a proof of her social standing.

Furthermore, there are only 25 students in the school. The school is managed by the principal and one teacher. It is therefore the prerogative of the Principal to ensure that the school functions in a manner that the children are motivated to attend class regularly. Instead, what is seen is a sharp decline of students not attending classes or dropping out of school. It is the school's responsibility to help children attend school regularly, and above all help them grow. The children who attend the school are daliths, the most disadvantaged in our society. The children do not have any other school to go to, except for this one, as the other schools in the vicinity have students from the upper cast. This often creating a tense/complex environment for the children.

It is therefore the obligation of the government and local authorities to save the children from such an abusive Principal, thus catering to the rules and provisions of the Children's Right to Education. There is a need for your urgent intervention in setting right a problem that has gone on for far too long. It is important to inculcate accountability, decorum and responsibility in the education system where anyone who disobeys the protocol laid down by the Act will be answerable

Despite several letters stating the issues, nothing could be done to suspend the school principle. The issues were never dealt with the urgency it requires to save the children from the constant moral, ethical and social conflicts that stare at them. Asking for the transfer of the Principal only meant that she would endanger other children of the country. The fact that the condition did not improve despite encouraging the panchayat and the local people to take up the issue, one got to know that one does not look at children for what they are. This being the case, there is a lot of change that needs to come from within our own thinking.

### *Children's Parliament*

The village visits in the area of Hannur and the in-and-around areas of Kollegal taluk were filled with interaction with children from villages like Chikkamalapur, Nagathan pura, Hannur and other areas.

The Children's Parliament introduces children to a world of ideas, creating opportunities for reflection and critical thinking as a part of mainstream society. Through participation, children make their contribution to a compassionate, just, socially aware school-home- village by becoming active and engaged contributors. This is a way to promote active citizenship. The parliamentarians are the harbinger of Health rights, health awareness, thus building a new social order of keeping the

community, the village, and thus the nation free of some of the social practices that cripple the health of an individual.

The children from standard 4th to 8th are integrated into parliamentary groups and the name of the group, the representatives are democratically elected. The children then group together to discuss the problems of the village, the health issues of cleanliness, hygiene, environment and wellbeing. This is taught to them through various modules on disease, need for clean drinking water, ways and needs for personal hygiene, and trying to remove practices that often cause large scale illness in the village like open defecation, littering the surroundings with environmentally hazardous materials like plastics, tobacco menace, nutrition and eating habits, apart from several other important issues.

## *Skills Children Learn*

The innovative program introduces children to a world of ideas, creating opportunities for reflection and critical thinking as a part of mainstream society. Through the Children's Parliament, the children learn the following skills:

### **Listening**

- working together as a group
- Exercising the democratic principles of respect to others opinion and views
- Planning and organization skills
- Problem solving

### **Arts**

- Messages on various issues are communicated through singing, drama, storytelling, journal writing
- Communication and presentation skills
- Members of the Children's Parliament learn and practice these ways of behaving

### **Being respectful of the needs of others**

- Compassion
- Being fair
- Thinking things through

- Taking care of the people and places around us

**Members of the Children's Parliament learn and practice the values**

- Honesty – The children exhibit leadership through honesty in action, speech and responsibility.
- Respect for the views of others
- We are different and we are equal- even though the children come from different backgrounds, the feeling that the children are all equal is shown in the way they sit together, discuss issues, and guide each other through the process of learning.
- We can understand others by putting ourselves in their shoes
- No-one should ever feel small or stupid
- It is everyone's right to have their say and to take part
- It is important that we all do what we can to make the world a better place for ourselves and for others.
- If something is wrong we should try to change it
- Punctuality
- Forgiveness and acceptance
- Respecting and preserving nature
- Working with the world towards a more sensitive , humane and fair world

Members of the Children's Parliament gain knowledge and understanding of both themselves and others. In particular, they know more about themselves and their world. They are motivated to change things for the better.

## *Hope and Vision for Tomorrow*

The children are a highly motivated group of vibrant, thinking, reasoning, hardworking children. Each child has a dream - a dream to succeed, a dream to become something, a desire that its world needs to change. When asked what each child loves about school – most of them said that they love to draw, play and study. Moreover, most want to become a doctor, some a teacher, few an engineer and still some more – wanting to carry the name of their parents through right action, becoming good human beings.



## *Children Monitoring the Nutritional Health of their Family*

### **The Children's Kitchen Garden**

The novel project of Children's Kitchen Garden introduced in the Comprehensive Rural Program in Hanur, is a way to teach children about food, nutrition and nature. The kitchen garden teaches children creative ways of creating and caring for their little spaces of nature. The tender care to sow the seeds of vegetables, to see the joy of the coming to life of delicate shoots from seeds that have been watered with little hands, to watch the quite growth of the plant and then to share it with the family for a delicious meal is a whole new experience.

The intuitive awareness to understand how life needs to be cared for, protected and tended to is a delicate relationship with everything that is driven by nature. The beauty of this process fills the child with the hope that creation is a difficult, arduous and yet a joyful process that involved hard work and the fruits that are reaped through toil.

The children lay the bed for the kitchen garden, manure it, dewed the earth, and with their tiny hands sow the seeds of vegetables. They are taught to water the plants and fence the area to protect it from animals.

The importance to have a balanced diet is also brought out well through this exercise as the children and their parents are told the importance of having greens in their diet.

### **Project to train children to monitor their families nutrition needs**

The effort to make children as change agents was looked at rather closely. The objective was to ensure that the child could look at the nutrition status of his/her younger sibling. We decided to look at Children who have 0-3 and 3-6 years old brother/ sister at home. Thus, the older child was trained at administering a list of questions. The child would collect key indicators from the mother, the younger child and the anganwadi where his/her baby sister/brother goes to.

#### **Data collected from the mother**

The questioner emphasized on the child's personal observation on the nutrition pattern of the mother, children who have 3-6 years old brother/ sister going to the Anganwadi, and questions enquires to the Anganwadi teacher on the status of the brother/sister visiting the school

The test model was conducted in three government schools: Uddanur, Hanur and Ellemala, with the total respondents being 42 children.

### Sample Questions:

- What are the foods we get from the Anganwadi?
- How many packets of these we get it in a month?
- Do you go to the Anganwadi and collect the food or the Anganwadi worker brings the food to our doorstep
- Is there at any time you were send back without giving the food when you went to collect the food from the Anganwadies?
- Observation Question: Have you seen your mother eating the food collected/ given from the Anganwadi?
- Do you think that she likes the food? Yes/ No

### Findings and Observations

0-3 Years	yes	No
Does the mother eat the food provided	19/30	7
How many members in the family eat the food got from the Aganwadi	All – a min of 4 members eat the food	2
Have you seen at any time the food given to animals at home*	13	13
<b>3-4 years – Children of the Anganwadi</b>		
Do you like the food that is given to you?	5/12	4 / 2 – no response
Questions pertaining to the Anganwadi teacher	Hostile response from the anganwadi teacher; the anganwadi teacher filled up the questioner; Unavailability of the Aganwadi teacher	

**Observations:** \*Only 2 responses were affirmative **NO**, where the other members in the family do not eat the food, but a minimum of 4 members eat the food.

## Observations

- The lactating mother was found to be sharing the food that is provided to every other member in the family
- The food is often bland and the food is given to the cattle
- The students who were conducting the observation were unable to read through the simple questioner as it reflected in the quality of education, where reading simple words was impossible for students who were in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> standards.
- This poor quality in the education system had an impact, though there was an awareness created in the older child to inform the mother of the need to secure the nutrition status of the family.

## CHILDREN BORN INTO AN UNEQUAL WORLD



One year old Divya imitates her mother washing dishes. Divya may well go on to becoming a housemaid like her mother, due to the poverty and the hard life that a migrant worker, living in the slums of Bangalore. To use William Blake's phrase, the world of a child like Divya is a "world of experience". This photograph was taken by Radha, age 17.

Ever since I quit the IT world, I decided to plunge into a world of the "other", "the marginalized", the "deprived", the "injured", "the crushed". This often looked me in the eye several times. Did I have neither the courage, nor the will to do something tangible about these issues— especially staying in the position that I was in!

Soon after I quit the IT industry, I got an opportunity to work with children who live in the slums of Bangalore. Their homes are in small narrow lanes, next to open drains. Most of the children are born into households of the "lowest caste", where their parents are manual scavengers, road sweepers, and manual labourers.

The children born here are children like any other. They dream. They play. They sing. They think. They know. The children were given cameras in their hands, taught basic photography and lo and behold, in a couple of month's time, they captured their worlds in its most beautiful yet stark contrast, innocent yet riddled with hard experience, bleak sometimes but hopeful mostly.

The photographs were presented to the world. Each picture tells a tale of a child caught in the limbo of the now and the tomorrow. The photo exhibition has travelled to many places – rekindling the dreams and hope in each of these children



A Photo Exhibition  
by the children  
born into an  
**uNeqUaL**  
wOrLd

"As a child, I had a great interest to write and paint. I owe what I am today to my sister, Shashikala. She encouraged me to look beyond my physical disabilities."

Mani today inspires people around him. His silent strength his belief in himself and his passion to change the world around him makes him a hero. Mani was affected with severe polio at the age of two. His sister gave up her schooling, to carry her 10-year-old brother to school every day.

"I have only one dream in life – to help the physically challenged. because of my talent and the support of my parents I was able to get this far. Most people are not fortunate as I am. I want to help those who are helpless. I want to work with software tools that are free, where people like me can benefit through the free software movement. If not for such the AC3 centre, I would never have known what a computer is, let alone the things I can do with it."

**Be the HOPE**

"I have a hope. I want to develop the Ambedkar Computing Centre. Free software has come to the rescue of the children like me in the slums. I do not think I would have been here without the Ambedkar Centre. Today I am able to earn through my paintings. Today i know i can do anything in life. I want to show to the world that we too can learn, we too can become artists and we too can have a good life"

**Be the CHANGE**

"I believe knowledge is freedom, and we should spread freedom"

## Stories of Strength, Courage and Hope

**Name:** Arumgam

**Age:** 18

**Education:** A school dropout. Quit school in the seventh grade.

**Dream:** I have none. I have no idea of what you call a "feature". All I know is that I need to go to work every day. I can only stretch my desires such that I want to motivate all the children in this area not to give up their studies. I did not have any interest in going to school. I know I cannot teach them at the AC3 Centre, but I can surely encourage each child to not go stray and ruin their lives.

**Occupation:** A machine operator at a shoe factory

**Talent:** I have the capacity to learn photography. I love taking pictures. The photo exhibition was a way to show to the world that there are people who live in the slums. I have tried to capture the pictures of my world. Today people in the slum call me to take photographs of local weddings and functions. I feel encouraged by the warmth of people out here.

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Armugam is young. He is not too hopeful of his life ahead. At least that was what he thought before the birth of the Ambedkar Community Computing Centre (AC3) that was started in 2009. The AC3 Centre has been a silent source of encouragement to a young boy like Armugam, who has watched other children around the area gain confidence in their ability to learn, grow and find their art of expression. This was alien to him when he was growing up, as it continues to be a great challenge to fight the survival game constantly in the adult world.

A few technology savvy volunteers from the Association for India's Development who also believe in the Free Software Movement transformed a dingy room in the slum area of Sudarshan Layout as their tuition centre. If you stand outside this tiny, often dark room, you know that it stands on the fringes of large IT corporations and plush marbled floor apartments that overlook the slum. When you walk through the lanes of the slum, you evidently know that this is a world on the other side of the divide: the urban-poor divide, the digital divide, the caste divide, the gender divide, the physically challenged divide, the un-equitable public health and education divide.

### *Through the Eyes of a Child*

The homes of Armugam, Asha, Mani, Saraswathi, Nadiya and many such children are built on small narrow lanes, next to open drains. Most of the children are born into households of the lowest caste, the crushed, the marginalized, where their parents are manual scavengers, road sweepers, unorganized workers, migrant workers, and manual labourers. The children born here are children like any other. They dream. They play. They sing. They think: they know that life is not about equal opportunities, equal access to knowledge, and equal rights.



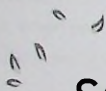
Is leisure ever considered child rights? Children often hold the family together, when parents step out to work. They spend their time gathering water, cooking or looking after their little siblings.

## *Who's Development, Anyway?*

Bangalore, India's Silicon Valley may have well made it to the map of the world as "THE" IT hub standing right next to San Francisco. Sure, it is development. But whose, anyway? It is easy to assume that a flourishing IT sector trickles down to the rest of the people. Bangalore symbolises Karnataka and Karnataka reflects Bangalore. Karnataka is considered one of the poor states where the disparity between the urban and village population is stark. It is estimated that there are over 1000 slums in Bangalore today, housing a fourth of the city's population and occupying only 2.5 to 3% of the total BBMP land of 800 sq.km. If one thought that computers was the key to development alone, that one needs to realize that India's 60 million children do not go to/or have no access to school at all.

## *Information-Digital Divide*

Today's twenty-first century may clearly be the age of information and communication technology. They are at the same time potential instruments for addressing the fundamental chasms of the digital, information divide. This digital divide exacerbates the glaring inequalities often making the technology itself unusable. We wanted to break that. We wanted the children to express their world breaking the fear psychosis of technology. The children were given cameras in their hands, taught basic photography and lo and behold, in a few months' time, we have seen their worlds being captured in its most beautiful yet stark contrast, innocent yet riddled with hard experience, bleak sometimes but hopeful mostly. These are photographs that tell a tale of every girl and boy who dream with the same refrain anywhere in the world – that "the pursuit to happiness is mine alone and I have a right to it!"



# SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND ACTIVISM

Social movements and activism is the doctrine that action rather than theory is needed at some political juncture to state claim to just and fair means of living - that which is often got through demanding. Activism is therefore an integral part to equitable, just living and to groom oneself to be an activist cannot be escaped. An activist is therefore one who works to make change happen. This section lists out the ongoing campaigns that I have been part of.



**Social movements** have become an integral part of societal existence. There arises a need to raise voice against the fundamental right to dignity of life and wellbeing of people who are meted with unfair treatment for a long time – that when the threshold for tolerance is passed then an upsurge occurs. Social movements question the way we think about our culture, power that bulldozes into unjust, unfair and often utilitarian methods of operation; and action in a globalizing world. The constant breach of fundamental right to existence compels society to take up the cause of justice and fairness. Contemporary movements and ideologies, ideas, goals, organization, strategies are the yoking of social activism.

Through the months of my leaving the swanky corridors of IT, I was part of several social movements and Activism. I realize that there is a need for action to engage with the government, civil groups to claim what is just and fair means of living – that which is often got through demanding. Since then, I have been part of the **Right to Food, Children's Right to Food**, and through several campaigns for the **Right to Health for All** through JAAK.

Apart from this, I have been involved in understanding genetically modified food grain, and the impact that free trade and globalization is having on every aspect of agricultural crisis, education, health care. Through this, I have been involved in child rights, living in the world of children in Hannur, participating in the right to immediate disaster management and rehabilitation of flood victims in North Karnataka, the right to dignity of living for people called "baggars".

# Misery lived with an ACT of GOD – The North Karnataka Floods



March 2009. When I first travelled to Badami, a historical place in North Karnataka. I saw not monuments and world heritage sites, but a world of rubble, abandoned villages, destruction and pain everywhere. As I walked through the colossal ruins, I could see from afar an image of a man walking through the "dead" village.

When sparrows nest in houses, you know they have moved into an abandoned house. A desolate place. The endangered sparrows have made the rain-gushed houses of Badmai their nesting homes. The sparrows fill the space of quiet. When you walk by fallen houses, for miles on end, you hear the little endangered beings tweeting. You wonder of what joy they sing.

It is numbing to see such a sight of colossal destruction due to flooding and simultaneously see the mindless joys that these little birds are engrossed in. This is the other world of a ravaged place, where the feisty act of god forced people into homelessness, despair, agony, and helplessness. They have made the sky their home.

## *When Heavens Open to Gush out Rain*

Natural disasters may well be acts of god. However, when calamities strike they leave destruction all around. Picking up the stings of life after a tragedy is a lifelong struggle. No land is alien to natural catastrophe, and seldom is the government in a "preparedness" mode, when it ought to be, given the history of flooding that North Karnataka has been experiencing for over a decade now.

North Karnataka experiences flash floods every year. Flash floods are flooding that occur due to heavy, incessant downpour in a "short duration". Often the high concentration of rainfall on a small

area causes devastating effects, where the water levels of the river raises several hundred times than the normal flow, in the space of a few hours. The Malaprabha River worked as god's will inundating villages that came her way.

The Malaprabha, a tributary of the Krishna River, rises in the Western Ghats. She travels a distance of 304 kilometers and joins the Krishna River at an altitude of 488 meters near Kudal Sangam in the Bagalkot district. She is known to be a temperamental river, often trying to break her path. She has taken her snake like coil into the villages rather ruthlessly many times before. This causing flooding in this region too many times, too soon. She had done it before in 2002 and 2007. An agrarian society that lives on the banks of the river, knowing well her tricks, are aware that when she invades, she leaves a lot of silt and makes the land fertile. She also destroys the entire path before here, taking everything with her- livelihood, shelter, people, cattle, crops, and the devotion that people have of her as a life giver. Repeated warnings to the government were meted with lethargy and apathy until the floods came in yet again.

## *HELP - The Long RUN*

In the four months since the floods, there has been an outpour of help from all quarters. Seen evidently, are the numbers of Non Profit Organizations (NGO) mushrooming in villages addressing human needs and providing mediums of intervention. It is such that there are several NGOs working out of one village alone, and you can evidently see the conflicts that arise in the community where each NGO has a self-help group created. More help the better, you would think. But what matters most in these times is the sustained manner in which the NGOs work with people for an extended period and not as if it is a short-term project of just a couple of months.

There are instances where the NGOs prefer to abandon a village that has complex undercurrents of cast demarcations- where the upper caste community overpowers the decision-making. Simply abandoning a village due to the complex caste divide is an easy solution, but making an effort however slow and steady to bridge the socio-political-economic divide is often strenuous.

The Association of India's Development (AID) has been working with several partner NGOs like Headstream, Janaarogya Andolana, Karnataka, CHC. The common goal that binds the groups together is goal of assistance for a sustained long-term rehabilitation that begins with the repair and renovation of the damage to critical infrastructure, to helping the village come up with sustained employment opportunities, and training people in leadership skills to fight for their entitlements and rights. The process of empowering the villages, to constantly engage with the government, innovate

strategies to overcome political lethargy and provide the villagers tools to fight for their right makes a systematic long-term impact.

Working with the displaced people in the remote villages of Badami: Beernur, Taminala, S.K Aloor, Manneri, and Khyda, I realized that India is very different when looked from the eyes of a landless labourer who tills upper caste's land for as low as 70- 80 rupees, a child torn to nothingness, living in cramped tinned roof in dilapidated conditions, a bonded woman who earns merely twenty rupees a day, a girl child married away the year she attains puberty, cast discrimination are just a few mammoth concerns that plague this land. These are just some of the aspects of human degradation that stares at you. One cannot change the scenario overnight. One can only make a concerted effort to help bring change from within in the hope of an equal, sensitive, resilient India.

### *People's Needs Are Not Linked to Rising Water Levels*

There have been several areas of "miss-governance" and this call for a paradigm shift in the approach to disaster recovery and management. One should be clear that peoples' needs and the impact of floods are not solely linked to the rising water levels of the river or the impact of heavy rains. The conditions of human lives and their livelihoods do not necessarily improve when the water recedes. The deep physiological impact lasts for a lifetime. One presumes that life comes to normalcy when the water has evaporated. People are left to pick up from where they were, before the floods, which is humanly impossible. The initial outpour of relief comes just like a torrential rain. It comes with a gush and stops when the sun shines. Rescue operations, and immediate relief is but one part of disaster management. Permanent settlement areas needs to be allocated as soon as possible, with housing, sanitation, clean drinking water, health care systems, educational institutions for children and alternative employment methods must be introduced. From what one sees so far, this process is exasperatingly slow. The victims of 2002 and 2007 floods continue to live in shanty-tin houses. One clearly does not allow people to live in "temporary shelter" for a decade.

I shudder to think what would happen to the world if not for volunteer organizations who silently toil in areas where the government fails rather sordidly. It is because of this that there is hope in the world. One takes a simple message that helps quell all doubt, gloom and hopelessness is: COMPASSION wherever there is suffering. CONVICTION that the compassion is strong enough to eliminate suffering and the COURAGE to make this conviction a REALITY.

## WALK FOR JUSTICE – WALK FOR THE FLOOD VICTIMS



One year gone, many more will pass.  
People continue to live in little tinned  
huts, waiting for the government to act.  
The government has clearly forgotten a  
people who live on the periphery of life.

One year after the flooding, there has been a snail pace of rehabilitation work carried out and people have no sign of any relief of permanent shelter coming their way. This means that they live "waiting for Godo".

Raichur (North Karnataka) that witnessed the worst flooding, is a place where the marginalized communities suffer the most – they often lack the basic amenities needed for a dignified living. When that is unequal, one can only imagine their plight where they live in temporary shelter for months on end, braving the harsh dry arid climate that north Karnataka is often associated with. When governance fails to address the needs of the people, one has but no choice to work a movement to compel the government to listen.

I was part of the *Paath Yathra*, walking through villages recording testimonies of stories of human rights violation and careless governance of people living in temporary shelter. One heard stories of despair, anger, hopelessness and many a times voices that had reconciled to a fate. The temporary shelters are built of tin sheets with space for one person. 3 by 5 meters is all that is provided for a family. Tin sheds turn into "ovens", "toasters" in summer, with children and the elderly suffering the most. This compounded by lack of drinking water, sanitation, health infrastructure, and accessibility to schools is living on the edge.



The vigil into the night on the eve of India's 64 Independence Day. The promise that the people of India will be treated equally is a promise forgotten.

### *Corporate Social Responsibility*

Several IT companies had come forward to help in the rebuilding of lives – the promise that is made as a reaction to the catastrophe does down of intensity as the months and years roll by. Having worked in the IT industry for over a decade, I was always proud of the social-consciousness that large corporations have. I was myself part of several social responsibility programs and knew of the passion to contribute to the wellbeing of society. Travelling to the places where companies were constructing houses I was dismayed at how much "removed" from reality we are.

Structural safety, minimum housing standards in the light of local conditions was not taken into consideration at all. The minimum space required per person: covered floor area per person is at least 3.5m<sup>2</sup>. The floor to ceiling height is a key factor, with greater height being preferable in hot and humid climates to aid air circulation. In warmer climates, shaded external space adjacent to the shelter can be established for food preparation, cooking and sleeping.



Walking through the villages as the sun sets. The only feeble way to raise a voice is through these silent protests – that often is ignored.

# RIGHT TO FOOD CAMPAIGN-VOICES OF THE OTHER



Women from all parts of India rejecting the National Food Security Bill. The five day dhama-cum-fast at Jantar Mantar, Delhi spearheaded by the Right to Food Campaign, compelled the government to take notice to the issues of hunger and entitlements.

India is in a state of emergency with the growing food security crisis that is coupled with severe hunger, malnutrition and infant mortality spiralling out of control. This catastrophe of human wasting away is easily avoidable. The state is responsible and accountable to ensure that no man, woman or child starves or is malnourished. And yet, one sees starvation deaths, women suffering from anaemia, children dying due to malnourishment. Then, you have the colossal waste of food that is left out to rot in the open, where the food can clearly be distributed to the poor. Despite these factors that stare at the government, the apathy continues.

The Right to Food must be seen as an implication of the fundamental "Right to Life" of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. The Right to Life is the right to live with human dignity – which also means the right to food and basic necessities.

The Right to Food (RTF) campaign brought a sea of over 2500 people from all parts of the country at the Jantar Mantar, New Delhi from 15th April to 19th April 2010. The voices were raised in unison to wake up the nation to pay attention to the millions of poor in this country who die due to the breach of a fundamental right to food and life. The voices of men, women and crying children from India, cried to the deafening ears of the political establishment, that the centre was reluctant to protect its people from tacking hunger, un-affordability of essentials by the poorest due to the rising food prices, children dying of malnutrition. The voices were raised in unison to wake up the nation to pay attention to the millions of poor in this country who die due to the breach of a fundamental right to food and life. The voices of men, women and crying children from India, cried to the deafening ears of the political establishment, that the centre was reluctant to protect its people from tacking hunger, un-affordability

of essentials by the poorest due to the rising food prices, children dying of malnutrition. The protests demanded the food security legislation be implemented as per the Supreme Court guidelines of 35 Kg of food grain per family, per month and that also addresses the nutritional crisis of the country.

### *Demands: NO Food Coupons or Cash for Food*

The RTF Campaign rejects cash transfers because it knows that cash can never take the place of food grains.

- ⊗ With food prices rising very rapidly, value of cash given will deplete fast before Government revises rates.
- ⊗ Cash can be spent by heads of households on drinking, gambling or other useless consumption without addressing food security.
- ⊗ The PDS has a procurement side and a distribution side. The procurement of food at minimum support prices means that farmers are encouraged to produce food. Replacing this with cash transfers means that the incentive to produce food is reduced and therefore the total food production in our country is adversely affected.

### *Demand: Ration Cards in the Name of Women*

Ration cards must be issued in the name of women. The NFSA has already agreed to implement this. Also, the following needs to be ensured:

- ⊗ Set up a good decentralized redressal mechanism with all offences made cognizable and non-bailable.
- ⊗ Checks and balances to curtail corruption: criminal offences with severe punishments, fines and penalties for the perpetrators and compensation for the victims.
- ⊗ Transparency measures and strong community vigilance to stop leakages.
- ⊗ The people of India demand that the Food entitlement cards in the name of women.
- ⊗ Effective grievance redressal mechanisms, with punishments, penalties and compensation.
- ⊗ Affirmative action for Dalits, Adivasis and other socially discriminated groups.





The Right to Life is also the Right to Food. An old man looks on. Protesting silently, for what may not come to him in his lifetime.

## *A Hope in Anticipation*

As I write this report, news just comes in that the Prime Minister's Expert Committee has ruled out the proposals of the National Advisory Council headed by Congress president Sonia Gandhi on the proposed Food Security Bill. The expert committee headed by C Rangarajan has found the NAC's proposal to supply subsidised food grains to 75% of the population as not feasible, keeping the availability factor in consideration. Instead, the panel has suggested that legal entitlement could only be granted to the "priority households" which comprise just 45% of rural and 28% urban households. The panel backs it up with the logic that the government does not have enough stocks to provide guaranteed food grains to "general households." In the process, nearly the same percentage of households would be left out from the purview of the legal guarantees for subsidised food grains if the committee's suggestions are incorporated and enacted as the National Food Security Act.

# JANAAROGYA ANDOLANA'S CRUSADE IN REALIZING HEALTH RIGHTS FOR ALL

Janaarogya Andolana - Karnataka (JAAK) is the Karnataka state level circle of the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan or People's Health Movement network. It consists of a number of people's organizations, NGOs, social movements, networks and individuals who are committed to working for Health for All. The JAAK Public Health Issues and Health Rights and (JAA-K) in educating people, creating health activists at the grass root level on public health issues and health rights. As part of the capacity building for district level field activists and staff of various NGOs, workshops on Health as Human Right was conducted in the course of the year in Haveri, Bagalkote and Belgaum districts.

The several training programs on health rights have helped bring awareness on the fundamental understanding to right to life.

## *Sowing the Seeds towards Realizing Health Rights*

Through the JAAK public hearings in Haveri, and attending several training on Health and Human Rights, one has seen a coming together of Health Activists. The strategies to evolve JAAK into a movement is one where there is effort made to strengthen the Health System, using the right to information act, escalate corruption cases to Lokayuktha, make efforts to engage with the authorities/Civic Administration. The need to bring in new members, youth for change is the sure way to create awareness to realize the need for health for all. This effort has gone a long way in creating second line cadres of Health Activists.

# CANDLE LIGHT FOR THE BEGGARS WHO DIED, AND CONTINUE TO DIE



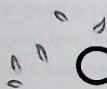
A Candle Flickers in the wind. The youth take on a candle light vigil to protest on the death of beggars in Bangalore.

Bangalore Citizens' Initiative consisting of several NGOs and students of different colleges organized a protest against the treatment meted out to beggars at the Beggars' Colony on 3rd September 2010 from 4.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m. Several city organizations joined the march. The protest began at the Town Hall from 4.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. The protesters proceed to M. G. Road (Mahatma Gandhi statue) and end their protest with a candle light vigil.

3 % of "beggary cess" is collected from us when paying property tax. 24 crores of about 800 crores for the tax money have come in the form of 'beggary cess'. Where has all the money gone? Where is all the money of the past years? Why are begging syndicates still thriving despite the "Karnataka Prohibition of Beggary Act, 1975". Who collects the "Hafta" and who pockets it??



Protest against the treatment meted out to beggars at the Beggars Colony, Bangalore, Karnataka, on 3rd September, 2010. The gross neglect of health saw the death of over 185 beggars.



## CATHARSIS – INCK BLOTS ON PAPER

Every day is like waking to a meditative refection. There were moments when I would scribble random thoughts on paper napkins and sometimes at the back of bus tickets. The writings have been noting in a "stream of consciousness"

I have brought together some of my reflective pieces that were hurriedly sketched in my diary. This brings back surreal recounting of my thought processes on a given day- where the winds magnified their careless whispers, notes as they made their presence felt.

## BEAUTIFUL MIND

WRITTEN ON: MONDAY, JULY 26, 2010, HANNUR

I sit at the edge of the spiralling stairs, looking out into the sky. It is dense. Each patch of cloud merges with the other, to form bigger clouds. There is a playfulness of the wind and the cloud, where they play hide and seek, tugging, nudging and making merry.

I have had a long day, of going to the village, seeing government schools function in haphazard manner, curiously observing children who sit in the corner reading, or playing with mud, or just dreaming, looking at broken tiled roofs, torn shirts that the child wears with ease, endless sights, endless arguments that run in the mind, spikes of anger that shoot and then subside momentarily. I walk back to my room. Climb the spiralling stairs. Listen quietly to the neem leaves rustle. It reminds me of the waves cascading on to large boulders. Therapeutic. Peaceful. Calm.

I try to look at the arguments of my mind. I listen to it almost as an outsider. I see my mind clearly. There is a relationship of the mind and the heart like the great expanse of the sky and the stars and the clouds and the wind. I am in love with the present moment – to know that I have a heart and a mind that is capable of being beautiful - of being able to nurture the simple joys of life, of being able to step out of the critical, judgmental, evaluating and pronouncing the dichotomy of what is and what must be. I am in love with the present moment because I can suspend the arguments to see the contrast of each trace of thought. To be able to see that there have been several oscillations that chums the mind with arguments and counter arguments – sometimes that brings us down to the deepest of low and despair, and then to the greatest of hope and joy and exuberance, is often a game with endless loops.

To be able to tell myself, that my heart and mind are free for a moment – free from the gravitational pull of arguments, to tell myself that my heart is pure, liberated, settled such that I can feel the freedom of choice to help, to give, to know, to share beyond my restrained emotion is to tell myself, in a mild whisper that I love my heart and mind.

It is this mind that I want to nurture. It is this heart that I want to tender. It is this mind and heart that I want to hold close to me – for I see that there is love and giving and feeling the complete presence of my body, my soul, to the choices that I have made.

Knowing well, that there could have been a zillion other possibilities in another world that I belonged, I see a difference in the choices of the heart that I have made. The vast expanse of wanting to nurture a desire to change and create a world a little less unjust for the most battered, has allowed me the equanimity of being collected, unflappable, calm. It is through the choice of a free mind, that I have come to love very deeply. This I want to cherish. I want this moment to be frozen for a little while

longer. As the wind blows the clouds away, and allows the moon to shine through, to bathe the lulling palm trees with its silvery rays, I am in love.

I will need to renew my vows, when I know that the human failings trickle the mind and the heart. The trepidations grip you and you resort to the habit of going with the gravity of occurrences without being mindful – then I will need to build a case, hold on to an un-fractured augment, tell my mind and heart that it is for me to hold on to the possibilities that lay ahead of me now and then, in being a good human being who has a beautiful heart and mind. I need to inspire myself from within the beauty of my being. I love myself, my heart, my mind and soul.

## SURREAL OCCURRENCE

WRITTEN ON: TUESDAY, JULY 27, 2010, HANNUR

This morning is like every morning – the church bells ring faithfully at 5.45, calling out to mortals to join the believers to practice their faith. I wake up when the bells resonance faintly disappears into the silence of the wakening morning. This follows the blind rituals of washing utensils, cooking for the community of the house that I reside in, and then with folded hands praying for the food that is on the breakfast, eating in quite. The reflections for the day start the process of inception, where thoughts are yoked together though ideas.

That is normal. But today, there was a surreal awakening to see a stream of events that unfold before me – It continues to unwrap, as I decide to capture the thread bare narratives of my mind, along with the occurrences outside.

I see a man come into the House with three little children – they look alike. I smile at them. Greet them and ask them to sit and feel comfortable. I allow myself to look deep at my computer, and stop what I am doing to open this page to write what I see. I know if I were to write about this later – I'd lose vital observations.

I make quiet enquires about the children. I figure in no time that the father, Krishna a thin, lanky man has come with his three children, Satya Vel is 11, Ajith Kumar is eight and the little girl Rajeshwari is 9. They look many years younger to their age. You know that they get to eat just enough to live. I hear the anklets of Rajeshwari, as she walks to the garden when she hears a bus pass by. I see she loves the openness of the garden and the activities of the world outside. Ajith sheepishly follows here, much to the disapproval nudging of the older brother. He sits quite for a long time, looking up to the ceiling. I wonder what he must be thinking.

It took them a whole to ease up to the strange faces in the room that looked at each of them carefully.

The boys wear their trousers, short. The hair is long and falls on the shoulder – you don't see such length of hair for boys normally, if you were to compare them to the schoolchildren of the city. Ajith has a side-burn that needs to be trimmed clearly. A visit to the barber would not be high in the priority of the day. The children have a nervous smile. They have come here to this house to be admitted to a school that takes care of dropout children. There are children who are not dropouts, but the father cannot manage to look after the children, should he go away to earn a livelihood to take care of his motherless children.

The children tell me they are keen to join the school. I wonder if it will pain then to see their father go away – when they go to the residential school – that clearly is nothing like their house.

Rajeshwari was only a year old, when her mother fell seriously ill, eight years ago. She died unable to recover from her illness that Krishna is unable to describe. Krishna smiles warmly and tells me that he brought her up, like the other children on his own. I soon realize that there is another girl who stays in another home for destitute children away in the city.

I realize not too long, that the mother must have been very young. Krishna was 19 when he married and soon had one child after another. She had borne six children in quick succession, and died young. I try to do the math in my head. I stop myself and do not want to count the chronicles of a young mother's death – now when I see her beautiful children in front of my eyes.

It is a month that the children have not gone to school, and the father cannot manage livelihood and parenting in one stroke. "They are all good in studies, they never failed in any subject", he tells me. Rajeshwari, has been sitting close to her father, smiles when he says that. I express joy at what I have heard and ask her if she would like to go to the residential school. She says yes! "What do you want to become when you grow big, chinna", I ask. "Doctor" she says hiding her face into her father's arm.

By then there is a bus that passes by, she stands up on her feet to run outside, as her anklets chime to the rhythm of her feet...

Rajeshwari comes back, when the room is empty and I have been engrossed feeding the data on nutrition in my computer. She sits quietly, and says "Akka, what school am I going to? Is it a Kannada medium school or Tamil medium?" I tell her that it is a Kannada Medium school. I ask her, how she feels that she is going to a different school. "I don't mind it." "What did you do for the past one month?" I ask. "I had been to Bangalore to be with my sister. She works there." Curious, I ask her what her sister does there, "She carries stones."

It has started raining, the father and the other kids have come in. I find out from the father, more about the older daughter: "I got her married four years ago. She works in Ramnagar. I married her off four years ago. She did not go to school. It is only these children who have been put to school."

It comes as no surprise that most often the oldest girl-child takes care of bringing up the siblings in the family. It comes as no surprise that she has not gone to school and married young and now has migrated to the city to work in the construction field as unorganized labour. The vicious cycle of survival sets in at an early age. "She is carrying now. After four years it is their first child." The world of innocence is for a world that does not belong here. Life is elsewhere. Here is its existence. Joy lies there. Here it is the sorrow of nothingness.

The rain pours heavily. The monkeys shake the neem tree for its seeds. It is playtime for them. Rajeshwari dusts her skirt and walks up to the door to see the rain pour from the tiled roof.



# HANUMANTHI IS DEAD

WRITTEN ON: WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 25, 2010, RICHRU

Hanumanthi is dead. The child that she carried safe in her womb is dead. Two deaths in one. A million deaths until the fatal blow dug her into the earth. That was not enough. To be sure she would not wakeup, she was dragged and thrown into the river. Hoping she would sail, set float and eventually sink. Her five month little child curled in the protective dark of her womb.

Hanumanthi is dead. Her mother Mallama does not know what her heart thinks. Her three little children are oblivion to the gathering of neighbours outside their hut. They whisper in hushed monologues. The moon has not shown today. It is amavasya. The kerosene lamps merely light the threshold of the hut. The night of amavasya is the darkest. Dark is the fear of death. Dark are the rituals performed to appease the gods on the night of amavasya. They wait for the dark night to pass. It does not. It gets darker, more intense, more forlorn, and more certain.

Hanumanthi will not return. Perhaps she will. Her mother needs her. Her children need her. Her three unmarried sisters need her. A lot is depended on her return. And return she will. She has never been away from home for so many days. She left home on the moonless night. It is six days since she left home, to go with Eerappa. They wait for the moonless night to pass. Hanumanthi's mother Mallamma walks to Eerappa's house that stands at the end of the village. She stands outside Eerappa house with folded hands. She is worried for her pregnant child. He tells her he does not know where she is. He had taken her to the construction site for manual work and after the day's work, had dropped her back to the village. She had walked her way home.

Hanumanthi has not returned. Bheemesh, her three-year-old son has been waiting at the mat door for six days now. He stops playing as his older brother Sharna Basawa, who is five, looks keenly at his grandmother as she walks in after a long days work. Hanumanthi's eldest child Ulugappa is seven. He knows nothing. Since the time of his birth, he has lived a vegetated condition and lies in a corner. Mallamma says nothing. She puts down the lunch box that she has carried on her head and sits down at the threshold. She waits. Evening is the time for her to wait into the dark. Mornings are spent cooking for the family and setting out to cultivate paddy in the landlord's fields. She needs her daily wages. These past days have been like the day before. The night gets longer and when you think the wait is finally over, with the sun out on the horizon, there is no sign of Hanumanthi's arrival.

Hanumanthi is dead. She has lived many deaths. This is just a physical exit from this world. Mallamma's first-born Hanumanthi has been the main breadwinner since a tender age. Now that Mallamma is old, the only way of earning a living is to work in the fields of rich land owners. Work is available for four

months during the monsoons. Hanumanthi would work at construction sites carrying gravel and stones. She was of support to her own children, her unmarried sisters and an ageing mother. If she does not return, who will then run the family?

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Mallamma the mother of Hanumanthi, bore her baby girl soon after she was ordained a Devdasi. She became the Dasi or slave to god. A slave to god sent men. The godly priest at the temple was the first to take Mallamma body. You need to touch and bless the offering. Then followed the god's upper caste men, who feel, fuck, molest, screw, abuse, discard and fuck again. Mallamma, had just "grown up". When a girl attains puberty, the time is right to make the offering to the goddess. An age-old tradition continues. Puberty strikes unaware, making way for men to have their want. Thus was born Hanumanthi.

Hanumanthi born to the offered mother grew up to see men come home at nightfall and slip by twilight. She knew her mother had no husband and she no father to call. She knew the sisters who came later, came through the men who visited her mother. She knew she was the first-born and that when puberty strikes, like it did her mother, her mother's mother, she too will be taken to the temple where the large, fierce eyes of Yellama will smile on her.

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Yellama the goddess smiles at the slaves under her feet. Yellama the goddess is appeased through human sacrifice. Yellama the goddess bears witness to the thousands of young girls who come to her. They walk to the temple. Naked. Covered in vermilion. Hair let loose on drooping shoulders cover delicate breasts. Clinging Neem leaves that shade the shame of the vagina.

Yellama, the beheaded goddess. From her womb was born Parashurama. Parashurama the incarnate of Vishnu. Parashurama, the valiant, the brave, brahmashatruja. Parashurama the youngest son of Yellama, who follows the orders from his father Jamadagni to behead his mother. The youngest, the dearest son, who without a thought snatches the machete from his fainthearted brothers to strike. The valiant one, who cannot allow his father go back on his words, thus must strike his mother into two. She falls into two.

Earlier, Yellama, had walked to the pond to fetch water for her husband's morning religious ritual. She sees young boys playing in the pond, watching them in their playful glee. She must return, but she lingers at the pond a little while longer, smiling at the laughter, playful chatter of young boys. She momentarily loses herself at the sheer pleasure of youthful freedom. Knowing her husband is waiting, she rushes back home with the pitcher of water. She is late. She knows the wrath of her husband, whose anger cannot be contained. Her distraction is a crime that befalls a fitting punishment. The

# I WANT TO BE

Written on: Sunday, September 12, 2010, Bangalore

I want to be the tree that shades the desolate under a busy road  
I want to be the leaf of that tree that catches dust day after day  
I want to be the leaf of that branch that falls down by evening  
I want to be dust of the leaf that dissolves into the earth

I want to be the flower that blooms in the chill morn of spring  
I want to be the dew drop that settles down on an obscure forest flower  
I want to be the unknown of the unknown and yet be the joy of flowering  
I want to be the petals scattered on an un-treaded path that leads to a ruined temple

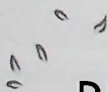
I want to be the soul of a child that cries to be held to the bosom of love  
I want to be that love that holds the child whispering tenderness  
I want to be the tenderness that holds like the girle of comfort  
I want to be the child that smiles at a face with the tears that I was just a minute ago

I want to be the agony of your heart when alone, morbid and lost  
I want to be the lost, the morbid, the lone, to take in my palm your ruffled heart  
I want to be the arguments and counterarguments that loses its intensity in time  
I want to be the tear of the dry eye that is delicately filled to the brim

I want to be the breath of your now, to breathe the joys of knowing  
I want to be the inhaling of the suffering, to breathe out for you peace and stillness  
I want to be the hand that you can hold, when you know your soul churns  
I want to be that smile of your face to know that you have found

I want to be the earth from which we are born  
I want to be the fire that comes from the earth of love, hate, misery all mingled with contradictions  
I want to be the phoenix that burns in hope, every time she burns into ashes  
I want to be the hope, the possibility of being when the earth, the river, the cloud breathes its last

I want to be



# PHOTO JOURNAL

These pictures take you through a journey that is ongoing; the random snatches of life speak for themselves, capturing more than a thousand words.

## PHOTOS OF MY JOURNEY



Hannur. Place: A Government School. Helping children in creating Children's Hand Written Magazine.

Children look on as they work in a team to create their own magazine.

Children's Parliament is often conducted under a tree or in a little cattle shed. Children gather to discuss on health and hygiene.

To ensure the nutritional needs of the children are met, and to educate the children on nutritional food and eating habits, children were introduced to growing their own kitchen garden.



**Riachur. Kalnadije Jatha.** People continue to live in temporary settlements with no sign of rehabilitation despite a year gone by since the floods that hit North Karnataka in October 2009.

Living under falling roofs.

**Promise failed.** Rich corporations promised to build houses for the victims. Clearly the foundation of the houses are tiny and of poor quality.

Every village we walked, people came by the many to talk about their plight.



**Fire gone cold.** Cooking is done outside the tinned roofs – mostly on the road.



I was humbled by the positive feedback received on the session on Information Mapping that I conducted



Training on Information Mapping: Hannu makes his presentation on "conceptualizing" information.