



# asha kiran

Asha-Seattle's quarterly Newsletter



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## RUNNING FOR ASHA

by Raj Chauhan

Working for Asha has always been a passion for me. And it's for Asha and the scores of underprivileged children in India that Asha supports which motivated me to participate in the Seattle marathon as an Asha volunteer. On a lighter note, I fell in it for some very selfish reasons as well - the thrill and experience of a physical challenge and the hope of losing some unwanted pounds.

What I didn't realize before starting the training for the marathon was that running a marathon involved as much mental strength as well as physical fitness. Getting up early for a run on a typical rainy Seattle day requires a lot of motivation than physical strength. Fortunately, I had two excellent running partners, Amit and Arindam (also Asha volunteers), to keep me company during these long and tedious practice runs with their somewhat incessant chattering which, in the long run, made the training a largely pleasant experience. Talking while running doesn't come naturally to me but during our umpteen practice runs, I dare say I got better. We were able to talk about things as varied as international movies, politics, the latest books we had read, and even compare our personal favorite Indian desserts!

To keep things interesting, we alternated our running routine between the East Side (Marymoore Park) and Seattle. During one of our runs, we actually ran the "big hill" Queen Anne; in the end, it was more of walking rather than running but it gave me a lot of confidence to

look forward to the actual event. The ability to run longer and better one's physical reaches gradually during the sometimes "interminable" training sessions was quite exhilarating and exciting. A very memorable and enjoyable, if not a trifle physically exacting, run was our training run for 22 miles on a cold, drizzling day about 3 weeks prior to the actual marathon.

The D-Day was the Sunday after Thanksgiving when the

Seattle marathon 2003 opened to about 11,000 runners.

The marathon started near the Seattle Center with the Space Needle and the breathtaking Lake Washington as the backdrop. The atmosphere was really charged up with so many eager and restless faces ready to go. For me, this moment was really electric taking into account my inner fears in the face of a grueling and formidable 26 miles

stretching in front of me. Hundreds of runners and their supporters had gathered near the starting point and at street corners cheering and egging us on - everyone appeared to be in high spirits. Even the Seattle weather was helping with breaks of sun and no rain.

Since I was running my first marathon, completing the marathon was my goal (although I set myself a goal of under 4 hours 20 minutes). The three of us started out running slowly together but soon we split up and began running at our respective comfort levels. Crossing the I-90 bridge with a few thousand others runners on feet was a novel and spectacular experience. The HOV tunnel to Mercer Island had been cleared of traffic as had other roads along the marathon route - having run the distance, I must say I appreciate the length of the bridge and tunnel a lot more now than when I am zipping across it in my car.

The support and cheering of hundreds of supporters all along the route keeps your spirits up and brings a smile (even if you actually really feel like crying!). The sight of my wife, Preeti and Swati (Asha volunteer) at the 18-mile point certainly helped me keep going towards the finishing line. Finishing the marathon while running into a Stadium with your name being announced is a huge high - a big accomplishment. It was a great achievement, not only in a personal sense but also for Asha. In every respect it was a great day, having survived through my first marathon logging a decent run-time.

Having completed the marathon felt terrific at a personal level; more importantly, the three of us (Arindam, Amit and myself) who completed the marathon were able to raise more than \$10,000 for Asha. Running in the Seattle marathon was actually a great way to contribute to the cause of Asha; in addition, the lessons of patience, perseverance and sticking on in the face of odds were additions that I learnt during the whole process. We thank all those who supported us in our efforts. I am planning to run the marathon again and this time around I can confidently say it is for Asha.

*You can also run for Asha and contribute to the cause. The money you help raise goes in totality towards educating underprivileged children in India. Asha is organizing training sessions, in Redmond and in Seattle, under a professional trainer for anyone interested in participating in the Seattle or the Portland Marathon (Oct-Nov, 2004). For more information, please visit <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/events/marathon/> or mail Rahul - [rahul@microsoft.com](mailto:rahul@microsoft.com) or Binay - [bk\\_pathak@yahoo.com](mailto:bk_pathak@yahoo.com)*



## A VISIT BY DR. BALAJI SAMPATH AND MRS. KALPANA KARUNAKARAN

by Raghav Kaushik

In May, Asha-Seattle sponsored a visit by Dr. Balaji Sampath and his wife, Mrs. Kalpana Karunakaran, who are both Jeevan Saathis of the association for India's Development (AID). They work in India with the Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF), and have made several vital contributions in planning and executing mass movements and improving the quality of education in Indian schools. During their stay here, they spoke about the Hundred Block Plan (HBP) - a multi-pronged rural intervention and development program across India, in which they are currently involved. While Dr. Sampath talked about the educational aspect of the program, Mrs. Karunakaran focused on the community health intervention.

Dr. Sampath started by talking about the history of TNSF and how they grew from a small group of individuals to a huge organization all over Tamil Nadu with more than 50,000 volunteers. Some of the key points about their work that came across as their talk unfolded were as follows. One was the focus on scalability. As the title "Hundred Block Plan" suggests (each block is further divided into villages), the planning of their projects is undertaken with an eye to scalability. This has several implications, such as the approach of building on existing infrastructure as much as possible. For example, the education program of the HBP (known as Makkal Palli Iyakkam) is undertaken as follows. It turns out that a large percentage of children, although enrolled in schools in Tamil Nadu, are not able to read and write until Grade 5. Teachers just keep passing them until Grade 5 since it would reflect badly on the school if they have high failure rate. One of the reasons why this happens is that, unlike privileged children where the family is typically educated, there is no support structure that inculcates self-belief in these students. Hence, the approach taken is to set up support centers that fill in this gap. The infrastructure needed for the support center itself is less - volunteers from the local villages run and manage these centers.

This has ensured that the drop out rates from the school are reduced, and as a result, the regular school infrastructure is optimally used. The coordination of the village-level volunteers is done through block - and district-level organization. Of course, the Makkal Palli Iyakkam program has many other aspects which were also described, such as the use of effective learning aids.

Another key point was the stress on measurability. For example, Dr. Sampath mentioned that 64% of the children using these support centers improved in a 3-month period, i.e., those who earlier couldn't read letters could read letters, those who earlier couldn't read words could read passages, and so on. The main purpose of these measurements is the demonstration effect it has on the government bodies. They also talked about a library program where small, 2-page pamphlets/stories are written by volunteers and enclosed in a plastic sleeve, so that children can borrow and practice reading them. These pamphlets also act as an awareness-generation mechanism.

Mrs. Kalpana Karunakaran then talked about the community health aspect of the HBP. Volunteers monitor the health of all women and children, and perform services such as weighing the children regularly, and making sure they are not malnourished. General hygiene and health advice is provided. Again, the existing infrastructure in the form of Primary Health Centers are maximally used by working along with the government run health centers.

Later on, there was also a discussion on the role that groups outside India (in particular, Asha-Seattle) can play beyond funding. One was in preparing learning aids, that Asha-Seattle is already involved in. Another was in providing services such as printing and language-translation which would serve to cut costs. Over all, we were all really inspired by how Dr. Sampath and Mrs. Karunakaran had dedicated their entire lives to the cause of the under-privileged.



Asha Seattle is organizing an evening of Music, Mazaa, Dance and Masti at the **ALLGORHYTHMS** concert on September 11 at the Kane Hall, University of Washington from 5pm onwards. This sizzling Bollywood extravaganza will include all your favorites from K3G, KHNH and many more. So, come and share the masti....

For more information, please go to [www.ashanet.org/seattle/events/allgorhythms/](http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/events/allgorhythms/)

# A TALK BY MR. P. CHENNAIAH

by Rahul Lahoti

Asha Seattle hosted Mr. P. Chennaiah's talk on June 4th, 2004 at the Microsoft Campus. P. Chennaiah is the founder and General Secretary of Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Viritidarulu Union (APVVU) - a federation of agricultural laborers unions in Andhra Pradesh. During the 1980s, when the agricultural workers were not paid minimum wages and the bonded labor system existed, Chennaiah started an NGO 'Sahanivasa' for agricultural workers. Sahanivasa, which literally means 'living together', intended to work for promoting trade unionism, especially among agricultural workers. Since its inception in 1985, Sahanivasa has been actively engaged in

*Even though government owns a large extent of the land, it has failed to implement the land reforms acts in a fair and unbiased manner.*

organizing dalits, landless laborers, and women on a variety of issues including implementation of land reforms, organizing for minimum wages and tenancy rights, organizing for gender equity and rights, and monitoring human rights violations. As Sahanivasa grew, some committed individual and

agricultural workers came together under the leadership of Chennaiah and independently formed a federation of agricultural workers and marginal farmers unions. The Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Vritidarula Union was registered in 1998 as a federation of 325 registered unions federated from 16 districts out of 23 districts in Andhra Pradesh. APVVU is a part of the National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM) and also a member of the National Centre for Labor (NCL).

During the talk, he elaborated about the work done by APVVU, especially concerning appropriating land reforms. Mr. Chennaiah first talked about the land ownership pattern in India and the state of land reforms. The present land ownership pattern is as follows:

## GOVERNMENT LAND

The Government owns 60% of the land in the country; these include:

- Land acquired by abolition of Estate Act
- Waste land/fallow land/grassing land/Common Property Resources
- Unassessed land
- Revenue reserves/forest reserves
- Cultural waste Land

## PRIVATE LAND

Of the private land, which constitutes 28% of the total

land area, are the Raitwari land and temple lands belonging to religious trusts

## FOREST LAND AND TRIBAL LAND

The rest of the land area is mainly occupied by the tribal settlements, including several forested areas.

Even though government owns a large extent of the land, it has failed to implement the land reforms acts in a fair and unbiased manner. The land acquired by the government after independence through the abolition of Estate Act was meant to be distributed among the various landless farmers. However, till date, only 1.67% of these lands has been distributed among the people. To make matters worse, the land ownership pattern is skewed in favor of large farmers. Recent statistics show that 40% of land is owned by 5.3% of the farmers.

APVVU has striven for land reforms especially among the dalits and the so-called "untouchables" in AP.

Mr. Chennaiah talked about the role of APVVU in details. APVVU, based in 382 blocks spread over 15 districts is actively engaged in preserving the rights of agricultural workers, marginal farmers and sharecroppers. Of the 424,356 registered members, 54% are women and 63% are Dalits and Adivasis. APVVU builds unions of agricultural workers and fights for the various rights of the farmers. They have tried to ensure that landless laborers get at least the minimum and equal wages.

They have been successful in releasing and rehabilitating approximately 16,000 bonded labor, including children. They have been successful in increasing the share of sharecroppers to 50%. They have worked with the government in appropriating approximately 150,000 acres of land to small farmers. The strategies that APVVU adopted towards attaining its goal are mainly non-violent methods like demonstrations and padayatras, networking with other organizations, and lobbying through mass actions and people's tribunals. They have also tried to increase general awareness of the population by globalizing the local struggles, especially through policy advocacy, signature campaigns and media coverage.

Asha has a long history of association with the Sahanivasa project, mainly in its educational thrust areas. The role of APVVU in strengthening and coordinating the various grass root workers forum representing the issues facing agricultural laborers has been nationally acclaimed and recognized.

Mr. Chennaiah's talk made us realize the plight of the dalit and adivasi landless farmers and the gross inadequacies in the present Government policies on land reforms.

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**WOULD YOU LIKE TO VOLUNTEER WITH US?**

Join us at our monthly meetings in the Lake Washington School District Administration Building near the Redmond Town Center. Our next meeting and venue are on <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/min/meetings.html>

Our meetings are open to everyone.  
Please do try and come.

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