



# ASHA KIRAN

Asha-Seattle's quarterly Newsletter

VOLUME 14 - ISSUE 1 APRIL 2008



*Greetings all!*

*We start 2008 with our feature article about Dayamani Barla's recent visit to Seattle. Dayamani Barla, a journalist working in Jharkhand, shared her story of how she has come to be who she is today. We bring her story to you in this article. Also featuring are articles on volunteers' perspectives in participating at the recently held annual Seattle marathon. We at Asha Seattle have always believed that a significant socio-economic change can be brought about in India not only by educating the underprivileged but also by spreading awareness.*

*Thanks to the donors in the annual "Giving" campaigns of different organizations as well as individual donors who have been supporting our cause/s. Again, thanks to everyone for your continued support and encouragement.*

*Do email us your suggestions and comments on what you'd like to read and learn more in the upcoming newsletters. In addition, we are looking for volunteers interested in coordinating projects for Asha.*

*Asha Seattle Team*



## **Dayamani Barla: The Voice of Jharkhand**

*Aparajita Durga [Asha volunteer, project coordinator for CMS]*

How many of us know about the history of adivasis (tribals) in Jharkhand, their struggle for social justice and identity for decades and their socio

economic condition today? Their story was brought to us by one activist, writer and fighter Dayamani Barla, fondly known as Dayamani didi. She visited Asha Seattle in December 2007 and touched our lives forever. She is a personification of humility, simplicity and courage, with an indomitable spirit to fight for the rights and beliefs of adivasis.

Dayamani Barla is a journalist in Prabhat Khabar, the leading regional newspaper of Jharkhand. Through her writings she gives voice to the thousands of adivasis who have been exploited for years. She writes about the struggle due to displacement of adivasis, the rampant corruptions, and the environmental degradation due to exploitation of natural resources. A recipient of

the Counter Media Award for better rural journalism (2000) and the National Foundation for India Fellowship (2004), she earns her living by running a small tea stall in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

Being an adivasi woman from the poorest section of the society, Dayamani's struggles were far greater than any of us can imagine. It began as a child when her father, who was illiterate and didn't have the paperwork to prove his land rights, was cheated off his land. Dayamani had to work to support her education throughout, first as an agricultural laborer, then as a house maid and later as a typist. Her poignant childhood stories led to the story of how she started working with an NGO. Later, joining the Koel Karo dam movement, (which would submerge hundreds of villages and displace thousands of adivasis) ultimately turned her into an activist cum writer.

At every point as a journalist there were two paths- one which would bring her easy fame and a comfortable life if she catered to the interests of the people in power, and the other of struggle and pain if she wrote about the issues of marginalized people. She decided to devote her writings to bring to light the unheard plight of the adivasis. Even today, to bring to us the story of a remote village in Jharkhand, it may take up to two days just to reach the

village. Followed by another two or three days to understand the village and gather the story and come back. All for one article which the mainstream newspapers would never publish. It was impossible for her to explain the innumerable hurdles this posed and how difficult it was to write such an article.

Dayamani was saddened at how adivasis are wrongly held responsible for destroying the forests. Giving a glimpse into adivasi life, she talked about how intricately their lives were linked to the forests and the seasons. With their strong tribal values and understanding of the environment, they have preserved and survived on forests for centuries. Talking about the so called "development" programs and policies, she said that even today the people making the policies do not understand their culture and values. Most policies are directed towards exterminating their indigenous way of living. Rich natural resources of Jharkhand such as iron, coal, copper and wood, has led the government and corporations to displace them on a large scale with almost no rehabilitation for big industrial projects and dams, many of which are funded by the World Bank.

Dayamani stated the example of Heavy Engineering Corporation (HEC), the first large scale industrial venture in Ranchi. HEC displaced around 32000 adivasis, out of which 22000 were told they would be employed. Only about 2000 were given jobs, which were the lowest paid ones of manual labor. From the 36 villages which were uprooted, only about 700 people remain today, earning their lives as manual labor or rickshaw pullers. The social, communal, cultural, and economic spirit of the adivasis from these displaced villages had drawn its last breath.

Dayamani talked about the human rights violation due to uranium mining by Uranium Corporation of India Limited at Jadugoda, in Jharkhand. For the last thirty years, radioactive waste has been dumped into the rice fields of adivasis. The complete disregard of the radioactive waste management rules by the corporations wreaks havoc on the daily lives of villagers and children, with genetic deformities and miscarriages in women becoming quite common. The adivasis of this region are dying a slow death by uranium radiation; the reality of the death is still being denied by all Government agencies.

Dayamani has been a powerful campaigner for implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). She brought to light dozens of cases where money was embezzled from accounts related to the work done under NREGA. This was done by entering more work-days than the number of days that they actually worked on the job cards of workers and then preparing a bogus master roll to capture the funds. There were other cases where job cards were not given to the villagers. Her investigative reports raised awareness and led to inquiries by the police and authorities.

During all these years of activism and journalism Dayamani has faced numerous threats and personal injuries in an effort to silence her, but she remains as strong as ever. While she continues to fight for justice for the poor and exploited, she urged us, the audience, to question what 'development' is and who is benefiting from this 'development'.

Dayamani Barla left us with many questions, notably the need to make the choice of whose side we are in, in this fight for human rights, justice and equality.

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## Team Asha Marathon 2007 training – Op-Ed.

**(Part 1)** *Megha (Asha marathon veteran, 2007 Coordinator)*

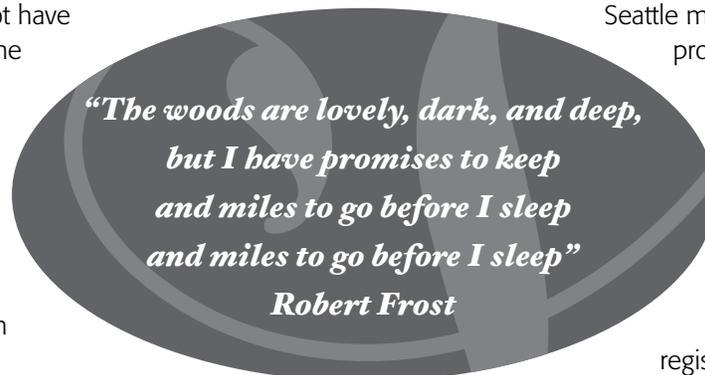
Perhaps, this is the mantra our runners followed or perhaps, they listened to Kanye West. Either way, to our runners, we say, "Thank you." Without your sweat, toil, aching knees and unfaltering spirits we would not have had another year of success with the marathon-training program. Our fearless coach, Chuck Bartlett once more whipped the runners into shape for the Seattle hills and we are grateful for his continued help. Our cyber link was sustained through the efforts of Tulika and, with Alok and Subhasish on the tracks with me; this was an exciting team finish!

Our marathon program is a six-month long event with a broad outreach in our immediate community. Runners are recruited by

word of mouth and office presentations. Beginners are especially encouraged and many of our previous runners return to run with Asha. Chuck Bartlett, the official coach for the

Seattle marathon is our trainer. Runners are provided with a schedule and training curriculum. Since we train with Chuck's big group of runners, the community feeling is greatly strengthened. This year, runners who committed with Asha- Seattle had to raise a minimum amount. In return for their fundraising efforts, their registration for the marathon and the cost of two shirts was borne by our sponsors.

This year we would like to thank Chetan Thakkar, Huzefa Karachiwala and three other sponsors who wish to remain anonymous, for their sponsorship of the event.



We were also very fortunate to have the Seattle Marathon Association partner with us. Benefits included the Asha logo on the finisher T-shirt, Asha logo on their advertising material such as registration form, posters etc., a link to Asha on their charity partners webpage, a booth with other charity partners at the finish line and the opportunity to have a stall during the marathon expo. Swati nucleated the momentum for Asha's participation in our info booth at the marathon expo, where crowds amounting to 15,000 or more showed up to pick up bib packets. This means runners and their families who may rarely orbit in the Asha event circuit were exposed to our philosophy and methods.

In addition, our volunteers (this time led by Lakshmi) participated in handling water station # 10 along the marathon route. Each year we receive many thanks and compliments on the enthusiasm and initiative shown by our volunteers for this job. In fact our efforts over the last 3 years at this water station are so well known that runners who stopped by the info booth on expo day, connected Asha with the water station.

The biggest change in our policy this year was the implementation of a minimum fundraising amount. Runners who committed with Asha- Seattle had to raise \$655 (half marathon) or \$1310 (full marathon). This rather controversial policy had its pros and cons. Sadly, many previous Asha runners would not participate under the scheme and a few new runners who

do not find fundraising appealing found this intimidating. To place fundraising in perspective, it must be pointed out that our entire sister Team Asha marathon training programs do have a minimum that is double of what we proposed. On the pro side, we generated nearly as many funds from 16 runners in 2007 as we did from 40 runners in 2006. Due to the small number of runners, it was also possible to build relationships and I sincerely hope it will translate into volunteering for Asha.

The marathon effort aims to increase awareness and provide a platform for fundraising. Both goals were achieved in 2007. The marathon has the potential to cross into several pockets of community awareness that is not possible by our other fundraising events (STP excluded) and therefore demands close attention. It is my sincere hope that the milestones achieved in 2007 will only be surpassed.

Overall, in 2007, Team Asha raised nearly \$17000 through the efforts of its runners.

*Our 2007 runners: Amit Paka, Jyoti Gawade, Anand Paka, Aravindan Kuttalam, Sriram Srinivasan, Siddharth Ramesh, Eera Mittur, Faisal Mohamood, Karan Pal Singh, Kirtika Dhathathri, Pavan Singitham, Rajiv Bharadwaja, Dhires Kumar, Palani Sundarmurthy, Anil Kumar*

*Two other folks whom I would like to acknowledge are Anupa, for logo and poster design, and Srijan, for consistent back up.*

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## My tryst with Asha Marathon 'Miles for Smiles'

**(part 2)** *Jyoti Gawade*

Before joining Microsoft in 2005, I hardly knew about the Asha Marathon program. I was never in to sports or even a regular exerciser. It never even occurred to me to attempt a half marathon, let alone, a marathon. But after looking at the Asha Marathon program and reading the runner's stories, I thought of giving it a try.

I started preparing on my own following one of the training programs available on the Internet. Because I was not used to working out regularly, it was very hard to follow the program in the beginning. I found that if I could force myself to get ready at the starting point, the rest was relatively easy. Once out on the road, I wanted to make the most of my efforts, so I would complete my run. Initially I was not able to run even a mile continuously. I adopted the "Galloway" approach of running, by including walking breaks. This way I could cover the given distance in the training program without developing any major aches and pains. I did most of the training runs on the road, as I wanted to get used to the cold weather. As I went on, I made adjustments to shoes,

orthotics, clothes etc. I successfully finished my longest run before the race, which was 10 miles.

On the day of the race the weather was really good, cold but almost sunny the entire time. I was expecting to finish somewhere between 3:20 and 3:30 hours, and I finished in 3:14 hours! It was really great to get the first medal in my life in any kind of sport. Before the race, I used to think that after finishing, I might not do any competitive running again. However, the overall experience and benefits to my health in terms of my cholesterol level, resting heart rate and stamina were so good that I did another half marathon the following year!

In 2007, I wanted to try a full marathon. I had a little more confidence by this time and thought of joining the Asha team. It not only helped me find running partners but the funds I raised motivated me to stick to the program until the end. This year's trainings turned out to be much better than the previous two years. In a couple of long runs, I did a mile or two less than prescribed but maintained consistency throughout without missing more than one consecutive training session overall. For the long runs, I paired up with other team members whenever possible. Having a partner really makes a difference!

The race day started dry and became sunny later. On the course I kept passing runners on the other side. Many of them, realizing that I was one of the slowest runners, kept cheering me up. When I reached Seward Park, I was happy to see I made half the distance in 3:14 hours. In the second half I started passing some runners who had given up running and started walking. There

were 2-3 more runners whom I had left behind on I-90 Bridge and never saw again. They probably just gave up. After around 5 hours, most of the booths had started winding up. When I reached the Asha booth, I was surprised to find a number of Asha volunteers. With their cheering, I gained a little more energy to push for a couple more miles. Then, the hills became too tiring. I started feeling weak too, so I decided to shift to brisk walking. My husband met me at mile 21 and started walking with me. He has been on the racecourse for all of my marathons. Though there are volunteers and road support, having your own support team i.e. spouse, friends and of course Asha volunteers is really encouraging.

In the last mile I found some more runners and walkers. As soon as I entered the stadium, I gathered all my strength and ran to the finish line. I finished in just over 7 hours. Yes, it is not a very respectable time for any seasoned runner, but compared with myself 2 years ago, it was quite an accomplishment.

It's been a long journey of 2 ½ years but it was all worth it. It taught me how to maintain a training schedule consistently, how to listen to my body and stretch beyond my comfort level, little by little. Training has taught me how to believe in myself. With Asha, there was an added dimension to this learning. Though I have always felt that I should help those less fortunate than myself, I did not know what to do beyond donating money. This time I got a chance to go further and reach many more people who otherwise would not have thought of participating in fundraising efforts. Not only did we let people know about Asha's work in educating children in India, but we became aware of other people caring about turning our dreams into reality. I wish more and more people participate in the marathon, get the satisfaction of making a difference in someone's life, become fit as they age and live long to tell some terrific stories of their accomplishments to their grandchildren.

## Site 2007 Visits

- Spastics Society, Shailesh Vaishnavi, December 2007
- Uthanu and CMS, Swati Sircar, September 2007
- Deenabandhu Girls home, Vijay Dwarakanath, Q3 2007

## *Calling for participants for* **Wheels of Change 2008!**

Wheels of Change is Asha's annual cycling program where volunteers participate in bicycle rides like the Group Health Seattle to Portland Bicycle Classic in mid July to

help raise funds for supported projects. The program has been very successful and last year we had an all-time high turnout of 15 participants and raised more than \$20,000.

**If you are interested, please contact [ashaseattlebikers@yahoo.com](mailto:ashaseattlebikers@yahoo.com).**

# photo gallery



▲ Community based education centres



▶ Reach Centres

## Past

Geetanjali, April 5, 2008

## E V E N T S

## Upcoming

Wheels of change July 12 - 13, 2008

puzzler

**There is some relevance of the answer to the meta clue to education in India.**

- What follows after our existence on earth – the great beyond!    \_ T \_ \_ L  \_ \_
- Abi strangely held the Hoysaleshwara temple here.    \_  \_ \_ \_ \_ \_
- gegs    \_ \_ \_ A  B \_ \_ \_ \_ \_
- Attempt to cover objective is fashionable.    \_ R \_ \_  \_
- Eyeglasses finally trimmed in a public display.    \_ \_ E \_ \_ \_  \_ E

**Meta clue:**

Asha Seattle. Vidyutsadasivapuram. Connect!

*Contributor:  
Rajiv Bharadwaja,  
Asha Seattle volunteer*