



# The Peace Gong



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## Be Happy, Live Healthy!...

*"Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence." —Aristotle*

Aristotle has rightly said every individual aims for a happy and fulfilling life. In today's world when all- youth and grownups- are in pursuit of material gains, happiness seems to be an elusive phenomenon.

When the Peace Gong team in Agartala learnt that the first International Day of Happiness was celebrated on March 20, 2013, the team decided to talk to the youth of their area on the importance of happiness in their lives. The basis of the interaction with the youth was the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki- Moon's message for the day. He observed, "The pursuit of happiness lies at the core of human endeavours. People around the world aspire to lead happy and fulfilling lives free from fear and want, and in harmony with nature. Yet, basic material well-being is still elusive for far too many living in extreme poverty."

Biswajit Debnath, a college student staying in Indranagar, Agartala felt that most of the time as young people were forced into the rat race to succeed they

remained tensed. Both family members and the society expected them to be better than the others.

"Parents need to understand the limitation and true potential of their children," said musician and stage actress, Alpana Deb Chakraborty. She said happiness depended on both personal and societal development. However, she stressed, "Development should be inclusive of social, financial and environmental conditions. Only financial development won't bring happiness. Basic rights of the people must be ensured. Also their fundamental needs must be ensured."

Kaushik, a class XII student of a local government school felt that a peaceful environment was important for people to be happy. He pointed out on the increasing pollution and vehicles in a city like Agartala. "We cannot remain healthy because of this problem of pollution. Protecting environment is important for people to be healthy and happy," he added.

Medha Bhattacharya, a medical student said poverty and inequality were major causes of unhappiness. "How can a person remain happy when she cannot have even proper meal in a day? When she sees children of

rich families having all facilities while she cannot even send her kids to school, she can never be happy," she added.

According to Medha doing good to others and society, helps a person to be happy. "We should learn the habit of sharing with others and not just run after money. Serving others will definitely give us satisfaction," she said as she shared how she tried to teach poor children.

Suchismita Chakraborty, a class XI student felt by giving opportunities to children to take up creative work and issues that interest them can make them happy. "I am sure we students can contribute more if we are given the right opportunity," she added.

Overall, all the young people with whom the Peace Gong interacted, felt happiness was important for all to remain healthy. However, just money was no guarantee for an individual to be happy. In the end, we are inspired by what Gautam Buddha had said, "Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared."

**Debarpita Deb, Class IX, Agartala**

## Preserve Forests, Save Humankind: Jane Goodall

Global Green Kids of Radijojo World Children's Media Network did an exclusive interview with Jane Goodall, UN Messenger of Peace and considered to be one of the world's leading experts on chimpanzees. A primatologist and anthropologist, Ms Goodall who has worked extensively on conservation and animal welfare, is also the founder of "Roots and Shoots". The

interview was conducted by **Lina and Mila of Hannah Hoech Primary School, Berlin, Germany** in March 2013. It was a radio interview produced by Nicole Wilden. The Peace Gong thanks Lina and Mila and all members of Radijojo World Children's Media Network for bringing voices of children in common platforms.

**Q. How did you get to Africa?**

A. I had to work very hard. I hadn't gone to University. When I was invited to Africa by a school friend; I went back home. I took up a job in a hotel. I saved my wages and tips until I had enough for a boat ride to Africa. Back then in 1957 girls didn't do that kind of adventures. Everybody laughed at me and told me to dream about something I

could do - except my mother who said: "If you really want something and work hard and never give up, you will find a way".

**Q. How did the chimpanzees in Africa accept you?**

A. (She laughs) When I first arrived, they all ran away. They did not accept me at all; and it took months sitting quietly on my peak with my binoculars. Gradually they got used to me especially one called "David Greybeard".

**Q. Why do you fight for the environment?**

A. I love nature and forests. The forests are disappearing. They are home to chimpanzees and many different kinds of animals. If we lose the forest, then we really harm the planet.

**Q. How can we protect the forest?**

A. We have to make sure that the people who are living around the forests in Africa

Lina and Mila interviewing Ms Jane Goodall



have better lives. Many of them are living in poverty so they cut down trees to grow food. We have to help improve their lives so that they become our partners in saving forests. We can also encourage tourism so that the locals earn their livelihood.

**Q. Why did you start Roots and Shoots?**

A. When I was travelling around the world talking to people, I met lot of young students who seemed not very hopeful about the future. They felt the adults were harming the planet. The youth however can do a lot. So "Roots and Shoots" is about young people talking about the problems they care about.

It is essential for young people to take action to make the world a better place for people, animals and the environment. Roots and Shoots is now in 130 countries; and we've got members who are in kindergarten to universities. Everyone is determined to make a difference. So it's like a great big family, everyone is supporting each other,

saying "Yes! We will change the world; we will make it better for our children".

**Q. What is the most important about Roots and Shoots?**

A. The most important thing is what it says: "Every single one of us, that's you - me - her - can make a difference. Every day, we can help make some difference." And we can chose: "Do we want to make a difference that makes the world a bit better or we don't care?" That's what Roots and Shoots is about, the importance of every single individual and what we can do to make the world better.

**Q. What is your message to the children of the world?**

A. The message is to remember that you matter; that you as an individual are

important and what you do is going to make a difference. There are so many people who say "There is nothing I can do, I am just one person." But if there are hundreds and thousands and millions of people making the right choices to help the environment and people and animals, suddenly you get the right kind of world.



Lily (5), student in Germany drew a sketch of an ape and presented it to Ms Jane Goodall

**Surovi shows the way Innovation in ecological conservation**

*Going beyond classrooms and textbooks, members of the Surovi Shishu Panchayat has been engaged towards raising awareness about conservation of wildlife and natural habitats in Guwahati, Assam, in the North East of India. Finds out Bhiyanka Devi, Class XI.*

*Our duty to the whole, including the unborn generations, bids us restrain an unprincipled present-day minority from wasting the heritage of these unborn generations. The movement for the conservation of wild life and the larger movement for the conservation of all our natural resources are essentially democratic in spirit, purpose, and method.*

Theodore Roosevelt, A Book-Lover's Holidays in the Open, 1916.

Roosevelt's message of restraining from unprincipled wasting of natural resources is the inspiration behind Surovi Shishu Panchayat's passion on nature and wildlife conservation. He says all conservation efforts are democratic in spirit and this is the basis of how the Panchayat is trying to create awareness about it.

Regular trekking and field visit programmes to the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary in Chandrapur Block of Guwahati, Assam has helped members of Surovi and many youth involved with it develop deep appreciation and passion for wildlife and the conservation of both the animals and their habitats.

Riya Akhtar, a class X student and a member of Surovi feels regular visits to Amchang and other wildlife sanctuaries have helped children like her understand the link between wildlife conservation and the concerns of people living inside these sanctuaries.

In view of the interest of the children and youth, Surovi has taken up another field study and nature conservation education programme in Chonoka, an ancient and traditional Assamese village behind Mayang Hill, under Mayang Development Block of Morigaon District attached to the Lower Range of Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary. The village is situated on the bank of Brahmaputra River.



Surovi's wildlife awareness programme

Supriya Dey, a student of class XII and President of Surovi Shishu Panchayat says, "Our team members and the



Surovi children with Peace Gong Assamese

local youth have been frequently taking up simple awareness programme on the need to maintain a peaceful social environment and ensure wildlife conservation in both Amchang and Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary."

Arpan Chakraborty, a second year college student who has been helping the Surovi children in their activities talks about the problems faced by villagers



of Shyampathar, a tribal village inside Amchang. He says "The children of the village do not have any schooling facilities. There are instances of illegal felling of trees. As the villagers are totally

dependent on the jungle for their livelihood, ecological degradation is affecting them."

Expressing concern at the destruction of environment and declining wildlife population, Naina Bora, a class X student of Axom Vidyamandir, Guwahati feels conservation of nature and wildlife should become compulsory in education system. However, she says it should not be restricted to only text books. "As members of Surovi, we have learnt a lot by visiting sanctuaries and understanding ourselves. The legendary song of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, green earth is beautiful, inspires

all of us," she points out.

Radha Sharma and Islam Ali, both students of class XII and leaders of the wildlife conservation programme agree with Naina. They say, "The amount of knowledge we have gathered on flora and fauna of the region, about how wildlife protects themselves and many other issues of nature conservation cannot be studied in the present education system."

To conclude the experience of the children involved with Surovi clearly shows that humans should learn to live in harmony with nature and wildlife. Practical exposure and learning is a must for all young people to ensure that many beautiful flora, fauna and wildlife do not go to the history books but everyone can see these amazing beings through their own eyes.



## VOICES FROM THE GRASSROOTS : THE FUTURE WE WANT

► **Thansila (Class XII) & members of Wayanad Shishu Panchayat, Kerala**

**Shobish, Class VIII**

I am Shobish. I study in class VIII in a very backward village school in Wayanad. I dream of a world where children get all facilities to study. I dream of a world-free of poverty, suffering and sadness so we could happily play and study.

We all go to school. But how many students attend classes regularly? If there are forty students in the class, 28 or 30 would come regularly. Do we ever think where do the other children go? Most of the children who are absent in our district belong to the tribal groups. They go for small jobs such as coffee plucking, areca nut plucking or do odd jobs to earn daily livelihood. They come to school only when they don't have food at home.

While other children are leading a happy normal life, many of these unlucky children have the responsibility to look after their parents and sometimes the entire family. How many of us have time to think about these poor kids? These children should get all support and financial help to continue their studies.

**Ananya, Class XII**

We are losing the enchanting beauty of Wayanad day-by-day. It won't take long before the misty mornings disappear from Wayanad. We used to make use of the water which was available in abundance to quench our thirst and also for irrigation of our land. A land once blessed with water and natural resources now is in the clutches of drought.

I feel helpless to see the slowly dying Wayanad. It is good to change with development. But it shouldn't destroy the land. The time has arrived to protect our land. We should look after our forests and work to protect endangered species. As students, we have great responsibility in protecting our land and the world at large.

**Santosh, Class XII**

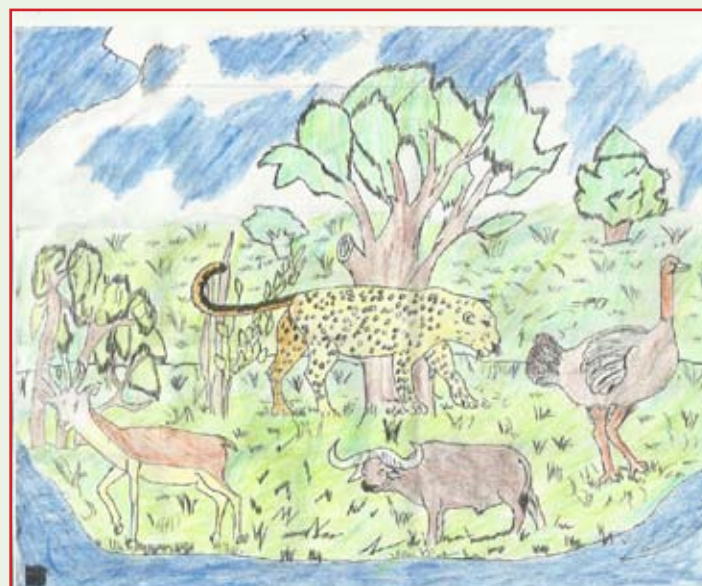
There should be enough facilities for everyone to study equally. There should not be any disparity between the rich and the poor at least among children. There should not be the class difference between English and Malayalam medium students. We students expect a lot from our judiciary. Very strict laws should come against atrocities committed against women. Our nation can achieve complete freedom only when women and children are allowed to walk freely without any fear.

**Ryhanath, Class XII**

What is the meaning of the word woman? The present society has comfortably forgotten the meaning of the word "woman". All are suppressing her. We live in a "modern" world where women are tortured and insulted every day. Not only this society, but ever since the world started women have been considered as some toys for men to trample on. In today's world women don't have freedom to walk freely. Each day newspapers bring sad news about women. Atrocities on women are often compensated by awarding the relatives of the victims a job and some money. Now women have become a commodity. Our world has easily forgotten that women are mothers and sisters.

**Neetha, Class XII**

When modern Kerala chases after computers, it forgets about environment. We should focus more on agriculture and eliminate poverty. By popularizing organic farming we can protect our agricultural land from poisonous chemical fertilizers. Organic farming is a good solution instead of applying deadly pesticides like Endosulfan. Pollution from factories is killing our environment. Strict laws should be introduced against this. Clean air to breathe is our right and let the law makers focus their attention on this.



Sketch by Adam Yahya, Tanzania

## Promoting youth volunteering in the post-2015 development agenda

Waynad Shishu Panchayat



volunteerism was delivered by noted environmentalist Dr Devadas (Chairman, Gandhi Gramam Prakruthi Chikitsa Federation).

In the students' session there were paper presentations by students who participated in Chennai Youth Consultation on Millennium Development Goals. The students emphasized the importance of caring and sharing for sustainable development. During the inaugural ceremony the students were



Members of Waynad Shishu Panchayat, Kerala have argued on the need to promote volunteering as an important goal in the post-2015 development agenda. In a programme organized by the Shishu Panchayat on May 4, 2013, the students felt volunteering provided immense opportunities to serve the society and promoted well-being.

The aim of the program was promotion and facilitation of Youth Volunteerism; Preparation of a memorandum on Volunteerism and support My World Survey by conducting offline Survey. The program was inaugurated by Member of Legislative Assembly, Mr M V Sreyamskumar.

A talk on youth volunteerism was delivered by Mr TM Joseph (Assistant Sub Inspector) and the keynote address on youth

honored by the MLA. Group Discussions, presentations and offline Survey on My World was conducted. The conference was conducted by members of Waynad Shishu Panchayat under the leadership of Thansila, leaders from Leadership Village led by Roshan and was coordinated by directors of AFRC INDIA Laila Saein and Anil Emage.



## (D)reams in a dustbin



Photograph by Mumtaz Numani

Children picking rags in Aligarh

Strolling through the streets of Aligarh we may meet a number of Zahids. Most of the Zahid's and their families have their own heart-wrenching tale. Their innocent smile has a deep dark story behind them.

Even after the enactment of the Right to Education Act, children like Zahid in many parts of India are denied education due to the lack of awareness and opportunities. In the country where a large number of people are living below poverty line there is no one to ensure primary education for their children. This is also a fact that the government spends a huge amount of money on poverty alleviation, yet the desired output is negligible due to the rising corruption.

Engaging small children in manual scavenging, begging and rag picking is a major problem in Aligarh. It is true of children like Zahid all across the country. These children are far away from the light of knowledge. Moreover, the task of rag picking is proving fatal for many of them. They end up in catching dangerous infections due to bacteria and germs; it is a serious health hazard. Besides they don't have any means of getting treatment once they get infected.

Every child in our country has the right to be educated and live in secure environment. They have the right to live healthy. It is the basic duty of all of us to contribute our bit into it and our priorities should focus on these aspects.

**Asiya Naqvi, Class XI, Aligarh**

This is the story of a rag picker whose name is Zahid. He, along with his five siblings is rag pickers. He assists his father in collecting the garbage from every household in a locality and dumping it in a municipality dustbin. His index finger is cut off due to an infection he got while handling the filthy garbage on the streets. His mother is suffering from severe malnutrition as is his whole family. His elder sister was married at a tender age of 15 after years of rag-picking. Shackled by the responsibility of earning livelihood, for Zahid school life is a faintest idea.

## Dissecting Development

**Swastik Loho Choudhury,**  
Class X, Santiniketan

Numerous developmental programmes have been initiated in India over the years but we have not got satisfactory results in many cases. To develop understanding of these development failures, The Peace Gong spoke to some teachers of Visva Bharati University. Here are some excerpts of the interviews:

- 1) Mr Rebanta Chatterjee, a retired teacher from Patha Bhavan, Visva Bharati feels there is a serious problem of primary education in the country. He opines that to spread education in the country, active participation of the common man is needed.
- 2) Dr. Ashok Sarkar (Professor, Department of Social Work) observes that in Japan even way back in 1900, the literacy rate was 100 per cent but in India still after 60 years of Independence we are hardly near that figure. In India a large number of rural people are ignorant of the merits of education. A poor villager does not want to send his ward to the school as he thinks it is waste of time.
- 3) Associate Professor in Department of Physics, Dr Aparna Saha Roy says, "In order to spread education we need to educate women first. As she plays a role of mother, she would automatically ensure that her kids get education."

- 4) Dr Pradip Ganguly (Doctor, P.M. Hospital, Visva Bharati) feels that besides giving academic education, it is important to impart vocational trainings like driving, repairing, electrical works, sewing, embroidery etc in rural schools so that it can get them a decent livelihood.
- 5) Violence against women is another serious concern before the country. Dr Aparna Saha Roy says "In today's India women are not respected rather they are seen as a package for entertainment. In most of the middle class family, they are being disrespected while in some cases they are treated as maid servants. No doubt children don't learn to respect women. To curb rapes in India and ensure dignity of women, we have to change the mindset of the society. We have to respect the fair sex."
- 6) Arbnab who has just given his matriculation exams blames it on the media for unnatural rise in rape and molestation. He says that now a-days over 90 per cent of Bollywood movies in India feature

item numbers with short dresses and erotic dance steps. This leaves wrong impression on the impressionable minds of young boys.

- 7) In the post 2015 development agenda, Mr Rebanta Chatterjee feels education, morality and proper development procedures should get priority. Dr Aparna Saha Roy feels the goals should include security for women and child, check of population growth and a religiously tolerant and corruption-free society. For Dr Sibransan Mishra, the goals should include programmes to reduce inequalities, reduction of urban-rural divide and proper implementation of policies.



Pursuing Happiness by Arijita Bose, Class VI, New Delhi

## Create positive relationships for peace: Olivier Urbain

They say perfection is achieved not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away. Such an epitome of perfection is Professor Olivier Urbain. Having met him at a conference in Japan in 2011, I have this honour of interviewing him via e-mail for The Peace Gong. Prof Urbain is the Director of the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research in

Japan. He is the founder and director of the Transcend: Art & Peace Network. In this interview he stresses on the importance of creating a vibrant and positive relationships in one's environment to promote peace.

- 1) **In a world where there are conflicts in different layers, how do we young people work to create supportive societies?**

Young people have many opportunities to create caring and meaningful connections with those around them, in their families, at school, or when they meet their friends to study together, or to party or simply discuss things. Each person has the responsibility of how s/he relates to others in their immediate environment. There is always a relationship

with a relative, a friend, a teacher, that can be worked on and improved. The big events in the world such as wars, revolutions or conflicts are basically triggered by poor human relationships. The antidote is to create vibrant and positive relationships in one's environment, here and now.

- 2) **What do you think should be major ingredients of sustainable development goals?**

Here I would like to quote, Dr Daisaku Ikeda, my mentor, from his 2012 "Environment Proposal". The passage reflects and inspires my personal conviction. It is all about our own potential, our talent for leadership, our focus on the dignity of life:

"In this proposal, I would like to focus on the kind of empowerment that brings forth the truly limitless potential we all possess. It is important that a sense of leadership be fostered within each individual, generating waves of transformation within our communities and societies. Only then can we realize the goal of a sustainable global



Rumana with Prof. Urbain

society in which the inherent dignity of life is given paramount importance....”

Helen Clark, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), made the following powerful statement:

“Sustainability is not exclusively or even primarily an environmental issue . . . It is fundamentally about how we choose to live our lives, with an awareness that everything we do has consequences for the seven billion of us here today, as well as for the billions more who will follow, for centuries to come.”

Today, there are widespread calls for a paradigm shift from the pursuit of material wealth to sustainability. To achieve this, we must interrogate the very nature of human civilization, from the ways in which our societies are organized to the manner in which we conduct our daily lives.

**3) What do you think the Millennium Development Goals have been able to achieve, especially in third world and least developing countries?**

First, stating the eight international development goals was a good way to create unity. More than 40 billion dollars of the debt of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries has been cancelled to allow them to redirect funds towards development. It is true that some countries do not seem to be in a position to achieve any of the goals by 2015, but many countries have achieved almost all of the goals. I think that the effect has been positive, providing unity of purpose, and allowing millions of people to improve their lives, even if we cannot declare victory on all fronts.

**4) One of the goals is to reduce infant mortality rate. Apart from this, what in your opinion are the most important factors that can change the future of the children in third World countries for the better?**

I think that efforts towards the achievement of all eight goals will have a positive effect on the life of children in countries where there is a lot of poverty and suffering. Let us take the first three for instance:

1. Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieving universal primary education,
3. Promoting gender equality and empowering women.

All these objectives are directly related to the future of children. It is only in a world where the people in charge place the dignity of human life as their top priority that children and young people will be able to flourish.

**5) Children and young people are most affected by conflicts, inequalities and other social problems. What role children and young people can play themselves in addressing these issues?**

All children, whatever their background, have the power to create caring and humane relationships around them. But in addition, children who are doing fine on the material level need to be aware that countless other children around them do not have enough to live a good life: many have no access to clean water, not enough food, no protection against diseases, no chance for an education... In theory, the adults in charge should make everyone aware of the situation and teach about the fundamental inequalities in society. But since many

adults do not seem to do this, children need to inform themselves, discuss with each other, come up with sharp questions, and ask their teachers, parents and people in charge. Many children nowadays all over the world have access to the Internet and know how to find information and do research. Children and young people could inform each other of the situation, of the inequality, and encourage each other to ask explanations from the adults.

**6) How can children and young people further inter-generational partnerships to contribute to sustainable development?**

Perhaps the first priority would be to contribute to an atmosphere at home that will generate such discussions. In other words, despite the inevitable generation gap between parents and children, young people can express themselves in the way that will create meaningful discussions at home, with their parents. The second priority will be to do this at school, asking the right questions to their teachers.

**7) What message would you like to give to the children who are striving to make a difference?**

First, never give up doing what you are doing. Adults can be very sincere, but they also have lots of responsibilities and obligations, whereas many children and young people are in a position to say exactly what they have in their heart and to contribute fresh and new ideas.

Second, as you become older and take on responsibilities, try never to lose your “inner child,” remaining just as you are now.

*Syeda Rumana Mehdi, 'A' Level, Karachi*

## Improving nutrition standards in Andaman

A large number of children in Andaman and Nicobar islands suffer from malnutrition. According to a government data, in Andaman, the infant death rate was 101 in 2008, 114 in 2009 and 118 in 2010.

In a small survey of different stakeholders on nutrition problems in the islands, it was observed that a large number of both children and expectant mothers face the problem of malnutrition.

Special attention to pregnant women belonging to economically underprivileged families is essential for avoiding babies with low-birth weight. The goals of the health and nutrition sectors, with respect to women and children cannot be achieved singly, but only if the efforts of each department act in synergy with the other.

A number of people, who were interviewed as part of this survey, said the problem

of malnutrition at grassroots level can be addressed by developing nutrition gardens in and around the premises of Anganwadi centres and also in schools.

Also to improve the nutritional status of the people of Andaman, awareness is the first step. Most of the poor people are ignorant and lack knowledge about the various vital nutrients which are needed for maintaining health. The gap between ignorance and awareness can be linked through literacy, that too with special emphasis to education on nutrition.

As far as Andaman and Nicobar islands is concerned, anemia seems to be an important problem. Some teachers who were interviewed said that to tackle this problem, household level nutrition security was important. The locally available vegetables can be grown in the kitchen garden and this should be popularized.

The student's community in the islands has a great role to play to prevent this malnutrition menace. In the premises of all school campus, under the concept of “one student-one nutrition plant” each student should be provided with the nutrition sapling. Along with the plant name, student's name should also be written. So atleast for three years it will be the duty of the students to take care of the plant. This will inculcate a sense of responsibility among the students besides inspiring others. Slowly this habit will reach the homes. By taking care of trees the students will also know the various components/ nutrients present in the vegetable / fruits and its health promoting qualities.

*T Arun Rudra, Class IX, Port Blair*

## Living in Harmony with the Purusha & Prakriti

Sustainable development is not a destination but a state where processes of transformation are primarily entropic. It is when there is enough energy, in the form of resources and capabilities for any unit of self governance - be it individual, family, household, community or village to generate and sustain its own development to higher and higher goals set by itself. This is what Mahatma Gandhi meant when he dreamt of "Gram Swaraj". Sustainability, therefore is not a static conflict-free state but a condition of continuous, non-violent exchange by the members within the unit for example, village.

As we students, did our micro-planning in the villages, near our school in Jharkhand, despite the introduction of the Panchayati Raj, we found all systems of development are highly dependent on resources and decisions from beyond the village. The higher the development of a particular village in our area; the more seems to be the need for outside energies of resources.

Our school, Anandalaya, promoted by PIDT (People's Institute for Development and Training) has been energetically trying to develop our skills and capacities, so that we can become self reliant and develop sustainable actions. We learn kitchen gardening, handloom making, planning voluntary action, so that even after spending so many hours at school, we do not disassociate ourselves from our life skills and can become part of the Gram Swaraj.

Infact in our villages, in order for a family to be happy and self reliant – much of the work is divided up between the menfolk and womenfolk. In our homes, the girls usually learn to take up the roles and responsibilities of the mother, whereas the boys learn from their fathers or elder brothers. This makes everyone in the family responsible for running the household. In the same manner, in the villages, different communities take up specific tasks and there is a inter-dependence of each other at the village level.

There are many differences in nature between men and women, that our traditional societies respect as in the Japanese tradition there is the yin and yang; whereas in our Indian societies, it is the Purusha and Prakrit both being essential complementary elements that make up a "whole". Thus all tasks are undertaken with mutual respect. Gender is these cultural differences between different sexes in different cultures that make for different expectations of roles and responsibilities.

Many of the development programs especially through self help groups seem to prefer giving all the benefits to the woman. In other cases, most of the development programs employ only men as wage laborers. External programs therefore are rarely gender neutral. A gendered approach to sustainable development, would understand how the men and women in the community / village divide their roles and responsibilities, so that they are non-exploitative, complementary and sustainable with least amount of effort.

**Class X students of Anandalaya School, Jharkhand (the story was originally put together by the children after a series of discussions on the issue in Hindi; translated by their coordinator)**

### Cleaning up Siliguri

"Peace is the most commonly preached word in all moral education books. But can peace suddenly descend from the heavens? Peace is a man-made factor. It can be achieved only when the root causes of trouble are removed."---these very true and memorable lines are by the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Chacha Nehru moulded the little and innocent minds to bring about international peace and co-operation.

Bagdogra, a small town on the outskirts of Siliguri, West Bengal has a local gram Panchayat. The area is divided into a few residential and commercial areas. For the past 15 years, commercial activities have grown in these areas. New shops, food centres, hotels, etc have come up. Also there are Army and Air Force camps, hospitals, schools and colleges.

One of the basic problems of the area is poor drainage and sanitation facilities. There is increasing degeneration of the land. The hustle and bustle of vehicles adds to the crowd and pollution in the area. In the absence of any proper dumping ground or area for waste disposal, people dump their garbage near the local playground which is gradually becoming the

breeding ground for mosquitoes and emanate foul smell. The situation worsens during the rainy season when the showers wash away the garbage on the road. The students of the adjacent schools such as Good Shepherd School, Nishkalanka Mata Hindi School and Hebron School have become the easy and ready victims of this mess.

Sincere co-operation between the local panchayat and the people is needed to address this worsening sanitation situation. Garbage bins should be provided for separating the degradable and non-degradable substances. Plastic bags are still in use in large scale. Women find it very easy to dump the plastic wastes outside where the cows and pigs in search of food face untimely death by eating the plastic garbage.

The youth has a major role in creating awareness on the ill-effects of poor sanitary conditions. Youth groups will have to join hands with adults to ensure a clean and green Bagdogra. We cannot ensure peace in unclean environment. We can be proud by planting new saplings and nurturing them.

**Subhasree Ghatak** (Class X) & **Ayush Thakur** (Class VII)  
Siliguri

## Gender inequality stuns progress

As part of Surovi Shishu Panchayat's efforts to understand people's views on whether gender inequality and illiteracy amongst women was an obstacle to progress of society, a survey was conducted in Chandrapur block of Guwahati in January-February, 2013. It was conducted at the behest of the United Nations Volunteers on youth perspective to the post 2015 development agenda.

A majority of young girls and boys who were interviewed agreed that inequalities emerged from homes itself. It was felt that on many occasions mothers were biased against girls. More attention is given to boys whereas girls are made to fend for themselves. Some teachers whom the Surovi team spoke to felt this was due to traditional mindset. "Unless we change our mindsets and start treating our children-girls and boys- equally, gender inequality will thrive," said Nayanmoni Kalita, 27 and a youth volunteer.

Many elderly women observed that equal opportunity in education was the key; they shared the hardships they faced in their lives. "Had we been educated we could have overcome many hardships and violence that we face in our homes," said an elderly woman in her 70s in Noonmati Nizarapur.

Mumtaz Begum, a class X student of Axom Vidya Mandir, Noonmati Nizarapur, Guwahati stressed that girls need to fight for their rights and equality in society. In fact she and many of her friends in the school felt that unless girls fight for equality, no one is going to give them their basic rights in a male dominated society.

College students like Neha Sharma felt attitudinal change amongst both men and women were important. She felt men should understand how important it was for the progress of the family if the womenfolk were educated and treated equally. Sensitization

on the benefits of equality was key to promote it, she added.

As part of this endeavor to understand the views of young people, Surovi Shishu Panchayat and the youth volunteers working with it led by Mr Rihan Ali organized a one-day sensitization programme in Axom Vidya Mandir, on 24 January, 2013.

Mr Ramen Chandra Talukdar, the Headmaster of the School, said that gender inequality was an obstacle to development of society. Sabita Begum, Rokibul Kazi and Anna Begum were of the view education was important to fighting gender inequalities. The programme ended with the children taking oath, "We should ensure equal rights to both boys and girls, we will teach it to our elders too."

**Rani Baruah** ( Class XII) &  
**Priyanka Chetri** (Class XII), Guwahati

## I feel strongly about...

### Empowering women for peace

If a nation is to develop, empowerment of women is essential. Women must be respected and ensured of their safety in every society. They must be allowed to script their own destiny. Let's free their wings so that they fly high. It is not only the duty of law to protect and promote women but we as citizens should come forward and join hands to root out social evils against women and the girl child. Women must also speak out, mobilize, organize and act to promote peace in the society. To conclude, there shall not be peace in any society and country if there is gender inequality and violence against women.

**Bisma Zaffar**, Class IX, Srinagar

### Women rights to the fore

In spite of the high stature of women, they have been always subjugated. Restrictions are imposed not only on their freedom of movement but also their thoughts. Laws were passed against them by the government as well as the society.

Indian women have been constitutionally granted equality at par with men and the State has also been empowered to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. By an Act of Parliament in 1990, the National Commission for Women was set up to safeguard the rights and legal

entitlements of women. For the reservation of seats for women in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment (1993) to

the Indian Constitutions have been made. This has laid a strong foundation for the participation of women in decision making at the local levels. But unfortunately, these seats often go unoccupied or are taken up by male candidates because women rarely contest for such seats.

According to Article 15(3) of the Constitution, the State is allowed to make special provisions for women and children. But little of this is implemented as women are subjected to physical and mental torture by their husband and their families and always remain under the control of the 'male' head of the family. Rampant cases of female foeticide and infanticide are reported from all over the country. As a result of this the Indian society continues to be 'patriarchal'.

Through Article (15) (A) (e) of the Constitution, a fundamental duty is imposed on every citizen to discard practices derogatory to the dignity of women. But what is the society doing about eve teasing? Can a woman spend an entire day on the streets

of the National Capital without getting cheap comments 'derogatory to her dignity'? Section 509 of the IPC protects women against practices which insult the modesty of a woman. Also under Section 354 of the IPC, an individual who has assaulted a woman or used criminal force on her can be punished with imprisonment of up to two years. But unfortunately even policemen, the people employed by the state to ensure that people don't sneer any rules, themselves indulge in these crimes not only on roads but also in police stations.

The mere existence of laws cannot automatically bring about a revolutionary change in the society. Discrimination and violence against women has to be taken as a priority issue by the society, major attention is needed to bring attitudinal changes and stricter punishments for perpetrators of crimes.

**Raashid Altaf** (Class X) &  
**Azhar Fayaz Rather** (Class XII),  
Budgam



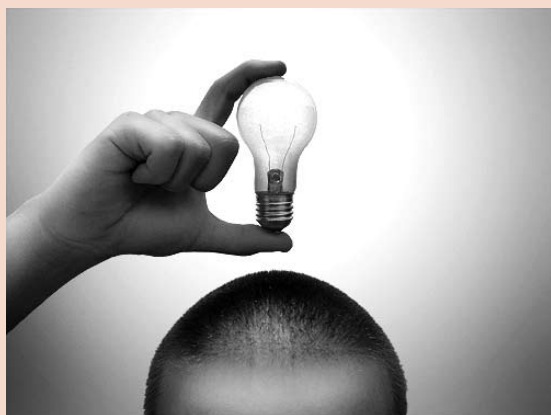


### Maternal health needs special attention

An estimated 287,000 maternal deaths occurred in 2010 worldwide. The maternal mortality ratio in developing countries is still 15 times higher than in the developed regions. Special efforts need to be taken so as to protect women and girl child from different health threats and hence stop them to be list as endangered.

**Aqib Mohammed**, Class X, Budgam

### Development priorities of India



As India sprints forward with a satchel full of dreams, she is also plagued with problems. While she grows she reflects all the signs and symptoms of a developing nation striving to attain the 'developed' tag. On her path to development, there are many issues that need to be given prime importance. A major issue is the growing rural- urban divide. While the urban regions are teeming with employment, education and energy, their rural counterparts are fighting for their basic needs. Development cannot only be limited to new roads and bridges; it must encompass a broader and holistic development through the medium of education. However the education shouldn't be just confined to textbooks but extends to the real life, a vocational education that will enable the rural folk to step out and break the cycle of poverty.

**Spandana Bhattacharya**, Class XII, Kolkata

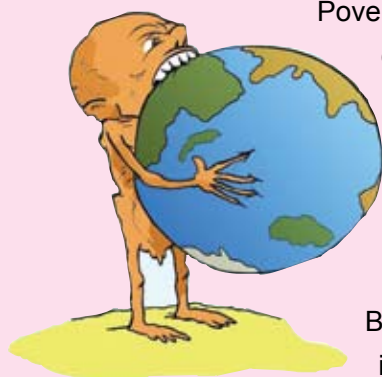


The Peace Gong advisor and the coordinator in Jammu & Kashmir, Javed Naqi orienting students of writing skills

Children handling pictures showing how we can stop early sex and pregnancy. Pic by Bienveni Kazadi, Uganda, who is trying to involve children there in The Peace Gong



### Poverty and Hunger



Poverty and Hunger are one of the greatest challenges faced by the world today. The state of poverty and hunger in India is alarming. Balance of economy is one of the remedy to end the problem

of poverty. This includes special monthly funds for poor families, good education and greater job opportunities for young people of poor families.

Poverty and hunger are not separate entities. Poverty gives rise to hunger and hence this leads to deaths and crimes. Thus the governments must prioritize the eradication of poverty in the national agenda. The day is not far when the poverty bomb will inflict more threat than an atom bomb.

**Aijaz Ali Rather**, Class XII, Khigam

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## Obedience to Parents



Obedience is a great quality in the life and character of human beings. If we learn to obey we shall learn to command. We should take the first lesson in obedience by obeying our parents. If we are obedient to them they will feel happy and satisfied and this will be an asset to us. Our debt to them, who do so much for us, is, really boundless. It can never be re-

paid of course our bounden duty is to reciprocate the sentiments they show towards us. We must love them, honour them, and respect them.

Obedience to parents and elders will give us decency, decorum and happiness, comfort, pleasure and satisfaction. It will help us grow well in life. This is what we young people should strive so that the world around us become a better place.

**Neha Dey**, Class IX, Shillong

## Let's all protect the environment

We are incomplete without our environment,

Our existence depends on a sustainable environment,

We get food, wood, water and fresh air from the environment,

Unfortunately we are not taking good care of our environment,

We continue to pollute it in every possible way,

Our bad actions has resulted in depletion of resources,

Glaciers and rivers have now become fairy tales of environment,

We are told, cars, buses, ships and airplanes will go to museums as there won't be fuel left to extract from the environment,

Isn't it a great irony that our actions are responsible for ecological degradation?

Lets us join hands and save the environment for us and all.

**Faizan Aslam Bhat**, Class XII, Srinagar &  
**Syed Kazim**, Class X, Kargil

## Editorial

## The Joy of Giving

*"And now you ask in your heart, 'How shall we distinguish that which is good in pleasure from that which is not good?'*

*Go to your fields and your gardens, and you shall learn that it is the pleasure of the bee to gather honey of the flower,*

*But it is also the pleasure of the flower to yield its honey to the bee.*

*For to the bee a flower is a fountain of life,*

*And to the flower a bee is a messenger of love,*

*And to both, bee and flower, the giving and the receiving of pleasure is a need and an ecstasy.- Khalil Gibran*

In today's world when people are increasingly becoming selfish and care only about themselves, new complex problems are emerging. Humankind has to address different forms of exploitation, conflicts, inequalities and injustices. Our society is becoming grossly unfair to the poor and destitute. In this context, former President of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel had rightly said, "As soon as man began considering himself the source of the highest meaning in the world and the measure of everything, the world began to lose its human dimension, and man began to lose control of it." So what are the remedies for making people happy and messengers of love so that exploitation and conflicts are reduced?

One of the remedies is definitely to imbibe the spirit of selfless service for the welfare of others. The joy of giving needs to be imbibed amongst all. Right from a young age, we need to develop a feeling of empathy and compassion for all living beings; a spirit of humanism should encompass all our actions.

At the dawn of this century, the United Nations had adopted the Millennium Declaration Goals which envisaged achieving development goals amongst member nations by 2015. With 2015 coming nearer, discussions and consultations are going on in different parts of the world on what would be the sustainable development goals post 2015. Worldwide different groups of people including youth are giving their views and ideas on how to tackle the existing and emerging concerns in our societies. The Peace Gong team too felt that we young people should look around our communities, understand our problems and try to find solutions to these. We felt we too could contribute our bit on what should form part of the sustainable development goals.

Ranging from concerns of gender inequality and malnutrition to hazards of children who are into rag picking, The Peace Gong reporters tried to take up the serious problems emanating in their society. To

make this world a just and peaceful place for all to live, we young people have a major role to play. Also it is significant to note that many of our friends in the Peace Gong have been working for quite some time on issues of ecological and wildlife conservation, motivating dropouts to go back to school, creating awareness on issues of health, sanitation and disability. We are honoured to interview two very internationally renowned personalities in this issue who gives us, the youth, a direction on what we should do. The UN Messenger of Peace Ms Jane Goodall and Prof Olivier Urbain, the Director of Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research in Japan tells us the importance of developing positive relationships with all living beings.

Lastly, I would like to share these lines of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri mystic poet, Lal Ded :

*I trapped my breath in the bellows of my throat:*

*a lamp blazed up inside, showed me who I really was.*

*I crossed the darkness holding fast to that lamp,*

*Scattering its light-seeds around me as I went.*

**Iflah Javed Qureshi**, Class XII, Srinagar

## Water 4 Birds campaign for thirsty birds

The Waynad Shishu Panchayat has launched a “Water 4 Birds” project to create water shelters for thirsty birds. Wayanad is well known for its wild life, greenery and soothing cool climate. But during summers, the heat waves are so bad that birds have great difficulty in finding drinking water.

Members of the Shishu Panchayat are collecting waste plastic bottles and discarded containers and with the help of old bangles are trying to create water shelters. The campaign also aims at promoting recycling.

Through this endeavour, the children are also trying to create awareness on the responsibility of humans towards other living beings. People especially the youth have to take the lead that the helpless animals and birds need attention during extreme conditions.

It has been decided that the water in the containers should be changed at very frequent intervals so as to assure fresh water supply and also eliminate the possibilities of mosquitoes breeding in it. While going to change water, the children are going to hang water shelters in new places too. We have taken more than our share from Mother Nature, now the time has come to give back...



**Shobita**, Class XII

The Peace Gong in the Newsletter on Children, Youth and Media

Published by The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media at Nordicom, Göteborg University

([http://www.nordicom.gu.se/cl/publ/letter.php#Marching Towards a Global Non-violent Future Through Children's Newspaper](http://www.nordicom.gu.se/cl/publ/letter.php#Marching%20Towards%20a%20Global%20Non-violent%20Future%20Through%20Children's%20Newspaper)  
<i>The Peace Gong</i>)

### Excerpts from the Story

#### *Marching Towards a Global Non-violent Future Through Children's Newspaper The Peace Gong*

**Syeda Rumana Mehdi**, Karachi, PAKISTAN and

**Spandana Bhattacharya**, Kolkata, India

“To ensure a global non-violent future, children should be encouraged to volunteer to build bridges of friendship amongst young people. Promoting children's participation in community building will not only contribute towards trans-generational progress of the society but also lay the foundation of an active young citizenry who are aware of their rights and duties.”

(Editorial in the special issue of the children's newspaper The Peace Gong, marking the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers in February 2012.)

This editorial in our special issue on volunteering underlines The Peace Gong's philosophy to bring together children of the world on one platform to volunteer to promote a culture of peace and non-violence.

It is further articulated by initiatives of young reporters in different countries of the world. For instance, The Peace Gong reporters at Anandalaya School in

a remote tribal village of Jharkhand, India have initiated interactions with seniors on the importance of peaceful co-existence and non-violence. During the interactions, it was generally felt that intolerance amongst communities was growing and that this needed immediate attention (The Peace Gong, September 2012 issue).

The students and seniors felt that encouraging mutual respect for each other was important to promote peace between communities. Children and young people have a great role to play as peace messengers and catalysts for imbibing respect for different culture and traditions, the young reporters reiterated.

#### ***Media- and Information Literacy as Means***

The Peace Gong is a global children's newspaper initiated by the Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation, New Delhi, as part of the foundation's initiative to promote peace and non-violence through media and information literacy. Children, not only from different parts of India but also abroad, are part of the Peace Gong team. Franklin D. Roosevelt was pertinent in saying, “We cannot always build the future for our youth but we can build our

youth for the future.” This vision definitely coincides with the mission of The Peace Gong.

We students involved with The Peace Gong feel that by developing capacities to critically understand the media and its messages, and to make use of information on different social issues, we are able to build appreciation for concerns of society and diversity.

Nikita Mishra, 17, a student in Class XII in Mumbai, India and involved with The Peace Gong, talks about how she perceives violence in the media and other social concerns after having started doing deconstruction exercises:

“Being part of an initiative which helps to understand media, I have tried to learn how to discern between reality and fiction. It gives us insight as to how media covers conflicts and violence. On the whole it not only enhances our communication and analytical skills, being a reporter of The Peace Gong makes us aware of injustices in the society and conscious of our responsibilities. We no longer take whatever the media tries to promote rather we try to look at it with different perspectives.”

# Make a difference!



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Bones are scattered everywhere,  
The shrill wail of death echoes in my ear,

I stand in a developed world in the 21st century,  
Then why does the Earth look like one big mortuary?

Why do mighty oceans look like pools of blood and mountains a heap of bodies?  
Why are innocent children smuggled across borders like commodities?

I watched silently as yet more tubes were inserted into that baby,  
I watched silently as the nurse roughly pushed the weeping lady,

I never spoke a word as the shroud covered that angelic face,  
I tried not to think that I could have saved that child in many ways,

I ignore the wetness of my eyes and the sorrow in my heart,  
After all, that country and my country are miles apart,

I walk on,  
I see children, whose clothes are torn,

Can I still turn a blind eye to all this mess?  
For how long shall we be under duress?

Everyone says that things will improve,  
The boulder of violence is too big for one to move,

So let's break this boulder piece by piece,  
Only then shall the havoc in our lives cease,

Only then shall the roses bloom,  
Only then there will be less misery and gloom,

Let my song of love echo over Tahrir Square in Cairo,  
the landmines in Vietnam and the deserts in Africa,  
Let my hand of love spread far and wide, from America to Australia,

United we stand and divided we fall,  
In order to make giant leaps, we first need to learn to crawl,

Together, we will make the world a better abode,  
Together, we will take care of this beautiful gift of God

**Syeda Rumana Mehdi.** 'A' Level, Karachi