

The Peace Gong

Vol - 6

December 2013

Pages 12

This children's newspaper is part of a Media and Information Literacy Initiative of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation.

This issue is being published in association with the International Association for Volunteer Effort.



Editorial

ABUSING CHILDREN IS ABUSING HUMANITY

“Every night I looked up at those same stars, but I didn't want any of those things. I didn't want Egypt, or France, or far flung destinations. I just wanted to go back to my life from my childhood, just to visit it, and touch it, and to convince myself that yes, it had been real.”

— Jenny Lawson

Few of us are lucky enough to enjoy a childhood full of candies, fantasies and innocent dreams. For others, childhood is a macabre recollection of traumatizing memories. The 2006 UN Study on “Violence against Children” revealed that in South Asia, between 41 and 88 million children witness violence at home annually – the highest regional total in the world. General comment 13 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines child abuse as, “All forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment including sexual abuse.” Specific forms of violence include corporal punishment, child marriage, domestic violence, child trafficking, bullying and physical fights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) stated that consent cannot be “free and full” when one of the parties involved is not sufficiently mature to make an informed decision about a life partner. However, the situation in South Asia is alarmingly different. In South Asia, there are more child marriages than in any other region of the world: half

(32, 6 million) of the 64 million young women 20-24 years old who have reported globally that they were married before age 18, live in South Asia. Overall, in the region, 46 per cent of women 20-24 years old were first married or in union before they reached the age of 18 and 18 per cent of women 20-24 years old were first married or in union before they even reached the age of 15.

According to the ILO (International Labour Organisation) convention, the worst forms of child labour include those that damage children's health, threaten their education and lead to further exploitation and abuse. Across South Asia, 12 per cent of children aged 5-14 are engaged in child labour -- which amounts to 44 million children, out of which 29 million live in India.

Corporal punishment is a common occurrence in the daily life of South Asian children. 95 per cent of the world's total child population lives in countries where they are not legally protected from corporal punishment from parents and 29.3 per cent of these live in South Asia. 54.7 per cent of the total children population lives in countries where they are not legally protected from corporal punishment in schools - and 44 per cent of these live in South Asia.

These figures are not mere data; they reflect our ignorance. The carpet in your living room could have been woven by a child earning a wage well below the legal minimum wage in



Preparing children to contribute towards a culture of peace and nonviolence through media literacy

his country. The garments that you wear could have been stitched by a ten-year-old girl who gets sexually exploited by her employer. Every child is our own and every time a child is abused, it is humanity that is abused; the humanity that still comprises of few individuals who want to make this world a better place, the humanity that seeks to protect the young saplings of today from turning into wilted flowers of tomorrow.

SYEDA RUMANA MEHDI,
A' Level, Karachi
Associate Editor



Lost childhood: A little boy in Srinagar selling woolen items (photo: Faizan Aslam Bhatt)

Special South Asia Edition

We will... we can!

This is a very special issue of our 'Peace Gong' newspaper! It is dedicated to the safety and well-being of South Asia's children, and to ending of all forms of violence against them.

These millions of children, living through their childhoods across the South Asian region, are the greatest wealth and most valuable asset of our region. But childhoods in all our countries are challenged by many risks.

In recent years, as the South Asian governments have got together to work in partnership for the security and happiness of all their children, some children of the region have themselves taken leadership to speak out for their rights and to make their dreams known.

We, the children of 'Peace Gong,' are among those who are seeking information, examining what we discover, and sharing information and ideas. Like all children everywhere, we want the attention, care and encouragement of our elders -- parents, elders, teachers, those in authority. But we also want to contribute to making our country, our region and a world a better place for all of us. This is why we work as volunteers, to find out things and think about them, and to publish our news and views in our very own news journal.

Our focus in this edition is the effort being made in our region to end violence against children across South Asia. This effort has brought eight national governments together, voluntary organizations and also children. We are proud to be part of this effort.

Most of us in Peace Gong today live in India, but friends and colleagues are from other countries too. Our editorial comes from Syeda Rumana Mehdi of Pakistan, who is our Associate Editor. She has also sent in an evocative poem on the girl child.

The Peace Gong is glad to offer its greetings and good wishes to all the children of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka -- and to all the leaders and decision makers of all our countries. We hope more of us will connect with the Peace Gong, and join together to track what is happening for children, and to help our elders reminded that we too have ideas to offer for the good of our region.

DYUTHI, Class XI, Waynad
Editor

BUILDING PROTECTION FOR SOUTH ASIA'S CHILDREN



A medical doctor by profession with an advanced degree in Human Rights, a PHD Fellow in Human Rights and a Post Graduate Fellow in International Humanitarian Law,

Dr. Rinchen Chopel is the Director-General of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC).

The Peace Gong team invited Dr Chopel for an E-interview, and sent their questions. Here are Dr Chopel's responses.

1) Nazneen Begum, Ishrath Begum and Rumana Begum (Class X, Girls High School, Maozzam Jahi Market, Hyderabad, India)

Q: In the context of conflicts around the world, how can we young students bring change in the world through our writings and movements?

Dr Chopel: Yes indeed we live in a world where our lives are affected by conflict, directly or indirectly. All we hear about now is death and destruction, pain and suffering, and mass displacement of populations around the globe....and the plight of women and children.

What we need is a change in the mind-set of the human race...to create a world where we can live our lives in an environment of peace and harmony...This thinking in this day and age sounds impossibility...but then, why not? Why shouldn't we try? The children and youth of today can move from being bystanders...or being subjected to the horrors of adults ruining this universe by being actively involved in shaping the way the world is evolving. Young students in particular with your ability to generate tsunamic energies by joining a cause to save the world -- from small villages to larger communities, states, nations, regions and the world -- SAIEVAC promotes our work through our slogan of 'In solidarity with the Children of SAARC' and we are making dedicated efforts to promote and create meaningful child participation in partnership with our national governments, the SACG (South Asia Coordinating Group against Violence against Children) and the NACGs (National Action and Coordinating Groups against Violence against Children) in South Asia.

2) Samina Parveen, Class 11th Government Higher Secondary School Chuchot Shama, Ladakh, J&K State, India.

Q: Corporal punishment in schools is still common and the students are humiliated not just physically but mentally as well. Many a times this discourages students to go school and results in higher school

dropout rates. What measures we are taking at the SAARC level or country level to change the mindset and attitude of the teaching community?

Dr Chopel: Corporal punishment or physical and humiliating punishment of children constitutes one of the 5 most common forms of violence suffered by children in South Asia. This is also one of the major themes being showcased for elimination by SAIEVAC.

SAIEVAC with support of the SACG held a Regional Technical Consultation in 2010 on Legal Reform on Corporal Punishment, and since then we have maintained a continued focus on driving this agenda at the regional level.

In May 2012, during the Follow-Up Regional Consultation to the UN Study on Violence Against Children, held in Colombo, SAIEVAC launched the Regional Campaign on Corporal Punishment, joining hands with the SAIEVAC national mechanisms, children of South Asia, parliamentarians, the legal and judicial fraternity, child rights advocates, CSO/NGOs, UN, international NGOs and the UN Secretary General's Special Representative to End Violence Against Children. Since then, SAIEVAC and the Member States have initiated national campaigns as well as updating information on the progress for elimination.

The 3rd SAIEVAC Technical Consultation on 'Eliminating Harmful Practices based on Tradition, Culture, Religion and Superstition' held in Bhutan from the 26th to 28th of September 2013, also showcased Child Marriage and Corporal Punishment besides other forms of harmful practices. The Child Representatives of South Asia/SAARC tabled their recommendations on the theme to the main session, which forms a significant part of the outcome of the Conference.

From 20-21 st December 2013, in Colombo, we will be conducting an Orientation Programme on Positive Development and Legal Reform for the SAIEVAC National Coordinators and the NACG Chairs. This will hopefully lead to more dedicated efforts at the national levels to create a change in mind-sets and attitudes towards this.

3) Syeda Rumana Mehdi, 'A' Level (Cambridge System), The Lyceum School, Karachi, Pakistan.

Q: The girl child is the most vulnerable and subjected to various forms of exploitation in all parts of South Asia. What can be done to help build a truly girl-child friendly South Asia?

Dr Chopel: As I have said, women and children continue to be targets of varied forms of exploitation and this remains tragically unabated even in this day and age. The situation of the girl child is painfully desperate. Despite global, regional and national movements to create

better security and protection for children and the girl child in particular, there are still continued violations taking place...tragically most are condoned by our systems and society. What we need is to respond to this ...not through fragmented programmatic or agency priority targeting...but creating a larger inclusive movement as SAIEVAC is trying to do by bringing all onto one common platform...and share our resources, expertise and energies ...and set in motion a movement that not only addresses new and emerging vulnerabilities but also takes the challenge of rectifying long drawn out traditions that continue to compromise the rights of the girl child.

4) Subharee Ghatak, Class XI, St Joseph School, Matigara, Siliguri (West Bengal) & Suchismita Chakraborty, Class VIII, Auxillium Girl's School, Agartala, (Tripura) & Areeb Bashir, Class 9th Burn Hall School, Srinagar (J&K), India.

Q: Women and children (girls and boys both) suffer most in conflict zones and in many under-developed countries they are used as a tool by the perpetrators of crime. Also in most of these conflict zones, child protection mechanisms are very weak. Why so?

DrChopel: Long-standing discrimination or suppression, economic disparities or exploitation, inequities in terms of rights, opportunities or power relations, ideological differences or belief systems, certain religious sentiments, greed for power and political corruption -- all contribute to triggering conflict in different forms, and in varying sizes and shapes. In every case at the end of the spectrum, is the low socio economic groups and in particular the children who bear the major if not the total brunt of the conflict.

Developing or underdeveloped countries are, as it is, severely limited in their capacity to support social sector services including child protection services. Continued conflict or unstable political situations render the ability of the Governments and other stakeholders to support or implement effective sytematic child protection services even weaker if not totally compromised, due to the lack of capacity or resources or conflicting priorities.

5) Dyuthi, Class XI and Editor, the Peace Gong (Waynad, Kerala, India).

Q: In a fast paced, technology-driven world, how do we promote value based education deeply rooted in local culture, tradition, as well as scientific progress?

Dr Chopel: I am definitely not the right person to address this question. But I do have my opinion. This is indeed the challenge of our times.....be it in the most developed country or even in a remote

village in an underdeveloped country. Technology and science continue to increasingly drive if not control our lives. In such a world, we can only hope to ensure sanity and humanity, by keeping ourselves..and more importantly the children and youth educated about the value of family, community and national pride....and the essence of respect for the values that drive our existence...be it religious, customs or traditions. Educating them young and ensuring that we have support mechanisms that continue to promote this meaningfully throughout the lifespan is important. But to have meaning, these things cannot be just instructional in schools but real life experiences ... and we do hear of numerous efforts by different governments and organisations to promote these values and respect for traditions and cultures both within the education system and outside. I can think of one good example (there are many others as well in other countries) ...the efforts of the Royal Government of Bhutan to promote wholesome education and GNH (Gross National Happiness) education in all schools...and giving increasing responsibilities to children and young people in community development, be it preserving environment, waste management or community services and volunteerism.

6) Asiya Baquar Naqvi, Class XII, Senior Secondary School, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Q: How do you think that young activists like us can create awareness against child marriage and its ill effects on the girl child, as it is still persistent even in the elite, educated families across South Asia?

Dr Chopel: I am sure there are endless ways one can approach the subject. You can continuously advocate for action against child marriage in your communities by joining hands ...and minds ...with your other friends...every person who joins the cause will make the fight against child marriage that much more effective. As young activists, you should not just limit yourself to creating

awareness...you need to find meaningful strategies to generate action against child marriage by developing effective responses...to real-time happenings ...so that you are able to make a difference. It is not just a simple matter of changing laws or policies...we need more protracted efforts to change mindsets....that reaches to every community and family...and visible efforts to bring those who commit these crimes to justice...so that we can ultimately eliminate this inhumane practice. Make your voices heard...the more you are, the louder your voice will be...

7) Mumtaz Begum, Class IX, Axom Vidyamandir, Guwahati, Assam, India.

Q: What are the reasons for the new-generation children getting more aggressive and impatient in different parts of our region? What can be done to stem this aggressive behaviour?

Behaviours are shaped by the experiences you grow up with and the environment you live in. We live in a world of competition/speed ... increasingly involved in aggression and conflict ...and our characters are shaped in ever-diminishing living spaces in a community that is increasingly becoming gigantic. Life has become a huge rush and competition...and therefore children and youth have no choice but to ride the wave... to survive.

Finding tangible strategies and interventions to channelise the energies of the new generation...and creating space for the children and youth to play a meaningful role in the ever changing world ..as you put it...will be the challenge of every society. As a father of 3 young men, it is also my belief that you have to continuously nurture their dreams..so that they have a mission in life...and devote their energy towards realising those dreams.

8) Lokendro Chabungbam, Class XII, Comet School, Imphal, Manipur, India

Q: Child trafficking is a serious problem in all parts of our region. What can be done to stop this?

Dr Chopel: This is indeed a huge problem of our region and this forms one of the 5

key focus areas for SAIEVAC. However in terms of the interventions we will need to consider these on the same lines as proposed under Question 6. The Peace Gong champions can make a huge difference by keeping this agenda alive... by keeping this in the news continuously so that we can trigger more effective responses from our governments and other agencies responsible to address this crime.

9) Debaprita Deb, Class IX, Shiksha Niketan High School, Agartala, Tripura, India

Q: Are children important in the ever-changing world order? If so, how can their voice be heard at the global level? How can the Peace Gong reach out to more children in different parts of South Asia?

Dr Chopel: I do not believe there is any room for argument about the role of children in our lives..and in the world. The world is as much yours now as it is of the adults. And the more effectively we involve children in addressing the challenges of this world today... we will have a better world tomorrow. SAIEVAC as the SAARC Apex Body for Children...embraces a vision that is 'in solidarity with children of SAARC.' In collaboration with the regional and country action and coordination groups, we promote meaningful child participation at both regional and national levels. SAIEVAC is the only inter-governmental mechanism in the Region that has 4 child representatives (2 full-time and 2 observers) in its Governing Board.

I hope that the SAIEVAC Child Participation Framework and the Peace Gong will find meaningful collaboration in the coming days so that we can create a united voice at the grass roots that can expand at the national level..and ultimately contribute to reaching out more effectively at the SAIEVAC and SAARC level. I look forward to this opportunity.

Lack of education promoting child labour in Ladakh



The Peace Gong Ladakh young reporters

In some far-flung villages of Changthang, Turtuk, Tyakshi, Nubra and Zaskar in Ladakh there are no proper schools for the children. This is the reason why many parents are unable to obtain school education for their children. The nomads of Changthang, who keep moving from place to place in search of food for their livestock, cannot get their children admitted in any schools. Just for the sake of educating their children, many poor people of these villages are compelled to hand over their children to richer town-dwellers. Families who are

earning well and living in the town promise good education to these children. But some families make the poor children do household work and do not send them to schools. This is resulting in the increase in the cases of child labour in Leh.

"Providing quality education to a child is our only hope to make this part of the world a better place to live," says Stanzin Angmo, a college student, "Otherwise the cases of child labour will continue to increase." She says "Children studying



here till Class X don't face any difficulties but when they go outside Leh for further education, they are left behind in the race of competing with other non-Ladakhi students."

Ladakh, being a remote area, has remained deprived of basic education opportunity for years. But the 2011 Census report showed 77.20 per cent literacy rate in Leh, out of which male literacy rate is 86.31 per cent and female literacy rate is 63.56 per cent. This puts it at the third rank out of 22 districts of Jammu and Kashmir. This

clearly indicates that the people of Leh are very aware of the importance of education.

"The thirst for knowledge is inherent in Ladakhi children and adults. This is coming as a blessing as it has bought a sense of urgency in the people to make up for the lost time," says Hajira Bano, a local journalist who lives in Leh. "Earlier the parents did not know their right to demand proper education for themselves and for their children. In early 1980s tourists started visiting Leh and the people realized how fast the world had moved on and how much ground we have to cover" she says.

As Ladakh remains cut off from rest of the world for half of the year, due to which life becomes difficult in this barren land where the temperature drops to

even 30 degrees below freezing. There is not sufficient availability of electricity, transport, internet and communication. This in some way or the other affects the education of students studying here.

The government has made education compulsory to all children below age 15 through the Right to Education (RTE) Act. The long-pending demand of Ladakhis for a Central University in Leh has also finally been fulfilled, and the people of Ladakh are getting to know about this. But there is still a lot to be done in this field. Meanwhile, parents still send their children to the city to get a chance of good schooling, and several children still end up as child labour.

SAMINA KAUSAR, ATHISUM FATIMA KHAN

Class XI, Ladakh

Fighting Child Labour in Homes



As one travels in city buses across Jammu and Kashmir, one finds little boys working as bus helpers. These children never go to school and face different forms of exploitation each day. In a reality check conducted by the Peace Gong in and around Srinagar on the issue of child labour, it was found that a good number of children from states outside Kashmir were also working in different places. They are living in pitiable conditions.

It is not just in the buses, but also one found lot of children working in roadside

dhabas and eateries in different parts of the city and also along the highway, different commercial establishments, serving guests in weddings and parties, washing cars and bikes and in the homes of middle class and the rich. These children have no access to education and are destined to keep up with the whims and fancies of their employers.

Despite anti-Child Labour Day being observed in Jammu and Kashmir on June 12 every year and a host of other efforts, thousands of children are caught up in the mess of the child labour. Most of these children work more than 8-12 hours a day with only one break for meals.

In many households today, there are children who are subjected to hard labour yet their tormentors comfort themselves that after all, they feed, pay, clothe, and house them.

Kaneez Zehra, a student of sociology feels extreme poverty and low educational

awareness pushes parents to force their children to work. "Children from remote districts generally end up coming to big cities like Srinagar" she says.

According to Kaneez, many of these children are often caught in different kinds of vices and often end up without any dreams for their lives. "These children do not have any voice and are forced to accept different forms of exploitation as part of their lives," she adds.

The Labour Department meant to check and curb the menace of child labor seems to have miserably failed to identify and come to the rescue of these ill-fated children.

We need to work together to give voice to these children. For them it is not just the Government and voluntary organizations that need to come together, but children and youth groups should also take the lead.

FAIZAN ASLAM BHATT
Class XII, Srinagar

Working to Ensure Child Rights in India: Dr. Vivek Joshi



Peace Gong E-interview: Response of Dr Vivek Joshi, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Govt. of India, SAIEVAC Governing Body Member, and National Coordinator for India in the South Asia regional initiative.

1) Ramsheena, Class XI & President, Wayanad Shishu Panchayat, Kerala

Q: How can children play a vital role in decision making regarding child rights and formulating a child inclusive, participatory system where their voice is heard and respected by the respective governments?

Dr. Joshi: Although child participation is a priority for the Ministry, and ideally we would like to incorporate children's views while formulating legislations/policies/schemes/programmes involving children but presently there is no institutional mechanism for this. Nonetheless, for the time being, children can reach out to

civil society organisations that are directly working with children and share their views and concerns with them. Thereafter, the civil society organisations could then communicate these views to the Central/State Governments who would take these into consideration during policy making and programme formulation. Children can also use successful models such as Bal Panchayats which can create an active and strong network of children who are aware of their rights and are capable of voicing their concerns within the community.

In this regard, we also look forward to your suggestions on the institutional mechanism that could be put in place for hearing your voices and concerns.

2) Iflah Qureshi, Class 12th, Presentation Convent School, Srinagar

Q: The Ministry of Women and Child Development specifically deals with and looks after child rights and related issues but still we are not able to arrest the growth of growing crime against children.

Do you think mismanagement and misgovernance are responsible for weak progress on the subject of children welfare?

Dr. Joshi: Crimes against children need to be tackled more vigorously and require innovative legislative and policy interventions along with a strong implementation mandate. But to say that the progress on the subject of child welfare has been weak is not completely correct. The Ministry has introduced some innovative legislation, policies and schemes such as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, The National Policy for Children, 2013, The Integrated Child Protection Scheme etc., in furtherance of its commitment towards child welfare, development and protection. But arresting the growth of crime against children by way of effective implementation of these legislation/policies/schemes is the responsibility of State Governments and Police Departments under them. The State Governments need to play a pro-active role to this effect.

Furthermore, the Ministry continues to work towards achieving increased alignment and coordination amongst policies, legislation and programmes of other line Ministries to tackle this challenge of growing crime against children.

3) Khusbu Kumari Class 7 Second Primary School, Sadokhar, Rohtas, Bihar

Q: Why is there no appropriate mechanism at district and local level for protection of child rights?

Dr. Joshi: The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 (amended in 2006), Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Rules, 2007, the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) Act, 2005 and the Integrated Child Protection Scheme have put in place service delivery structures at all levels viz., centre, state and district level with the aim to provide care, protection and a safe and secure environment for children in conflict with law as well as children in need of care and protection, including children in difficult circumstances.

The structures at district level include Child Welfare Committees, Juvenile Justice Boards, District Child Protection Society, District Child Protection Committee and District Child Protection Units which are headed by the District Collector. Some of the other services for protection of children include emergency outreach services through Childline, open shelters, cradle baby reception centres, family-based non-institutional care through sponsorship, foster care, adoption and after care. Additionally, institutional services such as shelter homes, children's homes, observation homes, special homes, and specialised services for children with special needs have also been put in place at district level.

4) Asiya Baquar Naqvi, Class XII, Senior Secondary School, Aligarh Muslim University

Q: Should juvenile criminals be engaged in social work and educational programmes instead of sentencing them to correction homes where reportedly they are subjected to abuse and corporal punishment?

Dr. Joshi: It may be noted that these children are not 'juvenile criminals', they are 'children in conflict with law'. Recognising that children in conflict with law need to be protected in 'observation homes' and 'special homes', Minimum Standards of Care for Institutions established under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, its Amendment Act, 2006 and ICPS have been given in ICPS. In addition to other facilities, these minimum standards also emphasise child participation in decisions affecting him/her, formal and non formal education according to age and ability, vocational training, recreation, sports, skill development and special programmes. These minimum standards also state that linkages should be established with educational specialists and community-based welfare agencies, psychologists, psychiatrists, child guidance clinics, hospitals and local doctors, open schools and Jan Shikshan Sansthan, etc., to provide the children access to value-added need-based services. The effective implementation of these minimum

standards would go a long way in rehabilitation and reintegration of these children in their families and communities.

[Questions 5, 6 and 7 have been clubbed as they relate to the same subject matter i.e., child labour]

5) Lokendro Chabungbam, Class XII, Comet School, Imphal, Manipur

Q: Some individuals take children from Manipur to other states in the name of good education. Instead of that they use the children as child labour. Many children have been rescued by some NGO's, still the trafficking of children is continuing. In such a situation, what can we do?

6) Bhiyanka Devi, Class XII, S.R. Academy, Narengi, Guwahati & President of Surovi Shishu Panchayat

Q: Child labour is the modern form of slavery. How do we end this form of slavery?

7) Andleep Fatima Ansari, Class 11th, KC Public School, Jammu & Senash Khan, Class XII, Hundred Flower English School, Imphal, Manipur

Q: Government has prohibited child labour but still there are thousands of children who are working in the factories, household etc. Should the government to be blame or the society which is encouraging such activities? What can we Peace Gong reporters do to create awareness in this issue?

Dr. Joshi: In spite of putting in place regulatory mechanisms namely, Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986, National Policy on Child Labour 1987, Right to Education Act, 2009, Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 etc., child labour still exists in our society. Instead of blaming each other, the need of the day is for all of us to come together and contribute in putting an end to this menace. Peace Gong reporters can play a vital role to this effect. Your pro-active involvement not just in reporting such cases but raising awareness through behavior change communication strategies by using multiple platforms could be an effective way to reach out and help these children.

8) Subharee Ghatak, Class XI, St Joseph School, Matigara, Siliguri, West Bengal

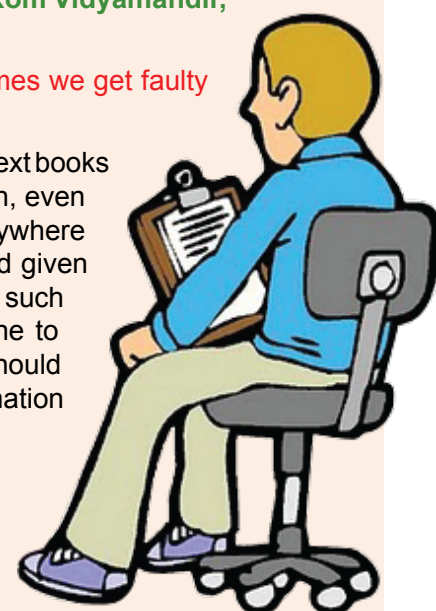
Q: How can children, young people, policy makers and NGOs work together to find solutions for issues of children like child labor, malnutrition, illiteracy and sexual abuse?

Dr. Joshi: Government legislation, policies, schemes and programmes on issues such as child labour, malnutrition, illiteracy and sexual abuse cannot succeed without involvement of the community at large. Since Government cannot reach out to people at every level, and given the presence of civil society organisations at all levels, these organisations should help the Government and work collectively for effective implementation of such laws, policies, programmes and schemes. We must remember that successful models are those where the community takes ownership of implementing the policies and programmes.

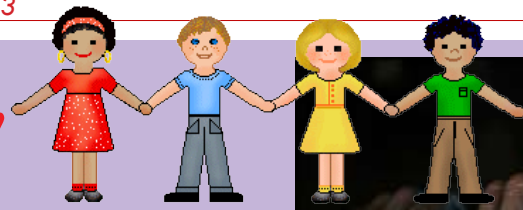
9) Samiran Kalita, Class VIII, Axom Vidyamandir, Guwahati, Assam

Q: What can we do when many times we get faulty information from our text books?

Dr. Joshi: Any information given in text books need not be taken as a gospel truth, even if correct. Information provided anywhere is only to guide you in your life and given the inquisitive mind of children, such information is only a stepping stone to start thinking. Also, knowledge should never be limited to the information provided in text books.



DEAR Chotu, I can hear you!



Denying children their dignity

It is a fact that there exists a Chotu in everyone's life. Chotu is a name often given to a child employed at various places. We can't help but notice these unprivileged ones at the roadside stalls, in factories, in the fields, and most shamefully, in our own houses where they are employed as domestic helps. In a nation which calls itself the world's largest democracy, child labour persists rampant. The 2011 national Census of India estimated the total number of child labourers aged between 5 to 14 years to be 14.2 million. Approximately 10 million children were employed in hazardous jobs.

Poverty is the root cause of child labour, compelling a tragic tale of lost childhood. Poverty-stricken families are unable to send their children to school, so they remain illiterate, and the cycle of poverty and of child labour continues. Child labour is a brutal denial of childhood; a ruthless denial of dignity, freedom, growth and the right to dream.

As these little children cling onto their broken dreams, let's support them. Let's

join hands and let them dare to dream about a better future. They need encouragement to dream about a future where their basic needs are met, where they can play, study and -- most importantly -- where they can live rising above their shattered childhood.

Their dream-less childhood raise some heart-wrenching queries:

Who will fulfil their dreams? Will India ever wake up? Will there ever be a day when these un-blossomed petals are not crushed under the stones of their destiny and struggle?

Yes, I definitely believe that there will come such a day.

Article 24 of the Indian Constitution prohibits child labour. Various laws and the Indian Penal Code offer safeguards. The Juvenile Justice Act of 1986 provides a basis in law to identify, prosecute and stop child labour in India. These innocent labourers are the nation's future. Young labourers today will be a part of India's human resource tomorrow.

I believe that proactive steps for their relief and rehabilitation need to be taken urgently.



I hope that my effort in my article will make people aware of the tragedy of their lives.

I longed to convey a message for all the Chotu's in the world.

"The bricks walls are there for a reason. The bricks walls are not there to keep 'you' out. The bricks walls are there to give you a chance, to make you realise how badly you want something. They are rigid for people who want to stop you in your realisation of your dreams."

Let's strive that these innocent voices will soon be heard and their echo lasts long enough to bring a revolution. Let's speak out! Let me, and you, be the change.

AAKRITI AJAY GOENKA,
Class XI, Bhopal

NEED TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM EXPLOITATION



Different forms of exploitation and discrimination against children -- like child labour, child trafficking and child marriage -- have been a major social issue in the rural as well as urban parts of Nepal. Sadly for children, the number of children working as child labourers has increased in recent years.

The main reason is widespread poverty. In exasperation, poor parents are left with no choice but to engage or send off their minor children for manual labour at a tender age. Perhaps unaware of the harsh realities of child labour, they believe their child would earn some

money and help support the family.

In the small community of Sunakoti of Kathmandu, the majority of poor children work in the construction sites, the biscuit factory and brick furnaces. Shiva Gautam, a local resident, shares the fact that about 25 per cent of the children of this area are deprived of school education as their parents can't afford to give them two meals a day, let alone sending them to school! About 10 per cent of the children who are

fortunate enough to attend school thanks to some funds, work on their holidays at construction sites to pay their school fees and purchase exercise books.

With the increase of child labour in this community, the situation is worsening. Also the condition of orphans and street children is miserable. They cannot get even simple food to live. Most of them beg, walking door to door. We can see many boys sleeping on the pavement or the roadside or in the temples and other public places. They are vulnerable to different forms of exploitation.

Shiva Gautam also expresses great concern at the increase in child trafficking, especially that of girls. He says girls especially from rural areas are taken away from their families and then taken to brothels in the cities. Many in the age group of 8-9 years end up in brothels, he adds.

Another major concern is the incidence of child marriage in different parts of the country especially in rural areas. Though the legal age of marriage is 18, a very large percentage of girls in Nepal are married before this legal age. According to Mr Gautam, there is one Newar community in Kathmandu where it is a common practice to promise children to one another without taking their views or opinion.

Many voluntary organizations have been supporting the children in many ways. Some of the major NGO's in the country are SOS Children's Villages, Save the Children. They support the children who are orphans, street children, uncared-for, unloved and unclaimed. These organizations provide the children education, health care, balanced diet, even shelter and clothes. Some of them have established schools for these children. Many children, who collect cans, bottles, and plastic, are also supported. Besides

they are given technical education like tailoring, carpentry, and paper work.

Here are some views of our friends on how to promote child rights in Nepal:

- Firstly, all children should be provided basic needs such as food, shelter, clothes. Secondly, education should be made compulsory for all the children. Thirdly, the discrimination between daughters and sons should be avoided.
- The parents who are uneducated think that education is necessary only for boys, but not for girls. They do not want to send their daughters



to schools. Those parents should be convinced to ensure that their daughters go to school.

- All the street children, orphan, uncared

and unwanted ones should be fed, cared for and educated.

BHAWANA DAHAL

Class – IX, New Tulips' School,
Kathmandu, Nepal

Striving towards changing mindsets

*I wish I could take a quiet corner in the heart of my baby's very own world.
I know it has stars that talk to him, and a sky that stoops
down to his face to amuse him with its silly clouds and rainbows.
Those who make believe to be dumb, and look as if they never
could move, come creeping to his window with their stories and with
trays crowded with bright toys.
I wish I could travel by the road that crosses baby's mind,
and out beyond all bounds;
Where messengers run errands for no cause between the kingdoms
of kings of no history;
Where Reason makes kites of her laws and flies them, the Truth
sets fact free from its fetters.*

– Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore



In these lines, drawn from poet Rabindranath Tagore's poem Baby's World, Tagore revisits the child within and cherishes every moment of the growth of the child.

Alas, the development of the child is often stalled in the backdrop of all the exploitations the child faces in day-to-day life. Young children in many parts of the country are either drawn to labour, deprived of education, or forced into marriages, especially girls. Tripura is not far behind.

Child marriage is prevalent in many villages of Tripura. Even though there are many initiatives aimed at stopping child marriages, a large number of families continue to follow this practice. In the majority of cases, it is the girl child who is the victim.

We children are concerned about this practice; it is due to this concern that children and youth involved with the Rabi Thakur Shishu Panchayat of Nutan Nagar on the outskirts of Agartala are doing their bit to create awareness.

Talking to The Peace Gong, the Coordinator of the Shishu Panchayat, Laxmi Debnath said that the insecurity and neglect of children, mainly the girl child, made her bring together youth to work for their younger sisters and brothers. "Many families who have a large number of children feel that getting

them married early will ease their burden," she said.

"We try to go and tell parents that getting their children married early is not good for their health and development. Every child has a dream but by getting them married early we will kill that dream," Laxmi observed.

Members of the Rabi Thakur Shishu Panchayat came together on the eve of the International Day of Volunteers (December 5) to discuss the ill-effects of child marriage. Nayan Debnath, a Class XII student of Navagram Higher Secondary School and Secretary of the Shishu Panchayat said many families felt that the best way to protect their girls was to get them married. "We have to create awareness that girls need to be given equal opportunities. Marrying early does not mean protecting them," he added.

Tania Das, (Class VIII) of Nutan Nagar Girls High School is enthusiastic and loves to make posters and paintings to make people in her village understand the importance of getting girls educated and giving them opportunities. Arpita Roy Parbath, (Class VII) of the same school shares the same sentiment.

Other members of the Rabi Thakur Shishu Panchayat like Krishan Shib (Class VII) Patunagar High School; Ankur Sharma (Class VII) and Prosenjit Debnath (Class X) have also been joining their team members

with posters, paintings and songs urging families in their localities to stop the practice of child marriage.

"Little girls have a right to play and study. Then they have a right to contribute to the society. This can never happen if they become brides when they should be playing," said Laxmi and her team as they pledge to continue their efforts.

The Shishu Panchayat members are trying to create awareness on issues which are affecting the life of young children. So they have ventured into educating the parents on why education is necessary for their children, especially the girl child. However, they feel that poverty must be tackled by the State to improve the ground situation.

SUCHISMITA CHAKRABORTY

Class VIII,
Agartala, Tripura



Can you see the tears in my eyes...?



RAMSHEENA, President of Waynad Shishu Panchayat conducting a training programme

*The Prettiest smiles hide the deepest secrets
The prettiest eyes have cried the most tears
The kindest hearts have felt the most pain...*

Muslim girls have suffered in many ways in our society. Her story is all about something which is meant for the marriage market. It was corrected very rarely in history.

Each time a girl is born, we can see the worried faces of parents, with troubled thoughts of the child, how to get her married off when she matures and also the burden of the dowry and marriage expenses. Giving birth to a girl child is to marry her off, nothing else. This attitude has to be changed and receipted.

The society has been instructing a growing child with lessons with no senses:

"Always speak in a low voice!"

"Make sure you don't cross the limits!"

Why is it that the average Muslim, or any girl child not instructed like:

"You are the citizen of the future..."

"You have to serve the nation!"

"You should study and the world shall benefit..."

Mrs. Ramla, who pursues her studies in teacher education even after her wedding is a mother of one child told The Peace Gong:

"Without family support, especially Muslim girls, find it difficult to continue studies. Boys go to gulf countries at a young age and prefer to marry girls once they finish plus two. Once girls are highly educated, they reach another category where getting married is a difficult issue. Parents are not willing to teach girls in a higher level as they have to meet the high education cost and they consider it a waste as they have to raise money for dowry for the wedding too."

The thought that discipline and manners should only be possessed by girls should be changed from the mentality of the society. Millions of Muslim girls spend days without knowing how wide this world is and there are open skies and vibrant oceans. In the middle of this darkness some lonely voices like Malala's (Yusafzai) can be heard.

I dream of a world where all the girls speak without fear and their ideas shape the world into a better place. It is so easy to love and give and so difficult to suppress. Then why can't we?

RAMSHEENA
Class XI, Calicut

ORIENTING CHILDREN ON CHILD RIGHTS AND MEDIA



Understanding media in today's world is very important for all young people. It is all the more important as different media forms like films, television and the Internet promotes lot of violence. A large number of children get influenced by these forms of violence and get desensitized.

To make children of Aligarh aware of their rights vis-à-vis the media, the Peace Gong Aligarh Bureau

organized a one day workshop on November 9, 2013 on the theme, 'Child Rights and Media'. The workshop was organized in S.T.S High School (Minto Circle), Aligarh Muslim University. About 100 students from the school, the Senior Girls Secondary School, AMU and a few other schools took part in this orientation programme.

Initiating the training programme, the Peace Gong Aligarh Bureau Coordinator, Mr Peerzada Mumtaz Numani said the media should focus on child rights issues. He quoted the senior educationist, Prof Krishna Kumar, "Cinema and television have made a substantial contribution to the creation of an unkind, volatile ethos. Bollywood films have glamourised certain kinds of violence; certain other kinds of violence have been trivialised. Television has enabled cinema to reach our living spaces, making horror and brutality a homely affair. Watching scenes of cold-blooded murder and rape from an early age allows children to develop a kind of derangement which lets them cope with the deep anxieties they carry."

In this context, Mr Numani said media literacy education was important and could contribute towards children understanding their rights and how to use the media to take up their issues. He and his team members have been working hard in Aligarh with full determination to spread the message of the Peace Gong.

There were discussions on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Articles 12 and 13 were discussed in detail to highlight the importance of child participation.

The Chief Guest at the workshop was Prof. T K Thomas, Chairperson of the Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation. He talked about various Constitutional provisions which safeguards on the rights of the child. He also discussed the different policies of the Government of India related to children.

AIMAN KHAN
Class XII, AMU, Aligarh

Voices:

RACHEL WAHAB, Class XII, Senior Secondary School, AMU: Continuous exposure to violence in the media desensitizes children. We must be oriented on what is real and what fiction is. Hence training and understanding of media is important for children.

YASIR KALEEM, CLASS 8, STS High School :-I think the schools and teachers should at least have a debate and discussion on the burning social issues so that children are compelled to read newspapers & magazines to get information and hence mass media will be a part of their daily life.

MOHD. SHADAB ANSARI, Class 9, STS High School - I was previously unaware of the role media can play in creating awareness and extending support. Having attended this workshop has transformed the way I shall use mass media now.

Together against child marriage

"The times of an only patriarchal set-up of society are said to be gone", or so they just say. Maybe this has become a metaphor for representing the modernised India. But how has India modernised? Obviously, it has the technology, infrastructure, and professional knowledge which make life easier, but inside the "modern" outer appearance the old beliefs and thoughts still prevail.

Child marriage is one of them. It is a social evil still prevalent in many countries around the globe, and most widely in India. According to UNICEF, 47 per cent of girls are married by 18 years and 18 per cent are married by 15 years in India, and this is often done without the consent of the child who is the bride. These kids go through a totally unimaginable phase of life. Instead of making new friends they have to deal with domestic issues involving in-laws and dowry. The child bride or groom's innocence is wrecked and they are burdened with responsibilities way beyond their mental stage.

According to Dr S Chandni Bi, Associate Professor, History, Aligarh Muslim University, similar is the case of children living in the Chidambaram district of Tamil Nadu, famous for its Shiva temple. The high order priests called Dikshitaras are the collective owners and custodians of the Chidambaram Nataraja temple, and are given all the collected donations to maintain the temple. Once reputed to have numbered 3000, and now reduced to 350 families, since decades they have managed the temple – raising the revenue for its upkeep, maintenance of the premises, periodic repairs and restoration of the structure, conducting many elaborate prayers and rituals that

take place every day in honour of the Nataraja. Dikshitaras are allowed to marry only within the community. Only married sons can become officiating priests – which in turn entitles them to become equal members and earn a share of the revenues -- so universal and early marriage is the norm. For their own selfish greed they make use of their own children and religion as an excuse to cover up.

"Meanwhile underage marriage among Muslims has ignited a debate in Kerala with the community's most influential organisation vowing to get legitimacy for the practice while political parties and women's groups have said it would be a setback when Muslim girls have been making strides in education." (<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/underage-marriage-among-muslims-in-kerala-ignites-debate/1177684>)

These children are not the only ones doomed to marry too early. Here are some similar instances shared by some young people:

Anabiah Naqvi (Research scholar, AMU): Children as young as 13 are being married off just because of the greed for dowry, especially in rural areas. Dowry gets more importance than educating the child.

Shuja Abbas (Class 12th): In many villages, innocent minor girls are being married to elderly men just for the sake of some money, and such men abuse and leave these girls afterwards; destroying their life and future. The girl's family is also to be as much blamed as the husband.

Samira Sufi (Research scholar, AMU): After the marriage, the girl's parents are



totally debt-ridden, and thus the girl child is simply considered a burden -- which is a very sorry state of affairs.

Though India is putting in place a national plan to combat child marriages, it was strange why India refused to join other nations in co-sponsoring the first ever global resolution on early and forced marriage of children led by the UN Human Rights Council, a resolution supported by 107 countries. By standing against the social evil on the world stage, India would have given out a positive signal that it is willing to find a solution to the problem.

India has taken positive steps at a national level to prevent child marriage. The Government brought into force the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006 which prohibits child marriages rather than only restraining them. In order to address the issue aggressively, a National Plan of Action clearly defining the required objectives, goals and strategies besides punishing the guilty is the need of the hour. We have to work hard to combat the roots of this social evil, and overcoming adverse effects of illiteracy and poverty. Let's achieve this by promoting government policies protecting child rights to save India's future!

S. SABA, RACHEL WAHAB, ASIYA NAQVI
(Class XII, Aligarh)

Indias Child Representative in the South Asia Initiative to end violence against children: Anmol Mittal

Children's views and ideas are welcome in the SAIEVAC forum!

Master Anmol Mittal, aged 16, has been selected by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, as a child observer for the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) in 2013. In this capacity, he has participated in national consultations and discussions on key issues related to children and made a presentation on children's recommendations in the 3rd Technical Consultation on 'Eliminating Harmful Practices Affecting Children Based on Tradition, Culture, Religion and Superstition' held in Bhutan from 24th to 27th September, 2013. He was also present as an observer in the 4th Governing Board Meeting held in Bhutan from 28th to 29th September, 2013.

Anmol Mittal's brightness and potential have already won recognition. He received the National Child Award for Exceptional Achievement in 2011. Earlier, he had represented his school in DAVMUN (Model United Nations Conference) 2009 and 2010 and had also won 'Best Delegate Award' in a General Assembly for exhibiting diplomatic and public speaking skills in DAV Model United Nations, 2010. He has won several prizes for debating and group discussions.

The Peace Gong welcomes the presence of a child representative in the South Asia process. We look forward to consultation opportunities to share our knowledge, concerns and ideas with Anmol, and he will be on the Peace Gong mailing list.

Children's representation is an important component of the SAIEVAC effort. Two children -- from Afghanistan and Bangladesh -- were the first to join, and India's Anmol has now come on board, along with a child from Bhutan. Country-wise nomination to the governing body goes alphabetically, and the next two countries in their turn will be Maldives and Nepal.

The SAIEVAC Director-General, Dr Rinchen Chopel, is thinking of making goodwill links between the Peace Gong members and the children in the SAIEVAC contact circle across the eight participating countries. This is an exciting prospect for all the children who might soon be in touch.

Regaining Lost Childhood

Children of Rajabari are left in darkness without any form of basic education. Not only this, the elders are also not aware of their basic rights, which mars their development, finds out students of Axom Vidyamandir and Surovi Shishu Panchayat in Assam in the reality check study.

Depriving children of basic facilities should be considered as serious violence against them. We, students of Axom Vidyamandir and Surovi Shishu Panchayat were shocked at the dismal condition of children in Rajabari village that comes under



Pankhaiti Gaon Panchayat of Chandrapur Development Block of Kamrup Metro District, Assam.

In a reality check conducted by our team in the village and nearby communities on November 17, 2013, we found large number of 'Anna' and 'Anjuma' (common reference of boys and girls in the area) who are living with no education, no safe drinking water, no medical and health facilities and recreation facilities. None of the children had any idea of free education services that the Government provides and which could benefit them. The reality check was conducted by 85 students along with teachers and mentors.

Illiteracy is the norm amongst the adult population and most of the people we talked to were not inclined to send their children to school. Instead the children are asked to help the elders in the agricultural fields where they work as workers. The backwardness of the adult population in the riverine area means their children continue to suffer deprivation.

Our team members asked the children in the Rajabari village about their school, class and if they ever went to school. The answer we got from almost everyone was 'no'. They knew about mobiles and television but they did not know about the ASHA (health worker) lady who sometimes visited them. Besides, they just knew about the weekly market that is there twice in a week. Here they are expected to help the elders by packaging vegetables and food-grains to sell and earn.

The reality check made us realize that the both the children and the elders in the area were not aware of even their basic rights. We tried to talk a little bit about their rights -- something we learn as part of being members of the Surovi Shishu Panchayat. But none of them were interested in listening to us.

We want to state that these children of Rajabari village and adjoining areas are suffering from the worst form of violence. They are losing their childhood, and their deprivations would continue when they become adults. They don't know what their 'rights' look like.

On behalf of the 'Anna' and 'Anjuma' of the area, our team would like to raise the following questions:

1. Where is our right to education?
2. Where are the helping hands and agencies working?
3. Where are the funds going that were allotted for needy children like us?
4. Are the children like "Anna" and "Anjuma" eligible to get access to the rights defined by UN CRC?
5. Who are actually responsible for the present condition of the 'Annas' and 'Anjumas' who have no dreams to look forward to?

KAVERI BARMAN, Class VII;
SAMIRAN KALITA, Class VII;
MAMTAZ BUGUM, Class-IX;
SAFIQUL ALI, Class- VII;
PRADIP BAISHYA, Class VIII;
Guwahati

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela

July 18, 1918 – December 5, 2013



Dear friends,

It is a sad moment for all of us, followers of peace and democratic values. The apostle of peace, Nelson Mandela is not amidst us. However his life and philosophy will continue to guide people across the world to work for a nonviolent world.

Mandela was born with the destiny of wiping off the ugly face of racial discrimination from the face of the world. Mandela did not fight for the suppressed South Africans alone. He won the love and admiration of all the people inhabiting on the blue planet, who believe in an equal and free world. Indeed, Mandela's life and struggle will continue to teach the generations to come on the importance of peace and dialogue. The flame of love and compassion left by him will guide us forever.

As the Editor of The Peace Gong, this moment is for me to pledge on behalf of all The Peace Gong family members, that we shall work and volunteer for global peace, shall strive to be as honest, down to earth and passionate as the great man was. The Peace

Gong is a global movement for peace, and stands strong for a just world.

I would like to conclude this brief note of remembrance and homage by quoting the poignant words of Nelson Mandela, which he made at the end of his famous "Speech from the dock" on April 20, 1964:

"I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Once more reminding you all to join my hands to live up to Nelson Mandela's expectations and spread the messages of peace, love and freedom.

Farewell to this symbol of fearless non-violence!

DYUTHI
Class XI, Waynad

Enabling scope for the tribals of Wayanad

An estimated four lakh tribal people live in Kerala and about half of this population lives in the interiors of Wayanad. The tribes were the original inhabitants of the district of Wayanad. The native Adivasis of the district are Paniyas, Kurumas, Adiyars, Kurichyas, Ooralis, Kattunaikkans and Uraali Kurumas.

At least one member of the tribe is regularly under the clutches of alcoholic consumption. Even women are not untouched by the addiction, though not at such a higher level. Ignorance of the tribes is exploited by many, for political or selfish motifs.

With the support of the Bamboo Village, Peace Gong and Shishu Panchayat, AFRC INDIA has started a life skill training program for a group of tribal and village children.

The Peace Gong interviewed Mr. Vinod, a social worker who works for the tribes and is closely connected to them. Extracts from the interview is as follows:

The Peace Gong: What are the problems which affect the lives of tribal people?

Mr. Vinod: Usage of alcohol and other harmful intoxicants are the major problems faced by the tribal people. They don't have anyone to advice. Sometimes, the entire family is involved into the consumption of alcohol.

The Peace Gong: What about their educational status?

Mr. Vinod: Most of them are not educated. Many were sent to school but they don't even know the basic alphabets. They are not even ready to go to school. Some children come back home, after they found that they had to travel long distances to go to school. Such things needs to be redressed.

In another interaction, with Mr Ratheesh Vasudevan, Creative Head, Darshana Television and documentary film maker, The Peace Gong learnt that that the tribes were earlier the slaves of feudal lords. However, now many voluntary organizations and political parties have brought them out of the feudal system and engaged them into different life-skill programmes.

Our team has started a life-skill training program for a group of tribal as well as other children of the village. As volunteers of the program, which is aptly called "Shiksha", we are deeply involved in the educational progress of the village. Once a successful model is developed, it can be presented to concerned authorities, which can be replicated in other tribal belts of the state.

DYUTHI,
Class XI, Waynad

Don't neglect the gift of nature

*"Come away O human child,
To the waters and the wild,
With a fairy hand in hand for,
The world full of weeping then you can understand"*



Isn't it ironical that W.B.Yeats had written these lines years ago. The poet felt the sadness that child may undergo to such depth. Childhood is said to be the golden period of a human life is full of illusion when we hear and see the rights of child being humiliated each moment. Newspaper, TV, Facebook, etc are full of horror stories of child exploitation.

Childhood is snatched and plucked away before it could blossom into something creative as children often forced into different forms of hazardous work. It is high time where the people are made to understand that children are not like coloring books to be filled with individuals whims and fancies but to understand that

"THE CHILD IS THE GREATEST GIFT OF NATURE".

PRARTHANA VERMA,
Class VIII, Mumbai

Children are not for sale...

"I have been held down like a piece of meat while monsters disguised as men violated me again & again". (Victim)

While India today boasts of being a developed country and one of the largest growing economies, the atrocities towards children seems to be unending. From trafficking children across the globe, to engaging them in hazardous work, the violence against children seems unending.

Trafficking of children is a form of human trafficking and is defined as the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, and/or receipt" of a child for the purpose of exploitation." Though statistics regarding the magnitude of child trafficking are difficult to obtain, the International

Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 1.2 million children are trafficked each year. The trafficking of children has been internationally recognized as a major human rights violation, one that exists in every region of the world.

The trafficking in child is mostly done, across the national borders and across continents. These forms range from bonded labour, camel jockeying, child domestic labour, sexual exploitation and prostitution, drug couriering and child soldiering to exploitative or slavery-like practices in the informal industrial section.

There is a need for society to stand against all forms of child trafficking. There needs to be systematic campaigns involving children and youth. Also people and the youth should be made aware of issues related to child trafficking so that they can challenge these.

Child trafficking is seen as lucrative and linked with criminal activities and corruption. It is often hidden and hard to address. Trafficking always violates the child's right to grow up in a family environment. In addition, children who have been trafficked face a range of dangers, including violence and sexual abuse. Trafficked children are even arrested and detained as illegal aliens.

Martin Luther King had rightly said: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter".

Taking leaf from this philosophy, it is important that all citizens become vigilant in their fight against child trafficking. Protecting children from violence, exploitation and abuse is an integral component of protecting their rights to survival, growth and development and children need not only to be nurtured, but an environment where they can grow fearlessly, be provided to them.

ANDLEEP FATIMA ANSARI,
Class XI, Jammu

I AM JUST A LITTLE GIRL

I am just A little girl,
Don't cover me with strings of pearl,
Let me study, let me learn,
I want to work, I want to earn.

Don't marry me so soon,
I am young, I still want to watch cartoon,
I don't want to cook,
Instead, I want to hold a book.

I will make you proud,
You will see how I reach for the cloud,
Let me live, let me enjoy my life,
I am not yet ready to become anybody's wife.

After all, I am just a little girl,
A little girl with hope in her heart,
A little girl with dreams in her eyes,
Don't ruin my future, don't let me whirl.

After all...I am just a little girl...just a little girl!!

RICHA SHARMA,
Class VIII, Delhi

The girl child:

A prevalent stigma



Those kohl rimmed eyes are captivating,
The depth of sorrow in those hazel eyes is devastating,

The bangles clink merrily on her fists,
The slender fingers have now formed tiny fists,

Her forehead is furrowed with concentration as she struggles to carry the
pail of water,
As she watches other children go to school, she feels like a sheep for
slaughter,

She has sacrificed her life, her ambition and her dream,
She is not a normal ten year old girl who craves for strawberries and
cream,

She is a girl child,
An innocent wide eyed doe strayed in a world that has gone wild,

She has never held a pencil in her life,
Her life's periphery is all about mopping floors, scrubbing utensils and
dreams about becoming someone's unwilling dutiful wife,

She can be slapped mercilessly by her mistress,
After all, she is just another daughter of an ordinary seamstress,

Why would we raise our voices for her right?
We, who possess a selfish heart and a blind sight,

We, who love to exercise our power,
Who have turned this budding rose into a wilting flower?

We, who will never speak until it is our own daughter who is abused,
We, who have always been guilty and rightly accused,

My fingers are crossed, I'm hoping for a difference to be made,
Just close your eyes and follow your heart; the path to serve humanity
has already been laid.

Syeda Rumana Mehdi

Credit Line

Editor: Dyuthi, Class XI, NSS Higher Secondary School, Kalpetta

Associate Editor : Syeda Rumana Mehdi, 'A' Level (Cambridge System), The Lyceum School, Karachi

Assam: Kaveri Barman , Class VII, Axom Vidyamandir, Noonmati, Guwahati

Samiran Kalita, Class VII, Axom Vidyamandir, Noonmati, Guwahati

Mamtaz Begum, Class-IX, Axom Vidyamandir, Noonmati, Guwahati

Safiqul Ali, Class- VII, Axom Vidyamandir, Noonmati, Guwahati

Pradip Baishya , Class VIII, Axom Vidyamandir, Noonmati, Guwahati

Delhi : Richa Sharma, Class VIII, Army Public School, Dhaula Kuan, Astha Srivastava Class XII B DPS, Dwarka

Jammu & Kashmir : Faizan Aslam Bhatt. Class XII, SPSHS School, Srinagar

Samina Kausar, Class XI, Govt. Higher Secondary School Chuchot Shamma, Leh Ladakh, Athisum Fatima Khan, Class X, Govt High School Thiksey, Leh Ladakh
Andleep Fatima Ansari, Class 11, K.C Public School Jammu, Areeb Bashir, Class 9th Burn Hall School, Srinagar

Kerala : Ramsheena, Class XI, Farooq College HS School, Calicut

Madhya Pradesh : Aakriti Ajay Goenka, Class XI, The Sanskaar Valley School, Bhopal

Maharashtra : Prarthana Verma, Class VIII, Kendriya Vidyalaya, Mumbai

West Bengal : Subharee Ghatak, Class XI, St Joseph School, Matigara, Siliguri

Tripura : Suchismita Chakraborty, Class VIII, Auxillium Girl's School, Agartala, Debaprita Deb, Class IX, Shiksha Niketan High School, Agartala

Manipur : Lokendro Chabungbam, Class XII, Comet School, Imphal, Senash Khan, Class XII, Hundred Flower English School, Imphal

Uttar Pradesh : Asiya Naqvi, Class XII, Senior Secondary School, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Rachel Wahab, Class XII, Senior Secondary School, AMU, Aligarh, S Saba, Class XII, Senior Secondary School, AMU, Aligarh, Aiman Khan, Class XII, Senior Secondary School, AMU

Bihar : Khusbu Kumari Class 7 Second Primary School, Sadokhar, Rohtas

International

Bhawana Dahal, Class – IX, New Tulips' School, Kathmandu, Nepal

Coordinators : Ms Ankita Poudel (Nepal), Lavanya Garg, Hajira Bano, Afifa Lone, Kaneez Zehra, Munaza Shah, Aslam Mir, Swati Mathur, Ruchi Kumar

Design Coordinator : Kokila Bhattacharya

Advisors : Prof T K Thomas, Prof K V Nagaraj, Prof Biplab Loho Choudhury, Dr A S Guha, Ms C Indira Dasgupta, Mr Vedabhyas Kundu, Ms Sharmila Sinha, Dr Mazher Hussain, Ms Amita Dahiya, Ms Archana Jyoti, Mr Javed Naqi, Mr Anil Mudgal, Mr A R Patil, Mr Praveen Panjiar, Dr. O. Sareeta Devi, Mr Tarun Bose, Ms Mou Mukherjee Das, Mr Siddhartha Bhattacharya, Mr Rajdeep Pathak, Ms Laila Saein , Mr Anil Emage, Mr Riham Ali, Mr K Venkatesan, Mr Mumtaz Ahmad Numani, Ms Sayantani Roy

For any suggestions and inputs, please write to the Editor: thepeacegong@gmail.com; Please visit our website: <http://thepeacegong.org/>
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Peace-Gong/187829521307498>

Published by : Prof T K Thomas, Chairman, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation

Designed by: Ms. Jayalekshmi

Printed at: Bosco Society for Printing & Graphic Training, Okhla Road, New Delhi - 110025 Ph.: 011-26910729 Email: boscopress@gmail.com