

Background information about
Days of Wonder – India & Nepal 2008
Multi-Media Presentation and Indian Potluck
Saturday, August 16, 2008
6:00 – 9:00 pm
Concord House, 1407 Chapala Street, Santa Barbara
Presenter: Sandhya Tillotson

Sandhya Tillotson is an Environmental Science senior at The Colorado College in Colorado Springs who recently returned from an extended trip to India and Nepal. In the Thar desert of northern India, Sandhya spent 4 months volunteering for an NGO called GRAVIS. GRAVIS says of itself on its website, www.gravis.org.in:

"GRAVIS believes in the reconstruction of rural communities, their institutions and their environment so that villagers have ownership and control over their future.

Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS) or Center of People's Science for Rural Development is a voluntary organization that takes a Gandhian approach to rural development by working with the poor of the desert to enable them to help themselves. Since its inception in 1983, GRAVIS has worked with over 50,000 desert families across 850 villages in Rajasthan reaching a population of over 1 million, and has established over 1,100 Community Based Organizations (CBOs). Through its outstanding field work, as well as its research and publications, GRAVIS has come to occupy a leading position amongst the voluntary organizations in Rajasthan with national and international level recognitions.

GRAVIS was founded in 1983 by the late Laxmi Chand Tyagi and Shashi Tyagi. Inspired by their experience with the Sarvodaya Movement and by the yearning to do their bit for the poor and the underprivileged, they began their efforts in Gagadi, a village located 60 kilometers away from Jodhpur in Rajasthan. The Tyagis' formal qualifications in agriculture and education, experience in social activism, and extensive direct exposure to life in the Thar Desert provided them the confidence to set foot on a challenging journey of social work in the region. Hard work, spirit of service and commitment earned them the trust of the rural community that was necessary to implement their ideas."

Sandhya learned of Gravis from Vandana Shiva at whose progressive farm, Navdanya, Sandhya also volunteered during a visit. Navdanya's website, www.navdanya.org, introduces itself as follows:

"Navdanya started as a program of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE), a participatory research initiative founded by world-renowned scientist and environmentalist Dr. Vandana Shiva, to provide direction and support to environmental activism.

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Institute of World Culture

Navdanya was born of this search for nonviolent farming, which protects biodiversity, the Earth and our small farmers.

Navdanya means nine crops that represent India's collective source of food security. The main aim of the Navdanya biodiversity conservation programme is to support local farmers, rescue and conserve crops and plants that are being pushed to extinction and make them available through direct marketing.

Navdanya is actively involved in the rejuvenation of indigenous knowledge and culture. It has created awareness on the hazards of genetic engineering, defended people's knowledge from biopiracy and food rights in the face of globalisation. It has its own seed bank and organic farm spread over an area of 20 acres in Uttaranchal, North India.”

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