

NIRNAYA

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Reaching Out To The World

Learning through cross - cultural exchange

Trustees

Indira Jena

A. Uma Maheshwari

K. Kavitha

B. Rajamani

T.N. Sadalakshmi

Advisory Council

Annie S. Mathews

Jhumur Lahiri

Shobhana

Anantharaman

Sujatha Rita

Urmila Subba Rao

Editorial

Indira Jena

Aruna Masarguppi

V.C. Harish

NIRNAYA

an indian women's fund

11, deepthi apartments

,s.p.road,secunderabad-3

A.P. India.

Phone: 91 040 7805089

Fax: 91 040 7717305

e-mail:

nirnaya@hd2 dot.net.in

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Nirnaya believes in reaching out to the world communities for better understanding and appreciation of the varied cultures. It believes that such efforts foster bonding among the humankind and lead to a better and a more peaceful world. To promote this concept Nirnaya conducted its first exposure visit for mutual learning through cross-cultural exchange in October 2000 to TEWA in Nepal. A three member team comprising a board member, a staffer and a grantee represented Nirnaya.

A second such visit was to Semillas, Mexico, under the aegis of the Women's Fund.

The unique feature of this trip was the inclusion of Jyothi, a staffer of Nirnaya and Bharathi, a grantee from Srikakulam.

Both hail from the indigenous community with rural backgrounds. Both were first time travelers, with no idea of air travel nor the concept of visiting countries abroad. The visit lasted ten days from September 26th to 7th October 2002. The original plan was to send a 5-member team, but in view of the laborious task involved in terms of obtaining visas, managing problems for grassroots first time travelers and the money involved, the Nirnaya Board decided to reduce it to a 3-member team.

Including women from indigenous community, though ambitious, was not easy. The visit was fraught with problems from the very beginning- problems arising out of the fact that both women lacked the required educational qualification and financial stability necessary for consideration for visa to any

foreign country. But despite all the hurdles the fact that the two women from grassroots community could successfully make a trip abroad was the proof of the giant strides international women's movement has made. Nirnaya pays tribute to the feminists who were in the forefront in all the work preparatory to the Beijing Conference where the CEDAW was pushed through and accepted by many nations all over the world.

Though travel to Mexico had its share of hiccups, the stay at Semillas more than made up for it. The preparation and arrangements for the visit were exceptionally good. The group's warmth, concern and anticipation of the team's every need was indeed touching.

Despite all the hurdles the fact that the two women from grassroots community could successfully make a trip abroad was proof of the giant strides international women's movement has made.

The presence of representatives from Ukrainian Women's Fund, Mama Cash, The Netherlands and Angela Borba, Brazil enriched the exchange.

The seminar took off with a professional presentation from the Semillas group on its three major thrust areas - namely: - Grant Meeting (Seed Grant Program), Fund Raising and Institution Building. All through the presentation the similarity in ways of functioning, successes and challenges were a confirmation to the Nirnaya team that their experiences were not isolated ones. As the head of Nirnaya, Indira found this particularly heartening and a great relief.

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NIRNAYA News

EDITORIAL

LOOKING IN THE EYE

What struck Indira, the managing trustee of Nirnaya in the new logo design, was the powerful eyes. Eyes, that spoke confidence, grit, equality, and quietly asserted – "I have arrived."

"They tell the whole life's story," she murmured, her eyes taking a far away look as if she was going back all those years and reliving the pain and helplessness of the girls and women she worked with from different strata of society.

It is sad, but true in India, that as an ultimate weapon of subjugation, women are instructed from childhood to keep their eyes down all the time. Looking another person in the eye, especially if it happens to be a father or a husband is sacrilege worse than sin. In Rajasthan, they go a step further and insist that the woman take a long gunghat- probably as an added safety measure against any inadvertent misdemeanor.

Though a simple demand on the face of it, it is an enormous psychological handicap that robs woman of even simple assertion of her identity. It takes away from her the basic tool for effective communication, at once turning her into a dumb mute being-fit only to follow, but never to lead. Fit only to suffer, but never to protest. Fit only to listen, but never to speak.

Any book on communication worth its salt, says, eye contact is most important for good communication. Without it, one can neither express anger, disagreement, nor love effectively. Every emotion is rendered impotent. And our society has very cleverly, in one masterstroke relegated the whole womankind into the sidelines by making such laws. Many may disagree, but the fact remains, that though it is not so visible in the educated, urban population, the practice is rampant in the countryside and among the economically backward.

This hideous practice has so seeped into the soul of the women, that till today she is unable to break free. Jyothi, a girl from the slums of Addagutta, who was chosen to go to Mexico for her various achievements, could not communicate properly in the beginning with her counterparts, for she did not know what it was to meet the eye while speaking. Harish, a consultant could not proceed with the workshop in rural Andhra because the girls, despite being doctorates, thanks to this stifling custom, could not respond effectively. God alone knows over the ages, in how many ways the woman has been condemned to silence and suffering, because of this insidious custom of ours. How many may have wanted to scream but were powerless.

The need of the hour is to help women break these shackles with empowerment, - financially, educationally and legally. Help them claim their rightful place in society by coming into their own.

Indira says, the day the women in India, irrespective of cast, creed, religion or background, look the society in the eye and assert their presence, Nirnaya's work will be done

Aruna

contd. from page 1

Reaching Out

As the exchange visit progressed, one got to witness many amusing and inspiring side-lights which such cross cultural gatherings throw up. Especially fascinating was

the exchange between Bharati and the women artisans group of Semillas. It was quick and lively conversation, flying to and fro from Spanish to English to Telugu to English and Spanish. In between

there would be quick consultation between the Ukrainian sisters in their language.

To enliven the serious tone of the seminar, sight seeing visits to all important places in

From Maredpally to Mexico

A fascinating account of Jyothi's visit to Mexico- literally a life's journey from the slums of Addagutta, Maredpally, to exotic lands of Mexico.



Jyothi, who lives in the slums of Addagutta in Hyderabad, started off as a help at Nirnaya, essentially cooking and cleaning. Along the way her curiosity made her learn to read and write and eventually graduate to taking on more responsible jobs at the office. Today under the nurturing care of Nirnaya, she has metamorphed into an able assistant to the managing head, acting as a liaison person, doing all the paper work, fund raising and you name it. Zipping around on her two-wheeler she is a picture of confidence. It is only natural that for a person with such zeal, her experience should culminate into something extraordinary. And Mexico was it.

She experienced it all. Resistance at home, fear of flying, dumbfounded response at the visa office which almost cost her, her trip, strange customs, everything. But through it all she kept her eyes and ears open. It not only humbled her, for she marveled at her good fortune, but also exposed her to the wider world where one has to constantly fight against odds. She says, "*the state of women is the same everywhere. Unless she is economically independent, the house is in darkness*". Her exposure here in India, helped her participate in the meetings that discussed the problems of women and their empowerment. She was able to relate to them very well because she saw a parallel in their problems. She asserted in her diary that the good work should go on as women had as much right to their lives as men, and only they could solve their problems as they understand them best. She also attended the lectures on fund raising as that was part of her work here and got an insight as to how difficult a job it was. All through her trip her one point of reference was Indira Jena, as she saw in her, all that she thought was good and aspired to be.

Mexico City were organized with Emilienne, Margaret and Manuel (Emillienne's husband) patiently walking the team through the museums, palaces and the city square.

A special thanks goes to the Ford Foundation, India for financially supporting this visit

NIRNAYA News

BHARATI 'S MEXICO MUSINGS

Bharati, another member of the team that went to Mexico, started off as an animator in a NGO in Srikakulam. She later went on to set up her own NGO, which was one of the first by an indigenous woman. It all started when she went through a personal crisis, and thought of ending her life. At that point, the Nirnaya board felt that it would be good for her to move out of her surroundings and helped her with it. She was with Nirnaya for six months, during which period her team members visited the Nirnaya office once a month for capacity building exercises. Later she went back to her organization, Integrated Village Development Society, which is being financially supported by Nirnaya and works among marginalized women of the tribal and dalit community. She had earlier visited London, and then thanks to Nirnaya, she went to Mexico.

Though a seasoned traveler, she still finds valuable learning in all the experiences. For instance Indira's forceful arguments with the immigration authorities that finally got them the visa was an eye opener for her, it made her realize the importance of exposure and education.



Moreover she feels women must know law which helps them they take a firm stand. This incident inspired her to complete her graduation.

These cross cultural exchanges help people get a better world view where they can empathise with the problems of other communities. For instance, during the discussions, Bharati realized that a woman's fate was the same irrespective of the region or country she was born in. *"All women have same intentions, desires and same wants"*, she says. *"We are all traveling in a same boat. Their thinking and our thinking is the same in all respects. So many organizations are coming but their thinking is different and their work is different. If women do any work its not a work, it is her life. She will think like that"*, is her poignant observation. This exposure has made Bharati realize the importance of women's initiatives and the changes they are bringing in their lives. She says *"My mother gave birth to me for her satisfaction and my husband married me for himself. But when I was in trouble, it was only Indira and Nirnaya who gave support. Thanks to them, today I am a proprietor of my own organization, or else I would be living in the mountains somewhere. With the blessings of Indira, I visited London, Mexico and so many other places. I learned computer and driving. Oh! How it has changed my life!"* she exclaims.



These initiatives have greatly sensitized women about their needs and rights, today Bharati wants her other girls in the organization to have the kind of exposure she has had. For she feels, it is the world that is the best school one can go to, the learning one can have is endless.

Turning weakness into strength

Women With Disability Workshop

Women as a gender are discriminated against, but if they happen to be women, that too from economically vulnerable background and physically challenged at that, their plight becomes pitiable beyond description in our country. Nirnaya held a workshop for such marginalized section of women to breath new life into them.

The workshop sought to facilitate these women to analyze their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats at the individual, family and community levels. This was intended to be a first step in recognizing and building on their strengths, turning their weaknesses into strengths, making the most of their opportunities and strategize effectively to gain access to denied opportunities.

This path breaking initiative was undertaken by Nirnaya, which is India's first women's fund. The 'Women With Disability' workshop was held on 3rd December 02 at YMCA Secunderabad. There were 32 participants (all women) from the districts of Medak, Srikakulam, Anantapur, Warangal and Karimnagar. Of these, 26 were physically challenged women and the rest were heads of the grassroots NGOs from whose working area the former hailed.

The workshop was organized with an understanding that:

Women, on the whole are marginalized despite the giant strides some women are making in various walks of life. The economically vulnerable sections of women are more



marginalized than other women. The physically challenged from the economically vulnerable sections of women are really fragile, being cut off from practically all sources of power. The gender discrimination hits these women in such a way that they suffer humiliation and alienation from the family, the community in which they live and other actors in civil society.

Thus by factoring the individual disability as also their background, Nirnaya was able to take a holistic view of the situation these women were in, and offer concrete help and solutions.

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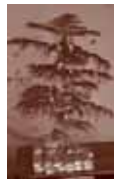
NIRNAYA News

Under Nirnaya Umbrella

Grantee update



WORKSHOPS



Vikasini School

Vikasini Girls School, one of the beneficiaries of Nirnaya celebrated Children's Day on 14 Nov. 02 with gusto. The children dressed in their Sunday best were in high spirits and sang songs. Indira surprised them with a cake, which the youngest among the children cut, and they all happily smeared themselves with cream and crumbs while finishing off their share. Two of the students, Anitha and Bhavani



had prepared posters for the occasion, which were displayed on the classroom walls. The children also got their second set of uniforms. The school celebrated Christmas

on 21st December with much excitement and gaiety. The completion of their half-yearly exam was a great relief, and they really let their hair down to have fun.

Women power to the fore

ISWO, the Dhenkanal based group ran into problems with the men of the dominant community in one of its operational villages. The head and staff of the organization were physically manhandled. The community women, with whom incidentally Nirnaya works, came out in hundreds to protest against the highhandedness of the attackers and the low-key response of the government to the complaint lodged by the organization. This is one of the visible signs of women empowerment, and sensitization to their rights.

Up in arms against violence

'Violence against women is violation of women's human rights', is a campaign that is being carried out by the various women's groups all over the world. This is a priority area that Nirnaya's partner groups also stress upon every year. The 18 days of activism on violence against women from 25 Nov – 10 Dec was observed by grassroots women's groups supported by Nirnaya.

Village level and mandal level meetings carried out the campaign by creating awareness about the issue through wall posters, distribution of pamphlets, workshops and lobbying with government machinery. The groups use these strategies to create awareness among the public, the judiciary, heads in workplaces and academic institutions.

Nirnaya made special grants on a modest scale for the groups to carry out these campaigns and it has been heartening to see the enthusiasm in these women leaders when they talk about the success of their campaigns. Rathnaleela of Shamshabad, Vijaya of Nangnur, Karimnagar, Susheelamma of Zahirabad, Medak, SWEADI of Chennaraopeta, Warangal, ASHISH of Secunderabad in Andhra Pradesh reported particularly successful initiatives. Other reports have yet to come in.

Computer wise

As part of its Human Resource Development program, Nirnaya conducted its third training in computer basics for 10th class girls from the slums in Secunderabad from 2nd – 30th Dec 02. The significance of this course is that it started on what had been declared as the World Computer Literacy Day. Padmavathy, program associate of Nirnaya conducted the training based on the kit Nirnaya team had downloaded from the Internet, on computer basics. There were 6 girls in all. At the end of the training a written and practical test was conducted for the students after which they were awarded certificates.



Turning weakness into strength

contd. from 3 page

Mrs T.N. Sadalakshmi, ex-minister, present trustee and well-known activist for women and dalit rights spoke on the occasion, which was indeed inspiring for the women present. Though AP as a state is big, with a large population of physically challenged women, Nirnaya

kept the initiative to a small scale, with the objective being, identification of the need for a space for themselves should come from the small gathering and thereafter the circle would widen. The objective of the workshop was to help these women recognize the difference such a space made to them as far

as sharing their specific problems are concerned. In this aspect the effort was successful.

At the end of the workshop a draft petition was prepared by the participants, which was sent to the Chief Minister and the Commission for Disabled Welfare, A.P.

Need For A Better World

How other sections of our society live

Irula tribals

Hard , harder, hardest. These are the only descriptions that come to our mind when we see the kind of life some of the people and communities live, especially in the remote areas of our country. Our regular monitoring visits help us get a glimpse into the lives of the people whose work Nirnaya and its donors support. The visit though short, reveal sharply the odds against which some of Nirnaya's grantees have to work and the abject poverty and distressing circumstances in which the community they work with live .

Gowri,our program volunteer works in one such remote corners of the Periyamalai hills surrounding Dhenkanikottai in Dharmapuri district of Tamilnadu. There are 75 villages in these hills with a population of 10,500 according to the last census report. While dependence on forest produce is predominant, defores-



tation continues on a high scale. Low level of literacy, female infanticide, low wages and sexual harassment at the hands of the government machinery and other people are some of the critical issues the tribal women in this area face. Gowri's vision is that of socio economic and political empowerment of these women.

The Irula tribals who form the target community live on tubers and roots. They work as agricultural wage labor and the main crop is ragi (millet). The road to their dwellings is a rough pathway laid by the community. The question of



electricity does not arise as there has never been any. Water supply is from the few shallow springs and ponds. While the community lives in harmony with the wild animals, they see the district forest authorities as a greater menace. This is reserved forest area where high level of degradation has taken place. There is no school, no primary health center, no government schemes, like housing, PDS etc. The place exists, but the people are non-existent for all practical purposes. But despite these dismal condition there is a lot of zeal and determination in them to know and to

gain access to their fundamental rights. This Gowri helps them learn through exposure visits and training. It was amazing to see the women quickly do an impromptu short skit on the concept of strength in numbers for removing all kinds of obstacles. This was after just one short exposure visit to a NGO working among Irulas in Chengalpet district.

Kalaivasal slum

A visit to the Kalaivasal slum occupied by the Kurivikarnaykar community in Karaikudi town was interesting and disheartening at the same time.

The people who were originally wandering gypsies, have settled down in Karaikudi about 100 years ago. Their traditional occupation was that of making wigs and hair switches. But as quality hair is exported, these people cannot lay their hands on good

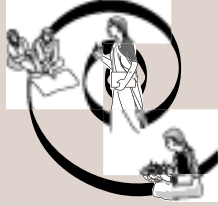
quality hair and therefore have to settle for snippets by weight from pilgrimage spots which is inferior. They fashion ropes for cows' neckties and other articles out of them. These people work long hours in order to be able to sell a two feet rope for Rs.2/-. This rate has remained unchanged since the past 60 years according to them. The literacy rate is very low here and abysmal for girl children

The women have now formed a SHG and taken bank loans for their work. But the government it was given to understand now wants to ban the work on grounds of it being a health hazard. Who is it a health hazard to? why the sudden attention to this when there has been no concern as to their basic needs for so long? The sad part is, these people know no other way to make a living, with no literacy nor skills. It is ironical that just a few yards away from where



this community lives there is electricity, a public water tap and proper housing for the washer community. The area where this community lives is in darkness with open drains, no road and water facility. This is the discrimination that stares in face.

It has been and still is an uphill task for Mallika of DROPSS, who works with tribals to create and sustain the trust and confidence of these people. But she is determined to persevere and it seems that it might just pay off.



They Make Our Day

Conferences And Meetings

Ford Foundation meet

Indira, represented Nirnaya at a daylong meeting called 'Indigenous trusts and foundations', organized by Ford Foundation on 16 December 02. It helped Nirnaya make contacts with different kinds of indigenous foundations – the established and self-sustaining, the established, but yet to become self-sustaining, the emerging etc.. Nirnaya being a middle level organization could learn a lot from this meeting.

Roshni anniversary

Roshni, a helpline for persons in distress celebrated its 5th anniversary on 20th December 02 and Indira attended the same at Hotel Greenpark, Hyderabad. The well attended meeting was a reminder for Nirnaya of the work, and areas that need attention and intervention. As Dr. Anji Reddy the chief guest and supporter of Roshni aptly put it-it is not finance that becomes a constraint for action but the lack of will.

Working for the upliftment of women from marginalised and economically challenged communities is an enormous and a never-ending task, especially in the context of our country. Some times the issues overwhelm us, and it is at such times we find strength and courage to go on, from the encouragement and help that is so generously extended by our friends. At such times we know we are not alone, and it make us engage in our work with renewed vigor. We owe our thanks to:

Ratnadeep Supermarket

Several pledges have been made, particularly for the girls school, Vikasini. Ratnadeep Supermarket, Secunderabad has generously agreed to meet the regular needs of rice and tuvar dal for the midday meal of the children.

Secunderabad's sizzling rock band

The Alter egoz rock band has committed to help raise funds for Nirnaya by doing a rock show in February 2003.

Ananda Shankar Jayanth

Ananda Shankar Jayanth has agreed to do a bharathanatyam dance program on 20 March 2003 to help raise funds.

Children's mite

Nirnaya's fundraising efforts took on a new turn with printing and sale of greeting cards. The paintings of the 'Paint Out' event of 24th August 02 were used for greeting card material. While the sales were good, it was enriching in terms of contact building, market assessment and sales strategy. The goodwill of the people was apparent in their warm response, visits and the orders for cards.

Nirnaya to her is like a second family. Because whatever she is today is because of Nirnaya

Kids, adults, all of you are alike lazy!

Wish even we had wives to wait on us

So much work to catch - up

Have you taken your morning medicine?

After discussing the day's work with Indira, she is on her way, zooming away on the scooter.

we are eligible for the loan

Nobody can fool our lady. She knows her rights and will not stand any wrong.

Jyothi single handedly looks after most of the day-to-day work at Nirnaya

Saving is important. Your husbands will listen to you only if you have money

Good work Jyothi

Jyothi returns to office tired but happy. She has accomplished all the tasks. Got the loan sanctioned, encouraged women, persuaded the funders, taken stocks from printers and picked her children from school.

No job is too difficult for this little lady from Addagutta. She has come a long way from selling flowers for a living. She even went to Mexico. Do you want to know how? We will tell you all about it in our next issue. Watch this space

Grants disbursed

Helping girls and women

SWEADI of Chennaraopeta, Warangal district has been sanctioned a grant for program and administration costs for its work among adolescent girls and young women of 10 gram panchayats and hamlets from the marginalised communities.

For better reproductive health

DAWN society of Tenali, Guntur district has been awarded a grant towards working on sexuality and reproductive health among dalit, Yanadi women and commercial sex workers. The focus of the group's work is on safe sex, women's health problems and safe sex counseling for adolescents in view of the fact that Guntur of A.P. ranks among the top five districts as far as incidence of HIV/AIDS is concerned.

Development

Al Fazal Educational and Charitable Trust, Godhra, Gujarat has been awarded a grant for initiating and carrying out community development through a center to be run by Mrs. Lateefunnisa, a volunteer from one of the post riot relief camps.

Empowerment of slum women

DROPSS – Development for Rural Oppressed People's Service Society has been sanctioned a regular grant for administration and program costs for its work in 8 slums of Karaikudi town, Madurai district, Tamilnadu.

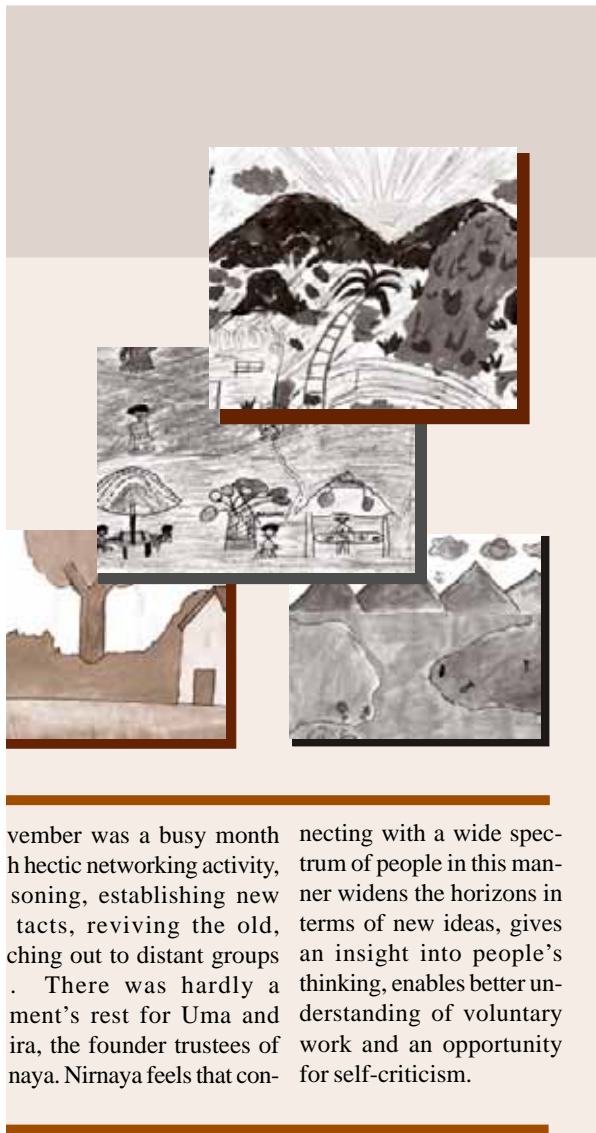
This grant is for its organizing and motivation work of the most deprived women of the dalit community living without any basic amenities like drinking water, streetlights, roads or medical care. One of the active members working there is Mallika. Empowerment of slum women was the long-term objective of Mallika, who was herself thrown out of her house by her husband and in-laws. She was a person who could empathize with the distress of others very well had responded to needs of varied nature from different quarters.

The domestic workers in the operational slum area expressed keenness to send their children below 7 years to a nursery by paying a nominal fee. So Mallika opened two centers, each of which has around 35 – 40 girls and boys and has a teacher taking care and preparing the children to well above primary school level.

Seeing that there was a crying need for alternate homes for senior citizens who were a burden to their children, she threw open her home to 3 women above 77 years on World Elders Day this year, and it now has 10 women and one man staying there. It is the only one in town and District social welfare department has expressed its desire to support the home. The application is pending approval at the central government level in Delhi. Mallika's principle is that women, irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, economic status, one should not feel unwanted or be deserted.

Women's media

Bhumika, a magazine dealing with issues of women and their empowerment, has been sanctioned a grant for the second consecutive year for its monthly publication. This magazine is the first feminist magazine in the regional language. It promotes women's writings, be it poetry, short stories or research / event reports of well known / little known writers etc.. It creates visibility for writers and community based grassroots women's work. It is at the same time highly informative in terms of building a gender perspective among different members of society. Nirnaya hopes that the quality of the magazine will continue to improve with increased readership whereby the publication team can strategize effectively towards self-sustainability.



ember was a busy month
h hectic networking activity,
soning, establishing new
facts, reviving the old,
ching out to distant groups
. There was hardly a
ment's rest for Uma and
ira, the founder trustees of
naya. Nirnaya feels that con-

necting with a wide spec-
trum of people in this man-
ner widens the horizons in
terms of new ideas, gives
an insight into people's
thinking, enables better un-
derstanding of voluntary
work and an opportunity
for self-criticism.

“On Friendship” – Turlapati Lakshmi

Friend! In life

There are some inexpressible feelings deep inside our hearts

Sweet melodies, exquisite images.

Though eyes meet

There are words within that cannot cross our lips.'

Donations to Nirnaya are exempted form tax under Section 80G of the IT Act,1961.

Please tick, your commitment below:

I would like to donate a sum of Rs. _____ monthly.

I would like to donate a sum of Rs. _____ annually.

I would like to make a one time endowment of Rs. _____

I would like to donate in kind.

Your details:

Name _____

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Fax: _____

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Cheques'Demand Drafts should be drawn in favour of **Nirnaya** payable at Secunderabad.

Donations in cash could be made only at

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an indian women's fund

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secunderabad-3 A.P. India.

Phone: 91 040 7805089

Fax: 91 040 7717305

e-mail:nirnaya@hd2 dot.net.in

To,

NIRNAYA

11, deepthi apartments ,s.p.road, Secunderabad-3 A.P.India.
Phone: 91 040 7805089 Fax: 91 040 7717305