



DANCERS FROM CHITRESDAS GROUP AT COI 2015

# Sanskriti

Indian Women's  
Association Newsletter

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Vol 21:1 Spring 2016

## From The Board

### You Are Among Friends!

If we ask most IWA members about the value of IWA, the first thing they say is... "IWA introduced us to the community"... or "I got to know most of my friends through IWA". And that is the best thing about our association. It is an Association of friends first. Friends who bring our community together. Friends who want to celebrate and share our culture. And most importantly, friends who care about the world around us.

The mission, vision and actions of our association has been guided by these simple desires.

This year too, all that we do will be driven by these same aspirations. But with an added dose of desi tadka!!!

We will begin 2016 with the Welcome Party on 20<sup>th</sup> February – *Bollywood Ishtyle* for our very own members. To be soon followed by Holi Celebrations on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March. Remember to save the whole day to enjoy this

festival of colors! In April, also don't forget to tie up your shoe laces and

sign up for the 5k Run which we organize with ASHA for Education – Purdue Chapter. You can walk if you want.

In early fall we will have our Picnic and later the Celebration of India. Ending the year with holiday cheer at our Holiday Party.

We hope you were pleasantly surprised by our Annual Sanskriti last year. We wanted to create a magazine that could become the voice of the Indian diaspora in Greater Lafayette. As the editorial team prepares to publish another fantastic issue, please feel free to write back with any feedback that you might have. Because of the effort it takes to publish the Annual, we have had to bring down the number of times we publish the Sanskriti Newsletter to two. Both in the first half of the year.

This year we are also very keen to publish the second cook book. From the Board contd...So start thinking

about which original recipe you want to publish.

We will also be continuing and hopefully strengthening our existing partnerships with ASHA, YWCA, ICRW and of course, Purdue.

Wheels are turning to see if we can organize a Panel Discussion in collaboration with Purdue and ICRW on the important topic of Gender and Violence in April. We will keep you posted. You will soon hear about the awarding of the IWA Research Scholarship. And of our support of the YWCA Clay Bowl.

So friends... Welcome to another year of fun filled company of friends as you... Stay Cool, Stay Happy and Stay Engaged!

Please feel free to contact the Board at:

[Board@myiwa.org](mailto:Board@myiwa.org)

## Engaging Schools and Play Grounds as Key Sites for Challenging Inequitable Gender Norms

By Ravi Verma

International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) is implementing evidence driven innovative programs in India and in countries of the Asian region to challenge the inequitable gender norms and practices so that girls are empowered to stay in school, pursue the career of their choice, marry when and whom they choose, stand up against violence if they experience or see it and exercise the social and political rights that would enable them to make a difference in their community.

The GEMS program (Gender Equity Movement in Schools)<sup>1</sup> is just one example. Through GEMS, we are working with public schools, which are often a place where norms, beliefs and behaviors are solidified, to encourage boys and girls to challenge old ways of thinking. Through a curriculum that includes exercises, games, dialogue and group reflection, students begin to question why girls have to do all the chores at home whether or not violence against a woman or girl is acceptable and also explore topics around gender and respect. Our data shows that the program is working. While GEMS may not be able to eliminate violence overnight or end patriarchal norms overnight, it has made serious headway in how children and teachers view gender and norms. An ICRW



analysis found that attitudes of students towards traditional roles of women and girls, particularly among girls, changed substantially among students who participated in GEMS. The proportion of girls who disagree with the statement "Bathing and feeding kids are the mother's responsibility" increased from 13 percent to 41 percent throughout intervention schools, while no significant change was observed in comparison schools. This provides just a few examples of the ways in which the beliefs about the role of a girl, as compared to the role of a boy, are being challenged through the program.

Another program that is working closely with girls to challenge the status quo, is *Parivartan* – transformation-- a program that uses the popular sport kabaddi to engage young women and adolescent girls. The program also engages with the family of the girls, community stakeholders and young men and boys. *Parivartan's* structure is simple: by empowering young women to mentor adolescent girls in their community,

young women become empowered and adolescent girls see role models upon which to model their own hopes and aspirations for their future. And if this is all done within an enabling environment of supportive parents and community, one can expect much faster results.

*Parivartan for Girls* includes workshops focused on empowering girls, which include modules on self-esteem, sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence in their community and negotiation skills that give them the confidence and talking to their parents about staying in school and instead of forcing them into early marriage. One major component of the program is that girls get the chance to reclaim public spaces, which are typically seen as only appropriate for men, through a public kabaddi tournament. This gives the community the opportunity to see girls as more than just potential wives and mothers, but as children who have hopes and dreams and should be allowed to play, develop skills and experience teamwork just like boys do. To truly make an impact for the

<sup>1</sup> IWA has partnered with GEMS to support campaigns in the schools of Jharkhand.

next generation, we have to start by engaging youth, both in educating

them on how gender norms are harmful and must be challenged and by empowering them to speak up when they feel discriminated against or experience violence. Deeply-rooted discriminatory beliefs may help explain why discrimination against girls is so prevalent, but does not have to be where the story end.

*Ravi Verma is the regional head-Asia for ICRW.*

*For more information on the GEMS program you can visit [www.icrw.com](http://www.icrw.com)*

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## A snapshot of 2015 Financials

SUMMARY			Donations		
Total income		\$33,543.90	Total Donations		\$5,342.09
Total Expense		(\$28,571.09)			
Income		\$4,972.81	EXPENSES		
INCOME			Event	Expenses	% of Total
Event	Income	% of Total	ASHA-IWA 5k run (Donation)	(\$629.95)	2.20%
Amazonsmile	\$44.93	0.13%	Donation-Other	(\$564.58)	1.98%
ASHA-IWA 5k run	\$585.78	1.75%	Holi Expenses	(\$3,635.76)	12.73%
Boollywood Boot camp	\$81.00	0.24%	Nepal Earth quake-2015 (donation)	(\$1,500.00)	5.25%
Cook Book 2014	\$44.45	0.13%	Newsletter/Directory printing	(\$519.36)	1.82%
Holi	\$4,334.49	12.92%	Picnic	(\$322.40)	1.13%
Membership & sponsorship	\$4,069.56	12.13%	Graduate Scholarship (Donation)	(\$1,000.00)	3.50%
Nepal Earth quake-2015	\$1,405.50	4.19%	Welcome party	(\$211.00)	0.74%
Picnic	\$320.32	0.95%	Administrative & other Misc.	(\$814.46)	2.85%
Recycle Art project-Cumberland	\$18.76	0.06%	YWCA (Donation)	(\$1,577.51)	5.52%
Yoga	\$180.00	0.54%	Holiday Tea Party 2015	(\$839.50)	2.94%
Sanskriti Magazine	\$8,350.00	24.89%	Sanskriti Magazine	(\$4,109.85)	14.38%
COI-2015	\$13,409.11	39.97%	COI-2015	(\$12,146.72)	42.51%
Chennai relief fund	\$700.00	2.09%	Chennai relief fund (Donation)	(\$700.00)	2.45%
Total	\$33,543.90	100.00%	Total	(\$28,571.09)	100.00%



## Are Diamonds a girl's best friend?

By Ritu Marwah

They twinkled and winked as she turned her head. Oh! She finally had a cluster of her own, a flower of white ice blossomed on her lobes. As I looked up at my mother I noticed her eyes shone brighter when she wore the diamonds, I was nine years old she was thirty-eight. She was not much taller than me; I almost brushed the diamonds with the top of my head.

Within a year my father had a fatal road accident. An astrologer looked at the white glistening tears rolling down my mother's beautiful hazel eyes and blamed her sorrows on the diamonds. "Didn't you know not to wear diamonds without consulting an astrologer? These are very powerful gems. They can destroy or make your life". The relatives whispered around her, "It was the diamonds you know. The only other stone more powerful than a diamond is a sapphire. ...He was only forty, such a handsome man; such young children. Tch. tch..."

They lay in her green steel Godrej almirah, tucked beneath her saris. She saw them often but didn't dare wear them. She thought she had lost the most precious thing in her life to them. Could they do more damage? Her life had changed completely. She was now a widow in a society where widows had no life. As I went through elementary, middle and high school my mother would touch the earrings, polish them, wash them in warm soapy water with an old toothbrush and then as time passed and sorrow became an indistinguishable part of her life, she would momentarily wear them. Now behind the sparkle in her eyes I saw furtive guilt.

My brother always wanted the diamonds. "Who is going to inherit them? Are you going to will them to

Dolly?" I was her only daughter. She loved the diamonds too much to leave them for her daughters-in-law. As she turned sixty she wore the diamonds more and more. I saw defiance in her eyes. The night she was killed she was wearing them. The doors to the green steel Godrej almirah were swinging wide open, the keys dangling from the keyhole. The intruders had made a quick escape. They left behind the diamonds sparkling in her ears, as she lay lifeless on the ground. Her breath choked out of her.

As I turned thirty-eight when my life turned upside down. I had sacrificed my all for my marriage and ambition for my husband but the toll of living a two-continent existence and the stress of working in a high tech company was finally fraying my nerves. As I headed towards a mental breakdown I grasped at straws, anything to stem the engulfing tide. I called the astrologer. It was long distance call to Delhi, the capital city of India. The astrologer, a math teacher who had embraced astrology as her new passion and found herself unusually adept at it, logged on to her computer in her study. She tapped in my date and time of birth and whispered down the long telephone wire, "Wear the diamonds in gold. That should do the trick." I embedded them in my ears. Day or night I refused to take them off. I knew their power. Feverishly I waited to see my life turn. Within a few months we moved out of our Californian town home to a single family home with a wide expanse of green and the healing of my nerves began. My two-continent marriage became a one-continent one. My son got accepted at his dream school, UCLA. The rocky seas seem to stop throwing me around in their choppy waters. My life took on the calmness of still water.

Diamonds a girl's best friend? Ask the astrologer.

### Call out for participants for the Holi Cultural Program!

Folks save the date for IWA Holi Celebration on **March 26th, 2016!!** If you or your child(ren) are interested in participating in the cultural program We are requesting participation by members or their family members.

If you would like to come up with a piece... choreograph or direct, you are more than welcome to. We would prefer themes based on Holi, celebration, colors etc but any family oriented entertainment is welcome. In case you come with some other thoughts, that too are welcome but please make sure that the performance is family friendly and children appropriate. Please contact the following Board members who will be coordinating the show--

Debjaya- [janimisra@gmail.com](mailto:janimisra@gmail.com) ,

Sailaja- [sailuot@yahoo.com](mailto:sailuot@yahoo.com),

Puja [pujatanwani@hotmail.com](mailto:pujatanwani@hotmail.com)

Uma-[umapeeta@yahoo.com](mailto:umapeeta@yahoo.com)

If you are not putting together a performance but would still like your child to perform, please write back too.

Details of the length of the performance, content should be discussed with the coordinators.

Looking forward to seeing all the fantastic talent we have in our community on stage!

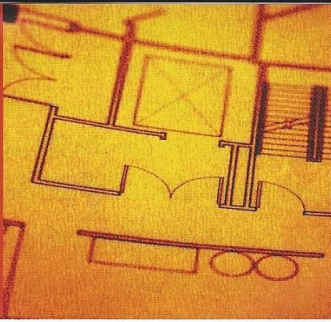
Board Contact info: [board@myiwa.org](mailto:board@myiwa.org)

This article was originally published in More.com.

<http://www.more.com/events/contests/one-amazing-thing-contest/are-diamonds-girls-best-friend>







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## The Joy Of Volunteering

By Amruta Inamdar

The truth is that most days, if we stop to think about, we've helped someone out. Watched a friend's kid(s) or said a word of encouragement to a colleague. Carried someone's items to/from India or welcomed a new neighbor. The list is endless. And more often than not, we've received help, too.

The only difference is, these folks weren't strangers. They have a place in our homes. And you know what they say: "Charity begins at home." But isn't the Greater Lafayette area also your home?

In fact, there are many reasons and opportunities to do some charitable work, to volunteer. Here are a few, ranging from the abstract to pragmatic!

- 1) "Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in." The internet can't tell me who expressed this widely-quoted idea. I'm guessing that most readers of this newsletter are proud citizens of democratic countries. Let's exercise our democratic values without waiting for election season!
- 2) Flexibility: You don't have to do it every single day/week/month. Volunteering can be a one-time-only deal. The YWCA needs help with their Kris Kringle gift-wrapping around Christmas. You sit at a table (for an hour or so), surrounded by pretty paper,

ribbons, and tape. Parents select toys for their kids, and you wrap them up! [All materials provided.] Or a once-in-a-while, when-my-busy-schedule-permits kind of deal. One example: visit to the grocery store! Some agencies like the YWCA or the Area IV Agency on Aging and Community Programs will give you money and a shopping list. You buy and deliver the items.

- 3) Fun: Some activities are extra-fun! E.g. you could bake cookies with your friends one afternoon for residents of a health center, and chat with residents as they enjoy cookies and milk. [Ingredients provided.]
- 4) Meet someone new: In all the examples given here, you can volunteer with a friend. But you can also go by yourself, and meet others in the community. The lovely friends you have today were once acquaintances and strangers... remember? ☺ [Though, many programs are looking for groups. If you are interested in an activity or an agency, just ask them about groups.]
- 5) Good karma, people. You know how that works! ;) Or to put it differently: Pyaar baatne se badhta hai, dukh baatne se ghatata hai.
- 6) Medical benefit: You feel good. Literally. There is scientific evidence that your good deeds, your altruism, improves your own health.
- 7) Employer support: Many employers encourage community engagement. E.g. Purdue supports Read to Succeed, a program in which

volunteers read to school children. Purdue employees can take time off during the work day (one hour for reading; 30 minutes for travel) to go to a local school and read with small groups of kids! Other big employers have donated significant resources to the community (CAT Park and SIA Playground) but may also have programs for employers.

- 8) Professional development: The volunteering activity could be directly related to your professional experience. (You do PR for a wonderful local organization, Book Cycle, or tutor an adult at LARA.) But it doesn't have to be! You can volunteer to bake or sell or shop or teach or read or drive or rake or counsel... Many organizations will provide the training you need! In either case, you gain valuable experience which adds weight to your resume and college applications.

If you are interested in some of these opportunities, sign up here! And happy volunteering!

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*In US 62.8 million Americans volunteered 7.9 billion hours in 2015. Based on the Independent Sector's estimate of the average value of a volunteer hour (\$23.07 in 2014), the estimated value of this volunteer service is nearly \$184 billion*

<https://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/>.

*Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile-Albert Einstein*

*I slept and I dreamed that life is all joy. I woke and I saw that life is all service. I served and I saw that service is joy-Mother Teresa*

## Getting To Know Renu Bajaj

By Sujatha Ramani

When you mention Renu Bajaj, first thing that most people think of is the conscientious treasurer and early founding member of IWA. Renu has been a key and consistent part of the association, mainly in the back ground but welcoming of old and new members.

Youngest in a family of 7, she had her early schooling in Moradabad and later high school and college in Lucknow. She did her PhD in Medicinal Chemistry at the prestigious CDRI - Central Drug Research Institute in Lucknow. It was interesting to hear her share her memories of her fun and naughty childhood. She remembers being fond of flying kites and once climbed to the top wall in the terrace of her house to get the kite up. Unfortunately she cut the kite of other boys in the neighborhood and was given a stern lecture by her father and oldest brother on the unsuitability of young ladies indulging in this kind of activity. She laughingly recounted this incident and also remembered another time when she got into trouble for taking a frog from the school tank for dissection in Biology class, instead of buying it in the store. The punishment was being made to sit on a separate desk all alone in the classroom for a whole week.

On being asked about her wedding, she said "Anil and I had a traditional arranged marriage". Along with the extended family, they met for lunch in a restaurant, which was a big treat in those days. Later she dropped him off in a two seater cycle rickshaw to the nearby station, a 15 minute ride that clinched the proposal. "We met, got engaged and got married in 3 weeks" she said. One funny post wedding incident she remembered was while going by train from Allahabad where the wedding was held to Lucknow her hometown. Someone put their hands through the train bars at the station and stole her glasses, which she had removed and kept for a minute on the seat near her. "From the station, we had to rush straight to an optician to get me another pair".

Anil soon returned to the US leaving his bride behind to join him later. She finished her PhD defense and then after 8 months in 1983, Dr Renu made her maiden overseas / plane trip to New York. That itself was another adventure. Due to the weather and flight cancellation, Anil could not meet her in New York and she had to find her own way around JFK airport. "I had no idea where Anil was and I had to figure out the terminals, understand the US accent and get to my Chicago plane. There was no way for him to contact me." But enterprising Renu saw an Indian face and with his help made a call to a friend in Chicago who met her at

O'hare airport. When she came out of customs, she saw a guy who looked "Jaana Pehchaana" (familiar) and was waving his hand. "I recognized my friend at once, but not Anil, who accompanied by his cousins had come to welcome and receive me. We laugh about it even to this day".

Renu soon joined Purdue as a post doc in the Medicinal Chemistry Lab in the Pharmacy department. She took a break for a few years and since 1999 has settled into her part time position working in the Animal Disease Diagnostic Lab at Purdue. She and Anil have three children, Nikhil, Nimisha and Nitesh. Nitesh's hurried entry into the world made newspaper headlines as he was delivered at home in the bath tub by fire men before Renu could go to the hospital. Renu's brother said 'Rush' Bajaj was impatient to see mom and dad. Couple of years ago they welcomed their daughter in law Andrea (Nikhil's wife) into their family.

I asked her what she did for relaxation. "My biggest hobby is music - both listening and singing. I have All India Radio playing in the background while I go about my day and I enjoy singing along. Renu is also very enthusiastic to learn new things, specially tech stuff. "I like living in this close knit community of West Lafayette and my involvement with IWA and my friends keeps me busy".

*If at first you don't succeed . . . so much for skydiving-- Henny Youngman*

*I heard Apple is designing a new automatic car. But they're having trouble installing windows.*

*René Descartes is sitting in a bar, having a drink. The bartender asks him if he would like another. "I think not," he says and vanishes in a puff of logic.*



# Sanskriti Indian Women's Association Newsletter

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