

By Ashok Sinha

On April 16, 2014, there occurred in India a momentous event: The Prime Ministerial candidate from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2014 Loksabha (National) Election, Shri Narendra Modi (NaMo) filed his official nomination in the holy city of Varanasi. The vast, enthusiastic, and effulgent procession of people on the streets of Varanasi was simply unprecedented. NaMo had been on the election campaign trail for many weeks. Throughout this period the entire country and the world had been reverberating and resonating with the sound of one particular word (shabda) more than any other: **DEVELOPMENT (VIKAS).**



# The Development Mantra and **IDRF**

**T**his word, "Development," sets another resonance in the hearts of the Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) in USA as they recall the saga of one organization set in motion some twenty five years ago. With many luminous milestones in the wake of an evolutionary dream, cast in the backdrop of the harsh ground-realities in our country of origin, we briefly pause today to pay homage to this organization and to its vanguard leader. We take a moment to outline its progression and its procession. Such a bird's eye-view, the celebration of a journey through the years, with many a human drama and accomplishments in the face of stubborn obstacles, enriches every traveler and every turn involved.

The name of that organization is INDIA DEVELOPMENT AND RELIEF FUND (IDRF), and the name of the leading dreamer and captain writing its success-story is Dr. Vinod Prakash (ViPr).

The mantra of "development" runs in the veins and enlivens the hearts and brains of both NaMo and ViPr. Another link joining the two souls comes to mind that simultaneously, and even curiously, connects the two figures and deserves our felicitation today. Notwithstanding the oceans of separation between their fields of action and scales of influence, there is a lowest common multiple (LCM) in terms of their Karmic field. Their concern has coincidentally touched upon the same land: Gujarat. One of the most memorable moments in IDRF's history was when it provided relief and rehabilitation to the victims of the earthquake that shook and devastated



*Amina Bibi, a farmer in West Bengal, increased her income six-fold with IDRF's microcredit program. She's one of 500 women in this program!*

Kutch, Gujarat on January 26, 2001.

Here we intend to sing a bit of well-deserved praise of IDRF, mainly to introduce the younger Indian Americans to IDRF and breathe a great deal of hope and promise into the future life-dreams of the newer generation of NRIs. And, again, we can hardly resist the temptation to emphatically underline its counterpart, NaMo's dream of "Development." It fills the hearts of the youth of the entire nation of India with a sanguine hope and a passion to be active partners in the work that lies ahead: a holistic march to build a better India for generations to come. It is not my purpose here to enumerate all IDRF's adventurous projects undertaken in pursuit of its root-mission - to genuinely serve the poorest of poor, in the fields of education, healthcare, women's empowerment, anti-corruption,



*These vanvasi (tribal) girls from the Northeastern states are getting quality education and the confidence to excel in the classroom, the field, and the workplace!  
IDRF provides them with a free education at a CBSE-accredited school.*



*Sita Devi, an anganwadi worker in Bihar, stood up to corruption. With training from IDRF's program, she held a social audit and recovered funds for her anganwadi (childcare center).*

ecofriendly development, and post-disaster rehabilitation. IDRF has helped emancipate the downtrodden across India, from Arunachal Pradesh in the east to Gujarat in the west, and from Jammu & Kashmir in the north to Tamil Nadu in the south. Countless girls and boys, women and men, have benefitted tremendously from the programs which IDRF has designed with utmost care and dexterity. Their numbers will continue to rise with the passage of time. All these programs are executed by very dependable local NGOs. A complete list is best provided in IDRF's annual reports and financial statements sent to people and organizations, including VHPA (and available online at [www.idrf.org](http://www.idrf.org)). The main focus for us, as IDRF's well-wishers, is to inspire new hearts and minds - regardless of their age - to carry on the torch that ViPr lit twenty-six years ago. At the same time, however, it would not be out of place to mention here a few moments of uncommon joy for India's underprivileged.

Following the cliché 'a picture is worth a thousand words,' we present the readers of Hindu Vishwa with a few worth-illuminating pictures that speak volumes about IDRF. So, here they are - just a few clippings from the vast album chronicling the bright instances of IDRF's work and its impact.

Such instances have been gratifying experiences for Dr. Vinod Prakash and his sahdharmini, Mrs. Sarla Prakash, who has shared the responsibilities and hard work that the austere mission of IDRF entails, from day one. The demanding endeavors and the courageous endurance of this illustrious NRI couple in the face of numberless obstacles and hardships continue unabated.

It is a cruel irony of fate that in the course of this heroic journey, Dr. Vinod Prakash has suffered a



***IDRF's eco-friendly water harvesting program has provided clean water and irrigation to 30,000 people in Gujarat - while providing employment to thousands.***



***An exceptional NRI partnered with IDRF to start a school in his native UP village 25 years. Today, children from 25 villages, from humble backgrounds, attend the school and ace their exams.***

devastating personal injury: the loss of his eyesight. Yet his tapasya in service of the poor, unprivileged, and destitute in India, continues without the least loss of spirit or vision. It would not be an exaggeration to say that he is, in fact, comparable to that ancient sage, Bharatiya Rish-Muni, who performed the Yajna of service unflinchingly throughout his life, and who brought forth gems that, like a divine boon, could light the way for multitudes of people in days to come, to lend their hands in the true tradition of Yajna. So, as we await the actualization of the hope and promise of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and of others ("Ache Din Aane Waale Hain"), we take a moment to salute our own ViPr, Dr. Vinod Prakash, and his dharmapatnee, Mrs. Sarla Prakash, for all their immaculate and fruitful vision and relentless efforts. We wish to lessen the pain of the loss of ViPr's own eyesight, in spite of which he continues to carry the torch, inspiring our NRI youth and others to join the marathon of vikas. I hope these photos inspire the Indian American community to help IDRF put power - not charity - in the hands of the underprivileged.