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Community & Public Service

In today's world, most of us who constitute the well-educated, highly qualified niche make that contribution towards social causes. Then, to most of us, this contribution equals monetary donations or a few hours of voluntary service outside of work. Then to others, it is their calling; their choice of profession; a mainstream activity- primarily, a way of life.

This section portrays the lives of those steeped in community welfare and Administrative



Kalpana Nayak

services. It is a tribute to these

fine women who have applied themselves to fields that perhaps come closest to making a real difference.

Each is a shining example of grit, sincerity and commitment to cause. We

begin with the illustrious **Kalpana Nayak** ('90 Comp Science) who is the Commandant of the first all-women battalion of TN police profiled in NewsToday. Recently, J Jayalalithaa, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu commissioned India's first All Women Police Battalion, led by Kalpana Nayak. Challenges on her job include providing commando training to over 1000 women police officers in TN. Unique in spirit and deed.

Dr. Jasveen (Dhillon) Jairath has charted a new course from the very beginning. A EEE graduate (1967-72), Jasveen dabbled in Dramatics and public speaking at BITS. She then followed that up with a

Doctorate in Economics and switched to the social services line. She is currently the Regional Coordinator of CapNet South Asia, which is an international network for capacity building in integrated water resources management. Jasveen's interests lie in research, advocacy and networking in water resource development.

Her message for us is simple and we suspect, straight



Chandra Anil

from the heart. "Escape from narrow careerism and be adventurous", she says. While there are women who work in the public service or with NGOs and other development-oriented organizations, there are several who break new grounds in education periodically. **Smita A.** has been working for the past 17 years in the field of social development, of which 12 years have been spent in elementary education. She has also worked on two major UEE programs in the country - Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan and District Primary Education Program (DPEP), a national program covering 18 states. Smita is currently the Director of Education Programs at the American India Foundation, New Delhi.

So does **Chandra Anil**, who as joint coordinator of AID in Chennai specializes in innovative educational methods to improve the effectiveness of education for primary and middle school children. Chandra, who graduated from BITS in 1995, says some young volunteers working on the course of India's development inspired her when she was still an engineer in electronic design. While working for seven years



in Wipro Infotech and SCM Microsystems, she volunteered at AID-India. She eventually became a full-time social work volunteer at AID Saathi in 2003 after giving up her job.

Anita Balasubramanian has had a thoroughly wholesome career in the social sector. After graduating from BITS in 1999, she has visited more than 80 groups in India involved in a variety of issues such as education, healthcare, tribal rights, conflict resolution and human rights and has learnt that all these issues are ultimately interconnected. She has also volunteered for several *Asha* chapters and has imbibed the spirit of the participative and democratic model that has made *Asha* so successful. Perhaps her crowning achievements have been the two organizations she has co-founded: *The Learning Network* that explores the various issues associated with education in a holistic manner, and *Sangati*, an organization that explores social and developmental issues through learning and related grassroots action. Anita has also conceptualized and managed Goodbooks Teachers Center, a resource center for teachers in and around Chennai. Given her affinity for learning and her irrepressible spirit, there's no limit to what Anita can achieve in the future.

Praba Subramaniam (1993) has had a career in public

service/nonprofit with a few gaps and breaks. She worked for sometime at Vidya Sagar (previously known as The Spastic Society of India in Chennai). She came to the US in 1999 and volunteered in several nonprofit organizations - mainly serving the technological needs of the disabled population. At Tulsa, OK Praba prepared a needs assessment report for implementing County's Headstart programs. Since last year, she's been mostly at home looking after her 3 yr old daughter and has started a small business on eBay that specializes in selling handmade accessories from India - products made by marginalized producer groups comprising women and the handicapped.

This section would be incomplete without a mention of **Minakshi Krishnan**, who has made a mark in the field of community service and is a recent *BITSAA 30Under30* awardee in the category of Community Leadership. Minakshi completed the Mardi Gras Marathon in February 2005 and raised funds for the Whitman Walker clinic that works with HIV/AIDS patients in the U.S. She is the coordinator of *Asha* for the DC chapter. She has also worked with a number of organizations in India including AID, and Kalpavriksh on issues as diverse as integrated rural development and health to women and child development. Committed all the way, Minakshi has also been a Service Corps volunteer and an American Red Cross volunteer for blood drives.

Creative Arts

India has always been well renowned for its culture, art and

architecture. Recently the West has also seen the success of the "Indian Engineer". A union of these two phenomena has led to the emergence of a new breed of individual - the creative intellect. To explain this new breed of individual, we must explore the nature and definition of creativity a little further. Creativity is defined as the ability to produce new things or new knowledge. One of the principal ways to be creative is to look for alternative ways to view phenomena or for alternative ways to ask a question. *Robert Sternberg's* theory attributes several factors that influence creativity - Intelligence, Knowledge, Thinking Styles, Personality, Motivation and other Environmental factors. Maybe creativity also requires a touch of eccentricity and stubbornness.

Voila! Is this not the environment in BITS, Pilani in a nutshell? Be it OASIS, APOGEE, plays by drama clubs, *music nites* or any other cultural event in BITS, we have had the opportunity to explore and nurture our creative side. Let me illustrate with some highlights from our own BITSian women who are prime examples of success in creative arts.

Anuradha Gupta (nee Sharma) who has a MMS degree from BITS ('86-'90) and an MBA from Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, New Delhi is the author of three books. Her first book was a book of philosophical short stories and poems for limited circulation, called, "The Quest for Life" that dealt with primarily social themes. The second book, "Memoirs of Army Days" was about her experiences as an Army Brat, reliving the nostalgia and joy of Army Life.