



10 years of Prajnya

A Heartfelt Message

- Dr. Swarna Rajagopalan

Dear friends,

Every year when I sit down to do this, there is a sameness to the exercise even though each year so far has been uniquely challenging and rewarding. It seems like our aspirations are the same – I am still hoping for a large multi-room office with a full-time team that more or less makes me redundant. Our problems and worries still are – lack of money, resources and finances. But on the good days, I think that to not have money is better than to have no ideas, no values, no people or, let's be honest – no obstinacy or persistence.

Last September, we stepped into our tenth year without really noticing. Our tenth birthday falls on September 9, 2017. This is the anniversary of the day Prajnya Trustees launched Prajnya Initiatives, the rubric for our activities. This distinction is irrelevant to most of you, but it offers you a sneak preview of the huge vision with which Prajnya was started – someday, this work that you think of as 'Prajnya' will be just one part of the many things that The Prajnya Trust does. If you've seen the size of our space and know the size of our team, you're chuckling now. But tell me, what's the point of a small dream?

And with this quixotic approach, we've worried, panicked, agonised and struggled but one day after another, one task after another, one step after another, we have reached this milestone. We can hardly believe it.

So in this note, I want to leave you with the prominent rasa of this moment – adbhuta. We want you to share our wonder at having come this far and having managed to do so much with so little. Has the world changed because of our work? Hardly. Has this work transformed us? Has it deepened our commitment every day? Have we learnt and grown, reached out to others for support and to support? Absolutely, as individuals and as an organisation.

The great gift of financial uncertainty has been autonomy. We have stayed close to our founding vision, adapting to our resources and to the needs of those around us and to what the community has taught us. Unfettered by reporting deadlines and having to invent 'deliverables,' we have done what we could, as honestly, transparently and frugally as we could. Sometimes, the harder route is actually more conducive to staying true to yourself.

As partners, resource people and donors have remained steadfast in our world, quietly increasing their involvement with and support for our work, we know we have been building a community for our values. We know that each new donor or volunteer is stepping beyond the clichés and polemic to express their solidarity with peace, equality and justice.

This birthday season, I have sorted through thousands of photographs from scores of activities, have listed over and over landmark moments and activities and recalled the best moments of our journey. I have worried about who will remember everything when I am gone, and then I remember that rivers just flow on – they take something, they leave something behind.

What I am now sure of – or to be honest, more sure of than before, still regularly assailed as I am with thoughts of shutting down – is that the river that is Prajnya will flow. We will gather people, stories and dreams, quietly gaining the strengths we need – with your support. One day at a time.

Swarna Rajagopalan
Managing Trustee



Our Work: A Quick Snapshot

Peace, Justice and Security are the three closely related goals that Prajnya seeks to promote through research, public education and network-building efforts. Here is how we understand them:

- **Peace** is possible when relationships are equitable and where people enjoy freedom and human rights.
- **Justice**, as fairness and equity, guarantees security and is a precondition of peace.
- **Security**, beyond physical safety, must include economic well-being and human rights as well.



Prajnya Resource Centre

Prajnya Resource Center is envisaged as a single-location clearing-house for quantitative, qualitative and archival data on women in politics and policy-making. We set out to collate and showcase statistics and histories, both oral and visual, of women's participation in the public sphere.

Prajnya Archives

The Prajnya Archives are an online repository where anyone can contribute images of women's work in the public sphere, provided of course, they own the rights to the image. The Prajnya Archives have launched several thematic photo-calls:

The Freedom Generation | First Graduate | We Make It Happen | Rainmakers | Citizen Next Door

LifeStories

The LifeStories interviews document women's accounts of their lives and work in the public sphere and in the context of public events. Performers, politicians, businesswomen, freedom fighters and several others have spoken to the project.

Women's History Roundtables

Informal presentations on historical research relating to women and other gender-related topics expanded to become a broad 'women's studies' platform. Run over three seasons, the Roundtables have featured academic, political and life-story presentations.

GRIT: Gender violence Research and Information Taskforce

GRIT Processes

Outreach programmes and processes that we create or facilitate for different groups of people, on a demand basis. This includes training, symposia and workshops.

Research

Gender Violence Report and other research projects, including blog symposia.





16 Days Campaign Against Gender Violence

Chennai's chapter of this international movement is spearheaded by Prajnya. The program has completed 7 editions since 2008, and has only grown year on year. Symposiums, workshops on self-defence, Wikipedia Editathons, Stories on Wheels, Community Cafes, marches and walks—a variety of programs help us spread the message against gender violence.

Peace Education

We started out wanting to teach peace through curricular and extra-curricular interventions. Our initial focus was on teacher training and school-based engagement. We have since piloted a Peace Club for 11-year-olds at the PSBB Millennium School in Gerukambakkam, Chennai. The Peace Blog, with a continuing series on Champions of Peace helps parents talk to children about peacemakers the way they now do about warriors: with an eye on eliciting awe and inspiration.

“Our gender violence training programme serves to emphasise that combatting sexual harassment requires systemic change, and that the work Prajnya does with targeted groups across the socio-medico-legal spectrum is what sets us apart in this space.”- Shakthi

Voices in Support

"I have known Prajnya ever since she was born and it has been a pleasure to watch her grow into a dynamic, confident, resilient 10-year-old. Among the many attributes I appreciate about this small, hardy organisation is that it has stayed true to its character as a voluntary organisation, relying mainly on occasional or regular volunteers for its work, and operating on a shoe-string budget that is almost entirely dependent on voluntary donations, mostly from individual well-wishers. It is amazing and admirable that, despite this somewhat precarious existence, Prajnya has not only stayed the course but emerged as an exemplary organisation, especially in terms of its steady, consistent, reliable and innovative work on gender violence. I always look forward to finding out what Prajnya has in mind for its ever-creative series of programmes during the annual 16 Days Campaign against Gender Violence.

I wish Prajnya a very happy 10th birthday and all the very best for the decade(s) ahead."



Ammu Joseph, eminent journalist and member, Prajnya Panel of Advisors



Mihir Bhatt, Director, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute

"Prajnya is a small but important voice in India's civil society that systematically guides us to think more and again about the poor women who repeatedly suffer loss and damage caused by disasters. It is these women who absorb the loss and give their best to get their families going ahead to recovery and upward to safety. Working on the two chapters on Women's Leadership and Disaster Risk Reduction in India and South Asia with Prajnya was an empowering experience for me: focusing on what is just words and what adds meaning to words. The importance of Prajnya to India's civil society cannot be more emphasized."

"A combination of research, training and discussion that has helped Prajnya in good stead! I remember fondly how Swarna was the first to support our play Kaala Kanavu to help us do the posters that were part of the show. Needless to say, how Prajnya included theatre training and performance as part of its campaign. To our fellow-traveller! Let our journeys continue."



Mangai, writer, activist and founder, The Marappachi Trust

In the workshops I conduct on gender, media and space, I have personally used several of Prajnya's well-thought through fact-sheets on gender violence. Their community café initiative is a much-needed intervention on gender violence at the community level and their training sessions on workplace sexual harassment fulfil a very important purpose. I particularly like the fact that Prajnya uses knowledge and information in very active ways to transform ideas about gender among different groups of people, be they members of a building society or media practitioners



Sameera Khan, journalist and co-author, "Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets"



Kalpana Viswanath, co-founder and CEO, Safetipin

"Prajnya is known for its in depth work on issues, both at the level of research and campaigns. They have been pioneers in addressing issues of violence against women in Chennai and work with integrity. Some of their campaigns have been very innovative, engaging a wide spectrum of people, aiming to reach beyond the converted. I wish Prajnya all the best and look forward to collaborating."

"As you usher in the next 10 years of activism to end violence against women, we commit to echo the pledge to change attitudes and behaviours to reduce social acceptance of VAW (Violence Against Women)."



Dr. Prasanna Gettu, Founder and Managing Trustee, PCVC

"Here we are a bunch of women, each one as different as can be, who have come together to contribute in our own little way to see that the goals of this organisation are met. In return what we get are new friends, challenges, opportunities and PRAJNYA." – Nandhini Shanmugam, in April 2008

Prajnya Timeline

**January
2006**

Foundation of Prajnya

**September 9,
2007**

Launch of Prajnya Initiatives for Peace, Justice and Security

**September
2007**

Politics, Security and Women Initiative (PSW) started its work

**March 14, 2009 -
September 2009**

Monthly Roundtable Series on Women's History started

August 4, 2009

seminar/ presentation of the first 3 studies conducted by the Education for Peace Initiative

**September 28,
2009**

Launch of Prajnya Archives

**December
2011**

Hollaback! Chennai, the local chapter of a global movement against street harassment.

August 2012

The Roads Project, identifying roads in Chennai named after women who had been in the public sphere

March 2013

Launch of "Kriti," a training programme on building a culture of peace in the classroom.

**February
2014**

First Graduate: Archives Campaign

June 2015

First Prajnya Peace Club launched

October 2015

"Champions of Peace" blog series starts

April 2016

Gender Equality Election Checklist released

June 2016

Blog Symposium. First partnership with an NGO from another country (Sri Lanka)

June 2016

Launch of the first book by a Sakshi Fellow (Women and Disasters in South Asia)

March 8, 2008

Prajnya's first public event: intercollegiate quiz on "Women in South Asia." (Repetition: 2009, 2010)

September 2008

Prajnya's first research study completed "Women Taking Action: A Survey of Chennai Women's Organisations" by Sweta Narayanan

November 2008

First 16 Days Campaign Against Gender Violence starts

November 2009

Launch of the LifeStories project

November 2009

Prajnya's first Gender Violence Report

March 8, 2011

Rainmakers, first Archives call-- a 100-day call for photographic entries showcased "resourceful women"

2013/14

Intensification of gender violence awareness training (especially workplace sexual harassment)

June 2013

Roundtable for HR managers in media companies on workplace sexual harassment and compliance with law

Jan/Feb 2014

Workshop for duty nurses on responding to signs of DV in Govt. hospitals

2015

Vasundhara donors: Four donors made a three-year commitment to donate Rs. 100,000/-per year

September 2015

First full-time Programme Officer hired

March 2016

'Patriarchy of Paperwork' blog series published

August 2017

Partnered with WCC for an activity series to promote gender equality

June/ July 2017

Namathu Nagram, Namathu Urimai project initiated

Blog Reflections

Our blogs are reflective of our path over the years, and distill our work into neat little slices that we tend to view as a continuum. They give a glimpse into our work in all its complexity.

Awed and Humbled: The First LifeStories Interview (November 7, 2009)

(Life Stories, a project to record women's public sphere experiences)

Writes Dr. Uma Vangal, of Vasantha Ramakrishnan, "Her activities in as a child in Rangoon, her migrant experience, Emergency—were all narrated in an unassuming manner as also her participation in the Seva Dal, Bharat Scouts, Quit India and down the years to the present. Her reminiscences were so vivid that we were entranced. And what zest and penchant for detail!"

<https://keepingcount.wordpress.com/2009/11/07/awed-and-humbled-the-first-lifestories-interview/>

Women's History Roundtable: Anitha S.: "Be Our Voice" (March 9, 2013)

Ms Anitha emphasized the social change which has come about as a result of the protest. Women have emerged as leaders in the area, caste barriers are broken, conflict between the Church and the Temple no longer exists; all this has contributed to create a homogenized society in Idinthakarai"

<https://keepingcount.wordpress.com/2013/03/31/womens-history-roundtable-anitha-s-be-our-voice-march-9-2013/>

The Multiplier Effect: Learning from our G.E.M.s (November 30, 2014)

"The lesson reinforced here is that every single thing we do matters. You don't need institutions or organisations; you don't need hundreds of thousands of rupees; you don't need a weekend supplement feature. You just need to decide that something matters enough to you to take action. And no matter what action you take, it will definitely have an impact, and a greater reach that you can anticipate: the people we reach out to, the people who help us do that, the people who watch us, the people who sell us tea or cater our event or help us hang banners."

<http://prajnya16days.blogspot.in/2014/11/the-multiplier-effect-of-individual.html>

What's going on in the world? (January 2, 2015)

The Peace Club is structured around a handful of interactions between the students and the Prajnya resource person. The activity that carries on through the academic year is the 'What's going on in the world' bulletin board. Peace Club members are responsible for updating this 'news board' every day, and ideally take individual and collective responsibility for it. For each day, they must post 'good news' about peace, 'bad news' about peace and then they have the liberty to post one thing of their choice—a thought for the day, a drawing or cartoon or photo, a poem.

<https://prajnyaforpeace.wordpress.com/2015/01/02/whats-going-on-in-the-world/>

Prajnya Gender Equality Election Checklist (April 14, 2016)

"Democracy without gender equality is incomplete and imperfect. Political parties, election officials and voters must all demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and a concern for gender-related issues from survival to violence to access to participation."

<https://keepingcount.wordpress.com/2016/04/14/prajnya-gender-equality-election-checklist>

Anjalai Amma of the Freedom Generation (October 11, 2016)

"My grandmother, Anjalai Amma was in jail for more than four and half years. She gave birth to her last son in jail itself. My grandfather Murugappa and my maternal aunt Leelavathy and her husband Jamadhagni were also freedom fighters. Her biography is included in the 8th Standard Tamil text book [second semester book]."

<https://prajnyaarchives.wordpress.com/2016/10/11/anjalai-amma-of-the-freedom-generation/>

Teach peace. One child at a time. One teacher at a time. One school at a time

A child's world today is fraught with emotional landmines. Bullying. Cyber shaming. Self-doubt. Feelings of worthlessness. Extreme competition. Violence in thought, word and action dominates news and entertainment. What does a child make of this?

Would you or I want our children to respond to everyday events with ridicule, anger, hate speech or worse, an act of violence or self harm? Could we teach our children to respond differently?

WHAT'S PEACE EDUCATION

Prajnya's Education for Peace works with children, teachers and parents to teach a different way of being and living.

- Transforming classrooms first and then generations of citizens through dialogue and by exploring peace values like inclusion and diversity.
- Adapting folk tales, myths and local literature to teach peace through story-telling so the learning is internalised.
- Promoting critical thinking to understand bias in media and our ways of thinking.
- Helping children (and adults) confidently articulate and live peace in the face of a world that teaches them aggression, competition and hostility towards the unfamiliar.

YOUR DONATION COUNTS

Rs 4,000 will support a workshop in one school

Rs 25,000 will support a whole year's work in one school

Rs 20,000 will support a citizenship education programme called Namathu Nagaram, Namathu Urimai (My city, my rights).

Rs 10,000 will support Prajnya with the costs of a workspace, an admin person and an accountant for one month.

In today's conflict-ridden world, this is a chance for you to invest in building a more peaceful world for our children.

So please donate online on www.ketto.org/prajnyaforpeace/

Thank you!

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