

# On *Being* In Chikhale



7 Essays and  
5 Poems  
Plus Photos  
and  
A Recipe

Reflections on the  
Experiences of  
An international visitor  
To the Maharashtrian Village of  
Chikhale



F. Nelson Stover  
1993 through 2020

Forward by Will Sands

(with photos by Kara Davis & F. Nelson Stover)

## Dedication

This collection is dedicated to the memory of **Fred Lanphear** and **Brian Stanfield**, who along with their wives, provided vision and leadership to the Chikhale Cluster Human Development Project while they lived in the village during the late 1970's and early 1980's. Their wisdom enlivened the villagers and their efforts ensured the viability of the Training Center which became the Chikhale Ashram Shalla, a residential school for 650 tribal children in grades 1 through 12.



Also, with special thanks to Vijay Lokhande whose gracious hospitality and tireless efforts made my visits to Chikhale possible and ensured the vitality of the Chikhale Project.

Cover Photos by F. Nelson Stover, January 2020: Chikhale Ashram Shalla from across the pond, students parading through the village. Above photo, Vijay Lokhande and Nelson Stover, January 2020.

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# Forward

Traveling to India in 2016 sparked a notion within me to continue working on what the Institute of Cultural Affairs started in Chikhale during the 70s and 80s. Who knew that a village development project would later provide a school with a high school-level science curriculum in English for children in surrounding villages to learn and interact with other students? Ultimately, fostering great leaders that have, and can, continue developing their careers and surrounding villages. The school at Chikhale experiences graduates going out into the workforce and starting their careers each year. However, after speaking with some recent graduates, many could use guidance and support on the how to's of developing their careers and villages.

In 2017, Emerging Ecology spent a majority of a month-long trip visiting students and graduates from the Adivasi Ashram School in Chikhale in their wadis and villages surrounding the Panvel area. Thanks to the help of graduates Janardan Wagh and Bharat Hawali, a database was created with over 200 graduate names, villages, and contact information that can be used as starting point for reaching out to graduates to understand their needs and how the school curriculum can be revised to attend to such.

Several things were learned during January 2017 in India. At the school, computer labs are planning to be updated. This will enhance the efficiency of the Skype calls and computer research skills which are vehicles for the students to learn English as well as increase their breadth of knowledge and interests. Pertaining to the graduates, Janardan specifically spoke of "guidance for career and developing villages." What better way to improve quality of wadis/villages than to create leaders that have experienced life in those areas.

In the states, parents and teachers are often educated in choosing careers and excelling in the workforce, especially if they have been on the journey themselves. However, people like Janardan are exposed to new careers and obligations to society. Therefore, going to his father who is a lifelong farmer, may not be the best option due to the perspectives and advice that may be lacking. Thankfully, the Chikhale students, graduates, and faculty are surrounded by passionate and helpful people like the Lokhande family and their friends and supporters through the ICA India, Emerging Ecology, and a partnership with Guilford College. These continue to initiate projects and curriculum that can help each student reach their full potential and succeed in any chosen career.

The Skype calls from students at Chikhale to high schools in North Carolina provide a great way to engage those from different cultures to improve English and awareness of energy use, food production, and various other topics within both societies. For the graduates, a similar system could be beneficial by providing online video calls monthly to monitor current involvements and progress in life and village development. In addition to answering any questions or discussing concerns the graduates may be facing in hopes of offering meaningful and effective solutions.

I look forward to continuing to work with the ICA and Emerging Ecology to provide long-term support for the Chikhale graduates.

Will Sands, April 2017



*Will Sands with students.*

## Introduction

*This document contains poems, photos and essays written by Nelson Stover over more than three decades while in India working with Vijay Lokhande and the students and staff of Chikhale Ashram Shalla. Both Vijay and Nelson have lengthy histories of doing projects – both individually and cooperatively – under the auspices of the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA). Moreover, both are keenly aware that effective action comes (most often) when one sits a moment longer before beginning action. This insight about Acting Before Action provided the seed for the third poem in this collection.*

*Contextual information about each piece and the date it was originally produced are contained on the **Background** page at the end of the document.*

*Throughout the journey into transformative action, one learns:*



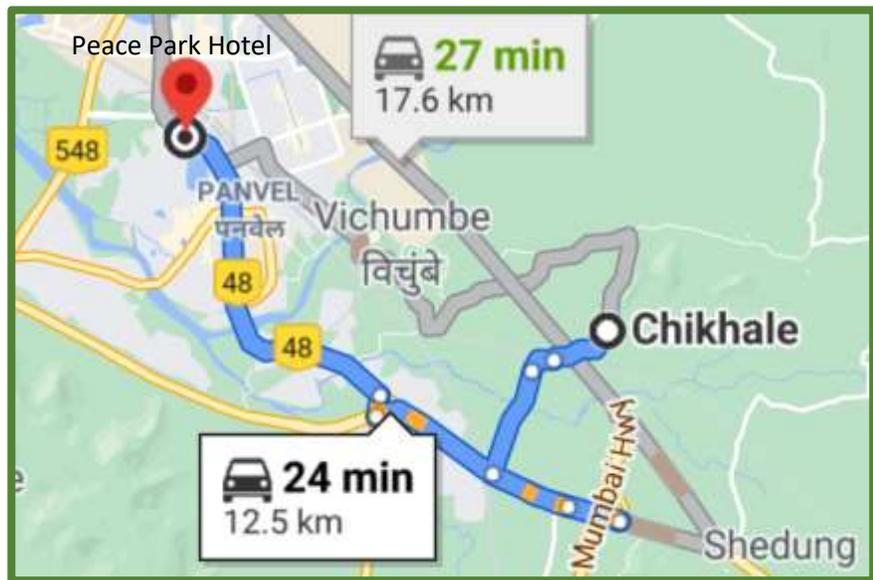
Don't Just Do Something,  
Sit There –  
And Eventually  
Do Something

## What's Special about Chikhale?

Chikhale Village in western Maharashtra has no special characteristics, except ...

For tens of hundreds of years, dedicated rice farmers have been tilling the rich soil that washes off India's Western Ghats. During the annual monsoon rains, they grow their rice crops and whatever else they can grow with the waters that remain. Eventually, the village worked together to dam up the rivulet that flowed through the village to create a pond. The pond provided a source of fish, a place to water and wash cattle and a nearly year-round supply of water for washing clothes. It also helped maintain the water level in the surrounding wells.

In 1978, when the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) began to expand its band of Human Development Projects beyond the initial Indian location in Maliwada, they sent John and Thea Patterson to look for a suitable place on the outskirts of Mumbai. The Pattersons connected up with Vijay Lokhande, a young business entrepreneur in Panvel who was excited about the prospects of bringing positive change to the surrounding villages. Together, the three of them talked with the leadership of Chikhale Village. The Chikhale Cluster Human Development Project was launched with a week-long planning consult combining villagers of all castes along with outside consultants from a variety of professions. (Map above shows route from Peace Park Hotel to Chikhale, 2020.)



For the next decade, teams of ICA staff lived next door to Bandu Patankar in the large house with a well. International couples on the staff included Brian and Jeannette Stanfield, Nelson and Elaine Stover and Fred and Nancy Lanphear along with a diverse group of other international volunteers and Indian staff from across Maharashtra. In cooperation with the Rotary Club of Bombay Central, the ICA organized a major grant from Rotary's 3-H program. For several years this funded many of the activities in Chikhale and surrounding villages and also brought international teams of Rotarians with specific expertise to the village for meeting particular pressing needs. A series of grants also provided funds for the initial construction of the training center located adjacent to the Chikhale Pond.

When the ICA hosted the International Exposition of Rural Development in 1984, Chikhale served as one of the spotlight villages in India. Visitors from around the world came to see the health, agriculture and pre-school programs being conducted by the village. Through the many opportunities to cooperate during this project, the villagers overcame many of their preconceived prejudices toward each other and

to foreigners; and they learned to care deeply for one another and for the larger community which surrounded them.

In 1988, when the international staff of the ICA left Chikhale, the villagers – in cooperation with the Indian staff of the ICA – continued many of the cooperative activities they had begun. When they started to consider the best uses for the Training Center, they looked beyond themselves to those less fortunate people who lived in the tribal villages at the foot of the surrounding ghats. Most of the tribal communities are quite small and are located on mostly unpaved roads. As a result, schools for these children are either non-existent or limited to only the early grades. This awareness prompted the villagers and the ICA to launch the Chikhale Ashram Shalla as a residential school for tribal children. Beginning with one grade in 1989, they added a grade each year as the first students progressed. In 2010, the school received permission to add 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> standard classes with both a Science and Arts track. By 2020, the school was serving 650 students about evenly divided between boys and girls. In many recent years, over 90% of the students completed their final exams. Several have gone on to complete degrees at various colleges and universities.

After Nelson and Elaine Stover left India in 1985, they moved to Greensboro, North Carolina six years later. Since then they have remained in close contact with ICA India and the Chikhale School. As the years passed, they frequently took small teams of guests from North Carolina to visit the school. Nelson returned to India almost every two years and visited Chikhale on each trip. Since 2000, he and those who traveled with him most frequently stayed in the Peace Park Hotel which is conveniently located on the old Bombay-Pune Hwy. and within walking distance of Vijay Lokhande's factory. In 2010, Nelson and Vijay conceived the idea of a Global Classroom which would virtually connect 11<sup>th</sup> grade science students from Chikhale with high school students in North Carolina. For another decade thereafter periodic Skype and WhatsApp conversations provided motivating contextual expansion for the Chikhale students. (The reflective pieces in this document were written during Nelson's various trips.)

In 2015, faculty members from Guilford College showed interest in establishing a working relationship with the Chikhale school. Subsequently, two groups of students, including Will Sands and their professor Lavon Williams, went to Chikhale as a part of the school's Cultural Enrichment curriculum.

The story of Chikhale Village continues as Mumbai and now Navi Mumbai continue to grow and expand to the borders of the farms surrounding the village. Construction has begun on the new international airport which will be located on the opposite side of Panvel, yet within 25 km. of the village. The train station near the village now has regular service, Canara Bank has opened a branch in the village near the school and a highway marker directs people to the village (photo right). Cell phone and internet service now connect the once remote village to the larger global community.



## Life is Good

Life IS good –  
Every moment,  
Every experience and  
Every day.

Affirming Life's perpetual goodness becomes easy when –  
You can sit in a soft chair,  
Drinking a fresh cup of hot chai that's been delivered free and  
Watch the sun rise through an open window.

Then you may know deeply that:  
Each crow is busy with their essential morning tasks,  
Every truck and bus is moving people and products into place for the work  
ahead,  
All the construction projects are poised to continue their journey to completion  
and  
Opportunities abound for expressing your own creativity.

Every person, plant, product and particle awakes  
Poised to proceed into the uncharted future,  
Energized from without by the Sun and  
From within by their unique passion to participate  
In giving particular form  
To the perpetually Unmanifested.



Peace Park Hotel  
Room 208

## God IS Great

God IS great –  
Every moment,  
Every happening and  
Every day.

Affirming God's ever-abundant Greatness becomes easy when –  
Two long-time friends reminisce in a well-used office  
Sharing memories of past adventures and envisioning future cooperation  
In the presence of images of revered ancestors and respected  
deities.

Then each may know deeply that:  
Envisioned possibilities often flourish beyond even the wildest individual  
expectations,  
Seemingly chance encounters may provide resources for vitalizing occurrences,  
Decisions, actions, and commitments foster individual and social transformation  
and  
Opportunities abound for expressing creativity and compassion.

Every person, plant, product and particle awakens  
Poised to proceed into the uncharted future,  
Energized from without by the incomprehensible Power and  
From within by their unique passion to participate  
In giving particular form  
To the Unbounded Wholeness.

Vijay Lokhande's workspace  
At the  
CASK Office  
Panvel Industrial Estates



## Acting Before Action

Actions:

- Affect the eventual direction of history,
- Crystalize irreversible results and
- Give unmistakable form to the Unknown.

Acting before action:

- Taps into the well-spring of motivating power,
- Focuses effort on fulcrums which leverage affectivity and
- Purifies individual resolve into selfless service.

So –

Before engaging in the on-going activities of everyday existence and Tackling the challenges of professional responsibility or individual passion:

- Sit quietly in the twilight of the rising sun or silent starlight,
- Listen to the wind, the leaves, your heart and the croaking frogs,
- Let your imagination walk into the future in an other's shoes,
- Recall ancient truths and ancestors' hard-learned lessons,
- Set aside personal anxieties, nagging fears and compelling visions,
- Journey beyond greed, cynicism and hopelessness and
- Let go of all practical expectations for immediate results and personal gain.

Then, Act!



Peace Park Hotel  
Dining Room

## When the Heart Roars

The Mind speaks

In words, phrases and sentences.  
Its communications make rational sense  
And produce an unconditional finality.

The Emotions speak

In tones, gestures and touches.  
Their communications emit passion and feeling  
And open the doors of personhood.

But the Heart speaks

With a roar which cuts to the Center of Being.  
Its message comes from the Unknown depths  
And carries neither content nor feeling, only Power.

Usually --

In the intervening silences of everyday living  
The Heart communes with the Mind and the Emotions  
Who translate its perspectives into words and undertones.

But !! When the Heart roars --

Sounds replace words,  
Grimaces replace gestures  
Tears soothe the face and blur the seeing  
And the rhythm of everyday living stops.

In the Silence which follows the Roar

The Mind will find some words  
With which to interpret the sounds to others  
But really only the Power lingers.

Only fools fail to heed the Heart's roar.

[A report from a Mind who has yielded to the roar of the Heart.]

# How to Get A Hug From Balaram Chandany

## I. Deciding that a hug is what you're looking for

Early in each person's journey through life, decisions must be made regarding the direction to be followed and the measures by which success will be determined. The operating structures of every dimension of society have established nomenclatures of promotions and parameters of office furnishings which identify one's progress toward the apex of their organizational charts. Educational institutions have created disciplines and degrees each with their own learning curriculum and testing process. Political and social organizations in each nation, community and field of interest have promoted honors, awards and titles to be bestowed on individuals who have achieved excellence in particular arenas.

In addition to these lofty benchmarks of achievements in the limelight of society, individuals at the local day-to-day goings-on level of society read the heart-spirit of those they encounter and pass judgement on what they see. Those of merit in this intuitive evaluation of the human depths earn hearty hugs and the knowledge of a life-long bonding of human friendship. Setting out to achieve this bonding often requires forgoing other measures of social success.

## II. Gaining stature in Balaram's eyes

Balaram Chandany typifies many of those at the grassroots level of society who read the heart-spirits of those who pass their doorsteps. Balaram owns and operates the larger of two adjacent grocery stores in the heart of Chikhale Village, a place where 1,500 people live at the end of a bumpy road which wanders 2 Km. east from the old Mumbai-Pune highway. From behind the counter of his store, he sells all sorts of food, candies and household supplies to the men, women, and children of his village. Day after day, he patiently measures out sugar in 100 g. packets, sells cigarettes one at a time and carries the villagers' rice to market in his bullock cart. He also plays an influential role in the decision-making process within the village and teaches the Hindu scriptures to interested learners in the local temple. Most importantly, he watches and listens.

Chikhale Village is not served by public transportation. Some people come to visit the village in their chauffeur driven autos; Balaram watches for those who walk. Business, industry, and politics seem to be run by the men; Balaram notices those who heed, honor and include the women and children in their counsel, planning and attention. Though he realizes the need to take care of the success of his own business, Balaram puts large amounts of energy into serving his community; he looks for others who likewise devote their energies to the life of service. Being a practical person, Balaram is interested in performance more than ideals, words and concepts -- he looks for people who produce. When he sees people like this, he remembers.

### III. Returning to Balaram's store

Balaram knows that his community can run its own affairs. While he watches and listens to those who come to help, he also knows that these people must go on their way. Furthermore, he respects the long-term commitment, the life-long decision to care, which cannot be embodied in a one-month work camp or a six-month service visit. So, one must leave Chikhale, travel to other points of service – and then return.

Upon returning to Balaram's store no words are necessary; the eyes tell the whole story, the hearts report. Then you get a giant hug from Balaram Chandany and two lives are profoundly affirmed, and the emotional power lingers for days and nothing else really matters any more – ever.



Balaram Chandany in his home, 2010

## ... And an Angel Came



During one 6:00 am morning walk from the Chikhale School in 2011 to the bridge over the seasonal river, my four associates (see photo left), each faculty or staff of the school, explained to me that they always taught the students in their classes that God is everywhere – in each person, in the plants and in the animals and stones. Among us, we affirmed to each other through a combination of English, Marathi and sign language that God had many expressions in the various religious traditions but that these were not different gods but rather particular attempts to describe in human terms what could not be fully expressed in language or symbol.

The effectiveness of the Ashram's faculty became apparent to me on the third day of my first residential week in Chikhale. I had lived in the village for 2 years in the 1980's and had returned frequently to renew old acquaintances. This trip, I had been invited back to the school to serve as a consultant to the science faculty and, in particular, to reopen the computer lab and establish an electronic communication link between the Chikhale School and a high school in the US. The 11 students in the upper class school in the US had prepared 1-page essays and sent them to me in an email. The challenge in Chikhale was more complicated – the computer room was unfinished, the 11 donated computers had not been tested, none of the students had any substantial word processing experience and most were reluctant to speak to me in English despite repeated prodding by the faculty and school leadership.

Monday's conversation with the students was cordial but strained. They all said they were interested in participating but had a difficult time just listing 10 words about the subject at hand. They were a long way from writing papers that could be shared. Of the 12 computers, 6 would not start at all, each for a different reason. I was hopeful that the other 6 could be salvage for the student's use.

When the students returned to my meeting space on Tuesday, several had completed their essay and the others assured me that they would have theirs done the next day. They had become excited about the prospect of typing on a computer and assured me that if the machines were working, they would have their reports typed by the time I left the village on Thursday evening. I told them that if they got their work done early, I would let them use my digital camera to take photos to illustrate their papers.

Since we didn't need the time together to work on their writing, I showed them the booklet that I used to promote the Global Grassroots Education Project among my friends in the US ([www.EmergingEcology.org/GlobalClassroom](http://www.EmergingEcology.org/GlobalClassroom)). We also talked about the previous times I'd been to the school over the past 2 decades. In leafing through the book, Shubhangi (photo right, taken in 2007) found a picture of herself taken during one of my earlier visits when I taught the students how to draw a perfect pentagon with just a compass and a straight edge.

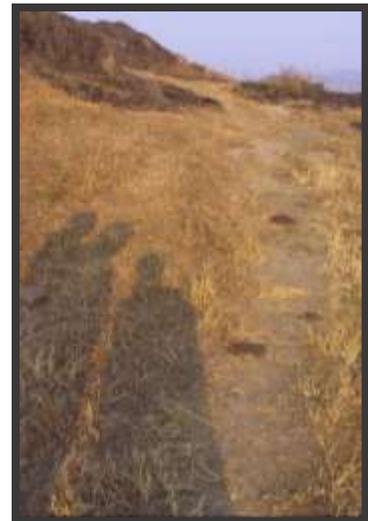


At the beginning of the day, Wednesday's work seemed to be all downhill, plug in the computers and let the students type in groups of three. Working with a new-found friend on the Ashram staff, I had organized electricity to three computers in a make-shift space. Mid-morning, when the power came back on, two of the computers started up as expected, the third had a faulty mouse. Five hours later, I had torn apart all of the remaining computers looking for combinations of parts to make a third machine that would work. Between dusty, corroded USB ports and non-standard booting processes I was unable to get a third machine to meet even the minimal requirements for the project. As a certified computer engineer with a college degree in the field, I had to admit defeat. I was tired, hot, frustrated and dirty.

After taking a 15-minute rest-break in my nearby flat, I returned to get the students started in the typing process. The faculty and I agreed on the outlines of a plan to orient the students to their first computer document and the first two students sat down to begin – about ½ day later than we had wanted to begin with only 2/3 of the resources we had hoped for in a room smaller than we had planned for. I apologized to the students for my poor attitude and assured them that they were not the cause of my frustration. Nonetheless, my frustration and tiredness could not be disguised to the students or faculty.

But, in Chikhale seemingly everyone knows how to care of each other at the deeper levels of the human spirit as well as the practical needs for chai and food. The faculty took over the orientation of the students to the computers, though most of them had only learned the day before; and an angel took care of me.

Shubhangi remembered that I had offered the students the use of my camera and asked if she could use it to take pictures of her village, Chikhale. I showed her how to use the digital camera; then she invited me to come along with her and her friend. I refused initially but the faculty and other students in the area encouraged me to go. Thus, Shubhangi, Karishma and I set out to photograph the buildings, surroundings and people of Chikhale. She even took a photo of our shadows photographing buffalo pies on the trail up the Chikhale Hill.



Three hours and 35 pictures later, I was reinvigorated and reaffirmed. I had made two new friends and hugged long-time colleagues and Shubhangi and Karishma gained some insight into why I so love to walk the pathways of Chikhale.

I passed Shubhangi on her way to school the next morning [Thursday] and thanked her again for taking me around Chikhale the day before. I asked if I could take her photo and she posed in the morning sun (photo at left). We both knew that I knew what an angel looks like in Chikhale.

By 4:30 on Thursday, all 11 essays were in electronic form and transferred to my laptop and the requisite group photo had been taken by the pond. The students returned to their homes and I headed up the ghats for a weekend with my friends in Pune.

## When Hearts Communicate

The day had been 30 years in the making, but on October 14, 2010 four men from diverse cultural backgrounds shared with each other in a way understood by all human beings – the language of the heart – that each of their lives had been profoundly blessed; and the ever-silent soul of the cosmos rejoiced.

Thirty years previously, in remote villages around the globe international teams of committed extra-nationals joined with leaders and residents of villages and neighborhoods to create demonstrations of hope – signs that local people could shape their own destiny and find fulfilled living even in the seemingly hopeless places where they were living. Chikhale Village, located at the end of a bumpy dirt road 2 km off of the old Mumbai-Pune highway, was one of the early participants in this endeavor. When the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) team arrived in 1978, the various factions of the village were frequently engaged in violent conflict and many of the residents suffered from debilitating naru worm infestation which came from the village well.

Over the ensuing years, countless people including – Balaram Chandany, Mr. Gangraker, Bandu Patankar and Nelson Stover – had had a hand in seeing that Chikhale Village and each of its citizens survived and thrived into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. On this one October morning they paused to acknowledge each other's particular contribution and in so doing affirm the deep significance of each of their lives – to themselves, to each other and to those new and old friends with whom they shared the special moments.

Two days previously, Nelson – then President of the Board of ICA International – had come back to Chikhale to visit the school for children from remote tribal villages which now fills the training center whose foundation had been laid in the early 1980's. After a morning meeting with the school's faculty, he took a walk through the village in which he and his wife had lived for two years during the early phases of the school's construction. The school's English teacher, Rajendra Garje joined him on a walk through the village's narrow streets with a now visible water pipeline to many of the homes. They stopped by Balaram's kirana shop, one of the village's grocery stores. Like friends who saw each other daily, Balaram and Nelson greeted each other warmly and recalled to Rajendra the lessons they had learned one Divali holiday when they sorted out how to resolve the outstanding grocery bill which Nelson and his friends had accumulated. Balaram offered a cold drink from his shop's refrigerator but refused his money when Nelson offered to pay. Nelson asked if it would be OK if he returned in the next few days to take Balaram's photo and a commitment was made.

The next day, Nelson and Rajendra arranged for a vehicle so that they and four other members of the school faculty could visit two of the more accessible villages from which the students at the Chikhale Ashram Shalla School came. On the way to the end of the road at the foot of the mountain, Rajendra recommended stopping to see the dam and resulting lake which provides the water supply for the town of Panvel. As the entourage

headed out along the levee, they noticed two women taking in the view. Conversations in English and Marathi among the various people concluded that the American woman and her new-found Indian friend shared many of the environmental sensitivities and passions for grassroots empowerment that Nelson and the school faculty shared. Kara and Neha agreed to come with Nelson on the following day to visit the Chikhale School.

After visiting the classrooms and kitchen of the school, a party of four – Kara, Neha, Nelson and Rajendra – set out to visit the Village of Chikhale. The group paused by the pond to observe the intricacies of the village blacksmith as he forged the hand-held cycles needed for the forthcoming rice harvest. Nelson turned around to acknowledge the universal welcome-and-come-hither signal from the old man waving from the door of his grandfather's home. Mr. Gangraker, now 91 years old, trundled from his perch in the doorway to the traditional swing in the house's main room. Mr. Gangraker started telling Nera – in Marathi, their common language – the story about how Nelson had helped him get an auto rickshaw for his son at a time when these vehicles were in short supply. Simultaneously, Nelson began recounting to Kara in English – their common language – the same story about how he visited the executives of Bajaj Auto to get them to adjust the distribution schedule on Mr. Gangraker's behalf. Everyone chuckled, and then cried when four beings communicated in the universal language of the human heart, and they each realized that the two men were telling the same story in their native tongues. Small acts, remembered over decades and shared with new-found friends, confirmed the never-ending validity that the structures of society can be bent – ever so slightly – so that each person can be given the chance to live a full and productive life.

Nela and Mr. Gangraker (see photo at right) discovered that he knew her grandfather and then proceeded to tell her about the details of his ancestral residence in which they were now sitting. After a brief tour of the house, the crew set off through the narrow village streets to Balaram's store.



Though Nelson had visited Balaram on many of his previous visits, his photo collection included none of Balaram. The four were invited in to Balaram's residence-cum-store and a pensive Balaram sat on the bed in the main room and invited Nelson to sit beside him. In the dim light of the traditional home Nelson took the picture – the memory held in digital form – that he had sought (see photo on page 13). He and Balaram had said all the words that were necessary; in the moments of reflective silence that ensued they communicated the rest of the gratitude that they felt for one another. Balaram related to Nera that his son had left their home 15 months ago and had not been heard from since. Everyone in the room knew that no words in any

language could assuage the pain of Balaram's loss yet, at the level of the heart, gratitude and solace was conveyed from each to all.



Bandu Patankar has spent the past several years transforming his 280-year old ancestral home that has served his family for nine generations into a habitable complex that may survive for the next century. He had just finished doing his morning prayers in front of the 10<sup>th</sup> Century statue of Ganesh which he had refurbished when the team arrived. As they settled into the reception room he changed into his daily garb. His wife and two daughters joined in the conversation which flowed in English, Marathi and in gestures which require no language. His wife prepared poha which Nelson and Bandu joking agreed was better than that which Bandu had prepared from him during his visit 20 years previously (see recipe on page 25). Kara and Nela, each design professionals,

admired the way in which Bandu and honored the traditional architecture of the building and yet made it livable for decades to come. His daughters shared their own academic successes and hopes for careers as paleontologists and biological researchers. Photo ops abounded as Bandu pointed out the multiple facets of his residential complex (photo above – front row: Bandu, Kara and Nelson, back row: Bandu's daughters). He and Nelson recounted, several times, how they had called to each other during their morning ablutions more than 25 years before. Part of the house in which Nelson had lived still stands – with shuttered windows overlooking Bandu's compound.

Talks of future collaborations abounded among each and all of those who gathered that day in Bandu's village compound. Past adventures on motorcycles and village work parties had laid a foundation of trust and compassion which invited others to join in the history long task of shaping a profound and sustainable future for Planet Earth.

Once in a while the barriers which separate genders, races and ages dissolve. In those rare moments, each life is affirmed, gratitude which transcends words heals wounds whether visible or hidden and hope which exceeds any cynicism and despair empowers future actions and enlivens the deepest realms of existence. Sometimes, in moments like these even grown men cry when their hearts have matters to share for which no words in any human language suffice.

## I Will Sit

I will sit at the doorway  
Through which the Present  
Passes into the Future.

I will wait – as long as needed –  
To ensure that my compassion informs  
The unfolding of a sustainable tomorrow for future generations.

As long as economic enterprises  
Are consumed with meeting only their financial bottom lines and  
Thus are unable to meet the needs of the poor and the marginalized;  
I will sit and wait.

As long as individuals and families  
Are preoccupied with collecting material possessions  
Which are doomed to fail to provide deep, life-giving fulfillment;  
I will sit and wait.

As long as governments and institutions  
Continue to make decisions and policies as if  
The natural world doesn't really count;  
I will sit and wait.

And then,  
When the humdrum, the mundane and the short-sighted  
Fail to produce their promised results,  
I will act with steadfast conviction  
To promote a world in which each person, plant and particle benefits from  
Sustainable Environmental Practices,  
Participatory Social Processes and an  
Inclusive Profound Spirituality.

## In Her Honor

In mid-1982, when my wife, Elaine and I arrived in Chikhale with our few belongings loaded in the ICA's Mahindra Jeep with a Peugeot engine, we brought the second motorized vehicle into the village. The ICA's 15-person staff comprised of Indians and extra-nationals lived in a rather large house loaned to them by a wealthy Brahmin family that had moved out of the village into nearby towns. The Brahmin houses were located on higher ground than the main part of the village. Bandu Patankar lived in his family home next door – he owned the first motorized vehicle in the village, a motorcycle. These houses had their own open wells for water and private outdoor toilets.

In the heart of the village, Balaram Chandany had his grocery store and personal residence. All the water for the houses in this part of the village was carried back from the main community well near the pond. The narrow streets of the compact village thrived with activity as workers went to their fields and children played their various games.

Since the ICA began its work with the Chikhale Village, the staff had gotten all its food from Balaram's store. He had a bullock cart which he often used to bring bags of rice, dahl, vegetables and other food supplies from the markets and shops in Panvel. For large orders, the food was delivered directly to the pantry of the ICA house. Balaram kept a ledger of the costs of the goods and the ICA paid against its bill monthly after the staff salaries were disbursed. While there some balance often remained at the end of the month, the good-faith process continued month after month. The staff maintained a healthy diet, Balaram covered his basic operating costs and the village benefited from the committed assistance from the ICA's team of village development workers. While, for technical purposes, the Indian nationals were the official leaders of the ICA in Chikhale, in the eyes of the village Elaine and I, as extra-nationals, played a symbolic leadership role.



Nelson At Balaram's Store (2015)

Elaine and I had lived in Mumbai for the previous year and we were generally aware of the basic flow of the Hindu religious calendar. We knew that Diwali, which comes in early November, forms the centerpiece of the annual cycle of festivals. Schools take holidays, shops and offices close and many of our Indian staff would be going home for extended vacations. As Diwali approached this year, our staff started asking me what I knew about Diwali, I told them what I knew about the details of the celebration and the reason for the holiday; sometimes they added a bit of details. As the days passed, the question turned to "Balaram wants to know what you know about Diwali?" Pretty soon it became clear that I should not try to play like I understood Diwali at all. Eventually, I changed my response and asked one of the more bi-

lingual members of our staff to go with me to allow Balaram to explain Diwali to me.

At the appointed time, my translator and I walked through the narrow streets down to Balaram's shop. He politely invited me into his home where his wife served tasty tea. After some polite formalities during which we both acknowledged the good work that the other was doing, Balaram began to turn the conversation to the upcoming Diwali celebration. He reminded me that Diwali was the celebration of the birth of Laxmi, the goddess of wealth. He and I both agreed that wealth was a good thing, that we both needed money to maintain health and wellness as well as to insure prosperity for the entire village. By giving honor to Laxmi, we would be asking for her blessing for the year ahead. This, too, would be advantageous for everyone involved.

Balaram then helped me understand that Laxmi really didn't like debts. We both agreed that debts didn't promote wealth and I could see that big debts would certainly not be a way to honor Laxmi. Balaram then suggested that in order to honor Laxmi, he was committed to ensuring that I (the ICA) would not owe him anything after Diwali. We talked around this matter indirectly several times. It was becoming clear to me that what he meant was that either we would pay the balance due before Diwali or he would write the balance off. When Balaram sensed that I was getting the gist of the conversation, he assured me that he was looking forward to continuing to provide grocery supplies to the ICA in the coming years and that a line of credit could be made available to handle the ICA's cashflow as needed.

The mood of the conversation lightened, his wife brought another cup of tea for everyone and I thanked him for his service to the community. I had learned an important lesson about Diwali and about collegiality. By working with the ICA financial team, the full bill to Balaram was paid within a few days and Balaram and I have remained friends for life. Laxmi has continued to bless us both.



Laxmi now has a special place in my home thanks to my dear friend Shakuntala Jadhav who gave me a Laxmi carving in 1999. At that time, I was at the height of my computer career and working to provide a stable foundation for my family's long-term future. Shakuntala thought that a perpetual reminder of the importance of fiscal responsibility would be important to me at that point of my journey. We went goddess statue shopping during my trip to India to explore the economic feasibility of the computer company for which I was working setting up a business venture in India. This never materialized, but Laxmi continues her watchful vigil.

Shakuntala, Laxmi and Krishna

## The Green Scooter

The little boy headed out for a day of adventure with his daddy and their foreign guest. They stopped at several places to visit mutual friends of the two adults. In some places the little boy played with friends; otherwise he occupied himself by exploring the sites around him while the older men talked about matters beyond the boy's comprehension.

At the end of the day, they arrived at his cousin's house for a long-awaited visit by the international guest. While the adults talked, shared stories, and dined on tasty snacks and hot chai, the little boy played with his niece. Though younger than he, she had a substantial collection of toys for all sorts of activities. The little boy started riding around the flat on her green scooter; she chose the rocking horse on wheels. The two enjoyed each other's company and eventually figured out that the boy could tow the little girl around the apartment by pulling on the string attached to the front of the horse. This arrangement delighted them both as they careened from room to room. After a visit to the apartment complex's garden, the time to head for home had arrived.

While the adults in the car's front seat continued their various conversations of the day, the little boy sat alone in the back seat. Afternoon traffic slowed their homeward journey as the day began to grow longer. Then the little boy asked his dad to buy him a green scooter. Knowing that the boy had his own scooter, the father refused. Then the boy started to cry, and cry. His plaintive cries pleaded for a green scooter, nothing else would suffice – not chocolate ice cream not an electronic helicopter. Only a green scooter could fill the boy's heart-felt need. But the green scooter never arrived, and the crying subsided when they arrived home and the boy relaxed in his mother's embrace.

Then the foreign guest reflected – what was it that the boy REALLY wanted but had no words to express. The playful relationship with his younger niece whom he had kissed goodbye earlier in the afternoon had impressed upon his heart the pleasure of living in a cooperative relationship with another person. When this ended, a relational hole remained in his being. Unfortunately, by focusing on the external form (the green scooter on which he rode) instead of the human interaction which the riding together fostered, the little boy missed the opportunity to fill the real hole by relating positively to his father and their international guest.

On further reflection, how many people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century try to fill the holes of meaning in their being by acquiring newer and fancier material goods? While this approach does fuel the global economic engine, it usually fails to instill meaning and provide lasting happiness in individual lives. Thus, the little boy's tears carried with them the pain and anguish of a generation advised by media moguls and advertising gurus who find themselves perpetually dissatisfied with their cluttered lives full of possessions but devoid of close, meaningful personal relationships; relationships which alone open the doors to profound awareness and lasting sustenance. ... Several years later he shared chocolate donuts (while mothers and wives weren't watching) and lively conversation with his international guest at a festive wedding (photo right) while meaning and understanding flowed across cultures and generations.



## Source of the Problem

In 1968, my wife, Elaine, and I joined the staff of the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA). Over the ensuing years we lived in Australia, Belgium, Egypt and India as well as several places in the eastern United States. A major part of the work of the ICA focused on conducting grassroots demonstrations of community revitalization. These demonstrations showed the power and capacity of local people to resolve their own problems by working together. We were attracted to the ICA because its programs focused on improving the lives and living conditions of some of the world's least advantaged populations.

In 1991, when Elaine and I were considering where to live and work for the next phase of our lives, two incidents from our time in India and Egypt played heavily on our minds. In addition to a growing awareness of the importance of meeting the ecological challenges of the Planet, we began to become aware that the consumptive life style patterns and global economic systems of our native place were a part of the problem we were trying to resolve in the villages.

Remembering the two events below, we returned to the United States in 1991. We moved to Greensboro, North Carolina and have continued working on matters related to ecological awareness and lifestyles which promote a mutually enhancing relationship between the people and Planet.

### **Powdered Milk**

In 1982, Elaine and I moved from Mumbai (then Bombay) to Chikhale Village to be on the staff of the Chikhale Cluster Human Development Project. Though we only moved about 40 miles in distance, we traveled back in time from the hustling urban pace of Mumbai to the slower, simpler pace of a farming community using mostly manual labor augmented by bullock. The village of Chikhale was participating in the ICA's global demonstration showcasing the possibility of grassroots community development. For centuries, the residents of Chikhale village had survived by practicing traditional methods of rice farming during the annual monsoons. They supplemented their basic diets and subsistence incomes with a second crop of small scale vegetable farming when adequate water was still available after the monsoon.

The Chikhale project began in 1979 with a week-long participatory planning event that involved the entire community working with a team of ICA consultants that included international experts and Indian professionals. One of the first endeavors of the Chikhale project focused on improving the roadway into the village. Chikhale lies about a mile off of the main Bombay-Pune highway. Before the project began, entrance to the village was effectively limited to foot traffic, motorcycles and bullock carts. With the improved road, cars, trucks and auto rickshaws could travel – slowly – to the village.

By the time Elaine and I arrived in Chikhale, the ICA's staff included four Americans, two Canadians and 20 Indian nationals most of whom had grown up in Maharashtrian villages and had been trained by the ICA to conduct village development projects. Our team owned a jeep which was the only four-wheeled vehicle in the village; our neighbor and another Brahmin family had motorcycles. During this period, no one else in the village of 1,000 people owned, or had regular access, to a motorized vehicle.

During our first year in Chikhale, Elaine worked with the village women on issues related to women's empowerment and children's health and preschool-level education. Most of my efforts were related to improving the community infrastructure – obtaining running water and improving the roads and bridges – and expanding economic activity within the village.

During the 1979 planning consultation, the men had envisioned establishing a small dairy so that they could collect and sell milk. They knew how to tend water buffalo and there was common land that could be used for grazing. The kind of water buffalo that thrive in this area can produce high-quality, nutritious milk. In working with the men, we had figured out most of the details and funding for expanding local milk production. The one piece that eluded us centered on securing a predictable long-term market. The villagers, themselves, couldn't afford enough milk to support the venture and the children who needed the nutrition couldn't pay for the milk. The cost of building a facility with refrigeration for collecting and storing quantities of milk until it could be collected and trucked into the urban markets made the project no longer financially viable without substantial seed capital which was not readily available.

One particular day, I had a list of visits to make at various locations around Mumbai. My assistant and I decided we would take the jeep in to town so that we could quickly get from one location to another. When Elaine heard that we were taking the jeep into town, she asked if I could stop by Don Bosco Roman Catholic church on our way home. She wanted us to pick up four 50-pound bags of powdered milk which they were giving to charitable organizations helping village children. The place was on our way home, so we agreed. When I got to the parish hall at Don Bosco, we loaded the bags into the jeep. They were each marked, in bold letters, "A gift from the US Government – not for resale".

While I was glad to be helping the children coming to the preschool that Elaine was assisting, I couldn't stop thinking about the powdered milk. The more I worked through what had happened, I realized how unhelpful the process had been. In order to help the American dairy farmers continue to get higher prices for their milk, the US Government used tax-payer money to purchase enough milk to keep the supply limited and the prices up. This extra milk could not be sold in the US, so the government agencies dried the milk and donated it to impoverished countries – like India. Helpful-minded organizations like the Catholic Church arranged for the distribution of the powdered milk to organizations like the Chikhale School. Therefore, since the kids were getting FREE milk, the farmers had no customers.

Thus, the village pre-school children benefited in the short-term, but the long-term dairy industry for all the families in Chikhale was stalled; meanwhile the American dairy industry thrived on artificially high prices. In a highly interrelated world, this represents a difficult choice.

### **Beef for Dinner**

After Elaine and I left India, we moved to Egypt. There we joined the ICA's staff in the subsistence farming village of El Bayad. This was another of the ICA's grassroots human development projects and was located on the west bank of the Nile River about an hour south of Cairo. The staff lived together in a stone compound on the edge of the village. We had a cook that prepared lunch and dinner for the entire staff.

On Sunday evenings, the cook was off duty and everyone organized their own food for dinner. One Saturday, I needed to make a trip into the nearby town of Beni Suif, which was located on the opposite and more prosperous side of the Nile. When Elaine heard I was going, she asked if I would stop and pick up a pound of beef so that we could have a special dinner on the next day. Since I knew where the butcher shop in Beni Suif was located and was aware that he spoke adequate English, I was glad to add the stop to my itinerary.

After the perfunctory pleasantries, the butcher asked me what I needed. I told him that I wanted pound of beef for dinner. He asked if I wanted fresh Egyptian beef or frozen European beef. "How much different is the price?", I asked. He told me the European beef was one-half the price of the Egyptian beef.

While I don't remember which I chose, I do remember pondering how this could be possible. How could the European beef, which was frozen and shipped hundreds of miles, be half the price of the fresh beef from the nearby farmers? Then I remembered the powdered milk scenario from Bombay. In the same way, the European Union (EU), in order to protect the farmers there, bought beef and froze it to keep it off the European market's grocery shelves. Faced with the dilemma of what to do with excess food, the EU helped poor people in countries like Egypt.

But the Egyptian farmers, then, faced the same problem as the Indian dairy farmers. How can they start a profitable business when their market prices are undercut with cheap imports of nonetheless excellent quality?

## Background

These pieces were written over a period of nearly three decades. The dates and circumstances surrounding each poem or essay provide a context for the reader.

**Acting Before Action** (November 2011): Each morning while enjoying breakfast at the Peace Park Hotel, Nelson observed the hotel staff person prepare the holy spaces in the restaurant and throughout the hotel. This action, upon reflection, is Acting Before the Action of the day. During the 2011 trip, Nelson spent a month in India by himself working on launching the Global Classroom.

**And an Angel Came** (2011): Reflections on the events at the end of a month's work to establish the beginnings of the Global Classroom.

**Bandu's Village Poha** (1991): Bandu and Nelson spent a night together, alone, in Bandu's village home. Bandu prepared poha and Nelson took notes – and had followed the receipt since then.

**God is Great** (November 2011): After showing the poem, *Life Is Good* (see below), to Vijay, Vijay remarked "God is Great". The next morning wrote a poem on that theme. The two poems have the same structure.

**How to Get a Hug from Balaram Chandany** (1993): Nelson and Balaram share common spirit and passion but lack the verbiage to articulate this. In fact, none is needed. Nelson visits Balaram's store each time he travels to India.

**In Her Honor** (2020): Narrates an event that occurred during 1984 and events that followed. Written during documentation prepared later.

**I Will Sit** (2011): During all of Nelson's trips, a lot of time was spent sitting, waiting for the next scheduled event or the arrival of the next person to visit. Much of this time was spent in Vijay's office.

**Life Is Good** (November 2011): During Nelson's trip to Panvel and Chikhale in 2011, as most trips, he stayed at the Peace Park Hotel. Watching life go by out of the window reminded him that, truly, Life is Good.

**Source of the Problem** (1992): Nelson's report of events that prompted he and his wife to return to the US.

**The Green Scooter** (2011): During Nelson's trips to India, he often travels up to Talegaon to visit ICA India's Environmental Education Center. His friend, Shankar Jadhav manages the center. On one trip Shankar and Nelson made several visits with Shankar's young son traveling along. Nine years later, Nelson met Aditya again at a wedding celebration.

**When Hearts Communicate** (2010): A story about old friends and new acquaintances sharing common experiences.

**When the Heart Roars** (1995): The awe that fills the hall when the Chikhale students gather to greet Nelson and those who travel with him usually becomes overwhelming. This poem captures the experience of trying to speak in this kind of situation.

## Bandu's Village Poha

(Serves 6)

### Ingredients:

|                            |                        |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| 2 cups thin poha           | 1 teaspoon gram masala |
| 1½ cups raw peanuts        | ¼ teaspoon cumin       |
| 2 onions (diced)           | diced ginger root      |
| 4 tbl. cooking oil         | 3 tbl. water           |
| 1 teaspoon minced garlic   | ½ teaspoon salt        |
| 1 teaspoon turmeric powder | 2 tomatoes (diced)     |

### Preparation:

1. Measure poha flakes into large bowl and moisten by dropping water from fingertips. See that all flakes are moist but leave no water standing in the bowl.
2. Measure peanuts into large skillet and dry roast over medium heat. Stir as necessary to prevent undue burning.
3. Peel and chop onions while the peanuts roast. Remove skin from ginger root piece and cut ginger into fine pieces.
4. Remove the peanuts from the skillet and store in bowl or measuring cup. Put the oil in the skillet and stir in onions, spices, garlic and ginger so that spices and oil coat all onion pieces. Lower heat and stir occasionally as needed.
5. Dice tomatoes if using fresh ones, otherwise open can of diced tomatoes and drain excess liquid.
6. When onions, spices and garlic are thoroughly cooked, quickly stir in moistened poha flakes so that all flakes are coated with spiced oil. Add water and stir in.
7. Stir in salt, if desired, and cook a few minutes. Stir in tomatoes and peanuts and continue to cook over low heat until tomatoes are warm.

### Serving suggestions:

- Serve warm with banana.
- Designed to accompany masala chai.
- May be refrigerated and warmed in a microwave oven.

Based on cooking experiences by Bandu Patankar, Chikhale Village, Maharashtra, India. Documented by F. Nelson Stover, Greensboro, North Carolina during his visit to Bandu's home.

## Spanning Three Decades



Left: The Chikhale  
Training Center, 1986

Below: Nelson and  
Balaram at the Chikhale  
rickshaw stand, 2016

