

## Facts About the Attack on the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF) by Sabrang Communications and the Forum of Indian Leftists (FOIL)

The India Development and Relief Fund [1] is a volunteer charitable organization which raises money in the United States for projects in India. It has been in operation since 1989, and has a record of exemplary service. IDRF's 2001 fundraising [2] of roughly \$2M is still a small fraction of total funds sent to India by the 2 million Indians and Indian-Americans in the USA. However, IDRF has come to be considered the most successful and *effective* of Indian-American charitable organizations.

For over five years now, while IDRF volunteers were spending their time helping Indians, the Forum of Indian Leftists [3] and their associates have been targeting this organization for attacks. This has culminated in the November 2002 release of a "comprehensive 91-page report" [4] on the alleged funneling of IDRF money to entities inciting communal riots and persecution of minorities in India. The report is very explicit in its "single, simple conclusion" [4]: "IDRF funds hate".

The choreographed release of the report, media interviews, articles, petitions, and threats to corporate supporters of IDRF, has brought much publicity. It has also brought a massive, spontaneous reaction of support for IDRF from fair-minded people who have some knowledge of IDRF and its attackers. The breadth of this support says it all – it is as diverse as India, including quite a few supporters who are politically and philosophically opposed to VHP/RSS – but respect IDRF and abhor Sabrang/FOIL's tactics. At this writing, there were two internet-based Petitions. Their progress is shown in Figure 1.

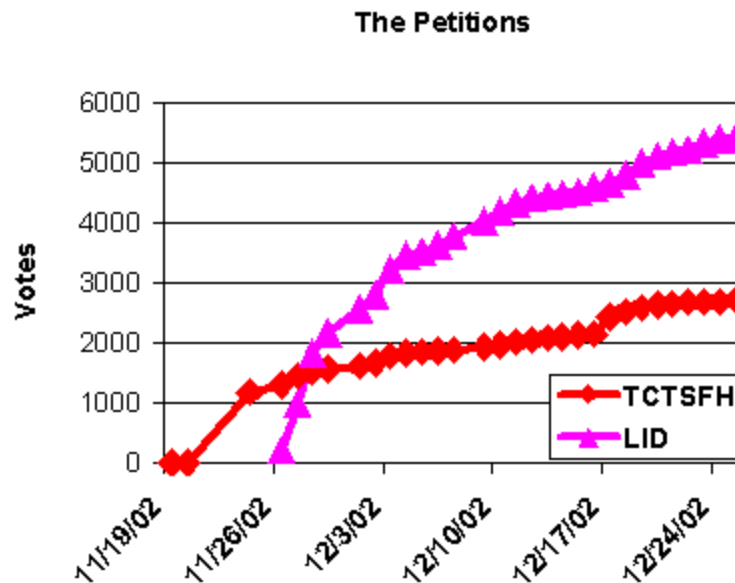


Figure 1: Progress of support for the two Petitions developed on the Internet regarding IDRF. "TCTSFH" is "The Campaign to Stop Funding Hate"[5]. "LID" is "Let India Develop" [6].

Sabrang/ FOIL's Petition by The Campaign to Stop Funding Hate (TCSFH) - asking the US Government and corporations to ban IDRF, has gathered over 2700 signatures [5]. Started a week later, the Petition to Let India Develop, asking US corporations to not be cowed by the threats from Sabrang/FOIL, has gathered over twice that many [6]. Below we briefly consider why people are rejecting Sabrang/FOIL's organized labor of hate.

Sabrang/FOIL start their report with the words: "*Hindutva, the Hindu supremacist ideology*". On page 4, they explain this more clearly: "*Hindutva – which translates literally to Hinduness or Hinduhood*". In one sweeping generalization they paint 800 million Hindus as supremacist ideologues and assume that Hindus in America have nothing but sinister intent in donating their time and hard-earned money to help people in their native land!

Those of us who reject this extreme bigotry know that there is nothing illegal, immoral or unethical in:

- a) IDRF being a charitable organization run by people who happen to be Hindus.
- b) IDRF accepting donations from a population which is probably 80% Hindu, like India.
- c) IDRF carefully selecting trusted individuals and organizations, approved and authorized under Indian law and with a long history of public service, to oversee the disbursement of donated funds, and submitting an initial list of such organizations for US Internal Revenue Service review.
- d) IDRF then expanding this list to include more organizations as donors' confidence and preferences expand.
- e) Recipient organizations disbursing the money carefully through trusted grassroots-level social workers, who happen to be deeply religious people themselves.
- f) IDRF ensuring that the end recipients are the intended recipients – tribal people, underprivileged children including orphans, and families left destitute by terrorist attacks and natural disasters.

Sabrang/FOIL tries with laughable ardor to twist each of the above into a sinister-sounding move. We wish to forcefully point out IDRF's record in making no distinction based on religion or sect in its work. That is, IDRF has equally cheerfully helped, and will continue to help, Muslim, Christian, Hindu or any other underprivileged people, including tribal people, Hindu or not. The Sabrang/FOIL report makes one of its many glaring misrepresentations in this regard.

**IDRF's activities are published openly on the internet, unlike FOIL who have rushed to close parts of their website to non-members following uncomfortable attention.** IDRF's accounts are independently audited. Below, we give you ten examples of Sabrang/FOIL's "standards" of truthfulness.

### **Accusations versus Reality: Ten Examples**

Sabrang/FOIL use an interesting nomenclature to pigeonhole IDRF-funded institutions into categories with two dimensions: ideology of the organization (i.e. "Religious", assumed to be RSS-affiliated, Hindu/Jain etc) and the main activity it undertakes (i.e. 'e' for "Hinduization/Tribal/Educational" and "rel" for religious.) Having categorized the funding thus, they arrive at their conclusion: 83% of the organizations are "RSS-affiliated", and 69% of the funding goes to "Hinduization". Sensible people would have interpreted this "finding" of 69% being used to benefit underprivileged, allegedly non-Hindu Indians as proof that IDRF helps minorities regardless of religious quotas! Below we examine some of these classifications.

**1. Miraj Medical Center** is in the "Religious" category, and its main activity is "welfare/health care". "Religious"? True enough, but only the curious reader would bother to discover [7,8] that "*.. the Miraj Medical Center, affiliated with the **Church of North India**, is the only fully comprehensive health care entity in a 150 mile radius...Ref. [7 &8 ] are the websites of the **Presbyterian Church, USA**, and the Church of North India, respectively.*

**2. Jnana Prabodhini** An unpronounceable name to some people outside India, to be sure, but one which translates roughly to "Knowledge Awakener" – nothing sinister about that, to those literate in Hindi, which most North Indians speak better than English. Jnana Prabodhini receives R rating in the Sabrang/FOIL scheme of certification. Its main activity is 'e'. That is, "Hinduization/tribal/education".

Sponsors of Jnana Prabodhini projects [9] include a broad spectrum – agencies of the Government of India, major corporations including Kirloskar Co. Ltd., ASHA and AID. Sandeep Pandey's ASHA, an organization endorsed by FOIL, funds Jnana Prabodhini! See [10], the American website of "ASHA". AID which also funds Jnana Prabodhini is a leading light [11] of the "Narmada Bachao Andolan" ("Save-the-River-Narmada Front") and is an associate of famous novelist Arundhati Roy, a virulent critic of the "RSS".

The following is from a message posted by user Vijn at the Bharat-Rakshak Forum [12] on 25 November 2002: "*One of the organisations listed as a recipient of 2000/01 funds (\$22,935) on the IDRF web page is Jnana Prabodhini, Sholapur, Maharashtra. This organisation is known in the Pune/Solapur region (and to me, personally) to be an exemplary educational and social service institution of a high standard and proven integrity - the kind that I'd want my kids to go to.. This organisation does pay (in my humble opinion: due) attention to Indian culture, language and philosophy. However it is up to modern standards in every way: at least one (and probably every one) of their schools is Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)-affiliated.... - Aarohi Vijn". See [13] for the school website.*

**3. The International Center for Cultural Studies, Nagpur**, is also R-rated. It is also classified as being into "Hinduization". ICCS has established enough credibility with Maoris of New Zealand to be running joint programs with them, according to the New Zealand website [14]. "*Hinduizing" Maoris ?*

**4. Arpana Research & Charitable Trust** is another IDRF beneficiary. Sabrang/FOIL classifies Arpana itself as "Hindu/Jain" and its activity as "religious." What does it actually do? Fighting AIDS, among other things [15]. According to the "FOLIO", published by "The Hindu" (despite the name, one of the most determinedly "secular" of Indian newspapers) recognizes Arpana to be a healthcare NGO [16]. The Financial Express [17] tells us that Arpana has won a World Health Organization award. Arpana too is funded by AID, the organization associated with Ms. Arundhati Roy [18].

**5. Vikas Bharati Bishnupur.** R-rated. Allegedly into "Hinduization" of tribals. Other funding for this project comes from the Mahamana Malaviya Mission [19], started by alumni of Benares Hindu University (BHU) – a major university established during the days of the British Empire, and site of one of the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology. Madanmohan Malaviya was a prominent scholar and founder of BHU. Office-bearers of Vikas Bharati include the Vice-Chancellor of Benares Hindu University – a Patron. The President is Justice Giridhar Malaviya, formerly of Allahabad High Court. The Vice-President is Ramesh Chandra, ex. Executive Director, The Times of India, one of India's most prestigious English language newspapers.

**6. Swami Vivekananda Medical Mission** is classified as an RSS entity – receiving IDRF funds. Awards won by this organization include one from the American College of Chest Physicians [20].

**7. "Atma Darshan Yogashram"** is declared to be a Hindu organization, engaged in "religious activity". In reality, it is a Yoga center.

**8. Satya Vishnu Charitable Trust and Muni Seva Ashram** are declared to be Hindu organizations. This is what the website "Baroda-online" [21] says about Muni Seva Ashram: *"Muni Seva Ashram's founder Anuben Thakkar, 58, passed away on 18th December (2001). Originally from a village in the Anjar District of Kutch, she came to Goraj village near Waghodia, in 1978, at the age of 35. Goraj then was a more or less barren area and Anuben built her seva ashram there in determined bits and pieces. The ashram's modern hospital caters to the people of over 100 villages in the vicinity. The needy are provided subsidised or free medical treatment. The ashram houses the Arogya Mandir, a school, a creche, a home for the elderly, a home for mentally retarded women, 'Gau Mandir' and a vocational training centre. It is a hub of welfare activities where the needy find work and food. The Rs. 500 million super speciality Kailash Cancer Hospital is fast nearing completion. The institutions are spread over an area of more than 15 acres and employ a staff of 210. Anuben had a remarkable ability to promote the ashram's activities in India and abroad. She thus attracted the needed funding as well as the necessary specialist persons to work on the ashram's various projects. The trustees have decided that the administration of the ashram will now be handed over to Dr. Vikram Patel, who has worked closely with Anuben for the past 18 years."*

**9. Krishi Prayog Parivar** (rough translation: Agricultural Techniques Club) receives an "R-rating". According to [22], a newspaper feature article on how the internet is bringing solutions to Indian farmers, this is a sample of what they do: *"Farmers in Karnataka switched over to non-chemical, organic farming after an NGO, Krishi Prayog Parivar, highlighted the benefits of such an approach on the society news group."*

**10. Ambedkar Vaidyakeeya Pratishthan** (Ambedkar Medical Establishment). Sabrang /FOIL rating: "R". Activity: "e" – religious conversion. Dr. Ambedkar, world renowned jurist was one of the fathers of the Indian Constitution. He was a passionate advocate of the interests of underprivileged, so-called "low-caste" people – the people whom Mahatma Gandhi named "Harijans" or "The Lord's People". They are Hindus. The following unsolicited letter was received on Dec. 1, 2002 from a gentleman who has been there.

*"Ambedkar Vaidyakeeya Pratishthan was the idea of a group of fresh medical graduates who wanted to do something different from jumping into the murky world of private medical practice. They started from a little hospital about 15 years ago. Their key principle was that all of them will draw fixed minimal salary. All other income from their hospital would help towards buying new equipment and subsidising medical care. The first time I visited them was in 1992. The two subsequent visits were in 1998 and 1999. They now have an impeccable reputation in Aurangabad for quality care at affordable cost. They were also planning to move to a new site and probably, the IDRF funding went towards that. What impressed me most however was the work in the community. I remember visiting an outreach centre called Lahuji Vastaad Kendra (I remember it because of the curious name which actually is of a Harijan (low caste) hero!). All the doctors are required to visit these centres once a week. It was a tidy little structure in an otherwise ram shackle Harijan colony. A primary school functions from the same premises which also doubles as community meeting place in evenings. I also recollect visiting a nearby Women's sewing*

*center run by the volunteers of sansthan. The local workers there told me that initially the local community cold-shouldered the project. They simply did not believe that anyone wants to do them some good without wanting their votes. By the time I visited, the community elders were whole heartedly behind the project. What also won them over was the fact that if anyone from their families was admitted to the Hedgewar Hospital they were treated with dignity.*

*Raveendra Surange  
United Kingdom"*

### **Concluding remarks**

We have had very limited time to check on the five-year organized labor of hate by Sabrang/FOIL. We can already see that the sensationalist descriptions in their report do not stand up to elementary curiosity, let alone expert scrutiny. One wonders about their "classification system" of organizations with whom IDRF works – where they insist that "education" is identical to "Religionization". One wonders – in five years of laboring over their report, did the authors actually try visiting any of these sites, at least on the internet – or did they simply download the list of organizations funded by IDRF, and assign labels based on their own bigotry? The alternative is to believe that "Hindu-Supremacists" are conspiring with the Church of North India, the Presbyterian Church of the USA, the American College of Chest Surgeons and the Government of New Zealand to "Hinduize" Indians and Maoris – and to "convert" Hindu Harijans to Hinduism. You be the judge – and please, when you have satisfied yourself of the truth, we appeal to you to continue to generously help IDRF as you have done in the past, so that IDRF can continue doing what they do so well. For those who wish to do more, you can do two things. Pass this document on, and write to your friends and associates pointing out the nature of the Sabrang/FOIL attack against IDRF. You can also ask the Sabrang/FOIL crew to cease and desist from their malicious misrepresentation of the activities of one of India's leading charities. Thank you for your support.

**Satyam Eva Jayate**

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