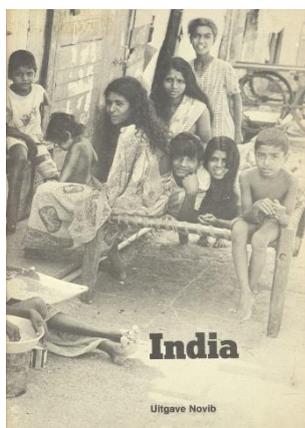


## **(More than) 40 years India Committee of the Netherlands / Arisa**

# **The first years....**

**On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 15 2020 it was exactly 40 years ago that the Landelijke India Werkgroep (India Committee of the Netherlands) officially was registered as an association. But the history of the organisation goes back even further....**

It all started with a small group of people, mostly scientists and students with a special focus on India, in an attic room somewhere in Utrecht, in 1976. Things did not go well in India: in the summer of 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared the state of emergency, because she could no longer manage the protests against her economic policy. Many political organisations were banned, thousands of people were imprisoned for political reasons and the press was heavily censored. Despite all these repressive measures, the Dutch media and politicians remained uncritically towards the Indian prime minister. The group of sympathizers in the attic in Utrecht decided to provide better and critical information to the Dutch public about the socio-economic, political and cultural developments in India.



The objective of "spreading information about India on the basis of solidarity with oppressed groups and progressive movements" soon became clear. However what that means in practice and what would be needed to be done was a whole other storybook. As a result, the group made a slow start, and there was initially a large turnover among the members. In order to overcome this, it was decided in 1977 to focus exclusively on writing a country documentation booklet about India issued by Novib (a Dutch organisation for development cooperation, now called OxfamNovib). It also became clear that the number of members would have to grow if the working group wanted to make a relevant contribution to the

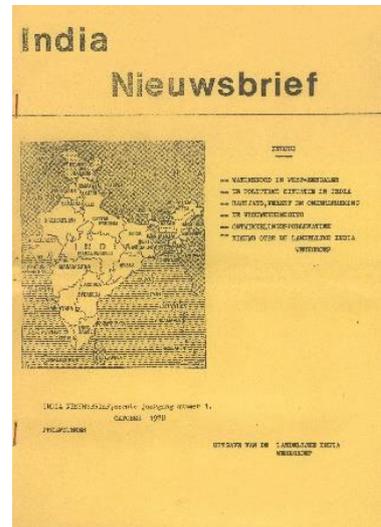
situation in India.

A decentralised organisation was created: an association consisting of regional groups coordinated from a national secretariat. From 1977, local working groups were formed in various cities, rather autonomous groups, linked together in the *Landelijke India Werkgroep*. In October 1977 the India working group Nijmegen was founded, followed in November by the India working group Utrecht, which was also the national secretariat and contact point, housed in a moist and mouldy basement room in the building of the Mondial Information and Action Center (MIAC) at Oudegracht 237. In 1978 the India working group Amsterdam started, and people were also active in Groningen, Rotterdam and The Hague. The first mention of the Landelijke India Werkgroep in the media was in an article about food aid in the Dutch daily *De Volkskrant* of 24 July 1979.



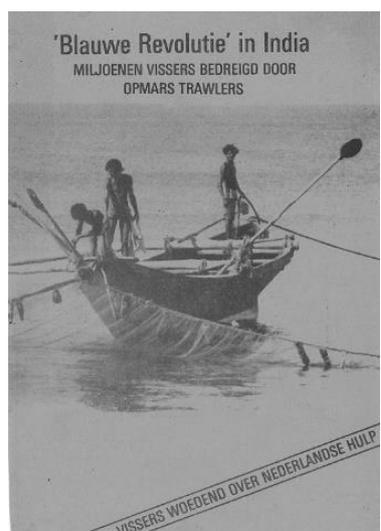
Due to the growing number of members of the groups, meetings were held on the ground floor of the building or in a basement with one of the members. The atmosphere matched that of the building perfectly: quite basic and maybe amateurish, but everyone working with great pleasure, dedication, motivation and commitment.

In 1978 the first national annual meeting took place, with a discussion about organisational structure and objectives. In order to achieve the goals, a way to communicate was needed. That became a self-published magazine: the *India Nieuwsbrief* (India Newsletter), with a first trial issue at the end of 1978, started a year later as a bimonthly magazine. Statutes were drawn up in 1979, and in 1980, on August 15, the association Landelijke India Werkgroep (LIW) – in English referred to as India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN) – was officially established, with a small volunteer secretariat in Utrecht, and with a subsidy from the National Commission for Development Cooperation NCO.



At the end of 1980, the relocation to Voor Clarenburg 10 brought LIW (ICN) into a modern, well-equipped, accessible and centrally located building in Utrecht. In those years LIW went through a rapid development and flourishing period that again corresponded perfectly with the atmosphere of the building in which it was housed. From 1980 onwards a work plan was drawn up every year, increasingly structuring the activities. The first paid employee was appointed in 1980 and the second one in 1982. In 1984 the staff consisted of three (part-time) employees, which provided a strong impulse for activities at a national level.

Raising awareness of the Dutch population and providing information was done by means of the (initially stencilled) *India Nieuwsbrief*, in 1990 renamed in *India Nu* (India Now). Many brochures were published and a national day for India groups was organised annually. In addition to spreading information, lobbying activities began,



with the first success being the 1981 campaign against the supply of shrimp trawlers as development aid. These trawlers, destined for the deep sea, would go fishing in the overfished coastal waters of India, thereby destroying the livelihood of traditional fishermen. Ultimately, the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation decided to cancel this delivery. The success of this campaign made LIW well-known nationally, and also in India through an



article in the *Deccan Herald* in August 1981. The local India groups, energised by this success, set up a large number of information activities and campaigns, on many different topics, including on fertiliser supplies as development aid, human rights, the position of women, the influence of the pharmaceutical industry, the Bhopal gas disaster, dairy aid ('Operation Flood') and job guarantee programs. Partly because of these actions, interest in India and the complex economic relationships of the Netherlands with India, grew among the Dutch population. The association experienced rapid growth, not only in members, but also in subscribers to *India Nieuwsbrief*.



*To be continued in the next newsletter....*