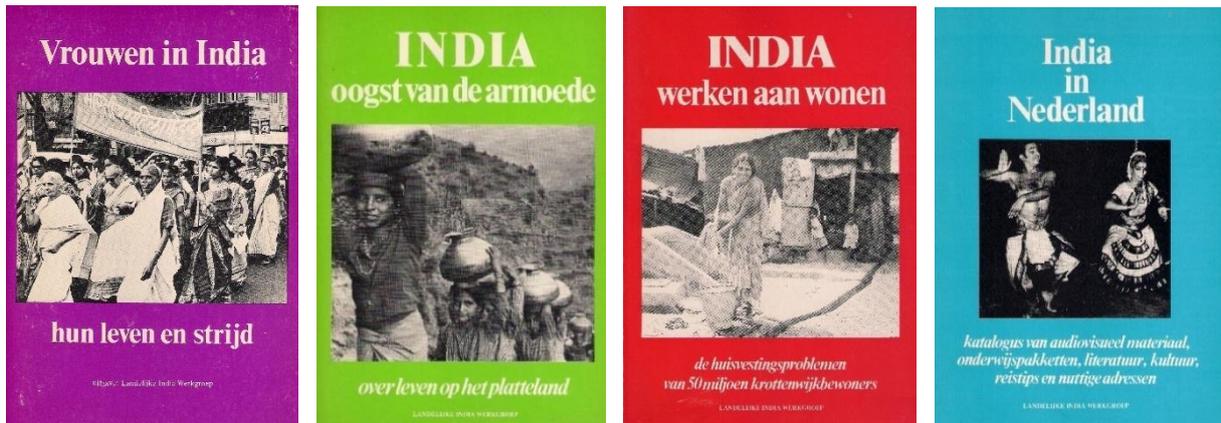


# The years 1985-1990

At the end of 1984, the association India Committee of the Netherlands moved from Voor Clarenburg 10 to the top floor of the Kargadoor building at Oudegracht 36. In the available rooms there, ICN organised information evenings and meetings. At the time, more than 125 people were active at the local level in one of the ICN groups, and the secretariat now had three paid staff members and a dozen volunteers.

The organisation produced a lot of information material about India. Some successful publications from the years 1982-1987:



*Women in India – Their lives and struggles / India - Harvest of poverty: Surviving in the rural areas / India – Working on housing : Housing problems of 50 million slum dwellers / India in the Netherlands: Catalogue of audio-visual materials, education material, literature, culture, travel advice and useful addresses*

In the early 1980s, two trends emerged within the ICN: one group wanted to further contribute to political awareness about India in the Netherlands, with solidarity actions on behalf of progressive groups in India; the other group wanted to focus more on criticizing the Indian government and political lobbying and making policy recommendations. At a general meeting in 1984, it was decided that ICN would focus more on the India-Netherlands relationship.

## Dairy aid campaign

At the end of 1985, the India Committee of the Netherlands started the campaign “EEC milk out of India!”. The action was mainly aimed at breaking the vicious circle of dairy aid and animal feed imports between India and the EU (then still the EEC). The EEC dairy aid program to India, 'Operation Flood', started in 1970, was a very ambitious development project and was touted as an 'ideal way of development cooperation'... Prince Claus of the Netherlands thought Operation Flood 'was one of the most impressive things he saw during his (state) visit to India', and Minister Schoof of Development Cooperation also praised this form of food aid. Official goals included improving the income of small dairy farmers and making India self-sufficient in milk production. But in fact, the dairy aid competed with the fresh milk of Indian cows and India's dependence on dairy imports increased. At the same time, despite major shortages on the spot, India exported a lot of high-quality animal feed to the Netherlands and other European countries, animal feed with which India



could produce three to five times as much milk than it received through dairy aid. But as dairy aid pushed down Indian milk prices and animal feed exports pushed up the price of feed concentrates, it became unprofitable for Indian milk producers to better feed their livestock. Breaking this vicious circle was central to the ICN campaign.



The campaign started with the widespread distribution of an action manifesto and the publication of the book *India als melkkoe van de EG* ("India as the milking cow of the EEC"). The book elaborated on the causes and consequences of the strange combination of dairy aid and animal feed imports. ICN's action was supported by scientists and organisations in India, and there, too, led to various publications, particularly in the 'dairy state' of Gujarat.



In the summer of 1986, an independent fact-finding mission was set up on behalf of the European Commission. The main conclusion of the mission was clear: the dairy aid and the commercial export of dairy to India harmed the further development of Indian dairy cooperatives and had to be stopped immediately!

Also other EEC institutions and NGOs in various European countries were now actively engaged in 'Operation Flood'. About 800 NGOs formed the *'European Action Group on Operation Flood'* which drew up a resolution with recommendations that were largely in line with the proposals of ICN. As a result, the campaign for a different EEC food aid policy towards India received very broad support.

In the Netherlands, too, the discussion around dairy aid to India got off to a good start. Various agricultural organisations and magazines showed a great deal of interest and parliamentary questions were asked which were answered in an evasive and partly incorrect way by the ministers concerned. The campaign by ICN and other NGOs eventually led to some important concessions from the EEC on the conditions under which new dairy aid would be given. Most important were a number of measures to prevent EEC-donated dairy products from continuing to exert pressure on the price and production of Indian milk and milk products.

**Further activities...**

The growth in the number of members of the association and subscribers to the bimonthly magazine *India Nieuwsbrief* stagnated somewhat in the second half of the 1980s. In order to attract more interested people, more articles on Indian culture and current affairs were included in the magazine.

In addition to the annual members' meetings and India group days where various themes were discussed, actions were organised against, among other things, the incineration of women (*sati*) and the arrests of human rights activists, and publicity was given to the lack of support for the victims of the poison disaster in Bhopal, 1984.

ICN's work also took a new focus: child labour. At the end of 1988 ICN published the book *Kinderarbeid in India* ("Child labour in India"). It was the kick-off for collaboration with many (Indian) organisations to combat child labour, including MV Foundation (see box below).

In 1990, a new campaign was launched: *"Work against Poverty"*, in which ICN advocated spending EEC aid on job guarantee programs for agricultural workers. More about this in the next newsletter.



**Shantha Sinha (founder MV Foundation, till 2013 chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights) on her collaboration with ICN**

Gerard Oonk, project officer at – and later director of – the India Committee of the Netherlands, visited Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF) more than three decades ago, when MVF was still a small NGO dedicated to the elimination of child labour in the remote villages of Ranga Reddy district, Andhra Pradesh (now Telangana). He was there as part of MVF's non-negotiable agenda for the abolition of child labour. Since then, MVF has had a long-term partnership with the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN), now Arisa.

It seems like yesterday that we met - a little later - in the Netherlands. Gerard picked me up directly from the airport, lugging my suitcase, and took me, changing trains and buses, to the meeting location as if it were a usual daily routine. It was pure madness!

When my colleague Venkat Reddy and I first visited ICN in Utrecht, I saw a simple workplace, busy and full of books, posters and materials and an atmosphere of warmth and care instead of the huge, chic and well-endowed office I had imagined I would see.

From this precious little space, our journey together began..... We were introduced to like-minded persons who gave us the strength to do more. Over time, ICN showed us the power of lobbying with governments, international funding agencies, multilateral institutions and companies, and also taught us to network with NGOs, trade unions, school teachers and research institutions, cutting across countries, cultures and languages. It was quite overwhelming to meet EU parliamentarians and even address 'very important people' to tell our stories.

We felt so reassured that our stand on child labour was no longer just MVF's, but belongs to everyone who cares about children's rights. We were so humble that MVF was embraced as a model for the global Stop Child Labour Campaign that was spearheaded by ICN, HIVOS, SKA, FNV, AOB, Education International and many others. We are very grateful to everyone for this.

We learned during this incredible journey with ICN that engaging with state and civil society through dialogue and non-adversarial positions is a sign of strength, not of weakness; that the real divide in the world today is ideological, a divide between those who take a firm stand for human rights and those who compromise; that networking and building fresh and new alliances is a relentless and continuous process; that hope is power and that we are all needed to bring about justice for all.

ICN - and now Arisa - is a 40-year-old sturdy organisation, dynamic and constantly evolving, adding value to the ongoing movements in India and elsewhere in Asia enhancing the struggles of the deprived, discriminated against and marginalised people for justice. Her strong ethical positions on human rights are a benchmark of action and thought.

I cherish with fondness the journey we had together. I express my solidarity with Arisa in her mission to stand with all those who struggle for dignity and freedom. Congratulations!



*Shantha Sinha on ICN meeting (May 2006)*